

## The Art Museum as a Platform for Self-formation

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This article considers the tradition of ‘Bildung’ in relation to the museum by drawing on recent self-formation theories developed by the Danish social analysts Lars Geer Hammerhøj and Lars-Henrik Schmidt. It is argued that today the museum can be used as a platform for self-formation, where the museum user employs the museum narratives and the art works in a self-formative and personal way. Furthermore, the article debates the pedagogical challenge, which faces the museum today, suggesting that the museum should take a more active role museum, becoming a partner for dialogue instead of a lecturer.

## Introduction

The focus in this paper is the basic question of what role the museum plays in our society today, in order to understand why exhibiting and communicating art remain significant. How and why do people use the art museum? And what consequences does this use have on exhibition practices and communication strategies employed by museum professionals? The theoretical angle, from which I wish to investigate the issue, is the recent theory of self-formation developed mainly by the Danish social analysts Lars Geer Hammerhøj and Lars-Henrik Schmidt. The self-formation theory reviews and challenges the modern notion of 'bildung' and offers a contemporary understanding of how we as individuals form and develop our selves today. Hammershøj and Schmidt describe their method as a 'social-analytical' diagnosis of our age, and attempt to investigate the relationship between the self and society. Based on this, they seek to make a diagnosis of contemporary society exposing the imminent tendencies present in society, which might influence the way society develops in the future (Raffnsøe, Nielsen et al. 2004 p. 3). By taking into account the radical process of individualization in late modernity, this theory is rethinking the way we shape and develop our self, and how this is done in relation to society as well as considering the consequences it will have on the future. The aim here is to consider how this diagnosis can be used in a museum context and what effects it could have for future museum practice.

The main reason for converging theories about self-formation and a museological discussion is that the art museum, as it is well established, was born in the late eighteenth century along with the nation-state, national identity and the notion of the people, and is closely bound with these concepts. One of its key functions was to educate and inform people, both through the artworks themselves and through chronological displays. The museum was used for disseminating knowledge to people, teaching them to be good citizens (Hooper-Greenhill 1993, Macdonald 2003 p. 1–3, Sheehan 2000 p. 83–137). In this way, the art museum has always been comprehended as a place where people can form and develop themselves. However, the understanding of how this development takes place has changed over time and Schmidt and Hammershøj propose a new perspective on this. In contrast to the initial ideas about museums and formation of the self, the self-formation theory argues that ahistorical or transhistorical values are not possible and education and development happens on the individual's own terms and on the basis of subjective priorities hence the word **self-formation** (Hammershøj 2003 p. 441). The idea of self-formation not only influences the primary functions of the museum such as exhibiting, but in addition has consequences for the understanding and planning of pedagogy, as well as the practical didactics, which are practised in the museum. It is these consequences that seem important and central when discussing the learning and the experiences, which take place in the museum.

Following these ideas this paper will consider the impact of the self-formation theory on the role of the art museum and the corollary for the work that takes place within it. It is proposed that the museum could be seen as a platform for self-formation and self-performance and instead of being a place where a shared culture is celebrated and common values communicated, the museum could be a space, where individuals are engaged in self-formation, debating personal values and reflecting upon their own originality.

I begin with briefly establishing the idea of education and self-development in the modern museum<sup>1</sup>, outlining the tradition, which self-formation challenges. The aim is to summarize

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1 I refer to the 'modern museum' as the first museum institutions, which were founded on Enlightenment ideas around 1800. See for example Eilean Hooper-Greenhill. (1992) *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. London: Routledge.

the historical background of how people develop in the museum, along with defining key concepts, which are used throughout the paper. I then continue to explore the self-formation theories seen from a museal perspective.<sup>2</sup>

