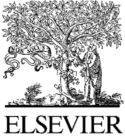
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The Museums' future

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Abstract

'The Museums' Future' argues that through the effects of the postmodernisation of museums, art has been ceded variously to culture, commerce, politics, values and to experience. In this scenario, political culture has surrendered to cultural politics.

It asks whether a museum project of the future can be envisaged in which history and experience are not replaced entirely by spectacle, and memory is not banalized? Can the museum contribute to reconfigurations of the Subject and Other and to identity and difference without falling into the traps of a politics of identity? Can the museum find ways of reaffirming universal principles without running the risk of imposing a new order dominated by a single culture?
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> [A]s soon as art becomes culture, is the means, the instrument of a culture, it can no longer belong to itself; it falls prey to travesties and servitudes: the wheel of values and knowledge [32].

This passage from Maurice Blanchot demands that we think about the incommensurability of art and of culture and alludes to the 'cultural industries'. We can see that the dialectic between art and culture is taking on new meanings today, as we witness a profound change to the ontology of the museum and art gallery from that of history to economics (value), from that of learning to entertainment (spectacle), from that of recondite (élite) to accessible knowledge (popular). These mutations have ramifications for our expectations, understanding and indeed of our experiences of art itself, along with the institutions that house it.

1. The appropriation of art by culture

Museums are inevitably contradictory—as are the concerns of art exhibitions that are always ambiguous. On the one hand, they connote our need for conservation, inventories, and for

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history: on the other, our desire for novelty and the affirmation of our new experience of art. Do we not want to be fascinated by masterpieces [sic], attached to them, enjoy them? Do we not want to be delighted, challenged and even dismayed by them? Do we not want to learn from them, contemplate them, and again perhaps be changed by them? In our age of 'hyper-reality' what can be now envisaged and expected from them?

In reply, we must return to the initial democratic ideals that precipitated the widening of the public for art, and advanced the notion of the 'universal aesthetic experience'. Modernism gave art the task of embodying Utopia that coincided with art agreeing to become museum art. Initially imbued with democratic values the problem of universalism is in essence one of education. What can we learn from what it abstractly posits? In the case of the spectator, it presents the statistical fiction of an abstractly universal individual who enters into a substantial interaction with some equally abstracted universal art work.

This logic dictated what are now visible as closures, but which gave impetus to particular renditions of art history, most influentially exhibited for us in the Museum of Modern Art (New York) and through its legacy. Here, art works were viewed as standing for a particular aesthetic, transferring that specific aesthetic to one current sufficient to make those works 'readable' as art 'in the universal'.

Exhibited in the tactical manner of the ubiquitous 'white cube', the works seem to offer themselves to us now for the first time, revealed as works of art in pure visibility, manifested in luminous privacy. Aesthetic detachment provides us precisely with a place for the contemplative away from the stress and the tedium of daily life. Assumed here was the disinterested expert in search of just such an experience—for which there can be no guarantee.

2. The appropriation of culture by commerce

The museums' presupposition of a universal visitor is no longer tenable and the issue of the spectator learning and experiencing something is an issue which continually besets the museum and its display strategy. In asking how objects mean is also a question of how Subjects are made. As an institutional practice, argues Donald Preziosi, the museum is central to creation of the modern subject [14].

A museum, such as the Sir John Soane Museum, according to Preziosi, was set up to project an enlightened humane and modern vision in response to the disruptive forces of early 19th century industrialisation. However, this paradigm was supplanted by the Great Exhibition of the Arts and Manufacturers at the Crystal Palace in 1851 that advanced the new model for the museological and art historical practices that have today become familiar and appear natural.

