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Life after the Apology: Making the Unspeakable Visible

Abstract: If we embrace the idea that historical representations cannot simply be true or false but should be considered as proposals to review historical realities in a certain light,[1] raising a multiplicity of interpretative repertoires by giving the past a place in the present through various ways is pivotal. In the aftermath of the many formal inquiries into historical abuse, Western welfare states should seize the opportunity to reflect on current practices and policies while being inspired by the past, in addition to finding ways to come to terms with the past. The major challenge for both academia and policy makers is to make the past relevant for the present. One way to engage in this quest is by visualizing or exhibiting the past. In order to make a questionable representation of history, we discuss the way we think about notions as 'the past' and 'the present' in this contribution. Rather than re-presenting the past, the Museum Dr. Guislain's emphasises and discusses the ambiguity of remembering the past, by mixing unique pieces with compelling anecdotes, big theories with hidden testimonies. And bringing objects, books and arts together. In that sense, dialogical representational practices should reside in contradictory and constantly shifting interpretations between the researcher, the research subjects, policy and practice.

Keywords: museums, memory, discourse, voice, cultural imagery

Memories in the Making

Across the world, (previously) oppressed and voiceless groups who suffered from violence and abuse "began to assert their rights and demand acknowledgement of, and apology for, their past mistreatment" during the second half

1 Anton Froeyman, "Frank Ankersmit and Eelco Runia: The Presence and the Otherness of The Past", *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 16, no. 3 (2012), 393–415.

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of the twentieth century.[2] In this vein, the historical abuse perpetrated against children in residential child welfare and protection services has been increasingly perceived as a public concern for social justice and has become a political priority in recent decades.[3] In the context of this global development, several formal inquiries into the alleged historical abuse of children in public social work services were commissioned in the 1980s and 1990s by authorities, including in the USA, England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Canada and Australia.[4] These public inquiries often resulted from complaints and accusations about maltreatment, violence, and abuse made by former residents of public and private welfare institutions. As a result, by the end of the twentieth century, giving an official apology for historical injustice had become a widespread practice for acknowledging the suffering of various groups of victims. The inquiries contain important messages for social policy analysis, in that they discuss the responsibility of the state as it relates to, for example, the responsibility and liability of social work services and the Church.[5]

In that vein, Brooks critically observed that we have entered an "age of apology"[6] since political and religious leaders across the world have begun to express official apologies for historical injustices.[7] Löfstrom described this apology trend as an "increased political mobilization and visibility of minorities and oppressed

2 Mark Gibney, *The age of apology. Facing up to the past* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2008), 3.

3 Carol Smart, "Reconsidering the Recent History of Child Sexual Abuse, 1910–1960", *Journal of Social Policy* 29, no. 1 (2001), 55–71; Johanna Sköld. "Historical Abuse: A Contemporary Issue: Compiling Inquiries into Abuse and Neglect of Children in Out-Of-Home Care Worldwide", *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention* 14, no. 1 (2013), 5–23.

4 Brian Corby et al., *Public Inquiries into Abuse of Children in Residential Care* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001); Fred Powell et al., "The Irish Charity Myth, Child Abuse and Human Rights: Contextualising the Ryan Report into Care Institutions", *British Journal of Social Work* 43, no. 1 (2013), 7–23; Kathleen Daly, "Conceptualising Responses to Institutional Abuse of Children", *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* 26, no. 1 (2014), 5–29.

5 Smart, "Reconsidering The Recent History Of Child Sexual Abuse"; Harry Ferguson. "Abused and Looked After Children as 'Moral Dirt': Child Abuse and Institutional Care in Historical Perspective", *Journal of Social Policy* 36, no. 1 (2007), 123–139; Paul M. Garrett, "'It is with Deep Regret that I Find It Necessary to Tell My Story': Child Abuse in Industrial Schools in Ireland", *Critical Social Policy* 292, no. 30 (2010), 292–306.

