The Spectacular Museum -- The Museum between Cathedral and Shopping Center, **Facing the Contradictions**

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The museum today is clearly the most overanalysed subject of contemporary culture and tonight, with your forbearance, I am going to add one more voice to this tower of babble, this inflation of opinion on which every taxi driver in London and New York has strong views. The reasons for debate are obvious.

More grand museums are being built to celebrate the year 2000 than grand cathedrals were built in the year 1000. The sudden outburst of enthusiasm and money – over £5 billion for Millennial projects in Britain as well as the longer boom in America and Japan – forces some fundamental questions upon us. Are we, perhaps, living through a Re-Renaissance; or, more realistically, about to enter a Post-Christian age where culture is taking the role of religion? I will focus here on the contemporary museum, the many Museums of Modern Art that are now challenging that in New York, because they pull together the basic contradictions of our time -- contradictions which are usually suppressed. My argument is that this denial does not work and that from contradictions new opportunities emerge -- if we can face up to them.

Questions of cultural value, spirituality and economic profit impinge on this institution as they do on no other. Moreover, after the opening of the new Guggenheim in Bilbao discussions about the contemporary museum have been dragged into a whirlpool of speculation that could be called "Bilbaoism" **(1,2)**. Bilbaoism, as the name implies, is an infectious disease that spins the brain of those museum curators, artists and critics who think about Gehry's masterpiece. As with whirlpools, the victims are pulled in faster the more they resist, and this building generates the usual questions that exercise artists and architects, except the vortex is stronger, the perplexities more acute.

Will Gehry's new building revitalise Bilbao over the long term? It has certainly done so for three years, but that is the usual attention span for this kind of theatrical building, what I would call the Spectacular Museum of the New. The whirpool spins faster. Has Bilbao swung the delicate balance between architecture and art irreversibly in favour of theatrical buildings? The deputy director of New York's Guggenheim and its chief curator, Lisa Dennison, thinks so – and I quote her from a recent article: "it's the 'build it and they will come phenomenon", she says. "And

it's not just the public. Build it and the collections will come, the artists will come, the programming will come, the money will come".[1] The proposition is clear, the Spectacular Museum is a self-fulfilling prophecy. But then the vortex goes round again: is a monumental, expressive structure appropriate in our time? Especially when media art and the Internet dominate it, and when so much contemporary work is meant to be ephemeral, or else a video-projection best suited to the windowless white cube or black box. **(3,4)**

Bilbao whips up the queries, as it epitomises the contradictions of the institution. In an age of background museums and the neutral white cube, many believe its assertiveness is gratuitous – public art should be the focus, not its container? Or, related questions: Is it some kind of elegant dinosaur? – as one European museum curator called it, "the greatest museum of the 1980s" (ie. a holdover from the period when we built giant gestures, an anachronism). Or, the question turned round: since the museum is really the cathedral of our time, does it not address this truth most directly and successfully? Gehry faces up to the spiritual role whereas the Tate Modern, in spite of its cavernous nave, runs away from it.

But then this answer only raises the deeper problem, the nineteenth century conundrum, all the more. Can art, in a secular society, really take on the role of religion? Maybe Jackson Pollock and Francis Bacon have been canonised as exemplary anti-artists and martyrs, but they make curious saints to be emulated. Maybe Thomas Krens is a visionary director of the Global Museum as a Lend Lease package, but he makes an amazing theologian. Imagine him, as he has recently appeared at the openings of motorcycle shows in New York and Bilbao, riding his bike onto centre stage, accompanied by other famous Hells Angels, such as Jeremy Irons -- he is a bizarre priest-on-wheels, a good candidate along with the Chapman brothers, as anti-Christ.

Or perhaps I should say he is a bizarre stock-broker on wheels because he is using all this showmanship in order to raise further money for his global strategy of *Guggenheim uber alles*. For instance, in the April launch of the New York Guggenheim, reckoned to cost over $850 million dollars, he has enlisted the support of Gehry's building on Bilbao's fortunes. Like the Tate Modern, which flashes its statistics to disarm the critics, Krens points out the obvious lessons. Bilbao has prospered *because of* the new Guggenheim. In his press releases he points out that it drew 3 million visitors since 1997; then 1.3 million in 1998; then 1.1 million in 1999. Most importantly in this investment strategy most

visitors are from outside the Basque country and therefore tourist spending in Bilbao has increased, as a direct result of the building, by over $400 million dollars in two years, giving $70 million additional tax revenue per year. Do the calculations: since the cost of the building was a mere $95 million dollars (less than half the cost of the Tate Modern) the Basques have got a beautiful bargain -- the Renaissance of culture *plus* a yearly profit of from 1 to 200 million, depending on how you calculate the write-offs. Excuse me for falling into stock-broker rhetoric, but I warned you that Bilbaoism addles the brain.

I will explore the basic metaphor, and cliché of our time, the one that Bilbao epitomises, the 'museum as cathedral'; but my first impression is that artists, curators and architects are not happy with the comparison. They do not themselves use the religious metaphor. Yet, at the same time, they seem unwilling to deny the spiritual and expressive qualities of these new theatrical spaces. Caught by the moment that turns the Spectacular Museum into a cathedral, they seem reluctant to either give up the religious role, or take responsibility for it. That is just another contradiction of many, perhaps the greatest.