The Great Exhibition succeeded ideologically because it was based upon 19th century positivist historicism. Museology has been its afterlife ever since, along with art history and criticism. It set the standard of 'technologising' museum practice and thereby inserted itself into the mainstream of a commodified cultural industry. It 'constitutes the dream work we as orthopsychic subjects in and for modernity endlessly practice, both as sterner minds and as giddy-minded shoppers or fashion junkies' [15]. Major institutions nowadays, still rely upon this paradigm. Tate Modern, as Preziosi puts it, is organised by *tendencies*—'tendencies towards abstraction, toward the body, toward costing a fortune, etc.' [16]—and is exemplary in the move from culture to commerce. We might add that the British Museum came finally to embrace the quintessence of a post-modern museum experience, evidenced as we stroll around the newly covered courtyard with its cafés and shops. We might ask what kinds of subjects are being made?

3. The appropriation of culture by politics

What are art galleries or museums like Tate Modern for, if not for their visitors? Chris Smith, who was Minister of Culture when Tate Modern was set up, in a recent essay to celebrate its first five years, tells us:

> And let us not forget that this is a profoundly political process, too. In finding the thrill of understanding and cherishing the contemporary, the new, the difficult, the cutting-edge, the awkward in art, it is but a short step to taking this to the wider world and society too. Sharpening the sense we all have of adventure and difference, whether it is in aesthetic perception or in social understanding, is a profound contribution to the way we think and act. The beginning of such perception can come from a visit to this exciting innovative and challenging place [11].

Political culture has been ceded to cultural politics: 'aesthetic experience' is to do the job of promoting 'social understanding'.

The last 25 years have been a time of acute upheaval in the art world. Nowhere perhaps has this been more evident than in Britain, where the exigencies of an entrepreneurial culture continue their head-banging test of social viability. The key objective of current economic liberalism is to reduce and privatise public services thereby presenting a grim challenge to public service ethics and values. Questions such as entry charges, de-acquisitioning and funding mechanisms have polarised the artistic community, but no longer on traditional party political lines. Such changes have effected the very management of culture and its values. Sara Selwood explains:

> Since the Financial Management Initiative of 1982, successive governments have assumed that better management of Britain's public services would result in greater efficiency, effectiveness and value for money. These aspirations are manifest in demands for 'strategies', 'monitoring', 'assurances' as to the 'delivery' of targets', and evidence of 'outputs' and 'outcomes' [35].

Museums and galleries have had to acquiesce to Conservative and more recently Labour Governments pressure to 'reform' and make themselves become more accountable to audiences, sponsors, trustees and public funding bodies such as the Arts Council, while at the same time offering 'consumer guarantees'. The present Labour government has pushed through many changes to the Arts Council, and has abandoned the arm's length principle towards arts funding and is determined to achieve a direct political return on its investment. New funding agreements drawn up by the Department for Culture Media and Sport for 2003–2004 to 2005–2006 compel the 18 museums funded by the department to raise the number of C2DE visitors by 8% on the previous financial year [19]. Accountability is expressed as turnover of visitors. Visitors' figures are collated and evaluated as performance indicators. Such accountancy renders individuals invisible and classifies them in certain identities—social class, ethnicity, age. In this scenario, spectators are classified as users and consumers.

Art institutions have translated such imperatives into an obligation to create exhibitions that attract large audiences. According to the art critic Martin Gayford, who also contributed to the Tate Modern pamphlet, 'really exciting modern art shows,' [29] provide the solution to what has now become a problem of extending museum access in the name of democracy. Chris Smith celebrates Olafur Eliasson's, *Weather Project*, in the following terms:

> The vastness of the space absorbs them. Once again, this gallery helps to make the case for openness, for inclusion, for welcoming all comers [41].

It is the building that is active; the spectator is a mere passive receiver of stimuli. For Nicholas Serota however, the twenty million visitors who have visited Tate Modern since its opening five years ago, 'have taken possession of the building itself' [36]. Yet, Serota acutely aware of the knife edge upon which, as Tate Director, he walks, declares, 'not every show should be a 'block-buster' [37]. The questions we might address, and shall return to later in this article, circle around what kinds of experience and what kinds of art, representing what kinds of values, are being promoted?