## Historic Self-Practices

The rise of the modern art museum in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was built upon the Enlightenment's neo-humanistic values about education of the public and establishing a feeling of national community. The museum was an institution that could be used by the people to develop and become educated, forming themselves through the objects and displays (Hooper-Greenhill 1993, Sheehan 2000). The concern of how the self is formed has changed throughout history and has been conceptualized and explained in different ways by various scientific disciplines (Giddens 1991, Rose 1998). In relation to this, the concept 'self' is by no means axiomatic, for example in relation to notion of identity, which is a certain perception of the self (Hammershøj 2003 p. 59–60, p. 443). Nikolas Rose explains that the notion of identity is based on the conception that the self is constituted by the narratives we create about ourselves (Hammershøj 2003 p. 60). It is the idea that the self can wear different identities and as such a particular understanding of the self, in the same way, but fundamentally different as we shall see to self-formation, which is also a certain way of explaining the development of the self. This is not the place for an elaboration of these two concepts, but it is key to note that I, following the theory of self-formation, use the concept of self as a description of what distinguishes one person from another<sup>3</sup> with the social-analytical emphasis on the self as a boundary in sociality. My aim here is to look closer at the debated self-formation as an understanding of the self, as well as the neo-humanistic way of relating to the self, which was dominant during the development of the modern museum.

In order for Hammershøj to establish a self-formation theory he looks at historic ways of developing the self. Hammershøj refers to Michel Foucault's article '*Technologies of the Self*' from 1982, where Foucault constructs three types of self-practices: The Greco-Roman, The Christian and The neo-humanistic. With self-practice Foucault means the way in which people have related to and developed their selves and corresponds in this way to the term self-formation.<sup>4</sup> Self-practices are historically determined and can be connected to ideal types, which constitute the 'perfect' person in a given time. These ideal types suggest therefore how the individual should relate to herself and reflect ethical, social or religious values present in society in a particular time in history. Foucault identifies two major self-practices as predecessors for the neo-humanistic practice. Briefly explained the Greco-Roman (fourth century B.C. – second century A.D.) is an ethical self-practice concerned with 'a care of the self'. Through self-mastery and education of the self a higher moral and good judgement is obtained. The ideal is an individual that takes care of herself mentally and physically educating her judgement by using reason (logos) and Greek deeds (Hammershøj 2003 p. 34–42). With the Christian self-practice the Greco-Roman practice is restructured. Here the ideal is concerned with 'self-knowledge' or 'insight into the self' and is imperative for purifying

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2 I wish to clarify that I use the distinction between the modern museum and self-formation not because I see a definitely break with all modern values in museal practise today. On the contrary, I often find that the separation between museums in modern times and today is obstructing the investigation of the complexity, which is going on within a museum. However, discussing self-formation is a break away from the traditional 'bildung' tradition and therefore the distinction is pertinent in this case.

3 See Oxford Concise Dictionary 10th edition, revised.

4 I interpret the use of the term self-practice as complying with the concept of self-formation, because in context both 'self-practice' and 'self-formation' is applied to the process, where people relate to and develop their self.

the self in preparation for the salvation. The ideal is acknowledging sin, showing penitence and by keeping oneself under constant surveillance, be alert for impure thoughts hidden in the soul and as a consequence of this exposing the self, denying and giving up the impure self (Hammershøj 2003 p. 43–47). An interesting note here is that Hammershøj draws a parallel from this Christian self-knowledge to the present concept of identity. He argues that both are using self-knowledge as self-practice, but for the concept of identity, self-knowledge is used as a positive constitution of the self, because the analysis and articulation of the self, leads not to a denial and religious acceptance of human sin, but to a optimistic and constructive definition of an identity (Hammershøj 2003 p. 48).

## Neo-humanistic Self-practice and Bildung

The neo-humanistic type of formation draws on the two self-practices described above, but interprets them in a new and aesthetic way. It is developed in Germany in the eighteenth century and is characterised by idealising Greek antique culture. Hammershøj describes this self-practice:

For neo-humanism ‘bildung’ is the process, in which the individual transgresses his particular self towards the universal humanism, and generates taste from this in a way so the individual at the same time displays his individualism and expresses the universal concept of humanity [My translation] (Hammershøj 2003 p. 69).

In this way educating and developing the self means a transcendence of the self into something larger, a formation of the self and a development of taste. We can talk about a process where the self transgresses into sociality and obtains the universal values. Behind the neo-humanistic understanding of self-practice lies the theory of ‘bildung’, a German work meaning ‘general education’ or ‘self-development’ in English, however missing a proper and pertinent translation.<sup>5</sup> It combines formal and informal education, development of aesthetic taste and self formation and refers to the potential of becoming a moral, educated person. It is not a set of rules and it is not dictated by any authority. As Martin Swale succinctly has put it:

The word **Bildung** implies the generality of a culture, the clustering of values by which a man lives, rather than a specifically **educational** attainment. [...] **Bildung** becomes, then, a total growth process, a diffused **Werden**, or becoming, involving something more intangible than the acquirement of a finite number of lessons (emphasis in the original) (Belfiore, Bennett 2006 p. 108).

