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**Negotiating the Values of Popular Music in the Museum: Curatorial Process and
Exhibition Narratives in the *Abbaworld* Exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney**

Gaëlle Crenn

Gaëlle Crenn

Associate Professor in Communication Studies

Lorraine University, France

CREM (Centre de Recherche sur les Mediations)

Gaëlle.crenn@gmail.com

IUT Charlemagne

Dept info-Communication

2, ter Boulevard Charlemagne

CS 55 227

54012 Nancy Cedex

Biography

Gaëlle Crenn is Associate professor in Communication Studies at Lorraine University, France, and a member of the Centre de Recherche sur les Médiations (CREM). She is interested in contemporary evolutions in museums and the heritage field. Her current research focuses on museums and cultural industries, intercultural exchanges in touring exhibitions and transforming ethnographic museums in Europe and Pacific areas.

Abstract

Museums are agents of cultural valuation where objects are selected, interpreted, exhibited, and turned into heritage. How does popular culture affect the cultural logic of the museum and how does the museum approach these new cultural contents? The text focuses on the case of the *Abba* world exhibition presented at the Powerhouse Museum, in Sydney, Australia. Based on interviews with the curatorial team and a comprehensive audience survey, the study aims to understand how the music of Abba is defined as heritage through the design and the experience of the display. It compares the exhibition previously staged by Swedish producers in Melbourne (2010) and its re-curation at the Powerhouse Museum - focussing on the representation of popular music, the narratives of the exhibition, and the choice of devices to experience popular music in the museum. It discusses the (re)valuation of popular music as heritage and the role of the museum as heritage's "respondent". The case study illustrates the growing importance of the mediatization of popular culture for museums and cultural industries.

Keywords: Museum, patrimonialization, Abba, exhibition, heritage

The patrimonialization of popular music in the museum

Museums are agents of cultural valuation, where valuable objects are selected, interpreted and exhibited (Macdonald 1998; Davallon 1999). Museums can also be defined as sites of patrimonialization: places where valuable objects, once selected, are turned into heritage¹.

¹ This term "patrimonialization" is formed after the French word *patrimonialisation*, used in the French speaking area. The synonym "heritagization" is proposed in English speaking context. In the French term "patrimoine", the notion of filiation is sensitive: the "patrimoine" is what we get from our fathers (pater). The neologism

Following André Micoud (1996), we understand heritage as the articulation of a ‘respondent’ (*répondant*’, a person or institution *responsible for* the heritage), a ‘content’ (the valuable common good) and a ‘link’ (a policy established between the respondent and the content).

Patrimonialization is thus the process of defining, through the negotiation between multiple social groups, the legitimate ‘respondent’, ‘content’ and ‘link’ of heritage.

Various social forces take part in this process; they help to determine what are the (material or immaterial) objects that are to be designated as memorable. Groups define themselves in the same movement, and the election of memorable objects is done in the name of a legitimate beneficiary: the community of people (past, present or future) for whom the common good is chosen. Thus the process of patrimonialization aims to define a common good and the group that will care for it, as well as the group for whom they act (‘us’, ‘the nation’, ‘the future generations’...). The construction of heritage contributes to the definition of social groups and to their relationships *to* the past, *for* the present time. Important works in sociology of culture have established how western museums have continuously tended to favour dominant social groups in the function of ‘respondents’, therefore favouring the cultural tastes of these groups as memorable ‘content’ (Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Bennett 1995; Bourdieu and Darbel 1969). Hence the cultural valuation that museums realize has helped to reinforce these dominant groups, and led to the on-going exclusion of all kinds of popular culture expressions from the museum.

In recent years, changes have been observed. Blockbuster exhibitions dedicated to Star Wars, Harry Potter and Doctor Who, as well as exhibitions of popular music and literature, circulate in major museums. In his seminal work, *Museums and Popular Culture* (1997), Moore has shown that the incorporation of popular culture into the museum has served as a key process of cultural legitimization. Museums are constitutive parts of the public sphere

“patrimonialization” keeps this idea of a transmission between generations, and of the duties that are attached to it, whereas the English term “heritagization” seems to focus more on the objects that undergo the process.

