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# Museums and Mausoleums: Museographical Practices of Galician Identity

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## *Keywords*

*Museo do Pobo Galego*  
Galician national identity  
Museographical studies  
*Lieux de mémoire*  
Museums

## *Palabras clave*

Museo do Pobo Galego  
Identidade nacional galega  
Estudos museográficos  
*Lieux de mémoire*  
Museos

## *Abstract*

This article analyses the museographical practices of the *Museo do Pobo Galego*, and its central part in the formation of a museistic complex that also includes the *Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea*, and the *Panteón dos Galegos Ilustres* within the urbanistic plans of the city of Santiago de Compostela. The article focuses on how this architectural centre has symbolised an aesthetic tension between a stereotypical past reality (a rural, backwards, and superstitious Galicia) and a modern present (a largely industrial, and cosmopolitan Galicia) that articulates a Galician identity or *Galeguidade*, which is distinctively mythical and uchronic. By playing with the idea of *lieux de mémoire*—in terms of Pierre Nora (1989)—the museographical complex represents the struggle to define a *Galeguidade* through the articulation of a mnemonic discourse inscribed, primarily, in dynamics of time and space. The relation between past and present manifests as a museographical function as well as a cultural and political paradigm, placing the *Museo do Pobo*, the *CGAC*, and the *Panteón* in a dynamic of continuous historical process. In sum, this study attempts to show how Galicianness is articulated not only in two dialectic times ‘past and present’, but also through the desire to understand the present as a product of the past in a concrete Galician space.

## *Resumo*

Este artigo analiza as prácticas museográficas do Museo do Pobo Galego e o seu papel fundamental na constitución dun complexo museístico que inclúe tamén o Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea e o Panteón de Galegos Ilustres, no casco urbano da cidade de Santiago de Compostela. O artigo céntrase na forma en que este centro arquitectónico simboliza a tensión

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estética entre unha realidade estereotípica do pasado (unha Galiza rural, atrasada e supersticiosa) e un presente moderno (unha Galiza industrial en grande medida e cosmopolita) que conforma unha identidade galega ou galeguidade que é inconfundiblemente mítica e ucrónica. Por medio do xogo coas ideas dos *lieux de mémoire*, en palabras de Pierre Nora (1989), o complexo museográfico representa a loita por definir unha galeguidade por medio da articulación dun discurso mnemotécnico inscrito fundamentalmente nas dinámicas do tempo e do espazo. A relación entre o pasado e o presente maniféstase como unha función museográfica, mais tamén como paradigma cultural e político, situando o Museo do Pobo Galego, o CGAC e o Panteón na dinámica dun proceso histórico continuo. En definitiva, este estudo tenta mostrar como a galeguidade fica articulada non só en dous períodos dialécticos (presente e pasado), senón a través do desexo de entender o presente coma un produto do pasado, nun espazo galego concreto.



A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle.  
Two things, which in truth are but one,  
constitute this soul or spiritual principle.  
One lines in the past, one in the present.  
One is the possession in common of a rich  
legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent,  
the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate  
the value of the heritage that one has received  
in an undivided form.

Ernest Renan, *What Is a Nation?*

Whether it is seen as a reappropriation or a recreation of the past, a nation's identity is a narrative always constructed through social practices that are circumscribed to notions of space and memory. In the concept of the nation, therefore, notions of both individual and collective memory converge with everyday life practices. Without memory, there is no possibility of giving meaning to the past in the present; thus, there can be no history. Historiography has always had an important role in the construction of a national identity, and according to Xerardo Pereiro (2004) history 'es un recurso cultural y una estrategia de construcción de identidades, y en su utilización como recurso, el pasado se reactualiza, buscando un sentido social al presente, construído sobre la diferencia entre el "nosotros" y "los otros", entre el "yo" y "el otro"' (76). Nonetheless, there can be certain degrees of 'doing history', as Friedrich Nietzsche argued in *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life* (1980), which can wither and degenerate the identity of a nation. We must remember that only 'one' historical past distorts such a past as it becomes closer to fiction than to history, and that most historiographical practices, as Nietzsche also suggested, tend to mythify the past, which in turn also brings the past closer to fiction (17). With all of this in mind, it is possible to say that memory, as an aesthetic and discursive tool, has the power to engage in a dialogue between past and present in order to interpret history. Normally, this dialogue tends to manifest in the localisation of a historic memory in places such as museums, monuments and even cemeteries. These types of cultural manifestations tend to make use both of a historiographical discourse and popular traditions in order to define or narrate a national imaginary through time. In the case of Galicia, the role of institutions related to cultural practices has had a tremendous impact in the 'creation' of a national identity that is represented as distinctively unique and worth of preservation. In fact, 2008 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the foundation of the *Consello da Cultura Galega*, which was founded to uphold the 'defensa e promoción dos valores culturais do pobo galego' and to 'ofrecerlle ó país galego un esquema ben fundamentado das necesidades e das opcións con que conta para forxa-la plenitude da súa personalidade mediante a recuperación da cultura propia' ([www.consellodacultura.org](http://www.consellodacultura.org)). It is obvious that the protection of a *cultura propia* is certainly one of the main objectives of most of these institutions devoted to the preservation of culture; therefore it should not be a surprise to see the role that museums might play in the achievement of these objectives.

