



## Disrupting Social Exclusion in the Museum through the Use of Rock as a Place of Memory

María Isabel Flores Varela<sup>1</sup>

Recibido: 30 de julio de 2019 / Aceptado: 6 de agosto de 2019 / Publicado: 15 de octubre de 2019

**Abstract.** The majority of people prefer to go to the movies rather than to a museum. This is not surprising given the image of a high-cultured, history-based, representation-controlled museum-cemetery that pervades in the collective imaginarium. We can admit that the museum as a whole, is affected by a set of wicked problems, and one resonates pretty loud: the social exclusion.

There are many forces that have facilitated the social exclusion in the museum. In this article, I would like to share the results of my research, “Rock as a place of memory,” in which I analyze how history has superseded memory through the museum’s genealogy and propose the transformation of rock music into a place of memory as a tool to disrupt social exclusion of the museum.

**Keywords:** Memory; Music; Rock Museum; Social Exclusion; Desecrate.

[es] Detener la exclusión social en el museo mediante el uso del rock como lugar de memoria

**Resumen.** La mayoría de las personas preferirán ir al cine que a un Museo. Las razones van desde una falta de hábito hasta el completo desinterés. Esta última, explorada a fondo, dejará ver su relación con la imagen del museo-cementerio en el inconsciente colectivo: un lugar de alta cultura, controlador de la representación y basado en la historia constreñida, que responde al sistema hegemónico. El Museo es afectado por una serie de problemas perversos, y uno de ellos suena estridentemente: la exclusión social.

Existen varias fuerzas que han facilitado la exclusión social en el museo. Este artículo busca continuar la conversación en torno a cómo la historia ha suplantado a la memoria desde la genealogía del museo, y proponer la transformación de la música rock en “lugar de la memoria” como herramienta, entre muchas más, para irrumpir la exclusión social en el museo.

**Palabras clave:** Memoria; música; rock; museo; exclusión social; desacralizar.

**Summary.** 1. Introduction; 2. Hyper-summarized genealogy of the Museum; 3. Why the Museum?; 4. Through Memory... and how we can make it work; 4.1. A couple of examples; 5. So, how can we revive the museum and transcend its walls? By exorcising it!; 6. How do the exorcism, memory, and rock get together?; 7. Conclusions; 8. Written sources and bibliographical references.

**How to cite:** Flores Varela, María Isabel. “Disrupting Social Exclusion in the Museum through the Use of Rock as a Place of Memory”. In *Museo. Imagen. Sentidos*, edited by Ángel Pazos-López y Alejandra Alonso Tak. Monographic issue, *Eikón Imago* 14 (2019): 149-159.

<sup>1</sup> Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, México.  
Correo electrónico: pirullinenkeiju@gmail.com  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4398-1059>

## 1. Introduction

When I started this research I was not necessarily visiting museums on a regular basis. I could not muster the patience nor the interest to spend even one hour in a museum unless I could relate to the exhibition. On the other hand, rock music is my passion, particularly because of its wide spectrum. The idea of introducing rock music in the museum was infamous yet daring. Did rock music have a place in the museum? And it wasn't until my duly Saturday journeys to the Chopo Cultural street-market led me to the institution that birthed it: *The Chopo University Museum*. But I am getting ahead of myself.

Similar to my own experience, my everyday circle of friends and acquaintances are not regular visitors to museums. This makes me wonder what many before and after me have questioned: why should we be interested in the museum? And do we need the museum at all?