(Barrett 2010; Rasse 1999). Beyond their productive role in the definition of heritage, they participate in shaping and reshaping authorized practices and behaviours (Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Message 2006), and in establishing relationships between social groups. How does popular culture affect the cultural logic of the museum and how does the museum tackle these new cultural contents? What kind of patrimonialization of popular culture is at stake in these exhibitions? In particular, how is the negotiation between cultural industry producers and museum teams embedded in the exhibition's design and the display's layout? The confrontation with an unusual subject – popular culture – highlights the transformative nature of the museum, and illuminates the way it helps to define social values in the public sphere, through the interactions between social groups and audiences (including fan communities) that take place in the exhibition (Brabazon and Mallinder 2006).

Blockbuster exhibitions are of high interest to the cultural industries because they attract large audiences and enhance the fidelity of the products on display. The exhibitions attract fans, users of the products (from movies and comics to videogames), and families sharing intergenerational knowledge and interest in the subject. The museum is a new social interface for cultural industries: a place where mass cultural production can be exposed, legitimized and appropriated by audiences (including possibly new museum-goers) in the social sphere.

The exhibition *Abba-world. The Music. The Memories. The Magic* is a prominent case of popular music's patrimonialization process. The exhibition was originally conceived and set up by the Touring Exhibitions company, founded by Abba's producer Polar Studio².

² 'Touring Exhibitions company was formed in the fall of 2008, by Synergera Rättighetsförvaltning, Eventum Exhibitions, Park & Resorts, and Universal Music AB, Sweden. Touring Exhibitions acquired the rights, not only to an ABBA museum in Sweden, but also rights to establish a touring ABBA exhibition, what has now become ABBAWORLD, from Universal Music AB, Sweden. The business concept of Touring Exhibitions was appealing to the new investment group. [...] In the spring of 2009, an investment group, led by John Wattin and Eva Redhe Ridderstad took part ownership of Touring Exhibitions. Chairman of the board, Staffan Holm, says that the new ownership structure will increase the possibilities of Touring Exhibitions to expand its business'.

Following the outstanding success of the *Mamma Mia!* movie³, the producers decided to create a permanent museum dedicated to the career and achievements of Abba in Stockholm. The exhibition was a preview of the museum, the Touring Exhibitions company organising the worldwide tour until its final location in the Abba museum. Launched in Earls Court in London on the 27th January 2010, the exhibition travelled to Melbourne and Győr (Hungary) in 2010, and to Sydney and Prague in 2011.

The music of Abba undergoes a process of multimediatization (‘multimediatisation’, Miège, 1997). Various media and different cultural forms – from best-of albums to a musical and an exhibition – enhance Abba’s cultural legitimation and ensure the widespread diffusion of the music. This massive diffusion strengthens the place of Abba in the common cultural pot, transforming it into an essential classic. In 1992, the successful *Gold* album reached sales of twenty-six million copies. The *Mamma Mia!* musical helped to cement Abba’s music as a widely shared reference, a music still able to express everybody’s feelings nowadays. Over four million copies of the soundtrack were sold. The exhibition project is a mean to enhance the visibility of Abba’s musical legacy, and to define it as heritage that is worth collecting, safeguarding and transmitting. The touring exhibition was designed to attract listeners from all generations and the producers expected significant profits from tickets and dedicated shop sales.

This article focuses on the case of the *AbbaWorld* exhibition presented at the Powerhouse Museum, museum of sciences and applied arts, in Sydney, Australia (December 2010 - June 2011). Based on interviews with the curatorial team and a comprehensive survey

(<http://www.abbaworld.com/article/press/new-ownership-structure-behind-abbaworld>, 11 Sept 2009) [consulted January 2012].

³ *Mamma Mia* is a ‘tribute musical’ based on Abba songs with additional music composed by Abba member Benny Anderson. The musical has been launched in Broadway in 1999 and it still touring worldwide. The *Mamma Mia!* movie” (2008) is among the highest box-office successes.

of the audience⁴, the study aims to understand how the music of Abba is defined as heritage through the design and the experience of the display. It attempts to show how the values of popular music as heritage are constructed, through negotiations between the different actors involved in the project. The *Abbaworld* case study aims to illuminate the actual representations of popular music as heritage that are embodied in the exhibition's layout. It enables us to understand the ongoing revaluations of cultural practices, experiences, and consumptions that such popular music exhibitions epitomize.

