ARCHITECTURE AND THE ART MUSEUM
IN SEARCH OF A SIGNIFICANCE

A Thesis Submitted to
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for the Degree of Master of Architecture

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A mon oncle Jean,
artiste accompli, dont la mémoire m'a inspiré

Au Liban,
dans l'espoir qu'il retrouve un jour la paix

ABSTRACT

Because it is chiefly a "place of meeting" of architecture with the other forms of art, the museum participates necessarily in the elaboration of an architecture that goes beyond the usual concern for "*habitable*" space - a functionalism derived from western civilization's pragmatism The concept of the museum has provoked profound changes in the cultural significance of what it *re-presents* The museum reflects a culture of "pluralism," of different world views as well as an intention to represent the world through a categorization of the "fragment " Hence it brings forth the contradictions inherent in our anthropocentric society which is, itself, the product of the complexity and contradictions specific to man. Thus the present thesis investigates the potential for significance of the main architectural themes pertaining to the art museum

RÉSUMÉ

Parce qu'il est principalement le "lieu de rencontre" de l'architecture et des autres formes d'art, le musee participe nécessairement dans l'élaboration d'une architecture qui va au-delà d'un interêt pour les espaces "*habitables*" - fonctionalisme derivé du pragmatisme de la civilisation occidentale. Le concept du musée a provoqué de profonds changements dans la signification culturelle de ce qu'il *re-presente.* Le musée reflete une culture de "pluralisme," de différentes visions du monde, ainsi qu'une volonté de representation du monde par une catégorisation du "fragment." Il met donc en avant les contradictions inhérentes à notre société anthropocentrique, elle même produit de la complexité et des contradictions propres à l'homme. Ainsi donc la présente thèse propose une recherche du potentiel de signification des principaux thèmes architecturaux intéressant le musée d'art.

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To my friends and "family" in Montreal and New York Charles, Hassan, Laurence, Lamia, Maya, Nadim, and Sabeh; a million thanks for having endured my moods during times that were sometimes frustrating You have been a joyful reminder of life beyond thesis

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TABLE OF CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

In observing the recent cultural development of civilizations one cannot help but be struck by the proliferation of museums. Newly independent countries that are in search of their cultural identity often build museums as one of the first gestures of emancipation; museums have become the core of their cultural infrastructure. Western nations are also in a period where new museums are being built at an impressive rate, and extensions to older ones added. Democratic ideals have found their way in the museum changing its popular perception; no longer a nineteenth century elitist 'temple' of knowledge, it has become a more democratic cultural centre.

Whether in large metropolis or in small towns, subsidised by governments or privately owned, museums have played a predominant role in the social life of their communities. Originating as an exclusive individual collection that reflected a specific world view, the museum was transformed forever by the opening of the Louvre during the French Revolution. It became the symbol of the citizenry's pride in their culture, historic achievements, and newly acquired political liberty. As opposed to the isolation of academia, museums are public institutions where visitors can *wander* around experiencing not only the objects of past times but temporality itself; enriching their own artistic, scientific or historical knowledge freely, at their own pace.

Museums are the theaters of very popular cultural events. What are the implications of these institutions on both the items exhibited and the way we perceive them? By assessing the role the museum has played in profoundly altering society's perception of the meaning of art and history, the present work attempts to draw the relevant conclusions that would help us give meaning to its architecture. The concept of the museum has provoked profound changes in the cultural significance of what it *re-presents*. Yet the concept of the museum has been so widespread that we find institutions for all kinds of objects which often express different cultural realities. It is difficult for instance to consider a museum of geology or astronomy as having the same cultural implications

as one of Fine Art or of cars. Museums are usually classified by discipline; i.e. as related to history, nature, technology, art. However a more encompassing and significant way of differentiating between them might be achieved by considering their relationship to man.* A line can be drawn between the museums that are directly related to man's production and action, and those related to nature or *God's work* - what is given. In the spirit of the modern era, it is legitimate to focus our attention on the subject of man: the contemporary world's centre. The following work is concerned primarily with the art museum artistic production as it relates to man's memory, and the recording of history through the collection and storage of art works as well as the architectural significance of the museum as an art work itself.

Here a clarification is in order. In dealing with the concept of the museum of art, no clear-cut distinction has been attempted between the *museum of art* and the *museum of contemporary art.* (the difference emerges only for the practical distribution of the works.) Some may argue that museums of contemporary art do not present art as a fragment of history in which case it would lead, through the search for art's significance, to yet another form of knowledge. Those detractors perceive history as something dead, whereas contemporary works reflect a cultural reality, a belief in a certain world view which is still lived and shared. It is inconceivable however, to ignore that all human actions are seen in a historical continuum; we *re-act* and react! All art is a process of enactment which is, in the author's opinion, so conscious of its cultural roots that contemporary art cannot be regarded as a practice divorced from any historical roots, referring solely to its own time. Our culture's sense of history is so deeply ingrained that even the most radically modern works can only be understood in the light of a historical perspective.

Current architectural theory and criticism's discussion of the transcendental significance of architecture tends to be diluted by all sorts of pragmatic, functional considerations. However, despite the fact that museum architecture has to respond to the strictest of practical constraints, it still offers the opportunity to design something that goes beyond the usual concern for *habitable* space - a building that could be a meaningful place. It is for this reason that museum's architecture

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* The term "man" is used to refer to mankind, meaning therefore both men and women.

is held in such great esteem by all architects who perceive it as an important and *delicate* task. This leads them to partake in the debate as to whether or not architecture is an art - rather than an applied science - and, if so, how to define it as such.

In a modern world divided between materialism and idealism, objective and subjective, rational and intuitive, the architect finds himself caught between two apparently opposing currents that are, in reality, fundamentally complementary. On the one hand, architecture needs science in order to achieve its initial goal of being built; on the other hand, technology, the *enfant chéri* of the age of science, tends to take over, becoming not only the 'means,' but the end in itself. Thus, architecture, considered as an applied science meant to provide the material comfort (cherished by Durand), is perceived as being opposed to art which is considered as an activity rooted in intuition and irrationality. Such an attitude has led to a perception of art and architecture as competing elements in our culture. The problem is encountered in the one building type which embodies their physical reunion: the museum of art. The question being raised as to know which - of art or architecture - should be doing justice to the other.

The premise here is that architecture is an art; that is, it contributes to the establishment of a symbolic order (be it human or cosmological). It *re-presents* the perceived reality of man. Architecture, by creating the most essential and primary environment of man does more than build shelters. The making of architecture involves a symbolism that translates the images it conveys, the spaces in which people evolve, the light through which everything takes shape, into a meaningful environment.

Despite the premise that architecture is an art and therefore, in its ultimate goal, is comparable to the other forms of art, our perception of it as a lived experience however, is altogether different.* Whereas one can only *'participate at a distance'* in the case of most of the other forms of art, architecture involves the body, mind and soul and is made of everything that surrounds us.

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* See Arnheim, "Introduction," The Dynamics of Architectural Form.

It is the opinion of the author that any architecture derives its meaning from two different sources. One, is its reason of existence which in that case is art; the other, is everything that is exterior to the building itself; the environment, history, and society's values. The implication of man happens in the understanding and interpretation of these elements. Frederick Kiesler, talking about architecture, said "any problem, big or little, requires a great humility to let it tell you what it wants, rather than you telling the problem how it should be resolved. It will develop from its own inner concept, which must be listened to and understood."*

It is not the aim of this work to determine a *'proper'* architectural form for the art museum, nor does it have the pretention of being a guideline, a check list, to which other people can refer. Rather than offering answers to problems, this thesis tries to raise questions and engage the reader in a discussion, perhaps encouraging further questions. The research revealed that there is a continuous questionning of the museum and its architecture because of a stimulating array of opinions and ideas on its significance. Thus one is encouraged to rethink his position on the subject and ultimately to address more deeply the problem of its architecture.

Finally, this investigation addresses some personal concerns. By investigating the cultural significance of the public institution and subsequently by trying to evaluate its possible influence on its architecture, an attempt is made to draw a relevant conclusion regarding *'my own'* architecture. Being able to establish a critical distance from the work, the hope is to develop a personal sense of architecture, an architectural judgement that does not rely on trends.

The thesis consists of two major sections: the first one deals with the idea of the museum; the second with its actual architecture. The former relates to the theoretical concept of the institution and its underlying principles. This section is divided into three chapters, the first of which deals with the prevailing ideas at the foundation of the museum, the social origins of the institution, its role and the way it has evolved. It explains the museum's effect on the work of art. Finally it discusses the ideas brought forth by the museum's detractors, and attempts to sketch new possibilities for its development. In the second chapter the focus is placed on the social context and

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* Kiesler, "Shrine of the Book," Progressive Architecture, (September 1965): p. 127

the way the museum influenced society's understanding of the significance of artistic practice. It discusses the evolution of the social role of the museum: its change from a sacred temple of taste to a democratic institution open both in a physical and figurative sense. The third chapter is concerned with the physical environment of the museum and the pragmatic and symbolic relationship between city and museum. This chapter constitutes the connector between the first and second part of the thesis.

The second part, the one which deals with the actual architecture of the museum, is presented as a critical, historical analysis of the three main architectural themes that are central to the theoretical discourse. The first theme is that of the museum as an architectural '*object*' in the urban context and the monumental imagery which the museum has adopted since its beginning. The second theme is that of lighting. It assesses its possibilities of expression and how it can enrich the environment of the art work. The third theme is that of the space surrounding the works of art. It relates to internal exhibition areas which are, of course the heart of the museum. It is of fundamental significance since it is the very physical place of the meeting of art and architecture.

PART ONE

THE IDEA OF THE MUSEUM OF ART

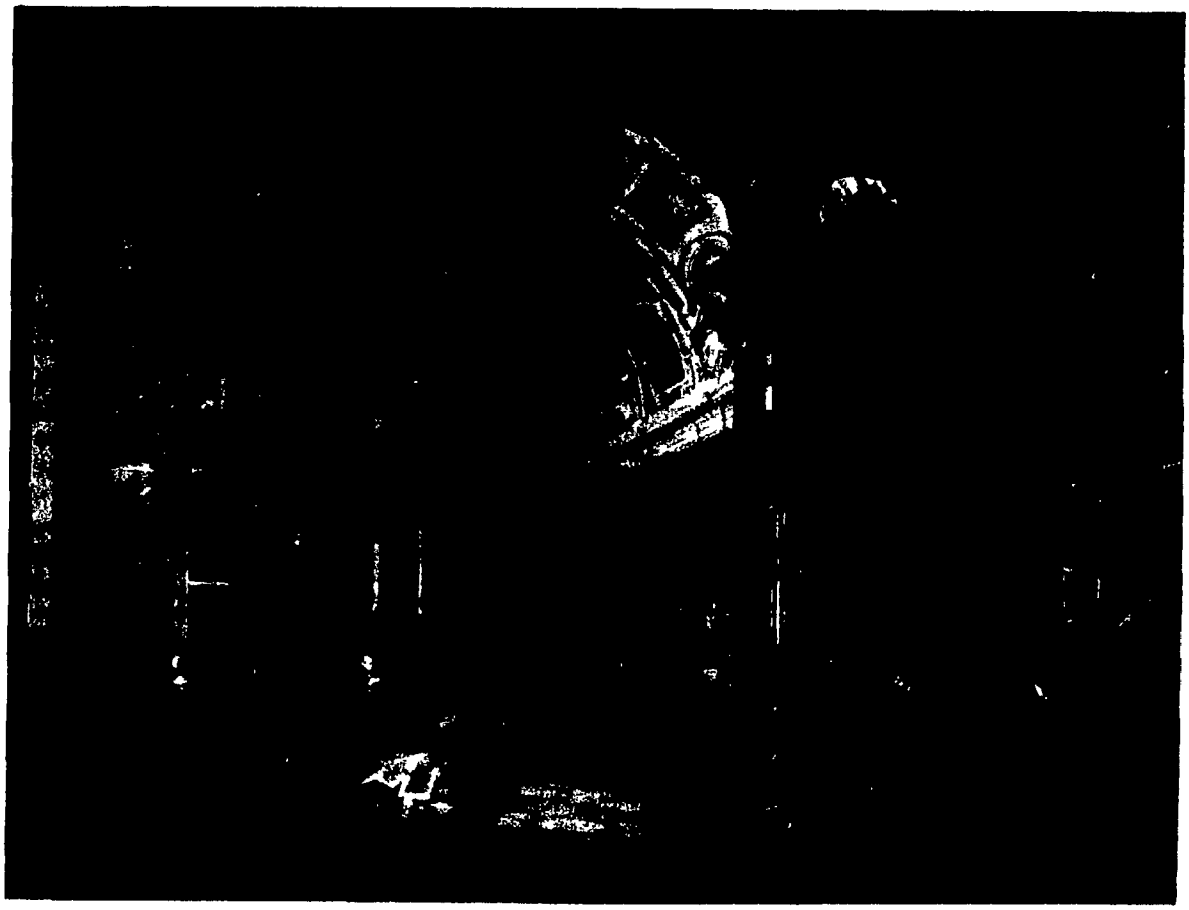

Fig.1· Galleria Valenti Gonzaga, 1740, painting by G P. Pannini (from N Pevsner, A History of Building Types)