In this article, I will analyse the museographical practices of the *Museo do Pobo Galego*, and its central part in the formation of a museistic complex that also includes the *Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea*, and

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The slogan Herzberger refers to is 'Una, grande, libre', which emphasised national unity as much as national greatness (based on a 'glorious' past), and individual freedom (which we know was limited and controlled, especially in the earlier years of Franco's regime).

the *Panteón dos Galegos Ilustres* within the urbanistic plans of the city of Santiago de Compostela. I will also focus on how this architectural centre has symbolised an aesthetic tension between a stereotypical past reality (a rural, backwards, and superstitious Galicia) and a modern present (a largely industrial and cosmopolitan Galicia) that articulates a Galician identity or *Galeguidade* that is distinctively mythical and uchronic. By playing with the idea of *lieux de mémoire*—in terms of Pierre Nora (1989)—the museographical complex represents the struggle to define a *Galeguidade* through the articulation of a mnemonic discourse inscribed, primarily, in dynamics of time and space. A *lieu de mémoire* or site of memory is 'any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community'; in other words, a site of memory is the place where cultural memory 'crystallizes and secretes itself' (Nora 1989: 7, 1996: xvii). Therefore, its function would be to stop both time and the act of remembering by the actual will to remember (Nora 1989: 19). Sites of memory have taken the place of 'true' memory by becoming 'the generating impulse for collective memory,' and as Charles Mier (1993) argues, these *lieux de mémoire* have an 'evocative capacity' that allows us to remember (143). More importantly, Mier argues that the difference between history and memory is that history 'must reconstruct causal sequences; [it] tell[s] stories of before and after and explain[s] events by their antecedents' while '[m]emories are to be retrieved and relived, not explained' (143). In this sense, a 'historical construction' replaces a 'true memory' because as sites of memory allow us to remember the past, such a past is nevertheless articulated according to those who control the historiographical discourse. In this sense, Pereiro argues that the images of the past usually 'sirven para legitimizar el orden social del presente' and historical memory becomes 'un instrumento retórico, ideológico y político' (2004: 78). It is not unexpected then, that since its creation, *O Museo do Pobo Galego* offers a mythical and stereotypical vision of the Galician national past. This *Galeguidade* is articulated not only in two dialectic times ('past and present'), but also through the desire to understand the present as a product of the past in a concrete Galician geographical space. Thus, the museum's function is to stop both time and the act of remembering by imposing a particular memory of *Galeguidade* that is offered to those that have 'forgotten' what it means to be Galician or to those that have no idea of what constitutes a Galician identity.

Before continuing with this analysis the historical and political context of Galicia and Spain at the time of the museum's conception and development should be addressed. By 1977, when the *Museo do Pobo* was opened to the public, barely two years had past after Francisco Franco's death in 1975; therefore both Galicia and Spain were in the initial moments of the democratic transition. This is very significant because it is impossible to ignore that the ideology of the Francoist regime had given all of Spain, as David Herzberger (1995) has said, 'an imposed homogeneity of historical understanding, neatly summed up in the Regime's synoptic slogan' (88).<sup>1</sup> As a discursive tool, Francoist historiography gave the regime a moral stature in Spain's history. In its attempt to define the nation's future, Francoism intended to establish continuity between the glorious past and the purportedly illustrious new regime. Franco's historiographical method forced historians to begin from the end (the present) and work backward to the beginning (the past). In consequence, as Herzberger

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One of the historiographical strategies of the regime was to appeal to the legacy of past historical figures that would represent the national character of Spain. Thus, *El Cid*, the Catholic Kings (Isabella and Ferdinand), and Teresa de Ávila, to name just a few, were crucial in the dictator's legitimisation of his own conception of a Spanish identity. However, this was not by any means new to Spain's nationalist historiography. As E. Inman Fox (1999) has asserted, 'the idea of Castile's centrality to the shaping of the Spanish nation, [was] an idea widespread in histories written until the middle of this century [twentieth]' which can be traced, at least back to the early nineteenth century (29). According to Fox, Spanish historiographical discourse, at different periods of time, had resorted to this strategy of recuperating historical figures in an attempt to delineate a national genealogy from a glorious past to a similarly glorious present.

suggests, Franco's regime saw history 'as an unfolding of time that [was] repetitive, deterministic, and radically unchangeable' (1995: 33). In this sense, Francoism pretended to stabilise the present as well as to define a national identity whose final objective was, indeed, that present.<sup>2</sup> As it is well known, in the Francoist nation there was very little room for diversity or for any peripheral or regional discourses. Indeed, Franco's notion of the 'Spanish nation' was precisely founded on the concept of political, religious, linguistic, and cultural integration by the centralisation of control, not only in Madrid, but also in his own figure as Spain's 'Caudillo.'

During the first decade after Franco's death, government officials attempted to decentralise and democratise the Spanish Nation. The so-called *Transición política* offered the newly organised political forces the opportunity both to recognise and encourage the diversity of the regions that shaped the nation. Consequentially, Spain developed a democratic state actively supporting the varying levels of autonomy of those regions. This newfound political freedom, nevertheless, required the regions to re-establish, or in some cases establish for the first time, distinct and separate identities while simultaneously demanding that they collaborate in the foundation of the 'new Spanish nation.' During this time, the leaders of the regions believed in remaining connected to the traditions that had kept Spain united during the last five centuries. For them, it seemed as important to recognise the centre, as it was to recuperate their own, long oppressed identities. The democratisation process of the late 1970's and early 1980's demanded that the government made any possible efforts to overcome the years of Francoist oppression. During these years the idea of the Spanish nation was distancing itself further from the notions of unity and homogeneity, while acquiring a new meaning based on political pluralism, freedom of ideology, linguistic and cultural diversity, and the recognition of Spain's seventeen autonomic governments. The ideological and political premise of the 'new democratic Spain' was, as contradictory as it may seem, a unity that acknowledged heterogeneity.

