

Interview between Elisabeth Delin Hansen and Jytte Høy, Wednesday, November 13, 2002.

EDH: I thought a useful place to start would be a short, concrete description of the most important elements in the exhibition, as well as your reflections on planning the exhibition, either for a visitor coming to see the exhibition – or perhaps for someone who hasn't had this opportunity.

JH: I see the exhibition as a spatial-visual experiment, and I have chosen the title The Museum of Thought, because I wanted to work with the museum as form. Part of the reason for this is that there is something delightfully paradoxical about combining the concept of thought with the concept of museum. Part of the reason is that I read an article, at one point, written by the former director of the Rosenborg Collection, Mogens Bencard, on early thought about museums, where he refers to the English philosopher Francis Bacon (among others) from the sixteen hundreds. One of the many things Bacon says is that one should collect things created by chance or created by a mixture of things. Much broader than what one experiences in a museum today, where it often seems as if the collection is created according to very tight guidelines. So what about everything that doesn't fit in?

EDH: The exhibition consists of some main elements which you call scenarios. Could you describe them in brief?

JH: When I had worked out that The Museum of Thought as a spatial-visual experiment was to focus on the relationship between "sense" and "non-sense", then I began to hunt in places and texts where I thought the phenomenon might appear. The first thing that caught my interest was a piece of blotting paper found in the Imperial War Museum in London. This blotting paper had a pencil drawing scrawled on it, done by Lloyd George, who was the British representative at the peace conference in Versailles in 1918 after the First World War. The blotting paper was later taken from his place, hidden, and has later become a museum exhibit. But what train of thought could possibly lead to something as irrelevant as a piece of blotting paper with a doodle on it being put in a museum? — The next item I came across was a text by Milan Kundera, where he talks about the great communist leader, Gottwald, who speaks to the Bohemian people from a balcony in Prague in 1948. Beside him stands Clementis, his comrade. It is cold, and Clementis lends Gottwald his hat. The photograph from the balcony is known to every school child. Later Clementis falls from grace and is executed. His picture is removed from the photograph, and all that is left of him is the hat on Gottwald's head.

EDH: Could you explore the individual scenarios in a little depth?

JH: Yes, I have chosen to work from three scenarios. I had originally planned more, but when I had reached three, I found out that it would be more interesting to go into these three scenarios in depth rather than simply increase their number. One could say that the scenarios put the basic idea into perspective, and working on them in depth points to the many facets of each individual phenomenon. — The first scenario uses the blotting paper mentioned earlier as its point of departure. The second uses the text by Milan Kundera, and the third is based on the fact that Lenin's, Stalin's, Gorky's and Tchaikovsky's brains are kept in glass jars at the Institute of the Human Brain in Moscow. I build the scenario up around this. My working method is to find out what is central in and thus characteristic of the individual scenario. For example Clementis gives Gottwald his hat by chance in the episode between Gottwald and Clementis, and the hat survives the execution of its owner by chance. Chance plays a very large role in this story, and I have therefore chosen chance as a general feature of the way in which I work with the works of the scenario. — In the scenario with Gottwald and Clementis, chance appeared in the guise of an equestrian statue created by the sculptor Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen, where I later found out that something actually had been removed. In a preparatory sketch done for the equestrian statue on Christiansborg Slotsplads, one can see that there was originally a frieze at the bottom, consisting of a number of figures who were a selection of the Danish people. I thought that this was a good point, which was connected to the story of Gottwald and Clementis. When I investigated the matter more closely, I discovered that the frieze had been modelled in plaster and was now to be found in the Odense City Museums in the shape of plaster casts, which due to casting techniques are separated from each other in some strange shapes. One of these shapes is a fine little figure which actually has the foot of another figure with it, and I thought "Aha, this foot is just like the forgotten hat, something from someone else telling of a connection which no longer is visible". — Furthermore, something strange happened when I took pictures of the horse on Christiansborg Slotsplads. I walked around with my camera, and snapped pictures here and there, some behind and some in front, and when I later got hold of the contact print where one can see what is on the negatives themselves, I could see that the horse's tail ran across the negatives, drawing a line. This is "The Line of Coincidence". I choose to say that something exists called "The Line of Coincidence". And I created a work about it. Afterwards I began to see if there were other places where I could localise

"The Line of Coincidence", and I have chosen to include one more work which demonstrates this strange phenomenon.

EDH: Is this a work that you have created yourself, or a thing you have found?