In order to delineate the process of patrimonialization, the article will focus on the curatorial work of two main actors, namely the Touring Exhibitions company, run by the Swedish producers from the Polar Studio, and the Powerhouse Museum's project team. At the Powerhouse, an associate curator, Jonathan Parsons, was assigned in order to re-curate the exhibition and to raise it to museum standards⁵. The invited curator played the role of main interface between the producers and the museum. This paper will observe the differences between the exhibition previously set by the Swedish producers in Melbourne⁶, and its re-curation at the Powerhouse Museum. It will analyze differences concerning the representation of popular music, the narratives of the exhibition, and the choice of devices used to experience popular music in the museum. It shall thus present results about the (re)valuation of popular music as heritage and about the role of the museum itself as heritage's "respondent".

⁴ The survey has been undertaken during a six months research leave in Sydney (February – July 2011). 81 people were interviewed, at the exit of the exhibition, individually or in small groups, during the April 2011 school holidays. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for the content analysis (Crenn, 2011).

⁵ Sydney is the only place where the exhibition has been shown in a museum, and re-curated for this purpose. The exhibition has been presented elsewhere in places dedicated to blockbuster exhibitions.

⁶ Melbourne, Federation Square, June-October 2010.

Exhibiting popular music

Music, rather than a purely material object, is durational. It can only be exhibited through different kind of objects that make it visible: ‘objects of the songs’, ‘objects of the singers’, and other *ad hoc* creations and artefacts (Dalbavie 2004). Music is an intangible object co-produced through multiple mediations. The exhibition as a whole offered a mediation of popular music as intangible heritage (Bortolotto 2011; Turgeon 2009; Jadé 2006), allowing multiple possible paths and points of views for the visitors (Hennion 1993). Through their visit, visitors perform the exhibition display. Indeed the display was designed to encourage a specific use by the potential (imagined) visitor (Akrich 1987). Thus, the meaning of the exhibition results from tension between the ideal use and the actual interactions with the display performed by (real) visitors. Following their own personal path, visitors built their own meanings in the course of the visit.

The *Abba* world exhibition exposed three main types of objects: artefacts and technical paraphernalia (mostly from the Polar Studio’s collection⁷), memorabilia and personal items (many of them loaned from the Abba members), and audiovisual material (recent interviews of the band, footage and videos-clips). In the original design in Melbourne, the narrative followed a chronological course, based on the band’s discography. The production of recorded music clearly delimited the story told to the visitors. Numerous interviews were available to be listened to: interviews with crew members and technical staff (such as artistic director for the covers, sound engineers and assistant manager), as well as recent interviews with the members of the band themselves. The interviews with technical and artistic crew members highlighted the importance of the producer, Polar studio, and acknowledged the know-how of the cultural industry in creating and supporting the success of the band. In this exhibition pathway structured around recorded production, the most prominent author of the

⁷ As Moore has noticed, museums rely more and more on private collectors and cultural industry producers to access the objects (Moore 1997).

music is designated as the producer himself. Following this scheme, band members are reduced to being mere means to an end. Only the Pygmalion producer has the ability to help them express their talent and reach an audience.

Fan communities pay careful attention to the legitimacy of those who claim the right to speak for their idol. Some communities try to play the role themselves. Thus, it is crucial for the producers to appear as authorized spokesmen. The role of the band interviews dispatched throughout the exhibition was mainly to authenticate the link between the producers and the members⁸. Such material constantly recalled the producers' legitimacy to tell the story of Abba. In this regard, the interviews are less to be listened to than to be just seen⁹.

The display organizes the encounter with the objects, and the contact with all the meanings and messages that the designers had in mind, their 'exposed world' (*'monde exposé'*) (Davallon 1999). In Melbourne, the producers presented the costumes under glass, with sophisticated and precise lighting, in order to enhance their aesthetic value: they were presented as works of arts, and tended to be separated from the contact of the visitors: they ought to be appreciated through the eyes only. At the Powerhouse Museum, the curator's choices drew an alternative 'intended display and suggested other appropriations of the 'exposed world'. First, the curator turned the strictly chronological course into a thematic one, articulating six sections: 'Abba performs', 'Behind the scenes', 'Australia adores Abba', 'The sound of Abba', 'Sweden goes pop' and 'Legacy of Abba'. Thus the narrative exceeds the limits of a career seen only through its marketed production (through the level of recorded music sales). It includes recent re-appropriations of Abba music, such as the *Mamma Mia* movie, but also less authorized forms of expression (see examples below). Besides, the new design includes other dimensions. Beyond the global worldwide phenomenon, new added

⁸ As the official website claims, it is the single exhibition authorized by Abba members.