The arts are being redefined as a component of the 'cultural industries' and social policy objectives have been installed in the criteria of arts funding. The notion of 'social inclusion' has appropriated centre stage in the management of art. The web-site of the Department of Culture Media and Sport declares:

> …the arts have so much to contribute to wider social issues. From neighbourhood renewal to health, and from the criminal justice system to employment, the arts have something to offer [43].

Museums and galleries have been required to address social inclusion, to become more accessible, and to channel more resources into education and outreach. The content, organisation and operations of museums and galleries must be made 'relevant', 'meaningful' and 'accessible'. Chris Smith's clarion call when Minister—that still reverberates today—was that art institutions must deliver access, excellence innovation and educational opportunity in accordance with the Government's wider social, educational and economic objectives is mere persiflage. Unable to throw off its Thatcherite legacy, Labour is in something of a dilemma. Thatcherism, in as far as it relates to political and culture theory, was revolutionary. In the 1980s, the central tenet of Thatcherism was that freedom is synonymous with the operations of markets. The only real freedom is the choice that comes from buying and selling. This was not the old idea that without capitalism you cannot have freedom but a new idea that market capitalism is political freedom. By stressing the instrumental value of art, art is marginalised, and its relative autonomy put in jeopardy. There is a danger that the market place entirely takes on the role of defining art.

4. The appropriation of art by values

According to an argument mounted by John Holden of the independent think tank, *Demos*,

> Cultural Value has to generate coherence from seemingly disparate elements such as the UK's coolest brands, children's art, the ambitions of corporate chief executives, Joseph Beuys, the purchase of lottery tickets, and the generation of power (from electrical power to political power)- among many other things [26].

Holden attempts to classify cultural values. For him, they are firstly, *instrumental* which he equates with the economic sphere and an 'increase in learning'. Here education is identified with and as an economic return. Secondly, cultural values are *intrinsic* by which he means the inherent intellectual, emotional and spiritual qualities of a culture. And finally they are *institutional* in so far as the institutions themselves are deemed trust worthy, are managed for the public good, and are seen to be fair. The complexities implied by judgements of value, the idea

of values in democracy as contentious, are subsumed by a notion of value that exists outside of ethics. This configuration of value fits perfectly with the post-modernisation of museums (which we could describe as the Guggenheim effect) and what is frequently understood as the spectacular success of Tate Modern expressed as visitor numbers: nearly twenty two million people (40% of these are repeat visitors) have visited since it opened. A feature article on the *Weather Project* in the *Guardian* reported that 'The Turbine Hall looked like Brighton Beach on a bank holiday' [5]. Chris Smith, thrilled by the apparent success of Tate Modern is of the opinion that,

> The innovative ways in which the Collection was and is displayed have also helped. People are drawn in to experience something else, having come to view the building or simply to laugh at the Duchamp urinal [42].

The forms of knowledge produced by museums or art galleries are no longer to be judged in their own terms. We live, as Jérome Bindé argues,

> in the realm of the ephemeral, accelerated obsolescence and subjective whim, as if the most sacred values, deprived of any foundation, could enter the great securities market and float in their turn. This speculative view of values as relative to a particular moment and circumstance applies to a great many ethical and aesthetic phenomena in the contemporary world [25].

As if to compensate for the floating world, where, to paraphrase Marx, 'all that is solid melts into air', values are now to be measured and judged a by a quasi scientific system involving, as Selwood explained above, 'strategies', 'monitoring', 'assurances' as to the 'delivery' of targets', and evidence of 'outputs' and 'outcomes'.

Judgements about art are now to be made in terms outside the ethical frames of reference that had given the study of aesthetics its special place in Western thought and have been reduced to that of 'managerialism'.

5. The appropriation of politics by experience

If Art is to be accredited democratic, élites must then appear discredited and popular appeal becomes the shibboleth of the day. Amongst the strategic responses to the dilemma of the museum and art gallery, have been the extension of the educational provision and the reconsideration of the dynamics of display. The circumspection of art gallery professionals, curators and artists, coupled with impossibility of a guaranteed affirmative and measurable response of the public, have conspired with and led to forms of art exhibition which attempt to be entertaining at all cost and which tend to locate 'experience' at the heart of the enterprise, as its justification and modus operandi.