One of the propositions supported by the new government was the creation of civic institutions closely related to the arts. The new political leaders saw in artistic manifestations the key to promote the construction of the 'new Spanish identity' by approaching culture as 'spectacle' or commodity in the new global market. In other words, as it has been argued by Annabel Martín (2003), the Spanish government of the *Transición* had an "'amnesiac" quality' that focused on the process 'to reclaim a "newness" and "(post)modernity" for itself in its newly articulated post-Francoist European identity', by substituting 'the historical "utopian" projects' of homogenisation and unity for more flexible and open systems where democratic freedom and the celebration of heterogeneity were the key as they were 'sold' as objects of consumption to the general population (214). By creating state-funded museums, while still supporting private ones, the government attempted not only to help achieve the goal of unity but also to implicate the whole country in what Spaniards believed was an endorsement of the country's heterogeneity. By revamping museums like the *Museo del Prado*, the *Museo Nacional de Arte Romano*, or the *Museo de América* with government funding, and opening new ones like the *Museo Reina Sofía* (1990), and supporting those with private funding especially in the autonomic regions like the *Museo d'Art Contemporani* in Barcelona (1995), and the *Guggenheim* in Bilbao (1997), the Spanish

government pretended not only to achieve a national unity but also to promote a cultural difference or heterogeneity by giving freedom to the different boards of trustees, and private organisations to create any type of museums.<sup>3</sup> What the Spanish Ministry of Culture has called *proceso de modernización* of museums was, in part, due to three events: the creation of the *Ministerio* itself in 1977, the Spanish Constitution of 1978, which offered a new governmental organisational model, and the publication of the *Ley 16/1985 de Patrimonio Histórico Español*. The *Law of Spanish Historical Patrimony* or *Ley 16/1985* is significant because it:

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This is only a sample list of some of these museums. For a more complete list and specific details on each of them, readers can refer to María Bolaños (1997) and Selma Reuben Holo (1999). It is important also to note that both the PSOE and the PP pursued this approach of supporting art related organisations as a political strategy of the democratisation process.

consagra una nueva definición de Patrimonio Histórico y amplía notablemente su extensión. En ella quedan comprendidos los bienes muebles e inmuebles que los constituyen, el patrimonio arqueológico y el etnográfico, los museos, archivos y bibliotecas de titularidad estatal, así como el patrimonio documental y bibliográfico. Busca, en suma, asegurar la protección y fomentar la cultura material de vida a la acción del hombre en sentido amplio, y concibe aquella como un conjunto de bienes que en sí mismos han de ser apreciados, sin establecer limitaciones derivadas de su propiedad, uso, antigüedad o valor económico. (www.mcu.es)

The date when this law was passed (1985) is significant in terms of our understanding the importance of the *Museo do Pobo Galego* in the context of contemporary Spain. The museum's foundation and conception pre-dates any political effort to offer a social and popular orientation of Spanish museums. This law, along with the *Real Decreto 620/1987*, which approves the *Reglamento de Museos de Titularidad Estatal y del Sistema Español de Museos*, are the first official documents to offer a new concept of museum: an institution whose function is to serve the community with a view to protecting every *bien de interés cultural*, which is defined as:

todas las áreas de la cultura, no sólo las tradicionales (arqueología, historia o arte), sino las de valor etnográfico, científico y técnico, y que es aplicable a aquellas posesiones que, con independencia de su propietario, habrán de estar sujetas a la protección estatal, en razón de su utilidad social y su disfrute público. (Bolaños 1997: 418)

As both the *Ley 16/1985* and the *Decreto 620/1987* facilitated and supported the creation of diverse museums in Spain, they also put the museums in a discursive level by describing them as 'instituciones de carácter permanente que adquieren, conservan, investigan, comunican y exhiben, para fines de estudio, educación y contemplación, conjuntos y colecciones de valor artístico, histórico, científico y técnico o de cualquier otra naturaleza cultural' (www.mcu.es). Crucially, these laws also foresaw the direct involvement and collaboration of the autonomous governments in the creation, foundation and organisation of museums. When studying the importance of museums in democratic processes, one must consider, as Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (1991) suggest, that:

groups attempting to establish and maintain a sense of community and to assert their social, political, and economic claims in the larger world challenge the right of established institutions to control the presentation of their cultures. (1)

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For more on a post-national approach to Galician Studies, readers can refer to the special issue of the *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* edited by Kirsty Hooper and Helena Miguélez-Carballeira (2009).

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I would like to thank one of the anonymous readers for pointing this out to me.

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The museum also counts with the contributions of individual members and private sponsors and the *Concello de Santiago* does not contribute financially but by assigning personnel to work at the museum (Fernández Cerviño 1997: 174).

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Anderson (1991) believes that, from an anthropological perspective, a nation is 'an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (6). Anderson also explains that this nation is imagined because its members would never know each other, but it is a sense or an image of their communion what ties them together.

It is precisely this atmosphere that allowed the creation of the *Museo do Pobo Galego*. The first Galician museum to offer any sense of negotiation between past and present was conceived with the intention of becoming '[...] un punto de referencia no que os galegos se recoñecesen e identificasen como pobo' ([www.museodopobo.es](http://www.museodopobo.es)). Although it was the first 'national' museum to be opened in Spain, the *Museo do Pobo* remains far from being recognised as a 'national' museum, and much less from becoming a 'brand museum' such as the Guggenheim in Bilbao. The *Museo do Pobo*'s conception, however, supported the early post-Francoist approach to the creation of a European identity through an apparent juxtaposition of past and present, while equally collaborating in the construction of a nationalistic discourse within the Spanish context. If, as Stuart Hall (1999) suggests, such discourses are usually articulated in terms of cultural meanings, then museums contribute to a specific notion of culture 'which bind[s] each member individually into the larger national store' (4). In other words, normally a national museum promotes the idea that a peoples have of themselves and the idea that others, outside this group, impose on this particular group. This position certainly follows the 'traditional' approach of the nation-state paradigm by focusing mostly on the forces of a Galician national movement (that must point to the distinctiveness of a Galician identity), and by not acknowledging the role of external forces that have contributed to the blurring of these lines as Galician culture is presently being redefined in other terms and in other venues beyond this scope and more within the parameters of a 'post-national' context.<sup>4</sup>