CHAPTER 1

DISCUSSION ON THE MUSEUM'S ORIGIN, CONCEPT & INFLUENCE

Collecting: man's fight against time

> ...the museum is a collection of collections...
>
> H.G. Gadamer*

> The child and the collector both share, in different fashion, a common erotic passion for the object: an experience of the object that is also an investment of the whole subjectivity... This love... is the subversive protest against the typical, the classifiable.
>
> F. Rella**

At the foundation of each museum there is at least one collection, and the originator of each collection is a person. What motivates these collectors of objects, curiosities, works of art, in brief collectors of things that, having no well defined use, should have disappeared in our utilitarian society?

This question is all the more intriguing since collecting is a tradition that seems to have survived throughout the ages and is indeed one of man's oldest activities. While at the beginning collecting was closer to an act of gathering, its endurance has spawned a variety of explanations.

We wonder about this perhaps illogical habit which maintains a mysterious dimension. Is it an unconscious reaction to the heavy burden of the passing of time which transforms every thing? Is it a conscious effort to learn about the past through the study of what it has left us? Is it an attempt at preserving relics of the past which would keep the memory alive? Is it a quest for permanence? Perhaps for all these reasons man gathers objects: icons related to religion, trophies of war, works of art, the fruits of human effort, fragments of the past.

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* H.G. Gadamer, Truth and Method, p.77-78.

** F. Rella, "The Vertigo of the Mélange: the Collector's Fight Against Time", Lotus International 35, p. 59

Regardless of their purpose, collected objects of the past provide us with an escape from our condition of mortality. It is in this desperate struggle with time that the great collectors, the *gatherers* (of which emperor Hadrian might be considered the precursor) emerge. This habit which is probably rooted in the same anxieties - eventhough, in modern society, it is explained as a reaction to consumerism - still prevents us from getting rid of seemingly common objects Whether the collected object is of a past age, proving that human effort has not been wasted, or is produced by our society, saved from destruction and handed down to posterity as a witness of our achievements, the act of gathering attests to man's attempt to come to terms with his existence in relation to passing time In this respect, Franco Rella wrote in an essay on the meaning of the act of gathering and the cultural significance of the museum:

> The extreme attempt of the collector is thus to detain and catalogue not things but time itself its memory and experience.*

Although Rella does not mention whether cataloging or ordering has been a part of the act of collecting since the beginning, he nevertheless sheds some light on the psychology of the collector.

> The collector, though enrapt by love for each of his objects in which 'all the world is present,' seeks to construct an order whose shaping is the destiny of his objects**

According to Rella, in addition to the very *erotic* relationship the collector has with his object, he sees beyond its material existence; thus, the already accepted idea of art as a *re-presentation* of the world extends to the collector's object at large. The sense of order that the collector creates has nothing to do with any systematic classification according to a scientific method Instead, it reflects a personal perception of the different objects and their relationships to each others [1]

In an attempt to describe the origins of the museum, many writers, while acknowledging the very old practice of collecting, fail to point out the major difference between *gathering* in the pre-modern era and the trend of systematic classification that was started some two hundred years ago.[2] It has only been with the rise of modern science and positivist thinking that man started systematizing his thought, environment and action.

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* Rella, op. cit., p. 57

** Ibid., p. 59

Since the creation of the museum, collecting had been one of its major activities; with already-established collections being the first material to have entered their premises. It is clear, with the popularity of the blockbusters, that museums are becoming more interested in reaching the large public through highly visible exhibitions. It is therefore important to clarify the reasons and theory underlying such a practice of collecting, thus, enabling us to see its characteristics and therefore to establish its cultural significance.

The Institution is the key concept which can explain the differences between a collector and a museum, a collection and a "collection of collections." While being profoundly influenced by the systematic methods, the collector has always kept an inexplicable *'passion'*· the subjective element. In the institution of the museum, the collecting proceeds according to a pseudo-objective method which has taken the poetic dimension away from the act of collecting

Deprived of its "humanity," the collection then enters the museum; a series of objects which stand metaphorically for time, and tell us about history.

Origins & brief history:

Although its origins could be traced back to the Romans, the modern museum of art was born during a period of great philosophical, political, and social upheaval in nineteenth century Europe. To better understand the concept of the museum and its influence on art and society, one must begin with a very brief historical account of its origins, and of the social and scientific revolutions that provided the context for the rise of the institutional museum as we know it today.

The Romans may have been the first to open their private collections to the public, by exhibiting them in temples. During the middle ages the art collections were used as icons to illustrate the holy texts and were stored in the parishes.[3] This collecting habit continued throughout the Renaissance in Italy, where collections of antique fragments, portraits, sculptures, and paintings were installed in specific rooms in palaces. In northern Europe, collecting evolved rapidely into a practice of classification of the world of man, culminating, during the Baroque period, with the cabinets of curiosities. According to Lewis,

as early as 1565, Samuel von Quiechelberg, a Flemish doctor, had written that ideally collections should represent a systematic classification of all materials in the universe .*

The museum as we know it today is a child of both the "early scientific" approach of the German Baroque *wunderkammer* (cabinets of curiosities) and the more '*romantic*' love for the fragments of a '*certain antiquity*' of the Renaissance - as in the case of the Museo Pio-Clementino in Rome.[4]

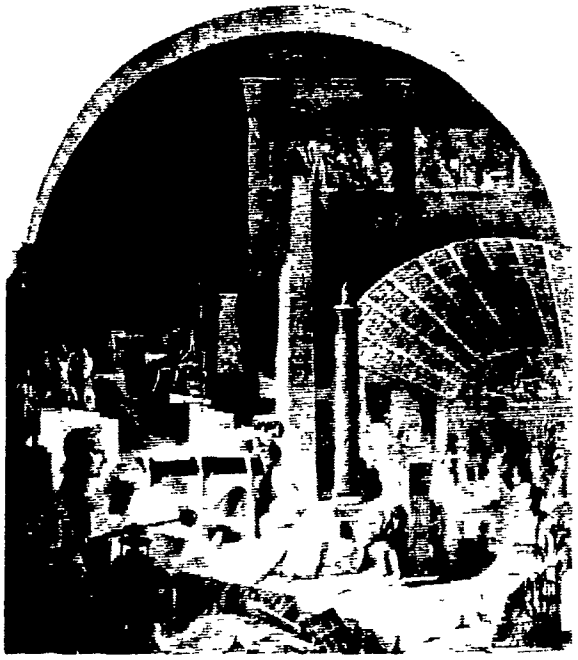

Fig.2: Allegorical portrait of Baron Vivant Denon, 1813 (from E.P. Alexander, Museum Masters)

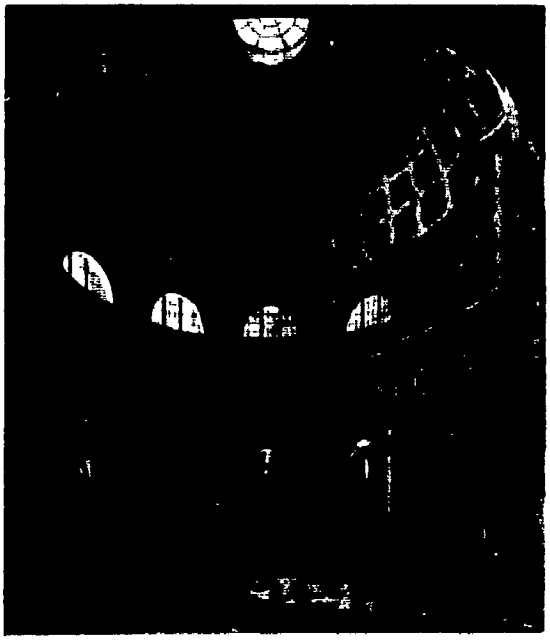

Fig.3· Simonetti and Camporesi, Museo Pio-Clementino, Rome 1773-80 (from N Pevsner, A History of Building Types)

Toward the end of the eighteenth century a dual revolution was set in motion, a revolution of ideology and of science Their joint effects had a great influence on man and his perception of the environment. Political and social orders were challenged by the bourgeois vision of democracy Yet the motto of the French Revolution, *le pouvoir au peuple*, was not fully realized, the enlightened bourgeoisie, having already a considerable economic influence, succeeded in taking the reins of political power. The monarch, whose right to rule was at one time deemed to be God-given, was overthrown as man took his destiny into his own hands. The political and social revolutions, inseparable from the scientific one, all contributed to replace God with man as the "primary mover." With the scientific progress, religion's search for metaphysical meaning evolved

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* G.D. Lewis, Chap. 2, in Manual of Curatorship, p.11

into a habit or superstition. In response to religion's seemingly irrational approach, the applied sciences and the movement of the encyclopaedist demonstrated the advantages of systematization. Categorization became a way of acquiring knowledge which, not only applied to the object of scientific research but to history as well. The latter was given a scientific luster that gave it the appearance of being "true" in the absolute; i.e. as "objectively" or "scientifically" stated facts.

All these drastic changes in society created the ideal moral atmosphere for a change in the understanding of the meaning of art. The loss of the mythical dimension of life lead to an unfortunate attempt to objectify the artistic production of man. Thus, the fundamental characteristic of the art museum which was unprecedented until the beginning of the nineteenth century is what Gadamer refers to as the process of "aesthetic differentiation."

> What we call a work of art and experience aesthetically depends on a process of abstraction. By disregarding everything in which a work is rooted it becomes visible as the "pure work of art". This abstraction of the aesthetic consciousness performs a task that is positive in itself. It shows what a pure work of art is, and allows it to exist in its own right. I call this aesthetic differentiation.*

It is this phenomenon which underlies the general consensus that the modern museum originated during that period. Since the changes occured in such an institutionalized manner, their repercussions were to be felt in the art world and society at large. Under these circumstances the modern Museum was founded; the aesthetic quality of art becoming its underlying idea and categorization its framework.

Role of the museum:

> Now the dilemma of the modern museum is a dilemma produced by this eternal conflict we have seen so well expressed in Genesis between the forces of synthesis and the forces of dissipation. We in the art museums of America have reached a point where we must make a choice of becoming either temples of learning and understanding in the Geneva sense [as proposed by the project of a *Mundaneum* by Le Corbusier], or of remaining merely hanging gardens for the perpetuation of the Babylonian pleasures of aestheticism and the secret sins of private archaeology.
> F.H.Taylor**

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* Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 76.