⁹ Indeed according to J. Parsons, in Melbourne, very few visitors actually listened to them. Interview with J. Parsons, 21st April. 2011.

elements reveals a local reception of the phenomenon. In the sixth section, ‘Legacy of Abba’, a quotation on the wall claimed that ‘there is nothing more Australian than an unhealthy relationship with ABBA’¹⁰; one can watch extracts of renowned Australian ‘Abba’ movies (*Muriel’s Wedding*, *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*) and performances (‘Dancing Queen’ by Kylie Minogue at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games’ closing ceremony). The section also highlighted the role of the audience, insisting on a specific local public who are considered, through their various appropriations, as co-authors of Abba’s music. This presentation differs from the Melbourne exhibition’s direction and reassesses the place of both the artists and the audience, along with the producers, in the ‘making of the music’. The creation of popular music is understood as a collective process rather than the result of a standard industrial process. Popular music is defined as an authentic creation from and with the people, and not as an industrially processed product imposed on the masses. The Sydney exhibition then contests the leadership of the cultural industry in the definition of popular music as heritage, specifically in the definition of its authors.

In Sydney, the curator chose to gather the recent interviews in a single section (section 5, ‘Sweden goes pop’), bringing biographical background and individual information about the members, and especially about how they feel toward their own history, from their beginnings to the present. Pictures are exposed in an intimate way on domestic style picture walls. Highly symbolic personal items loaned by the members provided an authentic touch to the portraits. This layout allowed visitors to get a closer contact with the members and to understand their individual trajectories, before and after the official career, including the sometimes harsh cost of the success. Instead of focusing on the links between the producers and the members, curator Parsons considered that interviews can create a valuable contact with the band, allowing an overview to their intimate lifelong story. The audience study

¹⁰ The label indicates: ‘Blog post from Vamstad, 2010, referring to Kylie Minogue’s performance of “Dancing Queen” at the closing ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games’. The quotation – by a member of the Australian audience – was often commented on by visitors.

showed that the public responded strongly to these interviews. Many visitors developed a powerful feeling of identification with the members of the band, and expressed a deep interest for the 'real people' behind the icons. For example a 48 year-old female visitor who lived in New South Wales commented in interview:

W: [Commenting the wall quotation about "unhealthy relationship with Abba"] Well you know I shed tears in there. I don't know if it's "unhealthy"...

GC: Yes ? Where ? Why ?

W: In interviews. When I saw Anna in particular. How she is today. Because she changed, so much, didn't she? To see her now, and how she was, I think it was lovely. And Frida too, to see them again. Just to think that they move on since this amazing time, that they are just normal people with a normal ordinary life...

Another visitor, who was a 39 year-old female preschool teacher living in Sydney, explained:

GC What do you like most?

W: The interviews. Seeing them speak now. Especially the girls. Seeing the girls speak now, because... Just to know, now that I am an adult, to know how they are going, it's really important to me, to know that they are well and healthy, that is really important to me [smiling]. I don't know why but ... Especially Agnetha.

GC: Yes ? Why ?

W: Because I think she was such an icon. To me she was, she is the most beautiful woman in the world. And for her to disappear, to be affected in a negative way by what she has given us, that was so positive and so beautiful. For her to then feel burnt out and not able to face the world after that. So yes, I felt very sad. So when she said after that:

‘Oh yes I had bad days, and then I put on an Abba song and I think I have done something good’, I’d loved that; I just loved that.

Unlike the Melbourne design, Parsons decided to remove the glass display cases in order to generate a more direct contact with the costumes, to allow a closer look at them. The curator considered it a way to engender a different relationship with the object: not a distant admiration of a magnificent preserved object, but on the contrary a close contact that made the exceptional more familiar and allowed a more vivid experience of Abba. Rather than being put on a high pedestal and under a glass showcase, the costumes were displayed on a low platform¹¹. Parsons decided to use this plinth in order to permit detailed observation of the costumes, practically at the level of visitors. Such intimate display methods made visible the marks of everyday use on the objects. Many comments from visitors relate to trivial details regarding the condition of clothing: how tiny they are, how glittering the sequins, how faded the colours, how high the heels, how used and dirty the clothes... The presentation thus underlines the “historical value” of objects, revealing the passage of time (Riegl 1984). Visitors also insisted on the feeling of closeness, instead of the usual experience of distance (through broadcast shows or because of the distance in a wide concert hall.)

