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**TOWARD A TRANSATLANTIC HISTORY
OF THE MUSEUM VISIT**
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TOWARD A TRANSATLANTIC HISTORY OF THE MUSEUM VISIT

Keith R. Allen

INTRODUCTION

In order to sustain a frank, constructive, and mutually beneficial dialogue among Germans and Americans, scholars must assess how the presentation of the past colors our impressions of today's transatlantic relationship. Because intersections of the past with the present are unavoidable, scholars should turn their attention to the actors engaged in disseminating popular accounts of history, prominent among them, museums.

In this working paper I seek to explore the significance of transatlantic exchange in an understudied area of European-American cultural relations, museum work. My focus in this draft essay is not the creation of new museums, but, rather, on the assessment of existing institutions. While scholars of Germany today have a reasonably clear sense of the various agendas that inform the establishment of museums, we know comparatively little about what happens in museums, art galleries, historical sites, and the like after the doors have opened to the public.

In this draft essay I investigate the origins and terms of German interest in visitors, proceeding in conventional chronological fashion through the twentieth century but focusing primarily on the periods 1900 to 1914 and 1960 to 1975. Throughout the period, in considering how to assess the effectiveness of museum exhibitions and programs one country, the United States, mattered more than any other. In the postwar Germanies, the transmission of American ideas about visitors in yielded paradoxical results, drawing together, not dividing, experts from the two German states; strengthening the role of the West German state as the arbiter of museum success or failure; and, at least in professional circles, calling into question the success popularly attributed to museums in the two Germanies during the late 1960s and 1970s.

AUDIENCE RESEARCH IN THE U.S. AND (WEST) GERMANY SINCE THE 1960s

Ideas about museum visitors have long circulated within the Atlantic world. During the past three decades, the exchange has been intense and one-sided. It is safe to say that the so-called "audience experts" in the United States are by and large unaware of scholarship on visitors beyond the English-speaking world. For example, the twenty-six page bibliography of John Falk's and Lynn Dierking's widely-cited 2000 publication, *Learning from Museums, Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*, contains only one reference to a publication in a language other than English (a German essay first printed in 1806).¹ English-language translations of important studies in continental languages are unavailable, and informal opportunities to exchange views with colleagues from other nations, such as the annual gathering of North American museum audience experts, the Visitor Studies Association meeting, are rare.

While in recent decades American practitioners have devoted scant attention to work abroad, American research has been followed with enthusiasm in Germany. A new German journal, the *Karlsruhe Series on Visitor Studies* (Karlsruher Reihe zur Besucherforschung), offers examples of the special recognition Germans accord American work. Edited by the doyen of the German

¹ John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *Learning from Museums. Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*, Oxford 2000. A methodologically more rigorous (though equally Anglocentric) approach to museum visitors is George E. Hein's *Learning in the Museum*, London 1998.

museum assessment field, the sociologist Hans-Joachim Klein, each issue of the journal contains a fairly gushing two-page research portrait of the field's (Klein's phrase, not mine) "founding fathers"; the first to receive the honor were American psychologists Chandler Screven, Ross Loomis, and Harris Shettel. Another regular feature of the journal is a glossary of "Anglo-American" assessment terms: recent examples include such gems as "informal learning environment," "formative evaluation," or "goal-referenced approach." In conferences, monographs, and journals, paying tribute to North American visitor experts assumes myriad forms.

Such frequent assertions to American innovation might lead some to believe that Germans have little to contribute to a transatlantic dialogue about museum assessment. Exactly the opposite is true. Inspired by individual American examples, during the past two decades, several prominent German sociologists have traced patterns of visitation within museums throughout the Federal Republic, producing studies without parallel on our side of the Atlantic.²

Taking a close look at the data gathered by the Institute revealed a more somber assessment of museum visitation, allowing two scholars in particular, Han-Joachim Klein and Heiner Treinen, to call into question the existence of a "museum boom" in West Germany during the 1970s and 1980s. In a statistical analysis of forty museums in two geographic regions, Klein has found that important regional differences had emerged during the 1970s and 1980s among West German museum audiences: while museums in the comparatively wealthy southern provinces were steadily gaining visitors, attendance declined, in some cases rather dramatically, almost everywhere north of the Main river. Remarkably, in a period of rising incomes and levels of education more German museums were losing visitors than gaining new ones.³ Impressive aggregate gains in visits obscure the fact that most museums were increasingly unable to attract visitors in the crucial age cohort of twenty to forty years (nearly half of all non-group visitors to German museums are in this range). While acknowledging occasional bright spots in particular art galleries and science museums, Klein's findings indicated that many German institutions would face significant obstacles in attracting new visitors as German society aged.

The misgivings Klein expressed about the present and future of the German museum have qualitative dimensions as well. According to fellow sociologists Heiner Treinen and Helmit Kromrey, the aggregate gains in visitation during the "boom" decades of the 1970s and 1980s may be attributed almost entirely to the creation of new museums (frequently very small, highly specialized institutions), as well as to special exhibitions and other extraordinary activities in a handful of the best-known German museums and galleries.⁴ In Treinen's view, in embracing an active program of special exhibitions and programs the most successful of these institutions increasingly resemble competitors from the entertainment industry. Although he's short on convincing proof, Treinen asserts that as curators seek new ways to capture the attention of visitors, the effect of their labors is often to confuse, distract, and sensationalize. Visitors to

²² In 2000, the Institute gathered information on visitors from 5,182 museums: the total number of visits (as opposed to visitors) recorded was 99,560,001. Profiles compiled by the Institute for West Germany since 1981 (as well as the former East Germany since 1990) enable researchers and practitioners to trace patterns of visitation across time and museum type. See, Statistische Gesamterhebung an den Museen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland für das Jahr 2000, *Materialien aus dem Institut für Museumskunde* 54 (2001).

³ Hans-Joachim Klein, *Der gläserne Besucher. Publikumsstrukturen einer Museumslandschaft*, Berlin 1990. An important exception to the first point is science and natural history museums, where the age structure is younger than in other types of museums.

⁴ Attendance figures from 1981 indicated for the former West Germany roughly 54 million visits: in 1990, the figure had reached over 70 million.

today's "blockbuster" exhibitions, he finds, are only rarely engaged in a process of communication with curators and objects; instead, they are exhibiting behavior he has described as "active dosing" or (in English) "cultural window-shopping."⁵

Treinen has begun a provocative strain of research that calls attention to the affective nature of the museum visit. Educational expansion, the clarion call of many German museum toilers in the 1960s and 1970s⁶ appears in the light of his research to have largely failed, while a "progressive museumification of everyday life," as one widely cited social critic during the 1980s observed, has yielded very few museum converts.⁷

One of America's impacts, then, has been to assist West German sociologists in debunking the myth of museum success during the 1960s and 1970s. Borrowing from North Americans has had also unintended consequences. The appropriation of American methods during the 1970s and 1980s, the basis of what Klein and Bachmayer describe as "systematic research" on museum visitation, informs a distinctly Central European view of visitor studies as a young field with American antecedents.⁸ While West German practitioners like Graf, Klein, Treinen, and others claim to have devoted significant attention to American research (an assertion certainly born out by their citations), their awareness of inquiries on visitors in their own country before the 1970s appears to be rather modest. Klein and Bachmayer have stated that the "decline of social scientific research in Germany at the beginning of the 1930s requires no explanation." The period of fascism, the Second World War, and the ideological struggles that followed are believed to have brought to a standstill nascent attempts at "systematic research" on visitors, as "issues other than museum work undeniably commanded people's attention."⁹ In Germany's East, where state ideology ostensibly prevented inquiry into the actual responses of visitors to exhibits and programs, professional ignorance of visitors is believed to have persisted until 1989. For example, art historian and museologist Bernd Lindner has argued that only one comprehensive survey of visitors was completed during the forty years of the East German dictatorship.¹⁰ In fact, important assessments of East German visitors were conducted during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, although only a handful were published: in order to correct this misapprehension, in the final sections of this essay I will examine in this paper the history of the museum visit under East German communism.

This definition of audience research – as new and distinctly American – emerges first in the 1960s, among West German museum directors and sociologists alike. A 1965 article published in the flagship journal of the German museum profession, *Museumskunde*, announced to readers that it was "the first such conducted in German-speaking museum world."¹¹ Like the scholarship

⁵ Heiner Treinen, "Was Sucht der Besucher im Museum?" in: *Museum als soziales Gedächtnis?*, edited by Gottfried Fliedl, Klagenfurt 1988, 24; Heiner Treinen, "Das moderne Museum als Massenmedium," *Karlsruher Schriften zur Besucherforschung* 5 (1994), 23-6.