6 Roy L. Brooks, *When Sorry Isn't Enough: The Controversy over Apologies and Reparations for Human Injustice* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

7 Michael Cunningham, "Saying Sorry: the Politics of Apology", *The Political Quarterly Publishing* 70, no. 3 (1999), 285–293; Berber Bevernage, "De hete adem van het verleden. Over het verleden dat niet voorbij wil gaan en het 'presence'-debat in de geschiedfilosofie", *BEG-CHTP* 18 (2007), 183–198; Berber Bevernage, "Time, presence, and historical injustice", *History and Theory* 47, no. 2 (2008), 149–167.

groups wanting to have justice to their collective memories and experiences of the past".[8] This idea of seeking social justice for historical violence and abuses is closely linked to the emergence of truth and reconciliation commissions, which have grown in prevalence as mainly non-Western, post-conflict and restorative human rights interventions that seek to repair damaged social fabric and often "constitute an opportunity for social work to contribute to the welfare of communities recovering from violence".[9] In this particular attempt to come to terms with the failure of painful past social welfare policies and to repair human injustices the number of apologies has continued to increase since the turn of the century.[10] However, several scholars have raised questions concerning this ambition, since it is not clear what societies are exactly apologising for and to whom the apology is addressed, how and when an apology should be issued, what the goal of such an apology is and how societies can proceed after the apology.[11] One important point of criticism is that an apology should never have the intent of marking the end of public debate, but should generate discussion on how historical injustices have meaning in present day.[12] Stamato pinpoints this as what an apology could be worth in the long run: "what seems to make public apologies matter, in the end, is where they lead, what they generate, what happens as a result of them".[13] Even though local authorities and societies are looking for ways to give the past a place in the present by issuing "an official apology", this practice potentially nullifies this ambition as an apology more often than not announces the end of the

8 Jan Löfström. "Historical Apologies as Acts of Symbolic Inclusion—and Exclusion? Reflections on Institutional Apologies as Politics of Cultural Citizenship," *Citizenship Studies* 15, no. 1 (2011), 94.

9 David K. Androff, "Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC's): An International Human Rights Intervention and Its Connection to Social Work", *British Journal of Social Work* 40, no. 6 (2010), 1960. See also Therese Sacco and Wilma Hoffmann, "Seeking Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa", *International Social Work* 47, no. 2 (2004), 157–167; Linda M. Kreitzer and Mary Kay You, "Social Work with Victims of Genocide: The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) in Rwanda", *International Social Work* 53, no. 1 (2010), 73–86.

10 Gibney, *The age of apology*.

11 Bevernage, "De hete adem van het verleden"; Löfström, "Historical Apologies as Acts of Symbolic Inclusion—and Exclusion?"; Sköld, "Historical abuse: A contemporary issue"; Brian Roberts. *Biographical Research* (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2002); Lieselot De Wilde, Griet Roets, and Bruno Vanobbergen, "Discovering Dimensions of Research Ethics in Doing Oral History: Going Public in the Case of the Ghent Orphanages", *Qualitative Research* 20, *no. 3* (2020), 294–306.

12 De Wilde, Roets, and Vanobbergen. "Discovering Dimensions of Research Ethics in Doing Oral History".

13 Linda Stamato, "Peace and the Culture and Politics of Apology", *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 20, no. 3 (2008), 397.

dialogue, discontent or controversy. Consequently, in many cases, an apology does little more than acknowledge nothing new.[14] In the words of Gibney,[15] states and private actors now offer apologies to groups and individuals in the hope that they can thereby "close" the memory of an incident.

States fail to translate this appeal from the past into an opportunity to reflect on present day social welfare issues. This refers to a key dilemma of the post-socialist era, according to Nancy Fraser who in 1995 already pointed out that: political activism strives for the recognition and rights of certain groups rather than aiming for the redistribution of resources in society. We therefore argue that this politic of apology should not only focus on what happened in the past but should also focus on the present and the future. So, in addition to finding ways to come to terms with the past, Western welfare states also need to be in search of opportunities and sites to keep the memory alive, to give history a place in the present. The major challenge here, for both academia and policy makers, is to make the past relevant for the present. As such, Ritchie emphasises that particularly life histories "have benefitted from a truly interactive methodology, from which they have learned to listen to conflicting opinions and to incorporate multiple viewpoints into their public presentations".[16] In this way, national inquiries should search for ways to raise the historical practices under scrutiny as questionable issues rather than neutral facts, to stimulate a reflexive process of humanisation in our societies on different levels.[17] For this reason, museums are often put forward as sites in which history can be made present by shedding light on histories hidden from history.

