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## **On The Artifice Of Art**

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#### Abstract

The art museum is the modern embodiment of a historic practice that has long seen to the separation and collection of authentic works of art in a sequestered place. This sequestering is a humanist institutional response to the enigmatic place of art and its inherent supplemental and paradoxical character as a mode of representation. The institutional substitution of a formal, spatial, and experiential clarity of place for the very spatial and temporal dimensions that painting and sculpture fundamentally put in question is an instituted resistance to representation. Spacing is authenticity's indispensable alibi.

## I.

- "Sacred symbols function," Clifford Geertz notes, "...to synthesize a people's ethos – the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood – and their worldview – the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order. In religious belief and practices a group's ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the worldview describes, while the worldview is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well-arranged to accommodate such a way of life."<sup>1</sup>
- Although Geertz's description pertains to "religion as a cultural system," we can readily read into his account a compelling description of the role of ecclesiastical buildings as "sacred symbols" within their broader

cultural context and by extension, of architecture as another "cultural system." We can remind ourselves of the pivotal role architecture plays in shaping a people's ethos and trace an interminable link from their ethos to their worldview. This is a link without which architecture would be hopelessly lost in having too great a choice of action and not sufficient grounds for delimitation of its choices. We can go on to read the evidence of the "confrontation and mutual confirmation" between the dominant worldview and ethos of, for instance, the Gothic, the Renaissance, or the Baroque period, respectively, in the translucent world of a Gothic Cathedral, the proportional harmonies of a Renaissance Chapel, or the unfolding, infinite universe of a Baroque Church. In each instance, we can detail how the specifics of each design objectified "moral and aesthetic preferences by depicting them as the imposed conditions of life implicit in a world with a particular structure, as mere common sense given the unalterable shape of reality," and how the experience of each building served to support "received beliefs about the world's body by invoking deeply felt moral and aesthetic sentiments as experiential evidence for their truth".2

Were we to engage this exercise, we would have the advantage of temporal distance and a markedly different worldview. Both readily allow us to assume the probing role of the "mythologist," as Roland Barthes described it years ago.<sup>3</sup> Focusing, as we may, on the "distortion," or the mechanics of universalizing the particular, it is not likely that we will experience the culture under study assume the guise of inevitability through the agency of its architecture. We will not experience the "confrontation and mutual confirmation" of the worldview and ethos that ecclesiastical edifices were erected to affect. Such a confirmation, when and if it occurs, largely goes unnoted. An edifice plays its cultural role effectively, when we do not see in it the passage of culture into objectivity. It succeeds when we do not take note of the edifice as an ideological construct, or the explicit embodiment of a metaphysics. It succeeds when we take it's peculiarities either for granted, or else attribute them to pragmatic concerns, and proceed as though the latter were immune to ideological conditioning. This is to say, that those aspects of an edifice which appear to be the most objective, i.e., impervious to ideological and metaphysical conditioning, are often the parts more thoroughly conditioned by such considerations, and at that the most successful from culture's perspective.

- Although it is not with great difficulty or much resistance that we may trace the "confrontation and mutual confirmation" of a culture's worldview and ethos in the design and experience of its ecclesiastical architecture, past or present, the same does not hold for secular buildings. The latter are far more resistive to such explorations, particularly the closer they are to us in cultural space and time. The more immediately familiar the building type, the greater is the likelihood of its appearing as no more than a pragmatic response to very real, practical needs and requirements. The library as a secular building type does not readily appear to be much more than a response to the need for storage and dissemination of books, the school to the education of the novice, or the museum to the preservation and public presentation of art, etc. It is not evident how the design and the experience of these buildings could lend themselves to a "confrontation and mutual confirmation" of a culture's worldview and ethos or to what specific cultural variables they tactfully give the guise of the objectively inevitable.
- If our secular institutional buildings do not appear as patent ideological constructs, this is not, of course, for want of participation in the construction and objectification of culture. Michel Foucault, in his study of prisons, schools, and hospitals, outlined the modalities of this participation long ago. If, however, the link between the formal and spatial properties of secular institutional buildings and a particular view of the world, or a pervasive metaphysics is rarely, if ever, explicit, this may well be because these buildings manage all too well in formulating "a basic congruence between a particular style of life and a spe-

cific (if, most often, implicit) metaphysic, and in so doing sustain each with the borrowed authority of the other".<sup>4</sup> Their opacity silently betrays their success.

Assuming that every building type, secular or ecclesiastical, is a purposed cultural construct, from its inception and through every stage of its permutation, and that each type serves, among other cultural mechanisms, to turn our assumptions about the world into an objective experience of it, what I wish to explore in this paper is the participation of the art museum as a building type in the cultural process of actualization and experiential objectification of a dominant worldview. What I intend to explore are the ideational, or metaphysical imperatives that have seen to the formation, proliferation, and perpetuation of the institution and the shaping of its architecture. In particular, I will outline the ways in which the specifics of the design and the particular experience of the museum objectify and sustain our assumptions about the nature of the relationship between reality and representation. The latter is the art museum's specific institutional agenda. The art museum, I hope to demonstrate, is a vital cultural mechanism that along with other allied institutions, e.g., the library, the theater, and the cinema, see to the proper dispensation and consumption of representation in a world of their own making where the reality outside as self-presentation retains its privileges and remains impervious to the challenges of representation, in no small measure because of these spatial constructs.

#### II.

- "The use of objects which have properties is usually prescribed by ritual. There are rules about the way they should be collected....There are regulations regarding their use, the time, place, quantities involved, without going into the sometimes vast array of accessory rites which accompany them and which allow the utilization of their properties and the application of their sympathetic mechanisms."<sup>5</sup>
- Museums are, as one contemporary account has it, "really last-ditch solutions to the problem of knowing what to do with artworks when they have been moved from their original homes for any number of reasons".<sup>6</sup> It is, we are told, "really as desperate as that. Our civilization has come up with no better solution than to pigeon-hole artworks and lock them safely away".<sup>7</sup>
- Curious as this determination may be, it speaks to the same logic as the following account ascribing the inception of the museum to two causes: "a level of physical

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wealth which allows an abundant production of art," and "a form of culture in which this art is seen as a kind of surplus not immediately wanted in any everyday secular or religious activity".<sup>8</sup> The museum is, both accounts assume, a response to a spatial displacement. Presuming that those works of art that fall outside "everyday secular or religious activity" or "their original homes" present a "*problem*," both see the museum as a solution, desperate or otherwise, to arts' want of a place, i.e., of having to have a designated place. This perception is relatively recent and western in origin.<sup>9</sup>

