

THE MUSEUM AS AN AUDIO-VISUAL CULTURAL CENTER*

Francis Cachia

An interview by Dr. Francis Cachia with Dr. Rainier Budde, Director of Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Dr. Sigfried Gohr, Director of Museum Ludwig, and Mr. Franz Xaver Ohnesorg, Director of the Cologne Philharmonic.

Cachia: Dr. Rainier Budde, as Director of the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Dr. Sigfried Gohr, as Director of Museum Ludwig, and Mr. Franz Xaver Ohnesorg, as Director of the Cologne Philharmonic, I felt that I ought to interview all three of you in order to find out the deeper implications of this monumental project you have realized together along radical lines.

Budde: You are referring of course, to the combining of the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, the Ludwig Museum and the Cologne Philharmonic in one single building complex which was officially inaugurated on 6th September, 1986.

Cachia: Not to mention also the housing under the same roof of the "Agfa Foto-Historama", a Library, a Cinema, and a Video Centre. The concept behind this undertaking is surely the conviction that the audio and the visual arts are so closely related to one another that they actually should be treated as a unity. Who conceived of the idea of combining two art museums and the

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*The ensuing contribution may appear strange to the regular readers of *Melita Theologica*. Its form as an interview, which it was in reality, offers an original way of putting ideas across and its subject-matter, the unity of art, is culturally relevant indeed.

The Editor

Cologne Philharmonic Orchestra Concert Hall in one large single building complex?

Gohr: Actually, what we had in mind has some parallels: the Centre Pompidou in Paris, for instance.

Budde: I was the first to put forward the idea. You see, I am a trained musician as well as an art expert and museologist. I have actually given concerts myself.

Ohnesorg: One reason why the audio and visual arts should not be considered as separate and unrelated to one another is precisely because people who are talented in one area are often found to be exceptionally gifted also in the other. Dr. Budde is a living example of this.

Cachia: But Dr. Budde is exceptionally many-sided in his talents and interests. Dr. Budde, you've just published a historical novel, called *Meister Stefan*, haven't you?

Budde: Well yes, among other things I'm a writer too. The journalist's profession is not entirely foreign to me.

Cachia: Not all journalists are talented musicians or art critics!

Ohnesorg: I see what you're driving at Dr. Cachia. An individual's versatility in different artistic fields does not prove that the arts themselves are related. But don't forget people like Liebermann, Kandinsky and Picasso, to mention some obvious examples.

Budde: Please consider also that there is what one can call a vertical and a horizontal line uniting painting and music. You can consider the relationship between them historically and see how the same spirit at different times pervaded them both. Take Impressionism.....

Cachia: The composers of music took over the term from the painters, did they not?

Budde: Exactly! The two Clauses, Debussy and Monet breathe the same spirit. It is most appropriate therefore to have Debussy's music played in a hall where some of Monet's paintings are exhibited. Another example, Canaletto's paintings would create a very fitting atmosphere for Bach's music.

Cachia: I see. So, musical performances are held not only in the Kölner Philharmonie Hall, but also in the Museum Section as well. Who is responsible for the organization of these musical performances?

Ohnesorg: I'm in charge of all musical performances, including Chamber music played in the Museum Exhibition Halls.

Cachia: Dr. Budde, by using the terms, vertical and horizontal relationship, you implied that there is an intrinsic, as well as a historical bond uniting music and painting.

Budde: Precisely!

Ohnesorg: Think of the cooperation of Chagall and Stravinsky in the production of the ballet, *The Firebird*, with the composer writing the score and the painter designing the scenery. Bartok took great care to match the scenery to his music when his Opera *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* was produced. He was deeply interested in "visualization of music", as the term goes. Incidentally, expressions transferred from the audio to the visual arts and vice-versa are indicative of the close relationship between them. Fontana spoke of "Klang-Skulpture" - sound sculpture. Dr. Budde and I can go on for ages talking about the relationships between the visual arts and music.

Cachia: Very good then. Now that you have explained so well the general background thinking behind your project, let's move on to another point. I will therefore come directly to details about the Cologne audio-visual cultural complex that you have brought into being and that you direct together. Wasn't it a clean break from the past when the two arts of sound and sight were usually considered to be separate?

Budde: It may have been a departure from the past practice; but this is where the future lies. I am convinced that the unity of the arts will be more and more stressed as time goes on even in the organization and administration of museums.

Cachia: Dr. Budde, can you please mention some salient facts about the history of the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum which you direct?

Budde: Like almost all museums in Cologne, the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum owes its origin to a private collection which was donated to the city. The collector was Canon Franz-Ferdinand Wallraf. The donation was made in 1824,

but it was only in 1861 that the collection was housed in a building open to the public. The building itself was a gift to the city made by a merchant, Johann-H.-Richartz.

