The Inhibitionary Complex:

Power Structures within the Art Museum

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B.A. 1996

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Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and Complementary Studies in candidancy for the degree of Bachelor of History of Art with Fine Art (Painting)

1996

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Introduction

Every museum is perforce a political institution.
(Hans Haacke in Wallis, p.66).

A recent project has been launched to transform the former Bankside power station, in London, into the new Tate Gallery of Modern Art (see plate I). Although this constitutes a considerable expansion within the art world, and there is great anticipation of such a "proper venue for the understanding of many of the major cultural and political events`of the twentieth century: a cultural, educational, and democratic forum for art,"(The Independent, 1/11/95, p.19), there is still an excitement that is largely based on the economic factors surrounding the museum's development: "Major city art galleries have become, without doubt, a vital and buzzing junction box on the leisure and tourist circuit,"(The Independent, 2/8/95, section II p.10), and therefore it is not surprising that it is the externalities, the ability to generate income, which makes the museum a so-called "necessity,"(The Independent, 1/11/95, p.19).

In the world table of premier cities, there is much competition for reputations that are attractive to financial institutions and big businesses, and through enhancing the cultural life of a city, signs of prosperity are encouraged. The creation of a new cultural quarter at Bankside is one such project, and there is a distinct risk that the more essential debate, of how an art museum should function, its right to the responsibility of positioning and negotiating art within a cultural, social and political context, shall be eclipsed by economic triumphalism.

The discussion of such institutions uses the term 'museum' generically and focuses particularly on those institutions concerned with the fine and decorative arts, and also attempts to demonstrate the "blurring of distinctions

and the uncertainty of boundaries across a range of institutions devoted to what is now loosely termed 'material culture," (Pointon p.3). As a site of access, privilege, success, power, and exclusion, the museum can be broadly discussed in terms of the loss of primacy that art objects experience when removed from their site of production. It is on these terms that art experiences restraint within the museum space. Advocates of art museums frequently frame their discussions around one of two perspectives, (Duncan, p.4); in both the educational model, and the aesthetic model[1] the museum is the provider of a sanctuary for the contemplation of displayed works. Contrary to being an open opportunity for the general public to come into contact with art, the museum institution serves to administer and impose upon such contact. The space that has been formed within the public art museum is akin to the power structure of the state from which it purports to provide a sanctuary.

By examining the relationship between the museum institution and the public that it has historically addressed, issues of rightful authority and impartiality on questions of value are raised. The role of the art museum in the formation and regulation of the cultural sphere of civil society inevitably undermines any sense of there being an 'objective directorship' involved in museum policy. Its participation in the ideological construction within society establishes the art musem within a system of power.

As the artist Lawrence Weiner has written, "Artists are but one vocational unit within a sociological system,"(Harrison & Wood [eds], p.869). If the art museum represents the official fulcrum of artists' activity within society, then it must be asked whether the museum's purpose has been to inhibit rather than exhibit their work. The museum, whilst symbolising a place for art that is perhaps[2] an independent stronghold for cultured reflection and consideration, nonetheless is bound within a system of civic amenities, which historically could be termed as state apparatuses.

As art has this capacity to become both commercial and political, often regardless of its consent, the paradigm into which the museum sets such art

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1 i.e. art's more unique, transcendental qualities, for example, Kenneth Clarke's concept of the art museum in his 1970's BBC television series"Civilisation", as a place for spiritual transformation.

2 This allusion to independence is suggested in much museum architecture; the Bankside power station itself sports a notably fascist-style facade.

must be considered. Cultural institutions, including those of art, cannot be considered in isolation, and it is the museum's historical links within a broader social and political project that have helped shape the nature of its operations. Alongside its functions of preservation and collection, which themselves are embroiled within politics of categorization and status, its part in commercial and cultural regulation, the museum becomes less of an asylum of material and semantic protection, but rather a site of transformation where artworks become witness to the spectacle of the museum.

The historical development of the museum institution has seen its role shift from one of public instruction, centered around its expansion during the nineteenth century, to that of commercial viability in an era of heightened consumerism and a diminished public sector. The consequence of this allignment of culture and commerce has inevitably contorted the display of art into the semblance of a marketable commodity. This has created its own form of enclosure and limitation, with emphasis on spectacle, celebrity, and what Robert Hughes has called the "masterpiece-and-treasure syndrome"(Hughes, p.6).

By looking more closely at the mechanisms and internal organization which
sets into play this transformation of artwork, the museum's maintenance of its own position of privilege and authority can be demonstrated, thereby undermining its aspiration towards 'universality.' The museum makes its mark by imposing a frame around that which it exhibits. Through the exclusion of many works and the amalgamation of a chosen few, such exhibitionary apparatus effectively dominates and formulates the way in which art exists within official culture. Most museums are still structured according to late nineteenth century ideals of rigid taxonomies and classification, where display is laid out in a linear way that implies a unified perspective which is consistent, comprehensive, and complete.

The prevailant ideology of the society inevitably effects the functioning of the public art museum. The rhetoric of official or dominant culture, as perpetuated by museum galleries, is neither rigid nor unnassailable, and as a consequence the growth of consumer society, and the depletion of the public sector and welfare state, has presented a powerful challenge to the museum

institution's ability to present art in an unfettered frame of reference.

This hinderance has caused intellectual ideas to shift towards a more complex understanding of meaning and interpretation within the museum space. Contemporary perspectives no longer posits the viewer as a consumer of an art product, that is negotiated and compromised within the narratives and fictions of museum display. The viewer, rather, partakes in a hermeneutical paradigm that considers both location and meaning to be embroiled within the museum's space and history.

The work of a few art museum curators, such as Declan McGonagle at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, and Nicholas Serota at the Tate Gallery, has challenged the conventions, for example by regularly rotating the museum's permanent collection, and arriving at surprising juxtapositions in their re-hangings. The effect upon the museum's display, however, merely constitutes a shift from an imposition of canonical art history, to that of personal signature. The resulting personality cults that surround 'creative curators' such as Serota and McGonagle only serve to further problematize the museum space.

From the perspective of working artists, and indeed artists who can now only live on within their work, the validity and legitimation of the museum location has long been in question, and their ideas and criticism on the subject are frequently as enlightening as those of writers, theorists and museologists. Artistic practice throughout the twentieth century has thoroughly considered the frames of reference within which art has evolved. The museum parodies of Marcel Broodthaers reveals the archetypal hostility between the artist and the institution, which questions the legitimacy of the museum space. The problem facing such artists now is how to sustain a balanced awareness of the museum's frames of reference within their work, and a recent exhibition "Guilt by Association," held at the Irish Museum of Modern Art demonstrates one such possibility. The blend of resistance to, and complicity with, the institutional placement of art informs the 'exhibitionary readiness' of artists, who shall be discussed the final chapter.

Chapter One: The Broader Complex

> Objectivity is a very important position that a museum always has, but a gallery never can obtain. (Mary Boone, quoted in Nairne, p.64)

Within a public art museum's galleries, an array of objects are displayed within its permanent collection and temporary exhibitions; nonetheless, the consistent and continuous impression of such a space must inevitably be one of being inside a singular and centrally administered institution. Considering that displayed works often derive from disparate and various contexts, then among the art museum's primary accomplishments must be its adherence to a unified and linear voice within its displays. It is perhaps this consistency that conjures the "objective position," which gallery owners such as Mary Boone depend upon for the well-being of their industry. If the position which the art museum occupies is a subjective one, it must then be asked where the museum's allegiances lie. By understanding the museum's change within its social function, the logic of museum display itself becomes apparent. Since the art museum's public inception during the nineteenth century, its development from a position of public instruction to that of consumer-based market expansion during the last decade has informed its systems of display.

The following verse, written by Robert Rauschenberg in 1970, outlines a popular view of how the art museum relates to the public;

> Treasuring the conscience of man
> Masterworks collected, protected and
> celebrated commonly. Timeless in
> concept the museum amasses to
> concertsise a moment of pride
> serving to defend the dreams and
> ideals , apolitically of mankind
> aware and responsive to the

changes, needs and complexities
of current life while keeping
history and love alive.
(quoted in Crimp, 1985, p. 53-4)

Composed for the Metropolitan Museum's Centennial Certifcate, this verse serves only to confirm the sediment of popular opinion that regards the art museum as a benevolent institution that is outside of politics. That the museum is "celebrated commonly" seems as incredulous as the claim that it is "timeless in concept." In reality, the concept of the museum has been an evolving entity throughout the last two centuries, and is in an increasingly contentious state of flux. The very nature of the museum as a repository for objects of value, visual interest and therefore knowledge makes it a vital institution in the generation of social ideas. The development of the museum's display has, however, been based on taste as much as it has on heritage.

Museums were originally established around private collections, (Schuster 1995 p.137), and access was restricted to an elite audience.[3] Works of art which were previously secreted in the studiolo of princes or enjoyed by the aristocracy in the cabinets des curieux were only made available to the general public in the nineteenth century, and as members of a sovereign state, the presence of such a public became essential to witness such a display of power (Bennett, p.59). Even at the beginning of the nineteenth century, individuals who wished to visit the British Museum, for example, acknowledged as one of the first public museums (Bennett, p.70), were obliged to present their credentials to the institution before being admitted, and sometimes even then only after a wait of months. As Ward indicates in his discussion of the history of the Louvre in Paris, the public art museum institution was also born in reaction to this private realm, into a power struggle between democracy and monarchy:

> In the history of the public art museum ... contestation is evident from the start....The museum was one of the institutions embodying a form of publicity that functioned to challenge the "representative" publicity of Royal collections (in order to realize a conception of publicness opposed to the secret politics of absolutism) (Ward, p. 76)

Thus the art museum, even in its origins, was deliberately engaged in an

3 The development of museums in the USA was the exact opposite of that in Europe; i.e. public museums were established many years before the great private collections of Barr etc.were formed.

ideological change that was part of a wider political movement, in this case the validation of a "new, bourgeois subject of reason" (Ward, p.73).