The tradition of ‘bildung’ draws on philosophical thoughts, which are found in for example Immanuel Kant and Frederich Schiller and their ethical and aesthetic theories (Böhm 1927, Kant 1969) (see below). These philosophical and aesthetic ideas were formulated into a theory about ‘bildung’, by Wilhelm von Humboldt in the beginning of 1800. He applied these theories to cultural policies and played a major role in shaping the school system, the royal library and Berlin’s museums (Sheehan 2000 p. 56). ‘Bildung’ is as such the historical reasoning that lies underneath cultural strategies as well as under personal development including formal and informal education, and can be seen as a direction towards which, all people should choose to steer.

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5 I have in this paper chosen not to translate the word ‘bildung’, since the terms self-development or general education do not cover its meaning properly. Instead I aim to establish the meaning from the following definition as well as from the context.

For the modern art museums the theory of 'bildung' was especially significant, since aesthetics are central to the theory. Kant's notions about the link between art, beauty, moral and universal human values are important, as well as Schiller's concept of 'Spieltrieb' (free play) as a situation where the personal and the universal melts together (Böhm 1927). This understanding of the self as developing from the particular to the universal, connected to the philosophical theories mentioned above, placed the art museum firmly within the project of self development and defined it as an institution for the neo-humanistic self-practice. When experiencing the artworks in the museum, people were exposed to universal values and history and through this, they were able to transgress themselves into a universal humanism, which would unite the personal and the universal and they would become educated and good citizens. Fundamental to this self-practice is an ideal image of a perfect moral universal human being modelled on the idea of the ancient Greeks, who were used as a mirror for the individual, hence the word 'bildung', which derives from the word 'Bild', which means image.

### Nationalism and the Development of the Neo-humanistic Self-practice

The German art historian Rudolf Margraff wrote in 1838 'The work of art not only reveals, it also stimulates and enlivens the spirit of the Volk, and thus becomes...means of cultivating [Bildungsmittel] the national spirit' (Sheehan 2000 p. 110). With the development of the nation state, the neo-humanistic self-practice was supplemented with a nationalistic aspect, hence the need for conveying a national feeling of community and belonging. In Denmark N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783–1872) had a strong influence on the nationalistic version of the neo-humanistic self-practice and with his concept of the 'historical-poetic', he drew a connection between Nordic mythology, poetry, history and the Danish people. He played a fundamental part in establishing the ideological foundations for the Danish Folkehøjskoler (Folk High Schools), schools for life, as he called them, arguing for a school where national history, Christian values, practical skills and poetry were combined through motivated speakers, dialogues and debates (Bugge 1968). To the universal human values and moral described by Schiller and Kant were added the idea about shared national values and a collective national culture. This meant that the ideal of a universal human 'bildung' were transformed or at least supplemented include knowledge about the nation and its history and culture. The development is also seen at Statens Museum for Kunst through the words of director N.L. Høyen (1798–1870):

it is not only because of the aesthetic enjoyment, even though it can be very significant that we dwell on art, but as one of the great means for strengthen, raise and draw the people (my translation) (Høyen, Ussing 1871–1876).

The consequence of this view is seen in his practical museological work, since he discarded a large amount of art work from the collection in order to focus on the major works of art, to give people a more pure aesthetic experience when visiting the museum. But he also started to collect and support Danish art and lectured about and promoted national art (Villadsen 1998 p. 45–46, p. 49–61). It is clear that he both prioritized a universal aesthetic experience in line with the neo-humanistic self-practice, but in addition saw the potential of art as a vehicle for a national feeling of community and homogenization.