In a lecture dating from 1996, *Experience or Interpretation: The Dilemma of Modern Art*, Nicholas Serota, provided an account of the history of the modern art museum, and indicated a future programme for Tate Modern [33]. His overarching concern was with the performative aspects of the museum. Serota mobilises as antithetical propositions, 'experience' and 'interpretation' which he suggested encapsulate the particular difficulties posed for art curators working today.

To begin with then, what might the opposition 'experience' or 'interpretation' in Serota's title signify? For him, 'interpretation' equals historical categorisation—the museum or gallery as a history book. 'Experience' means an emotional investment on the part of the spectator.

The question that remains is the commensurability or otherwise of this opposition, as well as its significance: hence the 'dilemma' for Serota. But perhaps it is a fake dilemma. Can experience be outside of interpretation and vice versa? Something extremely familiar is happening here: the separation of experience and interpretation merely repeats the age-old division of thought and feeling, of sense and sensibility. By so-doing a separation between emotional and rational identities is being enforced. What happens to 'history' when 'experience' is configured in this way?

In Tate Modern, writes Martin Gayford, in an apparently celebratory tone,

> …art history sometimes seems to have stopped: everything exists in a perpetual present; art from a hundred years ago jostles art from the day before yesterday [30].

The role of memory, past experiences or even the present is concealed, and in effect experience is reduced to little more than momentary excitement.

Serota concludes his lecture as follows:

> In the new museum, each of us, curators and visitors alike, will have to become more willing to chart our own paths, redrawing the map of modern art, rather than following a single path laid down by a curator. We have come a long way from Eastlake's chronological hang by school, but the educational and aesthetic purpose is no less significant…but in my view we still need a curator to stimulate readings of the collection and to establish those 'climatic zones' which can enrich our appreciation and understanding of the art of this century. Our aim must be to generate a condition in which visitors can experience a sense of discovery in looking at particular paintings, sculptures or installations in a particular room at a particular moment, rather than finding themselves standing on the conveyor belt of history [37].

We pass hurriedly from the inclusive 'curators and visitors alike' to the collective pronoun 'our'. The collectivity marked by that 'our' is that of the museum professional. This is not necessarily a cause for resentment; rather, it is the disingenuousness of this shift that is vexing. What Serota desires is an art freed from the burden of history (interpretation), a world in which the unidentified visitor is left alone to experience the 'climatic zone'. Another assumption operates here as Martin Jay explains, 'experience' presumes a 'strong notion of a centred subject whose meaningful life could be narrativized in a coherent way' [31]. We meet again the universal, abstract spectator, presumed as an idealised private self, but now expected to invent a path, albeit through a highly formalised 'climatic zone'. This provides a frame for experience, a supplement to the work staged in such a way that the narrator's voice is suppressed. Serota appears to advocate a go-as-you- please version of postmodernism which jettisons history and has the effect of conjuring Barthes' dead author to return as a ghost, a shadowy curator's presence, haunting but not quite articulating the space.

Instead might we not think about both memory and recollection as revealing themselves through history and experience? Or, to turn to Martin Jay, we might think of experience not as 'the antithesis of language, reflection, and judgement', but as including 'dimensions of each, even if they may or may not produce a harmonious outcome' [23]. The terrain occupied by subjects will never be unified and harmonious. Society is founded upon antagonism which itself provides the shield which prevents democracy from sliding into totalitarianism. In seeking a politics of contentment, antagonism has to be levelled and the potential 'experience' and understanding of art reduced to mere stimulation.

To return to Serota's earlier text, I am struck by two more key phrase: (1) 'appreciation and understanding' and (2) 'rather than finding themselves standing on the conveyor belt of history'. Another opposition is installed, signalled by 'rather'. The question that again remains is either/or? Either 'appreciation and understanding', or history as a 'conveyor belt'—another dilemma inevitably occasioned by this logic.