** Taylor, F.H. Babel's tower: the Dilemma of the Modern Museum, p. 6

Since the ultimate role of the museum is the education of the public, it may be assumed that this noble cause has led to a consensus about the museum's function.[5] However, in the quotation above Francis H. Taylor summarizes the contradictions with which both the museum and the people who work in it are faced. These contradictions have occurred ever since its creation, and concern the ways in which the museum ought to serve society.[6] On the one hand the works are presented as a search for "knowledge" of our world, on the other as an appreciation of the pleasures of aestheticism through the perceptual experience of the object, a subjective and sensual approach to the world. Taylor draws an interesting parallel between the religious symbolism and the eternal interest of man in the resonstruction of the Tower of Babel, and the museum Taking as an example the Mundaneum by Le Corbusier, he states that the museum is another attempt by man to re-present his world, to "encompass the world's knowledge into a single palatable confection "

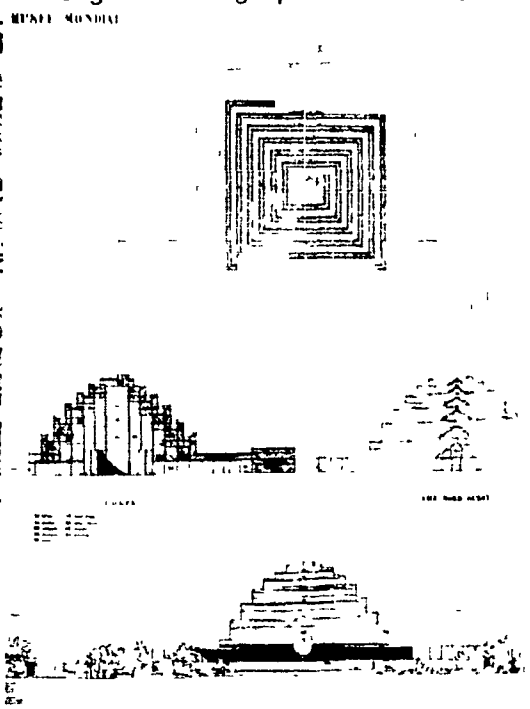

Fig.4: top: Tower of Babel, Woodcut by Jost Amman, from the Bible, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1566 (from F.H Taylor, Babel's Tower the Dilemma of the Modern Museum)

Fig 5: the Mundaneum, Le Corbusier (from H Damisch "The Museum Device")

But could we consider the museum as a place of pure intellectual activity where we go to learn about history? Furthermore, would it be possible for us to enjoy the "pleasures of aestheticism" of works of art of a bygone age when we do not perceive the world in the same way as their creators or contemporaries?

In our information-inundated society there is considerable confusion between information and knowledge, between facts and deep understanding of events and works Habituated to easily labelled images (incorrectly identified as "knowledge") most people are no longer willing to engage in the process of interpretation. Here, Marshal McLuhan's statement "the medium is the message" should be taken seriously since it is in direct contradiction with the real vocation of the museum: the meaning of art with regard to its content.* Man no longer questions. Consequently, he goes to the museum for "delectation," and disappointed with his passive role, he gets "bored."[7] Not willing to decipher the message that the work of art contains, the visitor rejects it Since culture has become its own "end," he comes back to the museum What then is the purpose of the historical knowledge imparted by the work of art exhibited in the museum? Through it we could be able to elucidate our own understanding of the *making* of art; not in technical terms but rather as a philosophical field of action which tries to explain the meaning of human existence Through the historical investigation of artistic creation, museum-goers are given the possibility to question the reason of their own artistic activity (an activity that could be painted, written, sculpted, built, or simply imagined); instead of considering the objects as self-contained: models to imitate [8] And this "knowledge" cannot be attained by the sole enjoyment of the aesthethics of the works of art, neither could it be reached by the shallow technical information provided by labels.

Advocates of the appreciation of art in its own right, argue for "a metaphysics of art" which could be achieved, according to Antony Vidler, through the "psychology of perception that attempts to return the characteristics of the objects to the vision that perceives them, and thereby to society itself."** The task of the museum would then be to establish a "subjective history of vision" rather than a history of objects with the specific quality that this history refers to the object itself [9] In defense of that position, Hubert Damisch seems to reject the *unnatural* situation in which the

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* Marshall McLuhan; quoted by George F. MacDonald, "The Future of Museums in the Global Village," Museum 155.

** Vidler, "The *Art* of History· Monumental Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Quatremère de Quincy," Oppositions 25. p 54 In the context of the explanation of the formal categories proposed by Adolf Hildebrand and Heinrich Wolfflin

object is positioned as one part of a larger system, i e. "a device of memory."* According to Damisch,

> ...if you want a history of art you can go to a museum, but the sensitive man should be kept away from it.' The sensitive man, meaning one who doesn't go to a museum to learn but to get spiritual enjoyment, and who will find greater pleasure in the sometimes incongruous juxtapositions produced in old-fashioned museums rather than in a rationally ordered layout**

Memory does not follow any rational pattern that refers to chronological or iconographic classification.

In a much more radical essay Eugenio Donato pushes the criticism of the museum even further by denying to the institution the possibility of "a representational understanding of the world" through a mechanism of substitution, the "displacement of fragments for totality " He adds that the failure

> ...of the museum at reaching the nature and the essence of the object it displays is due to the fact that it tries to understand them in relation to the spectator rather than in relation to the objects themselves 'Meaning,' the result of metonymic or metaphoric displacements, is anthropomorphic and anthropocentric, and it is because of its anthropocentrism that it is necessarily doomed to failure***

However, in this search for the essence and nature of the object, Donato acknowledges precisely this anthropocentrism; since man, whether he is searching for meaning or for the nature or essence of things, is always trying to explain his own actions and existence The work of art, which is a product of man, is therefore relevant only as it stands for the ideas and ideals of man Thus, it could not be appreciated in its own right without any regard for its content, that is the reason for its existence, its meaning with regard to its own world In this respect Gadamer claims that,

> Pure seeing and pure hearing are dogmatic abstractions which artificially reduce phenomena. Perception always includes meaning. Thus it is a mistaken formalism**** to seek the unity of the aesthetic object solely in its form as opposed to its content

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* Damisch, "The Museum Device: Notes on Institutional Changes," Lotus International 35, p. 9

** Ibid., p 7

*** Donato, "The Museum's Furnace: Notes Toward a Contextual Reading of Bouvard et Pecuchet," in Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism pp 223-224.

**** Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 82.

This discussion involves the problem of interpretation which is equally controversial. Indeed, the so-called *freedom of interpretation* allowed by the museum of art's supply of *objective* information - i e technical details concerning the medium, the date of completion, the title of the work and the name of the artist - is in fact a misconception because the public is unconsciously directed toward an aesthetic appreciation of the work The museum neglects to tell us about the "world of the work" and the intention of the artist, and therefore deprives us of the opportunity to understand the work of art within its own context It seems that this fundamental problem of interpretation will always undermine the efforts of the institution to reach out to a public that has not only lost the meaning and purpose of art but also the reason for inquiring about history. This problem will remain as long as the aesthetic criteria take precedence over what art represents, and the work is left as a "fragment" of its world. In this case the art book becomes a more appropriate and thorough source of knowledge, providing that it gives us some insight into the 'meaning' of the work The work of art, itself an interpretation of another *thing*, then becomes subject to another form of interpretation; interpretation that inspires the poetic/artistic sensibilities of each viewer.[10]

The work of art and the museum:

Being a modern *device* that has admitedly long struggled to achieve a form of neutrality in its concept and its physical manifestation, the museum often includes works that were not meant to be in such a *sterile* environment.[11] It is therefore worth discussing the influence of this device on the work of art Before going further in the discussion it is worth acknowledging the fact that no matter how works of art are stored and preserved public perception of them change as time passes and culture evolves. André Malraux acknowledges this by saying,

> La métamorphose n'est pas un accident, elle est la loi même de la vie de l'oeuvre d'art. ... Le chef d'oeuvre ne maintient pas un monologue souverain, mais un invincible dialogue.*

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* Malraux, A. "Le Musée Imaginaire," Les Voix du Silence, p. 67.

What is worth considering in this specific study is the problems that arise from the museum's organizational principle of gathering and grouping art works - what Malraux calls the "confrontation" between different works.[12]

> Le musée sépare l'oeuvre du monde 'profane' et la rapproche des oeuvres opposees ou rivales. Il est une confrontation de metamorphoses [13]

The object enters the collection and the museum where its presence, and therefore its meaning, oscillates between its own internal qualities and the place it assumes in the *larger order*. It is then ready for the metamorphosis caused by the unavoidable confrontation with other objects and other collections.[14]

> "Les oeuvres n'entrent pas au musée imaginaire en recusant l'histoire,(comme les oeuvres classiques entraient dans les collections,) elles y maintiennent avec elle un lien complexe, qui se rompt quelquefois, car la métamorphose, si elle anime aussi l'histoire, ne l'atteint pas comme elle atteint l'oeuvre d'art "*

Each work of art is a "re-presentation" of the external world - not as it is offered to our scientific vision but rather as it is perceived, in its essence, by the artist, as a world view Gadamer suggests that,

> . the basic mimic situation that we are discussing not only involves what is represented being there, but also that it has in this way come to exist more fully Imitation and representation are not merely a second version, a copy, but a recognition of the essence. they are not merely repetition, but a 'bringing forth' **

Thus, the museum leads to an "abuse of space," which acts on the way we perceive the work of art.[15] This metamorphosis by confrontation appears obviously when the work is understood in terms of its place in art history, as a "fragment of a totality." Seeing it with different *eyes* from those which created it, we find it impossible to recover, as Stephen Bann writes, "the integrity of the original system or code."[16]

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* Ibid., p. 125. According to Malraux the book would push to its limit the idea of metamorphosis by confrontation.

** Gadamer, Truth and Method, p.103

Franco Rella also acknowledges the existence of yet another kind of metamorphosis which occurs in the mind of the viewer when the object (of the past) becomes an embodiment of time * This is what Riegl calls the "Age-Value" of a monument, recognizing it as a relic of the past.[17]

Discussion of the influence of the museum on the ways in which art and its history are appreciated necessitates discussing the possibilities of interpretation that the institution offers. Indeed, it seems rather difficult to deny the museum's preponderant role as a *tool* for art historians, as a *treasure cave* for art lovers who can hardly own masterpieces nowadays, and as a place of learning for everybody [18] Through specific ways of presenting the works of art, the museum leads the public to make specific comparisons. Although the individual's interpretation will also depend on his background, the museum establishes the limits of interpretation. What the museum does achieve is the continual questioning of art: what a specific work of art meant to the artist and its public then, and its significance for our society and for each individual Therefore one could only agree with Malraux when he says that,

> Le musée impose une mise en question de chacune des expressions du monde qu'il réunit, une interrogation sur ce qui les réunit. **

Finally, one of the effects the museum has on artistic practice is manifested by the artist's questioning and criticism of the institution Many artists have reacted against the museum's dictates by creating works denouncing them, or by opening their own artist-run galleries Surrealist works such as Marcel Duchamp's *boite-en-valise* exemplify this rejection of the museum.[19] Duchamp has said about this work that,

> . ici encore, il s'agissait d'une nouvelle forme d'expression. Au lieu de peindre quelque chose de nouveau, je voulait reproduire peintures et objets que j'aimais et les collectionner dans un espace aussi réduit que possible. ...Puis il me vint à l'esprit que cela pouvait être une boite à l'interieur de laquelle toutes mes oeuvres seraient rassemblées et montées comme dans un petit musée, un musée portatif pour ainsi dire. ***

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* Rella, "The Vertigo of the Mélange: The Collector's Fight Against Time," Lotus International 35, p. 61.