- The art museum is barely over 200 years old. It dates back to the Decree issued by the Revolutionary Convention in Paris on July 27, 1793 for the creation of the "Museum of the Republic" at the Louvre. The spatial and formal consequences of this act were not to be fully realized at the Louvre palace for another 190 years. Elsewhere, the spatial and formal development of the museum as a building type had to await the heated debates and final codification of the type in Germany and to a lesser extent England, in the decades of 1810's to 1830's.
- The formation of the museum at the Louvre palace marked a first in the appropriation of art by a then newly construed entity -- the "public." The practice of collecting art was, however, well precedented in Europe. The "public" merely assumed, then re-defined, and thoroughly re-organized a private practice that traces its history back to the onset of the Renaissance. The practice of collecting art objects, public or private, presuppose, of course, their designation as *collectibles*. The history of this classification, recent as it is, is not patently different in duration from the history of art itself and it is not all too clear which classification came first.
- The "Middle Ages," Malraux reminded us long ago, "were as unaware of what we mean by the word 'art' as were Greece and Egypt, who had no word for it".10 What we understand by "art" was the invention of the Renaissance, or rather of a people who, over time, begun to see in the "Virgin" a statue and in the "classical statue" not a "heathen idol or a mere puppet",<sup>11</sup> but the embodiment of a universal ideal: the beautiful. The invention and the ensuing re-classification of paintings and statues as art required them to relinquish, in Benjamin's terms, their "cult value" to assume in its place "exhibition value".12 In the process of (re)classification as art, paintings and statues had to eschew their cult referents in favor of a subject and submit themselves as objects to aesthetic valuation for the measure of "exhibition value." The designation of art objects as collectibles did not

exclusively depend, however, on their newly acquired aesthetic value. The transformation of the cult referent into a subject had distinct spatial ramifications and these as well bore directly on the classification of art objects as collectibles. The first spatial ramification had to do with the recognition of two and three-dimensional graphic representations as autonomous objects. As cult objects, paintings and statues were meant to establish a visual link between the viewer and the cult referent. They were meant to be seen, not looked at. They functioned as intended -- making the absent referent present -- so long as they remained invisible as objects. As works of art, on the other hand, paintings and statues held their newly acquired status so long as they retained a distance from both the viewer and the place they happened to occupy. Taking note of the object and not the referent entailed taking note of the distance and the space between the observer and the observed. As cult objects paintings and statues collapsed space, as art objects they imposed it.

The spacing that constituted an insular frame all around the art object, in effect, displaced paintings and statues from their former allocated place at home, in the palace, the church, etc. The price of autonomy was the loss of place.<sup>13</sup> Once dispossessed of their place, paintings and statues were collected, re-classified, and re-located to a new and specific place, i.e., the "repositories" that in various forms were popular among European ruling elite in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>14</sup> The logic that saw to the reclassification and re-placement of these placeless *representations* in various repositories is fundamentally the same logic that had seen to their initial placement as cult objects and in time would see to



1. The Cabinet of Curiosities of Francesco Calceolari, Verona, Italy, 1622

their re-placement in the museum. Deciphering it will be our focus for the remainder of this work.

- Beginning in the sixteenth century, we find dislodged paintings and statues reposited in places that over the course of the succeeding two centuries would develop into two distinct realms: the "cabinet" and the "gallery," or else the Wunderkammer and the Kunstkammer.<sup>15</sup> The gallery, often a long rectangular room, served as a repository for paintings and statues gathered there for their aesthetic and iconographic value. These works were often tightly integrated with the decoration of the room.
- The cabinet [Fig. 1], on the other hand, was a designated *place* wherein, as Francis Bacon put it, "whatsoever the hand of man by exquisite art or engine has made rare in stuff, form or motion; whatsoever singularity, chance, and the shuffle of things hath produced; whatsoever nature has wrought in things that want life and may be kept; shall be sorted and included."<sup>16</sup>
- The bafflingly heterogeneous body of objects encountered in these cabinets appears to have one thing in common. Rare, singular, or wanting of life, the objects of the cabinet eschewed reproduction. They fell outside the normal cycle of (re)production where they were deemed collectible. Most had their origin in *other* times and *other* places. They were unique productions, not necessarily in origin, but where they were collected in the one place outside of which they had no immediate place.
- Unlike the gallery, the cabinet was not meant as a place of exhibition or public display. The impetus behind the collection was not to make oddities, rarities, and singularities visible, but to render them invisible. What the cabinet accomplished was not only the preservation of the rare and the singular, but also the institution of a distinct domain that kept the rare and the singular out of circulation and the places to which it did not belong.
- Among other oddities, rarities, and singularities, paintings and statues were included in the cabinets of curiosities on account of neither their aesthetic value nor monetary value. What made paintings and statues fit for inclusion in the cabinet and the company of other oddities, rarities, and singularities was their singularity where they happened to be, i.e., their authenticity and historicity, or what Walter Benjamin was to term "aura," that which "even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking...its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."<sup>17</sup>
- Although the authortic and auratic objects collected in the cabinet eschewed reproduction, this is not to say they

were not reproduced. An entire industry was formed in Italy and elsewhere to feed with fake originals and forged singularities the appetite of the European ruling elite for rare and singular collectibles.<sup>18</sup> In response, another industry was formed to identify, authenticate, and certify the collectibles as such. A branch of this industry would be consolidated in time into the field of art history. It is important to note, however, that both industries owe their development to the European ruling elite's search for the singular and the authentic, instigated by the desire to collect them in one place. The desire to open-up and set aside a space for authenticity and singularity appears to be independent of the presence of collectibles as evidenced by the active search for collectibles.

The peculiarity of the desire to collect curiosities in one place raises, of course, the question of motive. Why this preoccupation with the spatial control of the singular and the authentic? To postulate an answer we need to follow the development of the cabinet into the museum. For now, it is important to note that inasmuch as the aesthetic and iconographic concerns of the gallery were impertinent to the cabinet, the latter's preoccupation with authenticity was irreverent to the gallery [Fig. 2]. Unlike the cabinet, the space of the gallery was inclusive of copies and reproductions. Charles de Brosses, Germain Bazin recounts, did not "fret over acquiring originals by the great masters".<sup>19</sup> Confessedly, he preferred "beautiful copies of famous paintings," to "having originals by minor masters".<sup>20</sup> Mr. de Brosses' preference was not the exception. An entire industry dedicated to the commissioned replication of famous works of art, produced endless copies of old masters for the galleries of the European elite throughout the seventeenth



2. Giovanni Paolo Panini, Interior of a Picture Gallery with the Collection of Cardinal Silvio Valenti Gonzaga, 1740

and eighteenth centuries. The gallery and the cabinet had, in other words, two distinct purposes, reflecting two different, though not mutually exclusive, criteria for valuating art. The gallery, conceived more or less as a *path* for viewing, housed aesthetics, the Cabinet housed authenticity. In time, the two practices would coalesce into the museum, though the logic of the cabinet would prevail over the gallery.

- The questions of how to house art and how to shape its place once it entered the public realm were first addressed in France in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Museum was assigned as a speculative design problem for the Prix de Rome competition in the Académie d'Architecture on a number of occasions between 1778 and 1810.<sup>21</sup> Boullée and latter his student Durand offered designs for an ideal museum. Conceptually and experientially, the library appears to be what the designers of these early prototypes had in mind as the generative model for the museum, i.e., a place to gather, organize, and study art with all that this act spatially and ritually entails. Durand, for instance, in comparing the museum to a library, distinguished it from the latter only on account of having a number of different works to display as compared to only one in the library.
- The initial modeling of the museum on the library stems in part from a valuation of art that was deeply rooted in the cabinet, i.e., viewing art as a rare and unique document and not necessarily or primarily as an aesthetic object. Christian von Mechel, who was put in charge of re-arranging and cataloguing the Imperial collection in Vienna in 1779, summed up this sentiment well in his introduction to the collection's catalogue. "Such a large, public collection," he wrote, "intended for instruction more than for fleeting pleasure, is like a rich library in which those eager to learn are glad to find works of all kinds and all periods".<sup>22</sup> The antiguarian Alois Hirt was to echo Mechel's sentiment in his faithful appeal to Friedrich Wilhelm II in 1797 for a public art museum attached to the academy of art as a research and instructional resource. In the final count, however, the design of the museum would follow a different trajectory. The decisive period was the second decade of the nineteenth century. Mechel's distinction between "instruction" and "fleeting pleasure" was to form the bases of the heated debates between the artist/archeologist Johan Martin Wagner and the architect Leo von Klenz in Munich and later between Alois Hirt on one side and the architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel and the art historian Gustav Friedrich Waggen, on the other.