Cachia: Hence the name, the Wallraf-Rochartz-Museum!

Budde: Exactly. Among its most treasured items, it possesses an extensive collection of medieval paintings of the Cologne school.

Cachia: Most appropriate for one of the oldest German museums, which, what is more, was founded and based here! When I went through the Museum, I was deeply impressed with the pictorial illustrations of incidents in the life of St. Ursula, the patroness of Cologne.

Budde: We have works of the Gothic period from other regions as well, so that we can offer an almost unbroken survey of the development of panel painting from 1300 to 1550. Already in the late Gothic period, the portrait was emerging as a new genre.

Cachia: Your Medieval Department is not confined to German masters, is it?

Budde: Indeed, no. The Italian and Dutch masters are well represented too, with Martini, Lorenzetti and Daddi on the one hand, together with Jan de Beer, Joos van Cleve and Jan Mostaert on the other. Then of course, there are the Dutch and Flemish painters from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, with such towering figures as Rembrandt, Rubens and van Dyck among them.

Cachia: Coming as I do from Malta, I was particularly glad to note that the art of Mediterranean Europe is also well represented.

Budde: Yes, we have paintings by Canaletto and by Tiepolo among other Italians; we have Murillos and Riberas from Spain; we also have Rigauds and Bouchers from France, to mention but a few.

Cachia: The Wallraf-Richartz-Museum takes us up to the nineteenth century, does it not?

Budde: Yes, it does. It covers the most important artists and artistic currents of that century, especially the French and German. The collection of works by the Cologne painter Leibl is particularly comprehensive and extensive. The

German variant of Impressionism is well illustrated by Liebermann's and Slevogt's paintings. France is well represented with paintings including works by Renoir, Monet, Cezanne and Degas.

Cachia: Thank you very much, Dr. Budde. Now I come to another point. I happened to be present at your press conference in which you gave the news of the exchange of a number of paintings with museums in the German Democratic Republic.

Budde: Yes, that is the most significant and exciting development since we moved into the new building just a couple of years ago.

Cachia: A fascinating story, as exciting as the best written thriller.

Budde: As one author of fiction based on cultural facts to another, I must agree with you that in this case fact proved to be stranger than fiction.

Cachia: At least more exciting any way. Remembering what you said in the press conference, the whole affair could be given the title of my own work of fiction: *Mystery of the Vanished Paintings!* Please mention the most important facts from your point of view as Museum Director.

Budde: Gladly. The story of the "vanished paintings" which are finally being returned to this Museum actually takes us back to World War II. The story of the two paintings which we are handing over to the German Democratic Republic goes even as far back as 1921, when sailors on mutiny broke into the Wiemar Castle Museum and stole Rembrandt's self-portrait as well as a picture by Johann Friedrich Tischbein and one by the Dutch painter, Gerhard Terborch. Then in 1945, Dürer portraits, that of Hans and that of Felizita Tucher (painted in 1499) disappeared mysteriously from Schwarzburg Castle where they had been stored to protect them from war damage.

Cachia: In the press conference you said that the Rembrandt self-portrait mysteriously turned up in the U.S.A.

Budde: In Dayton, Ohio, to be precise. A young woman discovered two rolled-up canvasses in her husband's warehouse. When she took them for identification to a museum of fine arts, they were recognized as Terborch's and as Tischbein's missing paintings.

Cachia: How did such famous paintings find their way into the warehouse in the first place?

Budde: The husband's story was that they had come into his possession mysteriously when he was in a bar in New York harbour area at the time when he was still a bachelor. The art experts found it hard to believe his story. They sent the pictures for restoration to the National Gallery in Washington. Then in 1967, the American Government handed them over to West Germany. They were stored for safe-keeping here at the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum. No photos were allowed to be taken of them and it was forbidden to exhibit them to the public. Now we are handing over the Rembrandt to the Grand Duchess of Saxony-Weimar Eisenach from whose family it had been stolen. We are sending the other two paintings back to the Weimar Museum in East Germany in exchange for 17 paintings which were originally the property of this Museum.

Cachia: I will not ask you to tell the story of all the paintings involved in the exchange, as I am sure there is enough mysterious material there for the writing of a whole thick book full of thrills.

Budde: Quite. I'll just mention that according to the agreement signed on 29th October 1987 by the Governments of the two German states, the German Democratic Republic will be giving 300 paintings to museums in the Federal Republic of Germany and will be receiving 130 works of art in exchange. I must say that in the protracted negotiations involved in which I have taken part, the museum authorities of the German Democratic Republic proved to be most understanding and helpful.

Cachia: Which do you consider to be the most important painting that is being handed over to the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum?

Budde: To my mind it is the famous portrait of Goethe by Heinrich Kolbe. You can have a photograph of it to illustrate your article.

Cachia: Dr. Gohr, it is your turn to give me some details about the Ludwig Museum.