Tony Bennett has nonetheless written that "come the revolution, it seems unlikely that it will occur to anyone to storm the British Museum,"(Bennett, p. 69). This is perhaps as much to do with the museum-gallery's affiliation to the world of academia as it is to its contemporary role in leisure and tourism. However, this only ignores the museum institution's role in the power structure of society, through its facilitation of rational-critical debate. In orchestrating through art criticism the lay judgement of art, the art museum effectively organised the experience of art, placing the institution in a position of considerable influence.

State controlled museums, therefore, play a sizeable part in the formation of a public art, and subsequently in the generation of civic and national identity. That this is a political standpoint of the museum is evident in its original conception: the early art museum was part of a project of self-representation and self-authorization, where the "self" is itself highly problematic. As Ward continues,"The museum purported to represent the new civic body to itself, but this was still a matter, essentially, of the state granting identiy," (Ward, p.77).

The macrosocial aspects of the art museum places art works, often despite the artist's intentions, within a socio-political agenda that has been historically formed. The extent to which art museums became implicated within the state ideology was such that they operated not only as an 'ideological backdrop', but also as an effective means of displaying state power to the public.

If the establishment of the new Tate at Bankside implicates the art museum in London's bid for financial regeneration, then the historical foundation of The Tate Gallery at Millbank suggests a slightly different variety of collusion. Built during the 1890s, its foundations were laid using the bricks of the Millbank Penitentiary which previously stood on the same site. In the early 1890's Millbank was a forgotten and remote corner of the city, and in choosing such a decayed and desolate area as a site for a public art museum the government were most clearly engaging the institution in a project of urban regeneration. Brandon Taylor writes,

> The remote and despoiled character of the Millbank location made the successive designs for the new gallery all the more startling. Through a series of architectural signs they attempted to reclaim territory for 'civilized' London from the ravages of darkness and sin (Taylor,p.13)

The building when finished in 1897, subequently took on the semblance of a'temple' of culture, an enduring image which supplied art with a spiritual value that would "sanctify the urban mass. "(Taylor. p.16), and in general, the museum became a metaphor of improvement, encompassing both the illumination of the 'masses', and the definition of Britain's nationhood ("the English public have in the National Gallery and the Tate Gallery an exact counterfeit to the Louvre and the Luxembourg in Paris" wrote The Sunday Times Short Guide of 1897 quoted in Taylor, p.25)

The concept which juxtaposes the gallery and the penitentiary suggests a relationship discussed by Tony Bennett [4] in "The Birth of the Museum." During times of peace in the eighteenth century, state power was displayed through the spectacle of corporal punishment. The scaffold and the body of the condemned eventually came to be withdrawn from the public gaze as the use of imprisonment, though less spectacular, proved itself a more rational form of punishment. Thus a need for a disciplinary function within the public sphere meant that, while society's undesirables were being subjected to surveillence and incarceration, an exhibitionary complex was developed along the lines of an inverted prisonhouse.

Instead of confinement, objects were displayed in a progressively more open and public arena, "where through the representations to which they were subjected, they formed vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power throughout society,"(Bennett, p.124). In its origins, the art museum conspired symbolically with the prison house in a symbiosis of state control: "Where rhetoric failed, punishment began,"(Bennett, p.88). The power of the art museum, through the representation of objects of value, is to reproduce the structures of belief which inform social identities.

The capacity to yield such power was not ignored by the state authorities

[4] with reference to Michel Foucault's "Discipline and Punish."

and, during the nineteenth century, the museum came of age as a widely distributed civic institution. During the nineteenth century, "the closed walls...should not blind us to the fact that they progressively opened their doors to permit free access to the population at large, (Bennet, p.93).

In Britain alone in the latter half of the century the number of museums quadrupled, (Bennett, p. 82), and the museum can be seen to have developed in tandem with the growth in urban population. That the public museums were engaged in a project that extended far beyond the relatively innocuous job of selecting, protecting and exhibiting art is clearly evident during this period. Following the opening of the South Kensington Museum in 1857, the institutional policy specifically addressed the working classes. By extending opening hours and easing the admissions policy, the museum attracted over fifteen million visitors in the following fifteen years. By permitting evening opening, the museum, administered under the auspices of the Board of Education, proved itself as an effective instrument of public instruction. At a time when the urban population was transforming the shape of society, museums played a valuable role in the formation of a rational public culture.

As a form of ideological apparatus, then, museums enjoyed a high degree of public exposure.[5] Such sites provided an ideological backdrop for the modern state, that was a deep and continuous form of rhetoric and instruction to the state's citizenry. The exchange of both staff and exhibitions between museums and exhibitions helped to strengthen the allure to the public and allowed the institutional axis a broader distribution, thereby extending the state's power, (Bennett, p.83).

Iain Chambers has argued that in the late nineteenth century, working- and middle class cultures became sharply distinct as "urban commercial popular culture developed beyond the moral economy of religion and respectability" (Bennet p.82). As a consequence, Chambers argues, "official culture was publicly limited to the rhetoric of monuments in the centre of town: the university, the museum, the theatre, the concert hall, otherwise it was reserved for the 'private' space of the Victorian residence," (Bennett, p.82). The museum, therefore, became heavily enmeshed in the interface between the government

[5] In 1926 the Empire Exhibition at Wembley attracted over twenty-seven million viewers, (Bennett, p.86).

and the public.

In this respect, the art museum can be viewed as being successful in pursuing its nineteenth century prerogative of exposing to the public its wares. The museum-gallery conspired to allow visitors to fall under the gaze of each other as much as the exhibits themselves:

> The museum.... aimed not at the sequestration of populations but, precisely, at the mixing and intermingling of publics- elite and popular. (Bennett, p.93)

The nature of this "mixing and intermingling" was largely complicitous with the prevalent ideology of the state. As Hans Haacke has written,

> Even though [a museum] may not agree with the system of beliefs dominant at the time, their options not to subscribe to them and instead promote an alternative consciousness are limited. The survival of the institution and personnal careers are often at stake. (quoted in Nairne p.74)

Thus the intentions of any art museum are inevitably confined within a complicity that extends from individuals, to governmental policies and ultimately to other museums both nationally and internationally, that are linked through similar ideals, policies and programmes. Whatever their potential to enlighten and illuminate, art museums work within politicaly and socially structured limits. The museum-going public have therefore experienced the power of the institution's ideological continuity. It is this continuity that means in practise museums influence opinion as much as they accept those opinions established by others[6] . It is also this solidity, and homogeneity that has allowed the nineteenth century museums to serve as an instrument for "the moral and cultural regulation of the working classes" (Bennett, p.82), and means that today's art museums continue to be valued and supported, as "potent engines of ideology,"(Duncan,p.3).

In the late twentieth century, though we have cause to regard the museum as equally powerful in terms of popularity, its contribution to the ideology of the public sphere is much surpassed by the encroachment of film,

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6 Although art museums usually consider education as among their primary responsibilities, their effect extends beyond this; as Hans Haacke writes, "Museums work in the vineyards of consciousness," (in Wallis, p.66).

video and television. Nonetheless, in its own realm of cultural responsiblity and public engagement, museums are in no small way in the business of moulding and channelling consciousness, and their efficacy is assured through their relative popularity.[7] As Robert Hughes has written, the art museum, "has become a low-rating mass medium in its own right," that has, "very largely supplanted the church as the emblematic focus of the American city," (Hughes, p.6).

The internal organization that supports such homogeneity is an area whose investigation requires a shift in vocabulary. The issue of the museum's cultural authority cannot be resolved without a knowledge of its imposition upon the "material culture" (Pointon p.3) which it houses. That the museum's history as an appropriate centre for cultural excellence, and a tool of civic regulation is unjustified can be seen in how the art museum keeps its own house in order.

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[7] In America, for example, more people visit museums than go to football matches, and as recently as fifteen years ago museums such as MOMA in New York were recording annual attendances of nearly five million people (Hughes, p.6).

Chapter Two: House and Occupants

> [An art gallery] is as preposterous as would be a concert in which one listened to a programe of ill-assorted pieces following in unbroken succession. (Malraux, quoted in Hudson, p.13)

The model of the museum structure employed so far has relied largely on its extrinsic connections, where the public is witness to the spectacle of the museum's display, and comment on artworks and artists has been conspicuously absent. While the museum is involved in addressing the public consciousness in relation to the state, with a condition of permanence and stability, there is also the process of collecting and ordering to be considered. The actual gathering of objects so as to constitute a collection is of course the fundamental basis and a pre-condition of the museum complex. Through this strategy, art museums have ostentatiously cultivated an association with hegemonic culture.

Works in a collection are the subject of a transformation arising from their removal from their original context. The journey of such a work must inevitably begin at the site of its production, and terminate at the site of its reception, and the fundamental purpose of such a journey is to increase that work's viewership. Upon its arrival, however, it becomes implicated within the ideology of the art museum; the role of the art shifts, often involantarily, from one of exhibition to that of collusion. A particularly salient feature of the art museum, in comparison to other types of museum, is its use of objects as a means to maintain its authority. Daniel Sherman writes,

> ...art museums have traditionally been the most wedded to a system of display that priviliges the object and,disregarding evidence to the contrary, takes visual perception to be universal. (Sherman, p.123)

In adopting its responsibility, the art museum implicates the art which it displays in an illusion of adequate representation, that hinges on the idea that

the Western art museum's function is one of universal authority. Museums usually claim to be free of ideological bias, subscribing to the notion of impartial scholarship. In the light of the nonpartisan nature of consciousness, such idealism is a delusion.

James Clifford in his essay "On Collecting Art and Culture" takes up the issue that the collecting in most museums is primarily a Western phenomenon, and one that is in much need of explanation. During the West's early exploration and exploitation of the 'new world' in the eighteenth century, the museum became the medium through which Western society positioned the 'Other.' Historically the Western museum imposed the identity of cultural imperialism upon the cultures which it represented.[8] Clifford describes the rationale behind the West's curating of the world :

> In the West, however, collecting has long been the strategy for the deployment of a possessive self culture, and authenticity. (Clifford p. 218)

Clifford rejects the notion of the Western museum as an impartial 'art terminus': "All such collections embody hierarchies of value, exclusions governed," (Clifford, p.218)[9] . Thus any or work of art, when becoming part of a displayed collection, becomes interred within that narrative of Western identity, as articulated through possessions, and more importantly, is frequently an identity that is prescribed by the system of dominant beliefs.[10] As discussed earlier, the narrative that is implicit within any museum's collection, is complicitous with the ideology of the dominant culture, and so the framework of any such exhibitionary complex already constitutes much of the signification of any exhibition. The museum, in order to strive toward impartiality, must reconcile its own history of collecting.