⁶ See especially in this context *Das Museum: Lernort contra Musentempel* edited by Ellen Spickernagel/Brigitte Walbe (eds.), Gießen 1976; see also, Hilmar Hoffmann, *Kultur für alle*, Frankfurt am Main, 2nd edition, 1981.

⁷ See Hermann Lübbe, *Zeit-Verhältnisse. Zur Kulturphilosophie des Fortschritts*, Graz 1983.

⁸ Klein/Bachmayer, *Museum und Öffentlichkeit*, 68. See also, Ekkehard Nuissel and Christa Schulze, "Besucherinteressen und Besucherverhalten im Museum. Neue empirische Untersuchungen in: Faulenbach and Jelich (eds.), *Besucherinteressen und Besucherverhalten*, S. 24-36, here 24, 29-30.

⁹ Hans Joachim Klein/Monika Bachmayer, *Museum und Öffentlichkeit. Fakten und Daten – Motive und Barrieren*, Berlin 1981, 59.

¹⁰ Bernd Lindner, "Vom Öffentlichkeitsersatz zum Kunstbedürfnis. Zur Entwicklung der Wahnehmungsmuster von Kunstausstellungsbesuchern," *Karlsruher Schriften zur Besucherforschung* 2 (1991), 29.

¹¹ Günther Schiedlausky, Probleme und Ergebnisse einer Besucherbefragung im Germanischen Nationalmuseum in: *Museumskunde* 34 6 (1965), 97-103, here 97.

of the 1970s and 1980s, the report claims to draw inspiration from Americans: in this instance, a 1962 visitor study undertaken by the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago.¹² For two weeks in August and one in December, visitors to the German National Museum in Nuremberg, an institution which, then as now, exhibited the high-brow culture of the Middle Ages, were asked in German, English, French, and Italian how much time they had spent in the museum; whether they were first-time visitors; which galleries and objects they had seen; whether they desired more seating, a cafeteria, a change in opening hours, or a better selection of postcards and slides. The penultimate question of the sixteen answered by visitors may have given pause: “In your opinion, should this museum adjust to the needs of a mass public, or do you expect to find here a place of peace and contemplation?”¹³ Given the way the question is phrased, it is not surprising to read that the nearly three quarters of the public chose the latter definition, often adding passionate notes (in several instances punctuated with several exclamation points) that their museum must remain a sanctuary of calm.”¹⁴ With a nod to the demands “of the new era,” the author praises his institution’s decision to create “an educational institution … a place where conditions allow undisturbed appreciation of the exhibited objects.”¹⁵

What, one might reasonably ask, was “new” about the 1960s? Certainly it was not the interest in visitors. As I have discovered in the course of my archival research, many of today’s discoveries about visitor behavior in exhibitions and museum programs are actually yesterday’s news. The more I have wrestled with the history of museum assessment, the more I have come to the realization that the research on visitors should not, as has often been the case in the sociological literature to date, be separated from two essentially political questions: what sorts of people have been interested in visitors, and, why have their efforts garnered more attention in some eras than others?

AUDIENCE, EXPERTISE, AND THE MUSEUM IN WILHELMINE GERMANY

The education “boom” of the 1960s, the “new era” referred to obliquely in the *Museumskunde* piece cited above, has at least one very interesting historical parallel. In late Wilhelmine Germany, museum observers were at least equally animated by a museum mania of their own. The driving force of change was a humble institution still very much with us: the Heimat museums, or local historical museums. Located in one or two rooms of town halls, schools, hospitals, inns, and even restaurants, Heimat museums and the enthusiasts who ran them – teachers, civil servants, merchants and other members of the petit bourgeoisie in small and medium-sized German communities. Although the idea of the Heimat museum actually harkened back to Goethe’s day, the late *Kaiserrreich* witnessed the heyday of the Heimat idea: between 1890 and 1918, 371 Heimat museums were founded in Germany; 178 were founded in the 1900s, with a remarkable 103 more established in the brief period from 1910 to 1914.¹⁶ Popular in both Catholic and Protestant areas, Heimat museums were notable for reasons we today too easily take for granted: they combined objects of high art and everyday life; their exhibits were unpretentious; their collections were almost exclusively local; their physical location was

¹² D.M. MacMaster, Museum und Öffentlichkeit I. in: *Die Öffentlichkeitsarbeit der Museen*, I, Deutsche Unesco-Kommission Köln, 1964, 31f.

¹³ Schiedlausky, Probleme und Ergebnisse, 103.

¹⁴ Schiedlausky, Probleme und Ergebnisse, 100, 101.

¹⁵ Schiedlausky, Probleme und Ergebnisse, 102, 101.

¹⁶ A. Schramm, Statistisches über die Verteilung der 1500 reichsdeutschen Museen (um 1930).

peripheral; and, most important, their local bourgeois creators embraced extraordinary initiatives to ensure attendance.

During the past decade, historians have come to appreciate the enthusiasm for the Heimat museums of the late *Kaiserreich* as much more than reflections of antimodern or reactionary sentiment,¹⁷ viewing them instead as entities that reconciled the seeming opposites of local uniqueness and the then-new national idea. In the work of Celia Applegate and Alon Confino in particular, the role of museum activists in molding local and national bourgeois cultural values has been emphasized.¹⁸ These interpretations of Heimat museums account for the impetus behind their creation, though they tell us little about their remarkable staying power (until the early 1980s, Heimat museums constituted the majority of museums in both West and East Germany).

Heimat museums spearheaded turn-of-the-century efforts to recast museums as spaces of popular activity and introspection. Tellingly, when giants of the art world and social reform, such as the director of the prestigious Hamburg Kunsthalle, Alfred Lichtwark, invited museum directors to a 1903 meeting entitled, “Museen als Volksbildungstätte,” museum enthusiasts from the Heimat museums, not distinguished civil servants from the best-known urban museums, had the most critical words to offer on visitation. As one museum activist from one north German local museum, the *Römermuseum* in Hildesheim, instructed his fellow museum directors, “a museum, a true working museum, a museum that attracts locals as well as tourists, must constantly be changing: I would not wish to say from week to week, though certainly from quarter to quarter: If not, the museum will lose its appeal to the relatively small public it serves.”¹⁹ A colleague from Altona echoed these sentiments, proclaiming that his institution “did not have the ambition to become an institution of scholarship;” instead, his museum “placed itself at the disposal of the cause of people’s education and cultivation (*Volksbildung und Volkserziehung*). Activity was the watch word of the new Heimat museum: as one of the more enthusiastic participants at the 1903 Mannheim conference put it, “in my view, in a well-run museums one ought to see tours, presentations, slide shows, etc. on a daily basis: only then will the materials contained with museums be of use to more people.”²⁰

Creations of local notables without credentials as collectors and interpreters of objects, the new Heimat museum took aim at the big city museum world. The museum directors present in Mannheim, most of whom were art and science museum directors, heard from the Altona Heimat museum director that, “if you take a hard look at the visitors to decorative art museums, if you observe how indifferently the pass by the most precious objects, you have ask to yourself whether the success of a museum filled with such objects is really worth the effort, or whether, in relation to the large sums of capital involved, it’s worth it economically.” “The situation of natural scientific collections,” he continued, “is not much better.” “In the natural science museums curators display a wide variety of stuffed hides with only a passing acquaintance to animals. This is, as our Altona informant continued, “fantastic for research.” For visitors, however, “a hide is not enough to show patrons local varieties of wildlife; what’s more, the science museum cannot limit itself to the dissemination of knowledge about the outdoor world, but must also offer “lively, exciting depictions of nature” as well.”¹

¹⁷ See, for a fairly recent example of this view, Martin Roth, *Heimatmuseum. Zur Geschichte einer deutschen Institution*, Berlin 1990.

¹⁸ Alon Confino, *The Nation as Local Metaphor. Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918*, London 1997; Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat*, London 1990.

¹⁹ Professor Andreae, Das Römermuseum in Hildesheim in: *Die Museen*, 46-50, here 46, 47.

²⁰ *Die Museen*, 184.

Everything was not quite as static in the art and natural history museums of Germany's largest cities as these observers contended. While urban museums in the middle decades of the nineteenth century had opened their doors to the middle classes in response to the humanistic ideals of the German enlightenment, extending the museum's reach to new audiences in the cities around 1900 focused on the urban industrial male worker. What many today call "outreach" took many forms, though the most widely discussed at the time was the guided tour. A central figure in the development of museum guided tours for the working man was Robert von Erdberg. Like his counterparts in the social movements associations with youth and *Lebensreform*, Erdberg aimed through museum tours to broaden and enrich the experiences of adults. After the abolition of anti-socialist legislation in Germany after 1890, Erdberg's Society for the Extension of Popular Education (Gesellschaft für die Verbreitung von Volksbildung), embraced new educational initiatives such as people's libraries, lectures, theaters, concerts, and museum tours: in Berlin alone, in 1900 his Society organized fifty-two annual tours with a total of 200 participants.²¹

Erdberg's tours sought to undercut the organized power of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). Regular guided tours for workers were first conducted by the SPD at the beginning of the 1890s in Frankfurt am Main, organized by the Free Trade Unions and the party. In 1906, the same year as the creation of Germany's most popular national museum of industry and natural history in Munich, the Deutsches Museum, the SPD devoted a portion of its party conference in Mannheim to the topic of adult education in museums and other institutions.