There are many issues and intricacies that could be discussed around 'bildung' and the neo-humanistic self-practice, however, here I just briefly want to comment on one of immediate aspects that arise when thinking about 'bildung' today. Underlying the concept is the idea of a unified mass of people as well as the suggestion that all people have equal opportunities. When the royal collections were opened it was indeed a major step for

accessibility to the art. But the brief opening hours, the entrance fees and other restrictions meant in reality that it was difficult for lower social classes to use the museum (Sheehan 2000 p. 115–116). The people cannot be seen as a coherent unified group, on the contrary ‘the people’ is a heterogeneous body whose opportunities, priorities and interests differ. This has an impact on how the tradition of ‘bildung’ developed. Because ‘bildung’ and the neo-humanistic self-practice in reality not were accessible for everyone, it was consequently used and appreciated by specific groups. This soon turned into what Hammershøj calls the decay of the neo-humanistic self-practice, since it was used primarily as a tool to mark social distinction and as such became an outer practice, which was more concerned with correct manners, proper dress code and canonical knowledge, than with moral and spiritual enlightenment (Hammershøj 2003).

The debate concerning museums, social inclusion and elitism is very much a central issue today and seen from the perspective of the ‘bildung’ tradition, it adds to the complex picture of why this situation has arisen.<sup>6</sup> The museum is based on a conceptual framework that does not discern between individuals, but considers the people as one with the potential of shared and universal values. This very optimistic and humanistic idea originates from the theories about aesthetic experiences presented above on which the notion of ‘bildung’ was established and from which also the modern museum derives.

## Self-formation

And a rethinking and reframing of ‘bildung’ is what Schmidt and Hammershøj do with their self-formation theory and their conclusions are interesting for all institutions offering information, knowledge and experiences to the public such as libraries, museums, schools etc., since it challenges the way we look at the interaction between the public and the museum. By taking into account contemporary philosophy and sociology, Schmidt and Hammershøj seek a new understanding of the relationship between the development of the self and society. In their view the development of the self within the late modern society need to be redefined on the background of the philosophical developments that have taken place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Hammershøj self-formation today takes place on the following conditions:

The first condition has to do with the radical individualization process and the second could be called culturalization. These conditions seem to fit in well with the late modern concept of formation of the personality. Firstly, formation of the personality is per definition ‘without authority’ and is therefore interesting in relation to the ‘self-socialization’ of the late modern individual. Secondly, formation is an aesthetic practice of the self, concerned with the unfolding of the personality. This happens today as the individual’s transgression of itself, and the experiences made in various culturalized communities. (Hammershøj 2003 p. 443–444).

It is central to the theory that society still plays a large role and do not take the position that the individual is becoming more isolated, less involved in society and in the end is self-sufficient. On the contrary self-formation is concerned with the relationship between the individual and society and takes place in society (self-socialization) with transcendence into sociality, while at the same time the individual’s integrity is sustained. The individual and society are not in opposition to each other, but are in a contingent and dialectical bond, where

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6 See for example Pierre Bourdieu. (1991) *The Love of Art and their public*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Or more recently Richard Sandell, (2007) *Museums prejudice and their reframing of difference*. London: Routledge.

they assert and develop each other. This is what Schmidt calls ‘self-exceeding self-insurance’ (Schmidt 2002). I emphasize this, since in the debate about museum learning, the radical view of personal learning can lead to an understanding of museum users as black boxes, who project their own meaning and narratives into the displays, without being affected by the exhibition, the intentions behind it or the context in which it is presented. Thinking self-formation within a museal context opens for a dialogue between the museum and the user, since it is in the self-exceeding process or the transcendence into sociality (here the museum situation) formation of the self takes place. I will return to this later, but here just highlight the consequences of the radical individualisation and how the social-analytical approach understands the relationship between individual and society positively.

The social analysts investigate the relation between self-formation and society through particularly two concepts: sociality and transcendence. Sociality is defined as the process of interaction between individuals and society, and is imperative, since self-formation is determined by the perpetuating input that the individual gets from society. It is this interaction, which has changed under the late modern conditions (Hammershøj 2003 p.12). One of the ways this has developed is explored through the concept of ‘transcendence’, which refer to a state where the self moves out of itself into sociality, into the interaction with society, into something, which is larger and more than itself, for then to return and internalize the experience (Hammershøj 2003 p. 72–73). The notion of society as ‘something larger’ can be seen in relation to the theory of ‘bildung’ presented above, where the individual also transgress herself in the process of socialization. The difference however, is that in ‘bildung’ the individual assimilates the universal values and becomes part of the larger, in self-formation the individual experiences the larger in sociality for then to return to her own particularity. It is important to note here that the experience of the larger society is interpreted by the individual and as such not an objective experience, however self-formation highlights the preparedness to risk and to transgress beyond ones existing values and understandings.