## 2. Hyper-summarized genealogy of the Museum

Going through a quick review of the Museum's genealogy, the answer is neither particularly flattering nor hopeful (fig. 1). The Museum comes from the Muses. Depending on your chosen myth, these go from the Titanic Melete, Mneme and Aoide or Practice, Memory and Song to the nine daughters of Mnemosyne: Mnemosyne, Calliope, Clio, Erato, Euterpe, Polyhymnia, Melpomene, Terpsichore, Talia and Urania. All of them of a single mind: Memory. And inspirers of poetry, singing, and the word. They inhabited the sacred space of the *mouseion* which, as a semiophore object<sup>2</sup>, is a bridge between the visible and the invisible. The Museum also comes, according to Paula Findlen<sup>3</sup> from the library of Alexandria; the secular space of the *musaeum* where artists, poets, and wisemen got together in cultural collaboration. Up until here, no trespassing between the sacred and secular takes place. We have the sacred in the temple of the muses and the secular in the library of Alexandria. Wars and the coming of new "civilisations" violate the *mouseion* leaving behind only dread and a fertile field for the homogenizing history to take over. The exhibitions were therefore the war bounties tale-telling the version of the victorious, vanishing memory just like paganism in the *Museum Latino* until the advent of the Renaissance. In between the Renaissance and the Baroque, imperialism *discovered* the New World and with it the curiosity and the marvel, the secular and the sacred, but also the politics of collecting. This created intrinsic power relationships when these *collectors*, as *light-bearers*, define what is seen and what is learnt while at the same time, legitimising their social position. Thus, memory becomes a pariah in the establishment of history. The museum at this point in time is a restricted space to a few chosen ones until the French revolution, which brought with it the public museum and a version of the silenced ones.

<sup>2</sup> Krzysztof Pomián, "Coleccionistas, aficionados y curiosos. París y Venecia, 1500-1800", in *Producciones de sentido. El uso de las fuentes en la historia cultural*, ed. Valentina Torres Septién (Mexico: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2002), 164-66.

<sup>3</sup> Paula Findlen, "The Museum. Its Classical Etymology and Renaissance Genealogy", *Journal of the History of Collections* 1, no. (1989): 59-78.