The current discourse in the international museum sector emphasises the importance of debate and controversy that goes beyond finding a balance in the different views or engage in "telling the good stories too" but courageous engagement with the difficult narratives.[18] To give voice to the hidden, non-dominant stories. The Museum Doctor Guislain (Ghent, Belgium) has played, since its creation in 1986 a distinct and important role in the international scene of museums about the history of psychiatry. The museum is located in

14 Berber Bevernage, "Writing the Past Out of The Present: History and the Politics of Time in Transitional Justice", *History Workshop Journal* 69, no. 1 (2010), 111–131.

15 Gibney, *The Age of Apology*.

16 Donald A. Ritchie, "When History Goes Public: Recent Experiences in the United States", *Oral History* 29, no. 1 (2001), 92.

17 Griet Roets, Rudy Roose, and Maria Bouverne-De Bie, "Researching Child Poverty: Towards a Lifeworld Orientation," *Childhood-a global journal of child research* 20, no. 4 (2013): 535–549.

18 Adele Chynoweth et al., *Museums and Social Change: Challenging the Unhelpful Museum* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021).

the buildings of an adult psychiatry. There was a great deal of resistance against opening this piece of heritage to the public, certainly among those who worked in mental health care. The shame they felt for the past was so strong, their own history seemed to have some sort of taboo about it. Although the scope of the Museum Dr. Guislain has in time gone further than the history of psychiatry, the starting point for exhibitions and other activities has always remained questioning the distinction between normal and abnormal. This chapter explores the ways in which the Museum Dr. Guislain, and more specifically the exhibition 'Patch Places' (Pleisterplekken) reveals voices, narratives and data that are hidden and in doing that, rethink the museum. Drawing on first-hand experiences of practitioners and by zooming in on this contribution we draw attention to the significant contributions of museums in bringing about social change.

Making Voices Heard: The Memory Discourse

On April 22, 2014, the entire Flemish Parliament apologised at the address of all victims of historical violence and abuse in Flemish residential institutions in the period 1930 to 1990. In an open letter the Flemish Parliament publicly recognised the responsibility that society bears in this suffered grief. The statement declares that it "concerns the recognition of proven physical, psychological and sexual violence towards children and young people".[19] This Flemish public apology is by no means an isolated case, as abuses in the past have become a contemporary political issue in many countries.[20] This idea of seeking social justice for past wrongdoings is closely linked to the historical emergence of truth and reconciliation commissions, which can be considered as one of the most remarkable trends of the past decades in the attempt to pursue social justice.[21] Although several truth and reconciliation commissions existed previously in other developing countries, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, assembled in the mid-1990s, is often cited as the most influential, because it brought abuses of certain individuals in the past

19 The Newspaper, 22 April 2014, pp. 25–2. Mediahuis: Vilvoorde.

20 Sköld, "Historical Abuse: A Contemporary Issue".

21 Bevernage, "De hete adem van het verleden"; Androff, "Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC's)".

to the centre of international attention.[22] Many authors[23] have referred to these renowned truth and reconciliation commissions, active around the globe since the end of the Second World War, to situate the origins of apologies for historical abuse. The truth and reconciliation commission phenomenon is considered a non-Western practice,[24] yet dealing with a painful past also became a high priority on many political agendas in the Western world. As it became clear during the Nazi war crime trials that the traditional legal system was lacking, the quest began for alternative forms of seeking social justice as many other nation states in the West became convinced about "the idea that societies should redress injustices committed long ago".[25] As Bevernage asserted, "policymakers truly feel the hot breath of the past in their neck as civil society forces them to make an official apology, give symbolic or less symbolic reparation fees or establish truth commissions".[26]

These Western versions of the truth and reconciliation commissions are primarily based on oral testimonies and promote the exploration and manifestation of memory as an alternative form of justice.[27] They seem to offer an alternative, often restorative, way of seeking social justice, by offering a compromise between forgiveness or punishment and between forgetting or remembering.[28] Thus, these inquiries do not seek to sentence or punish the perpetrators, they instead offer an official and public "truth-telling" about historical injustice, which is beyond forgiveness.[29] This close collaboration between historical research and politics is reflected within the concept of "a politic of apology"[30] or "a politic of regret".[31] This concept has been framed as a global project in which regret,

22 Gibney, *The Age of Apology;* Priscilla B. Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions* (Routledge: New York, 2010).

23 Daly, "Conceptualising Responses to Institutional Abuse of Children"; Sköld, "Historical Abuse: A Contemporary Issue".