** Malraux, "Le Musée Imaginaire," Les Voix du Silence, p 12.

*** Quoted in Arturo Schwarz, The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp, p. 513.

According to Benjamin Buchloh, Duchamp's work was an overt criticism of the spatiality and temporality of the museum, of "the transformations that an artist's work undergoes in retrospective exhibitions, institutional collecting and display."*

Fig.6: "Boite-en-Valise," Marcel Duchamp
(from A. Schwarz, The complete work of Marcel Duchamp)

Other forms of museums:

> The time - in brief - is ripe for a new concept of the museum not as a place, not as an object, but as a moving, three dimensional, human solvent, a disseminator of regulative truths rather than abstracted objects.
>
> Douglas Davis**

What Davis suggests in his essay on the museum of the future, is that the concept and reality of the museum as an actual place be redefined as an "idea," free from any relation to the physical presence of the institution. This new perception of the museum involves an abstraction, a

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* Buchloh, B. "The Museum Fictions of Marcel Broodthaers," in Museums by Artists, p 46,47.

** Davis, D., "The Idea of the Twenty-first Century Museum," in Art Culture: Essays on the Post-Modern, p. 122.

departure from the space/time frame of reference. The object in the museum enters consequently the realm of *'non-reality'* - called the "virtual image" in optics - where it acts as a stimulant of the imagination Hence the book of photographic reproductions and the television give us neither the original work nor a perfect copy of it. And even though Davis opted for television rather than the book, both in fact can be considered as devices that are non restrictive to any physical place.

The book of reproductions is praised by Malraux in his *Musée Imaginaire* as a museum without walls. By bringing together all artistic manifestations it pushes to the extreme the currently incomplete confrontation of the museum. It is a mnemonic instrument par excellence.[20] By the same token, Malraux acknowledges the fact that the work of art loses its specificity through this type of presentation. He writes,

> ...Une tapisserie, une miniature, un tableau, une sculpture et un vitrail médiévaux, objets forts différents reproduits sur une même page, deviennent parents. Ils ont perdu leur couleur, leur matière (la sculpture quelque chose de son volume), leur dimension. ... Qu'y ort-ils perdu? leur qualité d'objet. Qu'y ont ils gagné? la plus grande signification de style qu'ils puissent assumer.[21]

In Douglas Crimp's summary of Malraux's intention and the purpose his museum would serve, he suggests that Malraux saw "art as ontological essence, created not by men in their historical contingencies, but by Man in his very being."* And disapproving such a vision of the artistic production Crimp adds, "this is the comforting *knowledge* to which the Museum Without Walls gives testimony."

However, the predominance of *style* in Malraux's museum must be critically assessed since it can lead to a total misunderstanding of art's purpose, meaning and the reason for our interest in it. When the work of art is removed from the space/time frame of reference it loses all connection to man's 'reality' of perception. Its quintessential *raison d'être*, and the meaning that it held for its creator and era, are thereby concealed.

The second device worth discussing is one whose influence on society has been considered in rather negative terms. Indeed, television has seldom been associated with positive educational events, and even people who support its integration into the museum realize its

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* Crimp, "On The Museum's ruins", in Hal Foster ed., The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture, p. 51.

dangerous effects. G.F. MacDonald, director of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa suggests, in a very lucid discussion, that an electronic medium such as television, despite its detrimental repercussions, might become a "first step" in the discovery of the "real thing" - i.e. the art work in the museum. He states that,

> [he has] great fears, as well as faith, in the media. Hitler produced one of the first media plans on a national scale. Visual literacy has brought with it textual illiteracy ...Museums have a unique place in the formation of an individual's reality and experiential grids. To the young visitor, the displays add scale, real time sequences and context, all of which are chronically absent from electronic media experience."*

Although television can be heavily edited and is often used as a tool of propaganda, it is often argued that the real problem is not the device itself but the way society has been using it.[22] Douglas Davis supports the concept of "museum as content" and argues that television is the best way to reimmerse the work of art in its context. He says,

> Television, because it exists in time, does not of its own volition abstract reality, as does the photograph. ...The museum can communicate through television on a private, mind to mind level. It can focus and deepen the experience of art, rather than promote the superficial 'now I have seen it all in ten minutes' experience indoctrinated by the bravura hovering method. Television restores context and content to the work of art - anybody's work of art."**

Davis' argument however, is based on the assumption that knowledge can be attained as a result of simply immersing the work in its context. Even if it is accepted that television could succeed in putting the viewer in a state of mind where he could assimilate, or rather, *read* the work with the *eyes* of the epoch, this 'knowledge' excludes the viewer's perceptual experience. Television therefore, offers only an incomplete perceptual experience without the advantage of being able to fully reproduce the visual experience. This device would exaggerate the problem of non-participation, what Eco calls "the call to narcotic passiveness."[23]

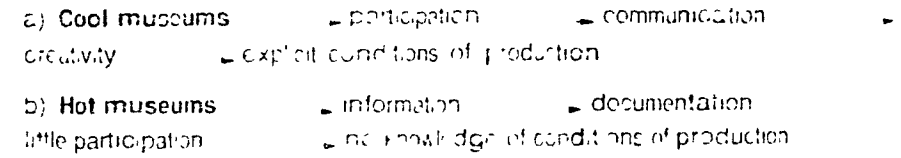

Fig.7: Gluesberg's Diagram of the difference between "cool" and "hot" museums.

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* MacDonald, "The Future of Museums in the Global Village," Museum 155, pp.214-215.

** Davis, chap.7 "The Idea of a Twenty-first Century Museum," in Art Culture: Essays on the Post-Modern, p. 120.

Conclusion: importance of the museum

Many people have militated against the museum, stating that it exorcises art from everyday life. Some argue that museums of contemporary art should be closed, while the ones inherited from the nineteenth century could be maintained as relics. They advocate that the artist be given a more active role in society.[24] Still others believe that the museum encourages an unwarranted bias towards an aetheticist interpretation of art.

Yet inspite of, or perhaps due to the criticism, it has been during the last fifty years of their existence that museums have known the most enriching experiences Challenged or criticized, used as scientific *tools* or walked through as *romantic* paths, endorsed by artists or highly criticized through their works, they have survived, changed, and opened up to the public, making themselves more educational. Museums have become places of encounter between people and art.

The institution is becoming more and more important as an organizer of or environment for socio-cultural events, and closing it down seems a rather unrealistic idea. Why is the role assumed by the institution indispensable in the modern society? and why should the museum exist as a 'place'?

Everything that modern man strives for seems to be consistent with the tendency toward keeping the museum alive as a "manager" of the socio-cultural consciousness. It is, indeed, in the museum, in the intellectual and artistic activities of the civilization, that one sees a reflection of the concerns, anxieties and hopes of society.[25] More than ever before, modern society, dominated by the *fuite en avant* of scientific speculation and pragmatism, seems to be in need of strong foundation; a past on which to lean, a tradition that would establish the place of man in an everchanging universe.

The museum is the only institution that makes the work of art accessible to the public - as both a physical presence (the real thing) and as message/content. Whereas schools and universities, in most cases, isolate students and researchers from everyday life, creating a sort of micro-society, the museum of art offers the possibility of reinstating art and culture in general as part

of our social life. That this potential is not always realized, is a fact that Gadamer and many others implicitly deplore.

Accordingly, the radical reaction of closing museums is not a desirable response to the positivist influences that have so far directed the museum The results of such a policy would be catastrophic for the work of art, since the 'object' as such would disappear If the museum closes its doors, waiting for a proper decision regarding its role, it would not serve any purpose. Art would disappear as a form of expression. With the triumph of technology, man would become a thinking machine; for even if philosophy remained, deprived of its field of action, questionning would be reduced to mere chattering. History, which in the case of art is mainly *constructed* with the help of the artifact, would lose both its subject and its tool, and its survival would therefore be jeopardized Deprived of its roots, society would thus be seriously shaken at its foundations

The museum has the privilege of being able to reconcile intellectual process, creative making, and perceptual experience; thus giving the chance to every museum-goer to understand the artistic process as well as its *raison d'ètre*. Once this is realized the opportunity should be seized to reinstate the museum as a place of social participation [26] A social participation of which we seem to have shut ourselves away in a passive voyeurism of T.V and cinema watching.

Finally the museum offers the visitor the poetic possibility of a bringing together of past and present through a re-presentation of their different world views Was it not Napoleon, a great collector, who said: "Du haut de ces pyramides vingt siècles vous contemplent."

ENDNOTES

1. See "Union of the Arts: Sir John Soane's Museum-House," Lotus International 35. Also K. Hudson, "A Social History of Museums" ch.3 pp. 50-51. See also W. Grasskamp, "Artists and Other Collectors," in Museums by Artists. a discussion of the idea of collecting as a form of artistic expression, p. 130.

2. Such is the case in the second chapter of the Manual of Curatorship or in Francis H. Taylor's Babel's Tower: the Dilemma of the Modern Museum, who trace back the first collecting practice to the romans.

3. Panofsky, E., "The Middle-Age," in Idea: A Concept in Art Theory. According to Panofsky, the art work represented on the level of the religious ideology a proof of the existence of God, being a "quasi-creation," an imitation of "The Creation "

4. Even though the "wunderkamers" do not rely on systematization as the underlying principle, their idea of collecting objects or curiosities, work of nature (god) or works of man, shows a rather scientific approach of sampling of the world.
It is Sebastiano Serlio who, during the Renaissance, first writes about historical preservation in his book Tutte l'Opere d'Architettura e prospetiva

5. It is to be noticed that nobody has seriously argued against the idea of making art accessible to the large public, even though we can find accounts of the reaction of museum owners and directors during the eighteenth century, complaining about the ignorance and the lack of respect of the layman for the works of art and the temple-like atmosphere

6. See accounts by D.Crimp on the role of the first museum in germany in his article "the Postmodern Museum," Parachute 46

7 Louis Kahn, commenting on the museums, said: "I have asked myself why I was fatigued within fifteen minutes by every museum I ever entered". Quoted by Douglas Davis, in "The Idea of the twenty first century museum," Art culture; Essays on the Post-Modern, p 109
See also John Cotton Dana, "The Gloom of the Museum," The New Museum, pp. 10-30.

8. K.W. Forster, in the editor's introduction to the periodical Oppositions 25 states "When Riegl argued for a historical contingency of all aesthetic values, he did not by the same token advocate eclecticism. On the contrary, he recognized that contemporary concerns, the *kunstwollen* (artistic will) of our epoch, profoundly determine our perceptions of the past: there is no objective past, constant over time, but only a continual refraction of the absent in the memory of the present "
Stephen Bann talks also about the problem of understanding the objects of the past according to their own codes: ". .objects can signify, they can be assembled in a para-linguistic structure in such a way as to establish meaning. ...the objects assembled by a collector whether perpetuated in a museum or not, belong in principal within this definition But it might reasonably he argued that the entropy which affects any such assembly with the passing of time is of so high a degree that we can never in practice recover the integrity of the original system or code. (in "Historical text and Historical object: Poetics of the *Musée de Cluny*," Lotus International 35, p 37)

9. Vidler writes: "Such a 'history of vision', substituting itself for history of objects, is necessarily dependent on the objects themselves for its material." (in "The *Art* of History Monumental Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Quatremère de Quincy," Oppositions 25, p 54)

10. See Forster's discussion of Riegl's text in endnote above (#8).

11. We can argue that sometimes works are commissioned by the museum to be exhibited in a specific place and are therefore meant for a sterile environment The fact is that, unless a work of art is created as part of an environmental composition, its meaning thus stemming from this dialogue, the work contains all its meaning and does not refer to anything external

12. Malraux comments: "[Les musées] ont contribués à délivrer de leur fonction les oeuvres d'art qu'ils réunissaient; à métamorphoser en tableaux jusqu'aux portraits " (in "Le Musée Imaginaire," Les Voix du Silence, p 12)

13. Ibid., p 12

14. Rella writes. "The battle (.) in which the collector had engaged himself ( ) may indeed turn into a victory against time, not because things are removed from time into the seemingly timeless world of the museum, but because these things themselves, mingling and becoming structured in a complex figure, are able to embody time." (in "The Vertigo of the Mélange The Collector's Fight Against Time," Lotus International 35, p 61)

This intermingling of which the author is speaking is what André Malraux describes as the metamorphosis of the work of art