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8 Hal Foster writes, "By the eighteenth century, with the enlightenment, the West is able to reflect on itself 'as a culture in the universal, and thus all other cultures were entered into the museum as vestiges of its own image,[Baudrillard, The Mirror of Production,pp88-9],' in FRANCIS & HARRIS, p.208.

9 Andre Malraux in his "Museum Without Walls" cites the art museum as an absolute anathema to certain cultures. He writes,
"For an Asiatic, and especially a man of the Far East [sic], artistic contemplation and the picture gallery are incompatible. The practise of confronting works of art with other works of art is an intellectual activity, and diametrically opposed to the mood of relaxation which alone makes contemplation possible."(Malraux p.10) In defining the desire to collect as a non-universal activity, Clifford points to the tradition in Milanesia where an individual accumulates objects not as private goods, but rather to give them away. This does much to undermine the museum as a universal institution

10 As a display of power, the museum has historically been an exemplary arena for the parading of national pride. Susan Pearce writes, "museum collections display the visible proof of our physical mastery over time and space," (Pearce, "On Collecting, " p.191).

This processing that the museum demands reduces the object to one part within an homogeneous series, forcing such a work into a denial of a sense of its origins. In his discussion of narrative and collection, Mike Bal notes how such objects are "radically deprived,"(Bal p.110), of any function they might have outside of belonging to a collection. He quotes Durst:

> If the predominant idea or value for the person possessing it is intrinsic i.e. if is valued primarily for use, or purpose, or aesthetically pleasing quality... it it not a collection. If the predominant value is representative or representational.... then it is the subject of a collection."(Durost 'Childrens Collecting Activity Related to Social Factors 1932 in Bal p.111)

According to Bal the collected status of an object is therefore transfigured from being a definition or articulation into an event in itself. Preservation only serves to transform art into an object of curiosity or luxury, thus depriving it of its "useful relations"(Sherman p.129). The museum space fosters the idea that art exists in special vacuums that are apart from the rest of life, and this separation is an important condition for the empowerment of the art museum that wishes to evaluate and classify art[11]. As Sherman puts it, "art museums constitute the most elaborately articulated instance of decontextualization as a strategy of power," (Sherman, p.123).

That the museum context is any less arbitrary than outside the museum is questionable; art presented within a collection or exhibition becomes the subject of that display's narrative. The narrative, or history, that creates association between objects in a collection or exhibition, relies greatly upon the faith of the society in the authority of the museum. As Douglas Crimp has demonstrated, the museum nonetheless involves itself in a radical re-ordering of that which it houses. That this right to such authority now seems

11 This insight into the art museum is as long established as the institution itself. Quatremere de Quincy, recognized as the leading art theorist of the era of the French revolution, himself argued against recontextualisation; the dismembering of original contexts for him has a seriously detrimental effect upon the understanding of works of art. Specifically, he comments on the French military's removal of works of art from Italy to France. He claims Rome itself to be the only suitable surroundings for art that was produced therein: "immovable in totality," and consisting of, in addition to the actual art, "places, sites, mountains, quarries,ancient roads, the respective positions of ruined cities, geographical relationships, the connections between objects, memories, local traditions, extant uses, parrallels and comparisons that can only be carried out in the country itself,"(quoted in Sherman p.127). The external surroundings, including those of 'secondary' works which inform the work exhibited, are required to be considered if a fully conceived understanding is to be gained

questionable, has been informed by a sense of "crisis in cultural authority," (Owens in Foster[ed] p.57), where the legitimacy of any museum narrative is in question. It is in his essay "On the Museums Ruins" that Crimp scrutinizes the dubiously holistic structure of the museum, describing the museum as a fragile institution whose vested power to approve and validate quality in art and artefacts has been undermined by the broader 'cultural crisis' of the postmodernity , the modern world that Fred Orton refers to as "a space wherein things and meanings disengage," (in Roberts [ed], 1994, p. 56).

In his discussion of Flaubert's novel "Bouvard and Pecuchet", Crimp focuses in on the underlying narratives or 'fictions' that serve to make sense of the museum's artefacts. He pinpoints the narrative of any collection as the most vulnerable aspect of any exhibition:

> Should the fiction disappear, there is nothing left but 'bric-a-brac', a heap of meaningless and valueless fragments, (Eugeniio Donato in Crimp p.49)

A museum's collection takes licence to create an illusion of adequate representation of a world by removing objects from their original specific contexts. Museum display makes such objects 'stand' for some abstract whole. Instead of the work serving as a synechdoche or metonym for its original reality, the representation itself comes under the heterogeneity of the museum. A musuem's promotion of its own coherence and unity must be considered as a given in any such display. The signifying possibilities, therefore are not only reduced, but the context of the collection can cause a form of semiotic interference between exhibits, the exhibition, and the exhibition's visitors. In other words, collecting itself becomes both a medium and a message, (Susan Pearce in Hooper-Greenhill[ed] p.15).

In a work by the English artist Abigail Lane, these issues of categorization and status are explored (see plate II). House and Occupants I & II, (1991) are two photographs that were taken in the V&A's sculpture gallery, where there are on display works from different periods, places, and cultures, and juxtaposed are original carvings with copies and plaster casts. The overall authenticity of the works is enhanced by the commanding aura of the museum space which engulfs all that inhabits the gallery.

Laine's representation of the space seeks out this mystification, by blurring the distinction between visitors, guards and exhibits, or indeed their reflections in the glass display cabinets. By homogenising both the people and things in the scene, Laine engages in her own form of curatorship, by radically re-ordering the subjects in her image.The casual and spontaneous quality of the image implies a whimsical commitment to this new order, and by implication criticizes the contingent nature of the official curatorship. Mounted behind thick panes of glass, the photographs' own presentation refers to the processes taking place in the image. They cite display and presentation as a forceful influence on judgement and understanding, and indicate the intimate level at which art museums inform upon the works shown within their walls.This suggests that for example an artists intention in a work of art is potentially subjugated to the meanings of the collection per se:

> the object is turned away, abducted, from itself, its inherent value, and denuded of its defining function so as to be available for use as a sign. (Bal p.111)

This view of museum language finds useful parallels in the claim by post-structuralist Jacques Derrida that "there is no archimedean point outside language from which the truth claims of a language can be surveyed," (Derrida, in Harrison&Wood [eds], p918). The art museum exhibition must also entail a certain degree of prohibition and even inadequacy. Laine's thick sheets of glass that provide an ungainly protection and also a distraction from the photographs, provide a parallel to the burden of museology. For the art museum to admit that its representations are held within such limitations of language, would amount to a relativisation of its position, thereby decentering its power and authority. Such insights call for a new self-consciousness in the way that cultural wholes and boundaries are constructed and translated within the art museum.

Clifford raises another aspect that makes clear the contingent position of any art museum's collection. Insofar as the criteria that determines value and quality is itself specific, such values change:

> The categories of the beautiful, the cultural and the authentic have changed and are changing. Thus it is important to resist the tendencies

of collections to be self-sufficient. (Clifford, p.229)

It is necessary, therefore, for the art museum to negotiate an awareness of its own processes of production, and its authoritarian imprint upon its exhibits.

How is it that if such conditions are so integral to a museum display, they are not also duly apparent? The explanation seems to hinge upon the metonymic qualities of collected objects. The means by which art museums have historically formed an 'ideological backdrop,' (Bennett p.80), relies upon the power of the fiction behind an exhibition. The conventions of classification and display have strongly moulded the nature of museum space since before the nineteenth century. Two principles that rule the poetics of cultural representation in museums have been thegalleria progressiva, and the period room, both of which obey chronological order as well as adhering to national classification. The order creates a solidity and permanence to the objects displayed and accounts for the "fiction" which Crimp believes to anchor a museum's 'bric-a-brac', and is achieved at the "price of a lack of ideological flexibility,"(Bennett p.86). This order of display is a totalizing form that refers to, "all things and people interacting throughout time,"(Bennett, p.86).

Andre Malraux in his "Museum Without Walls" provides further insight in his commentary upon the museum's ability to trick the visitor into believing in its representational authority :

> But our knowledge covers a wider field than our museums. The visitor to the Louvre knows that it contains no significant representation of either Goya or of the great English artists.... at a time when the artistic exploration of the world is in active progress, the assemblage of so many masterpieces - from which ' nevertheless, there are so many missing, conjures in the minds eye all the world's masterpieces. (Malraux p.10)

That art is as much a process as it is an object, and the extent of a museum's exclusive is considerable, Malraux raises issues that are all too frequently ignored by art museums. It is naturally of great difficulty to represent the idea of art as a process through the structure of the object collection, but it is equally true that the amassing of artefacts within the museum is also a greatly impeded process. As Malraux suggests, "Napolean's victories did not enable him to bring the Sistine to the Louvre,"(Malraux, p.11).

That the art museum experiences vast limitations in what it can collect is more relevant now than ever; as the art market pushes prices beyond the range of most public institutions, the art museum increasingly finds itself in a position of compromise. As Nicholas Serota has recently said of the Tate Gallery, "We can no longer collect comprehensively,"(Serota, p.46).

Thus the collection as articulated through the museum is seen to be embroiled in a specifically Western partialty that informs any art museum display. When amassed within the museum walls, the narratives that serve to make sense of the objects therein are often a contingent "bric-a-brac" which ignore the meanings that are site-specific. The museum's air of comprehensive authority, and its deceptive sense of self sufficiency should have more recognition; its short-comings should not be conealed.