- Klenz's counter argument to Wagner's was summarized in an 1816 memo, noting: "museum is not a place for artists' training, but a place in which to show a number of treasures of art to all kinds of visitors in a manner to be worthy of the objects and to create pleasure in them".<sup>23</sup> This sentiment was later echoed in the catch phrase of Schinkel and Waggen, "first delight, then instruct." "The principal and essential purpose" of the museum is, they argued, "to awaken in the public the sense of fine art as one of the most important branches of human civilization....All other purposes, concerning individual classes of the population, must be subdued to this."<sup>24</sup>
- All parties to these early debates over the museum's purpose, it is important to note, assumed that the place of art is instrumental to its perception. The contention was whether to spatially construe and render art an object of study or an aesthetic object primarily. The former presumes penetration and analysis, the latter, distance and reflection. The question at the outset was which should be the spatial and architectural experience of the museum: enclosure and penetration, or separation and distance, an emphasis on arrival or an emphasis on departure. Nonetheless, what all parties realized was that any given perception of art is, to a good measure, spatially construed.
- All parties also agreed on the chronological organization of art works in place of iconographic organization, which as Frieherr von Rumohr put it, meant "to seek art outside the field of art".<sup>25</sup> However, the chronological organization presented a unique dilemma to both parties. Every chronologically organized collection is bound to have "true and significant gaps" as Wilhelm von Humboldt, chair of the court appointed museum commission in Berlin, noted with regret in 1829. To alleviate the problem, Hirt had hoped to use casts to complete the historic sequence in the Berlin collection and later Humboldt suggested the purchase of copies to fill the gaps in the painting collection. Rumohr was quick to remind Humboldt, however, that "all the value of a painting turns around the idea of originality." The purchase of copies was out of the question and Hirt's casts were exiled from the collection.
- Ever since, the art museum has been, like the cabinet before it, a place adamantly exclusive of the copy. This is to say that to the hierarchy of missions outlined by Schinkel and Waggen, we must add one that superceded all others and was so obvious as to require no elaboration: a sanctuary to the original, the singular, and the unique around which idea purportedly turns "all the value of a



- 3. K.F. Schinkel, Master Plan for Central Berlin, 1816-41 painting." No painting, regardless of its aesthetic value, can be assigned a domicile in the art museum, if it is not authentic. The copy that had a place in the gallery and even the museum that aimed to educate, has had no place in the museum that has aimed to "delight."
- Of the two initial executed designs for the museum, Klenz's sculpture museum in Munich of 1815-30, and Schinkel's Altes museum in Berlin of 1823-30, the latter, having the advantage of hindsight, played the more decisive role in shaping the space that was to render authentic art the object of aesthetic appreciation. We should briefly follow its development, as it would hitherto set the criteria by which the success of an art museum design is judged.
- Alois Hirt's initial appeal for a public museum in 1797 was unheeded until 1822 when, first Friedrich Rabe, and latter Karl Friedrich Schinkel were asked to submit designs for an art museum attached to the Berlin Academy [Fig. 3, 4]. Schinkel's initial design of four enveloping arms around a central courtyard was in the spirit of Hirt's



4. K. F. Schinkel, Altes Museum, Berlin, Plan, 1823-30

vision and earlier French speculative museum designs. In the subsequent three years, a number of significant changes to the initial plan were to radically alter the shape of the museum and along with it the experience of art in the public realm.

- The first departure occurred on January 7, 1823, when Schinkel made the unsolicited proposal to separate the museum from the Academy building and move it away from Unter der Linden in the center of town to a new site opposite the royal palace in an island on the Spree river (Spreeinsel). This was the first of a series of spatial and formal manipulations that were to create a highly ritualized path to the resting place of art.
- Schinkel's vision for the place where delight was to come before instruction consisted of a free standing rectangular building, raised on a high podium above the Lustgarten. Reaching the art works put on display for public "enjoyment and appreciation" required venture on a journey that was, if not deliberately arduous, meticulously elaborate. The ritual procession out to the new place for art, approached from the initial proposed site on Unter der Linden, required one to leave the dense city fabric behind, cross the Spree river on a bridge near the palace, to enter the large open plaza of the island bordered by a church opposite the bridge and to the sides by the palace and the museum. One had to then turn left and on transverse axis cross the immense void of the plaza, terminated by the ceremonial staircase and the long monumental colonnade behind which the main body of the museum was carefully withdrawn. Ascending the staircase in front of the columnar screen, one was led past this monumental threshold and through the depth of the colonnade to the central recessed vestibule and from there, on axis, through a constricted passageway under the pyramidal mass of the vestibule staircase to the expansive space of the rotunda that put a dramatic end to the first leg of the journey. Much as the colonnade marks the beginning of a new territory, the rotunda is, in a manner, the gateway to this other world. To reach it from the rotunda, one in turn had to continue on axis past another constricted passageway to enter, having now traversed the width of the building, the galleries branching out in transverse and opposite directions.
- What Schinkel in effect instituted in the name of "enjoyment and appreciation" of art is a distinct and separate domain for art that is disjoined from the city by a deep and elaborate threshold. This was to be the legacy of Altes Museum. It transformed the conceptual distinc-

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- 5. K. F. Schinkel, Lustgarten, Berlin, A. First Landscaping Proposal, B. Second Landscaping Proposal, 1828
  tion between art and non-art on the one hand and the authentic and the inauthentic on the other, into a spatial experience of separation and disjointment played out at the conceptual edge of the city. The art that was withdrawn from circulation and made invisible inside the city before, now became visible outside the fabric that characterized the city. This outside, it is important to note, was neither literal nor a given, but construed and fabricated by the journey and the experience of disjointment that would become the distinguishing marks of the art museum as a building type.
  5. K. F. Schinkel, Lustgarten, Berlin, A. First Landscaping Proposal, B. Second Landscaping Proposal, 1828
  bordered by the palace and thad initially conceived of the connecting the palace, the cherch and the connecting the palace, the cherch and the city, one would have had entering a different realment the palace, the church and the rejected the proposal in favore the museum from the palace
- The carefully orchestrated experience of disjointment from the city, as the place of habitation, to the museum, as the place of visitation, was significantly enhanced by four major modifications to the initial design proposal between 1825 and 1828 [Fig. 5]. The last and the most elaborate modification was to the design of the plaza



6. K.F. Schinkel, Altes Museum, Berlin, top: First elevation design, 1823, bottom: Second elevation design, 1825

bordered by the palace and the museum. Schinkel had initially conceived of the plaza as a unified space connecting the palace, the church, and the museum together into one integrated composition or what he called a "regulated whole." Crossing the bridge from the city, one would have had the distinct impression of entering a different realm encompassing in its totality the palace, the church and the museum. Wilhelm III rejected the proposal in favor of a scheme that disjoined the museum from the palace and turned the plaza that was before conceived as a distinct place into a ceremonial path across layers of space to the museum. Following Wilhelm's instruction, Schinkel divided the plaza in two and turned the area bordered by the palace and the bridge into an open space whose experiential role is similar to the rotunda of the museum. It too is placed at the nexus of two paths, here at the terminus of the access line from the city across the bridge and the point of initiation for the path that journeys to the museum through cross-axial layers of space.