## Radical Individualization and Cultural Pluralism

The first condition that Hammershøj mentions is the radical individualisation. Radical individualisation is closely connected to the rejection of universal values, since if there are no ahistorical truths it must be up to the individual to establish her own principles and standards. The sociologist Ulrich Beck says in his book *Risk Society*:

In the individualized society the individual must therefore learn, on pain of permanent disadvantage, to conceive of himself or herself as the centre of action, as the planning office with respect to his/her own biography, abilities, orientations, relationships and so on...[...] in order for one to survive an *ego-centered world view* must be developed, which turns the relation of ego and world on its head, so to speak, conceiving of and making them useful for the purpose of shaping an individual biography. (Beck 1992 p. 135–136).

The self is placed in the centre of the world and it is from here everything is understood and through which everything is filtered and the sole responsibility of the development of the self is placed on the individual. The universal prototype has been dissolved, and it is up to the individual to find meaning and develop her self. In relation to the neo-humanistic self-practice these ideas have a deep impact. Earlier the individual developed through aesthetics from a particular personal self to become an educated person, with universal values. It was transcendence into sociality, where the universal values and moral was assimilated. This has now been turned around and the aim for self-formation is not to become universal, but instead increasingly particular. It is a transgression into society where the individual reflects upon what she is exposed to and then returns to her self, adapting what she has seen to her own use, values and standards. Self-formation today is not about being able to quote

Shakespeare as Schmidt proclaims, but to enter into a state of transcendence in different communities, being able to expand our self, reflect upon ourselves and others, and then return to our self differentiated. It is a question of using values and ideals in a unique and personal way. (Vesterdal, Dehlholm 2002) Here again is the social aspect of self transcendence emphasized, since it is in the interaction with society that transcendence is possible and the development of the self tested. Lars-Henrik Schmidt illustrates this further by saying: ‘Today no one would ask: “What did you learn in school today?” Instead a father would ask “What did you say in school today?”’ (My translation) (Vesterdal, Dehlholm 2002). It is not so much about what knowledge is acquired, but more about how the individual responds and internalizes it. Instead of looking outwards for a universal prototype, the individual looks inwards and tries to build up his or hers unique self. Said in another way, in the neo-humanistic self-practice everyone was striving towards the same values and would essentially all become alike. In self-formation the individual strive to become different.

The second condition for self-formation is the development of cultural pluralism. One of the aims for Grundtvig’s Folkehøjskoler (see above) was to establish a school where Danish common culture was in the centre. There was a clear idea of specific Danish values and a history, which all Danes could recognize. This is the idea of culture as a community and as a stable and homogenous signifying system. These ideas are also what shaped the modern museum. However, today culture is viewed as much more complex. It is in constant movement and development and consists of numerous, often opposing voices and values, and is as such a heterogeneous place, where difference and diversity exist<sup>7</sup> (Hammershøj 2003 p.101–102). The consequence for the museum is the major challenge not to portray one singular culture, but on the other hand show and present the complexities within a culture, giving space to a multiplicity of perspectives.

### The Original as Ideal Type

With the two conditions epitomized above, a setting for how we today, and in the coming future will relate to our selves, is mapped out. But is it possible to create an ideal type? How will the ‘perfect’ human being look like in the future? Hammershøj uses the term ‘interesting’ as directional for self-formation. Using ‘interesting’ underlines the aesthetic or taste oriented aspect of self-formation. The individual forms herself in relation to what she personally finds interesting in the transgression into society. (Hammershøj 2003 p. 140–149). Jonas Lieberkind, another Danish theorist, explores this further proposing a new ‘ideal’ type, using the quotation marks to specify that it is not the old concept of an ideal he is referring to. As explained, today it is not possible to establish a universal image for everyone, in which they can reflect themselves. Instead each individual needs her own ‘ideal’ which she can navigate towards. Lieberkind has named this the original attitude (Lieberkind 2005). By this he means a posture or an attitude that the individual takes when internalizing the information, values and views she is presented with in society. The aim for the original is to form a distinct personality, in order to differ from everyone else. In this way the interesting or the original can be said to be a common ideal for dissimilarity (Hammershøj 2003 p. 140–149). Hammershøj and Lieberkind agree that it is not about being like everyone else, but on the contrary being as original as possible. This is, of course, a posture that is ever changing and never stable, since being original is determined by how the surrounding individuals respond and accept views and values. A significant consequence of the original as ideal type could be that the motivation for putting oneself through experiences, which are transcendent, is very

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7 For writings about culture see for example the writings of Zigmund Bauman, Lars-Henrik Schmidt, Terry Eagleton.



much present today. Following Schmidt, Hammershøj and Lieberkind's ideas, individuals today and especially in the future, should be seeking experiences, which continuously can shape, form and develop their selves.