By the first decade of the twentieth century, a critical public of social reformers, politicians, journalists, and others had come to accept that attendance depended not only what museums collect but also how audiences respond to what they collect. A 1902 debate in the pages of Berlin's leading liberal daily, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, addressed the desirability of evening opening hours for museums: the discussion was taken up by the Prussian *Landtag*. Critics' suggestion that lighting, heating, and security would be prohibitively expensive were not brushed aside by museum enthusiasts: instead, adult education advocates championed a proposal to create small museum auxiliaries, rooms adjacent to the main galleries that would display less precious objects in an informal environment.²²

The men running the most prestigious museums in Germany were clearly not as enthusiastic about museum visitors as their counterparts in Heimat museums and the urban adult education movement. That said, the pages of the new profession's most important journal, *Museumskunde*, do bear testament to a growing enthusiasm for the cause of enlightenment. According to one writer in the journal's inaugural edition in 1905, "the primary concern of the museum and its most noble responsibility rests today in its close interaction with the living stream of the public. We must serve not merely a small circle of the learned, but instead the people as a whole: as an means of education and ideal enjoyment, as an educational workshop, and as an inspiration of creative activity."²³ Day-to-day visitor observation complimented the flowery abstractions, leading some, particularly those working in natural science museums, to reconsider relationships between objects and physical spaces. Writing in *Museumskunde* the next year, a provincial director of a natural science museum challenged the view that the purpose of the museum is first and foremost research and only secondarily public service. "The observation that a display of

²¹ Herta Siemering, Museumsführungen für Arbeiter. In: dieselbe, *Arbeiterbildungswesen in Wien und Berlin*, Karlsruhe 1911, S. 113-118.

²² Kuntz, *Das Museum als Volksbildungsstätte*, 67.

²³ J. Leisching, "Museologie heute" *Museumskunde* 1905, 91.

adjustable stereographs receives infinitely more applause than cases containing stuffed birds leads me to conclude that museums should become places where ‘profanum vulgus’ invites reflection and relaxation.”²⁴

Aspects of museum attendance at the heart of today’s debates within the “visitor studies” literature in this country: issues such as the choice and display of objects; the size and placement of labels; the need for careful social profiles of visitors, the demands of local community outreach and special programs for out-of-town tourists, the desirable visitor flow through exhibitions; and how best to write exhibition brochures; even debates about the efficacy of objects themselves (brought on by the creation of dioramas of the sort advocated by the Heimat enthusiast from Altona) all emerged in late Wilhelmine debates as legitimate concerns of museum work.²⁵

GERMAN MUSEUMS, AMERICAN MODELS: THEN AND NOW

So how is it that Germans have come to ignore the work of earlier generations? The simple answer is that in the years after the 1960s West (and East!) Germans traded their own past for a new one “Made in America.” True, American ways of doing museums also appealed to Germans a hundred years ago: absent a tradition of transatlantic exchange, postwar borrowings would have produced a more awkward fit.

The discussion of the museum visitor in Wilhelmine and particularly Weimar Germany, to say nothing of the debates that characterized the museum life of the postwar Germanies, abounded with examples of practice outside of the German Empire. Reform efforts in Germany drew from many sources, though in a variety of published and unpublished accounts Americans were almost invariably most often. American developments were rarely considered alone, but instead in a reform context that included western European countries as well. The most prominent among these countries was Great Britain and, to a lesser extent, France and the Benelux countries, with Scandinavian museums also receiving significant attention.

While Americans shared the stage with foreigners from other so-called *Kulturländer*, for museum professionals eager to assert the educational dimension of exhibition work in the 1920s American museums offered the models. Carl Zimmer, who had gathered first-hand impressions of American museums during a tour of the northeastern United States in 1907, played a critical role as an interlocutor of American ideas about visitors between his fellow German museum directors and the then-emerging American field of “visitor studies.” Speaking to fellow science museum directors in 1929, Zimmer insisted that Americans were without equal in organizing such diverse tasks as guided tours, lectures, radio programs, excursions, travel services, nature trails, children’s programming (including story hours and for-children exhibitions), the instruction of grammar school pupils and teachers, admission fees, as well as loans of film materials, slides, books, and bit cases.²⁶ The following year, 1930, Zimmer attempted, “inspired by the example of the Pennsylvania Museum of Arts in Philadelphia, a statistical analysis of questionnaires completed by visitors to the institution he directed from 1924 to 1937, the

²⁴ Otto Finisch, Das Reich-Museum für Naturgeschichte in Leiden und seine Umgestaltung in ein Ideal-Museum in: *Museumskunde* (1906), 29-40, here 37.

²⁵ On dioramas, A. Fritze, “Biologische Gruppen,” *Jahrbuch des Provinzial-Museums zu Hannover* 1908, S. 35ff; on guided tours Fr. Dahl, “Das zoologische Museum als Mittel zur Volksbelehrung,” *Museumskunde* V (1909), 90-96.

²⁶ C. Zimmer, “Die naturkundemuseen der Vereinigten Staaten im Dienste des Publikums,” *Museumskunde* 2 2 (1930), 57-76.

Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin.”²⁷ Data from over 750 completed questionnaires collected over a three-week period on the names, age, sex, place of residence, and occupation, allowed Zimmer to correlate the frequency of museum visits with district-level population data (the museum’s bread and butter was the local, not the out-of-town visitor, with 40 percent of patrons coming from nearby districts); to determine the age structure of his audience (like Klein, he discovered that the 20-40 age group is overrepresented in the museum population); and to pose additional questions that anticipated the labors of subsequent generations. Without the use of a computer, complex survey instruments, and developed research literatures, Zimmer drew partial conclusions about the occupations of his museum’s visitors; the frequency of museum visits; the impetus behind the visit; guests’ wishes regarding opening hours and presentations; which displays particularly held their interest; requests and special wishes concerning the amenities and the organization of the museum’s three permanent exhibitions.²⁸

Zimmer was, however, more than an interlocutor of American ideas. Musing on how best to include visitors in a new calculus of success or failure, he reasoned that if one were truly interested in determining the value of museum visits one would have to assign different values to “indifferent” visitors and to “desirable” visitors, raising the importance of the “desirable” visitor with each visit during a one-year period and assessing museum effectiveness either on the basis of the presence of “indifferent” and “desirable” visitors in the population as a whole or the relative cost of the museum’s maintenance. While his definition of “indifferent” and “desirable” visitors was predictably old-fashioned, his conclusion was anything but. As Zimmer contended, “(by these measures) I suspect that the beautiful and spacious museum palaces of the big cities would compare highly unfavorably with some of the wretched little holes out in the countryside.”²⁹

If the parallels between the issues addressed by visitor experts today and three generations ago are so apparent in those drawn by Zimmer and others, one might equally ask how much was actually known during the Weimar era in a statistical sense about visits to individual museums. Could one, as one could for West Germany in the 1980s and East Germany as early as the 1960s, compare attendance in the “wretched little holes in the countryside” with the capital’s cultural palaces?

Unpublished, and until now unquoted, materials housed in the archive of the Berlin Institute for Museum Studies reveal that one can offer a tentative “yes” to this question. On September 9, 1933, the German Museum Association issued a questionnaire to the most august members of the Association, the directors Germany’s largest art and cultural museums. Each was asked to respond to the following questions:

²⁷ C. Zimmer, “Eine statistische Erhebung unter den Besuchern des Museums für Naturkunde zu Berlin,” *Museumskunde* 2 3 (1930), 113-133.

²⁸ Ibid, 131. If historian Adelheid von Saldern is correct in her estimation that during the 1920s expressions of anti-Americanism in Germany clearly outweighed enthusiasm for “America” and that, further, *Kultur* remained one of the very few areas the country’s *Bildungsbürgertum* could still claim with pride as undamaged by the world war, Zimmer’s enthusiasm for American museum practice appears remarkable. Adelheid von Saldern, “Überfremdungsängste. Gegen die Amerikanisierung der deutschen Kultur,” in: *Amerikanisierung. Traum und Alpträum im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Edited by Alf Lüdtke, Inge Marbolek, und Adelheid von Saldern, Stuttgart 1995, 213-244, here 242, 243. On anti-Americanism in Weimar Germany more generally, Philipp Gassert, *Amerika im Dritten Reich. Ideologie, Propaganda und Volksmeinung*, Stuttgart 1997, 12-136; Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity. American Business and the Modernization of Germany*, New York 1994; Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Domination. American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919-1933*, Ithaca 1984.