Chapter Three : The Art of Good Business

> We live in era of priorities, not ideals. (Justin Lewis, p. 135)

> The god that [art] now serves is the god that dominates the culture, which is the god of commodity, of money.[Art] is already in service - in fact it is in yoke - to the commodity-museum-gallery ethos, behind which is our consummerism god - the bottom line god. (James Hillman in Gablik, p.200)

The provision of a forum for the understanding of the cultural and political events of our time is one of unending controversy. The consequence of the alliance of the museum with consumerism is that alongside pressures on the ideal of impartiality, the need to contort artworks into a marketable commodity suitable for mass consumption has created a duplicity with which art must often comply . Rather than removing art from the confusion of contemporary life that limits its potential, the recently commercialized zone of the art museum proves no escape from such hinderance. The development of a consumerist culture that has taken place in Western society during the twentieth century has duly been reflected in the workings of the art museum. As Justin Lewis has quoted:

> What was once thought of as the ideological superstructure has now become a significant part of the economic base (Mulgan and Warpole ' in Lewis, p.135)

This paradigm has altered the art museum's relationship to its public. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the public has generally accrued an increasing amount of spending power, and since the nineteeth century, personnal incomes have increased seven-fold, (Benson, p. 12). This in itself has generated a new context in which the museum becomes less of a masterly institution, a patron of instruction, and tends now more towards that of a tertiary industry, where visitor's money becomes the vital life-blood of the

museum infrastructure.

Most obviously is the advent of admission charges on what were previously free institutions. For the majority of museums and certain shows in art museums, this contributes to the crucial criteria of its function: economic viability. Other signs of change are the introduction of merchandising outlets within the museum complex. Selling goods that frequently sport reproductions of art on exhibition in the museum, on mugs, pens, tee-shirts and inflatable toys for example, such shops flaunt that which the museum supposedly protects. Such outlets represent an expansion on the more usual souvenir shop and cafe.[12]

As Brian Wallis has written, "one of the most emulated and symbolically significant innovations of...the Metropolitan Museum of Art was [the] introduction of large banners, hanging on the facade of the museum," (Wallis p. 51). Designed in the early seventies to advertise temporary exhibitions, such banners mark the art museum's subscription to "mass spectacle, entertainment, and consumerism,"(Wallis, p.51). As such, they reflect a social value that can be defined in terms of purchasing power and material possessions. Society is now one in which, "there is a desire above all for that which is new, modern, exciting and fashionable," (Benson, p.4).

The tension that persists between commercialism and an unfettered discursive space came to recent attention in the example of the National Gallery of Scotland's exhibiting of the art 'masterpiece,' Antonio Canova's The Three Graces of 1817 (see plate III). The nineteenth century statue's value was the focal point of much media attention when it was nearly sold off to the Jean Paul Getty II Museum in California, thus constituting a great loss to the nation's heritage. A substantial sum of taxpayers money was used to save the statue from leaving the country and the media furore which followed gave The Three Graces a notoriety reserved only for the most prestigious of national treasures (a contentious status for such a statue.) It became a front page colour photograph in The Independant, (9/8/95), and The Scotsman Magazine, (9/8/95) after its

12 In the UK, that the institutions are now heavily subjected to the prevailing economic conditions was made clear by the ex-director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, who said that the V&A "could be the Laura Ashley of the nineties" (Sir Robert Strong, quoted in Hewison, p. 162).

unveiling in Edinburgh.The National Gallery Of Scotland's publicity generated not only new levels of prestige and institutional pride, but also boosted gallery attendance. The statue took on the role of more a tourist attraction than a museum gallery exhibit.

Indeed the banners that perfunctorily flew outside the main portico entrance, draped between its pillars , gave the entire building an altogether new identity: "The Three Graces". They are emblematic of the combination of the populism of mass culture, and the elitism of the institution's exhibits. The large banners that hang from the front facade of the building come to signify the alliance of the art museum with the strategies of "spectacle, entertainment, and consumerism,"(Wallis, p.51). It balances the consideration of the artworks(an essentially minority and elitist activity) with its primary purpose of mounting such an exhibition - namely the generation of money. The Three Graces exhibition is typical of a recent genre of art museum presentation that aims for "maximum coverage and maximum publicity to generate maximum attendance,"(West p.75).

Consumer choice, with its implicit principle of pleasure and enjoyment, has informed the logic of such museum display. In Hewison's discussion of the ultimate hybrid of business acumen and museology, i.e. a museum that has no collection, the heritage centre, he comments,

> here the original purpose of having a museum, which was to preserve and interpret a significant number of objects has been almost entirely displaced by the desire to give the visitor some kind of more or less pleasureable 'experience' (Hewison p.166)

A similar goal is shared by the art museum's strategy of the blockbuster show, which also aims to provide pleasure to a mass viewership. If, as Hewison suggests, that official interpretation of art and artefacts has been subsumed by a pleasure principle, then it is clear how much cultural practice, the rational-critical debate that feeds the public sphere, risks becoming contingent within a commercial system.

In the instance of the National Gallery's promotion this resulted in a singular glorification of the statue that seemed to preclude any of curatorial

consideration of its gallery surroundings of paintings. The three naked female forms were framed unlike any other exhibit in the museum by a constantly renewed circle of admiring visitors. The hype and celebrity surrounding the exhibit eclipsed the remaining exhibits. Arguably, such populism eclipses those values which are not reducible by tangible monetary terms - namely scholarship, conservation and the sense of identity (which was originally threatened by the statue's possible departure). If scholarship is taken to mean the disinterested study of historical material, preserved by previous generations,then it is through this that a sense of present identity is negotiated. Personal, local, regional, and national all pertain to a location in history, and the connection between these two elements is subjected to a transformation through such commercial populism. As such the example of "The Three Graces" is typical of the art museum's 'blockbuster' strategy in a consumerist era.

In the pursuit of providing "an elite experience for everyone," (Zolberg, p.49), it is feared that in losing its position as a serious institution, the art museum will also lose its standards in governing the selection of artworks, (Hewison, p.63). When Hewison writes,"the ideas of education have been supplanted by ideas of consumption," (Hewison, p.166), he is describing an amalgamation of actual goods with knowledge, that does not take into consideration the need for scholarly re-evaluation and discussion of art and ideology as part of a present cultural life. It is when ideas about art become parcelled like a product that they fail to ackowledge the need for critical judgement.

The deceipt that is conferred onto art by the museum institution is that the democratic profile implied in the 'blockbuster's' populist language of hyperbole, sensationalisation and commercialistion, is belied by the mystification that surrounds the exhibits, and effectively conceals the essential fragility of museum narratives. By maintaining the mystique and allure of the 'great artist,' flocking visitors are encouraged to be awed by the overwhelming spectacle conjured within the museum space, that ultimately prevents them from engaging meaningfully with the art on display. Although it pertains to be a mass activity, the 'art blockbuster' in fact alters very little of its conventional methodology, presenting the art "as cyphers which can only be interpreted by

the initiated,"(West, p.75). Even if it is largely perceived as a populist and glamorous event, most who come to it are prevented from participating fully in it. For many, the popularisation of the art museum amounts to little more than a downgrading of both the institution and the audience; the reduction of art to comsumption posits the audience to little more than part of the apparatus, rather than a critically aware participant in the art world.[13]

Although the blockbuster may eschew or deny politics, its stance seems troublingly implicated. Frazer Ward in his discussion of the "haunted museum" posits the blockbuster show as a stategy of power and control, where the "double-coding," (Belchner, p.35), is essentially a form of cultural distribution that allows an elite section of society to sustain its position of privilege. He writes, "In the moment of the blockbuster show, the museum clearly takes its place within an at least partly refeudalized spectacle culture," (Ward, p.79). The exhibiting of artworks under the auspices of the 'populist' art museum redirects the aspirations of that art toward a politicised scenario which reflects damningly on the function of the museum. According to Ward,

> ...the commodofication of the content of culture is central to the shift from an active, educated or trained public to a passive, unenlightened culture-consuming public. It is only this shift into mass culture that gives rise to a degree of refeudalization of the public sphere, so that 'publicity comes to be generated from above.... in order to create an aura of goodwill for certain positions,'[Habermas].(Ward, 79)

The art blockbuster, in contrast to its connotations of popularity, effectively assimilates its democratic function by forcing it to collaborate with the commercialization of art, and subsequently alienates the majority of the population through its elitist-based presentation of the work.

The blockbuster show also implicates art in a political discourse through the open-ended nature which permits its broad appeal. This is evident in accompanying catalogue essays which, as Shearer West indicates, favour an "old fashioned,"(West, p. 85), approach to its scholarship which ignores more recent developments in art criticism, including various feminist, Marxist, and

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13 Aronowitz ascribes to this condition the notion of an unenlightened public, not entirely dissimilar to those targeted by the museums during the nineteenth century: "Critis and artists alike have agreed that the mass audience does not constitute more than a receptacle for the most degraded commodities of the culture industry. The mass audience is marked by the instrumental use of culture as escape rather than as a part of its life, enriching its sensibility and indeed its social existence," (Aronowitz, p.75).

poststructuralist perspectives. It may seem in itself apolitical, but nonetheless such insular discourse only hides the "affiliations that exist between the world of ideas and scholarship on the one hand, and the world of brute politics, corporate and state power, and military force on the other," (Edward Said, in Foster [ed], p.136). This neutral position makes the exhibition all the more compliant with newspapers, for example, whose distinct political orientation often interpret an exhibition in a way that will appeal to the political convictions of their readership. That the nature of mass appeal requires a seemingly neutral political stance does not necessarily indicate that its reception will not be subsumed within competing political discourses, (West, p89). The example of The Three Graces seems symptomatic of the "acknowledged crisis" in values, (Hewison, p.167), in the museum-gallery's function.