15. Damisch refers to this abuse of space when quoting Paul Valery. The author compares that situation to the one in chess when two pieces occupy simultaneously the same square. (in Damisch, H., "The Museum Device· Notes on Institutional Changes," Lotus International 35, p. 7

Merleau-Ponty, speaks about the essence, act, and experience of painting "...en un sens la première des peintures allait jusqu'au fond de l'avenir " (in L'Oeil et l'Esprit, p 92) This, I believe, is the case of any artistic activity

16. Bann, "Historical Text and Historical Object. Poetics of the Musée de Cluny," Lotus International 35, p. 37

Umberto Eco comments on the medium in communication explaining its impact on people and how they interpret what they receive He states, "The medium transmits those ideologies which the addressee receives according to codes originating in his social situation, in his previous education, and in the psychological tendencies of the moment (.) there exists means of communication that, unlike means of production, are not controllable either by private will or by the community." (in Faith in Fakes, p. 141)

17. See Riegl, A "The Modern Cult of Monuments. Its Character and its Origins," see also the essays by K.W Forster and I. de Solá-Morales, Oppositions 25

18. Some accuse the museum of monopolizing the cultural life. See T. Shermann's article in Parachute 46

19. See Museums by Artists, edited by Bronson & Gale.

20. André Malraux states: "Car un musée imaginaire s'est ouvert qui va pousser à l'extrême l'incomplète confrontation imposée par les vrais musées." (in "Le Musée Imaginaire," Les Voix du Silence, p. 14)

21. Ibid. p. 19. Also Malraux writes that the works have almost lost their specificity at the benefit of their common style. A style which Malraux defines as a real entity, not a mere classification; as something resembling the life-story of a great creator. He states, "Rien ne donne une vie plus corrosive à l'idée de destin que les grands styles, dont l'évolution et les métamorphoses semblent les longues cicatrices du passage de la fatalité sur la terre. (Ibid , pp.42-44)

22 According to Umberto Eco, "the battle for the survival of man as responsible being in the Communication Era is not to be won where the communication originates, but where it arrives." (in Faith in Fakes, p 142)

23 Umberto Eco writes:"...the addressee of the messages of the mass media receives only a global ideological lesson, the call to narcotic passiveness. When the mass media triumphs, the human being dies " (in Faith in Fakes, p. 137)

24. Douglas Crimp, in a lecture given at the Montreal Museum of Fine Art in January of 1988, proposed that museums stop being opened and that existing ones become relics of the nineteenth century

25 Hans Haacke writes about the preponderent social role of the museum: "...as soon as work enjoys larger exposure it inevitably participates in public discourse, advances particular systems of belief, and has reverberations in the social arena." (in "Museums Managers of Consciousness," Parachute 46, p 86)

26. For a discussion of the idea of active participation in the museum see Jorge Gluesberg, Cool Museums and Hot Museums: Towards a Museological Criticism Gluesberg writes that, "Any attempt to involve the public in creative action represents a move to encourage growth in artistic awareness ..The ideal would be to establish centres where an analysis is made of the underlying reasons for presenting or making an object in a certain way, a kind of laboratory providing an opportunity for participation (p 17)

Gluesberg also defines participation as an active consumption of art which is "linked to the understanding and development of the critical abilities of the recipient." Not that he should elaborate the artistic product "but he should be able to advance his personal criteria and to this extent, integrate with the work or contribute his views on it." (p.19)

CHAPTER 2: THE MUSEUM AS PUBLIC PLACE

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

> As soon as work enjoys larger exposure it inevitably participates in public discourse, advances particular systems of belief, and has reverberations in the social arena.
> H. Haacke*

Along with the political democratization accomplished by the French Revolution - which gave the impetus to the creation of the *Europe des Nations* - came the cultural democratization, starting with the opening of the Louvre and its art collection to the public The Modern Museum was bound to become the link between society - laymen as well as art historians - and art and artists, history and tradition. In order to clarify both the museum's social role at the end of this century, as well as the possibilities it offers the visitors in terms of their encounter with the work of art, the relationship between art and society and how it has evolved must be investigated

Art and Society:

> The notion of art for art's sake can only arise in an age when the purpose of art is no longer known, when its relation to life has ceased from being recognized.
> A.M Ludovici**

In a world where art is increasingly seen by the layman as a technical, and formal thing bearing no higher meaning than its immediate physical quality of representation, the traditional relationship between art and society must be seriously evaluated Artists create their work, translating their perception of the environment (nature), as well as their view of the man-made world (the field of action), acting on the matter (the artist's medium). Michel Seuphor writes in his book on Mondrian,

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* Haacke, H. "Museums managers of consciousness," in Parachute #45, p. 86.

** Ludovici, A.M., Nietzsche and Art, p. 117.

> On peut conclure une fois de plus que tout artiste subit - consciemment ou non - l'influence du milieu dans lequel il vit. Une triple et ineluctable participation à l'oeuvre est fournie par l'entourage immediat (ce que l'artiste voit), par la constitution viscérale de l'individu (ce que l'artiste sent), enfin par la culture de l'esprit (ce que l'artiste veut).*

This "*world view*" stands metaphorically for the artists themselves and, in many cases, for the whole society. Whether it expresses the hopes, expectations and beliefs of society or takes a critical stance, the work of art speaks of man. It seems then, that art is deeply rooted in everyday life. Art is not limited to an aesthetic or decorative function but rather tends, through these qualities, towards a nobler role, i.e. an inquiry into man's position in the universe.**

Any person related in one way or another to the art world could not help but denounce the place accorded to art by our society. Paintings by Van Gogh reach incredibly high sale values in auctions; superstar artists such as Picasso and Dali, by selling their works at astronomical prices, are often accused of practising a form of elitism.[1] With multinationals participating, art becomes a victim of speculation, and is threatened by the prospect of being reduced to a simple *cultural commodity*, its value a function of the price, measured against a scarcity index.[2] Living artists contribute by turning art into a luxury item. Once deceased they become a myth symbolized by their work: a treasure in a world devoid of mystery and sick of appropriation. Art and the artist are caught up in the meshes.

Painters and sculptors had always been commissioned for their work, being remunerated in one way or another. Patrons of the art were their link to a society of which they artistically expressed a world view that, needless to say, they shared. It has been only for the last two hundred years that the artist's creation are of his own inspiration, sold to the art dealers or to the museum whose commission's main characteristic is a total freedom of creation.[3] The main implication of this situation is found in the process of artistic creation itself. Disconnected from society, the artist, through his work, expresses a very personal world view. Art has become experiential and individual.

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* M. Seuphor, Mondrian, ch. IX, p. 141.

** See A. Perez-Gomez, "Abstraction in Modern Architecture: Some Reflections in Parallel to Gnosticism and Hermeneutics," in The Carleton Book, p. 183.

The fact is that the artist has no place in the social structure of our industrialized society. Modern society, too busy managing its industry and overwhelmed by its positivist philosophy, rejects any higher role for art than that of giving mere aesthetic enjoyment According to this perspective, it seems that art cannot fulfil its role in modern society This break in tradition is mostly a result of society's changing perception of art and the artist, rather than of any radical change in the philosophy of artistic creation

Art, however, is not dead Ironically, positivism and materialism, the source of art's isolation, reintroduce it into our everyday life, as yet another consumer product, or as a game of political manipulations.[4] Or, perhaps in reaction to positivism's domination (and its metaphysical dead ending), man has finally realized the limits of the scientific systems and their inability to solve the mystery of life? Yet our perception of art has been altered as the implementation of the notion of "aesthetic differentiation" bears witness Judging by the current success of the artist and art in society, and by the popularity of museums around the world, many would say that these criticisms are not well-founded. The fact is that art is not taken as *seriously* as it used to be Art is assessed on the basis of its "look" (style), as removed from its content, and the artist is valued for his eccentricity, the superfluousness of his task, rather than for the ideas for which he stands[5] Gadamer, however, sees in the artist the potential for a "secular saviour "

> But at the same time the artist . bears the burden of a vocation which makes him an ambiguous figure. For a social culture that has fallen away from its religious traditions expects more from art than is in accordance with aesthetic consciousness which takes the 'standpoint of art' The romantic support for a new mythology gives the artist and his task in the world the consciousness of a new consecration The experimental search for new symbols or a new myth which will unite everyone may certainly create a public and create a community, but since every artist finds his own community, the particularity of this community-creating merely testifies to the disintegration that is taking place.

At first glance, through the provision of bursaries, exhibitions, and catalogues, the museum seems to be an essential source of support for the contemporary artist. Unfortunately, it does not contribute to his reintegration as an active element at the heart of society, as an artist in the traditional sense of the word. More than ever before, the artist is a marginal person whose

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H.G. Gadamer, in Truth and Method, p. 79.

intentions and true message are hidden, imprisoned in the work which becomes a purely "aesthetic object." By concealing the intention of the artist, the museum has contributed to the malaise in the apprehension of art, between the "recognizable" and the "abstract."[6] It has also contributed to the false understanding of art as an ornament, a decoration in the most superficial sense of the word, as a *trompe-l'oeil* that beautifies our efficiency-obsessed world.

Museums and Society: the Change

The term "cultural democratization" which refers to the period following the French Revolution - and heralded the beginnings of the modern museum - is to be understood as a declaration of intent rather than as an actual rule. The enlightened bourgeoisie's prejudice concerning the uneducated masses had to be overcome before the current situation of the museum - in terms of its openness to the public - could be achieved. The ideals of democracy, in this case, of equal educational opportunities for everybody, were not realized overnight.[7] Although as early as 1750 exhibitions of art from the royal collections were held in the Palais du Luxembourg, they were only opened to the public for a few hours a week. Actually, the institution that really "served" the public was created after the Napoleonic wars whose *acquired* treasures turned the Louvre into the richest museum of the world. After the first decade of the nineteenth century, and following the French example, all the

Fig.8: "The Artist in his Museum" 1822, self-portrait by Charles W. Peale (from E P. Alexander, Museum Masters)

European nations became museumconscious, exhibiting their wealth (and the greatness of their regimes) to the citizens.* One gets the impression that these institutions were not as much democratic instruments as they were monuments to the glory of their sponsors the states. In fact, some of the comments of that period suggest that the citizens were often meant to be excluded In 1816 Johann Martin Wagner was asked for his opinion about the atmosphere of a new museum to be built in Germany. Arguing for an austere architecture stripped of any ornament, he wrote,

> It is not for the ordinary riff-raff, however, accustomed to showing more appreciation for the flooring or the walls of shiny marble, that museums are made**

The vulgar and uneducated masses were seen as being disrespectful and in sharp contrast to that which should inspire "reverence and devotion " This haughty attitude was to slow down the museum's efforts to "educate the people," that is, "to elevate mankind, to teach it to think, to set it free."*** Besides the problem of accessibility - which was resolved around the end of the nineteenth century - the museum had to address its image of sacredness, which was paralysing the institution and depriving it of great social accomplishments. Hudson claims that,

> At the early nineteenth century Folkwang Museum at Hagen, the curator, Osthaus, saw the main purpose of a collection of works of art to be the awakening of reverence and devotion. Museums were temples and their directors priests, to be addressed as such In an age when the appeal of religion had faded, art had to take its place****

At the beginning, the belief in the museum's sacred nature helped protect its treasures from the wrath of the French revolutionaries.[8] The attitude of deference however, prevailed until quite recently, and was often reflected in the architecture of the institutions that were built like shrines reminiscent of pagan temples. The museum, as late as 1945, was still regarded as filling a spiritual void left in the life of the community by the loss of religious beliefs.***** Accordingly Douglas Davis wrote,

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* See N. Burt, Palaces for the People, pp. 23-25.