A paradoxical presentation

As Moore has shown, the ‘authentication’ of popular culture – the construction of popular culture as an authentic (proper) museum material – is the result of a series of displacements in the mapping of material culture (originally designed by Pearce, 1992). Popular culture can be considered according to ‘two fundamental positions’:

¹¹ This plinth had been used previously to display garments in an exhibition devoted to fashion, in the same exhibition space.

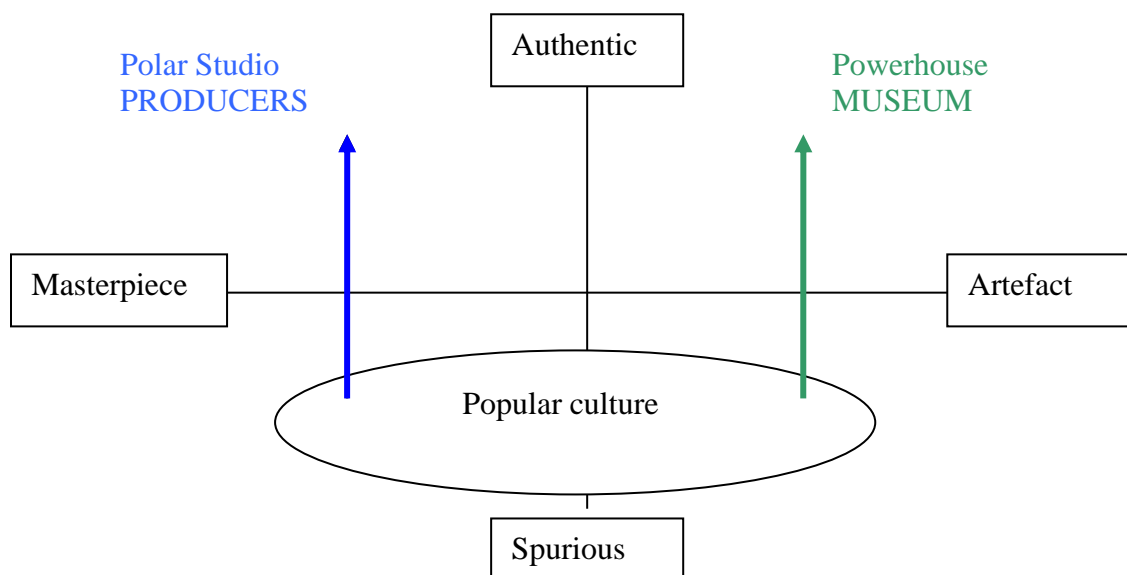
‘Either a mass culture imposed by a culture industry to maintain the power of a running elite, or alternatively as a genuine, creative cultural expression from below; a form of consumer subversion in opposition to the dominant ideology’ (Moore, 1997: 2, following Strinati, 1995: xviii).

On the graph (Figure 1), popular culture is considered either as ‘spurious artefacts’ or as ‘spurious masterpiece’. Moore concludes:

‘The plot explains graphically why popular culture has been traditionally ignored by museums. The material culture of popular culture, what we might term popular material culture, is considered non-authentic, belonging below the horizontal axis and not among the “proper” museum material above’ (Moore, 1997: 4).

In the *Abbaword* case, the changes in the design led to a paradoxical presentation, where the producers preferred a ‘museum –like’ presentation of auratic objects, in order to legitimate popular culture’s artefacts in the museum, whereas the museum’s team chose to present the living objects in a ‘un-museum’ style. A paradoxical logic rules the relationships with artefacts, the Polar Studio producers trying to transform the artefacts from ‘spurious artefacts’ to ‘authentic masterpieces’, drawing on artistic values, while the Powerhouse museum team aims to change their value from ‘spurious artefacts’ to ‘authentic artefacts’: objects with an historical value, seen as witnesses of history. The costumes especially, key pieces of the exhibition, presented under glass showcases, as ‘authentic masterpieces’, highlighted throughout the exhibition in Melbourne, whereas they are inviting to a close contact from the start (Section 1) in the Sydney exhibition.