There are other strong trends and any attempt to wrestle with the question – "where is the museum going?" – will have to start from this point of plurality, of radical heterogeneity. One could even argue that the museum is not a single building type, but several opposite institutions that only accidentally share a common word. Because of its chequered history, which leaps from stage to stage as I will show, with no apparent logic, it becomes a suitable case for speculation. Its historical emergence reveals eight very different forces, each of which is incorporated into our idea of the museum. It is important to review these varying motives before asking whether it is still a coherent entity, whether it still hangs together.

1,2 The first two functions from the past, and ones that remain primary, were to preserve artefacts and to memorialise events. Reconstructions of Greek temples made by architects from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts portray a truth that we find hard to accept today (5,6). They were not the white purities of our musée imaginaire, but polychromatic stage-sets for large votive statues made of gold and ivory, and they stored a treasure chest of icons. Some of these renderings put the genre close to a Hollywood spectacular, or at least a Baroque Catholic church, but in either case the temple and museum had overlapping roles. This anticipates the thirteenth century metaphor, the reverse of ours today, 'the *cathedral* as museum'. The Gothic Cathedral in France was full of sacred

relics, stained glass, statues near the salient points of transition, all of which were celebrated and preserved as icons.

Even in the Protestant north where there was kind of iconophobia, the church cted as repository for rt **(7,8)**. Is it stretching a point to say that the great white interiors that Pieter Saenredam and Emanuel de Witte celebrate are early exemplars of the modern, puritan streak – "the white cube"? The blank, white background has become the convention for exhibiting art in this century, and it may have origins in the Protestant drive for unvarnished truth (or, is it rather the well know Dutch "embarrassment of riches"?)

3) By the eighteenth century, when it became a social institution, the museum took on a third role: to educate and reaffirm values. The pediment over the British Museum, with its female divinity of Britain, sweetly portrays this idea of cumulative progress **(9,10)**. Its Ionic columns and proportions directly recall those of the Erechtheum, and inside of the Museum an actual Caryatid has been taken from this Greek original. So the educational message is sent: "according to Vitruvius the Greeks portrayed the women of Caryae on their Erechtheum porch to teach them a lesson against rebellion; and now that we own a Caryatid, and the splendours of Greece and Rome, we summarise Western culture". To educate with "the best that is thought and felt" through the ages was the elevated role of culture, a role which, as Matthew Arnold pointed out, was beginning to replace religion.

4. This led directly to the fourth emergent function of the 1850s the museum as substitute cathedral, with culture and art as quasi-religions. Matthew Arnold may have argued persuasively that art makes a very poor religion, but that has not stopped its new sacral role taking over in a Post-Christian West. After Nietzsche, after the decline of Christianity among the intelligentsia and creative elite, and with the rise of the art market, the aesthetic building type replaced the spiritual in terms of urban and economic importance.

The spectacular fact of these spectacular changes in spectacle is that no one asked for them, no one designed them, and few saw them coming. The possible exception to this is Henri de Saint-Simon who, in the 1820s defined the notion of the avant-garde and, in 1825, wrote a book on the changes to come called *Nouveau Chistianisme*. He argued that artists would constitute a new form of priesthood and that they made up a profession most suited to moving mankind toward progress. Only they could stimulate the right sentiments, find the expressive qualities suited to

this elevated task. In his work titled *Opinions*, he is most explicit on the new role: 'What a most beautiful destiny for the arts, that of exercising over society a positive power, a true *priestly* function, and of marching forcefully in the van of all the intellectual faculties, in the epoch of their greatest development! This is the duty of artists, this their mission....'[2]

It may have taken 100 years for the metaphor "museum as cathedral" to become dominant, but its presence was adumbrated by 1873, the time when Alfred Waterhouse designed London's Natural History Museum in the shape of a Romanesque Cathedral **(11,12)**. Challenging the supremacy of Darwinism to explain all creation, he created a nave with clerestory lighting (for dinosaurs), gave the cathedral a west front of bell towers, used real and angelic animals to decorate the skyline, and placed a triumphant Christ over the whole natural kingdom to show who was in charge, an icon only knocked down in the war, never to be resurrected.

A few members of the avant-garde took up Saint-Simon's call to arms and acted like "the new priests" of a secular society **(13,14)**. John Ruskin, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Mondrian, Brancusi, and Joseph Beuys have certainly done so; but the majority of the avant-garde are *not* trying to convert society to anything much at all. Their overriding goals are to create works of art, to get paid and become famous. They do *not* meet in conclaves to work out a public creed, they do not even group today into 'movements', as they did in the 1920s with De Stijl, Purism, the Bauhaus and Constructivism. They have no collective vision, indeed they have no mission that could be generalised and defended – all the hallmarks of a public religion. As privately motivated, especially by the art market, they make bad theologians.