** Quoted by F. Werner, "On the Typology of the Museums in the Eighties," Lotus International 55, p. 38.

*** Ibid., pp. 38,39

**** Hudson, K., A Social History of Museums, p. 52

***** Taylor, F.H., Babel's Tower: the Dilemma of the Modern Museum, p. 38.

> In the late 20th century, the museum itself has a public meaning. ...it is a symbol of aspiration. Complaints about the Death of God aside, the museum now stands for all that the cathedral used to represent.*

Such a role for art can only be praised if it is seen as a mean by which *knowledge* can be attained; however it is highly doubtful that culture (even high culture) will ever be able to replace religion or that people really wish it does so.

It might be argued that religion's educational and social roles expressed through religious rituals and events in which the whole community used to participate could be replaced by the museum However, the differences in their philosophies, origins, and goals are such that we can only have serious doubts about the validity of the comparision. Western religious philosophies are based on faith in one single truth, whereas museum displays are a recognition that different world views can exist simultaneously. Whereas religion is rather impervious to any question related to faith, the museum's main action is that it brings together and even opposes the different world views.

Mainly because it was surrounded by an aura of sanctity, the museum's ability to accomplish its mission of education was thwarted. By giving the artistic product such sacred connotations, the original intentions of the museum were undermined Instead of teaching people to think and judge for themselves, the museum implicitly encouraged them to *admire* works of art even though their meanings were inaccessible. Furthermore, it denied to the museum-goer the possibility of making his own judgment, by erecting itself as the *grand priest* of art and taste. Admiration, as Bernhard suggests, can be detrimental to the collective mind.

> I have never seen anyone enter a church or a museum in a totally normal fashion (...) for these people travel for the sole purpose of admiring. Admiration makes them blind . ...People find respect and esteem too difficult, this is why they admire, it takes less effort. ..The state of admiration is a state of mental weakness. They enter museums of art in this state as well...**

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* Davis, "The Museum Impossible", Museum News June 83, p. 34.

** Bernhard, "Alte Meister" Frankfurt 1988 p. 122, quoted by Werner, F., "On the Typology of Museums in the Eighties: the Experience of the German Federal Republic," Lotus International 55, p. 37.

It is only since the mid-seventies that the museum has become a less rigid environment, encouraging us to question the values of our civilization by investigating our artistic past and present. It is only now that we can hope to see the beginnings of a new era for the museum. With an approach based on participation of the public, museums can become "social events," offering a significant experience to a society that might be able to recover and rediscover a common awareness of the meaning of art.[9]

ENDNOTES

1. A rumor circulated saying that, at a peace conference, Picasso was once approached by an admirer who said that he would pay a considerable amount for one of Picasso's works. Disappearing for a few minutes, Picasso reappeared with a small sketch that he handed to the man saying that he owed him thirty thousand dollars. Shocked, the man complained stating that it was a lot of money for the few minutes it took Picasso to draw. Picasso answered that the man was not paying him for those few minutes but for the thirty years of reflection and work that were necessary for him to be able to produce this sketch!

2. See H. Haacke, "Museums Managers of consciousness," in Parachute 46.

3. Gadamer wrote that, "thus through 'aesthetic differentiation' the work loses its place and the world to which it belongs insofar as it belongs to aesthetic consciousness. (...)The free artist creates without a commission. He seems marked out by the complete independence of his creativity and thus acquires the characteristic social features of an outsider, whose style of life cannot be measured by the yardstick of general morality." (in Truth and Method, pp.78-79)

4. See Hans Haacke, op. cit.

5. According to Marshal McLuhan (The Medium is the Massage) our culture has turned from a production-directed one to an information-directed one in which the medium of the artist becomes the subject of interest: "the message."

6. A certain form of abstraction has always been practised by the artist since his work is a *re*-presentation of a reality offered to him. This *re-presentation* is, in fact, a much more important quality of art than its isolated aesthetic attributes because it shows the interest of the artist. The intention of the artist is thus the key to our understanding of the work. See Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 103.

7. In 1773, Sir Ashton Lever opened a museum. A notice inserted in the newspapers read as follows: "This is to inform the public that being tired out with the insolence of the common People, who I have hitherto indulged with a sight of my museum (at Alkrington), I am now come to the resolution of refusing admittance to the lower class except they come provided with a ticket from some Gentleman or Lady of my acquaintance". (Quoted by Dillon Ripley, The Sacred Grove: Essays on Museums, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1969, reprinted 1982; p.32)

8. According to Bann, Alexandre Lenoire, founder of the Musee des Petits-Augustins, "was not so much collecting as salvaging what could be salvaged from the dilapidation and threatened destruction of French national monuments ...[the salvaged objects] were essentially fragments, often mutilated fragments, which testified eloquently to the putting in question of French history and institutions during the revolutionary epoch." (Bann, S., "Historical Text and Historical Object: Poetics of the Musée de Cluny," Lotus International 35, p. 39.

9. Jorge Gluesberg deals with the idea of participation. He writes: "A communication approach is thus seen to be necessary to tackle the problems of museology in relation to its function as a mediator between the producers and consumers. (...) The kind of participation to which we refer is participation through active consumption. The concept of the active consumption

of art is linked to the understanding and development of the critical abilities of the recipient, with respect to the object which he consumes from the artistic point of view. This does not mean that he has to 'elaborate' the artistic product, but he should be able to advance his personal criteria and, to this extent, integrate with the work or contribute his views on it. (in Cool Museums and Hot Museums: Towards a Museological Criticism p. 13, 19)

CHAPTER 3: THE MUSEUM AND THE CITY

THE URBAN CONTEXT

About the City

With all its splendour, its complexity, its intricate layers, and its misery, the city is the product of man *par excellence*. Not only is it a man-made environment, but it is man's most typical achievement, the symbol of both his fight against the austerity of nature and his tendency towards gathering. Man lives in a "love-hate" relationship with the modern city. On the one hand he often rejects the city as the epitome of the negative aspects of modern life; on the other, he cannot live isolated from his fellow men. Nature, which was once seen as a threatening world from which cities were meant to protect us, is now considered as the means of escape from our bustling, overcrowded, and non-sanitized metropolises.[1] However, even in these very critical times where the city has been transformed into a giant cluster of specialized *sub-urban* spaces, many artists and architects have recognized through their work the symbolic dimension of the city, its poetic meaning[2]

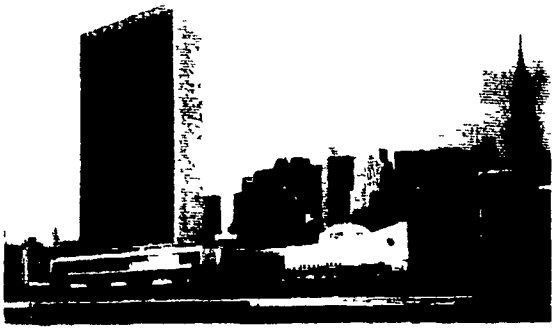

Fig 9 "Silhouette violente comme un graphique de fièvre au pied du lit d'un malade." (from Le Corbusier, Quand les Cathédrales étaient Blanches, about New York)

Fig 10· "Broadway Boogie-Woogie," Mondrian 1942-43, (from M. Seuphor, Mondrian)

Cities and Museums: Cities as Cultural Centres

> Cities are product of time. They are the molds in which men's lifetimes have cooled and congealed, giving lasting shape, by way of art, to moments that would otherwise vanish with the living and leave no means of renewal or wider participation behind them ..Layer upon layer, past times preserve themselves in the city until life itself is finally threatened with suffocation. then in sheer defense, modern man invents the museum,
> Lewis Mumford*

It might be said that the city and the museum, in their process of emergence as well as in their *raison d'être*, have nothing in common. The city, as Lewis Mumford writes, is "a product of time," of patiently superimposed layers of constructions added on by men who are intent on building their own world - often unaware of the process of historical continuum in which they are involved. The other is an institution, an instrument, a device invented by man "to collect and categorize time."**

Literally, the city and the museum have the relationship of a whole to one of its parts Museums, like other public institutions, are an essential element in the life of the city, and therefore in that of society. If any culture is to be found in a given society, it is more likely to be completely represented in the city which boasts the largest population Given the educational task the museum has to fulfill, one can only agree with the principle established by Sir Hans Sloan in 1759 when he founded what was to become the British Museum He said that his collections "may remain together and that chiefly in and about the city of London, where they may, by the great confluence of people, be of most use."***

Franco Rella discusses the symbolic relationship between the city and the museum by drawing a parallel between the surrealist vision of the modern metropolis and the fragmented vision of history and art offered by the museum.

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* The Lewis Mumford Reader, edited by Donald L. Miller 1986

** See F. Rella, "The Vertigo of the Melange," in Lotus International 35, p. 57

*** Quoted by Phyllis Lambert, "La Chaine Ecologique des Musées," Musée, fall 86, p. 9. For more discussion on the urban role of the museum see the article by Sergio Crotti "Il Museo come Sezione della Storia Urbana," in Urbanistica

> Besides, the great city, the metropolis, is already in itself the supreme venue of collecting, the museum. ...Surrealist practice, (...)was quite simply the discovery of the city as museum. ...The same gaze must embrace 'harmonies and styles of painting that are quite incomparable' and hence 'in this home of incoherency,' built by a society which is 'neither voluptuous nor reasonable,' we only discover 'the accumulation of an excessive and therefore unutilizable capital.' ...For this reason, the museum compels a superficial gaze, the same gaze that we are compelled to adopt in metropolitan space and time.*

In his essay, Rella posits the museum as both child of and metaphor for an era of fragmentation, its objects embodying time while revealing man's struggle against it. The museum can be considered as the expression of urban reality in the historically conscious society - a reality of *anachronistic collage*. Thus, it is essential to note the parallel and reciprocal relationship between man's urban environment and his creations.

Now it has become obvious that the museum as well as the city are the outcome of an identical conception of society and its objects. For symbolic reasons as well as pragmatic ones, the museum *is* the city as much as the city *is* a museum, and this is clearly expressed in the morphological influence they have on each other.

Urban Role

> The museum is a public building. Its significance in the public realm, due to the nature of the display of art, is that it returns public space to the city, enclosed public place, space that aerates the density of the urban mass.
>
> K Train**

Some city administrators have already understood that museums have an important role to play in the recuperation of our urban environment. Indicative of this phenomenon are the projects undertaken in many European cities such as Paris. President Francois Mitterrand, speaking before a Professional Association in 1982, said, "Nous n'avons rien fait si nous n'avons pas créé dans les dix années à venir les bases de la civilisation urbaine."[3] And those foundations are manifested in the form of buildings housing cultural facilities, among which museums have the lion's

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* Rella, op.cit.

** K. Train, in Perspecta 16, p. 143.

share. But one might wonder why our cities have to be reconstructed as if something had destroyed the urban environment.[4] After the second world war, European and American cities were drastically reorganized, a phenomenon that occured throughout the third quarter of this century. As a result of this approach all building forms, including the museum, have suffered from an *anti-urbanity* Peter Davey, in a recent article, criticized this situation,

> Leisure is increasingly taken in centres set apart for the purpose (..) The one-dimensional quality of the experiences has a profound effect on the buildings and structures that cater for them: they are almost by definition anti-urban late twentieth century leisure buildings are in general, profoundly alien to the complex and varied nature of real cities *

The modern vision of city life currently seems much less appealing to its citizens People have come to recognize the quality of traditional cities where activities are integrated, as opposed to those which are compartmentalized in distinct, reserved districts People are starting to realize the benefits of the variety and complexity of the traditional urban fabric where street animation provides an enriching experience. These transformations in the urban scene can be traced back to the loss of the social ritual, reflected in the city form Man has lost the sense of participation.**

These concerns are also echoed by Kirk Train in his analysis of the museum's architecture.[5] While acknowledging that the modern museum has become devoid of public character, turning its back on the city, he states that recently, with the "decline of doctrinaire modernism," architects have been reconsidering the relationship between the museum and its urban environment

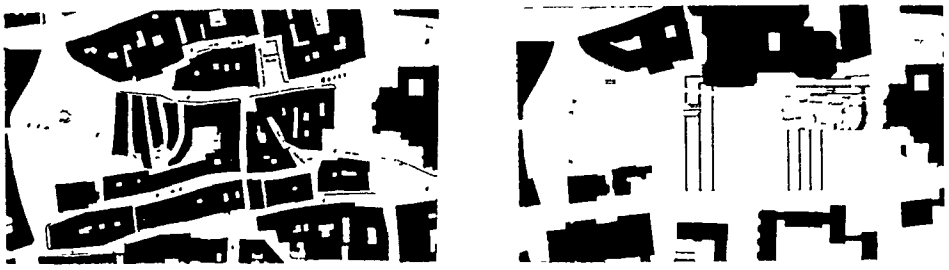

Fig 11,12 Frankfurt-am-Main, "Dom-Romerberg Bereich," before and after the destruction of 1944

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* Peter Davey, "Leisure and the City," Progressive Architecture 1099, (Sept. 88): p 39.