It is significant that the museum's name does not include the word 'national' or 'nation', although it is 'vocacionalmente hablando, el Museo nacional de la Cultura gallega', according to José Carlos Sierra Rodríguez (1990: 135). The name does refer, however, to the *pobo galego*, emphasising a more ethnographical and anthropological approach to the representation of Galician culture.<sup>5</sup> As such, the *Museo do Pobo Galego* focuses on 'the dialectic between identity and otherness [...] by promoting the authority of self and local identity with links to the rural past' (Pereiro and Vilar 2008: 88). Therefore, as Xerardo Pereiro and Manuel Vilar (2008) argue, Galician museums, including the *Museo do Pobo*, have adopted a 'generalized and stereotypical self-image' that focuses 'largely on displaying the rural world, technological backwardness, and androcentrism (male-centredness) in a manner that results in a representation of an essentialized Galician identity' (2008: 98, 99). Even the government of the *Xunta de Galicia* 'entendendo que o Museo do Pobo Galego pode ser considerado como cabeceira espiritual e simbólica da rede de museos antropolóxicos de Galicia', did not recognise its competence to act as 'centro sintetizador de todos os museos e coleccións públicas e privados integrados no sistema galego de museos dedicados ó estudio, promoción e difusión do patrimonio histórico-antropolóxico de Galicia' until the *Decreto 111* of the *Xunta de Galicia* in June of 1993 ([www.museodopobo.es](http://www.museodopobo.es)). All the same, the museum has always had the support of the Board of Trustees, which includes diverse institutions that work in favour of Galician culture such as the *Xunta de Galicia* itself through the *Consellería de Cultura e Deporte*, the *Concello de Santiago*, the *Parlamento de Galicia*, the three Galician universities (Santiago, Coruña and Vigo), and several banks such as *Caixagalicia* and *Caixanova*, among others.<sup>6</sup>

According to one of the *Museo do Pobo*'s curators, Belén Sáenz-Chas Díaz (2006), the museum has always attempted to be a 'museo de síntese no

The case of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is significant because it was the first 'brand museum' in Spain. There is no doubt that the conception of the Basque museum was instrumental in the 'beautification project aimed at reconstructing the city's rather unappealing image, both in Spain and especially on an international level', as Justin Crambaugh has commented (2001: 41). However, Nerea Arruti (2004) has poignantly argued that the Guggenheim Bilbao Museum is in itself a paradox of death and life (167). A 'living' tribute to a dying city as it offered a positive look into the future by creating wealth as much as beautifying the post-industrial city: 'the Guggenheim effect has been linked not only to the economic renewal of the city itself, but also to the potential for effecting positive change on the latter's social problems' (Arruti 2004: 171). Bilbao's Guggenheim has been seen as a successful model of the contemporary museum as it integrates a globalised perspective to a local reality. The truth is that the Guggenheim Bilbao Museum represents a negotiation and articulation of the relationship between a past, decadent reality and a modern, prosperous present as seen from a globalised politics of Basque culture (Arruti 2004: 175).

que se pretende dar unha visión global da cultura galega' (102). With such objectives, the museum employs an anthropological approach and, as the *Guía do Visitante* (1995) expresses, a 'perspectiva da antropoloxía cultural' (3) allows the museum to:

abranguer e relaciona-las diversas manifestacións humanas no seo dunha comunidade diferenciada, recollendo, conservando e estudiando as mostras da cultura espiritual e material para, a través desa realidade, coadxuvar á planificación do futuro colectivo. (3)

We can distinguish a number of important points of analysis in this citation. First of all, we can focus on the idea of a *comunidad diferenciada*, which implies, on the one hand, a sense of unity or community (thinking in terms of Benedict Anderson)<sup>7</sup> of all Galicians. On the other hand, this idea also suggests that Galicians perceive themselves as different from other groups or communities and this 'embodies the complex identitarian tensions that the micronational political units of government face in the Spanish/European context: self-government promoted on the grounds of cultural difference and its ties to geography' as Martin has suggested in the case of the Guggenheim Museum in the Basque Country (2003: 214).<sup>8</sup> It seems that even though the museum must exhibit material culture that gives the visitor a concrete idea of the *pobo galego* (as differentiated from other communities), the fact that it reinforces most aspects of rurality and emphasises the myth of Galicia as 'rural, agrarian, static, religious, conservative, and of course, depoliticized and free of conflicts' is far from being an accurate depiction of Galicia's reality (Pereiro & Vilar 2008: 101). Secondly, we must consider the idea that the museum's function is to 'recoger, conservar y estudiar' the several elements that show Galicia's cultural difference. In this sense, the museum intends to establish a temporal dialogue in which the (re)presentation of a diversified Galician identity is manifested in its material culture as a *lieu de mémoire*. Therefore, the *Museo do Pobo* presents an image of Galicia based on a synthetic vision of 'as distintas facetas que definen a cultura de Galicia' (www.museodopobo.es). It is my contention that the problem with the concept expressed by this quote is that this image of Galicia (whatever that image is) must be easily observable by Galicians and foreigners alike since both groups must recognise and identify Galicians as a people through the museum's exhibits. As Karp (1991) argues, '[e]xhibitions represent identity, either directly, through assertion, or indirectly, by implication' but when cultural identity is implicated 'exhibitions tell us who we are and, perhaps most significantly, who we are not. Exhibitions are privileged arenas for presenting images of self and "other"' (15). In other words, through the *Museo do Pobo*'s exhibits, people must 'identify' the elements of Galician identity by comparing their own selves with what they see. However, the ethnographic image presented to the visitor communicates an essentialist identity, and the Galicians that must 'recognise' themselves in the museum are those who have 'forgotten' who they are; and it is very possible that foreigners who are entirely unfamiliar with what constitutes a Galician identity, in opposition or comparison to a Spanish, Catalan or Basque identity, for example, may leave the museum with an 'inaccurate' impression of Galicia's reality.

