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scapes, distracting as they may be. It would appear that art becomes more acceptable to the public in this way.

There can be no doubt about the success with the public; it is a fact. Be it the building of James Stirling in Stuttgart, Hans Hollein's construction in Frankfurt a. M. or the Centre Pompidou in Paris, all of them are points of attraction which draw vast numbers of visitors. Whether or not this leads to a greater interest in art is another question. Evidence suggests that a great number of people visit these places because of the architecture. This certainly speaks for the architecture but not for its suitability in presenting art. Despite this success I am convinced that open art in an open architecture amounts to tautology and becomes utterly meaningless.

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Peter Weibel

**Museums in the Post-industrial
Mass Society (2000)
An argument against the
metaphysics of presence and for
the physics of the masses**

S. 117-120

In order to find answers explaining the change in the discourse about museums and in the use of museums in the post-industrial mass society, new questions have to be put to architects, artists, curators and the public about the function of art and of exhibition and collection. We presuppose the admittedly romantic idea that art, i.e. the architecture and the exhibited works of art, could shed light on one another. This common goal is shared by probably all those who work in the museum field; therefore, disagreements arise only when asked how to achieve this goal. For the conception of how architecture, the building surrounding the exhibit, should relate to the exhibited works themselves diverge widely, on occasion even building binary, contrary poles. Artists and curators generally tend to grant an ancillary function to architecture, whereas architects tend to reject this function and insist upon the artistic character of the building. Architects may find art annoying, on the other hand, artists and curators often find the architecture too obtrusive, and therefore annoying.

We are, therefore, concerned with differing conceptions about the function of art as well as architecture. Considering the situation described above, we can derive that every exhibition, every presentation, every display has something to do with ideology and that the worst kind of ideology is one which claims and believes it is not one after all. There is no neutral display, even the most neutral display in a so-called "white cube" reveals a certain ideology, a certain attitude to the function of art, for example, a neutralizing one. Every display, every presentation can emphasize different aspects of a work of art, can neutralize certain components and stress other emotional or cognitive aspects, can reduce a work of art to an art-immanent aesthetic experience of beauty or also unfold its social and critical dimension. Every architecture, every presentation dictates particular forms of enjoyment and of recognition. The kind of ideology which claims to be pragmatical and anti-ideological, so to speak according to the motto "Nail in the wall and picture on the nail", reduces the work of art to an object of purely visual significance, strips away from the work of art all other aspects, basically robs a work of art of its artistic character and because of this will be all the more ideological, namely power-pragmatical, granting certain privileges for the enjoyment of art. The anti-ideological conception of an art exhibition is fundamentally a power-pragmatical ideology that stands in the way of every other ideology. All other conceptions will therefore be excluded.

In the same way, the lack of criteria of present-day curators guarantees their omnipotence because without criteria their individual dictatorship, disguised as "intuition", becomes legitimate. An apparent pluralism shrouds the tyranny of subjective choice. Thus, the exhibits and exhibition buildings themselves become the realm of ideologies, a place where ideological conflicts hit each other head-on even more so than in many other areas of society, a place where ideological views also change much more often than elsewhere. The protagonists of the "museum revolution" of the 60s, during which the museum should have been blown up and the difference between art and life dropped, did a turnaround in the 80s and demanded the museum be a shelter for art.¹ In the 60s art felt confined by the museum; the museum was called

1 Harald Szeemann writes in the catalogue to his influential exhibit. *Wenn Attitüden Norm werden*, Kunsthalle Bern, 22. 3.-24. 4. 1969: At the same time a desire has been expressed to blast apart the triangle, in which art occurs - atelier, gallery, museum. In the same catalogue Scott Burton writes: "This exhibition reveals how that distinction between art and life is fading."

a prison. In the 80s art was produced directly for the museum. The musealization of art was no longer treated with hostility like in the 60s, rather to the contrary, it was strived for, and the exhibition curators went along with this change.² If it was considered progressive in the past to liberate art from the museum, then today the main concern is liberating the museum from art and replacing it with something else. The boom in the "exhibition happenings" of the 80s is illustrative of this substitution process. The contradictory views of the function of a museum, the exhibition and of art, how they are expressed in the change from the museum revolution of the 60s to the museum boom of the 80s, proclaimed mostly by the very same people, demonstrate the radical change in the discourse about museums. However, they also show that, as far as space for art and exhibitions of art in museums are concerned, art alone is not the only important factor, and that it has never been a central factor at all. Whether a museum is a prison or a shelter for art depends upon one's conception of what are should be. Whether a museum is a prestigious building or a simple multi-functional gallery depends on the function one attributes to art. What space for art looks like depends upon whether or not art is used as a means to change society and life. As far as space for art and art exhibitions are concerned, the architectural debate itself is not the only important topic: if art is a stage for society to observe itself, then the discourse about museums is really about the structure of society itself and how it functions.

