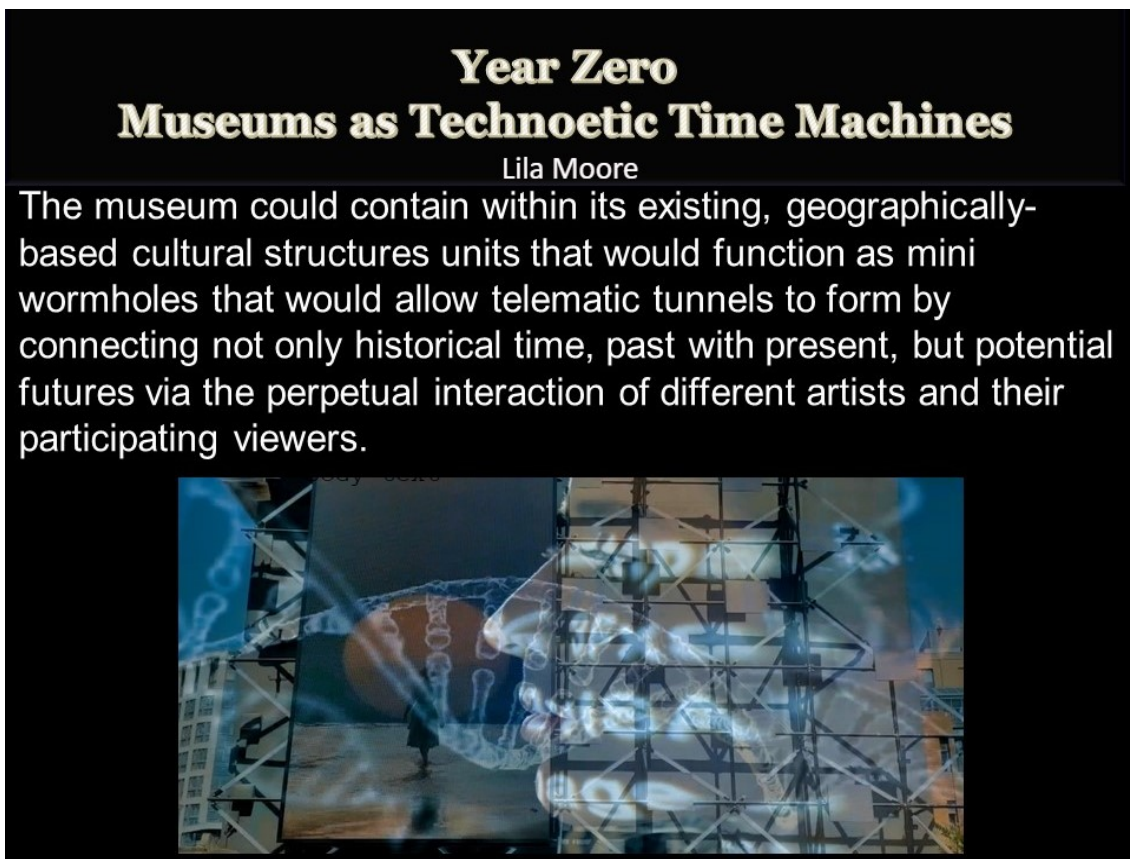


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Year Zero: Museums as Technoetic Time Machines

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Abstract

The article speculates on the status and function of museums in a post-corona culture and world. It envisions the museum evolving as a technoetic time machine.

Key words: technoetic, museum, time-machine, digital culture, post-corona, art gallery

Introduction

“In Year Zero of the Corona pandemic I called upon Seeker_of_True-files, my technoetic adviser, and together we conjured a wayward A.I. and started studying the unfolding world. Art has become an act of existential resistance” (Moore, 2020, 2021).

The term Year Zero derives from a series of videos that I made in response to the corona pandemic during lockdown, and which were shown in exhibitions curated by FEMeeting, Women in Art, Science and Technology such as Acquired Immunity and the FEM Meeting Garden in Ars Electronica, Lisbon. I perceive Year Zero as the year that marks the corona pandemic outbreak. Our post-corona age is not entirely free of the Covid-19 virus that continues to mutate via endless variants and like a virus art and design should mutate as well into numerous nodes and variations.