²⁹ Ibid., 9.

1. Has the number of visits increased? (If possible, provide figures for the years 1913 and 1932)
2. What education initiatives have been introduced in recent years?
3. What has been undertaken in your museum to promote German art?
4. In what respect is your museum a local museum (heimatlich bedingt), and if yes, in what ways?
5. How is the relationship between art and life cultivated outside of the museum?
6. To what extent and according to what criteria is German contemporary art collected or promoted?
7. Provide details on the exhibition work of your museum.
8. Which special initiatives would you say might be most effective in integrating museums in the life of the National Socialist state? Which of these do you feel you could implement in your own museum?
9. In what form and to what extent should the leadership principle (*Führerprinzip*) be applied to museums?³⁰

Among the 161 members of “Section A,” the archive of the German Museum Association houses forty-eight responses. The quality of these responses varied considerably, with some directors taking as many as ten pages to record their answers (offering precise details on the number of visits and elaborate descriptions of museum exhibitions and programs), while others provided only the barest details in less than a full page. It seems reasonable to assume that those with better results were more likely to respond; in fact, most of the completed questionnaires note an increase in visitation during the period, in some cases offering detailed year-by-year numbers. Of course, many museums had either expanded, contracted, or expired between 1913 and 1933; it should be noted that the reasons for increases or decreases over a twenty-year period were more complex than the snapshot provided by the questionnaire may provide.

This said, the results of the questionnaire show that even the most traditional of German museums had been collecting data on visitors, in some cases rather precise data, before the First World War. Certainly Klein’s and Bachmeyer’s assertion that the dark days of National Socialism silenced inquiry on museum patrons is untenable; if anything, political pressure after the Nazi seizure of power had led the Association to pool, probably for the first time, rudimentary statistical knowledge about patrons. The 1933 questionnaire further suggests that when museum civil servants were required to produce knowledge about audiences, they could do so quickly. During the 1970s, of course, the computer offered European and American analysts new opportunities to count individual visits and compare the results on a regional and national level, and with the creation of Institute for Museum Studies in 1981, the administrative muscle to compile and interpret the results over time. The raw data, however, had existed for several generations.

Although a full explanation of the political pressures on the Association during the early years of the Nazi regime would go beyond the bounds of this essay, the timing of the questionnaire deserves some attention. We know that Max Sauerlandt, Director of the Museum für Kunst und Kunstgewerbe in Hamburg, had presented his views to an audience of twenty-seven museum directors at the annual meeting of the art and cultural museums in Mainz. Sauerlandt couched a very popular and politically expeditious demand for greater appreciation of

³⁰ Fragebogen. Die deutschen Museen und der nationale Staat, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 282.

contemporary German art with an appeal for a “new orientation,” toward “activity,” and away from “mechanization.”³¹ The minutes of the closed-door proceedings note that Sauerlandt’s speech was met with “frenzied applause,” leading two supporters to assert that Germany’s museums had become far too intellectual. Another colleague warned that one had to guard against “a strong tendency toward seeing the museum as an end in itself.”³²

While acknowledging that each museum in the new Germany should determine whether it was actually doing its best to meet the goals outlined by Sauerlandt, Werner Noack, the director of the most important art gallery in Freiburg, the Augustiner-Museum, insisted that museums were far too different to embrace one measure of success. Another colleague seemed to agree, contending museum personnel could be nothing more than “mediator” of works of art, whereupon Sauerlandt responded that “in terms of mediation the museum director must assume for himself the authority of the Führer.”³³ Seeking to broker a compromise, two final speakers suggested the questionnaire, an initiative all parties appeared to accept without comment.

The cover letter which accompanied the questionnaire hinted at the differing opinions which had emerged at the 1933 meeting, as well as the enhanced scrutiny museums faced during the first months after the Nazi seizure of power. “The totalitarian principle as expressed by our state leadership must naturally be extended to the administration and evaluation of museums. On this point the gathered assemblage in Mainz could agree. Certain members of the Association also believe that, especially during the past two decades, the Association has made strides toward the goals that were being expressed by National Socialist politicians. “As loyal civil servants, museum professionals will have much to learn from the politicians,” the letter began. “We also believe that leading museum authorities have already achieved much of what has been – without full knowledge of the facts – demanded from museums. The enclosed questionnaire is intended to collect information that may be either directly or indirectly provided to state authorities and museum colleagues.”³⁴

During the 1920s the German Museum Association had come to include not only art and cultural museums (*Kunst- und Kulturmuseen*), but natural science, ethnological, and, in 1930, Heimat museums as well: the last category, Section ‘D,’ was by far the most numerous with over 570 members (as opposed to 180 art and cultural museums, eighty natural science museums, and twenty-five ethnological museums).³⁵ With nearly 1700 museums, in 1934 Germans might regard theirs as the leading museum nation in the world, followed by the United States (1400); France (650); and Great Britain (600).³⁶ By the 1930s in all of these countries (as well as the Benelux nations and Scandinavia), virtually every city over 30,000 boasted a museum, with scores of smaller towns and villages with local museums as well.

In spite of its numerical strength, the Association yielded little power. The structure of the German Museum Association, which covered not only Germany, Austria, parts of Switzerland and Poland as well, was remarkably loose, with each section making its own regulations, holding its own conferences, and handling its own finances. A president was elected from the four

³¹ Protokoll der Tagung der Abteilung A (Kunst- und Kulturmuseen) in Mainz am 20. August 1933, 4, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 282.

³² Ibid., 5.

³³ Ibid., 5.

³⁴ Ibid., 5.

³⁵ The inclusion of technical and transportation museums in a fifth group, Section ‘E’, was planned but not realized.

³⁶ The Museums Association and International Cooperation, 20 March 1934, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 4.

sections and held office for two years. In exercising his duties, the arrangement of conferences, publicity, and external relations, his authority was checked by the section heads, each of whom exercised independent financial control over his branch budget. The irregular appearance of *Museumskunde* throughout the 1920s points to serious financial difficulties. Readers were forced to suffer through three interruptions of the journal during the 1920s alone. Even coming together was a problem. Unlike their American counterparts, whose Association from 1906 on brought together representatives from all museum types on an annual basis, the first meeting of the three section leaders for art and cultural museums, natural science museums, and ethnological museums took place in October 1929. Even at this late date, several of the most prestigious German museums, including the most important Bavarian museums and the Prussian state art museums in Berlin, chose not to join the Association. Technical, industrial, and medical museums were also excluded.

The Association's weaknesses stemmed in part from the unprecedented financial exigencies of the 1920s, strains that were accentuated by museums' nearly complete dependence on local, provincial, and imperial government. Museum work was, as prominent museum directors frequently and eagerly asserted, among the victims of the First World War: they were correct insofar as the struggle for scarce resources, it proved far more difficult to put pressure on politicians in their name than in that of welfare recipients, needy pensioners, invalids, and especially the unemployed.

In Germany, the Great Inflation wiped away the great philanthropic expressions of the Wilhelmine era, of which the Heimat museum mania was one of many. Organized benevolence took another course in western Europe and North America, where, during the 1920s, charitable organizations such as the Carnegie Corporation and members of the Rockefeller family had begun to devote time and money to museums in North America, the British Empire, and France. Widening charitable giving beyond academic and quasi-academic institutions took many forms: in Europe, perhaps the best known among them were John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s support of the restoration of the Reims Cathedral and the palace and gardens of Versailles. Largesse did not end with such high profile projects, however: Edward Robinson's classic monograph, *The Behavior of the Museum Visitor*, quickly became the standard work for all interested in museum inquiry; at Yale, where Robinson taught during the 1930s, Carnegie support allowed him to bring museum professionals to campus for a year of mutual study.³⁷

Germany's loss in the 1914-1918 conflict and the conditions of the peace brought to an end philanthropic innovation and, as we all know, sharply curtailed international cooperation. Within Europe, cooperation was largely restricted to the activities of the League of Nations' International Museums Office. Created in 1926 and housed in Paris, the International Museums Office's modest budget encourage the organization to compile directories of museums in smaller European countries. Unlike its post-WWII counterpart, Unesco's International Council on Museums, the International Museum Office lacked the political will to shape museum practice in member countries. German museum directors were, in any event, strongly disinclined to look to the International Museums Office for support, regarding the organization with suspicion for, in the view of Max Sauerlandt and others, its ostensibly low regard for German art and its purported designs on *Museumskunde*.³⁸

³⁷ Robinson, who taught at the University of Chicago, and later, Yale, also brought museum professionals to Yale for a year of mutual study.