As the modifications to the plaza further disjoined the museum from its broader context, the other three modifications further disjoined the place of "enjoyment and appreciation" from its immediate context. The rotunda dome that was visible in the initial proposal acted as a central visual terminus to the path that leads through the center of the building to the gallery spaces. It's visible presence placed greater emphasis on the destiny of the path than the journey along the way. The suppression of the dome in the final proposal shifted the visual focus of the visitor in the plaza from a focal point in the background to the foreground colonnade and the backward

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8. Marcel Breuer, Whitney Museum, New York, 1966

layering of the compositional elements along the path.

- In the same vain, turning the vestibule staircase behind the colonnade 180 degrees, to no advantage other than its visual impact, radically changed the perception of the vestibule from a multi-directional space to a uni-directional path through the imposing mass of the staircase. The changes to the ceremonial staircase in front of the Colonnade had much the same impact on the colonnade. Schinkel had initially conceived of the staircase in front of the museum as a multi-directional pyramidal mass gathering up to a landing that lined up with the recessed vestibule behind the colonnade. The strong and funneled visual connection between the two stairs had a negative impact on the perception of the colonnade's depth. Changing the staircase to a uni-directional path that forcefully cuts through a mass projected from the podium and extending the stairs in both directions past the vestibule space behind, severed the visual tie between them, had the staircase confront the colonnade directly, and reinforced the latter's depth as the imposing threshold that it was meant to be [Fig. 6].
- What these changes, minute as some may be, clearly indicate is that the journey of disjointment past the multiplicity of thresholds imposed in front of the galleries was carefully contemplated and deliberate in the minute. It was also a collective consideration that had its opponents along the way. The most vocal opponent was, of course, Alois Hirt who submitted a lengthy dissenting opinion to the museum commission.
- Hirt's objections to Schinkel's design are telling and predictable given their differences over the purpose of the art museum. Hirt objected to the new site, the staircase and the podium, to the monumental colonnade in front, and to the rotunda that he regarded, along with the other elements, as unnecessary luxuries. Hirt objected, in other words, to every major element in Schinkel's proposal that served to locate and place art at a distance in a distinct and disjoined domain, i.e., every element that distinguished the art museum from a library. This is not to say that Hirt objected to the delegation of art to a distinct and separate domain. Rather, he had a different form and experience of separation in mind, i.e., one internally focused on the experience of penetration and arrival as opposed to Schinkel's external focus on the experience of departure and disjointment.
- Schinkel, of course, dismissed Hirt's criticism and emphatically defended the elements in question as essential to preparing the visitor for the proper "enjoyment and appreciation" of art. Hirt were to subsequently resign from

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the commission whose members were in agreement with Schinkel.

- Deferring for the moment the question of why the enjoyment and appreciation of authentic art should have the ritual of spacing as a precondition, it is important to note that the logic of the spacing that saw its first expression in Altes Museum has since informed and characterized the art museum as a new and unique building type. The manifestations of this logic have been diverse and particular to each context. They have been as dramatic and elaborate as the Philadelphia Art Museum (Traumbauer, Borie, and Zatzinger, 1911-28) [Fig. 7] or as minimal and subtle as the Whitney Museum (Marcel Breuer, New York, 1966) [Fig. 8]. Nevertheless, the modalities of the implementation and the realization of the requisite spacing have been the measure of each museum's success or failure. We may begin with the success stories, before addressing the failures, of which Guggenheim Museum is a notorious example.
- As one of the last in a line of monumental art museums that stylistically trace their roots to the Altes Museum, the Philadelphia Art Museum was given its place, after much deliberation, and careful examination, on top of a hill (a former reservoir), outside the city fabric, at the borderline of the city and the Fairmont Park. The disjointment and the spacing of the Philadelphia Art Museum begins at City Hall in the center of the city and traces a path that leads out to the city's edge on a diagonal axis, along a ceremonial parkway that was dramatically and forcefully cut through the city's grid to reach the park at its edge.
- The parkway that leads out from the city center terminates in an oval at the foot of the hill that forcefully lifts the museum above its immediate context. The role of the oval in this drama is similar to that played by the plaza in front of the palace in the Spreeinsel. It too marks the termination of the line of access from one domain and the beginning of the other.
- To reach the museum from the foot of the hill, one must cross a succession of carefully orchestrated thresholds that begin with an open plaza at the base of the stairs and reach up through a wide and segmented staircase to a landing on top that is, in turn, separated and distanced from the forecourt in front of the museum by a vehicular passageway that encircles the building.
- Like Altes Museum, the design of the Philadelphia Art Museum underwent numerous modifications between 1911 and 1915. Here too, with every modification the designers experimented and in the end further consoli-

dated the disjointment and the perceptual spacing of the museum before settling on the final solution.

- Much as the sequence of thresholds in front of the Philadelphia Museum is a dramatic expression of the logic of spacing at work in front of the Altes Museum, the museum building offers, in turn, its own unique interpretation of the key sequestering components in the Altes Museum. The role of the colonnade of the Berlin Museum is played in the Philadelphia Museum by the end pavilions and the forecourt that institute a deep, layered, translucent threshold, past the landing of the front stairs and the encircling passageway, all of which has to be ceremoniously crossed before reaching the base of the staircase in front of the central pedimented portico of the back wing. One must then continue the ascent, cross the columnar screen of the portico and go past two tall vestibules, to arrive at the central stair hall or the Philadelphia equivalent of the nexus point in the Altes Museum: the rotunda. Here as well, to reach the galleries, one must traverse the depth of yet another threshold: a well-sequestered passageway on either side of the hall, leading to the galleries on each floor.
- In contrast to the Philadelphia Museum, Whitney Museum offers an abridged, though equally effective expression of the logic of spacing. Having a corner site within the dense urban fabric of New York City, the building forcefully disjoins itself from its context with an economy of expression, all the more remarkable for its effectiveness. To its right, where the building would have had to confront the city fabric, the interjection of a tall concrete retaining wall effectively frames and separates the site from its immediate context. Pulling the cubical core of the building away from this wall and leaving a visible void to frame and separate the building from the wall relieves the core of visual attachment to the city fabric from the side. A similar sequence of frames, in turn, divorces the building from the sidewalk. Here, the disjoining frames are a low retaining wall and a deep moat. The moat whose perceptual depth is made manifold by the weight of the cascading facade on top is as effective in disjoining and placing the museum at a distance from its context as the monumental sequence of the island and the plazas in Berlin or the prolonged sequence of the parkway and the hill in Philadelphia.
- At Whitney, the journey of disjointment begins at the retaining wall that literally holds the sidewalk back to form the first threshold. Behind it is the canopied gateway that is carefully divorced and slightly set back from the retaining wall. The divorce is essential to the sequential

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layering of thresholds on what is meant to be perceived as a journey out to an *other* space. The gateway, in its literality, merely underscores the message, while the canopy's shape and weight add to the momentum of the movement through the gate. With the weight of the building cascading down overhead, urging one's movement forward, the journey past the gate continues precariously over the moat on the ensuing drawbridge and across the translucent glass curtain wall in front, i.e., the Whitney Museum's equivalent of the columnar screen in Altes Museum. The drawbridge eventually lands at some distance past the glass wall at the lobby platform and from there one must cross the vertical threshold of the elevators that lead to the gallery floors, now worlds apart from the point of departure.