The pressures of government agencies and businessmen have forced changes within the museum, where corporate attitudes have become crucial in the annual running of the institution.The election of the Conservative goverment in the 1980s had a noticeable effect on the status of the art museum in the UK, indicating the institution's subservience to the political realities. Late capitalism has at best had a dynamic effect upon the museum, and at worst has been a detrimental catalyst to its declining position of privilege. Robert Hewison, in his essay "Commerce and Culture" fiercely criticizes the state of the contemporary art museum in Britain:

> A combination of mismanagement, economic failure and political manipulation has now thoroughly undermined that principle [of state-funded, publicly owned open access]. The government has deliberately weakened the eleven national`museums for which it is directly responsible by funding them at a level that does not keep up with the rate of inflation. (Hewison, p.164)

The government's purpose has been to privatise the museum institution.[14] Early changes in the museum structure were intended to promote public access as a civic right; the impetus of recent years has been economic. Unlike the

14 The poignancy of the government's position is made clear when in 1989, chosen to mark Museum's year, the UK government effectively reduced the museum's budget by over seven million pounds in real terms (Hewison p.168). In 1974 the then Secretary of State for Education, Mrs. Thatcher stated that "the government require changes to be made" (q. in Hewison p.167). This is a most concrete rejection of the traditional view of the museum as laid down in the British Museum's Act of 1753, where their role was unequivocally a public responsibility.

expansion during the nineteenth century which was one of civic instruction, this contemporary development is along the lines of the tourism and leisure industry, where the logic of the supplier differs greatly from that of the state funded public museum. When categorized as a business, the museum's rationale becomes the increasing of revenue, the minimization of costs, and the provision of a desirable service.

In order to prove that they are serious about surviving, museums have to be run like businesses, (Perreault, p.63). The other main party in the joint ownership of The Three Graces is the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, which in a bid to increase its attendance figures, altered the public perception of its function. During the eighties it held several exhibitions which were quite openly part of the publicity for outside business interests. First came a pre-auction display of Elton John's memorabilia in conjunction with Sotheby's, and then the launch of the V&A/Habitat collection, marketing updated versions of designs in the museum's archive. On the surface, such financial sponsorship seems welcome and beneficial, however with corporate sponsorship, as Hans Haacke has investigated, comes a crippling set of limitations which are imposed upon any sponsored exhibition. It has already been seen in the example of the V&A's relationship withsuch high profile businesses as Habitat, Sotheby's and the Sock Shop, corporate interest can have a questionable degree of influence on the institution's programming. Haacke writes:

> Shows that could promote critical awareness present products of consciousness dialectically and in relation to the social world, or question relations of power have a slim chance of being approved... self-censorship is having a boom. Without exerting any direct pressure, corporations have effectively gained a veto in museums. (in Wallis, p. 72)

The idea of art holding a mirror up to society is seemingly being challenged. Haacke depicts a scenario where, even if museum institutions operated with an impartial 'neutral' agenda, its financial dependency will inevitably reduce that freedom. He continues,

> For it is unthinkable that a corporation would be willing to find a show that does not enhance its image, even if indirectly." (in Wallis, p.72)

As a consequence of this, work by artists which does challenge prevalent consciousness within society becomes marginalised or else excluded altogether from commercialised space of the art museum.

During the eighties, the V&A had to counter one commercial scheme with another in order to survive. Following the introduction of an optional entrance fee in 1985, attendance figures fell by two fifths, the museum felt the need to capture the public eye, and so hired Saatchi and Saatchi[15] to market the museum. As ambiguous as it is, arts marketing essentially has two aims; firstly to maximise the current audience, by making visitors go more often, and secondly to increase the number of people engaged in such cultural consumption. This second strategy is largely an imperative of cultural expansion, which seeks to enhance the institution's allure to a wider population. It is this second, expansive strategy that the V&A adopted. In the nineteenth century this was achieved through the extending of opening hours; in contemporary terms it is done through challenging existing patterns of cultural consumption.

The maleability of the museum's identity became clear in the Saatchi and Saatchi advertisement campaign which included the slogan "An ace cafe with a nice museum attached," (in Hewison, p.169).The advertisments were designed to challenge traditional notions of the V&A, by targeting a young audience with intriguing and surprising images. The accounts director of the campaign claimed that the advertisements attempted to "showcase the objects while simultaneously lampooning snobbish attitudes to art," (quoted in Benjamin, p.11).The stark images commit themselves to notions of leisure and tourism, using an anti-intellectual tone, including "heavy dollops of sexism," (Benjamin p.11): "All right, the chair's a bit weird, but we don't monkey around with our dumplings."

Such shock tactics were criticized for reacting too vehemently against the museum's connotations of being fusty and dry. Benjamin pinpoints the museum's almost embarrassingly opaque role-playing : "The theme, and the

15 Saatchi and Saatchi played a part as the advertising agency for the election campaign of the Conservative government.

tone... is that of a schoolmaster trying to sound hip in front of his pupils," (Benjamin, p.11). The V&A's use of popular advertising demonstrate that financial desperation can set into action a most thorough overhaul of institutional identity, which contradicts its position of transhistorical stability and continuity. Thus the public image and the economic reality of the institution become increasingly unrelated[16], while the museum visitor is left distracted by the blended dichotomy of commerce and culture. Hewison states that the time has come to argue that commerce is not culture, "that you cant get a whole way of life" into "a V&A shopping bag"[17] .

The example of the Victoria and Albert Museum highlights the intensive alteration within such institutions, which now crave the credence of popularity. This is indicative of the museum's true state as being one of flux; as Tony Bennnett has written, "the museum...of course has been constantly subject to demands for reform," (Bennett, p.90). Irrespective of changes within curatorial practice, the externalities of the museum are strongly alligned with the realm of tourism, and as such are almost in opposition to that position of cultural privilege which has been historically held. The museum's transformation from being historically a "huge sarcophagus for imperial plunder," (The Independent , 16/12/95, section II, p.7), into "the Laura Ashley of the 90s,"(Hewison, p.168), seems a feat of flexibility if not deceit.

The marketing strategy of the V&A does succeed in negating for the public eye those functions which are commonly held to be fundamental. Daniel Buren in his essay "Function of the Museum" sets out to map the crux of the museum's workings, and does so using the vocabulary of subjugation. In its key roles of preservation, collection and refuge, the "museum imposes its frame (physical and moral)....[upon] an amalgam of unrelated things,"(Buren, pp. 188-9), Buren's description of the art museum as a careful camouflage, undertaken

16 The reformed veneer of the Victoria and Albert Museum seemed all the more misplaced when, concurrent with the glib marketing, evidence of damage to the museum's scholarship was surfacing - in 1989 the V&A told the Museum's and Galleries Commission that it was "no longer has any expertise in lace of any date or embroidery from 1500 to 1840," (in Hewison, p.169).

17 The detrimental coupling of enterprise and museology has displaced to at least some extent the principles that are even today being re-iterated by curators: 1. free access to collections; 2.total commitment to scholarly traditions; 3. the best possible service to the public, (R. Anderson, Director of the British Museum, in The Times ,2/6/95).

by the "prevalent bourgeois ideology,"(Buren, p. 188), serves here to put into high relief the narcissistic overtones of the Saatchi and Saatchi advertising campaign.

The fraudulence[18] of the advertisements were summed up by Georgina Godfrey, one of the designers whose fashion Design was used in the campaign, who said that "the campaign itself said more about design in 1988 than anything that they [V&A] have got on exhibition," (in Benjamin, p.11). Undeniably the art used in the campaign had a greater degree of integrity ; its complicity with the museum institution was professional and explicit, unlike those works which were displayed inside the museum, which were inescapably implicated in the "careful camouflage" described by Buren:

> A camouflage which has until now made it possible to transform the reality of the world into an image of the world, and History into Nature. (in Hertz [ed], p.193)

Museums under the economic pressures of profit and loss imploy marketing strategies that portray an image which is perhaps only a glamorous and distracting veneer. This is indicative of how the ideal of providing a free discursive space for art and the public has been subsumed by financial priorities which fetter the politics of museum presentation.

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18 the duplicity of the V&A was no more evident than when in 1964 the Public Relations offeicer of the V&A publicly said of the museum curatorsthat, "they either patronise, resent, despise, dislike or even hate the public," (Quoted in Hudson, p.2).

Chapter Four: Guilt By Association

> Artists are expeced to fit into fraudulent categories. Some artists imagine they've got a hold on this apparatus, which in fact has got a hold on them.(Robert Smithson, in Harrison & Wood [eds], p.947)
>
> Whatever their limitations, however large or small... art museum space is space worth fighting for."(Carol Duncan, p.134)

i. Not a Museum of Art

That the credence and authority of the art museum has been debased as an honest enterprise has inspired the emergence of an odd hybrid figure in the artworld. All too aware of the politics of collecting, and the strategies used by art museums to 'engage' the public, artists themselves have attempted to address their own historisization. By collecting and exhibiting their own work, and in making art that has an inherent sense of context-awareness, such artists have generated alternative models to the conventional museum structure, as well as providing ways of working within the museum complex that is duly self-aware. By analysing their art, the analysis of art museums is greatly opened up.

The work of Marcel Broodthaers is characterised by its acute self-consciousness, its deliberate nature serving to de-reify many of the processes of the museum. Four years after deciding to become an artist, at the age of forty, Broodthaers took part in the occupation of the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, and along with students, fellow artists and political activists made a protest against the control over Belgian culture exerted by official institutions. This amounted to a condemnation of such cultural authority and a tendency to

conceive culture only as a form of capitalist consumption. In an open letter addresed "A mes amis", Broodthaers described the occupation:

> A fundamental gesture has been made here that throws a vivid light on culture and on the ambitions of certain people who aspire to control it one way or another: what this means is that culture is an obedient material. (dated Palais des Beaux-Arts 7 June 1968 in Crimp 1980 p.76)

Broodthaers, incensed by the ideological subservience of a museum's collection to an elite minority recognized the inseparability of knowledge from the power relations of politics. Three months later, Broodthaers "officially" opened his own Musee d'Art Moderne at his house/studio on Rue de la Pepiniere in Brussels, and in so doing appropriated the officialdom of a public collection. In his own description of the event he writes:

> I am the director. I dont care. Question? Why do you do it?(in Walker Art Centre, p.25)

In addressing his own reasons for the functioning as director of a mock-collection, Broodthaers suggests a Kantian disinterest in his regard for the collection, thus ridiculing the art museum's illusion of universality.

The museum, whose official title Musee d'Art Moderne, Department des Aigles, Section XIXeme Siecle seems to satirize specificity itself, carried the warning "No people allowed" (open letter 19/9/68 in Crimp 1980 p.77), where in its original French the word carries heavier connotations of the masses, the lower classes. Again Broodthaers emphasises the relationship of the public to the art museum collection, as opposed to the conventional scenario, where the participation of the public is ignored. By removing the public, Broodthaers renders the public collection dysfunctional. In creating an institutional tautology, he turns the gaze upon the museum itself.