With its practices, the *Museo do Pobo* establishes a dialogue with those who visit it by creating a physical and rhetorical space that, in turn, lays claim to a national identity by looking at Galicia's past through an ethnographic lens. Pereiro and Vilar have argued that this type of view

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Please note that all the pictures included in this article are originals and were taken by the author on September 2008.

reinforces the ‘rural cliché [...] by the material culture used historically by peasants and fishermen [is] irrespective of social changes and [of] the experiences of the objects’ creators or users’ (2008: 100). Nevertheless, it can be argued that even though the *Museo do Pobo*’s material culture lacks exceptionality (these are not unique pieces), its significance resides in the fact that they are popular expressions (because they are of unknown authors) and, as such, they represent the entire group. As museographical scholar Aurora León (1995) explains, this type of collection shows ‘la sensibilidad, producción, modus vivendi, industrialización o artesanía de una raza o pueblo que trabaja anónimamente siguiendo una tradición artesanal como expresión artística de la colectividad’ (138). The concern with such approach is that the artefacts shown to the public are only a small part representing the whole, giving the illusion that what one sees is everything there is to see about Galicia’s cultural productions. This also suggests that this is a ‘collection-driven’ exhibition and as such, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991) comments, it might ‘suffer from ethnographic atrophy because [it] tend[s] to focus on what could be, and was, physically detached and carried away’ (389). Consequently, the *Museo do Pobo Galego*, with its ethnographic approach and its exhibits dedicated to several socio-cultural aspects of Galicia (the sea, agriculture, architecture, music, etc.) defines a *Galeguidade* at a symbolic level, from a rural and working-class perspective by showing pieces that represent all of Galicia’s cultural productions, traditions, costumes, etc. (figs. 1, 2 & 3).<sup>9</sup> The blatant lack of any reflection, or even a hint to the socio-cultural changes happening in Galicia, by taking into account life in the cities, or the newer meanings and uses of rural spaces, reinforces an even more essentialist perspective, since it emphasises the idyllic aspects of Galician cultural past. Sáenz-Chas Díaz alleges that the *Museo do Pobo* ‘ofrece unha visión máis antropolóxica da sociedade tradicional galega’ because of the ‘múltiples e profundos cambios que experimentou e ven experimentando’, subsequently, what is left of Galicia ‘a penas é recoñecible por gran parte do público’ (2006: 93). The museum also follows an *in situ* approach by the use of dioramas of villages, recreated environments, photo murals, and videos showing a variety of ‘real life’ events which extend the boundaries of ethnographic objects ‘to include more of what was left behind, even if only in replica after the object was excised from its physical, social, and cultural settings’ (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991: 389). The problem with these displays is that



Fig. 1. Diorama of typical Galician farming instruments.



*Fig. 2.* Window showcase of Galician typical bagpipes, drums, and tambourines.



*Fig. 3.* Diorama of a typical Galician village.

they are usually monographic in nature; that is to say that they tend to represent culture as a coherent whole forgetting all the different elements that conform it (including those who create the displays as much as those who see it). At the same time, this type of museums tends to maintain an educational approach often becoming ‘closed spaces, of cave-like, store or laboratory appearance, where objects and walls play a prominent role, [...] focused on the past, and designed with a passive visitor in mind’ as Pereiro and Vilar assert (2008: 91).

Even though the criterion used to design the museum is supposedly derived from ‘[d]a vontade de dar unha visión comprensiva do proceso de produción’ of Galician identity, the museum offers a synthetic vision of the diverse aspects that complement Galicia (*Guía* 1995: 5). The image of a Galicia ‘eminenteiramente campesiña e mariñeira, pero tamén urbana, co factor humano que fai de cada manifestación do diario quefacer unha obra con personalidade propia’ is the one that stands out (*Guía* 1995: 5). There is no doubt that this affirmation, offered to the museum’s visitors, holds the idea of difference, although it perpetuates stereotypes. Back in 2001, when I visited the museum for the first time, it had only eight permanent exhibits dedicated to the ocean, trades, farmland, regional dress, music, sumptuous arts, habitat and architecture, and sculpture. Between 2003 and 2004 the Museum went through a series of renovations and six of these galleries

remained (the sumptuous arts was relocated into other sections) and five new galleries were opened (society, urban trades, art, archaeology, and press and publications) making a total of eleven exhibition halls. Even with these new changes and additions, the museum's profile still emphasises a synthetic representation of Galician culture in one concrete or closed space. We must remember, as León already suggested, that the contents of a museum, no matter how old and what is their nature, are 'siempre un producto inacabado' that constantly promotes a reaction of the public, and in this case, the museum is looking for a recognition of what is Galician proper (1995: 71). Sáenz-Chas Díaz comments that

o labor do Museo do Pobo Galego é de recoller aqueles aspectos do patrimonio cultural galego que son máis descoñecidos para as novas xeracións e que, afortunadamente ou desafortunadamente, están a perderse; a súa labor consiste en recuperar e conservar ese patrimonio para dalo en herdanza as xeracións futuras. Temos un rico patrimonio que está en vías de desaparición e non hai tempo que perder para a súa musealización. (2006: 102)

In spite of this, the celebratory tone of Galician culture that characterises the museum is undermined by the curatorial practices that are used, as already mentioned, and the public does not have 'real' access to the objects, although some of the displays create the illusion of the real (figs. 4 & 5). Therefore, the 'experience' of Galicia's cultural identity is translated into a 'marvellous', 'amazing', 'out of context', and 'outside the real' experience.



Fig. 4. Objects are still displayed in window cases, and in photographs.