And yet, contrary to these basic truths, there are some important exceptions that complicate the matter considerably. Modern and Post-Modern artists, inheritors of the avant-garde, do have an implicit spiritual function, which is to symbolise the creativity of the universe and its uncanny surprise **(15,16)**. They also provide icons and spaces for contemplation, and their work often poses the most fundamental questions of life, death, sexuality and being. Some Minimalist Art and Earth Art provides a sense of awe, and an aura of uniqueness. This aura, in Walter Benjamin's formulation, was supposed to be rendered obsolete in the age of mechanical reproduction, but it has not turned out that way. People still go to museums to find originals, not reproductions, that are markers for orientation. These icons of culture are enhanced, not diminished, by reproduction because they remain relatively permanent fixtures in a culture of change.

There is also the convention that the museum should provide a hushed and reverential ambience where objects are respected, not touched – the exception being such provocative installations as that in the Tate where Tracey Emin's bed of orgiastic love-making was violated by over-zealous followers, who fooled the guards and jumped into it. But the norm is that museums display their treasures as if they were religious icons – highlit on pedestals, or behind glass, or across ropes and carefully removed from profane contamination.

Furthermore, institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Mother of All MOMAS, see their role as providing the historical view of the religion of Modernism, its main line, apostolic succession and destiny. MOMA is indeed the Vatican of Modernism and, for instance in 1981, its chief curator William Rubin organised its layout of masterpieces in a linear succession to prove that the true faith flourished in Paris for 75 years until it shifted, with Saint Pollock and the gospel according to Clement Greenberg, to New York. Here the exhibition of paintings and sculpture provided a linear argument as singular as that from Christ to the disciples of St. Peter. The Vatican in the fourth century had to establish its legitimacy through this kind of straight-line evolution, and so too did MOMA – except the latter had no real creed and scripture (unless one calls the movement in painting towards abstraction, process, and flatness, the destiny of history). (Admittedly the argument was more complex than this simple teleology, but it was still the dominant party line).

For such reasons, one could argue that a *slight* aura of religion remains around the modern museum, a weak but palpable halo. People now flock to both old avant-garde – Cezanne – and new—Damian Hirst – as if they expected to find spiritual nourishment. Thus, taken as a whole, these contrary motives have created the major contradiction of our time, the *Secular* Cathedral. Who can blame the museum for providing the equivalent of a mystical epiphany, especially when the church has lost its cultural credibility? Perhaps the greatest reason for art becoming a form of mass-cultural religion is that the churches no longer are willing or able to fulfill this role, a function they *did have* when the cathedrals were built. In terms of per capita expenditure they cost more than present day museums, thousands of times more. And yet, to return to my theme of contradiction, this role conflicts with the fifth main function, one that grew in the 1960s, and then exploded in the 1980s:

5) The museum is now a place of entertainment for the whole family. "More Americans", it is often said, "go to museums than go to football games". More Britains go to cultural institutions than to sporting events. This mass cultural fact, that is often claimed, has dramatic consequences for the way museums are designed and experienced. It means – as the entrance to the new Sainsbury Wing at the National Gallery shows – that the building type has partly become a stadium (13,14). As Robert Venturi, the designer, points out something like a million back-packers get off the bus per year to enter, not by the temple entrance, up a Palladian stairway, but directly from fast-moving traffic. This is why he has called it by the quaint Roman term for the stadium entrance, a "vomitorium", and it leads directly to an information kiosk, shopping labyrinth and 'spaghettic junction' of pedestrian movement Needless to say, there is a spectacular contradiction between the millions rushing through the revolving doors and the quiet, spiritual dialogue between individual and icon. In the Sainsbury Wing these contradictions are handled intelligently and with grace, opposite functions are clearly contrasted, whereas at MOMA in New York there is a seamless slide from the icons to shopping. MOMA INC, as Rem Koolhaas calls it, has triumphed over the visionary spirit of Modernism.

Another consequence of entertaining the whole family leads to the kind of organisational patterns that the Disney Corporation has pioneered for large numbers and what it has christened 'Entertainment Architecture'**(15,16)**. In the big museum, especially those science museums celebrating the Millennium, one can now expect, behind the black box, to confront turnstiles, crowd management barriers, an emphasis on interactive displays, monitors that supply quick information, all set off with dramatic lighting. Another consequence of this entertainment function, and closely related to it, are roles that also grew in the 1960s –

6) The blockbuster exhibition, the shopping precinct and the million dollar painting. All of these new, commercial functions can be seen where they originated: at the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the new Louvre (underground) in Paris **(17,18)**. The facts of large numbers, large shopping, large-scale marketing are intertwined with the blockbuster exhibition, the gold of Tutankamun, the gold of China, the gold of Mexico and Peru – our love for spectacle and profit. The process began, as Robert Hughes pointed out, when the Metropolitan spent $2.3 million on Rembrandt's Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer, and put a red velvet rope around to distinguish it from all other Rembrants.[3] By the mid-sixties the new art market had been launched and been turned

into big and predictable business by the Times-Sotheby Art Indexes. These, for the first time, showed how art could mimic the rising fortunes of Ford or IBM, and the graphs rising like Mount Fuji convinced corporations, and Japanese in search of Van Gogh, that $30 to $40 million was not a bad investment for a scarce item.