Serota's interpretative themes derive from his reading of Adorno's essay, 'Valéry, Proust, Museum' [39]. Adorno plays with the assumed discord of his protagonists but argues as well that although Valéry and Proust's outlooks are diametrically opposed, their statements are not directed polemically against each other: their ideas complement each other providentially [1]. Valéry and Proust both regard the museum as a mausoleum. For Valéry, 'dead visions are entombed there'. More, he feels oppressed by the 'over-accumulation' of objects which effectively reduce the experience of art to that of education and information [2]. Art is thus contaminated. Proust, the flaneur, instead enjoys his museum visits which Adorno likens to 'the childhood of an encounter'. The very death of art in a museum is that which restores it to life [3]. It is a place of revival and resurrection. If Proust is concerned with recollection, then Valéry is preoccupied with memory.

According to Adorno neither Valéry nor Proust is right or wrong. Akin to bookends—read as it were together—their attitudes reveal the contradictory moment of truth: '[U]nfettered subjectivism, is untrue to objectifications of the spirit, but it is only this subjectivism that enables him [Proust] to break through the immanence of culture [4]. Thus, Adorno argues that the dialectic between the passionate fixation with the object (fetishism) and the subject's enthusiasm with himself (narcissism) finds, if not reconciliation, then redress.

Serota, unlike Adorno, attempts to appease and transcend the tension between subject and object and to iron-out the contradictory nature of the museum, declaring:

> The best new museums of the future will, like Schaffhausen, Insel Hombroich and Frankfurt, seek to promise different modes and levels of 'interpretation' by subtle juxtapositions of 'experience [40].

Experience has its correlation not in knowledge but in authority. That is to say in the power of words and narration and it is not possible to guarantee the truth of experience. Paradoxically, authority is founded on what cannot be experienced. The effect of Serota's argument is to privilege experience above knowledge, is to shift the locus from knowledge to authority. Experience can only be verified by authority which makes it unquestionable. It is at once deeply personal and only to an extent capable of being shared with others. While we cannot easily share experience, we can at least share and question knowledge.

In Serota's transmutation of experience and interpretation the dialectic is lost, as is the intimate connection of both memory and recollection to history and experience. His argument eliminates the necessary tension between the 'thing in itself' (objectivity) and the 'subject' (subjectivity). It presents as settled what are in reality a series of irresolvable contradictions and demands for which no unequivocal assurances, not least that of the spectators' participation, can be supplied. Serota's dilemma is insuperable and made all the more so, now we are enmeshed in hyper-reality—after all, can an art display compete with a theme park?

Jean Baudrillard asks what is at stake in the hegemonic trend towards virtuality. His persuasive exaggerations alert us to current problems quite clearly:

> It would seem to be the radical actualization, the unconditional realization, of the world, the transformation of all our acts, of all historical events, of all material substance and

> energy into pure information. The ideal would be the resolution of the world by the actualization of all facts and data [24].

His writing offers a defence of the real against the simulacrum. He is, as Rex Butler has put it, 'a thinker not at all of reality as a simulacrum, but of the possibility of reality when all is simulacrum' [21]. Simulation is not a question of truth or falsity. Signs, Baudrillard argues, now construct the real as simulation and camouflage the fact that the real is not real. The highest function of the sign is to conceal the disappearance of reality. Disneyland, Baudrillard once notoriously argued, disguises the fact the 'real' America is already destroyed. Such distractions are alibis and are also decoys: they are the baits and seductions of projection.

The insistence on the spectator's experience is also a postulate in some contemporary art which, to instance Bill Viola, physically encapsulate the viewer. Are his works compensations for the perceived 'emptiness' of the white cube, and also goads to reinvent the spectator as participant? In Viola's work, the spectator is a manoeuvre of the exhibition. In other words, the notion of disinterested viewing is untenable and this is because we are not involved enough. What is enough? Is it not enough for someone to visit an art show but now must be part of it, enrolled, and stitched into the fabric of its meaning?