Gohr: With pleasure.

Cachia: Dr. Gohr, I understand the Ludwig Museum is really an offshoot of the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, so again it is really not at all surprising that the two Museums are now housed under one roof.

Gohr: You're right. It started as the Department of Modern Art of the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum. Although interest in Modern Art was keen even before World War I, the National Socialists in 1937 confiscated much that was of value. The gap they created was closed thanks to an important collection of works by German Expressionists donated by the Cologne lawyer Dr. Josef Haubrich.

Cachia: But the Museum is called Ludwig, not Haubrich.

Gohr: That's because in 1976 it acquired over 300 items of recent European and American art which had been put together by Peter and Irene Ludwig. So my Museum acts as a bridge between American and European art.

Cachia: Do you not find that it might confuse visitors when no clear distinction is made between 20th century art to which your Museum is exclusively dedicated and art all the way from the medieval up to the 19th century?

Gohr: Dr. Budde and I were agreed from the start that a museum should not be regarded as a temple of the muses, open only to devout worshipers. A museum is meant for the general public, embracing that is, people who are not experts in any one particular field, but who are keenly interested in all, as all-rounders in the vast area of general culture.

Cachia: But is not the general public confused when, as is the case in the audio-visual complex, you pass almost without noticing it, from a hall with classical paintings to one exhibiting pop art?

Budde: You are referring I suppose to the central stair-case. We meant it to be that way.

Cachia: I know, but does that not confuse visitors?

Gohr: Not at all; they are well aware of what we had in mind when we fused the two museums.

Budde: The unity of art is what we wanted to stress most particularly, and as Dr. Gohr indicated, the lay-out of the building, especially the central staircase brings this out very well.

Gohr: We advise visitors to follow the chronological order when going through the exhibited paintings and sculptures. We want them to return again

and again to our audio-visual complex. We also hold, from time to time, special exhibitions devoted to particular aspects of art.

Cachia: Yes, I visited your special exhibition of historical paintings. Moreover, I understand that the whole section of your Museum is dedicated to the art of photography, the "Agfa Foto-Historama", I believe you call the section.

Gohr: That's right. It boasts not only photographs of unique artistic value from the past 150 years, but also an extensive range of historical cameras, viewing and projection equipment as well as a specialized library. Altogether, the collection consists of about 12,000 photographs, circa 20,000 cameras and instruments, as well as over 3,000 books.

Cachia: So your complex includes a unique "Museum of Photography", a library, and, I have discovered, also a Video Centre as well as a Cinema.

Gohr: We wanted to offer the public an audio-visual cultural Centre that would be as all-embracing as possible. We had institutions such as the "Centre Pompidou" in Paris and the Wiener Symphoniker all along in mind.

Ohnesorg: Again music and the visual arts coming harmoniously together! The Cinema of course, unites them very well, movement in sound and movement in sight!

Gohr: In our cinema, we offer films about the history of filming itself and what we call "Landeskunde" in Germany.

Cachia: A term I find it hard to translate in one single expression. It implies knowledge about a particular country, its national identity, its own special cultural heritage and historical development, as well as its economic and political situation: a very wide term indeed.

Gohr: Yes. What we do is to concentrate for a period of time on one particular geographical area and show films for instance from South America, Eastern Europe, etc. We had a very successful special series dedicated to films from Poland.

Ohnesorg: We have actively participated in the composition of film music, which is very important from the point of view of the relationship of the arts of

sound and sight, for there the tempo of music and movement takes place in the same perimeter.

Budde: Our audio-visual cultural complex looks very much to the future as well as to the past and present. We do not only want to document the process of artistic creation, but also contribute creatively to its development. We encourage young composers to write music for special occasions.

Cachia: I have one last question. It is about broadcasting facilities in your audio-visual complex. I understand Westdeutscher Rundfunk is involved; how exactly?

Ohnesorg: Westdeutscher Rundfunk has contributed money for the building and installed permanent facilities for sound broadcasting. The Kölner Rundfunk-Sinfonie Orchester and the Kölner Rundfunk-chor transmit programmes regularly from the Hall. There are also facilities for recording.

Cachia: This is as far as radio is concerned. I have spoken to Mr. José Montes-Baquer, who directs the WDR television musical programmes. He told me that there are no permanent facilities for TV. However, three or four times a year, television programmes are made there.

Ohnesorg: That is right.

Cachia: Your idea was not to build a television studio to which the public is invited, but rather an audio-visual complex where the public are the regular occupants. What you have succeeded in creating will surely remain a valuable model for many future projects throughout the world. Your complex unites harmoniously the audio and the visual arts; museums and media; the old and the new in artistic achievements of many kinds.

I am most grateful to you for giving me so much of your precious time. I hope you will consider it has been well spent also from your point of view.

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