³⁸ Niederschrift über die allgemeine Sitzung des deutschen Museumsbundes, 9 Oktober 1929, 4. A variety of party and state agencies sought to exert influence over German museums during the Nazi era; as of the spring of

Interest in visitors, in Germany as elsewhere, has, of course, always been reflected through the prism of political realities. Where one initially perceives continuities, such as in the sustained interest in American examples, a closer look reveals subtle changes as well. While the Nazis attempted to ban much of American popular culture, its jazz, dances, and fashions, American attempts to popularize the elite practice of museum-going continued to exercise a certain appeal. Unlike the Weimar period, however, under National Socialism German museum directors expressed doubts and even criticism about American examples. In 1936, for example, even Zimmer was arguing that American examples could not simply be emulated in Germany, where a different set of relationships had arisen between school authorities and museum officials. Three years later, in an article on the subject of museum marketing, a colleague of his singled out Americans for criticism, as well as praise. In the pursuit of Lichtwark's aim to break with the model of the museum that merely stood there and waited, American museum directors were prone to sensationalism, tastelessness, and the propensity to "...speak often with the pathology of the do-gooder or preacher."³⁹

A more critical stance toward America did not mean that popularization was out of fashion. During the National Socialist period, reaching audiences in new ways remained a focus of considerable activity. In Berlin, to offer one example, the Prussian State Museums created exhibitions for laborers through its program, "Exhibitions in the Outer Districts," with over fifty masterpieces displayed at the "Comrades' Home" at the Siemens Works in Berlin-Siemensstadt and the train assembly plant of the Reichsbahn on the Oberbaumbrücke. Shortly before the war's outbreak, the director of the collection at the prestigious Berlin *Museum für Deutsche Volkskunde* (im Prinzessinnen-Palais) created, in conjunction with the Berlin University, the first full-time university research position devoted to museum pedagogy and the first museum education department in Berlin. The new position was occupied in 1939 by Adolf Reichwein. A member of the Kreisauer Circle and assassinated at Plötzensee in July 1944, Reichwein was canonized by East German museologists. Because the German Museum Association was excluded from many of these efforts after the mid-1930s, sources on museum outreach during the National Socialist are highly fragmented. The 1930s, the decade that witnessed the first widespread use of the term "museum pedagogy (Karl Jacob-Friesen, the director of the Hanover Museum first coined the phrase in 1934)," certainly deserve further examination; in the context of a separate essay, I will explore the history of the museum visitor under fascism and in the decade following the end of the Second World War.

Attention to museum pedagogy and measurement was largely absent from both Germanies during the second half of the 1940s and the 1950s. As we shall see, during the 1960s, visitor-centered museum activity came from the States, an observation, as I will show, that was valid for both East and West Germany.

The importance of visitors to museum success was self-evident to one post-WWII organization, the International Council of Museums, or ICOM. Formed on the occasion of Unesco's tenth anniversary in 1956, the International Council of Museum came to serve as a plebiscite on the measures member countries had adopted to boost museum visitation. In 1958,

1936, all publically-accessible collections were formally under the perview of the Reichsministerium für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung.

³⁹ Niels von Holst, "Wie Werben Museen?," *Museumskunde* 11 1 (1939), 1-9, here 5.

the Council issued a memorandum defining what it saw as the obstacles to museum visits.⁴⁰ Initially, representatives from West German museums, as well as the most important federal agencies charged with their administration, the German League of Cities and the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder, resisted ICOM's overtures. According to the Standing Conference's director, "the theses introduced in the Unesco memorandum were widely based on the pioneering work of German museums conducted the first decades of this [the twentieth] century." "A review of contributions to *Museumskunde*," he contended, "would show clearly that Germans had very early on been engaged in a serious way with the problem [of visitors]."⁴¹ The representative of the Standing Committee was of course in one sense correct: since 1900 Germans had publicly addressed the practical matters of cooperation between museums and their audiences. During the 1960s, museum experts and the German civil servants charged with the administration of culture tacitly agreed to relegate their own history of audience assessment to archival obscurity.

During the 1950s, a wide range of high civil servants, professors and teachers, judges, religious leaders, captains of industry, and students had profited from American initiatives to convince Germany's decision-makers that the United States boasted, in the parlance of America's Central European cultural critics, not only a *Zivilization*, but a *Kultur* to go with it. Re-education's recipients, in turn, used the knowledge and connections they had gained from their exposure to America to their political advantage. After 1960, sociologists and, to a lesser extent, select figures within the German museum profession, embraced attitudes toward visitors that were in important respects Made in America.

In embracing American ways of assessing museum success, professional sociologists led the charge. In preparations for a Unesco-sponsored workshop on museum education to be held in Essen in 1963, Alfred von Martin, Professor of Sociology at the Technical University of Munich, recommended that "foreign museum experts" be brought to the Federal Republic speak to two dozen of their German counterparts. To Martin and his colleagues, "foreign" meant American: while his colleague, Gert von der Osten, suggested the participation of Otto Wittmann from the Toledo Museum of Arts, Martin put forward Thomas Munro from the Cleveland Museum of Arts. Both further agreed that, "the entire seminar is only worthwhile when it is proceeded by sociological analyses;" the purpose of these, one reads in unpublished memoranda, was to expand the knowledge and experience of museum experts."⁴² The inducement for museum directors to take seriously the seminar would be simple and powerful: money. As von der Osten, General Director of Cologne's city museums, noted art historian, and professor of sociology at the city's university put it: the "sociological-psychological" studies would not only prove useful for the seminar, they would help museum directors to obtain from the Standing Committee the resources to expand personnel and to create (in English) "Education Departments."⁴³

⁴⁰ Preliminary Study of the Technical and Legal Aspects of the Preparation of International Regulations on the Most Effective Means of Rendering Museums Accessible to Everyone, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris, 30 April 1958, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 64.

⁴¹ Ergebnisprotokoll der Sachverständigenbesprechung am 25. Oktober 1960 in München zur Frage der Förderung der Öffentlichkeitsarbeit der Museen, 23 November 1960, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 64.

⁴² Vorbereitungsgespräch zum UNESCO-Seminar 'Die Öffentlichkeitsarbeit der Museen' am 11. September 1961 in Köln, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 64.

⁴³ Vorbereitungsgespräch zum UNESCO-Seminar 'Die Öffentlichkeitsarbeit der Museen' am 11. September 1961 in Köln, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 64.

Sensing a change afoot, the leaders of the West German museum profession published at length the impressions of the Association's secretary's visit to Midwestern American museums in 1960.⁴⁴ Whereas the Association's director had declined an invitation to the preparatory session for the workshop, a little over a year later the Association was scrambling to show its funders it had gotten the message. Following in the footsteps of Carl Zimmer, Eichler wrote in *Museumskunde* concluded that Americans were particularly good marketers, if not exactly the best custodians, of museum collections. In order to bring museums to a more favorable assessment of American museum, the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder would continue to push: in February 1963, a resolution pointed with concern to the fact that the educational dimension of museum work [in Germany] remained untapped. In December 1965, in a bid to gain greater funding the German Museum Association would seek to emphasize its importance as an education institution. As Eichler and Wolf put it to their superiors in the Standing Conference, "there is hardly another institution in which educational and research tasks are regarded with equal importance. Museums are the link between research and public."⁴⁵

The claim that museums were especially useful intermediaries of research (or, in the buzzword of the era proceeding educational reform, "learning") demanded evidence. Counting, of museums, museum types, and visitors, seemed to offer initial answers. Historically, the impetus to collect and interpret visitor statistics had come from outside of the profession. During the Weimar Republic, the German League of Cities, not the German Museum Association, had compiled the most comprehensive guide to museum types. A first survey of German museums in 1926 was published two years later; subsequent inquiries followed in 1937, and, (for West Germany), 1949, 1954, and 1958.⁴⁶

The League's survey was an odd one, for museums as we think of them today were woefully undercounted. The organization's very conservative definition of a "museum," its insistence upon counting public collections in only the largest German municipalities, and, most importantly, its inability to record visits to institutions where admittance was not charged, yielded a significant undercount of museums and museum visits. What's more, the League's survey did not provide time series data, but merely snapshots of museum visitation every few years: for instance, the 344 museums counted in noted 8.7 million visitors, while the previous attempt to count visitors in 1954 yielded 6.1 million visitors. Deducing trends from these numbers is perilous: more museums were included each year, making the results comparable in no statistically rigorous sense. Perhaps worst of all, the municipalities, not the museums themselves, answered the questionnaires. Rather than to quibble with their results and survey methods, I prefer instead to draw attention to the perception of growing attendance in West German museums during the 1960s. Based on its 1958, 1963, and 1965 surveys, League officials discovered dramatic increases in the number of museum visits.⁴⁷ As counting became a means to define museum success or failure, representatives of the German Museum Association sought to administer annual surveys of their own members. As it happened, opposition from the

⁴⁴ Niederschrift über die Tagung des Deutschen Museumsbundes e. V., Kulturgeschichte und Kunstmuseen/Naturwissenschaftliche und Technische Museen in Oldenburg vom 26. – 29. September 1961, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 13.