As it can be appreciated from these photos, the *Museo do Pobo* maintains most of its collections in permanent glass displays and dioramas, making it clear that their purpose is to preserve the material culture as much as to educate the visitor, which is a practice dating back to the XIX century implying a conception of the museum as a tool for public teaching (Bennett 1999: 71). In this regard, the matter of who represents the public targeted by the museum as part of its objective to educate about Galicia must be considered. This question arises since the museum is near the *Porta do Camiño*, which is the main entrance to the city for the pilgrims who complete the French section of the *Camiño de Santiago*. At a first glance, it

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I would like to thank José Colmeiro and Joseba Gabilondo for pointing this out to me.

is possible to argue that the main group that attends the museum is that of foreigners who go to Santiago to visit the tomb of Saint James; however, the signs and posters used through out the museum are monolingual (Galician), a new practice at the time of the museum's conception, and still not widespread among other Galician museums. It is true that the *Guía do visitante* can be bought in other languages (Spanish, French, English, German, Italian, etc.), but the foreign visitor may have limited access to the explanations about the exhibits and, therefore, his or her knowledge of Galician culture is reduced to the objects behind glass cases. One of the new sections, 'Sociedade e Memoria', does include two computers where information about the exhibit and its contents is displayed through a slide show and 'a información está dispoñible en tres idiomas: galego, castelán e inglés' (Sáenz-Chas Díaz 2006: 104). Even with some access to the exhibits by other media and in other languages, this *lieu de mémoire* (the *Museo do Pobo*) becomes an object with a symbolic reference that is conditioned by a *Galeguidade* that exists only for it and it is directed to those who have 'forgotten' what it means to be Galician: young children and students, as they have to be 'reminded' of what is no longer there and what they have lost through time and in the contemporary world.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, as art historian Tony Bennett has pointed out, 'the museum visitor is never in a relation of direct, unmediated contact with the "reality of the artefact" and, hence, with the "real stuff" of the past' (1999: 146). Thus, the public leaves the museum without actually being able to experience Galician culture.

It is also critical to mention that the space where the museum is located (the convent of Santo Domingo de Bonaval), is just next door to the



Fig. 5. Anonymous samples of pottery, and cooking utensils.

church where the tombs of the *Galegos Ilustres* are located. In a small chapel on the left hand of the church 'reposan los restos de Rosalía de Castro, Alfredo Brañas, Francisco Asorey, Ramón Cabanillas y Domingo Fontán' and in another one at the right 'está o sepulcro de Castela' (*Guía* 1995: 4) (fig. 6).

The creation and location of the *Museo do Pobo Galego*, next to the remains of these figures that lead the Galician national sentiment, is not a coincidence, hence its significance as official *lieu de mémoire*. This strategy is charged with a great discursive power since it places the museum in direct dialogue with what these figures represent as icons of Galician



Fig. 6. Alfonso Daniel Rodríguez Castelao's grave.



Fig. 7. The *Museo do Pobo Galego* is the building on the left, and the *Panteón dos Galegos Ilustres* is the one on the right.

identity (similar to the strategy Fox suggests had been used to create 'Spain as Castile'). The conception of the museum, through the adaptation of a monastery, allowed the incorporation of the first Galician museum within the urbanistic plans of Santiago de Compostela, and given the building's proximity to the *Panteón dos Galegos Ilustres*, it has become a prime focus in the construction of a discourse of Galician identity. It used to be possible to just visit the church and not the museum; however, currently, in order to go into the church, visitors have to enter the museum first, visit the *Panteón*, and exit again through the museum, bringing both sites together as one space (fig. 7). The fact that the *Panteón* is now inscribed in the museum's curatorial practices prevails in the appropriation of a nationalist past for the present.

As Bennett (1999) has argued, the production of a site of memory, be that a building, a museum or a cemetery, carries several difficulties, since this site must 'coincide as closely as possible, brick for brick and paling for paling, with an earlier model' (128). In the case of the *Museo do Pobo*, we must question what that model is or was, as it was the first ethnographic museum of Galicia. Certainly, there is no simple answer, and what is clear is that the symbolic connection between the *Panteón* and the *Museo do Pobo* was key to its conception and design. In this instance, the museum functions as a *lieu de mémoire* that historicises and mythifies a Galician

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According to Alba Tizón, in 2003, ‘despois de negar repetidamente a súa pertinencia, a Xunta de Galicia retomou a idea do museo da emigración, e fíxoo no lanzamento do que seguramente é o equipamento cultural máis ambicioso nunca proxectado en Galicia’: the *Cidade da Cultura*, which will be discussed later in this article (2005: 67).

identity grounded on tradition. This is possible because the *Panteón* allows the museum to inscribe itself in a perpetual past, and this frame renders it ‘the product of the present practices which organise and maintain that frame’ (Bennett 1999: 130). Although the *Museo do Pobo* aims to offer a view that distinguishes a specifically Galician cultural heritage, one important characteristic of Galician identity –emigration– had been completely absent from the exhibits until the one entitled ‘Sociedade, memoria e tradición’ was created. This new section offers a ‘percorrido polas diferentes manifestacións dos usos, costumes, prácticas e crenzas que, en conxunto, caracterizan o pobo galego desde a perspectiva da antropoloxía social’ (www.museodopobo.es). The exhibit is divided into several sections like ‘Espazo e sociedade’ which focuses on the ‘concepto tradicional da casa, a organización social en aldeas e parroquias e as relacións de veciñanza’ emphasizing home and family life, farmland organization, land ownership and inheritance (Sáenz-Chas 2006: 100). It is in this section that there’s some visual mention of emigration, as part of everyday life in Galicia. However, such a reference is limited to a couple of suitcases, some pictures and some signs with ticket prices to different destinations (fig. 8). It is important to point out that there is still no ‘Galician Museum of Emigration’, although:

[d]ende hai unha década algunhas voces veñen reclamando a necesidade de fundar un equipamento museístico que recolla o patrimonio da emigración. E malia que nos últimos anos se propuxeron varias iniciativas para crear un museo da emigración galega, polo de agora non se acadou un acordo suficiente, e outras comunidades autónomas están tomando a dianteira na creación de equipamentos deste tipo. (Alba Tizón 2005: 65)

Given the lack of a dedicated museum on the theme of Galician emigration, the *Museo do Pobo Galego* could presumably incorporate this aspect of Galician modern history and culture within its representational scope. However, and as can be appreciated through the exhibit, emigration seems to be regarded as tangential within the scope of the *Museo do pobo galego*.<sup>11</sup>

The section ‘O devalar das horas’ shows an imagined daily routine through different places such as the bedroom, the kitchen, the classroom



Fig. 8. Showcase of a sign advertising tickets to different destinations, a picture of emigrants on a ship and couple of suitcases.