The million dollar, avant-garde masterpiece has become another cliché and self-fulfilling prophecy. Today one does not blink when a Rothko goes for $2 million, a Jackson Pollock or Jasper Johns for more than $10. In November 1996 at Christie's, Willem de Koonig's *Woman* sold for $15.6 million, a figure that showed the Art Market had started to climb back to its highs of the late 1980s (when Christie's and Sotheby's had annual turnovers of $3 billion). The mass media keeps reminding us of such figures and thus we have become used to another kind of spectacular contradiction: Old Master Dadaists, Collectible Nihilists, SuperRich Dropouts – the graffiti artists like Basquiat who seek to rival the Rockefellers.

Robert Hughes traces the developing art market to the Royal Academy and Sir Joshua Reynolds' desire to establish artists in power and pocket. Hughes quotes the opposing views of the time: William Blake, who said Sir Joshua was invented to depress art: "Where any view of money exists", Blake asserted, like the spiritually motivated purist he was, "art cannot be carried on". Samuel Johnson put the opposite case for culture: "No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money" – alas, Johnson proved more accurate than Blake. Money stimulates the muse and museum, to a degree, and if it is dished out in the right manner. For Titian it was motivating. But when thrown at a few young priests of the avant-garde – like Julian Schnabel (who claimed to knock out 'portraits of God')– it can lock them into stereotype, just as it does any corporation. Mass-production of handcrafted work remains the great problem for the contemporary artist preparing for an annual opening.

7) There is another pressure, related to this and the avant-garde, which has a somewhat contradictory effect on the museum. It is the site of the culture industry, a mini-university and the seat of education, the place where thousands of artists, art professionals, critics, journalists, historians and docents must work. In New York City alone, in 1982 (the last statistics I have) there were 14,000 artists with gallery affiliations; in America 1984, according to Hughes, 35,000 painters, sculptors, critics and art historians graduated from the art schools. According to these numbers, and since 15th century Florence had only 70,000 citizens, there

ought to be more great painters alive In New England than in the entire Renaissance.

What this runaway growth has led to is not more good artists but, as Leo Tolstoy, who hated it, pointed out in his tract *What is Art?*, many more art-explainers, art-expositors, art-swindlers, art-dealers and artistic movements. He witnessed the rise of the culture industry and didn't like its elitist implications, which he contrasted with the accessibility of Christian art. Yet, in a capitalist market, as they say of successful products: "it is the difference that makes a difference, that sells". This extreme differentiation, caused by the great numbers making and buying art, means that the museum must become the nerve-centre of the cultural industry. It has to educate and, above all, authenticate.

When parking in downtown America to shop, one has a parking voucher "validated" by the store, so one does not have to pay. In America when an art dealer has a potentially hot artist, he tries to get him into a major museum to be validated with a show – or better, Christie's, and the validation of a sale price. In the 1980s, Charles Saatchi, the advertising genius, managed to have his Schnabels given the right provenance by a show at the Tate (before he sold them off?), and then, in 1997, he pulled off the supreme act of transformation at the Royal Academy with the show *Sensation*. Artists who might have languished in obscurity at his gallery in North London were suddenly turned, by the miraculous act of a Royal imprimatur and the right location, into the media event of the nineties. No Royal Academy, no sensation: the shock of the new only works if the establishment internalises a direct contradiction, such as – "pornography is good for you". Being an intelligent and learnéd Academy it is following up the huge success of *Sensation* with a show that opens next week on the *Apocalypse* **(21,22)**. Inevitably those artists closest to pornographers, the Chapman brothers, are making the centrepiece, devoted to recreating the gas chambers and ovens at Auschwitz. 5,000 hand painted figures involved in lurid killing will make up *F******* Hell*, conspicuously bought by Charles Saatchi for £500,000. As usual he will turn the predictable media outrage to his advantage, as he did when the *Sensation* show opened in Brooklyn last year. The Shock of the New, that old Modernist standby, has now been taken over by the advertisers, who understand its logic somewhat better than did the artists.

The right museum, like the Fairy Godmother, can turn frogs into princes. Value and meaning can be conferred instantaneously, rather the way Duchamp turned a bicycle wheel and urinal into art: by nomination. God, of course, created the world by naming its more interesting parts and

calling them "good" **(23,24)**. The general term for those holding this miraculous power is "nomothete", and it is no secret that in London Norman Rosenthal, Nicholas Serota and Charles Saatchi create the Fortune 500 through their nominations. Economic validation is what an exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art confers on an avant-garde artist or architect, which is why Philip Johnson and others control, so carefully, the corridors and white display rooms of that Vatican.