- Another vivid example of the logic of spacing at work in the fabrication of the art museum are the corrective renovations and additions to the Louvre palace (I.M. Pei, 1989) where our museum history begun. The changes, in effect, have belatedly turned the Louvre that was not designed as a museum into a proper museum. Lacking at the Louvre were the requisite spacing and the ensuing journey out. Although clearly defined and well marked off from the city, the Louvre was a palatial realm to be penetrated rather than journeyed to. The alterations that remedied the problem are as telling as they are compelling. The least conspicuous change, that is all the more effective for it, is the alteration to the exterior walls of the palace. Through its exterior walls and monumental doorways and portals, one can no longer enter the palace, because they have been sealed off and turned into an impenetrable limit that inconsolably separates the worlds instituted on its sides. To reach the world within the impenetrable shell of the old palace, one must now make one's way to and through the forecourt, to the pyramidal glass entry in the middle that marks the nexus point of the world below the ground plane and the one above. The ritual of disjointment and the journey out continues through the pyramidal glass, past the imposing threshold of the ground plane, down twisting stairs beneath the court to the Louvre's equivalent of the rotunda at Altes Museum and from there through a sequence of mediating thresholds up into the meandering maze of the gallery spaces.<sup>26</sup>
- Much as compliance with the museum's ground rules is expected, deviations from the norm are severely criticized and condemned. The failures are, in this respect, as instructive as the success stories. Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum (New York, 1959) [Fig. 9]

is a case in point. Criticized from inception as an unsuitable *place* for art, Guggenheim fails on crucial counts. It fails to distance itself from the fabric of the city and thereafter it fails to simulate the experience of an other, distinct, and separate world for art behind its facade.

- Although, as Ada Louis Huxtable notes, Guggenheim is successful in divorcing itself from its context by the novelty of form, what it lacks as an art museum is the requisite distance and the ritual disjointment from that context. The unceremonious entry sequence is abrupt and fails to simulate the requisite departure across sequentially layered thresholds to an *other* space. In compensation for the missing distance, Guggenheim's critics wished it had been moved "out of the city," or "relocated" across the street in central park where the Metropolitan museum is located at a visible distance from the city fabric.<sup>27</sup>
- The lack of sufficient separation in Guggenheim has had no simple solution and it bears on the interior. "Once inside," Huxtable tells us, "you understand an art critic's anger. The interior is not really a museum, but a place for merchandising art, and it oversells".<sup>28</sup>
- The elements here are familiar. Their juxtaposition is not. As opposed to being sequentially layered into a chain of discreet experiences, they form a single or "total space." Art here is placed not past the nexus point, but at the nexus point. "Unlike the labyrinth common to many temporary shows, the path (ramp) exists in a comprehensible total space. Although the spectator continually moves he is never lost and can see where he has been and where he is going. The entire area has a



9. Frank Lloyd Wright, Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1959 Amir Ameri: On the Artifice of Art

single, unifying character that is never lost sight of."<sup>29</sup> From the "story told in the spiral," according to another

- critic, there is "virtually no escape." Guggenheim is not "really a museum" because in it there is no *other* space, only a "comprehensible" space that one can never leave behind to enter a world proper to art. "Spreading all the merchandise before the eye," Mumford tells us, "is a ruinous one for a museum".<sup>30</sup> This is not because one can see everything in a glance. One cannot. Rather the ruin is brought about by everything being in an inescapable, comprehensible space, where movement produces no alterity.
- Guggenheim is not "really a museum," because in what is "really a museum," there is a sequential unfolding of discrete spaces through which one travels as though on a journey through a seemingly infinite land. Where there is no sense of continuity, when the space is comprehensible and total, there is a crisis and the space ceases to be "really a museum," e.g., Guggenheim Museum. The ideal art museum is a space whose boundaries escape comprehension. It is, to a measure, an unfamiliar, ulterior space to the extent that in it one stands the chance of getting lost. It is a space that leaves something to incomprehension. It is a place where everyone is, by design, a tourist away from home in search of the authentic in an *other* space. Guggenheim does not and is not.

## III.

- Thus far I have tried to point out that there has been a deliberate and persistent logic to the design of the art museum from inception. Between the public and the artwork, the art museum has insinuated, by design, an elaborate and deep threshold that mediates and oversees the passage to and from the seemingly infinite world that it fabricates to contain art and the "real" world from which it is sequestered. This spacing, deliberate as it has been, constitutes the criteria by which the successes and the failures are persistently measured in the critical dialogues that have played an indispensable role in the development of the type. The lingering question is, of course, why the persistent spacing and the disjointment of art over the course of the art museum's short history. What exactly is at stake in the spacing of art?
- Over the course of its history, the relationship of Western culture to painting, alongside writing and other forms of graphic representation, has been, in the least, an ambivalent relationship. Conceived at the advent of an unwanted absence, according to a pervasive myth

that ascribes the invention of painting to the Corinthian youth, Butades,<sup>31</sup> the site of painting from its presumed inception has been the site of a desired presence that it cannot judiciously fill. As such, painting has been the subject of simultaneous condemnation and praise for its ability to duplicate and perpetually conjure an absent or else invisible referent. It has been at once prescribed and proscribed as a mimetic device that substitutes memory for perception. Plato, for instance, Jacques Derrida reminds us, condemned painting as a mimetic art, much as Aristotle interrogated it in the name of mimesis.<sup>32</sup>

"The painter's products," Plato purported, "stand before us as though they were alive, but if you question them,



10. Joseph-Benoît Suvée, Butades or the Origin of Drawing, France, 1791

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they maintain a most majestic silence".33 The painted images are, in other words, neither simply living, nor simply dead. They have the appearance of the living and speak with the voice of death: silence. Painting can bring merely to sight what is rightfully out of sight. It can displace and collapse space. Its space is neither the immediate space of the present nor the distant space of the absent. Painting, in a sense, fits into no space and belongs to no one place. The ambivalence toward painting has as much to do with its irreducibility to presence or absence, life or death, as to the cause of the confoundment: mimesis. Plato, Derrida tells us, "is obliged sometimes to condemn mimesis in itself as a process of duplication, whatever its model might be, and sometimes to disqualify mimesis only in function of the model that is 'imitated,' the mimetic operation in itself remaining neutral, or even advisable. But in both cases, mimesis is lined up alongside truth: either it hinders the unveiling of the thing itself by substituting a copy or double for what is; or else it works in the service of truth through the double's resemblance".34