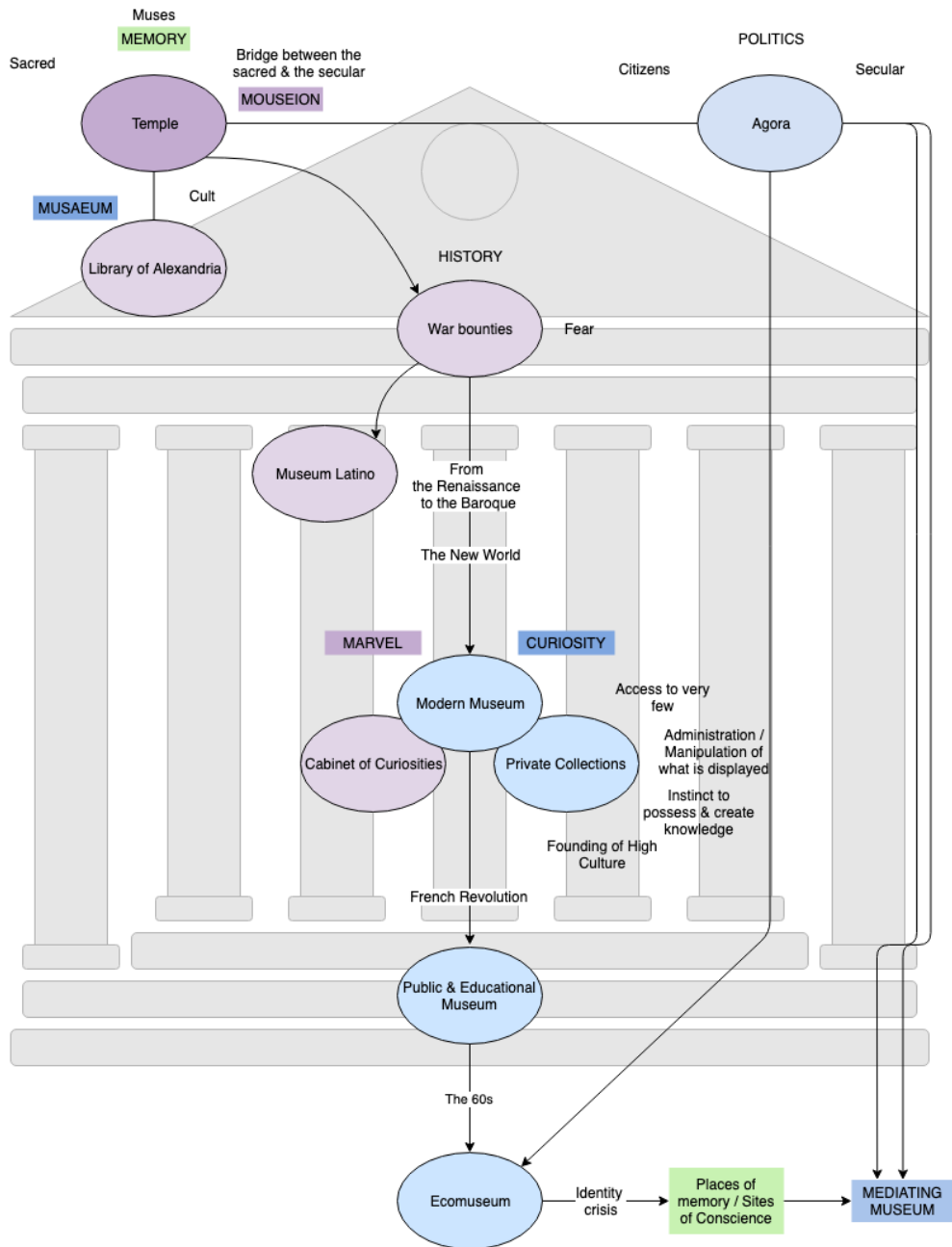


Figure 1: Genealogy of the Museum. Source: author.

It wasn't until the 1970s, thanks to Hugues de Varine-Bohan and Henri Riviere<sup>4</sup>, that the museum as an idea, as institution and device was severely questioned, so much that in 1972 during the Santiago de Chile's round table proposed by the UNESCO & ICOM, the conclusions were:

1. the museum does not fulfill its social function and
2. the museum is prohibitive, bureaucratic, elitist and if it does not change, it will disappear.

Facing this landscape is difficult to push for the museum's survival. Now, I would like to introduce a third space/concept from old Greece: the *agora*, as the public square/space where citizens could get together and perform political, economic, social, cultural and religious activities. At least, as an idea, this space sounds inspiring for the museum through time, doesn't it? And although the *ecomuseum*<sup>5</sup> was thought as a bastion of possibility, as that *agora*, many decades after its inception, "the museum still perpetuates class consciousness and racist prejudices, artistic-historical notions of authenticity, taste and all those values and political instances dictated by the power which had led the collecting practices"<sup>6</sup>.

Again... Why should we be interested in the museum? Do we need it?

### 3. Why the Museum?

Gail Anderson prefaces in her work that throughout the discussions around the museum and its reinvention, common threads prevail. One of such threads becomes relevant to answer the above-mentioned questions. Anderson writes that "The primary responsibility of museum leadership is to fulfill its social contract by serving and reflecting diverse people and communities in all ways"<sup>7</sup>. And when we talk about people and communities, we talk about a museum that owes itself to those same people and communities within which it is inserted. What does this mean?

The former director of the National Museum in Australia, Doctor Dawn Casey asks the visitors and herself "who are we exactly and how did we get to be this way?"<sup>8</sup> And the answer is provided by Duncan Cameron in his well-known essay *The Museum, A Temple or the Forum* where he concludes that "from the chaos and conflict of today's forum the museum must build the collections that will tell us

<sup>4</sup> Mario E. Teruggi, "The Role of Museums in today's Latin America", *Museum* 25, no. 3 (1973): 129-133.

<sup>5</sup> Ecomuseums are participatory processes that facilitate sustainable social, environmental, and economic development. Ecomuseums are specific projects that relate to the cultural heritage of an area. Ecomuseums develop creative and inclusive practices for local communities, organizations, and associations. "ICOM Ecomuseums and Community Museums," Ecomuseum studies and discussions, Ecomuseums, accessed July 30, 2019, <https://ecomuseums.com/icom-ecomuseums-community-museums/>

<sup>6</sup> Juan Martín Prada, *La apropiación Posmoderna. Arte, práctica apropiacionista y teoría de la Posmodernidad* (Madrid: Fundamentos, 2001), 26.

<sup>7</sup> Gail Anderson, "Preface", in *Reinventing the Museum. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Gail Anderson (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2004), x.

<sup>8</sup> Dawn Casey, "Museums as agents for social and political change", ArtsHub, accessed July 30, 2019, <http://www.artshub.com.au/au/news-article/opinions/visual-arts/museums-as-agents-for-social-and-political-change-12921>

tomorrow who we are and how we got there. After all, that's what museums are all about"<sup>9</sup>. So yes! We DO need the museum and yes! We SHOULD care about it, yet "few individual institutions, if any, can be all things to all men"<sup>10</sup>.