Figure 1 : The authentication of material culture (Moore, 1997, after PEARCE, 1992)



Experiences, literacy and politics of popular music

The exhibition was composed of three types of exhibits:

1. Exhibits presenting objects (personal and technical artefacts), along with audiovisual material (interviews, footage, video clips and movies).
2. Reconstitutions: evocative decors and immersive reconstitutions, such as the Swedish summer hut, the backstage dressing-room or the recording studios.
3. Interactives: a wide range of interactive devices which require various skills and level of body engagement. Interactives included an Abba quiz (outside and inside the exhibition), a mix game (one should re-mix an Abba song on an interactive mix table); sing-along (cubicles with microphones to sing Abba songs and record the performance) and finally “The Stage”,

where one is invited to perform an Abba song with human-scale holographic silhouettes of Abba¹².

The interactive exhibits relied on physical, oral and visual literacy, whereas the reconstituted decors required more visual, textual and intellectual skills. The interactive exhibits call for active physical engagement, participation and immersion. The evocative ones provoked feelings of evasion, stimulated observation and reflection. The interactives were inspired by domestic games and leisure activities, such as home karaoke devices and parties, or TV shows, based on the *Pop Idol* model. The devices were clearly designed for an intergenerational audience and for collective participation. The producers well understood the ability of such devices to gather a large intergenerational public. In the exhibition official publication and in the promotional tools, they explicitly addressed fans of all generations. The ‘promise’ of the visit was to share the pleasure of re-singing and re-playing Abba songs with friends or family, and to communicate intensively with one’s group in doing it collectively¹³. The exhibition transformed formerly private (or semi-public) practices into a public performance, where the public could be successively member of the audience and performer. The roles were shared and also easily exchanged. Watching visitors performing on the stage was an activity in itself, and you could have a fully satisfying visit without performing yourself¹⁴. The interactives re-enacted the museum as a space for public aesthetic judgment. They tended to encourage an immediate and direct consumption of Abba music. They appeared as a mean to acculturate new museum goers (Abba fans) to the museum and to symmetrically develop the acculturation of museum visitors to new cultural industry products.

¹² All the performances are recorded on the exhibition web site and accessible 24 hours later thanks to the smart ticket.

¹³ In Parsons’ view, the exhibition is designed for adults first, children being considered as a ‘captive audience’. A fraction of the audience acknowledged and positively responded to the strategy, commenting on the fact that the Powerhouse Museum had scheduled an exhibition for adults for once which was perceived as a reward for their cultural good will (many visitors are parents bringing their children for educative day trip during school holidays).

¹⁴ Indeed, for some visitors, the pleasure of the performance seems to be reachable by substitution and/or sympathy: when people of one’s group are encouraged to dance and sing instead of oneself (children instead of parents for instance).

For example, the official Abba website conveniently announced at the same time the launching of the brand new “Abba Sing-a-long” App.

Evocative reconstitutions

In the re-curation process at the Powerhouse Museum, the design of the exhibition highlights the place of the reconstructed decors: these displays not only produce a greater audience’s immersion, they also provide a deconstruction of Abba’s cultural representation. The immersive behind-the-scenes exhibits help understanding Abba as a social phenomenon, and integrating Abba story within one’s own personal history. In the reconstitutions, the treatment of technical artefacts, such as recording material and instruments, differs as well. Where the Polar Studio producers tended to acknowledge the exemplary technological level achieved by the recorded production, and considered it the main reason for the success of the band, the Powerhouse Museum’s curator deeply integrates the technical artefacts in the decors in order to illuminate the links between technique and creation, mediated by the inspiration of a personal undeniable talent.

Who creates popular music? The two narratives proposed distinct ways of understanding the creation of popular music. In the initial exhibition, the focus on chronological production and technical creation highlighted the role of the producers as authors of the success: the cultural industry made Abba a worldwide success, thanks to their commitment and know-how in the music industry. To that extent, the exhibition tells us more about the role of the producer and their crew than it shows the role of the composers, the interpreters and the musicians. The mediations of the music are exposed – all the intermediary objects and people (Hennion, 1993) required for that music to exist – but they remain closely linked to the studio. In the alternative narrative conceived at the Powerhouse Museum, the range of intermediaries was wider. They included the Abba members themselves (with their talent, their personality and

singularity, their unique inspiration) and the audience (which was seen as local and specific rather than global and uniform). A specific section about ‘Abba in Australia’ completed the original exhibition. Unlike the initial design founded on objects possessed by the studio, this part included objects brought by local witnesses, or local owners of personal collections. For instance, the Australian tour’s producer Paul Dainty loaned local newspapers’ front pages and photographs. Local fans brought tickets, posters of the shows and many other memorabilia.