⁴⁵ Letter from Heinrich Wolf and Hans Eichler to the Präsidium der Kultusminister-Konferenz, 21 December 1965, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 64.

⁴⁶ Maria Frede, Museen 1954. *Statisches Jahrbuch Deutscher Gemeinden* 44 (1956), 116; Maria Friede, Museen 1958, *Statistisches Jahrbuch Deutscher Gemeinden* 47 (1959), 229.

⁴⁷ Bernhard Mewes, "Zahlenbild der Museen," *Museumskunde* 35 7 (1966), 8-13, here 11.

Standing Conference blocked this initiative, refusing to grant the Association the requisite funds and confirming the League's role as the collector of museum visitation data.⁴⁸

Why wouldn't the Association have enjoyed the privilege to report on the needs of its patrons, especially given the widely-perceived inadequacy of the League's survey and as the ranks of museum visitors continued to grow? The answer lies partly in the fractured nature of cultural affairs in West Germany (on several occasions during the 1960s and 1970s the southern Länder had blocked efforts to boost the very modest financial support received by the DMB from Bund, Länder, and Städten), the resulting weak financial position of the German Museum Association (by the mid-1970s: routine correspondence and the organization of annual meetings were only possible due to the engagement of secretarial support from the director's home institution), the tepid enthusiasm Germany's most prestigious museum directors brought to visitor assessment throughout the 1960s the 1970s,⁴⁹ and, finally, the sense, based on aggregate increases in the number of museum visits, that a measure of popular success had already been achieved.

In one sense, as Wolfgang Klausewitz, then chairman of the German Museum Association exclaimed to colleagues at the association 1976 conference in Kassel, museums during the first two decades had gone from "step child" to "superstar." Noting that while theaters and zoos were witnessing declining visitation, the popularity of museums continued to rise. Contact with the public had become close: and, in his view, many museum directors had learned very well to tickle the ivories of the "public relations piano."⁵⁰ At the top of their game in one sense, Klausewitz nonetheless insisted that museums remained woefully underfunded vis-à-vis schools, universities, and other research institutions. As he correctly noted, many museums had the same level of staff support as before the World War, a state of affairs, he rightly asserted, virtually unimaginable elsewhere in the civil service.⁵¹

The Association, it must be said, had arrived late to the cultural politics of the Federal Republic, not meeting, as noted earlier, as an organization until 1961 and only then representing a much smaller number of museums than before the War. The autonomy enjoyed by individual museums, it seems, was more jealously guarded than the more abstract interests of a profession or social organization, a fact that undercut its director's ability to wring concessions from federal authorities.

Was the American Association of Museums, the closest equivalent to the German Museum Association, in a better position to assert its authority over museum affairs? Yes and no. One key difference between Germany and the United States was, and is, funding. During the 1960s, the American Association of Museums successfully lobbied Congress to amend the Internal Revenue Service's definition of an "educational organization" to include museums (along with historical agencies and libraries) so that donations were qualified as tax deductible. American museums also profited from the largesse of foundations, as well as, importantly, new contacts

⁴⁸ Letter from Mohr, Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland to Wolfgang Klausewitz, Deutscher Museumsbund, 11 July 1975, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 107.

⁴⁹ Letter from Mohr, Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland to Wolfgang Klausewitz, Deutscher Museumsbund, 11 July 1975, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 107.

⁵⁰ Begrüßungsansprache von Wolfgang Klausewitz, Vors. Des Deutschen Museumsbundes e. V., 5 April 1976, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 109.

⁵¹ Begrüßungsansprache von Wolfgang Klausewitz, Vors. Des Deutschen Museumsbundes e. V., 5 April 1976, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 109.

with business and government (during the 1970s, the most important among the later actors were the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Institute for Museum Studies (today's Institute for Museum and Library Services), and the National Science Foundation.

Of course, competition for audiences, grants, and trustees was not new in the United States. While more financial opportunities existed to secure aid to carry out educational tasks, the American Association of Museums continued to rely upon membership contributions and annual dues to provide most of the Association's funds. What's important to grasp about the new American funding constellation of the 1970s and particularly the 1980s is the emphasis on accountability, a notion borrowed from the business world that, in turn, encouraged the development of for-profit museum evaluation agencies and, within the American Association, the establishment of a Standing Professional Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation. Finally, like Germany, a handful of academics, such as Chandler Screven and Harris Shettel, kept a foot in both the museum and the academic world of applied research.

West Germany, by way of contrast, went a different, ultimately strongly statist, direction during the 1970s. Support for academic research on visitors through the German Academic Council (the supreme achievement of which was Hans Joachim Klein's 1990 publication) In 1981, the state-administered and state-funded Institute for Museum Studies in Dahlem (whose director, a professor at Berlin's Free University, reports directly to the head of the powerful state Foundation for the Preservation of Prussian Cultural Properties), was created and given the mandate to cooperate closely with academic analysts. While criticism of educational reform in the United States led, during the 1980s and 1990s, to a greater volume of studies on exhibitions and programs than their German counterparts, individually, these *qualitative* studies were no match for the statistical precision of the Berlin Institute's *quantitative* analyses of all German museum institutions.

While the loser in the new assessment constellation appeared to be the German Museum Association, it is interesting to note that its director during the 1970s, Wolfgang Klausewitz, did not share this view. Perhaps he sought merely to put a positive spin on his lost battle to gather basic statistics on museum visitors, or perhaps, as I would suggest, he felt that the era of visitor focus was nearing its conclusion. In a lecture delivered to the annual meeting of the German League of Cities in October 1981, Klausewitz posited that the "overemphasis" on the educational mission of museums and exhibitions had had "catastrophic" effects on other aspects of museum work. The pendulum had swung to far in the opposite direction: the guiding principle at the beginning of the new decade [the 1980s], should be to bring the emphases of all museums—⁵² collection, preservation, research, and education—into balance.

As accommodating elements of America's popular culture, including, but not limited to, its visitor-friendly museums, became a way to promote consensus in the increasingly affluent West German market democracy, sociologists, the Standing Committee, and the League step forward to provide analyses.⁵³ Internal revolt during the mid to late-1960s and early 1970s further encouraged populist strains of museum activity, giving way by the mid-1970s to call to measure

⁵² Wolfgang Klausewitz, Vorsitzender des DMB, "Aufgaben und Situation des Deutschen Museumsbundes sowie aktuelle Probleme des deutschen Museumswesens," Vortrag anlässlich der Sitzung des Kulturausschusses des Deutschen Städtetags in Berlin am 1 October 1981, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 107.

⁵³ This process is explored creatively by Uta Poiger with reference to American popular culture of the 1950s and 1960s in Chapter 3 of her work, *Jazz, Rock, Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in Divided Germany*, Berkeley, 2000.

the effectiveness of the 1960s pedagogical zeal. Experts and enthusiasts alike had found inspiration not in their own past, but in America: and in this respect, as I will show below, they differed very little from their counterparts in Dresden, Stralsund, and Magdeburg.

The range of state ministries engaged in museum affairs in East Germany was considerable, extending from such unlikely candidates as Ministries of National Defense and Health to such obvious suspects as the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry for Popular Education. Within the latter two ministries, advisory councils were created during the 1960s to address issues of museum pedagogy, exhibit design, and museum theory. One group in particular within the latter ministry contained a “Working Group on Museum Pedagogy,” a loose collection of experts especially relevant to this examination. Led by Kurt Patzwell and Joachim Ave during most of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the group collected annually from all East German museum directors information on opening hours; conservation and administration; space devoted to the display and preservation of objects; income and expenditures; capital investments; acquisitions; employees; activities, publications, and research; and, finally, the number of adult and child visitors.