- The lining up of painting alongside truth was not to change with the transformation of painting into art. The referent merely gave way to a subject that retained all the privileges of the former vis a vis the painted image [Fig. 10]. Whether painting is seen as the representation of an absolute ideal, as it was by the theoreticians of the Renaissance, or as a mode of expression that renders painting in particular and art in general, as Ruskin put it, "nothing but a noble and expressive language, invaluable as the vehicle of thought, but by itself nothing"35 up to and including the conception of painting as the "revelation" of the "concealed truth" of the subject or the "reproduction of a thing's general essence" as Heidegger, for instance, defined it,<sup>36</sup> the priority and radical alterity of what is painted as compared to the painted image has not been a question.
- What "Platonism" which stands "more or less immediately for the whole history of Western philosophy, including the anti-Platonisms that regularly feed into it," Derrida notes, has "decided and maintained" in the face of the confoundment and the displacement that is painting, is "the presumed possibility of a discourse about what is." "That which is, the being-present (the matrix-form of substance, of reality, of the opposition between matter and form, essence and existence, objectivity and subjectivity, etc.) is distinguished from the appearance, the image, the phenomenon, etc., that is from anything that, presenting it *as* being-present, doubles

it, re-presents it, and can therefore replace and de-present it. There is thus the 1 and the 2, the simple and the double. The double comes after the simple; it multiplies it as a follow-up....The image supervenes upon reality, the representation upon the present in presentation, the imitation upon the thing, the imitator upon the imitated. First there is what is 'reality,' the thing itself, in flesh and blood as the phenomenologist say; then there is, imitating these, the painting, the portrait, the zographeme, the inscription or transcription of the thing itself. Discernability, at least numerical discernability, between the imitator and the imitated is what constitutes order. And obviously, according to 'logic' itself, according to a profound synonymy, what is imitated is more real, more essential, more true, etc., than what imitates. It is anterior and superior to it."  $^{\prime\prime\,37}$ 

- "Doubtless," Derrida continues, "this order will appear to be contested, even inverted, in the course of history, and on several occasions. But never have the absolute distinguishability between imitated and imitator, and the anteriority of the first over the second, been displaced by any metaphysical system."<sup>38</sup>
- What "Platonism" has decided about the order of appearance in the world, it has maintained with a host of distinct ritual practices and institutions. Of these, the art museum, invented as it was at a particular point in time, is an indispensable element. The art museum as an institution and a building type, along with the institutions and practices it supplanted, are indispensable to "Platonism" and its "logocentric" determination.
- If the question of art's place and placement has loomed large since the inception of painting and sculpture as art, it is, in no small measure, a reflection of the problematically undifferentiated and undifferentiable space of graphic representation. It is because art has no decidable place in as much as every place assumes boundaries and outer limits, i.e., an outside. Art at once exceeds and defies any sense of place or any act of placement, predicated upon, in the simplest terms, a clear boundary separating two opposite terms, e.g., here and there, inside and outside. Art has no outside, since outside every presumed or presumable place for representation, one finds only more representation.
- To curtail the ever-looming danger of exposure and displacement in the company of art, it is essential to put in place, institutionally and literally, what art defies and denies conceptually: a sense of place. The fabrication of the museum as an *other* space is, persistent, as it has been, a cultural substitute for what is missing

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and missed: an outside to representation. Within the confines of the picture frame provisionally and within the confines of the museum permanently, art assumes an outside. The logic of spacing at work in the making of the museum puts the relationship between art and all that is to escape its grip in the proper cultural perspective.

- From the ever-present picture frame to the cabinet and the museum, the preoccupation with a place for art is primarily a preoccupation with a place from which all that is to escape its "effect" can be safely withdrawn.<sup>39</sup> It is a preoccupation with preserving the presumed alterity of art as measured against the real. Opening up a place for art is tantamount to opening up a place for its presumed other and for otherness as such to representation. At stake is authoritative control over the determined superiority and anteriority of reality over representation, the imitated over the imitator, the original over the copy. At stake in placing art is, in other words, the presumed order of appearance in the world, which is, in a manner, order itself. If our construed cultural reality is to assume the authoritative guise of inevitability and truth, then the decisive exorcise of representation is not a choice that can be readily avoided. If, from the princely and monarchial courts to the public realm authoritative control over representation and its potentially destructive effect is entrusted to the state and delegated to specific institutions, it is precisely because of what is at stake. The institution of the museum is an instituted resistance to representation. No claim to power can go without evidential control over the alterity of representation as measured against the real. To control representation is to control not necessarily what is real, but the possibility of its authoritative being and presence as a non-representational, self-referential entity.
- As an institution and a building type, the museum effectively differentiates the undifferentiated space of graphic representation into two distinct realms separated by an elaborate journey. Between the seemingly infinite world that contains art and the "real" world from which it is sequestered, the museum insinuates an elaborate and deep threshold that mediates and oversees the passage to and from the worlds it fabricates as such. It thereby offers the visitor – by design – a spatial experience that is profoundly alien to art as the space of a non-place. The logic that shapes the museum is fundamentally a totemic logic.<sup>40</sup> Past the careful delineation, separation, and processional transitions that are the hallmarks of a successful museum, art is given to stand in the same

relationship to its presumed other, as inside stands to outside, here to there, and as do all other binary spatial and formal terms that are called on to shape the museum into an *other* space. Should one even wish to conceive of the relationship between art and the world from which it is sequestered, in any terms other than in binary terms, one must confront and contradict the immediate experience of the museum. Much as art resists a sense of place, the museum successfully resists its defiance of a sense of place, to the point of invisibility.

- The exercise the art museum implements architecturally is a two fold practice. On the one hand, the art museum, as an institution and a building type, exiles the inherent representational characteristic of the real in the name of mimesis and art to the museum. In turn, it curtails the inherent reproducibility that is art in the name of authenticity through the exclusion of the mock. In the world outside the museum, the copy may thereby proliferate without undermining the alterity of the real, because its face is turned toward the authentic in that other place where the copy has no place by design. What makes room for the docile cohabitation of the real and the reproduction is the designated and exclusive place for the authentic on the outside. The copy poses no apparent threat so long as it is in reference to another reality, at the end of a journey, in an other place, i.e., so long as its origin is on the outside.<sup>41</sup> The museum is, in other words, the indispensable reserve to the economy that regulates the widespread and free circulation of images outside the museum.
- The sequestering, and placement of the authentic in an other world is not, of course, a practice that is unique to the art museum. The entire tourist industry with which the museum has a historic affinity is predicated on the assumption, MacCannell points out, that the authentic is outside the sphere of everyday life.<sup>42</sup> An extent of tourism is the rite of locating the authentic on the outside, be this measured in spatial or temporal terms. Authenticity is, in a sense, intimately tied to distance. The authentic mandates a journey. It is, to an extent, everything that is inside from the vantage point of the tourist visiting from the outside. The authentic is, in this context, inside a place to which the visitor does not belong by design and by force of label: a visitor.<sup>43</sup>
- Whereas from the outside the museum as a site for tourism provides the assurance of a place and a receptacle into which we may, in a manner, project our trepidations about language and representations, from the inside it is the place where we face them only to locate repre-

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sentation within the bounds of its culturally designated place. The place varies, but the placement does not. The virtual debate over the rite of visitation to the museum between Adorno and Valéry is a case in point.