This leads the museum not to the roles I have mentioned – palace of memory, cathedral for worship, or place to shop – but to becoming a bank, a Stock Market and a university, all in one. The cultural industry must work here to see who is on top, or who gets on top, and that takes a constant updating of knowledge. Scholarship, taste and authentication are necessary to give an artist a particular historical valuation; the art market would collapse without its PHDs and connoisseurs. Of course, the kind of knowledge required for the contemporary museum collection is more subject to fluctuation than with the traditional collection, but both types depend to a degree on keeping their stocks high. For that to happen in the complex, post-modern world of international quotations, the exhibits must be changed constantly and with acuity. That is not possible unless the museum has a vast structure and space for the culture industry.

8) Inevitably the reaction to these forces was against the rise of the international art market in the sixties and this has led to another identifiable movement that has influenced the museum, that of public art or anti-museum art (23,24). It starts with such work as performance and body art, Land art and Earth art, much Feminist art, and the ubiquitous street art of the seventies. These become, by the 1980s, a general movement of "public art". Each one of these labels marks a journey on the road to the uncollectible and, to coin another word, the undomesticatable.

Also in this tradition, at least conceptually is André Malraux's *musée imaginaire* on the Internet. In addition there are the expositions at Kassel and Munster which recur every 5 or 10 years **(25,26)**. From these urban art festivals, the local Germans select those works they want to remain permanent additions to their city. There are also many open-air museums in Japan, Europe and America that mediate between the museum-going public and the uniniated. Perhaps Donald Judd's permanent factory installation, and many other artist-created spaces, are examples of this genre. Also on the edge of this category are the host of democratically run exhibition centres and gallery cooperatives that are run by the artists

themselves, and even some kunsthalles. The anti-museum flourishes today – on the edge of the art world, an institutional non-institution.

Experience versus Interpretation

If these eight forces, or trends, show the external pressures on the museum, then there is also an internal evolution underway. Nicholas Serota, director of the Tate, has recounted the story in a book that sets the major opposition in its title: *Experience or Interpretation, The Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art.*[4] As he points out there is a continual tension between the experience of art and its interpretation, a tug of war between artists and curators. Artists, who want their individual works to be seen for themselves, not as instances of a theory or trend, favour heightening the experience of each work, whereas curators tend to favour interpretive displays where schools, movements or ideas are grouped. Obviously, in any particular museum, there will be a trade-off between these two motives, as indeed the other values I have mentioned.

Early collections in the 16th century, the studiolo of an Italian prince, or the Cabinet of Curiosities of a German burgher, were magical associations compiled from works of art, specimens from nature and rare treasures **(27,28)**. In their names, the *Schatzkammer* and *Wunderkammer* – treasure and wonder chambers – bring out the basic idea of the early exhibit: to create awe and delight at the bizarre things of the earth.

Another convention that grows out of it, the 18th century all-over hang, also accentuates experience, pluralism and the associations of the object. The architect John Soane's house, turned into the Soane Museum, is a good example of these two traditions coming together **(29,30)**. It can be understood as a giant Cabinet of Curiosities combined with the all-over hang and the museum as cathedral, because it has many heavenly domes, a crypt of relics and dramatic lighting meant to evoke a religious ceremony.

From the late-nineteenth century, scientific perspective such compilations were considered a jumble and the dialectic of exhibition methods started that is still underway. Works of art were now to be placed in an evolutionary line, as I have mentioned, according to school, movement and 'ism'. From such decontextualising it was not a big step to the neutral "white cube" of Modernism, first, in the twenties, the spiritual work of the early Bauhaus and later, in the sixties, the abstract white box of rational artists such as Bridget Riley and Sol LeWitt. In the former case

the work is decontextualised to give it a transcendent charge, in the latter to give it the clarity of a geometrical proposition.

Reactions to the white cube method of display came in the late seventies with the flexible space of the Pompidou and the labyrinthine spaces of museums such as Hans Hollein's Monchengladbach **(31,32)**. Pluralism had to be acknowledged, at least in the abstract, and Modernism was not seen as the single apostolic succession that it was at MOMA. Post-Modernists fought for the legitimacy of many micro-narratives. By the late 1980s this led to another twist in the dialectic. Artists clawed back some power and started to take over the museum again: as Serota points out, *experience began to take precedence over interpretation* **(33,34)**. Artists such as Beuys, Rothko, and Nauman had rooms devoted solely to their work, and they were designed to accentuate the experience of the objects.

This trend culminates, appropriately, in the museum opened in April by Serota and his co-director, Lars Nittve, the Tate Modern **(35,36)**. While its architecture is in the tradition of the grand spectacle, a converted power-house with the largest single museum space yet built, and while its rooms are a succession of Modern white cubes, its strategy of exhibition is Post-Modern. That is, out of 81 white cubes no less than 46 are devoted to single artists.[5] Experience, in this way, has trounced interpretation; it is the victory of the museum as a collection of one-man shows; or the apotheosis of the artist as lonesome cowboy, the John Wayne figure doing his own thing. At the Tate Modern not only the single evolutionary line of Modernism has been abandoned, but any historical argument. Yet, at the same time, the curators have struck back and outgunned the lonely cowboys as they now make up their categories and free associations -- showing they too are artists. The most surreal of these juxtapositions has the Minimalists in the Nude section, in the category of "The Perceiving Body". Why? Because of the minimal argument that such sculpture requires the viewer to be mobile thereby heightening one's body perception. According to such Monty Python thinking Mondrian grids become relevant as the precusor to those of Gilbert and George. The results, as intended, set the teeth grinding of the few remaining Modernists and also serious critics such as David Sylvester. A few rooms succeed very well in making fresh and illuminating juxtapositions and the post-modern emphasis on micronarratives, the intent of Tate Modern to reveal hidden correspondences. The recent re-hang at MOMA called *Making Choices* is even more successful with these intentions, possibly because their collection is so rich in its ability to make pertinent cross-references.