The display consisted of empty picture crates onto which were stenciled such typical slogans as "handle with care", and "keep dry", which foregrounded the essential frailty which surrounds the art museum's authority, and implicates the deprived state of any object in such a collection. In addition to forty postcards of nineteenth century French paintings by 'masters' such as Ingres David and Courbet, slide projections of prints by Grandville were

projected and numbers on doors served to designate rooms as galleries. The makeshift feel of the event was enhanced by installing of a ladder which merely leant against a wall.

In its essence, Broodthaers' museum installation relates to the institutional framework surrounding art objects, but there is also an emphasis upon the nineteeth century, pointing to developments in urban society and the art museum, and the processes which kept art at a remove from less rarified environs. Broodthaers adopts this nineteenth century rhetoric of instruction and reduces the stature of the collection to little more than 'bric-a-brac to emphasize the fictions generated within the institution. Using such well orchetsrated non-museological artefacts, Broodthaers demeans the museum and suggests that objects are not so much housed as entombed within such display. In his "Museum Without Walls", Malraux wrote that:

> [The museums] were so important to the artistic life of the nineteenth century and so much a part of of our lives today that we forget that they have imposed... a wholly new attitude toward the work of art. They have tended to estrange the works they bring together from their original functions, and to transform even portraits into 'pictures.' (Malraux p.9)

Broodthaers demonstrates the power of this transformation in his exhibiting of empty crates and postcards. The postcards, works robbed of their authentic aura, no longer succeed as a metonym to the whole of knowledge; instead they focus in on the distance between the site of their production (a commercial printers), and that of the exhibition. As well as openly referring to Malraux's concept of the "museum without walls', into which any photographically reproducible work can be admitted, Broodthaers' postcards also suggest the exclusion of the artist's interests. They recall the words of Sandy Nairne:

> Artists have an unprecedented kind of control over their own production, but most lose it immediately in the post production process,(Nairne p.58).

In estranging the works in their collections, the art museum can equally estrange the producer of that work, and if Malraux's 'super-museum' is seen as the ultimate apotheosis of museology, then seemingly the artist's intention

need not be heeded at all in the promiscuous proliferation of interpretation and meaning that ensues. In Broodthaers' theatrical event, Broodthaers usurped the role of the museum director in order to play but also to assume control of those mechanisms that have traditionally subjugated the artist's position. Hence the choice of his house/studio for the mounting of the event. Not only does Broodthaers deliberately confuse the usually separate sites of production and reception, he also foregrounds his own disempowerment in contrast to the public institution's grandeur. Broodthaers' anti-museum established a radical stance in opposition to the complicity between the artist and the political will of the art museum.

After continuing a series of mock- institutions from 1968 onwards, Broodthaers mounted his Musee d'Art Moderne, Section des Figures in 1971, his most complete collection which scrutinized more closely the systems of classification that formulate art museum collections. Culled from forty-three actual museums, as well as private collections, the exhibition consisted of over three hundred objects that represented eagles. Shown in glass cases, vitrines, hung on the walls or free standing, each exhibit was labelled "This is not work of Art," the antithesis of every "real" museum's display. "The concept of the museum," he wrote , "is based on the identity of the eagle as an idea with art as an idea,"(quoted in Crimp, 1980, p.86). Here, Broodthaers deliberately contrasted a vast disparity of objects - from paintings to fossils, comic strips, typewriters, product logos etc. - with the singularity of his classification. "Their juxtaposition," writes Crimp " can only seem surreal,"(Crimp, 1980, p. 86).

The Section des Figures demonstrates the arbitary nature of a museum's order of knowledge, and by scrambling the museum's methodology of ordering artefacts by national origin, chronology, subject matter etc. , the undoing of the logic of presentation demands that the conventional modes of viewing be questioned. Specifically, that the conventional exhibitionary order can be a totalizing form which aspires to refer to "all things and all peoples interacting throughout time," (Bennett, p. 86), is now presented as dubious.

Broodthaers' imaginary museums involved a strategy of resistance against the consumption and manipulation of art in the modern world, by drawing attention to those very things. By parodying the power structure of the

art world, Broodthaers reveals the relationships of power that remain hidden and unacknowledged in the art museum.

ii. Inside a Museum of Art

> " ..big art questions like "what constitutes an artwork outside of the gallery? and What constitutes a gallery? may be valid at appropriate times. They definitely have a point if artists, curators or whoever are prepared to get off the fence and take a position....Too often the debate becomes an exercise in semantic gymnastics....I think our strength is to indicate as opposed to highlight the presumptions and expectations that are relative to any context. In this way we can help spark the recognition of a variety of ideological conditionings, and perhaps open the way to a challenge being offered." (Douglas Gordon in conversation with Thomas Lawson "Guilt by Association" 1992)

In 1992 an exhibition was held at the Irish Museum of Modern Art involving five artists from Scotland, whose work cumulatively scrutinized the status of the museum institution, referring not only to its historical development and historical connotations, but also to its present-day functioning. The work of Christine Borland, Douglas Gordon, Roderic Buchanan, Craig Richardson, and Kevin Henderson resided inside and outside the museum's galleries, often employing wall-painting as a way of becoming intimate with the fabric of the museum. The objects displayed deliberately opted for a low-key commodity status, favouring bland and non-seductive materials such as unadorned wood and glass. The impoverished aesthetic served to divorce meaning form the actual object as well as commenting on over-commodification within the museum space.

Craig Richardson shows an awareness that extends beyond the actual museum grounds, when contemplating the site as one of transformation. As a parallel to the neighbouring Kilmainham Gaol, which has experienced a transformation of function from prison to museum, his work centres on the transformation of IMMA from a hospital into an art museum. As he writes, "the Royal Hospital has a history of controling 'docile bodies,'"(in Lawson, p.

25), in a manner that echoes the control of the gaol. Subsequently, Richardson painted on the walls on either side of the entrance to the museum's courtyard the slogans "sign over the remains", and "measure your children", texts that relate to the control of childhood and old age.

The frailty of these two groups poetically equals that of the work of art within the authority of the museum's hermeneutical framework, recalling the vocabulary used by Daniel Buren in his description of the museum , which "makes its 'mark,' imposes its frame (physical and moral) on everything that is exhibited in it in a deep and indelible way"(p. 188). With this emphasis on the power relations between the host institution and its inhabitants, a paradigm of control and disempowerment associates the original hospital institution with the latter-day art museum. Richardson's piece establishes a first level of site-specific signification that was previously dormant in the art museum's historical fabric. The piece generates a critical awareness on the part of the museum visitor.

If Richardson's work centered on the idea of the power relations conferred onto the museum of modern art, then Christine Borlands continues the discussion of the relationship between inside and outside the gallery space. Her Shot Materials specifically addressed the history of violence that has surrounded the museum comprising of a series of objects at which a bullet has been fired (see plate IV). The rawness and simplicity of the exhibit succeeded in foregrounding the transition from outside to inside the museum, and the matter-of-fact quality of the objects shown seemed to undermine the aura that the museum space was according it.

Borland's work, along with the four other artists' in the exhibition, was evidently engaged in a resistance against the museum space whilst operating within it. Along with this piece there was Small Objects that Save Lives, and Maps, two works that referred so closely to Shot Materials that the distinction between the three was reduced considerably; yet another strategy of defiance against the commodity-based rationale, where signature and identifiability are primary.

Small Objects that Save Lives was a collection of personal objects lent to

her by an invited group of individuals. Some of the owners interpreted the title metaphorically, whereas others have literally displayed something that could stop a bullet. Presented on tressle tables with the names of the owners printed beside them, the work mirrors that of BroodthaersSection des Aigles, where the categorisation is repositioned within the museum complex as a hermeneutical liability. The work also repositioned Borland as no longer being the primary creative agent in the function of an artist, but conferred responsibilty onto a larger group.

Maps is another blending of the status of 'artwork' and 'art gallery', where she displayed in the public information area maps of the museum which showed the trajectory of an imaginary bullet fired from the building. Borland's investigation is coded in such a simple and paired-down language requiring only minimal intervention with materials, that the exhibits almost become the "bric-a-brac" that Douglas Crimp has discussed, where the narrative, or concept that binds them to form, is presented as a highly fragile matter.

The same fragility is evident in Roderick Buchanan's sculpture which occupied the central courtyard (see plate V). Stacks constructed from off-saw deal and fibre board were scattered in one corner. In their peculiar simplicity they become a visual conundrum, echoing the ambiguity of the museum building at the time. Just as these sculptures were indeterminate, so too was the function of the building, experiencing a crisis in identity via its then functions: art museum, military museum, National Trust museum, parade ground, national war memorial, conference centre, Office of Public Works headquarters, restaurant/cafe and a retail outlet. In this instance, the building's lack of clarity in purpose was reflected in the sense of incompletion in the human-scale constructions, which, "seemed to bleed from under the collonnade near the cafeteria entrance," (Buchanan, in Lawson, p. 8). This serves as a more explicit reference to the commercial ventures operating within the museum, against which this unadorned, non-aesthetic piece seems to rail. That these artists banded together in such an exhibition, which scrutinized the workings of the museum is summed up in the text that Buchanan grouted to the wall: "Where bad men conspire, good men should associate."

This black and white dichotomy (which is of course somewhat ironic

considering that is the 'bad men' who are giving support to the 'good men's association), is continued in a work by Douglas Gordon entitled Museum Keys, which explores the issues of ownership and access. An unlimited multiple, the piece was an actual duplicate set of keys to the museum building, thereby undermining the significance of the originals. Gordon's strategy of creating meaning attempts to side-step the museum-exhibit pardigm that confers status to the object, by making a work that countered its own subjugation by actually being part of that framework. Gordon blends the status of the art museum with that of the artwork, thereby indicating the intrinsic links between the two.