In a *Year Zero's* video (2020), I suggest that the fear of the virus is similar to the fear of radical innovations, and from any form of *other*. However, since Year Zero we are pushed to think more and more outside the establishment box, in this case, the box could be a museum or an art gallery. Regardless of the perhaps subliminal existential fear of extinction that the pandemic engenders, we are compelled to think about the transmission of viral concepts. Moreover, as the world of human culture seems to be shifting our perception of cultural heritage and historical time is shifting as well. The shift, which is digitally, and technologically based and oriented via telematic systems, coincides with a cognitive shift, a collective mind shift.

The Museum as a Technoetic Time Machine

As many artists, theorists, philosophers and lay people noted, the corona altered the perception of time and space through social distancing and intensive exposure to, and participation in, the experience of telepresence and cyberception, even though the general public is not familiar with these aesthetic terms. Finally, the theories and artworks of cyberspace pioneers such as Roy Ascott and Sherry Rabinowitz and Kit Galloway, e.g., *Hole- In-Space* (1980), have been fully embodied experientially by all those who have Internet access wherever they are in the world. Two years after

the corona outbreak, in November or December 2021, most people are ready for the next stage of cultural transmission and reception via digital technologies and mixed reality situations involving physical and virtual levels of experience. Thus, it seems inevitable to return to the technoetic notion of the museum or the gallery as brain, mind or consciousness.

During my reflection on Year Zero, I returned to Mary Shelley's novel *The Last Man*. Lionel, the novel's protagonist, is possibly the last man on Earth after a pandemic brought an end to most of humanity in 2100. Interestingly, Lionel spends many lonely days pondering about the remains and preservation of the world's cultural heritage. He leaves a message to an unknown future which we can still receive one hundred and ninety five years after the publication of the book. Thinking ahead, who will pick up our messages or observe our cultural heritage in the year 2121? Unlike Lionel's historical era, our culture possesses complex tools and immersive technologies but likewise Lionel it may be wiser to think about the future now. Traditionally, museums are storage houses for historical time and memory. The concept of the museum as a time machine includes both poles of past and future with Year Zero as a metaphor for the present moment, the starting point of any experience of culture in space and time. The idea of a museum as a time machine recycles and extends the potential for a wormhole space-time tunnel experience of art and culture, a notion initially experimented with in *Hole-in-Space* by Sherrie Rabinowitz and Kit Galloway in 1980, and envisioned and speculated by Roy Ascott in his paper the "Mind of the Museum" (1996). The latter was a keynote address for "The Total Museum: An Interactive Multimedia Conference" at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1996.

Fast forward to the present, our digital technologies including artificial intelligence are becoming so powerful that we need to be cautious about their ethical applications, which could have severe consequences on definitions and representations of cultural heritage. However, the fact that digital technologies and telematics are globally connected and shared in the post-corona age like never before makes it not only possible but also logical to think of the museum or the gallery as a brain or mind that is constantly active, responsive, interactive and evolving. The KIMA Colour project, commissioned by The National Gallery as part of the National Gallery X residency (Gingrich, O., et al. 2021) is a step in this direction. I

encountered videos by KIMA in various digital online art exhibitions which extended the videos' cultural reach beyond their point of origin in the National Gallery's collections and paintings.

I suggest developing further the interrelations between museum's artifacts and collections, allowing access to more digital artists, designers and theoretical artists to form creative interactions that could add digital layers, links and nodes to any museum, extending its scope in time and space and allowing it to be constantly evolving. The museum can thereby contain within its existing, geographically-based cultural structures units that would function as mini wormholes that would allow telematic tunnels to form by connecting not only historical time, past with present, but potential futures via the perpetual interaction of different artists and their viewers as participants. As suggested in my EVA paper (Moore, 2019), some ancient tombs and museums are essentially technoetic time machines. They harness techniques and technologies to record, preserve and demonstrate cultural and esthetic experience by interacting with our perception and cognition of time. Thus, when we think of the future we already expect it to become the past. Moreover, our existential challenge to last forever as cultures in a post-corona world presents creative opportunities which correspond with the spirit of our time, the post-corona zeitgeist.

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Moore, L. (2020) [Video]. <https://www.cyberneticfutures.com/yearzero>

Note: This paper has a visual component on video which can be watched via the link below:
<https://www.cyberneticfutures.com/yearzero>

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<https://www.digitalartarchive.at/database/general/work/year-zero.html>