** See Pérez-Gómez, "The City as a Paradigm of Symbolic Order," The Carleton Book

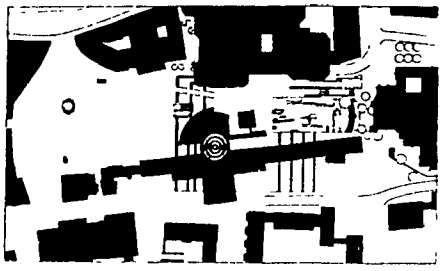

Fig.13: Reconstruction of the neighbourhood,the "Schirn" cultural centre and gallery. Bangert, Jansen, Scholz and Schultes Architects

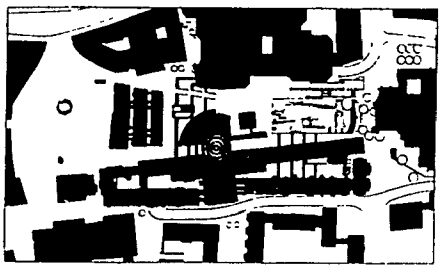

Fig.14: the two rows of housing along the side of the museum (from F. Stella, "A Gallery between the Cathedral and Town Hall)

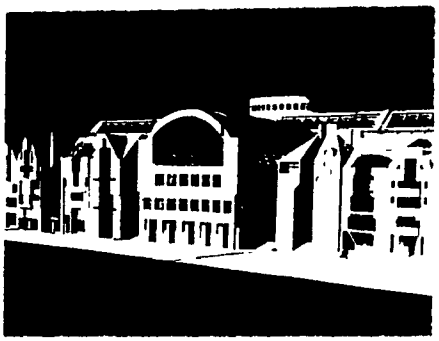

Fig.15: facades of the projecting part of the museum and the houses along its sides. Houses designed by ten different architects (from F. Stella, "A Gallery Between the Cathedral and Town Hall)

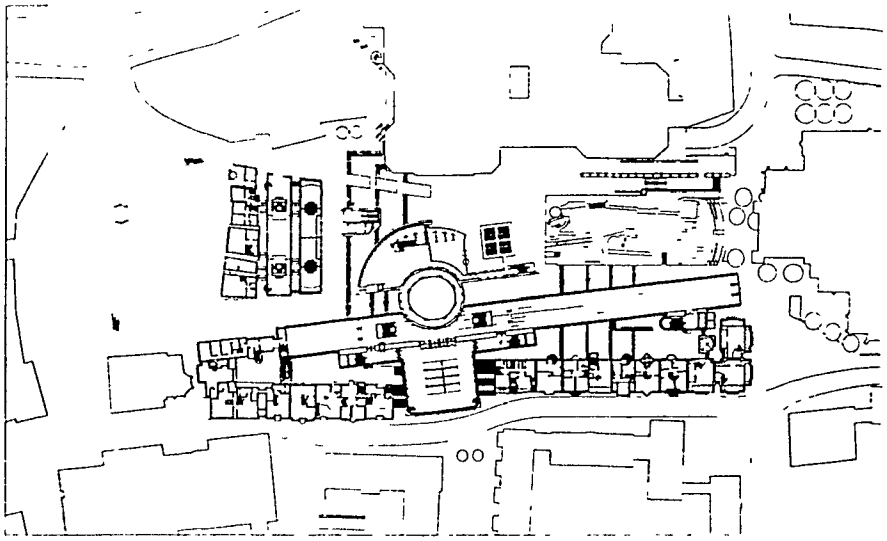

Fig 16· Plan of the project and its intricate relationship to its surrounding

ENDNOTES

1. See A. Pérez-Gómez, "The City as a Paradigm of Symbolic Order," in The Carleton Book.

2. Seuphor writes about Mondrian's experience in the city of New York: "L'île extraordinaire, hérissée de ses tours comme une gigantesque projection de San Geminiano, a dû lui paraître comme la proue même du navire de la civilisation. ...*'I feel here is the place to be.'*...On peut voir dans ce *Victory* une synthèse de New York telle que la ville a dû paraître chaque jour au peintre dont le dernier logement était placé au centre de ce prodigieux tourbillon carré." (in Seuphor, M. Mondrian, pp. 137,192,196)

Also see Le Corbusier, "Quand les Cathédrales Etaient Blanches," which contains a very poetic description of New York city.

3. Quoted by Yves Dauge, President of the Interministerial Coordinating Commission for the Major Architectural and Urban Planning Projects, in Architectures Capitales: Paris 1979-1989, p. 11.

In the preface for the catalogue of the exhibition, Mitterrand writes, "Le Paris des grands projets annonce celui de l'an 2000. ...Bousculée, parfois brisée par les évolutions industrielles, les crises économiques, par la démographie, l'immigration, la ville doit retrouver son unité et le centre communiquer avec la périphérie, avec ses quartiers marginaux... La Cité des sciences, le parc de La Villette et la Cité de la musique feront disparaître les frontières entre le centre et la Seine-Saint-Denis." (Ibid.)

4. Cultural centres are being built in the Federal Republic of Germany as part of a large scheme aiming at restructuring some areas in old cities which were totally or partially destroyed by the war and have since been left empty like scares. The most interesting project in terms of its integration in the urban fabric is the cultural centre in Frankfurt am Main which also integrates housing projects. See Lotus International 55, pp. 55-67.

5. K. Train writes, "The modern museum has neglected its responsibility to the city and become introverted and devoid of public character. More recently, with the decline of doctrinaire modernism, museums have exhibited a reexamination of historical precedents both urban and spatial. (in Perspecta 16, p. 143)

PART TWO

THE MUSEUM AND ITS ARCHITECTURE

CHAPTER 4

THE MUSEUM AND ITS IMAGERY

Intoduction

This chapter will address the architectural imagery of the art museum in the city. The museum being considered a public place, the following discussion will underline the relationship of the museum to its built environment, as well as the way in which its architectural imagery reflects societal attitudes towards art. The argument will focus on the appropriateness and the importance of the theme of monumentality to the museum's architectural imagery, as well as on the historical evolution of the monumental style with regard to this building type.

The symbolic significance of architecture, transcending its functionality, is conveyed to us through its imagery; in the domain of metaphorical representation Interpreted by the human mind, the imagery links the visible to the symbolized, the signifier to the signified, allowing us to grasp the world and dwell in it. Considering metaphors as a direct expression of the ability and willingness of man to depict the ideal in the given, monuments are metaphors erected in celebration of historical events. Therefore people have considered museums to be monuments ever since their creation as public institutions in the early nineteenth century Such a conception is often assumed from the beginning of the design process.

Role and Meaning of the Monument

In the traditional city, monuments highlighted and punctuated the processional and ritualistic dimension of the public realm.[1] They were meaningful because they triggered in each member of the community a sense of collective memory characterized by a profound belief in a

common world view. In addition to being civic reminders of certain values, they played an active role in the life of the community as arenas of social participation. The monuments acted as places and symbols with which one could identify, as well as orientation signs within the city. This latter role is probably the only common thread remaining between the traditional and the modern monuments. Today it seems the modern monument relies solely on its visual aspect and effect, a phenomenon due to the increasing importance of the image in our culture. But let us examine the meaning of a monument. Alois Riegl defined it in these terms.

> A monument in its oldest and most original sense is a human creation, erected for the specific purpose of keeping single human deeds or events (or a combination thereof) alive in the minds of future generations.*

Thus we could say that the museum is often based on the possession of monuments which belong to one of the three categories defined by Riegl: intentional, unintentional, or having an age-value.[2] However, it seems that the monuments, in the etymological sense - i.e as devices of memory - play today a role on an individual level only The significance of monuments has changed radically, and those of the past are valued precisely for their *pastness* rather than for the ideals they used to commemorate through depiction of specific events and people.[3] The Gothic Cathedral for instance, is no longer considered as the "City of God on Earth" but as a masterpiece of medieval architecture, a wonder of early engineering prowess We realize that in this contemporary epoch of incoherence or, to use a term of Norberg-Schultz, of "pluralism" of views,** monuments seldom speak to and touch everybody.[4] W.H. Gass has demonstrated this by showing that different people have different interpretations of a given monument.[5] There has been a decided shift away from the traditional metaphysical concerns of man towards a belief in positive determinism, i.e. a belief in science, technology and the power of man to change and control nature[6] Today there exists a sharp delineation between the public and the private realms. Such a situation originated probably in the political practice of democracy, the right to be *different* and the *freedom* of belief having become

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* Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and its Origin," **Oppositions** 25, translated by W.K Forster and D. Ghirardo, p. 21.

** Norberg-Schultz, "Significance and Architecture," La Signification de l'Architecture Occidentale, p. 425

sacred. The most important change of the modern era may well be the shift from a collectivist society to an individualist one. The museum reflects such changes thus being an instument of democratic thinking, an "exhibition of thoughts"* where each one can find a work of art to relate to Even though the first museums were meant to epitomize taste through the exhibition of works from a selected period, it has increasingly attempted to show the disparity of the concerns reflected in the works.[7]

The monument is of primary importance in the architectural discourse, for it might be the last architectural type to be defined by its symbolic dimension. The interpretation of other building types having indeed taken a materialist stance focusing on their function, any possibility of a symbolic or transcendental significance is ruled out as incompatible with scientific and rationalist paradigms However where the symbolic significance of a building is its *raison d'être*, as in the case of the monument, it is unwarranted to give pre-eminence to its structural or functional determinants Thus, in our age, the monument (in its etymological sense as defined by Riegl) is perceived by most people as the only type of building which seems to escape the prevailing positivist trends; its architectural imagery has a metaphorical content that transcends its self-referentiality. In order to understand the debate about the notion of monumentality as it pertains to the museum, we have to fully grasp the evolution of its architectural imagery Thus, the purpose of the following section aims at showing that the historical reasons for creating monumental museums may no longer exist.

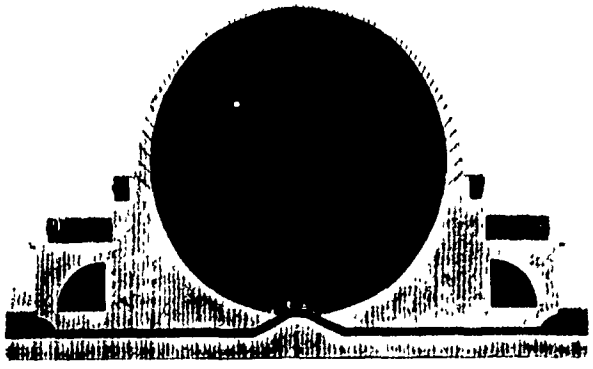

Fig.17: Boullée's monument to Newton, 1785. "ô Newton, Si par l'étendue de tes lumières et la sublimité de ton génie, tu as déterminé la figure de la terre· moi, j'ai conçu le projet de t'envelopper de ta découverte C'étoit dans le séjour de l'immortalité, c'étoit dans le Ciel que je voulais placer Newton" (from H Rosenau, Boullée's Treatise on Architecture)

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* Rella, "The Vertigo of the mélange: Man's Fight Against Time," Lotus International 35, p. 57

Historical Precedents

To look at the architectural origins of the museum, we have to go back to the Renaissance Palazzo. Typical of that period, the castles of European aristocracy were built with galleries or loggias that were meant to be hallways or *passegii*. These were soon to be used, around the end of the sixteenth century, to display marble antiquities.* By the end of the seventeenth century, rooms exclusively reserved for wall-to-wall display of paintings were a standard feature of palace planning. As the aristocrats of the eighteenth century began to realize that their collections should be accessible to their subjects as well, museums were established as separate buildings, that were open to the public.[8] Count Algarotti's written account for a museum in Dresden, Germany (1759) is the first description of the layout of an independent museum. Relying on this description, Pevsner states in the History of Building Types, that some features of this museum, such as skylighting, domed hall, and portico, referred directly to architectural elements typical of palaces ** Not surprisingly, architects were to get inspiration from precedents that had been established by private residences - regardless of how accessible they were to the public.