By parodying the idea of IMMA as a 'people's museum,' using a means that potentially poses a very real threat to the well-being of that institution, Gordon indicates quite clearly that the museum effectively belongs to a minority. The contrast between access and exclusion is given a distinctness that is usually not so apparent to the museum visitor. The keys also, if purchased, force responsibilty onto the viewer as the ultimate site of meaning. As Gordon says,

> Decisions related to the construction of meaning have to be made by asking questions and weighing up the answers. Those answers are not to be found in gazing at the object; they are based on an individuals thinking around moral and ethical issues. (in Lawson, p.17)

This critique of the art museum, however, is not a limitation to the piece. As Gordon says' "I chose the keys because`they have this metaphorical and allegorical currency outside of, as well as, the critique of the museum," (in Lawson, p.16). This double-coding allows for a personal reflection that extends beyond the site-specfic meaning pertaining to the museum.

This distinction between personal judgement and those meanings that are already generated within the museum site is implicit in the paintings that were exhibited by Kevin Henderson, where he purposefully worked in a genre that was without "much in the way of critical or political credibility"(in Lawson, p.20), namely flower painting. The connection between his twelve paintings of flowers and the building refers more succinctly to the buildings function as the Royal Hospital, rather than museum of modern art. He writes, "as there is always a withdrawal of the object into discourse, I intend the context of the

museum, the Royal Hospital, and Ireland to change that," (in Lawson, p.20). Henderson allows the context to speak through his work; in his paintings he channels the meanings that are already on-site and thereby generates possibilities in contemplation that are not without a critical awareness of the space. In doing this, Henderson advances a different form of validity than that conferred by the museum's authority.

Declan McGonagle in an article entitled "Art as an Issue of Place" discusses how this strategy represents a shift away from a homogeneous official culture:

> The validity comes not from central attention,- a distribution of meaning issued from a canon of art theory criticism and history,- but rather it comes from the connection with meanings already present in peoples' lives in a given situation.(McGonagle 1988 p. 20)

The interconnected elements of meaning and location allow viewers to become participants in a cultural process, rather than consumers of a product, the "passive, unenlightened culture-consuming public,"(Ward, p.77), that is the result of an over-commodified culture, and specifically an over-commercialised museum space. The inhibitive nature of the musuem gallery has prevented art from defining its own space, forcing it to become in the late twentieth century, a question of context.[19]

What the exhibition demonstrates is how a critique of the museum can be conveyed in art which does not confine itself to that project, that the necessary critical awareness does not have to be a burden. Primarilty the work focuses on the institutional frame, and secondly on th eeconomic logic. An 'association' of artists, working with the 'museum conspiracy', can produce interesting areas in the discussion of the museum space, and demonstrate the range of possibilities for artists working within art museums.

In all, then, the difference between the approach of Marcel Broodthers, and that of the "Guilt By Association" exhibition is stark; where Broodthaers works in exile from the museum system in a state of almost military contention,inventing his own hypothetical, and ultimately mythological,

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19 "[Art's] existence has no reality aprt from its social reference because it has lost the space in which to develop an autonomous aura," (Aronowitz, p.74)

museology, the contemporary artists favour a strategy of complicitous critique. The benefits of working 'inside' the institution are substantial, insofar as they can clearly instruct, on site, the viewer in the shortcomings of the museum, with the parodoxical support of the museum to promote such ideas.

Conclusion

Since their appearance in the late eighteenth century, art museums have become steadily more numerous, and lately more glamorous. The early development of the art museum quite clearly demonstrates how the institution fell far short in its provision of a 'haven' for art. The site of the museum space is actually one of conflict, as was evident in its earliest civic roles, for example in France, where it negotiated new ideas about the 'bourgeois subject of reason,' replacing the ideology of the monarchal and princely collections, (Ward, p.76). This allegiance to the formation and regulation of the nation state represents an early limitation to the idea of free discourse within the museum.

The processes of the art museum has throughout history conspired to conceal its own curatorial inadequacy. In its more recent developments during the nineteenth century the museum institution complied with the state's directive of disciplining the newly formed urban populations. By using its power to represent cultural objects of value, the public museum sought to enhance the 'civility' of the people by purveying the dominant belief system encoded within the display's classification. The art museum was effectively ensconsed within such political complicity, and this stringency assisted in making rigid the systems of classification which persist in museums to this day.

The collection and display of art and culture does not take a universal form. In a global context, the West's tradition of the art museum has a sense of relativity which it has historically ignored. The "careful camouflage,"(Buren p.193), that art musuems employ within their display allows the reality of the world to become an image of the world, implying a sense of both universality and completion that distracts the viewer. Through the recontextualisation of art works, the art museum preserves its semblance of authority (a neccessary condition for its role of education within the state's ideology and economy.)

In contradiction to the term 'free' capitalism, contemporary economics

has resulted in the diminishing of the public sector, thus distancing the art museum from governmental bodies. Increasing concern over commercial and financial considerations has produced a new phase of the art museum, in which the pervasive rationale of marketing and populism incurs a different play of pressures upon the exhibitionary apparatus. The populism of the 'art blockbuster' forces art into the deceitful scenario of "an elite experience for everyone," (Zolberg, p.49), which sustains the old- established belief that art and its discourses are the concern of a priviliged minority within society. The resulting ambiguity of function camouflages the processes of power and exclusion that are inherent in any art museum complex. Advertising campaigns, in a bid to generate popularity, have unwittingly revealed the museum's flexibilty in their self-identity, perhaps betraying a capacity for change. That the art museum has demonstrated a capacity for evolution suggests that it shall, in time, absorb those criticisms which have been made over recent decades and address these qualities which inhibit the interaction between artists' work and visitors.

Artists who have addressed the anathema of the museum by exhibiting outside, or else generating an awareness inside the institution have revealed the redundancy of considering the public museum as a 'natural' home for art objects. By indicating its reliance on, or involvement with, institutional placement, work by artists such as Marcel Broodthaers and Daniel Buren has established a working awareness of the art museum that has been capitalised on by many artists working today. Such artists seek to reveal how both the production and reception of art came to be predetermined by the museum. If the medium constitutes much of art's message, then it is equally true that the context inescapably constitutes much of art's content. Such knowledge is an essential requirement for artists who wish to navigate their work through the inhibitive history and politics of the museum space.

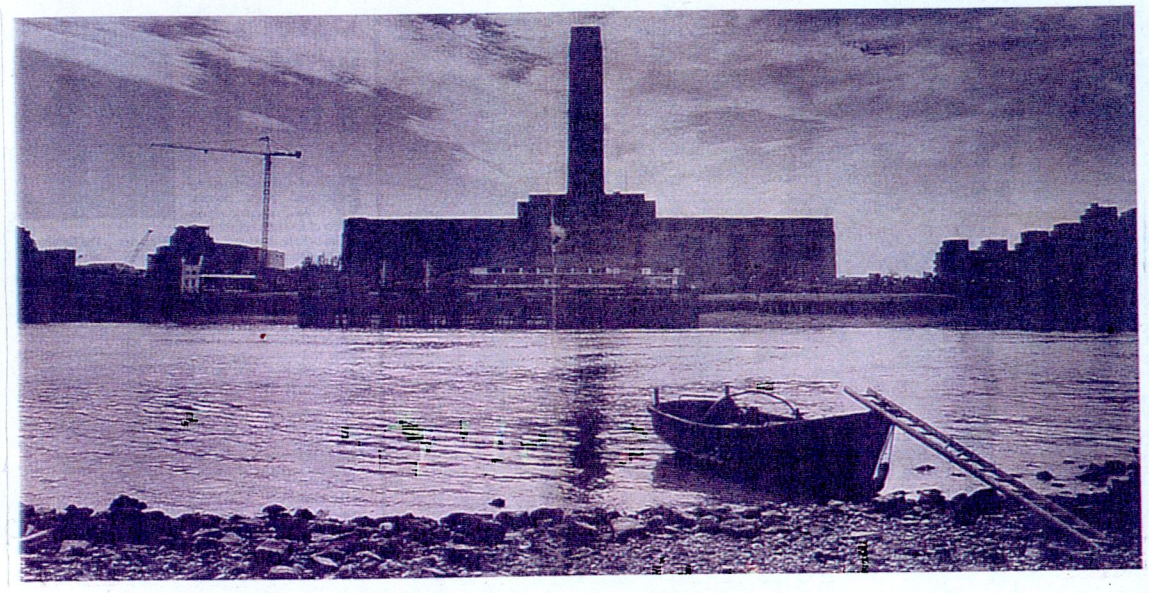


Plate I, the former Bankside power station in London, which is due to be transformed into the Tate Gallery of Modern Art before the millenium.

Plate II, Abigail Lane, *House and Occupants, I & II* (1991)