The museums have shielded themselves under this argument for so long that the philistine oligarchies coming from the few who have appropriated them are leaving out and unattending to a lot more. This triggers our next question: how can we converse with the idea, the institution, the device of the system that perpetuates the power relationships and fosters exclusion?

Richard Sandell in his text *Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion* defines social exclusion as the breakdown of the links between an individual and their family, friends, community, and state services and institutions. He shapes the problem by citing M. M. Ames who states that

"museums are products of the establishment and authenticate the established or official values and image of a society in several ways, directly, by promoting and affirming the dominant values, and indirectly, by subordinating or rejecting alternate values"<sup>11</sup>.

And concludes by describing how, in the cultural dimension, exclusion manifests in 3 elements: representation, participation, and access<sup>12</sup>.

So, the key lies within these 3 elements. Now how can we introduce representation, encourage participation, and facilitate access to the museum?

#### 4. Through Memory... and how we can make it work

In her writing *From History to Action*, Hannah Arendt defines 3 ideas: labour, action, and work. Labour is the act of producing what is vitally necessary to continue the life of the human body. Action is the process of triggering other processes with irreversible and unpredictable consequences. And work is the act of fabrication of the world in which we live in. While labour is constrained by biological needs and physical weathering, action requires critical reflection and the keeping of promises to fight the weaknesses of irreversibility and unpredictability, and work is done when the object is too<sup>13</sup>.

If we go back to the beginning, between the sacred-*mouseion* and the secular-*musaeum* we can find the *agora*. Rethinking about the muses, we understand that at the very beginning of everything there was time and memory and that history was

<sup>9</sup> Duncan F. Cameron, "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum (1971)", in *Reinventing the Museum. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Gail Anderson (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2004), 61-73.

<sup>10</sup> Alma Wittlin, "A Twelve point program for Museum Renewal", in *Reinventing the Museum. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Gail Anderson (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2004): 45.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Sandell, "Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion", *Journal Museum Management and Curatorship* 17, no. 4 (2017): 407-418.

<sup>12</sup> Representation –the extent to which an individual's cultural heritage is represented within the mainstream cultural arena. Participación– the opportunities and individual has to participate in the process of cultural production. Access the opportunities to enjoy and appreciate cultural services. Sandell, "Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion", 409-410.

<sup>13</sup> Hannah Arendt, *De la historia a la acción* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1995), 89-108.

only introduced through the written word. So paraphrasing Arendt we can define memory-labour as the act by which men can produce the spirit, emotion, and mental capacity necessary to feed the life processes of the soul, the conscience, and humanity; memory-action, as an evolutionary process, which triggers narratives with irreversible and unpredictable consequences within humanity's grand narrative; and history-work as the act of fabrication by men/system in which usage is not urgent in the vital process.

Hence, memory comes from labour to work, and as a fabricated product by man's hands becomes history, and then action. That last one is irreversible, unpredictable and never isolated. We live in a fabric of human relationships, within which we insert ourselves through action and word, which, in turn, trigger a set of inevitable chained reactions. Through this perspective, all forms of human life are actions which, by inserting themselves in the human relationships' fabric, comprise the grand narrative of humanity. This narrative is memory as a constant evolutionary process which, through inclusivity, is able to keep the promises to fight irreversibility and unpredictability and not only become a dead fabrication. memory-labour-action is then *agora*.

Pierre Nora in his work *Les Lieux de Mémoire* searched for the construction of the french identity by mapping the mnemonic symbols as a different perspective from history<sup>14</sup>. To Nora, the places of memory's purpose was "to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial, [...] all of this in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs"<sup>15</sup>. Memory, a set of narratives, turns the past into ourselves, a part of ourselves ever-changing and unique; a past that can hardly be controlled and which, among the different appropriations and reinterpretations, becomes a fiction. One that strives to know without exclusion and that relates to everybody: all fictions must be heard.