Not surprisingly, East Germans had little positive to say about the West Germans’ embrace of pedagogy after 1960: a 1966 publication of the German Ministry of Culture, *Museum and School in the German Democratic Republic*, appeared to draw the battle lines between the two German states. “The recommendations of Unesco’s 11th General Conference occasioned,” the volume begins, “prompted the first attempts in the FRG to brake the growing isolation of museums from the broad masses of the public, especially the youth.” The culmination of outside pressure, the report continues, was the 1963 workshop sponsored by Unesco in Essen.⁵⁴ The swagger was not unfounded: particularly in history museums, the East Germans devoted more attention earlier than their Wessi counterparts to the relationship between pedagogy and display. For example, during the years 1950 to 1968 the leading West German history teachers’ journal, “History in Scholarship and Instruction,” published only one essay on historical sites and education, in the journal’s two East German equivalents a total of 57 articles were published during almost exactly the same period.⁵⁵ The contrast in the respective museum organs, *Museumskunde* and *Neue Museumskunde*, was no less glaring: while the West Germans devoted 7 articles to the subject of “museums and popular education” between 1960 and 1968, from 1958 to 1968 East Germans had published forty-four essays.⁵⁶

Numbers do not, as we all know, tell the whole story. Behind the scenes, the leaders of East German museums adopted a much more conciliatory tone toward West German counterparts on the subject of pedagogy. “Dear Dr. Eichler,” begins a 1967 letter typewritten on private stationery from Ave to *Museumskunde*’s publisher, “at the moment I am engaged in a large project examining public relations work within museums (educational work within museums, cooperation between schools and museums, etc.). Because there are relatively few published works on this subject, and as publications on this topic are often difficult to find, I wish to request your assistance in finding relevant citations. If you have at your disposal copies of essays (even older ones) that you would be willing to share with me, I would be grateful to you for your

⁵⁴ *Museum und Schule in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, edited by the Zentrale Fachstelle für Museen beim Ministerium für Kultur der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik gemeinsam mit der Arbeitsgruppe ‘Schule und Museum’ beim Wissenschaftlichen Rat des Ministeriums für Volksbildung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Berlin (Ost, 1966, 79-82.

⁵⁵ Joachim Ave, “Historisches Museum und Volksbildung,” (Dissertation), Dresden 1970.

⁵⁶ Ave, “Historisches Museum,” 70.

assistance.” “Of course,” the letter concludes, “at your request I would be pleased to send you relevant publications on cooperation between schools and museums.”⁵⁷ Eichler, clearly curious, turned to the German Unesco office for advice on whether he might, as he was inclined to do, send the published results of the Essen seminar “into the Zone.” Further, he wished to know if the German Unesco office maintained “any sort of contact” with the “Soviet Zone of Occupation” noting that representatives of Eastern bloc states had appeared at the 1963 seminar.⁵⁸

German Commission for Unesco agreed that no harm could be done in granting the request. While noting that contact with “state officials” was quite naturally “out of the question,” the German Unesco official noted that materials were routinely exchanged with private individuals and public libraries.⁵⁹ Acting on this advice Eichler forwarded materials to Ave, apologizing for the delay in the correspondence (claiming that the letter had been sent to the wrong address). To his credit, Eichler acknowledged that “here as well there little is written on the relationship between schools and museums; studies from the perspective of pedagogical and psychological experts are lacking.”⁶⁰

In stark contrast to the rages common in the East German popular press during the late 1960s and early 1970s against America’s mass culture, in the specialized museum literature the attitudes of East German socialists toward American ways of presenting collections to visitors was remarkably favorable.⁶¹ Evidence from this view comes primarily, though by no means exclusively, from unpublished sources, dissertations, memoranda, and letters of the sort cited above.

During the spring of 1970, Ave’s bosses in the Council for Museum Affairs commissioned his working group to analyze museum visitors. Exactly what Ave’s bosses had in mind is outlined in a letter from the Council’s Secretary in a letter to Ave. “It proves more and more necessary to us with each passing day to possess more exact information about the visitors to our museums.” Working groups within the Ministry, the letter continues, were considering the following issues: the social and age composition of our visitors, individual and group visits, the flow of visitors through exhibitions (annually, during the work week, as well as during the day); visitors’ suggestions; and evaluation methods.⁶² Ave had in fact submitted the guidelines for a more precise inquiry of museum effectiveness as reflected in visitation nearly four years earlier; in his proposed study, the “cost” of each museum visit would be determined.⁶³

By 1970, Ave’s superiors had concluded that a “long-term research program” focusing on museum visitors had become a “social necessity.”⁶⁴ Why 1970? Reference to international affairs provides part of the answer: With the thaws of détente and *Ostpolitik* East Germans were allowed to join ICOM in 1968; in September 1973, both nations were accepted as full members

⁵⁷ Letter from Ave to Eichler, 10 February 1967, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 66.

⁵⁸ Letter from Eichler to Mechtild Fischer, 3 April 1967, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 66.

⁵⁹ Letter from Mechtild Fischer, Deutsche Unesco-Kommission, to Präsidenten des deutschen Museumsbundes, 5 April 1967, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 64.

⁶⁰ Letter from Dr. Hans Eichler, Vorsitzender, to Herrn Ave, Arbeitsgruppe Schule und Museum, 25 April 1967, Archive of the Deutscher Museumsbund, File No. 66.

⁶¹ On American imagery in the East German press of the 1950s, see, Ina Merkel, “Eine andere Welt Vorstellungen von Nordamerika in der DDR,” in: *Amerikanisierung*, 245-254.

⁶² Letter from Rolf Kiau, Sekretär des Rates, to Joachim Ave, 6 March 1970, Archive of the Institut für Museumswesen der DDR, File No. RfM 0069.

⁶³ Arbeitsplanentwurf 1967 (undated), Institut für Museumswesen der DDR, File No. RfM 0022.

⁶⁴ Letter from Rolf Kiau, Sekretär des Rates to Joachim Ave, 6 March 1970, Archive of the Institut für Museumswesen der DDR, File No. RfM 0069.

of the United Nations. While the 1970s witnessed very public attempts to cultivate German-Soviet friendship and therewith a unique socialist identity for the GDR, in their thinking about museum visitors, East Germans were always looking West as well as East, toward the Federal Republic, Great Britain, and the United States.

The most important study of visitors conducted in East Germany was a dissertation successfully defended by Ruth Freydank at the Humboldt University in March 1978. In her work Freydank drew heavily from published studies of West German sociologists and psychologists, including in her bibliography citations from over thirty West German academicians. (In the text itself she refers frequently to the better-known East German interlocutors.) Key texts in West German museum debates about the relative importance of pedagogy in museum activities also find their way into both the text and bibliography, as well as more than a dozen essays from the humble monthly newsletter of the American Association of Museums!

Of the then 595 museums in East Germany, Freydank's survey was conducted in thirty-three museums – ten art galleries, five natural history museums, fourteen regional history museums, and four “specialty” museums: examples of one or two museum types came from all of the country's districts, or *Bezirke*, so that visitors from all of the GDR were included. Excluded were the very smallest museums. More than 37,000 visitors over the age of sixteen were asked to complete a questionnaire after their visit; roughly 24,500, or 66 percent, chose to do so. Patrons were asked to provide personal background information, e.g., age, gender, level of formal education, and occupation, as well as to record whether they had visited alone; with others; how long they had spent at the museum; their willingness to visit the museum again; the occasion for their visit; their opinion of the information presented in the exhibition; and whether they considered the museum a source of education or entertainment.⁶⁵

Compared to Hans-Joachim Klein's and other similar West German studies, Freydank's questionnaire was distributed over a much shorter period of time, the last two weeks in February and the first two weeks in July in 1973; finally, in contrast to West German endeavors, Freydank chose to exclude foreigners as well as visitors under the age of sixteen.

The survey showed some differences between East and West Germany. For instance, in East Germany visitors were more likely to be women than in the West, and more visitors were travelling greater distances to attend exhibitions than Klein's analysis revealed (or Freydank had postulated). Both of these findings can be accounted for by the importance of guided tours: women were, in sharp contrast to the Federal Republic, well integrated in the workforce in the GDR. What's more, an elaborate network of leisure activities sponsored by the Councils of the Workers' Collectives existed for workers, of which occasional visits to distant museums were a part.⁶⁶

On the whole, the portrait of the real existing socialist visitor during the 1970s is remarkably similar to the West German bourgeois we came to know through Klein. Freydank found that museum audiences, in comparison to the population as a whole, were better educated, earned more, and were considerably younger than the general population. Time spent in exhibitions and programs was also not different than in the West: the vast majority of visitors allotted one to two hours to the visit. Younger and less educated patrons visited the museum out of a sense of

⁶⁵ Freydank, “Die soziale Determination,” 17, 18.

⁶⁶ 1973 betrug der Anteil der Frauen innerhalb der werktätigen Bevölkerung der DDR 49,1%. *Statistisches Jahrbuch der DDR* 1974, 19. The percentage of individual female visitors was 47,7%, while individual male visitors constituted 52,3%. For groups, the breakdown was 54.1% and 45.9% respectively. Freydank, “Die soziale Determination,” 73.

“general interest,” expecting to be entertained as well as educated; and the more educated were the least likely to want a tour and most likely to purchase catalogues.