From the museum's perspective this could mean increasingly motivated museum users. But how is self-forming individuals using and behaving in a museum? How can self-formation happen within the museum? How does this influence the professional work, which takes place? And will this change the museum institution as we know it today?

## The Art Museum and Self-formation

Art museums are part of society and part of the arena where sociality happens. It is a place for individuals to meet, have experiences and discussions, and a space where values, history and a diverse range of issues can be engaged with and debated in different ways. The museum is unique because of the interaction between objects and users. It is a social space where collective experiences happens, facilitated and mediated through objects, context and the individual, as well as through dialogue between individuals. This interaction happens in a dialectical, contingent and continuous relationship between individuals, objects and companions.<sup>8</sup> At Statens Museum for Kunst more than 80% of adults visit the museum with other people, underlining the social aspect of a museum visit.<sup>9</sup> The museum experience has in this way a double-sided aspect, since the individual experiences the displays and art objects, but in addition she is able to reflect upon and put forward her opinions in conversation with other individuals. This gives a unique opportunity for new experiences and acquisition of new knowledge, which can challenge existing values and the same time realising, performing and socialising herself. The performing aspect of this is similar to what Jay Rounds has described as the 'performative character of identity', which happens within the museum (Rounds 2006 p.6) and what Eilean Hooper-Greenhill discusses as the performative characteristic of a museum visit. (Hooper-Greenhill 2007). However, in a self-formation perspective, the preparedness for forming the self is emphasized, focusing on the museum visit not just as a stage or an opportunity for performance, but a place where formation of the self can happen, since values and preconceptions can be challenged and changed through the interactions with the displays. What has changed is not just the fact that we, as we are exposed to new experiences in the museum, learn and in that sense are in a continuous state of 'becoming' (Wegner 1998), what is just as significant seen from a self-formation perspective, is that the general tendency in society today is a willingness and eagerness to keep changing. We are not just seeking a forum where we can perform our identity, but to a larger extent turn to experiences, which will transcend this identity. In this way the self is never stable and is continuously redefined by the thriving towards development and change. The museum visit can be seen as a situation where this challenge of the self can happen on different levels: through artworks, the narratives they are presented within, the interpretative material arranged by the museum and the discussions the museum users have with their companions. Following the lines of self-formation, it will then be the

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8 For more information on the interaction between museum, objects and individuals see for example John H. Falk & Lynn D. Dierking (1992). *The Museum Experience*. Washington D. C.: Whalesback Books or Leinhardt, G., & Knutson, K. (2004). *Listening in on museum conversations*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.

9 Visitor surveys conducted over the last two years have shown that between 78,5%–86,5% of all visitors share the museum experience with other people. It is important to note that the surveys are carried out in special exhibitions and not in the permanent collections, where the percentage might be different. No survey has been carried out in the collections.

task of the museum to enable and motivate the transcendence of the self in order to support the individual self-formation.

To facilitate the modern tradition of 'bildung' the art museums first of all opened the royal collections to the public, so people were exposed to art. Later it was important to minimise the amount of 'noise' present in the galleries so people could absorb the artworks as untainted as possibly.<sup>10</sup> In the era of self-formation the role of the museum can be seen as encouraging museum users to engage with the art, make own judgements and debate whether the art and the thoughts, which it provokes, are interesting and relevant for them. This means that the role of the museum is shifting from a lecturer to a facilitator, becoming a partner in dialogue and a resource for the museum user.