24 Gibney, *The Age of Apology*.

25 Katrina M. Wyman, "Is There a Moral Justification for Redressing Historical Injustices?", *Vanderbilt Law Review* 61, no. 1 (2008), 128.

26 Bevernage, "De hete adem van het verleden", 184.

27 Bevernage, "De hete adem van het verleden"; Gibney, *The Age of Apology*.

28 Bevernage, "De hete adem van het verleden"; Androff, 'Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC's)'; Kreitzer and Kay You, "Social Work with Victims of Genocide".

29 Bevernage, "Writing the Past out of the Present"; Powell, et al., "The Irish Charity Myth, Child Abuse and Human Rights".

30 Gibney, *The Age of Apology*.

31 Jeffrey Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

apology and redress are central as a way of taking responsibility for the past.[32] All these developments led to (previously) "voiceless" groups getting a voice through social activists who, since the late twentieth century, started to demand attention for those who suffered violence and inequality but did not speak up for themselves.[33] In fact, "indigenous peoples all over the world also began to assert their rights and demand acknowledgement of, and apology for, their past mistreatment".[34] By the end of the previous century giving an official apology for historical injustice, as a way to acknowledge the suffering of various groups (of victims) had become a widespread practice.

Making Up for the Past: When Saying Sorry Isn't Enough

We have shown that the prevailing contemporary way to recognise or acknowledge historical abuse of any kind is principally shaped through an apology. As Sköld ascertains in her overviewing article on historical abuse "the many quotes of the different inquiries, illustrate that the content of such investigations is based on compilations of traumatic memories and the informants descriptions of abuse in different countries have a great deal in common".[35] However, many different interpretations and comprehensions of "apologies" are in circulation, much has to do with the lack of a consistent definition of the significance, procedure and content of an official apology and the fact that this practice is relatively new and under-exposed in scientific research. As Thompson puts it: "there is no agreement on what a political apology means, whether it is meaningful at all, when it should be offered, whether it is possible or appropriate to apologize for injustice of the more distant past, whether offering political apologies is an adequate way of dealing with injustices, and what relation they have to reparative justice".[36] As a result, most theoretical definitions

32 Brooks, "*When Sorry isn't Enough";* Philip Seaton, "Reporting the 'Comfort Women' Issue, 1991–1992: Japan's Contested War Memories in the National Press", *Japanese Studies* 26, no. 1 (2006): 99–112; Johanna Sköld, "Apology Politics: Transnational Features", in *Apologies and the Legacy of Abuse of Children in 'Care' International Perspectives,* eds. Johanna Sköld and Shurlee Swain (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 13–27.

33 Gibney, *The Age of Apology, 3.*

34 Ibid, 3.

35 Sköld, "Historical Abuse: A Contemporary Issue", 3.

36 Janna Thompson, "Apology, Justice, and Respect: A Critical Defense of Apology," in *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past*, eds. Mark Gibney, Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann, Jean-

primarily focus on what an apology may consist of. As Stamato showed: "An apology can acknowledge that an injury or damage has occurred. It may include acceptance of responsibility for the mistake; recognize regret, humility or remorse in the language one chooses; explain the role one has played; ask for forgiveness; include a credible commitment to change or promise that the act will not occur again; and often, tender some form of restitution or compensation".[37] Based on Barkan's definition of an apology,[38] Löfström proposed a refined description for "apologising" in the context of coming to terms with the past: "it is a process where the claimants demand recognition of the experiences and memories of loss and pain that are formative of their collective identity and their own history".[39] Here it is highlighted that apologising is actually a process-based practice, with a clear ambition to give recognition both on a collective and an individual level.[40]

In line with Ignatieff, who formulated some fundamental doubts about the reconciliation and healing potential of telling "the" historical truth, we plea for a nuanced interpretation of "the past" that goes beyond the "truth logic" that is at stake within the politics of apology.[41] In this vein, Butler and Drakeford stressed that "the report is only one record of event".[42] It is, however, equally important that policymakers and researchers take a stance on tackling the failures of the social welfare system in the past, especially on a collective level. One universal expressed element in the collected testimonies seems to be "the need for recognition". In the Flemish report composed by the expert panel "recognition" is identified as "what the victims are in need of the most".[43] The Australian report connects the need for recognition to the notion of responsibility because: "responsibility for past abuse and neglect and the development of measures of reparations go to the heart of the

Marc Coicaud, and Niklaus Steiner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 31–44.