In the Bruce Nauman exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, we were overwhelmed by 'experiences'. The Gallery guide suggests that '[Nauman] makes you powerfully aware of your own presence in the often complex psychological spaces of the contemporary world'. In its effect, the work hectors and baits the spectator, for whom little choice remains other than to endure the excess, the end of illusion. Surrounded by Nauman's vast video projections, bombarded by noise, seeing oneself on TV screens, everything closes in, is too close: distance has disappeared. Nauman's work functions by assimilating the identity of the spectator to the point of vertigo in a delirious penitentiary version of 'reality'. Nauman's recent installation at Tate Modern, (2005) exaggerates this affect through its insistence upon the auditory. At least with the visual we can close our eyes, from sound there is no flight.

It has been argued that Nauman's work by dramatising the spectacle, claims the real in space and time and articulates the struggle against mastery and authoritarianism. If indeed this is a credible view, does such work still represent a convincing aesthetic strategy and a valid political response? Greg Hilty, in the exhibition leaflet, maintains it does. Referring to works such as *No, No, No, No*, and *Pete and Repeat*, he claims: 'The brutal self-mockery of this work lays bare the pretensions of the 1980s art world boom, and the grotesque manipulation of the wider media spectacle.' [44]. I am inclined to agree with Baudrillard that radicality has changed. An exhibition such as this one operates as an incitement not as critique. We are quite literally projected into the work, coerced and enlisted to empathise with it. This procedure might on the face of it appear benign. But it can also disguise a tyrannical design which destroys any true relation of communication. In the name of interaction, we are implicated and entrapped in spectacular simulation.

Do such contrivances as these collude with the ontological shift from education to entertainment? Even this dichotomy is inadequate as a description or an acknowledgement that we are insurmountably captured in the ideology of hyper-reality. Baudrillard warns 'art and the media follow the same course, and often become confused with one another' [45]. The dream of a common public space (civil society) has been transformed into the new public realm of TV, media and mass culture.

Cleary the paradigmatic shifts in the techno system are being accompanied by far-reaching changes in every domain. We now have in the West at least, a multitude of perceiving subjects,

each having a different grid for interpreting the world. So the problem becomes not only that of communication, but of intercommunication and recognition. Jon Snow writing in the Tate pamphlet comments:

> Holding the PDA in the palm of their hand as they walk round the galleries, visitors can see videos and still images that provide additional context for the arts. They can also take part in interactive games and opinion polls, and play art-related music. Visitors can bookmark information they find interesting, and ask the PDA to email further details to their home email address [27].

We might ask what is being masked and unveiled for the viewer? We should avoid the pitfalls of either a naïve celebration or a demonization of these technologies but we do need to consider what is happening to the notion of critical viewing?

The new technologies of reproduction, Walter Benjamin thought, would lead to the destruction of art's aura: its uniqueness, remoteness, its dependency on magic and ritual [22]. He anticipated that art would be brought to everybody, at any moment. Art would become closer and encourage more critically vigilant spectators. His thinking presaged momentous democratic possibilities. The collapse of distance, he was well aware, correspondingly allowed politics to become more spectacular. Fascist or Communist, he asked in a surprising dramatic twist, which brought his essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', to an ambiguous close.

The museum without walls now exists but not in the way that Benjamin might have hoped. The subtle vacillations and equivocations of his remarks have become a little clearer now. He noticed that the 'replacement of the older narration by information, of information by sensation, reflects the increasing atrophy of experience' [8]. More recently, Giorgio Agamben has warned, 'the question of experience can be approached nowadays only with an acknowledgement that is no longer accessible to us' [20]. Only too keenly today do we witness an exponential increase in the desire to possess the aura of the original art work and likewise, a yearning for the expression of the total Self realised in and through having an experience. What kind of experience can this be?