- Confessing to be "not over fond of museums," Valéry begins his reflections on the museum by characteristically marking the point of transition from the world outside into the world inside. The memory of the former would remain with him throughout the visit as a point of contrast and a place of conceptual refuge. He marks the borderline by making note of the hand that relieves him of his stick and the notice that forbids him to smoke at the entrance. "Chilled at once by this act of authority and by the sense of constraint," he nevertheless makes his way toward "things of beauty" only to enter a place where, as he puts it, "cold confusion reigns" and the "total impression is something quite intolerable." Moving from the sculpture gallery to the painting gallery changes nothing. As "a strangely organized disorder opens up before" him "in silence," Valéry tells us, "I am smitten with a sacred horror. My pace grows reverent. My voice alters, to a pitch slightly higher than in church, to a tone rather less strong than that of every day. Presently I lose all sense of why I have intruded into this wax-floored solitude, savoring of temple and drawing room, of cemetery and school....did I come for instruction, for my own beguilement, or simply as a duty and out of convention? Or is it perhaps some exercise peculiar to itself ...?"44
- The rite of visitation is indeed an exercise peculiar to itself in as much as it puts the visitor in the grip of language over which he or she has no hold. What Valéry is made to confront at the Louvre is what late nineteenth century museum visitors were designed to confront: a profusion of art works and walls covered with paintings *en tappiserie*. By sheer force of number, the total impression simply exceeds comprehension. "Only an irrational civilization," Valéry protests, "could device such a domain of incoherence. This juxtaposition of dead visions has something insane about it, with each thing jealously competing for the glance that will give it life".<sup>45</sup>
- The works of art call from all directions for Valéry's attention, i.e., for the glance that transforms dead vision into living idea, form into thought, writing into speech. For the generation that conceived Valéry's museum, art was, to use Ruskin's words, "nothing but a noble and expressive language, invaluable as the vehicle of thought, but by itself nothing."<sup>46</sup> Valéry presently finds the mind inadequate to the demands of this language. "The mind," he

tells us, "can neither follow nor perform several distinct operations at once".47 The voices that call from all directions cannot be turned into thoughts in this "domain of incoherence." "All alone against so much art," Valéry finds himself incapable of conceiving each work as an individual expression, i.e., as "rarities whose creators wanted each one to be unique".48 The uniqueness of each expression is lost to the repetition that purportedly "kills" all. The art works are "most inimical to each other when they are most alike." Repetition proves fatal. In defense, Valéry's thoughts take refuge outside the museum in other places and distant civilizations. The uniqueness that he feels lost inside the museum, he re-locates outside it through an act of virtual tourism. "I feel sure," he tells us, "that Egypt, China, Greece, in their wisdom and refinement, never dreamed of this system of putting together works which simply destroy each other".49

The "Modern man", on the other hand, is "impoverished by the sheer excess of his riches".<sup>50</sup> Having located what is lost inside the museum at a safe distance, Valéry conceptualizes the loss itself as an attribute of modernity and its characteristic accumulation of "a necessarily unusable excess of capital." The art works in the museum are conceptualized as excess riches, i.e., images in excess of what is consumable. The slippage between image and thought and the inability of images to do what they are meant to do, i.e., merely and readily transport thought, are thus conceptualized as not endemic to language and the consumption of images, but in excess of it. The slippage is conceptualized as being not permanent, but temporal, and within the bounds of the museum also spatial.

Valéry's reflections on the museum become at this point both comforting and stupefying. The museum, we are told, "exerts a constant pull on everything that men can make....All things end up on the wall or in a glass case".51 Since "our capacity to use" the "ever-increasing resources" of the Modern age is "far from growing with them," the museum's constant pull on all that cannot be consumed is comforting. It responds to "the need to concentrate it all in one place".52 Having collected the excess outside the place of consumption, the collection is, essential as it is, also "stupefying." "However vast the palace, however suitable and wellarranged, we always feel a little lost, a little desolate in its galleries, all alone against so much art. The product of thousands of hours' work consumed in painting and drawing by so many masters, each hour charged with

years of research, experiment, concentration, genius, acts upon our senses and minds in a few minutes!...We cannot stand up to it. So what do we do?"<sup>53</sup>

- Not being able to stand up to the task, not being able to exert a clear hold over language and bridge the gap between form and content, we "grow superficial" or else we "grow erudite." We either acquiesce our inability to control language, resign ourselves to not getting beyond form, and "grow superficial," or we play the language game and *substitute* for what is not adequately and authoritatively expressed. We substitute "theories" for "direct feeling", and "encyclopedic memory" for "marvelous actuality". In either case, the direct and the actual slip away or rather, out.
- The solution to being in the grip of language is, as Valéry sees it, to stagger out of the museum, which he does, taking refuge and solace in the domain of the direct and the actual. The "glorious chaos of the museum" follows him out, however, "and blends with the living activities of the street." It threatens to infect the outside, less Valéry's "uneasiness, groping for its cause" is put to rest. What remains is to explain the cause of the slippage and the "obsessive feeling of confusion" within the bounds of the museum. What remains is to explain away the slippage as being not endemic to language and art, but peculiar to the museum and as such safely contained within its bounds. What remains is to close the doors behind. Hence, once safely outside the museum, "Suddenly I glimpse a vague ray of light. An answer begins to form itself, separating out from my feelings, insisting on expression. Painting and sculpture, says my Demon of Analysis, are both foundlings. Their mother, Architecture, is dead. So long as she lived, she gave them their place, their function and discipline. They had no freedom to stray. They had their exact allotted space and given light, their subjects and their relationship....While Architecture was alive, they knew their function...".54
- What is not had in confrontation with art inside the museum is thus merely the loss of what was readily had in another time and another place. In its place art speaks vividly. The hold that is never had over language is thus localized safely within the bounds of the museum at a distance, there. It is symptomatic of that place and of being out of place.
- If Proust's and in turn Adorno's reactions are any indication, returning art works to their presumed place, e.g., to exhibit paintings in "their original surroundings or in ones similar, in baroque or rococo castles," is even more

distressing than leaving them within the confines of the museum.<sup>55</sup> Both, in fact, advocate leaving art works in the museum, albeit a reformed museum. This is "a museum, where the rooms, in their sober abstinence from all decorative detail, symbolize the inner spaces into which the artist withdraws to create the work".<sup>56</sup> Theirs is a museum, in other words, that returns the art works not to the space of consumption, but further back to the space of creation. Theirs is a display practice that is far more familiar to the twentieth century visitor than Valéry's Louvre. Both practices, however, represent, legitimize, and, to an extent, impose a particular interpretation of art and language in response to one and the same dilemma.

For Adorno, speaking also on Proust's behalf, the work of art is "neither a reflection of the soul nor the embodiment of a Platonic Idea".<sup>57</sup> It is not, as Ruskin had it, a "vehicle of thought." Rather, and this is precisely what Adorno accuses Valéry of not seeing, "even in the very moment of its conception the work confronts its author and its audience as something objective, something which makes demands in terms of its own inner structure and its own logic".58 The work of art is a representation that refers only to itself. To appear as "a 'force field' between subject and object," however, works of art have to be "uprooted from their native soil and have been set out along the path to their own destruction".59 All external references, pressures, and potential distortions, all traces of prior consumption must be stripped from them, if they are to appear as self-referential representations. They have to be estranged from "human ends," allowed to die in the museum, in order to return to "life" by the attentive glance of the visitor "who leaves his naïveté outside along with his cane and his umbrella".60 This is a visitor who does not "stroll through museums letting" him or herself "be delighted here and there".61 Rather, this is a visitor who "picks out two or three paintings, and concentrates on them as fixedly as if they really were idols".<sup>62</sup> However, only some museums at the time were "helpful in this respect".63 There were only some where the rite of resurrection could be performed effectively. These were, common as they are now, museums where the works of art were hung "in discrete separation," completing their cycle of isolation and decontextualization.<sup>64</sup> Valéry's museum was neither conducive to the rite of resurrection, nor was it meant to be. It had its sights on the past, and not the future. Both museums are, however, engrossed by a precarious present.

agree on one thing. For both, the museum withholds death. Valéry likens it to a "cemetery," Adorno to a "mausoleum." For both, the museum marks off and removes from within the order of the living what has to 7. Ibid. be removed by a fatal necessity. This much is vociferously pronounced by both. They part ways locating the life that is presumed absent in the museum. One locates the life of the artwork in the past, the other in the future. One laments its passing and mourns away its felt absence from within the museum, the other celebrates its passing in the hope of resurrecting it. Each responds to a display practice that turns his assumptions about 11. Ibid. the work into an evidential experience of it. One practice induces and reinforces the dream of a consumption

that has been, the other of one perpetually commencing. What neither worldview can consume and digest, however, is what both confront presently.