37 Stamato, "Peace and the Culture and Politics of Apology", 389.

38 Elazar Barkan, "Introduction: Historians and Historical Reconciliation", *American Historical Review* 114, no. 4 (2009), 899–913.

39 Löfström, "Historical Apologies as Acts of Symbolic Inclusion—and Exclusion?", 94.

40 See also Smart, "Reconsidering the Recent History of Child Sexual Abuse".

41 Michael Ignatieff, "Articles of faith", *Index on Censorship* 5 (1996), 110–122.

42 Ian Butler and Mark Drakeford, *Social Policy, Social Welfare and Scandal: How British Public Policy is Made* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 4.

43 FR Flemish Report, *'Ondubbelzinnig kiezen voor erkenning' – Historisch geweld en misbruik in jeugd- en onderwijsinstellingen in Vlaanderen.* [An unambiguous choice for recognition: historical violence and abuse in child welfare and educational public services in Flanders] *Analyse en beleidsaanbevelingen.* Eindrapport expertenpanel. 9 december, 2013, 38.

concerns of victims of institutional abuse".[44] In Ireland the report of the Laffoy commission states in this regard: "It is important for the alleviation of the effects of childhood abuse that the State's formal recognition of the abuse that occurred".[45] The present-day method to recognise or acknowledge historical abuse of any kind principally gets shaped through an apology. In other words, the outcome within the politics of apology logic, being an official apology, is only one interpretation of how recognition can take form, which may possibly not meet the needs or wishes of all claimants or saying sorry is simple not enough. But more importantly for this contribution is the fact that, by publicly apologizing for the past Western societies as a matter of fact state that "the past" is not gone, on the contrary these societies acknowledge that "the past" is on some level still existing in present-day. This desire for presence in fact becomes most clear in the current societal attention towards the past in the spirit of memory, remembrance and nostalgia.[46] The ambiguous presence of the past has become the last decennia one of the major contemporary international political issues[47] and subsequently found its way to the research domain of history.

Within the traditional conception of the past, it is practically impossible for the historiography to contribute to the quest for justice.[48] According to Bevernage, this will only become possible if we should first leave behind the dichotomy between absent and present. In this way time becomes something that is reversible.[49] In this conceptualisation of time, it is possible for the past to be simultaneously present and absent,[50] which leads in Bevernage's view to a sharper image of the ethical dimension of history. Bevernage points towards this specific approach of history by what he calls a modern historical discourse.[51] Under the influence of various appeals by victims of historical injustice and their heirs claiming that the past is not death, historians slowly began

44 The Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Forgotten Australians: A Report on Australians who Experienced Institutional or Out-of-home Care as Children* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2004), 171.

45 Ryan Report, *Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse: Implementation Plan* (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Department of Health and Children, The Stationery Office, 2009), 22.

46 Jacques Bos, "Presence als nieuw geschiedtheoretisch paradigm?", *Krisis. Tijdschrift voor actuele filosofie* 1 (2010), 11–21, 14.

47 Bevernage, "De hete adem van het verleden", 184.

48 Bos, "Presence als nieuw geschiedtheoretisch paradigm?".

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Berber Bevernage, "'*We Victims and Survivors Declare the Past to Be in the Present.' Time, Historical (In)justice and the Irrevocable*" (Ghent: University of Ghent, 2009).

to take the presence of the past more and more serious.[52] The assumption that the past is absent or is at a distance[53] from the present seemed no longer tenable. But even though historians gradually became aware of the "presence phenomena", it lacked the theory of history for a long time of an appropriate paradigm to approach the presence of the past idea.[54] In recent years several different approaches have turned up with the common project to rethink our relation with the past, in order to make the past present again.[55] In 2006, the Dutch philosopher of history, Eeclo Runia, introduced in this respect the notion "presence" which has first and foremost to do with the way the past can be present in present-day.[56]