None of these findings conflicted with the major findings in the literature that has developed since the 1970s on visitors in West Germany and the United States. Why is this so? Do culture or ideology matter? Part of the answer is methodological: in both Germanies and North America, audience experts were using the same tools to measure museum effectiveness, with the Germans on both sides of the Wall turning earlier and more enthusiastically toward the use of computation.

In both Germanies, during the 1970s and 1980s analysts in the universities and the East German state agencies charged with cultural affairs relied heavily upon computational power to process results. As Freydank noted, the scope of her project necessitated use of the computer: Without the use of the Humboldt University’s ROBOTRON 300, hers and other such dissertations would not have been feasible. Computers allowed for correlations across a much larger body of data than previously possible; as Freydank acknowledged, this approach opened some avenues while closing others. “[Our methodology] would not allow us to pose detailed questions about individual life strategies and attitudes toward culture and leisure time. Raising these issues in the context of an anonymous questionnaire, in which straightforward, easy-to-answer questions are posed, would have gone well beyond the limits of our study.”⁶⁷

In future years, Freydank would be promoted within the Ministry of Culture’s task force on museum pedagogy, a sign that her views were not regarded by museum insiders as controversial.⁶⁸ That said, when considered in the lights of the GDR’s pronounced allegiances to workers and peasants, hers were the sort of findings one wouldn’t shout from the roofs of the nearest Plattenbau. Tellingly, her correlations between higher education and income levels among East German museum goers were hushed up in a press release outlining the survey’s result: instead, the release stated that “The educational levels recorded in our study allow one to deduce that [East German] museums are visited irrespective of the level of education.”⁶⁹

Perhaps it’s nonetheless worth noting that within the small and closed world of East German museum assessment, opinions of a critical sort were aired. Freydank was not alone in airing views that contradicted, however politely, state claims. During the 1970s, much was made in both Germanies of growing levels of visitation: East German commentators were especially proud of their country’s ability to generate 30 million visits annually among a population little over half of this number. In words that could have just as easily come from Heiner Treinen, Johannes Gurke, a colleague of Freydank’s, pen his dissertation that “the impressive attendance statistics, that we encounter in many printed accounts, tell us little about the actual cultural-educational value of our museums. Too often high attendance to an exhibition is offered as ‘proof’ of its impact, a point of view we frequently encounter in final reports on important special exhibitions and especially in press accounts.”⁷⁰ Gurke’s dissertation, a study of visitor behavior in the museums of Karl-Marx Stadt provided him with opportunity to offer more pointed criticisms of what Americans, and of course West Germans, would have called

⁶⁷ Freydank, “Die soziale Determination,” need a page number here!

⁶⁸ Letter from Ave and Patzwall (recipient not specified), 28 December 1977, Institut für Museumswesen der DDR, Ref. No. 0073.

⁶⁹ Information über erste Ergebnisse einer Besucherbefragung in ausgewählten Museen der DDR, Institut für Museumswesen, Ref. No. 0090.

⁷⁰ Johannes Gurke, “Das öffentliche Wirken der Museen und ihr Beitrag zur Ausprägung der sozialistischen Lebensweise (Untersucht an Wirkungsfaktoren und Praxiserfahrungen der Städtischen Museen Karl-Marx-Stadt) Dissertation, Leipzig, 1983, 60.

“blockbuster” museums: “high attendance alone, practical experience tell us, is no measure of the personality-shaping impact [of museum exhibitions]; on the contrary, it may in fact typify negative effects.” In conclusion, Gurke noted, one could not expect good results when “...brigades and collectives feel “required” to visit, i.e. in instances where no real need for the exhibition visit exists and where this sense cannot be awakened in the course of the visit.”⁷¹

However veiled, Gurke, Freydank, and others were taking aim at exactly the sort of deficiencies being asserted more openly by West Germans. This was no coincidence. In both countries, growing affluence, more spare time, and the baby boom had created perfect conditions for the growth of a *Lustkultur*. By the early 1970s, tourism, particularly automobile tourism, was bringing even the *Ossis* into the countryside and into the *Schlösser* and *Burgen*.¹

From the perspective of the assessment experts in both East and West, museums, especially open-air museums of the heimatliche ilk, were succeeding only too well. The skin-deep nature of museums’ success was of course acknowledged by experts in both Germanies, though the reality of the museum visit – fleeting, bourgeois, and often enough valued primarily for its entertainment, not educational, value – seemed to present greater ideological challenges to *Ossis* than *Wessis*.

In November 1976, at the annual meeting of East German museum directors, Patzwell boasted that the idea of museum pedagogy had become self-evident abroad largely through the contributions of East Germans, the rightful heirs to the legacy of Adolf Reichwein, Nazi opponent and pedagogical advocate. That Patzwell’s and colleagues’ publications had become “essential literature” at ICOM’s headquarters in Paris was, in his view, no coincidence. No wonder, he continued, that he had recently enjoyed the opportunity in Sweden to report on museum education in the German Democratic Republic to the ICOM Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs.⁷²

While Patzwell claimed in print and abroad to be doing pioneering work, in fact he and other East German luminaries were offering precious little knowledge to the study of museum visitors. Marked “nur zum persönlichen Gebrauch der Mitglieder im eigenen Dienstbereich,” a 1978 proposal drafted by Patzwell entitled, “Educational Programs for Museum Educators,” contains a short bibliography of the following five texts. Each translated from English into German, the memorandum gives us a sense of how significant foreigners had become to the study of pedagogy in East Germany, a field state officials frequently claimed as their own:

A. ICOM Erziehungskomitee – Arbeitsgruppe Ausbildung – Corsham (Grossbritannien) 1969, veröff. In Museums’ Annual no. 1 (1969) S. 19f

B. Harry S. Parker III, Die Ausbildung von Museumspädagogen. In: The Museum in the Service of Man...Protokollband der IX. Generalkonferenz von ICOM, Paris 1972, S. 167ff.

C. Marcella Brenner, Ausbildung für die museumspädagogische Arbeit an der George Washington Universität. In: Museums’ Annual no. 6 (1974), S. 10ff (Bereits in einer frühen Literaturinformation übersetzt!)

D. Alison Heath, Die Ausbildung der Bildungsbeauftragten. In: Museum Education Training (Konferenzbericht des Australischen Verbandes der Museumspädagogen). Sydney 1977, S. 8f.

⁷¹ Gurke, “Das öffentliche Wirken,” 67.

⁷² Kurt Patzwall, “Museumspädagogik und Hauptaufgaben,” in: Konferenze der Museumsdirektoren der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 17. Und 18. November 1976, Berlin 1977, vol. I, 121-131, here 122.

E. John C. Hodge, Vorhandene Programme zur Ausbildung von Museums pädagogen (in Australian). In: Museum Education Training... (sh. Abschnitt D), S. 10f.”⁷³

With all of this aping of capitalist museum practice, East German officials’ constant headache soon became how to limit contacts with the West. Soon after the illicit trade in ideas about museum had begun in earnest between the Germanies during the mid-1960s, state efforts to regulate its flow had been undertaken. To cite one of many examples, a 1966 memorandum from the Council’s archive exhorts colleagues that “Regarding the contents of intended conversations with foreign museums and offices, management must be informed in advance.” The memorandum goes on to suggest that a brief report also be filed after any conversation.”⁷⁴

Twenty years later, unwanted Westerners were no longer merely on the phone, but in the office. In February 1987 no less than the Secretary of the Council of Museum Affairs informed his “Dear Colleague Dr. Ave” that “according to the wishes of the Ministry of Culture guests from the ‘nonsocialist world’ were prohibited from participation” in the meetings of the Ministry’s various working groups.”⁷⁵ By then, separating East Germany’s museum profession from its counterparts in the West was no longer really possible: to some, the division was clearly no longer desirable. As the 1980s drew to a close and the East German state collapsed, the work of the Council for Museum Affairs, paradoxically enough, continued in new veins. With the support of the Museum Affairs in the former West Berlin, the Council’s research arm received support from the unified federal German government. Until the end of 1993, the newly revamped institute experimented with its new freedoms, borrowing openly from models from around the world, especially, it might be said in the conclusion, the United States.

⁷³ Literaturinformation (Nr. 3), compiled by K. Patzwall, 24 November 1978, Archive of the Institut für Museumswesen der DDR, RfM 0073.

⁷⁴ Memorandum from the Zentrale Fachstelle für Heimatmuseen “an alle Mitarbeiter,” 29 July 1966, Archive of the Institut für Museumswesen der DDR, RfM 0022.

⁷⁵ Letter from Kiau to Ave, 16 February 1987, Archive of the Institut für Museumswesen der DDR, RfM 0069.