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*Fig. 9.* Display of sleeping quarters.

*Fig. 10.* Showcase of a typical classroom.



*Fig. 11.* Display of a traditional *taberna*.



(where children would go and study), and the *taberna* (where people would socialise), to mention a few (figs. 9, 10, & 11). Sáenz-Chas explains that it was very difficult to design this section since ‘non é posible tomar unha xornada tipo para describir en que empregaban as horas do día tódolos membros dunha sociedade [...] Así que tiñamos que buscar contidos xenéricos que

non chocaran de fronte co anteriormente exposto. E as únicas cuestións que parecían estar presentes nos diferentes tipos de xornadas eran dúas: comer e durmir' (2006: 101). In any case, these exhibits do offer a view, albeit a fairly limited one, of a 'typical daily routine', although the visitor needs to apply his or her imagination.

The section, 'O tempo, un concepto cíclico' offers a view of traditional festivities and *traballos* related to the year's seasons and the different patron saints. The section 'A corrente da vida' focuses on traditions related to different life-changing events such as birth, marriage and death, by showing baptism and wedding gowns, as well as death certificates and other artefacts used in burial practices. This section 'concibiuse dende un principio como unha sucesión de idades, comezando polo nacemento e rematando na morte, marcado o paso dunhas idades a outras e sinalando, en cada unha delas, as obrigas e os dereitos dos homes e mulleres que as conforman', according to Sáenz-Chas (2006: 101). This section is particularly interesting because it allows the visitor to see what Pereiro and Vilar have described as an 'androcentric, male-centred representation of Galician cultural identity' (2008: 101). Most of the exhibit's artefacts, and photos depict a prominent space of men and male-oriented activities, while women



Fig. 12. Photograph displayed in the section 'A casa e a familia'.



Fig. 13. Representation of a *lareira*, where meals were cooked, with a photograph of a woman sitting by the fire.

and their role in Galician society 'are seldom represented – in either objects or activities – and when they are, it is always in a role linked to domestic life' (Pereiro and Vilar 2008: 101) (figs. 12 & 13).

Finally, the section 'Crenzas e saberes' portrays diverse cultural practices and symbols related to medical care, focusing on superstitions, and other religious practices such as *ex-votos* (wax pieces resembling body parts that are offered to different saints when asking for miracles in healing a particular part of the body). This new section is appealing to those who would never have visited or 'experienced' a Galician village or house, since it makes the visit seem more 'real'. Despite the museum programme's insistence on keeping a close relationship (both physically, and metaphorically) with the past (thus its condition of *lieu de mémoire*), there is also a rhetorical effort to incorporate the museum into the present and future visions. With this purpose, in 1993 the Museum donated the monastery's garden to the *Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea* (fig. 14). The Board of Trustees asked the Portuguese architect Álvaro Siza Viera (Pritzker Prize of 1993) to design the new space and, as Siza himself commented, the building '[s]érvese da pedra como un elemento que o une coa tradición, dialogando cos edificios circundantes, respectando o sentido de *historia* que pervive en Compostela' ([www.cgac.org](http://www.cgac.org)). In this sense, it can be said that the conception of the *Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea*



Fig. 14. *Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea*.

had the purpose of uniting the historical past and cultural traditions with the present and future. The new building constitutes another institutional effort to incorporate Galicia's historical past into a more modern and cosmopolitan vision.

In a chain that begins with the *Panteón dos Galegos Ilustres*, the *Museo do Pobo* takes the centre, and the *CGAC* closes the complex (fig. 15). The *CGAC* 'é un espazo de difusión que ten a función de dinamizar o panorama artístico actual e reflexionar acerca da diversidade das conformacións culturais na sociedade contemporánea' ([www.cgac.org](http://www.cgac.org)). The museum was created 'para promover o desenvolvemento de plataformas culturais e favorecer a entrada de Galicia no círculo artístico internacional' ([www.cgac.org](http://www.cgac.org)). The *CGAC* has a relatively large collection (about 1000 works) of artists from all over the world, and one of its objectives is to 'reforzar a representación de artistas galegos intentando fortalecer o impulso revitalizador e internacional da arte galega' ([www.cgac.org](http://www.cgac.org)).

However, the focus of the museum is in the temporary exhibits that have seen the museum as their home, even if it was for short periods of time. Through these exhibitions, it is obvious that there is an attempt to engage the museum in direct dialogue with some of the other museums of contemporary art both in Spain and around the world. The fact that contemporary artists' exhibits are temporary points towards a 'natural' sense of mobility, and to the sense of constant change that characterises contemporary times. The present is continually changing, mobile and malleable, as the past remains intact in the *Museo do Pobo* and the *Panteón*. Thus, the diverse historical, cultural, and artistic cultural moments that come together with these three spaces become intrinsically connected to promote a Galician identity that has a rich culture and history as well as a cosmopolitan and modern present (and future). By ending this sequence with the *CGAC*, the *galegos ilustres* are appropriated for a democratic and modern present that is, in turn, a reappropriation of the present for the past.