Intercultural dimension

In Sydney, Parsons’ use of narrative introduced a local perspective along with an intercultural dimension. The curator played the role of translator between Swedish and Australian cultural traditions and backgrounds¹⁵. The original exhibition was designed for a Swedish public. Thus, Swedish folk music festivals mentioned in the fifth section (‘Sweden goes pop’) are considered well known. At the Powerhouse Museum, the curator first added specific information for the Australian public, less familiar with the European context. A map showing the ‘Folkparken’ describes, the panel says,

‘A unique Swedish tradition [which] provided a crucial performance training ground for musicians and artists. ABBA was a product of this important touring network as many of the group first met on this circuit and gained valuable performance experience’.

These additions helped Australian visitors to determine to what extent Abba can be considered as ‘Swedish’. Further, the curator introduced elements that invited audiences to think reflexively about the valuation of popular music in various spatial and temporal contexts. For instance, the critical devaluation of Abba’s music in their own country at the beginning of their career was detailed. After their success at the 1974 Eurovision contest they

¹⁵ Of Swedish origin, J. Parsons attended the 1977 Abba show in Sydney with his parents.

were rudely criticized as commercial, non-authentic and non-Swedish (because they sang in English) in Sweden. A parodied album cover of Abba was placed close to the band's original work to illustrate this contested valuation of their music. Thus the process of establishing the network of relationships, experiences and spaces that have 'built' Abba (Hennion, 1993) gave a definition of the band, on one side, as authentically 'Swedish', and as such, part of a national heritage, while on the other side their links with Australian audiences (via items, memories and perceptions of Australian people) showed how they have been transformed into an aspect of Australian heritage. Finally, the name 'Abbaworld', underlined the worldwide resonance, and designated Abba as international heritage. The patrimonialization of Abba's music occurs at these coexisting levels via the designation of multiple 'respondents'. Hence, a more complex and detailed approach of the ways of valuing and categorizing popular music enriches the exhibition's narrative at the Powerhouse Museum. Exploring the local context of reception, the exhibition encouraged visitors to question the social processes of cultural valuation. Besides, the uses of popular culture were discussed. In the general course of the exhibition, the interactives, using various devices, encouraged the consumption of Abba labelled products. Furthermore, curator Parsons decided to extend the narrative to recent fans' appropriations of Abba music, beyond official and commercial ones. In this regard, the Sydney's design authorized visitors to go on with their own creative appropriations of Abba music's forms.

Museums and the Meanings of Popular Culture

The distinct narratives produced by the curators in Melbourne and Sydney reveal more fundamental patrimonialization's issues. The first issue points out the definition of the legitimate heritage's 'respondent'. For the Abba producers, the exhibition aimed to illuminate the artistic achievements of the band, thanks to the technological expertise of the cultural

industry. The exhibition highlighted the skills of Polar Studio in the making of successful popular music, as much as the band itself. For instance, a whole wall of gold records recalled the achievement in terms of record sales.

What was at stake here was the legitimacy to be 'respondent' for popular music as heritage. The exhibition had to demonstrate the ability of the Polar Studio to conserve and display a popular music collection, and establish its authority to 'musealize' its own material. The exhibition was intended to prove both the legitimacy of the producer to take care of the legacy, and their authority to exhibit it. The Powerhouse museum tried to establish an alternative narrative, showing how the group's success depended on the role of personal talent, of changing contexts of production and reception, and of audiences' active role, here and there. Unlike the hagiographic story of a global success that the producers tend to put forward, the story of Abba was described at the Powerhouse Museum as a more detailed and contrasted story of local appropriations, a story still going on today. The museum put on stage the various mediators of the music, and helped local or other publics understanding the reasons behind the success, as well as the social processes through which cultural value is attributed to popular music. This re-curation attempted to legitimate the museum as the place where popular music is interpreted as social phenomenon. The museum showed its skills to interpret such social phenomena, and established itself as a place where heritage topics will be discussed. Thus, the museum reinforced its social role as a legitimate heritage 'respondent'.