At such moments one can applaud the whole revisionist endeavour, and anticipate the next stage of development. The Modern/Post-Modern museum of the future will strick a much better balance between the demands of dominant history and micronarrative, experience and interpretation and the other contradictions I have mentioned. This will happen because of the relentless criticism from within the art profession, and because the curators will become more skilled with their new found freedoms.

The wandering search

What sense can we make of this summary of contrary trends? Does it show any hidden patterns, is there some story that can be divined? Does the evolution of the museum from cathedral to scientific time-line to shopping centre – from white cube to black box to post-modern collage reveal a secret dialectic? I have diagrammed these positions in what is called a semantic space to bring out some of the order **(39,40)**. As can be seen, the three major axes define a few key issues: experience versus interpretation, monism versus pluralism, and the neutral decontextualised space versus the charged, contextualised place. The colours of the diagram bring out the similarities, as well as the way the museums cluster in semantic space.

This reveals some surprising points. There is not a single narrative to the history of the museum, its story jumps around in space, as if searching for all the possibilities. At first this looks like the famous "drunken walk", a random sequence of just one idea after another, the hunting of a computer that has no destination, that moves around in larger and larger zig-zags as it gets further and further from the mark. But then one notices the local coherence and trends, the way for short periods of history there is a direction – for instance, the pluralist works in the 1980s, or the recreation of the artist's studio or ambiance in the 1990s. These moments of coherence are obviously related to each other dialectically even if, across time, there are unpredictable and sudden jumps. Taken as a whole the diagram confirms my basic point, that there is no single overarching logic, or telos, or theme to the museum – we are dealing with an institution hunting for its soul. But the semantic space shows there is a loose centre to this search, a kind of strange attractor that pulls the museum and exhibition towards the middle of the extremes, or rather pulls it towards contradictory poles at once. In other words, the museum strives to be a contradiction of the opposite forces that are pulling it this way and that.

Facing the contradictions: juxtaposition

These various ideas and forces are not exhaustive – there is, for instance, the virtual museum and its relationship to new media – but they make the point that contradictory models must be acknowledged and possibly exploited. One view is that contradictory functions increase the pleasure and depth of a museum, accentuating its role as a new building type. At the Groningen Museum in Holland, Frans Haks and his four architects led by Alessandro Mendini have created a system of differences, a juxtaposition of spaces, moods and structure that brings out the qualities of different periods of art **(41,42)**. Here the local, Dutch artefacts are shown within an abstracted version of the local vernacular, and four further styles either support, or contradict, the work within **(43,44)**. Either way it heightens experience and difference. And whatever one thinks of the architecture, which is rather diagrammatic, the ad hoc juxtapositions do refresh the identity of each type of art, both by a contrasting ambience and contrasting views of the city and water. Given the pluralist collections of large museums, eclecticism and collage become realistic strategies for the architecture, indeed minimal requirements for an art that differs. I am not suggesting that Groningen is the model for the contemporary museum, only that its strategy is superior to the muddles that come from putting the shopping centre inside the cathedral and treating both as if they were the same thing – as does the Museum of Modern Art. Honesty and grace demand that we face up to differences, enjoy them, make an architecture from them.

Facing the cathedral

Secondly, after the decline of Christianity and the displacement of the cathedral from the centre of public life, I think we should also face up to the metaphor that has surrounded the debate for the last thirty years: with all its faults, the 'museum as cathedral' is here to stay. There is no other building type or institution that can take on its role in what is fast becoming a Post-Christian society. Not only is the art market a multi-billion dollar industry, but we spend cathedral-like sums on museums: the billion dollar New Getty, the 650 million dollar New MOMA and the New Guggenheim projected for New York at 850 million dollars **(43,44)**. In terms of the French cathedrals of the Gothic period these figures may still be relatively low. Chartres Cathedral in over seventy years of building, took a much larger proportion of the citizens income than any contemporary museum today -- perhaps as much as 50%. But the point is not an exact equivalence between museum and cathedral. Rather it is to

understand the role of museums in orienting spiritual and cultural life, in being the institution on which we spend extra effort and disposable, or honorific, income.