In the scope of this chapter it is not possible to work out the "presence (paradigm)" in detail, but Eelco Runia puts forward one idea that is particularly interesting for our account because we want to think about ways to make the past relevant for the present. We want to look for a road that is not in search of the truth and not heading towards closing the memory but one that captures the ambiguities, opens up the dialogue and the limits of the quest for recognition. Runia puts forward the idea that it is ultimately not "meaning" we are looking for, but "presence". According to Runia the term "presence" can in this way break open a classical historiographical question, the problem of continuity and discontinuity.[57] Through thinking about the past in terms of presence – of the past in the present- rather than in terms of meaning we should be able to do justice to the phenomenon of discontinuity: "In order to come to grips with discontinuity we have to focus not on the past but on the present, not on history as what is irremediably gone, but on history as ongoing process".[58] If we embrace the idea that historical representations cannot simply be true or false but should be considered as proposals to review historical realities in a certain light,[59] raising a multiplicity of interpretative repertoires by giving the past a place in the present through various ways is pivotal. In that sense, Lather argues for dialogical representational practices, that reside in contradictory and

52 Bevernage, "De hete adem van het verleden".
53 Bevernage, "We victims and survivors declare the past to be in the present."
54 Bevernage, "De hete adem van het verleden", 185.
55 Froeyman, "Frank Ankersmit and Eelco Runia".
56 Bos, "Presence als nieuw geschiedtheoretisch paradigm?".
57 Ibid.
58 Eelco Runia. "Presence", *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006), 8.
59 Froeyman, "Frank Ankersmit and Eelco Runia".

constantly shifting and changing interpretations between the researcher, the research subjects, policy and practice.[60]

Making the Unspeakable Visible: Cultural Imaginary

In the aftermath of the Flemish apology and the end report of the inquiry commission the exhibition 'Patch Places: between romance and trauma' came about. The inquiry commission recommended in its report *Choosing unambiguously for acknowledgment*[61] to give public recognition to the experiences of the former residents. This recommendation was taken up by the Museum Dr. Guislain and resulted in an exhibition about growing up in youth welfare institutions in 2014. This Ghentian Museum questions the boundaries between normal and abnormal by exhibiting past and present issues concerning mental health. More than thirty years after the opening of the museum, this ambition still stands as the museum aims to exhibit well-known as well as underreported themes and social debates. As a result of the growing of public interest and the acknowledge the museum earned in past years, the scope of interest of the museum also changed and became broader then psychiatric and mental health related issues. In recent years the museum put up exhibitions on (forced) adoption, addiction, psychiatric diseases as anxiety and depression, Internment, and so on. In preparing this exhibition on the history of youth welfare institutions the museum worked together with a steering committee. The steering committee of Patch Places consisted of experts, academia, policymakers, practitioners and other interest groups, who met on a regularly basis to explore the content of the theme, to identify sensitive issues and to discuss the selection of visual material. The goal of the steering committee was striving for polyphony, urging the museum to listen and to hear different voices and perspectives concerning the often sensitive and emotional themes they're exploring.

For a museum on psychiatry that is housed in the buildings of an old asylum and surrounded by a working psychiatric hospital and a school for psychiatric

60 Patti Lather, "Against Empathy, Voice and Authenticity", in *Voice in Qualitative Inquiry: Challenging Conventional, Interpretive, and Critical Conceptions in Qualitative Research,* eds. Alecia Y. Jackson A and Lisa A. Mazzei (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 17–26.

61 Ondubbelzinnig kiezen voor erkenning. Historisch geweld en misbruik in jeugd- en onderwijsinstellingen in Vlaanderen analyse, duiding en beleidsaanbevelingen. Eindrapport experten-panel 9 december 2013.

nursing, engaged voices are everywhere. There are also the voices of the visitors of the building: a constant mix of individual museum visitors, schools, groups, caregivers, caretakers of the hospital and their family. The plurality of all these involved voices can be heard best concerning the permanent presentation on the history of psychiatry. A permanent presentation of collection items can never be endless. On the contrary, a collection is only possible by means of careful preservation and by a fixed time of exposure to light. Every few years this permanent presentation undergoes a complete shift where all these voices are heard and the modifications are a returning point for discussion.

The process of including multiple voices is anything but easy as the conversations with stakeholders and experts by experience are often emotionally charged and the stories very divergent. They all want to see their perspectives and interests represented and displayed in the exhibition. In this sense, raising a multiplicity of interpretative repertoires, implies a risk of getting lost in translation with stakeholders, visitors, policy and practice while interpreting and representing layered and ambiguous findings. Nevertheless, in the course of interpreting and representing the research findings as a multiplicity of interpretable issues to different audiences, the museum embraces this ambiguity as an opportunity.[62] This quest is illustrated in the choice for the title of the project: Patch Places. 'Patch Places' sounds warm and refers to a resting place, an intermediate stop in life, but at the same time it also refers to a plaster for the wound, the place that remains if you have severe scars. In that sense, the title attempts to encompasses both the romance and the trauma associated with (a stay in) child and youth welfare institutions. Juvenile institutions provide care and protection, but can also leave deep wounds.