JH: No, it is also something found. One can say that a lot of scenario 2 consists of a strange mixture of things found and things which I have created myself, or things I have arranged so they in some way illustrate my idea. Somewhere in my preparations for the scene about Gottwald and Clementis I wrote: "A man on a balcony, a statue in a park, a borrowed hat, a lost glove, to be remembered, to be found". In this way the episode from Milan Kundera points to something which a perfectly ordinary Dane can experience in a park, where one can see the naked statues stand around freezing in the winter, and where someone has lost a glove which someone else has placed on the arm of a statue, so that it can be found again. I have given the whole tableau the title: The Lost and The Forgotten. There is a melancholy atmosphere connected to the text, the statue and the glove. — But some of my point lies in the nuances lying between "the lost" and "the forgotten". If we are talking about a glove, then it doesn't really matter whether it has been lost or forgotten, because the result is the same, even though the starting point is different. I have just added a little twist, where I think that "a man on a balcony", "a statue in a park" are images which in some or another way are similar, but at the same time are different. It's the same with "being remembered" and "being found". There are some nuances in the juxtaposition of words and images which interest me.

EDH: Let us return to scenario 1 and talk a little more about it.

JH: Yes, this is the scenario with the blotting paper. I had some thoughts about creating a sculpture and the idea of translating things from one dimension into another, i.e. what does a flat drawing on a piece of blotting paper look like when it is translated into a three-dimensional sculpture? The question about the drawing from the peace conference is whether one can see the structure of peace in it. — When one sits doodling while on the telephone, then one sits making a certain movement which can be seen from the length of the line made when one's hand lies resting on the table while the pencil moves backwards and forwards. But what if one does this in space, in relation to the body, what kind of line is then drawn? Well, then the arm must draw the line. And I have sat and measured the length of the line, it turns out to be approximately 80 cm. So I have set myself the task of inventing a way in which I could work and build the sculpture just as I would draw it on a piece of paper. What it turns out to look like is really unimportant. The internal logic of the sculpture is

what counts. This logic stems from the drawing on the blotting paper, therefore I call the sculpture: The Structure of Peace. — The work Chequered United is the ultimate consequence of the scenario with The Structure of Peace, just like The Line of Coincidence in the scenario around Gottwald and Clementis. — In this work I have taken a little element which looks like a grid, a kind of square, one could say. I have collected a large pile of photographs at home, which for me constitute a kind of material from reality. I have looked through them and chosen the motifs which have squares on them. I then put forward another postulate, the rather circumstantial postulate that everything which is chequered is part of a community of chequered things. I put the photographs in a box system, which itself is made chequered. And then the idea is to let anybody who comes in wearing something chequered to take a photograph home with them. — The third scenario is about Lenin's brain. The various brains, Lenin's and Gorky's and Tchaikovsky's, are kept in the glass jars mentioned before, but I concluded that Lenin's brain is the most interesting of them, simply because it also has a political element. — I was taken aback by the argument that the brains were kept solely for scientific purposes. Did they think that they could solve the riddle of what a genius was, were they collecting trophies, or was there some element of belief involved? — I thought quite a lot about whether to go to Moscow to bring his brain back to Denmark. But I decided that the sentence "Lenin's brain in Denmark" was enough to activate the fundamental concept. So I have chosen to hang the sentence on the wall and at the same time create a work with the sentence on it, and in this way spread the sentence around Denmark. — To examine the phenomenon of the preserved brains of geniuses I have interviewed various brain specialists. As a brain specialist you can have your training in biology, psychology or medicine. I chose one of each kind, from three different countries: Denmark, Russia and the USA. I then create an audio work from the interviews I have conducted, where I put my questions in one set of headphones and have their answers come through another. The answers are not necessarily related to the individual questions. All the questions are one place, and the answers another. And all the answers come in a way so that the physician and the psychologist, for instance, do not necessarily answer the same question in the same way. But it is precisely the divergence which interests me. Their diverse responses to my slightly wondering and philosophical questions create the space I want. EDH: How do you see The Museum of Thought compared to your earlier works? JH: I see the exhibition as a continuation of some of the investigations which go back to the large series with

small objects which I made with the common title Touch, exhibited at Louisiana some years ago. Here I worked within the field of visual logic. In the next large collection of works, called something closer than small, a form of visual thinking is put on paper and also demonstrated in the way the exhibition was installed. Through the methods I use one can see how thoughts are created, how they jump to another subject, change direction, but come back again. And regarding the exhibition The Museum of Thought, I would say that the process has gone from visual logic – to visual thought – and on to a kind of visual philosophising. So in that way I see them as a natural consequence of one another.