Despite their considerable differences, Valéry and Adorno

- What both worldviews confine to the museum and what each confronts at the museum is, at the risk of repetition, neither life nor death. The confined defies life, much as it defies death conceived as its absolute other. For this confoundment neither worldview has or could have a place. It erases the very sense of place. If, in turn, both Valéry and Adorno take recourse to supplemental spatial and temporal boundaries, it is only to overcome the confoundment and re-establish order. First, there are the spatial boundaries imposed by the museum to incise the confoundment, then there are the temporal boundaries that serve to deny the confoundment by its conceptual transformation into a life that has been or one that will be. In the meantime, the life that is exorcised from the museum is given to reside safely outside it, in a reality that is thus untouched by the confounding effect of representation. Both operate with assurance of life's safety on the outside from the vantage point of the museum as a mausoleum: the place that keeps death in place, at a safe distance.
- If, as Malraux notes, "all art is a revolt against man's fate," the art museum is a revolt against reality's fate.

## Notes

- Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The* Interpretation of Cultures; Selected Essays (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89-90.
- 2. Ibid.
- 3. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Noonday Press, 1972), 128.
- 4. Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, 89-90.

- Marcel Mauss, A General Theory of Magic (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972), 102.
- Rossana Bossaglia, "Tempo di Musei," *Abitare* (September 1990): 287.
- 8. Michael Brawne, *The New Museum* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1965), 8.
- For a discussion of the Western roots of the museum see: Malraux, *The Voices of Silence* and Bazin, *The Museum Age*.
- 10. Andre Malraux, *The Voices of Silence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 53.
- Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 224.
- 13. Whether they served a religious cult or the cult of remembrance, what had thus far given paintings and statues a place in the world of things, and what had also kept them in that place was their specific cult referent. Once they eschewed their referent, they surrendered their place.
- For a discussion of the subject see: Impey, et. al., The Origins of Museums; Pomian, Collectors and Curiosities; and Weil, A Cabinet of Curiosities.
- 15. See: Bazin, *The Museum Age*, 129 and Impey, et. al., *The Origins of Museums*, 3. Also, it is important to note the Kunstkammer is not the exact equivalent of the gallery as it was often used to designate a specialized version of the Wunderkammer.
- Impey, Oliver, and MacGregor, The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe. (New York: Oxford University, 1985), 1.
- 17. Benjamin, Illuminations, 220.
- For a detailed discussion of the subject see: Jones, Why Fakes Matter.
- 19. Germain Bazin, *The Museum Age* (New York: Universe Books, 1967), 116.
- 20. Ibid.
- 21. See: McClellan, *Inventing the Louve*, 8-9 and Pevsner, *A History of Building Types*, 118.
- Nikolas Pevsner, A History of Building Types (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 121.
- 23. lbid., 126.
- 24. lbid., 128.
- 25. Ibid.
- 26. One could site numerous other examples in which the logic of spacing finds a new and different expres-

sion pending the unique circumstances of the context. Among the more celebrated recent examples one that readily comes to mind is Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, Germany (James Stirling, 1984) with its elaborate entry sequence of stairs and ramps that lead up the slopes over which the museum is carefully lifted. (For a detailed description of the museum see: Davey, Stuttgart, 38-46.) Another example is the High Museum of Art in Atlanta (Richard Meier, 1981) where the journey of disjointment follows the literal path of a long, ceremonial ramp that leads up on a diagonal axis to a terrace on the second floor of the building and from there on a twisting and meandering path through the entrance lobby to the Atlanta's equivalent of the Berlin rotunda. We find an even more exaggerated expression of the Atlanta journey in the recent Getty Museum in Los Angeles (Richard Meier, 1997) where to reach the museum that is located far away from the city, on top of a hill, the visitor must traverse the distance from the bottom to the top of the hill on a monorail train.

- 27. Ada Louise Huxtable, "That Museum: Wright or Wrong?," *New York Times Magazine* (25 October 1959): 16.
- 28. Ibid., 336.
- 29. Sherman E. Lee, *On Understanding Art Museums*. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 50.
- Lewis Mumford, "What Wright Hath Wrought," *The New Yorker* (5 December 1959): 115.
- 31. See: Rosenblum, The Origin of Painting, 39.
- 32. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981).
- 33. Ibid., 136.
- 34. lbid., 187.
- 35. John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (New York: Wiley and Halsted, 1843), 8.
- 36. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 37.
- 37. Derrida, Dissemination, 191.
- 38. Ibid., 192.
- 39. The customary and celebrated view out from the museum, the one that transforms the world outside into a picture, is the consummation of this withdrawal.
- 40. See: Lévi-Strauss, Totemism.
- 41. The allocation of an exclusive place to the authentic, in effect displaces the copy from every place. It dispossesses the copy of a place because inside the museum it has no place and outside it, it is out of place: an outsider. In the company of the real, the copy is an import, i.e., a substitute for what is at a safe distance elsewhere.

- 42. See: MacCannell, *The Tourist*, 3-14, 121-158; Culler, *Framing the Sign*; and Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 11-13.
- 43. The fake, or the tourist trap is often what is not part of the inside from the vantage point of the tourist on the outside. It is staged from where the tourist stands, i.e., not there, but here.

 Paul Valéry, The Problem with Museum, Collected Works. vol. 11. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), 203.

- 45. Ibid.
- 46. Ruskin, Modern Painters, 8.
- 47. Valéry, The Problem with Museum, 204.
- 48, Ibid.
- 49. Ibid.
- 50. Ibid.
- 51. lbid., 204-5.
- 52. lbid.
- 53. lbid., 205.
- 54. Ibid., 206.
- 55. Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms.* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 175.
- 56. lbid., 179.
- 57. lbid., 184.
- 58. lbid.
- 59. lbid., 185.
- 60. Ibid.
- 61. Ibid.
- 62. Ibid.
- 63. Ibid.
- 64. Ibid.

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Figure 2 - Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art collection.

Figure 3 - Hermann G. Pundt, Schinkel's Berlin; a Study in Environmental Planning. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1972.

Figure 4 - Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Collection of Architectural Designs. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1989.

Figure 5 - Hermann G. Pundt, Schinkel's Berlin; a Study in Environmental Planning. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1972.

Figure 6 - Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Collection of Architectural Designs. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1989.

Figure 7 - United States Geological Survey

Figure 8 - Author

Figure 9 - Author

Figure 10 - Groeninge Museum collection, Bruges, Netherlands.

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