Although this museographical complex has existed since the early 1990's, it has never been considered a 'brand' with regard to a Galician representation of its national character. It was not until 1999, when de *Xunta de Galicia* held an International Contest of Architecture to build a *Cidade da Cultura* on Monte Gaiás in Santiago, that the idea of a 'brand' name



Fig. 15. The *Museo do Pobo Galego* is at the centre, and the *Panteón dos Galegos Ilustres* (not in picture) would be at the right of the museum as it can be seen in Picture 7.

surfaced as a viable project. Out of the twelve initial proposals, the winner of the competition was the group of Eisenman Architects based in the United States. The *Fundación da Cidade da Cultura* began the construction of the project in 2001 and it is expected to be completed between 2010-2012. The Foundation's web page explains that Eisenman's inspiration was born 'na cidade histórica de Compostela, nas cinco rutas de peregrinación da cidade medieval que conducen á catedral' and the entire complex is understood to be more than 'unha serie de edificios discretos, a forma tradicional do urbanismo figura/fondo' in which 'os edificios que componen a Cidade da Cultura están literalmente tallados no terreo para configurar un urbanismo de figura/figura' ([www.cidadedacultura.org](http://www.cidadedacultura.org)). The architect Fernando Agrasar has commented that the initial conception of the *Cidade da Cultura* 'é, en parte, unha consecuencia do efecto Guggenheim' as it promotes a global visibility of the city ([www.vieiros.com](http://www.vieiros.com)). José Colmeiro (2009) has argued that the project of the *Cidade da Cultura* 'underlines the

key relationship between creative cultural producers and cultural and political institutions in contemporary Galicia', and it 'could be interpreted as an attempt to create a Galician version, certainly of gargantuan proportions, of the project commissioned from Frank Gehry by the Basque government, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao' (225). In its initial conception the architectural complex included several buildings that would host museums, libraries, archives, and auditoriums with the objective to 'reconciliar a conservación patrimonial coa produción de coñecemento, investigación, creación e consumo cultural'; however, the original project has been revised and reformulated and there are still questions as to what it will hold ([www.cidadedacultura.org](http://www.cidadedacultura.org)). There has been much controversy surrounding the creation of such an ambitious project including the high cost of materials, the need to re-conceptualise the project itself, the 'use' of the *Cidade da Cultura* as a political tool by both the PSOE/PSdG and the PPdeG, and the need to stop the project and divert funds somewhere else. In 2006 the *Padroado do Museo do Pobo Galego* was commissioned by the newly elected Socialist government (elected in 2005) to draft a report on the status of the project, and to reformulate its objectives, plans and goals for such expensive endeavour. This report focused on the idea of opening Galicia to the world and in seeing the *Cidade da Cultura* 'as cabeceira do Sistema Galego de Política Cultural..., como espazo de transferencia dos coñecementos, das artes e da tecnoloxía..., como escaparate do futuro que se quere para Galiza..., [and] como elemento integrado no desenvolvemento urbano...' (Padroado do Museo do Pobo Galego 2006: 17, 18 & 19). José Carlos Bermejo Barrera (2007) has criticised the project for lacking a material culture to display other than the actual building, and for representing in itself a crucial paradox: namely that, on the one hand, Galicia has much culture to offer, while, on the other, this culture has to be exhibited because it has been 'unha protagonista marxinal da historia' (65). As the new government of Alberto Núñez Feijóo, elected in 2009, talks about continuing with the original plans for the *Cidade da Cultura*, most of the criticism surrounding the creation of the *Cidade da Cultura* centres upon the politics of cultural representation used by those in power; and the *Museo do Pobo Galego*, the *CGAC*, and the *Panteón dos Galegos Ilustres* have already been a part of this contradictory line of cultural politics.

The effort to create historical continuity, which can be perceived through these strategies, points towards a temporal and spatial perspective that dominates Galician national discourse. The relation between past and present manifests itself as a museographical function as well as a cultural and political paradigm, placing the *Museo do Pobo*, the *CGAC*, and the *Panteón*, in a dynamic of continuous historical process. In other words, the museographical complex is perceived and presented as the medium in which to explain how Galicias's cultural practices have developed and, furthermore, how they are intrinsic and inherent to the definition of a Galician identity. Nevertheless, the efforts surrounding the conception of this museistic complex do not guarantee direct and immediate access to what it should represent: *Galeguidade*. The ambiguity created between the confusion of who the target audience is and how Galician identity is represented prevents the visitor from seeing what is real to the Galician nation. The museographical strategies used in the *Museo do Pobo* and in the *CGAC* aim to sustain a structure that follows a national historiographical definition of cultural identity by emphasising the preservation of material culture through an ethnographic lens. Likewise, the fact that the three

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sites are next to each other, visually points out to the connection between time and space. The public cannot visit 'only one' of these places, people are 'forced' to visit them all, following the order imposed and established by those who systematised this image of Galicia. Although it can be argued that one can start the visit from the *CGAC*, and finish with the *Panteón*, the dynamic remains essentially the same one, since the present becomes embedded in the past as a means to understand the origins and history of contemporary Galician culture. The fact that the museographical complex includes the *Museo do Pobo Galego*, the *CGAC* and the *Panteón dos Galegos Ilustres* highlights the need to maintain a continuous relationship between past and present for the future, as well as a Galician identity that is both traditional and modern. Perhaps the *Cidade da Cultura* might provide Galicia with a new conception of cultural politics; but until then, the already existing museistic complex is dialoguing with Galicians as much as with visitors, and what it communicates is the fact that the Galician nation is constructed through the juxtaposition of past and present, of rural and urban, of traditional and modern. Therefore, it would appear that the function of the historical and museographical discourse used by the complex aims to erase the borders between these dialectics for a future and modern Galicia.



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