The commodification of experience is arguably one of the most prevalent tendencies of our age. The notion of experience as a commodity for sale is precisely the opposite of what Benjamin argued an experience should be, that is something which can never be fully possessed by its owner. The aura returns as a pastiche of emotion and remains that which escapes the reality of what is lived through. What is lost is the delicate interplay between understandings of the world as that which impinges on a mind that is not a mere passive receiver of stimuli.

Paul Virilio has argued that Fukayama is right: 'it is the end of history and the start of another history, that of events, of the live' [34]. Nowadays an event is only verified by having become spectacle and is severed from the context from which it takes meaning. If we envisage the annulment of history, we are also obliged to take account of the diminution of the field of reflective contemplation. One of the traditions of democracy is to have granted reflection as a right. More, as Benjamin has put it, 'Without reflection there would be nothing but the sudden start' [9]. Contemplative thought takes a long time and understanding and comprehension come slowly: these processes cannot be short-circuited. This is the reckoning and the problem.

We might argue that the value of art is to create a place for self-reflection, while undoing the narcissism that does not allow the autonomous existence of another. In the face of the work, the self-as-identity is woken as Other and through this encounter other possible selves proliferate. Through art it becomes possible to inaugurate an image of the Self in which Narcissus' gaze

moves away from love of the self to initiate a relationship with the external world. It is the subject's position in relation to the object that is crucial, in that in provides the pivot of the ethical, demanding decision and judgement. This encounter is the pre-condition of true dialogue and the fundamental value of criticality and a critically vigilant democracy.

6. The appropriation of politics by culture

We have been describing a scenario in which, in its diverse guises, art has been ceded variously to culture, commerce, politics, values and to experience. The surrendering of political culture to cultural politics points to changes in our understandings of traditional democracy. Government policy towards the arts highlights this shift. In the last century, two notions of democracy prevailed. In the liberal tradition, it signified the open elections of representatives and freedom; while in the Socialist tradition, majority interests were deemed paramount under the banner of popular power. The regulating discourses have changed. We now witness a merging of these different identities of democracy with their mutually exclusive ideas as virtual democracy. Electioneering is what we now have in a US—style Presidential promotion—'party political' hardly means what it says. As for 'majority interests' or 'popular power', these have surrendered to consumerism.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, 1989 marks a critical juncture. We were told then that we had come to the 'end' of history and of ideology. Yet can we be so sure that ideological war has ended? Does not the very existence of an American presence at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and its prison facility for terrorists perversely remind us otherwise? Does not the compulsion in the USA to secure government permission to publish or edit the writings of scholars and researchers from Cuba, Iran, Libya, North Korea or any other country with which trade is banned, give renewed evidence to support the argument that the war is far from ended? For failing to comply, publishers in the US may be charged with 'trading with the enemy', receive a fine of $500.000 and a ten year prison sentence [13]. It is not without irony to remember that the *fatwah* against Salmon Rushdie sent liberals into a frenzy. Freedom of speech has been the cornerstone of liberal thought—but there again, so too has hypocrisy. Have the quests in art in the 1980s and 1990s for 'criticality' or 'identity' enabled us to surpass the predicaments that the diverse guises of modernism have attempted to resolve in sometimes terrifying and other times heroic ways?

Modernity is often understood as representing a single Western paradigm which in the name of the 'universal' dictated its view without regard to other cultures. In the realm of cultural politics today, the idea of the universal is increasingly represented as an old-fashioned totalitarian dream. However, politics cannot be adequately understood as a choice between the universal and the particular, or between identity and difference.

The drive to the cultural politics of identity can lead to the glorification and seductions of sheer affirmation. The representation of the Other is itself a political presentation and sets up the drive for a liberating politics which can be figured as a politics of overcoming. When differences are stressed exclusively, we are thrown into a world of incommunicability. Identity politics, with its handmaiden multiculturalism, have solidified identity into new forms of terror. Through these moves, the erosion of political will is legitimated and the difficult political problems of freedom and equality are avoided. Violent overcoming is the means of countering the modern anxiety of identity and non-identity [28].