Since the museum is evolving quickly today, as well as jumping around exploring new territory, we might define more clearly its spiritual role. Again there is muddle because we do not face the reality. For instance, on the interior of the new Tate Modern, the grand cathedral nave rises up not to a work of art or a suitable object for contemplation, but a blank window and frosted windows **(45,46)**. On the outside the only thing expressed is a giant frosted window-wall, the restaurant. By these lights the architect's are inadvertently saying 'life culminates in a three-star Michelin'; at least the architects of Santiago de Compostela knew that, if lucky, you ate in one on the pilrimage road, not on the high altar. Surely we can be responsible for the symbolism and message on which we spend so much honorific money, surely if we are going to feature frosted glass we can find a greater excuse than sitting or eating and drinking (or, if not, then at least show the way *cul*ture comes from *culti*vating wine). Meaning and symbolism are primary when society's discretionary money is spent.

Moreover, the content of so much contemporary art – Earth Art, Minimal Art, Conceptual Art – is spiritual in part and directed to our relationship to the cosmos **(47,48)**. We go to this and other art for nourishment, transcendence, speculation, and all the pleasures of the mind and body. A museum is the place where meditation and contemplation are well served. The majority of contemporary art is secular, ephemeral, wilfully promotional, sometimes pornographic but that should not distract us from those parts that have a greater reach. In a robust cathedral such as Toulousse the secular, noisy and smelly life of the pilgrims was allowed to enter, but it still did not overpower the main functions of education, passing on values and worship. Obviously we cannot pray in museums, if people still pray, but we can as Louis Kahn did in the Kimbell, provide momentary backgrounds where the basic facts of life – light, geometry, growth, our connection to the cosmos – find expression and celebration **49,50)**.

After all, one of the great excitements of today, one of the great spiritual discoveries of our time, is that we are the first generation to know the story of the universe right back to the beginning moment of creation 13 billion years ago. We can tell this story for the first time as a single, creative unfolding event -- one that is still unfolding and jumping from stage to stage and one that includes us in its narrative as participants and celebrants. An architecture and art is emerging that is based on this

cosmic view and one that celebrates its creativity and dynamism. That is the direction towards which I foresee this strange and dynamic building type evolving: the Spectacular Museum will, like art, either take on a cosmic vision or we will soon tire of the spectacle.

Footnotes

1. Martin Filler, 'the Museum Game', The New Yorker, April 17,2000, p.101.

2.(Henri de Saint Simon, Opinions littéraires, philosophiques et industrielles, Paris 1825, pp. 347, quoted from Donald Drew Egbert, Social Radicalism and the Arts, Western Europe, New York, 1970, pp. 121-2).

3. Robert Hughes in 'Art and Money' (1984, reprinted in Nothing If Not Critical, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1990, pp. 387-404) makes some very interesting points about the way the art market has hanged in the last three hundred years and its effect on the way art is produced and perceived.

4. Nicholas Serota, Experience or Interpretation: The Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art, Thames and Hudson, London, 1996.

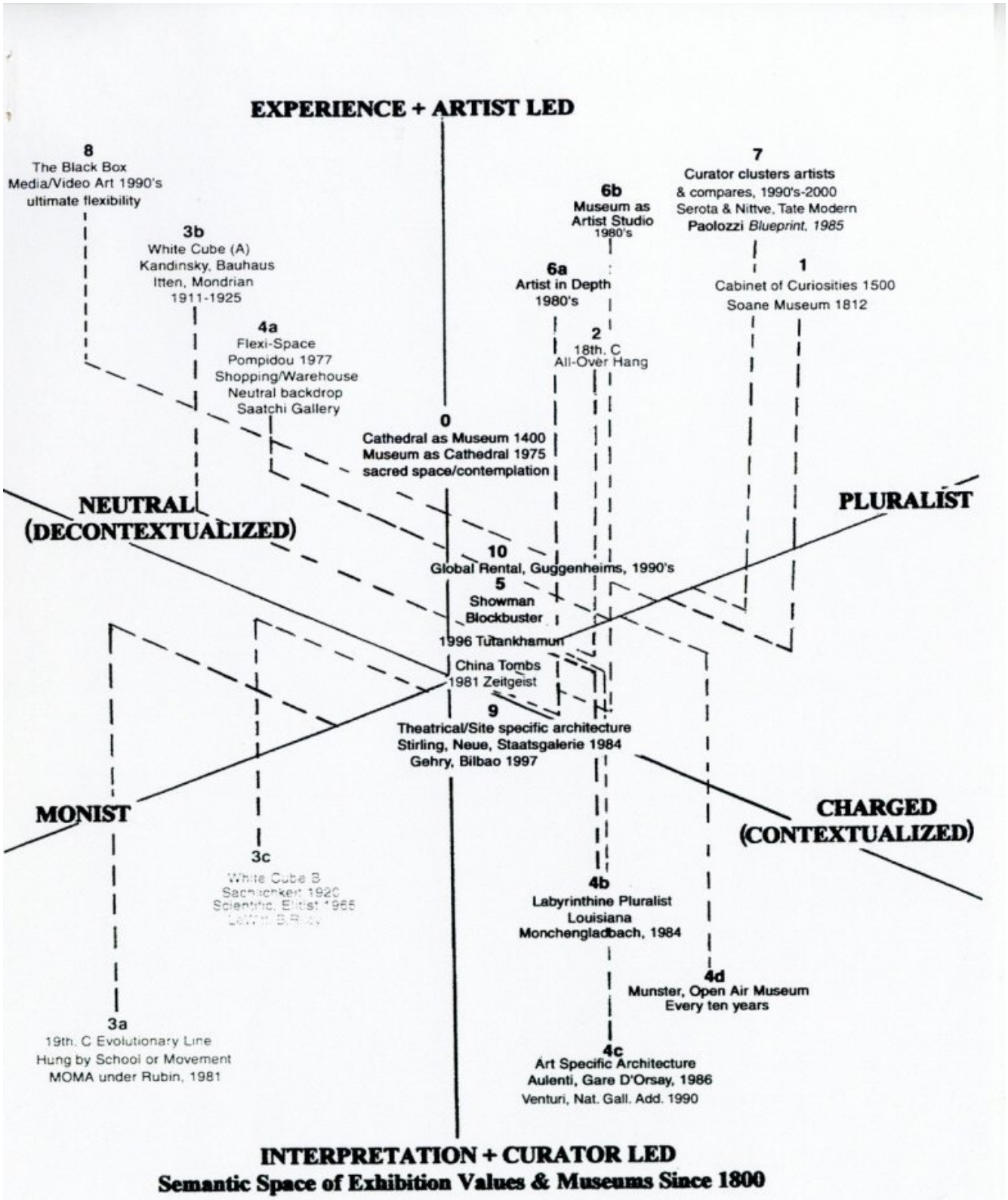
5. For some of these ideas see the pertinent review of the Tate Modern, James Hall, 'The Age of the Isolated Individual', *TLS*, May 19, 2000, pp.18-19.