The transformations of the post-industrial and information-based society have decisively shaped not only cultural behaviour, but also the relationship between art and society at the end of the 20th century. The challenges of the modern mass society have laid new responsibilities especially on culture. Modernism and the masses form a changing and dramatic chapter in the 20th century, a spectrum that reaches from the rejection of the masses and of the definition of art as the last bulwark of the elite to the embrace of advanced civilization and popular culture. From Nietzsche to Baudrillard there have been attempts to shed light on the correlations between the power of mass media, the function of culture in the modern mass society and behavioral and normative standards.³ The discussion about post-modernism has used mass culture as a agent provocateur and reduced certain prejudices against mass culture. Especially architecture has played a great role in the post-modern attention given to mass culture (see "Learning from Las Vegas" by Venturi). Architecture has shown understanding for the social changes and their cultural consequences. Its development of a multilinguistic code, which combines popular and elitist forms, has created a diversified perception of phenomena in mass culture. Post-modern architecture has calmed the fear of this mass culture, the fear of losing artistic autonomy, the fear of losing advanced civilized traditions, which represent a touch of antiquity on the post-modern horizon, by dealing with differing codes belonging to the popular and elitist culture playfully. The historical difference between the fine arts and so-called mass culture has become blurred in the post-modern age. From this several problem areas and suggestions for their solutions have developed.⁴

2 In Archiv, No. 3, 1988, p. 9, H. Szeemann says in a conversation with Rob de Graaf and Antje von Graevenitz: Art is fragile, an alternative to everything in our society that is susceptible to consumption and reproduction. Therefore, art must be protected, and the museum is an appropriate place for this.

3 Norbert Krenzlín (ed.), *Zwischen Angstmetapher und Terminus. Theorien der Massenkultur seit Nietzsche*, Berlin: Akademie 1992.

4 Fredric Jameson, *Post-modernism - Concerning the Logic of Culture in the Late Capitalistic Era*, in: A. Hyssen, K.R. Scherpe (eds.), *Post-Modernism. A Sign of Cultural Change*, Hamburg: Rowohlt 1986.

As the difference between fine art and mass culture disappears, it could naturally and justifiably be feared that critical distance, negativity and subjectivity, which once were the trademark of modern art, might be abandoned. Furthermore, mass culture is suspected of being solely consumer-oriented. Part of the logic of late capitalist culture, a multinational capitalism built on electronic production, is the expansion of culture (everything is art, everyone is an artist) and the universal transformation of everything into merchandise, even works of art. The odium of mass culture, being a consumer-oriented culture, is therefore a challenge which should be critically met.

On the other hand, the correlation between class society and the division of art in "high" art (for the privileged classes) and "low" art (for the masses) is very apparent. The climb of the industrialized mass society has put an end to this division. The diverse revolutions in mass communication have intensified this process. The transition of a class to a mass society, from a class to a mass culture is therefore historically inevitable and demonstrates above all that the post-modern-age discussion has not only aesthetic, but also above all political accents. The unfortunate loss of autonomy in art etc. is therefore in many cases only a lamentation over the loss of privileges (of a particular class). The radical change of discourse about museums is fundamentally defined by the discussion about post-modernism and the changing cultural behavior in this mass society (between historical elitist positions and consumerism). This cultural change has particularly compelled the classical museum architecture and exhibition culture to far-reaching changes.⁵ Assimilating those changes in the new "Mainland" (Gilbert Seldes, 1936), in the postindustrial faceless society, would mean accepting the right of the masses to culture as well as the resulting transformations of the concept of culture, i.e. like the fading difference between fine art and art for the masses, however, at the same time not throwing overboard all the modern views of critical negativity. Instead of classical museum architecture, which addresses itself to an aging elitist public, we are concerned with museums today that have become a part of the tourism industry. The boom in museum construction, which began in the 80s, tried to create new space for this new cultural behavior of the masses, where art also becomes a form of entertainment, a form of freetime activity and playful creativity, a weekend-course experience; that means space changed meeting the needs of a changed cultural behavior. From this we can observe one main trend, namely that architects, curators and artists are working simultaneously along the same line, even though each one believes to be acting differently for his/her own reasons, mainly because they run into conflicts of interest along the way. The trend is namely towards exhibitionism. And because everyone would like to take a front seat in this exhibitionist display, they all step on each other's toes. The demands of the masses have created a mass-media entertainment industry, into which art has been integrated. In keeping with its democratic convictions, museum architecture has now tried to collect and support this growing interest in art by the public sector, i.e. the masses and the mass media, as part of the organized leisure time of the mass society by intensifying the entertainment value or rather the post-