Hence, by turning back to its mind, to its original subject matter, memory is the way through which we can introduce representation, encourage participation and facilitate access in the museum. Yet, this still sounds a bit vague. In which form does memory embody representation, participation and free access? Well... in reality, it takes several forms that have been explored in the museum such as the *Sites of Conscience* which work with live memory in the format of oral histories, collecting the largest amount of narratives that encourage dialogue among visitors on problems of abuse, justice, and resistance in the present and past<sup>16</sup>. Or the *Community museums*, which foster the participation of the community not as passive and contemplative subjects but as active and participative, focusing on the community to facilitate a new kind of non-formal education, which in turn encourages the communities' social self-management to rescue and preserve their cultural heritage. In both cases representation, participation and free access are palpable and linked to a specific goal or community. Could we follow their

<sup>14</sup> Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2003), 103.

<sup>15</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", *Representations* 26 (1989): 19, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0734-6018%28198921%290%3A26%3C7%3ABMAHLL%3E2.0.CO%3B2-N>

<sup>16</sup> Liz Sevchenko, and Maggie Russell-Ciardi, "Sites of Conscience: Opening Historic Sites for Civic Dialogue", *The Public Historian A Journal of Public History* 30 (1) (February 2008): 11.

example and widen it to include quotidianity, instigate society's curiosity and not only revive the museum but transcend its walls?

#### 4.1. A couple of examples

*Museo Universitario del Chopo*, as it is known today, is a space turned place with a long journey both temporal and sociocultural. Temporal from 1903 to 1971 when, after being considered a piece of junk to recycle, is acquired by the National Autonomous University of Mexico, and sociocultural from the positivist dictatorship to the democratic forum for the arts and culture.

Jorge Pantoja, former communications coordinator of the Pro-Music and Arts Organisation and the museum's cultural coordinator back in 1980, talked the then director of the museum, Ángeles Mastretta, into opening the institution to music sub and countercultures. On Saturday the 4th of October 1980, the temple opens its doors to musicians, collectors, producers and all the people interested in rock, jazz and similar sounds to exchange, distribute, and sell record and paper productions out of print, old or in limited print runs: known internationally today as *Tianguis Cultural del Chopo* (Chopo Cultural Street Market). The mix between youngsters and museum authorities made the street-market what Hakim Bey dubs a *TAZ or Temporary Autonomous Zone*; a space of sociability where each and every one of the attendees was included, participant and representative of the alternative culture. Between the super-controlled environment of the museum, akin to a green-house, and the street market, a special symbiosis was born which gave the Chopo-museum its renowned characteristic to this day: the subalternity, a place where marginality could thrive and the Chopo-street-market its name, organisational process, vision and courage when, a year later, went out of the institution to conquer the streets<sup>17</sup> (fig. 2).



Figure 2: Museo Universitario del Chopo Mexico City. Source: author.

<sup>17</sup> Abraham Ríos Manzano, *Tianguis Cultural del Chopo una larga jornada* (Mexico: Ediciones AB, 1999), 20-26.



The *MoPop - Museum of Pop-Culture*, formerly known as *Experience Music Project - Science Fiction Museum* in the city of Seattle, Washington, is a space dedicated to the exploration of creativity and innovation in popular music. I had the opportunity to visit the EMP back in 2012 and dive deep into the exhibition “Nirvana: Taking Punk to the Masses”. The core matter of the EMP was its thousands of hours of interviews of musicians, producers, photographers, artists, fans and generally everyone who was involved in the construction of the different music movements and scenes from the American north-west. Memory led many of the exhibitions in the museum when, out of those oral histories, a big narrative would take shape like the Hip-Hop genealogy for example. I cannot think of a better way to introduce representation and encourage participation. The last part of the exhibition included a “confessional” where each willing visitor would have 60 seconds to record her / his / their personal memory related to the band, the music or the subculture. The recordings would then become part of the short-film signaling the very end of the exhibition and would grow exponentially from short to a long-film. In these two examples we can see Rock music as origin, result, communication channel, and above all a space of representation, participation, and free access. These are also elements found in memory. Music as Memory is comprised of associations, connections, and triggers which, by highlighting them, turns memory into a space charged with signification.

### **5. So, how can we revive the museum and transcend its walls? By exorcising it!**

The scholar and artist Alejandro Sabido asks himself and us how can we change the tendency of using the museum as a structure for social reproduction and aesthetic and historical or contextual normalisation of the objects, and activate it as a construction capable of introducing new ways of understanding, posing, and relating with the world?