'Patch Places' showed both romantic images of children and education, the scientific-pedagogical approach of institutions and the current attention for youngsters and trauma. The curatorial narrative is an important recipe of the museum. The themes of the exhibitions unfold their complexity through a more or less historical narrative with a building up of images and theoretical frameworks. The exhibition started with the romantic and optimistic image of children in a family context. Unconcerned, loving, a place to call home: it showed the classic family as the ideal environment to grow up in. However, what if that family does not at all meet the expectations that society imposes in terms of hygiene, warmth and security. Intervention of the state then seems in place. The legislation on child protection (1912) and youth protection (1965) made interventions possible and sensible. "The best interest of the child" gavegovernments an argument to

62 Roets, Roose, and Bouverne-De Bie, "Researching Child Poverty".

intervene when the child is in a problematic educational situation or when the minor themself causes problems. Youth institutions took over the idealised role of the family and were sometimes the only solution to provide a protective educational environment. However, what if the institution also fails? 'Patch Places' shows the developments in the history of youth care, with attention to both the efforts and the dark pages, the ideals as opposed to the sometimes bitter experiences. The "normal" child counts as the standard, children who deviate from the social standard are problematized, labelled and corrected. In the 1960s the optimistic faith in the institution was broken. The idea of feasibility through discipline is questioned by the broad anti-cultural movement. Schools, psychiatric institutions and prisons are criticised, but also special youth care is scrutinised. There is more attention to 'institutional' and other violence and abuse. The defective material circumstances in which youth institutions 'must' function, are being charged.

Throughout the history of feasibility ideals and the translation in pedagogical regimes, trauma is gaining a more distinct shape through real stories and scandals. A collective sensitivity is growing in which shame and astonishment are strongly present. The White March during the Dutroux period (1996) and the sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, particular for the Flemish context stirred up sensitivity to the notion of 'trauma'. In this context, the importance of testimonies cannot be overrated. When victims are not heard or are not believed, the impact of the trauma is intensified. The Museum Dr. Guislain has built up their curatorial practices on the foundations laid by the famous museum director and curator Harald Szeemann. This Swiss curator became world-wide famous for his version of Documenta. In international exhibitions as *Visionary Belgium* or *Grandfather: A Pioneer Like* Us, he incorporated contemporary art as well as cultural heritage, science and popular culture into a fascinating and disturbing narrative. The Ghentian Museum has a long history in presenting several media in an exhibition. Other than focusing on the question what art is, the museum aims full attention of visitors to the disturbing or underreported debates. By means of paintings, historical photographs and postcards, contemporary art, film fragments and original testimonies "Patch Places. Between romance and trauma" draws a versatile image of the history of educational ideals, youth institutions and children's rights. "Patch Places" wanted to highlight this tension through pedagogical paradoxes that characterise life in an institution. The exhibition questions the obviousness of institutional problem constructions through which people learn to accept social injustice, by which the "unquestioned" becomes "questionable". In that vein, as Schuyt asserts, the researcher's interpretation might create conflict between existing, taken-for-granted institutional and the suggested non-institutional problem definitions since " . . . the interpreted problem constructions of the relationship between the individual and society can

vary blatantly . . . [as] non-institutional phenomena stem from radically different perceptions of reality, they obey quite different rules of action from those underlying the existing social order".[63]

This implies that knowledge claims resulting from (oral) history research can be presented as questionable issues rather than neutral facts to stimulate a process of humanisation, which can be read in multiple ways by the different actors involved. To grasp the difference in interpretations or to capture the different visitor's experiences, the steering committee considered it pivotal to give visitors the opportunity to share their experiences, emotions and thoughts, with the idea that these data in turn could inspire future research and result in possible adjustments to the exhibition. At the end of the exhibition, visitors had the chance to leave a (anonymous) written message. A total of 94 responses were written down by the visitors. Most of the responses consist of short texts about how they experienced the exhibition, but there were also six drawings found in the book. The visitors most often reported their emotions in response to the stories told in the exhibition. Feelings of inspiration, confrontation and inspiration were described, but above all, the visitors indicated that they were "moved" by everything they saw and heard during the tour.