We should not abandon entirely an ethics of universalism. After all the universal is only the proliferation of the particular. Put succinctly by Alain Touraine, 'The universal is the right we all have to be both equal and different' [6]. The point is, as he continues, 'to accommodate

the multiplicity of cultural commitments and affiliations within the overall political order' [7]. The concepts of cultural identity and difference need to be superseded by a notion of cultural rights which signify the right to participate in a global world while at the same time to be culturally specific, particular and singular.

The ontology of art is being reduced to the dangerous pieties of identity politics and multicultural festivities and seduced by the lure of the hyped economic ideology of the cultural industries. Complexity is being reduced to statistical fictions.

7. Time to come

My sketch suggests a bleak prognosis. It has described the intimate relationship between museums and the very formation of the subjects of modernity and postmodernity. The postmodernisation of museums continues the trend in which art has been spectacularized and commodified in the cultural industries. The margins for a critical response within art are narrowing. Douglas Crimp in his book, *On the Museum's Ruin* has argued that the museum as the paradigmatic institution of modernism is a project in ruin. It's an institution whose time is up. For him, 'postmodernism is founded on the collapse of the museum's discursive system' [17].

Crimp reports on an exchange that had taken place between he and Frederic Jameson in which Jameson had asked him:

> …if "idealism" is always a reactionary position, or whether under certain circumstances—read in a precise historical context as an ideological move, with certain determinative social and class content—it may not have had progressive if not revolutionary consequences [18].

Crimp replied that the museum was only as progressive in its early history as the consolidation of bourgeois hegemony, 'insofar as the museum is one of those institutions that work to guarantee that hegemony within the cultural sphere'.

Indeed we have observed in the Nauman example that the affects of the work turn from a potential political and radical critique of authoritarianism to become its very expression.

So we might ask, is the time of the museum now up? Perhaps so unless that is that we begin to think outside the categories in which it must be seen to operate. A museum is not simply an institution: it is also an idea and a practice. It defines tradition and arranges objects in patterns of significance. It preserves and transmits, is an archive of what is lost or at risk. It is ultimately about bereavement. At its foundations is loss. Nothing replaces loss that is precisely why there are museums and art galleries and indeed why their responsibilities are impossible.

A regulative and programmatic aim can never regulate itself, and disjuncture is bound to emerge. It is the very possibilities inherent in visual art and its display which open signification to something beyond the logic of a framing identity. Meanings are both organized and unstable, hence the very possibilities of meaning. It is these possibilities that permit art to escape from its housing and resist the insistence of bureaucracy. Chris Smith, now deprived of his ministry reminds us, 'deep down it's the art that matters, much more than the economic or social spin-off' [12]. While such a breach remains, it is for us to continue to elaborate it. This means neither locking ourselves away in ivory towers, nor ignoring the new forms of expression presented by science and technology. It means that we use these in an attempt to testify to Proust's 'childhood of an encounter' and states of reasoning.

Is it possible to envisage the museum project of the future in which history and experience are not replaced entirely by spectacle, and memory is not banalized? Can it contribute to

the reconfiguration of personal experience and instrumental reason? Can the museum find ways of reaffirming universal principles without running the risk of imposing a new order dominated by a single culture? A remark of Blanchot's is suggestive:

> The Museum is [thus] not the receptacle of erudite contemplations, nor the ordered inventory of the discoveries of culture. It is the imaginary space, where artistic creation, struggling with itself, ceaselessly searches for itself in order to discover itself each time as if a new, a novelty repudiated in advance [10].

Understood in this way, the museum can be a place, where the reality of the world can be momentarily forgotten to open up or designate an infinite relation with the Other. A museum could help us appease our memories and recollections and facilitate us to better appreciate the vexed question of experience. As art itself simultaneously possesses a universal and particular dimension, it is a place in which it is possible to overturn the anguished space of the Self-as-identity and embrace the universal with obvious relevance not only to the museum, its aura and objects but also for sustaining the increasingly fragile prospects of democracy.

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