Moreover, the meaning of popular music in society was discussed in these narratives. Distinct conceptions of popular culture as heritage's 'content' were negotiated through the exhibition design, oscillating between forces of consensus and emancipation. The original exhibition celebrated Abba's music and especially its ability to gather people together. Popular music was represented as a way of creating consent between people and generations. Visitors responded strongly to this ambition, and acknowledged the power of the exhibition to

make you ‘simply feel happy’, to recall strong memories, and to provide pleasure through sharing fun activities: singing, dancing...On the other hand, the Powerhouse Museum re-creation insisted on pop music’s ability to support and encourage individual or collective identification. The critical potential of popular culture was enhanced, underlining its capacity to create alternative and even counter-cultural values. More than celebration, the exhibition pointed out individual or collective emancipation. In the predominantly female audience of the Sydney’s exhibition, women responded strongly to the portraits of the female members of the group: they felt deeply moved by Agnetha and Frida, life-long subjects of identification and affection, who represented valuable models for a ‘good living’ (Radway 1992). As a female visitors explained, the female singers embody figures of women ‘strong and weak at the same time’, who have been able to go on despite the highs and lows of life, and who, finally, ‘age well’.

The response of the female audience suggests that the manner in which heritage is built affects the definition of heritage itself: with the emergence of a primarily feminine ‘respondent’, ‘patrimony’ changes into ‘matrimony’, where alternative feminine values of heritage’s ‘content’ are put forward.

Conclusion

The *Abba* world exhibition is part of the process of making Abba’s music a national and international heritage. Along its worldwide journey, the exhibition reveals the statements made about the revaluation of popular music as authorized museum material, and raised issues, more broadly, concerning the changing role of popular culture exhibitions in museums. Surfing on the remarkable success of the *Mamma Mia!* movie, the historical producers of Abba extended their multimediatization strategy (Miège, 1997) to a new kind of mass product: the museum exhibition. New processes of popular culture’s musealization took place,

engaging contested patrimonialization. This paper has shown how the construction of popular music as heritage was negotiated in the *Abbaworld* exhibition. Following the steps from the original exhibition designed by the Swedish team in Melbourne until the final design at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, this article analyzed the choices embedded in the exhibition's design that reflect the negotiation between the main operators. The meanings of popular music as heritage are built through the mediations of popular material culture and the experiences provided by the exhibition (Hennion, 1993). Focusing on the gaps between the original exhibition conceived by the Swedish producers and the re-curated exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum, this article has aimed to understand the sense of popular music as heritage that emerged from the oscillations between two fairly different narratives. The curatorial work carried a series of revaluations concerning the 'respondent', the 'content' and the policy ('link') of popular culture. First, the analysis of the curatorial work helps to explain the choice of the exhibition's global design and the selection of interactive devices. It highlights the different and sometimes opposed conceptions about the value of popular culture artefacts, and to the ways of organizing the encounter between auratic objects and visitors. This analysis attempts to locate more precisely the origins of statements about the cultural value of popular music, including those influenced by the fan communities and the cultural industry. The tension between the different narratives in the exhibition's course frames the visitor's experience of popular music at the Powerhouse museum, an experience quite different from the ones they could have in other Australian or European venues. This process highlights the productive role of the institution in the definition of heritage and of authorized practices and behaviours. The display reflects conceptions of what are the legitimate cultural practices and behaviours in the museum, and how popular music should be socially experienced and consumed.

In the Powerhouse Museum *Abbaworld* exhibition, two intricate levels were involved: first, the definition of popular music (as content and practices). Each partner aims to ‘authenticate’ popular culture, by choosing distinct ways of valuing the artefacts. Secondly, the definition of the legitimate ‘respondent’ for this heritage is discussed. Each partner tries to consolidate its right to musealize popular culture, to be acknowledged as a valid operator of contemporary popular culture interpretation in the society. These negotiations also reflect various understandings about the meanings of popular culture and its role in society, such as oppositions between community celebration and individual or collective emancipation.

The *Abbaworld* case illustrates the dialectical tension between museums and the cultural industry. Through exhibition experiences, the culture industry acculturates new consumers to its products, whereas the museum acculturates new (culture industry) audiences to museum practices. In a context of the growing commodification of cultural production, we probably can expect in the future an on-going competition between museums and its culture industry challengers in the museum field. Initially designed as a permanent exhibition for a museum, *Abbaworld* became a travelling temporary exhibition. Settled in various national and organizational contexts, it was transformed by its re-curation and its local reception, offering an alternative vision of popular music’s patrimonialization. To that extent, the temporary exhibition can be understood as an active ‘contact zone’ - as James Clifford put it for anthropological museums (1997), where definitions of culture are put into contact and mutually transformed. Finally, the sense of popular music as heritage can be observed in the ‘contacts’ that undergo between display, co-producers and audiences, in each particular venue of the exhibition.

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