> The worst thing you can do to someone is that he / she has to be and remain invisible. This is no longer necessary from now on. Thanks. Thanks also for the apologies. It all doesn't seem like much, but it's super important and a start where without an apology there is no cure.

Nine entries, as the quote above, in the book turned out to be testimonies of children (7) who spend their childhood in residential care and the two other testimonies were reported by former educators. In that vein, the guestbook of 'Patch Places' turned out to give the museum and steering committee a unique insight in the mind of visitors.

> The beginning of an 'ending story' if possible. Historical abuse, indeed an item that needs to be addressed. However, it is still happening now and that is the next job . . .

The quote, from the guestbook illustrates how the exhibition on the history of youth welfare institutions serves as a bridge between the past and the present, with an eye on the future. In this approach, the museum recognised that "interpretation should be attentive to inconsistency and ambiguities in stories rather than assuming one story and a simple receptiveness of the audience".[64] In this

63 Kees Schuyt, *Recht, Orde en Burgerlijke Ongehoorzaamheid* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1972), 25.

64 Roberts, *Biographical Research*, 7.

sense the museum Dr. Guislain does not look at history in terms of evolution or progress but considers histories as a collective learning process by questioning the ambivalent ontological status of the presence or non-absent past.

As a result, this specific history became a theme in the new presentation of the collection of the Museum in 2019. "Patch Places" proved to be not only a temporary exhibition, but the voices heard were included in the new perspectives of the museum in *Unhinged*. The exhibition not only gave insight in existing but unknown archival material, institutional archives and photography that were included in the new permanent exhibition. It also strengthened the idea of the museum of broadening the story on institutional care outside the psychiatric world and including the evolution of child and youth institutes in this presentation.

Making History: An Ongoing Process

As history cannot be considered a closed chapter, contemporary Western societies struggle with the question of how they can come to terms with their (dark) past.[65] In recent years several attempts have been made through public inquiries and public apologies to "make up for the past". However, these initiatives mainly (1) focus on the pain suffered, (2) try to avoid making the same mistakes again and (3) create one common story of history. If we embrace the idea that historical representations cannot simply be true or false but should be considered as proposals to review historical realities in a certain light,[66] raising a multiplicity of interpretative repertoires by giving the past a place in the present through various ways is pivotal. As Riessman puts it, in "the 'truths' of narrative accounts lie not in their faithful representation of a past world, but in the shifting connections they forge between past, present, and future".[67] In our view, in addition to finding ways to come to terms with the past, Western

65 Lieselot De Wilde, *Between the Past and the Present. Government Interventions and Children in Residential Care. A Never Ending Contested Space? The Case of the Orphanages of the City of Ghent* (Ghent: Ghent University, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, 2015); Lieselot De Wilde, Griet Roets, and Bruno Vanobbergen, "Challenging the Normative Truth Logic in the Politics of Apology: A Quest for Recognition", *British Journal of Social Work* 49, *no. 3* (2019), 653–669.

66 Froeyman, "Frank Ankersmit and Eelco Runia".

67 Catherine K. Riessman, "Analysis of Personal Narratives," in *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research. The Complexity of the Craft*, eds. Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2001), 705.

welfare states should seize this memory momentum as an opportunity to reflect on current practices and policies while being inspired by the past.

The major challenge for both academia and policy makers is to make the past relevant for the present. One way to engage in this quest is by visualizing or exhibiting the past. This entails a fundamental change in the way we commonly conceptualise testimonies: a shift from "the truth" to "their truths". In which we do not turn to memories and testimonies in search of the truth, but attempt to capture the meaning of historical narratives today. In this way, the Museum Dr. Guislain's emphasises and discusses the ambiguity of remembering the past, rather than re-presenting the past. The starting point of the exhibition 'Patch Places' therefore lies in questioning the thin line between normality and abnormality. And who's voices can be heard? The exhibition draws attention to the evolution and influence of power relations in care settings and tries to grasp the many labels that are a help as well as a hindrance. It brings the mind-body debate to the fore and shows how imagination gives perspective and makes the unspeakable visible. Since the visiting audience in turn interprets the material and the stories presented in the exhibition and gives it back to the guestbook and the public debate. In other words, the audience puts a mirror in front of the past which the museum tries to gain insight into through the guestbook. In order to evaluate the exhibition in this way, but even more so to continue working on the process that is history.

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