⁵ As especially enlightening analyses of opposing points of view, I can recommend to this topic: Umberto Eco, *Apokalyptiker und Integrierte. Zur kritischen Kritik der Massenkultur*, Frankfurt/M. Fischer 1986. Rosalind Krauss, *The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museums*, in: *Texts about Art*, No 6/June, Cologne, 1992.

modern multiple coding of architecture. This trend led to a new style in exhibition space which emphasizes a show-like character. Major exhibitions for masses of visitors were especially staged in this newly created exhibition space. Exhibitions became shows. This new exhibition space and its show, this union of dramatized museum architecture and display architecture have substantially contributed to the growing numbers of visitors. These show-like exhibitions and their theater-like exhibition space are a primary attempt to reconcile the demands of art and the masses. Conflicts naturally arise between architect, curator and artist as they try to win the audience, in this competition for the pole-position of public attention.

Peter Eisenman speaks for many architects when he said on the occasion of the opening of his Wexner Center for the Visual Arts, built 1982-89, in Columbus, Ohio: We would like to exhibit art here, but must we necessarily do it in a way as it has always been done, in front of a neutral backdrop? In other words, should the architecture be a backdrop for art? Must architecture therefore serve art? My answer to this: on no account. The architecture should provoke art. We must dispel this definition of architecture as a service-oriented profession. As soon as we question the habits of how museum curators exhibit works of art or how art critics write about these works, we upset the balance. Art critics dispise my construction, curators do, too. Why? Because it forces them to reconsider the relationship of painting and room. In museums even the most radical artists would like the architecture to subordinate itself and act as a pedestal or an easel.⁶

The architect would also like to be an artist him/herself with all the privileges like critical negativity, autonomy etc. The architect like the modern artist does not want to conform to the surroundings, to society, to life, rather he/she would like to criticize society and art, too. Architecture's criticism of art very seldom aims at the cognitive deficits of the works of art themselves, usually only at the show and sensationalist value of art. In this "society of spectacles" (Guy Debord) art becomes a rival to architecture in the fight for visual attractiveness, in the fight for mass popularity. The architect who propagates a post-modern exterior structure retreats in the battle against art to modern conceptions of autonomy and negativity for the interior. The museum's exterior may function as a dialogue to level and blur differences, however, the interior presents itself as autonomous. Therefore, museum architecture sets itself apart from architecture as a whole: it is a special case of architecture as interior design. The otherwise common unity of the exterior and interior construction can lead to conflicts with art in the battle for show value in the post-modern age. It is, of course, legitimate to see the exterior of an architectural structure as an artistic sculpture, even in its post-modern version with its increased show value. However, if the interior of an architectural structure is designed to be too much of an autonomous work of art that simultaneously in the exhibition space itself satisfies the increasing post-modern demand for staging, there's a risk that the exhibition space and the exhibited works of art will compete with one another.