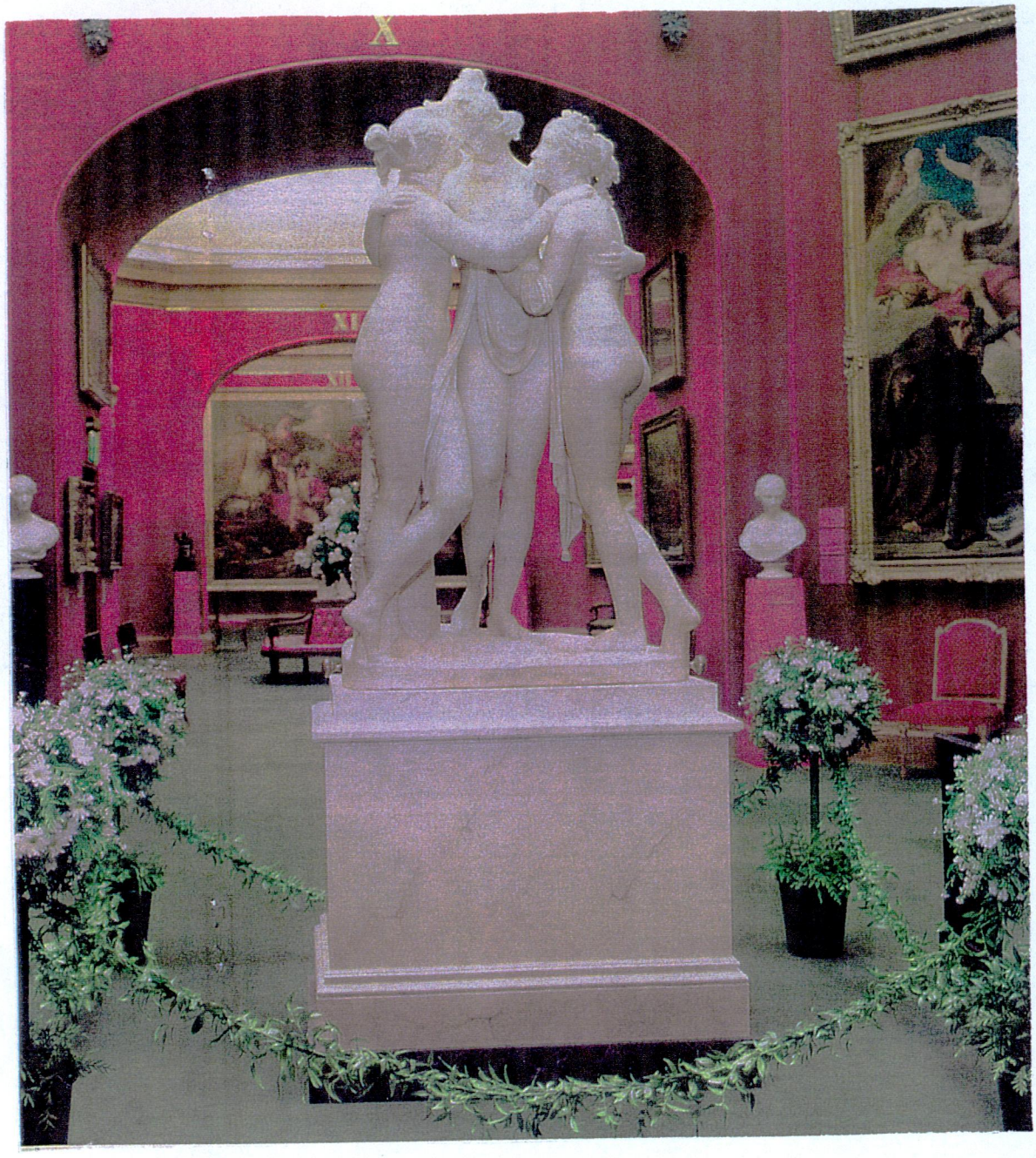
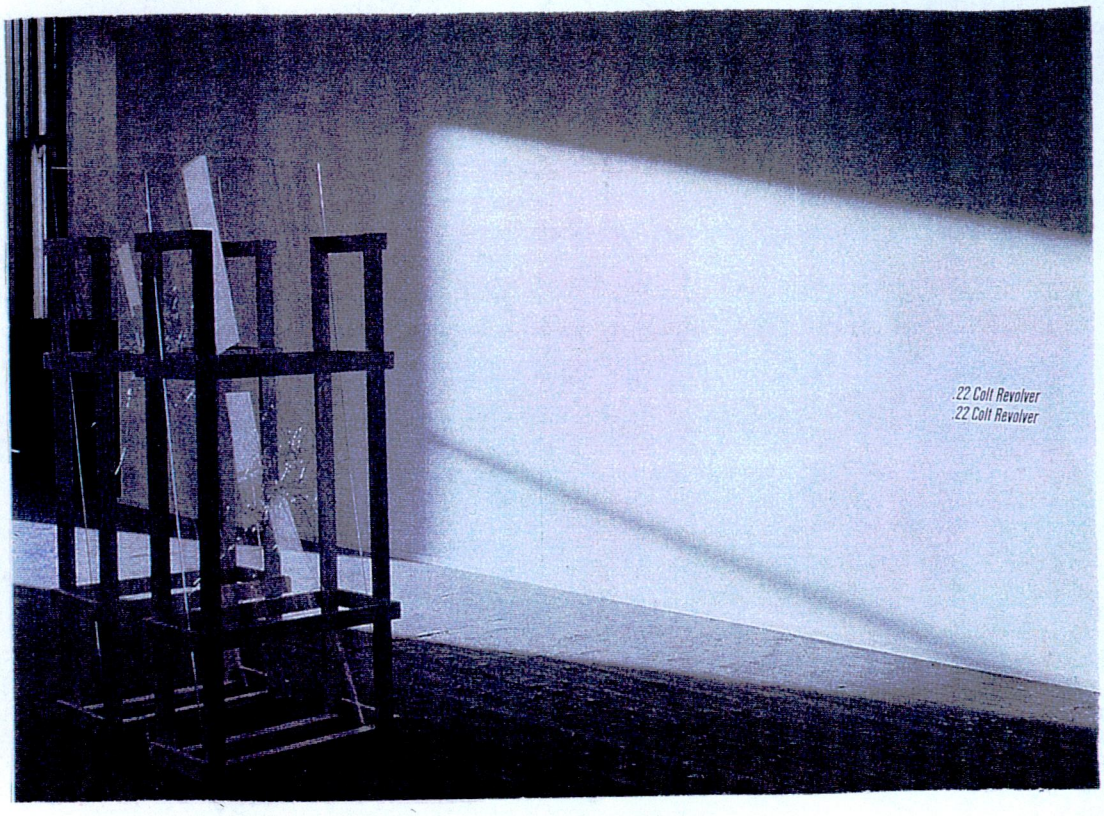
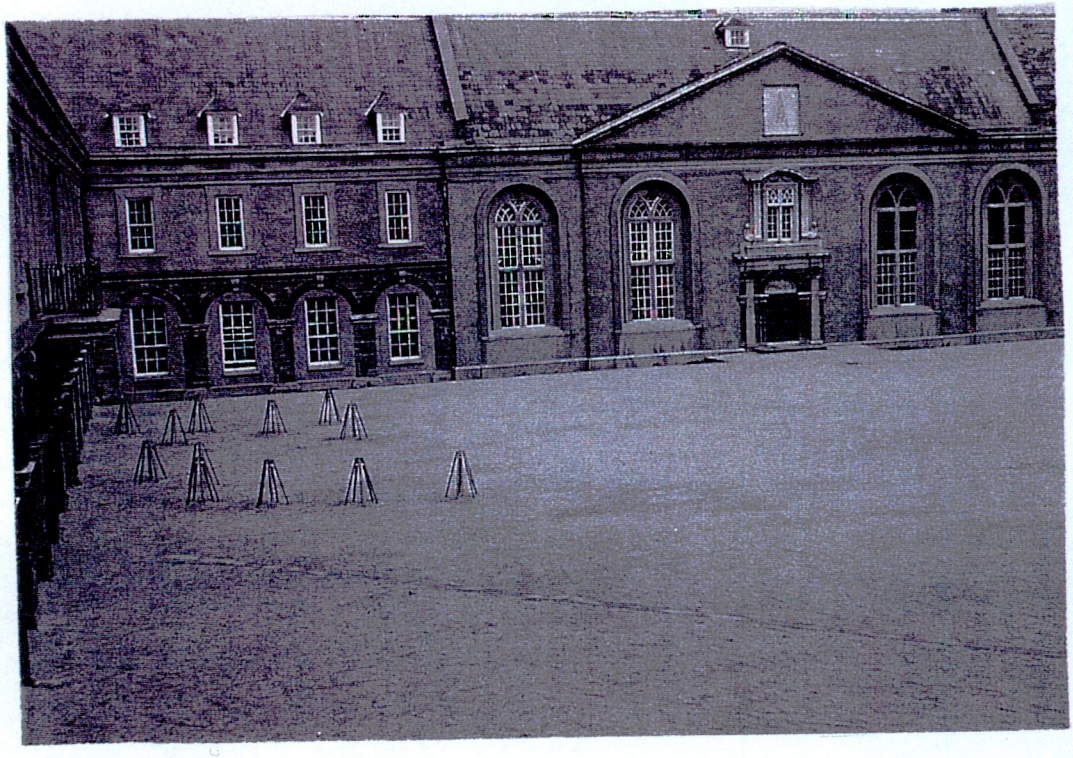


Plate III, Antonio Canova, *The Three Graces* (1817), installed in the National Gallery of Scotland, Septmber 1995.

Plate IV (above),Christine Borland, *Shot Materials* (1992), installed in IMMA, Dublin, and plate V (below), Roderick Buchanan, *Considering Each Other Through the Narrow Abyss* (1992), installed in the courtyard at IMMA, Dublin.





Appendix

In stark contrast to the museum's officialdom and rational atmosphere, the act of collecting is usually understood as a private and impasssioned pursuit. Indeed, the pusuit of collecting has as much a psychological resonance as it does a social one. As Aristides has written, the "collection [is] an obsession organized. One of the distinctions between possessing and collecting is that the latter implies order, system, perhaps completion," (quoted in Hooper-Greenhill, p.16).

The power of a displayed collection of objects to make an impact upon , and thereby instruct (or distract), the minds of viewers extends far beyond the more obvious pride of a public museum as a centre of excellence. As John Berger writes, " the majority take it as axiomatic that museums are full of holy relics which refer to a mystery to which excludes them: the mystery of unaccountable wealth," (Berger, p.24). Though any collection can operate on this level of wealth, property and power, the showing of objects also appeals to the viewer's own desire to collect.

This power over the viewer is an undercurrent of every exhibitionary complex that supplies much of the 'aura' which masks the art therein. Susan Pearse has written:

> ...distinct from social or overt perceptions of value, a universe which matches that which we have already described, but is its opposing twin... the individual interior, where what is collected matters less than how and why it is collected.(in Hooper-Greenhill p.21)

As Clifford describes, there is a coherent link between this personnal, psychologically charged impulse, and the subsequent presentation of a meaningful and authoritatative collection. As he writes, "an excessive, sometimes even rapcious need to have is transferred into rule-governed, meaningful desire." (p.218) Clifford posits the collecting of art and culture as well within the bounds of fetishism, which at once debases the museum's provision of a 'neutral' space.

The implications of such a strategy for the represention of art and artefacts point away from the idea of a pure impartial curatorship. That the frames of reference within which such objects are presented are themselves loaded with a subjectifying charge also indicates that there is inevitably some ulterior narrative that is emdebbed within any exhibition. The 'treasuring of the conscience of man' (Rauschenberg, in Crimp, 1985) seemingly posits the 'treasuring' as important as the 'treasure' itself.

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