xx. Andreas Huyssen, Twilight Memories, Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia, Routledge, New York and London, 1995.

Captions, more to come:

1,2) Frank Gehry, New Guggenheim, Bilbao, 1993-7. Seen from the surounding hills against an industrial city, or glimpsed from anywhere within the urban fabric, this brilliant explosion of titanium shines out like a new cathedral. 3,4) Erectheum, Caryatid 5,6) Edouard Loviot, Parthenon restoration, Athens, 1881. Mythological and historical scenes are memorialised while, on the outside, countless votive statues surrounded the building -- a site of memory. 7,8)) Emanuel de Witte, Dutch Interior, 17th century. The "white cube" before the fact. 9,10)4) British Museum pediment -- the progress of civilisation leads to Britain, Robert Smirke, 1823-1847. 11,12) Natural History Museum --the iconography and layout of a Romanseque Cathedral, Alfred Waterhouse, 1881. 13,14) "Vomitorium" at the Sainsbury Wing -- because of its mass culture role, Robert Venturi made this comparison to a stadium entrance, 1986. 15,16) Arata Isozaki, COSI, Columbus Ohio Science Center, 1999 – the ultimate black box as cosmic enigma. 17,18) I.M.Pei, New Louvre Shopping Precinct -- what every mega-museum gets. Psychologists say that shopping develops the brain. 19,20) FLW, Guggenheim, 1959, FG, Guggenheim Opening, October 1997 – the Opening Ritual. 21,22) Apocalypse 23,24) Constructivism, 25,26) Munster 1997; The open-air

museum, the street-art museum, the public-art museum, all extensions of the local Westfalisches Landesmuseum. 27,28) Looking backwards, a Cabinet of Curiosities; looking forward, a Joseph Cornell box. 29,30) Soane Cabinet 31,32) Hans Hollein, Museum of Modern Art, Monchengladbach, 1972-82. The labyrinth, the cathedral, the underground museum -- the hybrid type. 33,34) Rothko Room/ Schafffhausen with Naumann 35,36) Tate Rooms 37,38) Paolozzi Blueprint 39,40) Charles Jencks, Semantic Space of Exhibition Values, 1997.There are a series of three main oppositions around which exhibition and museum strategy oscillates. 1) The choice between the monism and pluralism. The issue is one either of categories or taste or both. 2) A choice between the artist and curator. Which is the more powerful? Put another way is it the art's autonomy as displayed or the interpretation of the curator which is more important? 3) The choice between contextualising art in its historical framework versus showing it abstracted as an aesthetic or religious icon of veneration ("The White Cube" argument of many critics and curators). The semantic space also shows that there is both local coherence and large-scale randomness in the way art is displayed. For instance, between the traditional and pluralist collections of the 15-18th century and the evolutionary, single-line displays of the 19th and early 20th century (that is 1, 2, and 3a, 3b, 3c). Thus there is both coherent evolution and a reactive revolution, and the latter may lead museums in almost any direction. Put another way, the history of museums jumps choatically, but it also shows, within these punctuations, more predictable sequences. However, there is also a definite centre of gravity, the museum cannot evolve any which way, and it is the Blockbuster Show, post-1965, which tries to occupy this implied centre.41,42) Museum as Juxtaposed Pavilions -- Frans Haks asked Alessandro Mendini to work with other architects to create this system of difference at the Groningen Museum, Holland, 1994.
43,44) FG Guggenheim NYC, 45,46) TATE MODERN, 47,48) Cosmic/Kimbell.



Semantic Space of Exhibition Values & Museums Since 1800