Architecture claims the right to be art itself, architectural art, which can cause an intense conflict with the rights of the exhibited

⁶ Peter Eisenman, *Weak Form*, in: Peter Noever (ed.), *Architektur im Aufbruch. Neue Positionen zum Dekonstruktivismus*, Munich, Prestel 1991, p. 39.

works of art for two reasons: first of all, because works of art want to be left in peace and only function in a neutral white cube, thus themselves serve a specific ideology of modernism; secondly, because works of art present themselves as post-modern and compete with the style of the exhibition space and the show. However, both the new space for art and the new presentation norms for art show a common trend toward show-oriented exhibitions and theater-like exhibition space. As a rule the architect and curator create the new museum in "Mainland" together: the museum, the kunsthalle, the exhibition as adventure park and event zone, as part of the leisure, tourist and entertainment industry. The argument between architect and curator, whether art should serve architecture or architecture serve art, hides the fact that they both serve the same thing, namely an event-oriented culture. Peter Eisenman describes the common credo of architects as well as exhibitors:

The time of reality is no longer the time of stagnation, the time of history, the time of this room. It's about another kind of time, the time of the event.⁷

Most exhibitors have deliberately or nolens volens, consciously or unconsciously, shown the same response architects have to the challenge of modernism created by mass culture, namely the emphasis on the event- and experience-oriented character of the exhibition. Only this changed mass-cultural representation and reception of art has created other specific forms in the discourse on exhibitions than in the discourse on museum architecture. The new show-like displays of art in special exhibition rooms have especially led to a new exhibition type and to new exhibition strategies, which have completely changed or destroyed the classical recipes of presentation and reception of art, like genealogy, chronology and stylistic development. The real tragedy in this development is that exactly those exhibitors who are waging war on post-modern architecture in the name of modern art are in reality the ones who through their exhibition strategies betray modern art to a much greater extent than post-modern architects have. In this cultural dispute they have become fundamentalists. New types of exhibitions, a reaction of the fundamentalists among the exhibitors to the demands of mass society on culture, are productions that deal with software, not hardware, or the way works of art relate to one another. The production has entered a mental phase. The physical post-modernism of architecture, its goal set on emphasizing experiences, converges with a mental post-modernism of the exhibitors, which has set its goal in emphasizing experiences as well by propagating the metaphysics of presence. Metaphysics cuts the band of history, of chronology, of genealogy, of causality, of evolution. Exhibitions are no longer arranged by so-called criteria of time because if time refers only to the time of the event, then the exhibition is only an event and not a window through time. A close relationship to the present is being strived for, one that insists on immediacy, sensibility, purity, simplicity. Correspondencies, constellations, affinities, interference and resonance are produced purely subjectively, intuitively. They replace the historical categories of genealogy, of development, of chronology. The eternal present rules in the museums of the Mainland. The new post-modern exhibition type

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 37.

(from Rudi Fuchs to Harald Szeemann), which in self-deception believes itself modernistic, but in reality is a kind of post-modern fundamentalism, is ahistorical.⁸ This ahistorical exhibition type enables the intensification of voyeurism, the reduction of the work of art to a simple sensual form of experience, which apparently accommodates the consumer needs of the masses and at the same time satisfies the elitist awareness of experts and exhibitors.

The ahistorical type of exhibition that seems to display everything simultaneously as a cross-section of the present, a cross-section of events in the universal space of the present, lures the masses with the false hopes of the modern age. For the achievements of modernism like genealogy, evolution, originality, autonomy have more profoundly been betrayed in ahistorical exhibitions than in dramatized or display architecture. Traditional chronological arrangements, genealogical arrangements based on style or those based on evolution are replaced by empathetic mixtures and comparisons, which are based on nothing other than the curator's subjective taste and conception of the world, and therewith is an expression of his/her subjective tyranny for the sake of sentimentalism.⁹