## Competent Museum Users

Considering museum users as self-forming individuals, means that they can be regarded as highly motivated, very active and looking for ways to transcend their selves. In his article '*Identity work in the museums*' Rounds explains that museums can be seen as a threat for established identities and this highlights the fundamental difference between the two theories, since in self-formation individuals will embrace a change and never consider their identity or self to be stable (Rounds 2006 p. 9). On the contrary a major and perpetuating life mission is to form themselves and this is done through interesting jobs, exotic travel as well as with demanding leisure activities and as described the museum presents experiences, which can facilitate this. Their self-practice is to continuously risk their self. They have values, opinions and a personal agenda for the museum visit. This is very far from the understanding of the passive guest receiving expert knowledge or universal values in the modern museum. The user becomes the centre of the experience, a position, which earlier was inhabited by the art works and art historical knowledge.

It is clear that not all museum-users are expert self-forming individuals, nevertheless both Hammershøj and Schmidt would argue that it is a tendency that they see within contemporary society, and a development in relation to how we practice ourselves today. In that way the self-forming museum user might be the younger generation and as such an immanent characteristic of many of the museum users in the future. However, just as the antagonistic divide between the modern and the post-modern museum at times causes an unproductive and less complex discussion about museums, the idea about self-formation need to be seen in a syncretic perspective, where other pertinent theories and empirical material are taken into account.

The redefinition of the museum users as very competent individuals has many consequences for the museum as an institution and how it defines itself. For example, following this view, the museum is returned to the people in the sense that it is theirs to use. It is interesting here that the new slogan for Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen after the complete rehanging of the permanent collections is: 'The New Statens Museum for Kunst – its your's use it!' Of course, this slogan can be understood in many ways, but from a self-formation perspective this is what they do. The museum loses its status as the authoritative voice, cannot control the experiences that the individuals have and becomes a platform, where each of the museum users can transcend their selves in relation to what they find interesting. The role of the museum becomes not to transmit knowledge, but to form a frame from where knowledge and experiences can be produced in dialogue with the museum users.

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10 See for example Brian O'Doherty (1999). *Inside the White Cube: the ideology of the gallery space*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

## The Dialogical Museum

A major challenge for the museum seen from the self-formation point of view is how to handle the pedagogy within the museum, when everyone is different and have different agendas. Since the relationship between museum and user has been turned on its head, and it is not the museum, which transmit narratives and values to the user, but instead the user who interprets the museum objects and displays, constructs her own narratives and relates them to her self. The productive authority of the museum has shifted to the museum users and from this perspective it could become difficult to pinpoint the role of the museum pedagogic. How does the museum face this deadlock?

Seen from the perspective of self-formation the process of sociality and the transcendence into society is as important as ever. In order for self-formation to happen the individual must play against and be in dialogue with other values and other views, said in other words, there must be something to draw the borders between. Therefore the slide into total relativism is not an alternative seem from a self-formation point of view. On the contrary, the transcendence into society means an acknowledgement of the knowledge and the different views outside one self. However, it is not a question of taking it over uncritically, but a question of internalizing it and using it for development of existing values. Consequently, the need for a museum, which demonstrates and displays values and views, is even stronger than it perhaps has been in the past and it is crucial that it actively presents itself as having a particular position or taking a special stand. Accentuate that the particular display is no objective truth. This means a more transparent museum, where the reasoning behind the displays, views and perspectives presented as well as the processes, are emphasized giving the museum users the opportunity to judge whether they agree or not. It could also mean a type of display showing the complexity of a theme and let the answers stand open, for example presenting a research project, but not reaching a definite conclusion.

The pedagogic consequences for the museum in relation to the concept of self-formation can be seen as supporting the ideas presented in the constructivist learning theories by authors like Hein, Hooper-Greenhill and Falk and Dierking. This is by no means surprising since the self-formation theory is operating within a constructivist paradigm. However, as I have mentioned self-formation is also epitomized by the imperative need for dialogue and interaction with society, which opens for a more social and conversational model of interaction with objects and a pedagogic, which focuses on the social aspect of communication. Within the museum this places an emphasis on the dialogic process and suggests a more active museum, which embraces the museum users as a partner for dialogue. However, a dialogue that happens on the terms of the user in the sense that it will be impossible to dictate what she comprehends and experiences as the museum's perspective. It will be the user's interpretation and the user's specific areas of focus within the exhibition that will be engaged with, and together with her companion, the user will start a dialogue, where she internalizes the experience and use it in her self-formation. What the museum also must be prepared to accept is that the criteria for success is not whether the museum user got the message, whether the art historical research was communicated to the user or not, but instead define it as successful when a museum user has a unique personal experience, which is important and relevant for her self-formation.

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