Sabido posits a solution without leaving out that there might be more. Working Giorgio Agamben’s text “What is a device?” he proposes to exorcise the device without nullifying it through the act of desecration: “if to consecrate (*sacrare*) was the term to identify the act of taking out things from the human right’s sphere, to desecrate meant putting things back to the free use of men”<sup>18</sup>. We know that if there is something the museum knows how to do, it is to consecrate the object and non-object, pulling them out not only from their context but stripping them from their capacity of questioning, contesting, protesting or simply providing an alternate vision and proposal of the other different from us.

To the solution of desecrating that which is of our interest through its use, I would add one more element: the day to day. The fertile field of habit, rites and the everyday as a way to examine reality and the way that the individual/person/subject relates to and within it. It is not only a matter of desecrating the object and non-object collection through its common usage but also through the visions of reality which will allow the activation of the device to introduce new ways of

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<sup>18</sup> Giorgio Agamben, “¿Qué es un dispositivo?”, *Sociológica* 26, no. 73 (2011): 249-264.



understanding, posing, and relating with the world<sup>19</sup>.

## 6. How do the exorcism, memory, and rock get together?

Rock music as a place of memory is a space in constant construction that loads itself of meaning, serves as referent and trigger, allows the dialogue and participation of heterogeneity and contestation as well as provides access to everyone who wishes to remember or forget.

Rock music as a place of memory contains all narratives and promises to battle irreversibility and unpredictability as opposed to the coercive, shaped-by-few fabrication of history.

Rock music as a place of memory desecrates the object and non-object through the use of everydayness as a fabric of memories triggering more memories. Rock music as a place of memory can be a way to turn the museum into the agora of representation, participation and free access where all memories can be heard and put to the test of time.

Rock music worked as memory in the museum can provide the tools to create knowledge through acceptance, like Maffesoli once wrote, from the heterogeneities that give strength to the structure<sup>20</sup> (fig. 3).

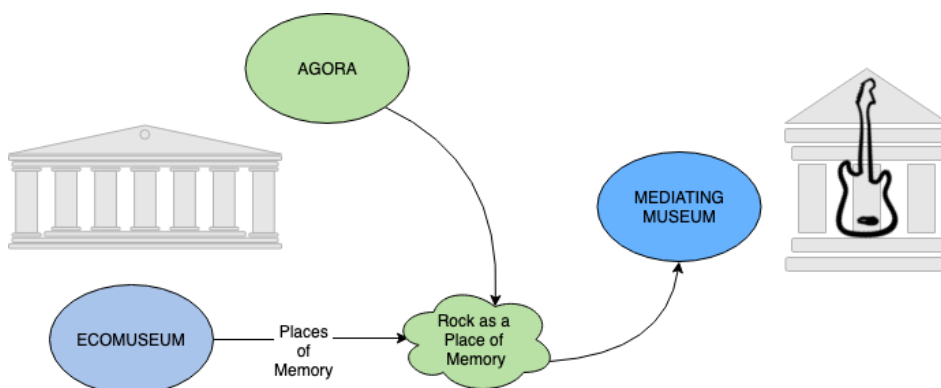


Figure 3: The Mediating Museum through Rock as a place of memory. Source: author.

## 6. Conclusions

To deal with the exclusionary museum, we must question its lack of representation, participation, and free access.

To introduce these elements into the museum, we must make use of its original

<sup>19</sup> Alejandro Sabido, “Museología, Presencia–Dispositivo”, in *Memorias del Tercer Seminario Permanente de Museología en América Latina*, ed. Luis Gerardo Morales Moreno (Córdoba: ENCRYM-INAH, 2015), 97.

<sup>20</sup> Michel Maffesoli, *El tiempo de las tribus el ocaso del individualismo en las sociedades posmodernas*, (México: Siglo XXI, 2004), 188.

subject matter: memory.

To transform the museum, we can make use of a new form of agora-memory: music.

By transforming music in general and rock in particular into a place of memory, we desecrate its introduction into the museum by making an object non-object of common use in our day-to-day. As a set of memories and promises it is the non-place or utopia where all fictions can and must be heard.

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