The pluralistic potpourri of this subjective emphatic choice, the cross-sections through the present, through geography, the subjective arbitrariness of correspondences, combinations and affinities, which replace comparison, observation, derivation and analysis, prepare the ground for a culture based on spectacles and adventures, on which a dramatized post-modern architecture builds, and also prepare the ground for a society dominated by swaying emotions, which are drifting to the right. Wandering drunken by the experience from room to room - this is the result of the exhibitor's fundamentalist metaphysics of presence and the post-modern staging of display architecture, for these only seem to be in conflict, but in reality they are working hand in hand. Together both have achieved undeniable success in bridging the gap between modernism and the masses, between art and the entertainment industry. Nevertheless, the question remains: at what cost have these successes been achieved, and secondly, have all possibilities already been exhausted. Another question is whether the museum as an experience, the museum as a zoo, doesn't actually sacrifice art to the masses or the masses to manipulation in the same way that this was done under the Nazi regime, just in a different, democratically legitimate way. Does the mass audience still experience art in the museum in Mainland, in the exhibitions in Mainstream anyway or is the work of art not robbed of all potential of criticism, of negativity, of distance, of autonomy through its neutral presentation in these museums. Another question is whether a spectacular, experience-oriented, representative style of construction, which supports the ahistorical, experience-oriented exhibitions, is still able to translate and release or construe the meaning, the signification of the work of art; or is it not better suited to level or to extinguish art? Can references, contexts still be created here, which lend these works a genuine meaning, from which our cultural capital, our knowledge is put together? Is cultural competence still produced there or is everything drowning in the frenzy of experiencing? Isn't the deconstructivist play with tectonics and gravity the last turn

⁸ Deborah Meijers, *The Museum and the "Ahistorical" Exhibition*, in: Ine Gevers (ed.), *Place, Position, Presentation, Public*. Jan van Eyck Academy, 1993.

⁹ See for example the exhibition *Ahistorische Klanken*, by H. Szeemann, 1988 in the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam, and the Documenta IX in Kassel 1992 by Jan Hoet.

in the screw of voyeurism, where the work of art degenerates to a voyeuristic object, to its basic show value? A legitimate transformation of the concept of culture through post-modernism and mass civilization is the expansion of the term art.

In this respect, the Centre Pompidou, which is not only a museum, but also a cinema, a library, a train station, a theater, a drug store, a zoo and an archive, is still the epitome of the post-modern museum, a place of enlightenment and diversion. Namely, it shows architectonically as well as functionally the artificiality and the hypotheticalness of culture. There is no sacral white cube, but also no historical exhibition; there is only its architecture, which overdramatizes its transparency, but nonetheless enables a scientifically sound treatment of art. In a post-modern exterior, which serves several functions simultaneously (from library to observation tower), the production of exhibitions, which attract post-modern masses and nevertheless fulfill the classical requirements of modernism like analysis and genealogy, is made possible. In this way passing off something as universal for present time, which is only personal feeling, can be avoided. The simultaneousness of multicultural needs and artistic methods of production do not have to inevitably end in a historical event- and experience-oriented exhibit, but can quite to the contrary abandon those conditions of its origins. A exhibit and museum typology, which puts more emphasis on experiments and laboratory than on representation and eventfulness, more on the telematics of the media than on the metaphysics of presence, could offer new answers to the transformations of culture through mass civilization. At least it mapped out, moulded the open forms of the future.

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Peter Wigglesworth Project for Bregenz

Peter Wigglesworth born 1945 in Witney/England, lives and works in Zurich.

In creating his works, Peter Wigglesworth has adopted an all-encompassing approach reflecting his intention to create forms for life, work and art. He no longer distinguishes between artistic work, architecture and the surrounding landscape, but wants to produce a synthesis of all these. The exhibited artistic works and the rooms created for them are to become one with the surrounding landscape. Wigglesworth's considerations initially stem from developments in his flat, wall-oriented work. Based on his approach he made two models for Bregenz as well as eight sketches.

The model *Bregenz I* shows two structures made of concrete that could either be artistic projects or exhibition rooms. Both projects are placed close to one another. Wigglesworth uses glass for the first time in this project. These are his first projects in which he has strived to overcome the limitations of room and architecture.

Real dimensions: Structure I: 3.3 x 4.3 x 9.1 m, with two central entrances and four interior walls for painted wall surfaces, 3 x 4 m each
Structure II: 3.3 x 4.3 x 9.1 m, four entrances and two interior walls for painted surfaces, 3 x 7 m each

The model *Bregenz II* consists of four single buildings: alternating, two living and work rooms and two artistic projects made of concrete which also could be architectonic rooms. Art work exhibited here forms a whole with these rooms.

Real dimensions: Building for living and work space: 3.3 x 12.45 x 6.3 m. Artistic project: 3.3 x 12.3 x 3.15 m each, within each structure two opposing walls of 3.3 x 12 m each

Building and artistic projects stand in a row within a plantation of 15 trees in a 20 x 20 m framework which is meant to integrate the surrounding landscape.