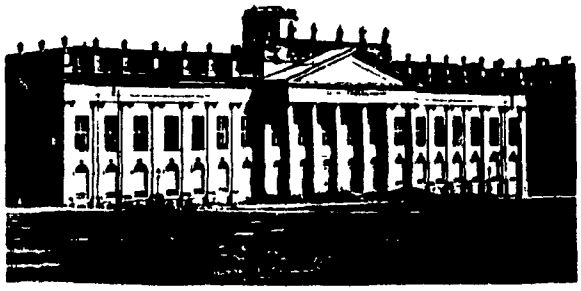

Fig.18· Museum Fridericianum, 1769-77 (from Pevsner, A History of Building Types)

However, towards the end of the eighteenth century, museum imagery had started shifting from an urban, rather closed, Italian Renaissance Palazzo form to a monumental one that was to dominate throughout the nineteenth century In the 1770s the "Fridericianum," built in Kassel, Germany, was designed by Simon Louis de Ry. It reflected the transitional situation of museum imagery and the style *en vogue* at that time with its "giant pilasters [that] look back to the Baroque, the portico forward to Neo-Classicism."*** Pevsner states that those choices were a reflection of the

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* Pevsner, A History of Building Types, p. 111 & seq.

** Pevsner, A History of Building Types, p. 114.

*** Ibid, p. 115.

preferences in art collecting rather than a nostalgic monumentalism * The Museo Pio-Clementino, built between 1773 and 1780 by M Simonetti and G Camporesi, with its Neo-Classical style, its Rotunda, and its monumental imagery was to establish a model for the nineteenth century

At the same time, and in a parallel development, the results of the *Académie*'s competitions of 1753 and 1754 concerning palace galleries, were published The winning entries were indicative of the transitional period during which an essentially Baroque design borrowed elements from the classical style of the Pantheon ** In 1778, the first prizes of a competition by the *Académie d'Architecture* for an independent museum, won by Guy de Gisors and J.F Delannoy, heralded the arrival of the layout and monumental imagery of nineteenth century museums *** Their entries demonstrated the influence of their teacher Etienne-Louis Boullée.

Fig 19 Museo Pio-Clementino, Rome 1773-80 (from Pevsner, A History of Building Type)

Boullée's theoretical project for a museum, published in 1783, had in terms of imagery a tremendous influence on the more pragmatic nineteenth century designs that were actually built He may be considered as the originator of the monumental imagery that was to become so popular For Boullee, however, the primary inspiration of art and architecture was nature and, as Pérouse de Montclos notes, he saw his Museum as a temple dedicated to "Nature and Genius "****

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* Ibid.

** Pevsner, A History of Building Type, pp 115, 116

*** Pevsner, pp.115, 116.

**** Pérouse de Montclos, J M Etienne-Louis Boullee (1728-1799), de l'Architecture Classique à l'Architecture Revolutionnaire, p 164

Boullée's architectural imagery was an "imitation of nature in the original Greek sense of mimesis, that is a metaphore of the a priori of the world,"* and the museum itself was only a pretext for a monument Pérouse de Montclos writes,

> La Révolution créera les conditions spirituelles pour un traitement monumental des édifices publics. . La notion de 'monument' se chargeait d'une pensée nouvelle ...L'essentiel du programme [du Museum] ne serait donc pas la destination fonctionnelle**

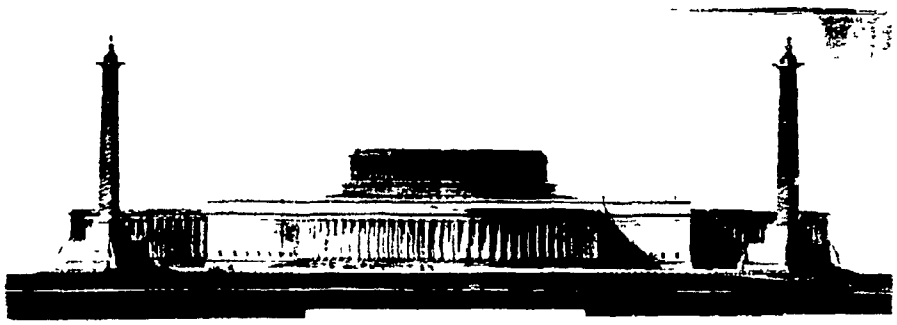

Fig 20 E L Boullée, design for a Museum, 1783
(from H Rosenau, Boullée's Treatise on Architecture)

Boullée's "megalomaniac" project, by its scale and the feeling it provoked in the viewer, implied monumentality However, his concern was to give physical shape to infinity rather than express his admiration of the historical happening of the French Revolution, as the preceeding quotation may imply By expressing infinity his aim was to build a temple to eternity in which the content, art, as well as the container, architecture, paid tribute to mother nature [9]

Often described as Boullée's most influencial disciple, Durand, with intentions quite different from that of his teacher, designed the *ideal* museum which he published in 1801, together with other projects, in the Recueil et Parallèle des Edifices de Tout Genre, Anciens et Modernes Durand claimed in the Precis des Leçons d'Architecture (1802) to solve all the practical problems of economic construction and comfort that, he argued, should be the exclusive concern of the architect [10] In accordance with such a pragmatic approach, the monumentality of the building can no longer be considered pertinent Boullée's formal *elements* were present to serve an alltogether

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* Pérez-Gómez, Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science, p 138

** Pérouse de Montclos, op.cit., pp. 126, 164.

different purpose. While Boullée's Museum was really a pantheon - i.e. a monument - with all the dramatic and grandiose effects of light and scale, Durand's project referred to the Roman Pantheon as merely a formal inspiration, without its accompanying symbolic connotations.

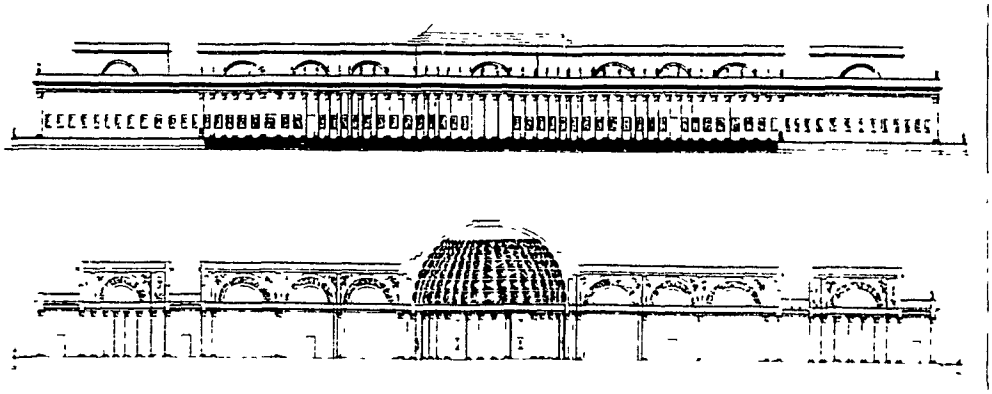

Fig 21: J.N.L Durand, Project for a Museum, 1803 Précis des leçons d'Architecture (from H. Searing, New American Art Museum)

For Durand, the classical orders belonged to a variety of forms dictated by customs and added to the buildings whose "initial form was derived from the nature of the materials and from the use of the objects in whose construction they were employed;"* they were therefore devold of symbolic value. Pérez-Gómez states convincingly that, for Durand, Neo-Classical architecture had lost the power to reconcile taste and reason, and had become clothing for the structure, a fashionable decoration.** Yet Durand's ideas were to have such an influence on the twentieth century that they are often considered the point of departure of any architectural thinking or creation.[11] However, nineteenth century museum architects, as we will see it in the following discussion, did not quite simply fall under the influence of Durand's ideas on functionalism. Instead they retained the image of monumentality, trying to reduce Boullée's theoretical museum to a building that could actually be constructed. Monumentality was expressed by the austerity of the Neo-Classical style that was considered as one of remembrance. Nineteenth century Neo-Classicism was quintessentially

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* Pérez-Gómez, op. cit., chap. 9 "Durand and Functionalism," p. 301

** Ibid.

monumental, fueled by a "mythical history," as the plea of Fischer von Erlach suggests * With this in mind, I will now look at the century that saw the emergence of the boom in museum building.

The main historical milestones of the nineteenth century were the Dulwich Gallery, designed by John Soane in 1814, the Munich Glyptothek, whose competition was won by Leo von Klenze in 1816, and the Altes Museum in Berlin by K F Schinkel, completed in 1830 Whereas the Dulwich Gallery's architectural imagery hints at the first museums through its character of domesticity and its housing of a private collection, the two others, could be seen as demonstrating, as Helen Searing writes, "the international persuasiveness of Durand's paradigms due, no doubt, to the scope they offered for individual interpretation and the flexibility that could be achieved by combining aspects of several schemes "** Even then however, Durand's global project or goal was only partly achieved since the architects were inspired by the formal aspects and were not really interested in Durand's concerns for economy, salubrity, and function. Unlike Durand, von Klenze designed a main facade for his building, and above all was concerned with giving it an encyclopedic array of architectonic elements derived from Greek, Roman and Renaissance periods *** The Greek portico confers to the entrance a temple image, and because of the replacement of windows by niches, its seclusiveness and its appearance as an *instructive object* were emphasized

Fig 22 Sir John Soane, Dulwich Gallery, 1811-14 (from Pevsner, A History of Building Types)

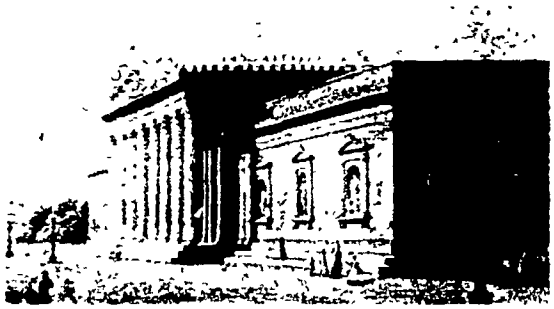

Fig 23 Leo von Klenze, Glyptothek, Munich 1816-30 (from H Searing, New American Art Museum)

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* See Pérez-Gomez, op cit , p 313.

** Searing, New American Art Museums, p 17

*** Ibid

The Altes Museum by Schinkel, it is generally admitted, has had an important impact on museum design in the western world up to the first decades of the twentieth century. According to Helen Searing, this museum proposes a new approach to the building She writes that despite its monumental size, its classical language and its austere character - and unlike the preceding example - the peristyle creates a transitional space, a buffer zone between the mass of the building and the street, in the way the french architects of the revolution had conceived of it some thirty to fifty years before.* Nevertheless, the stairs leading to the peristyle present the visitor with a theatrical monumentality which emphasizes the pedestal effect, thereby tending to differentiate and therefore isolate the building from the empty piazza in front of it. It is also significant that Schinkel called the rotunda "the sanctuary," a word still full of religious connotations in nineteenth century Europe

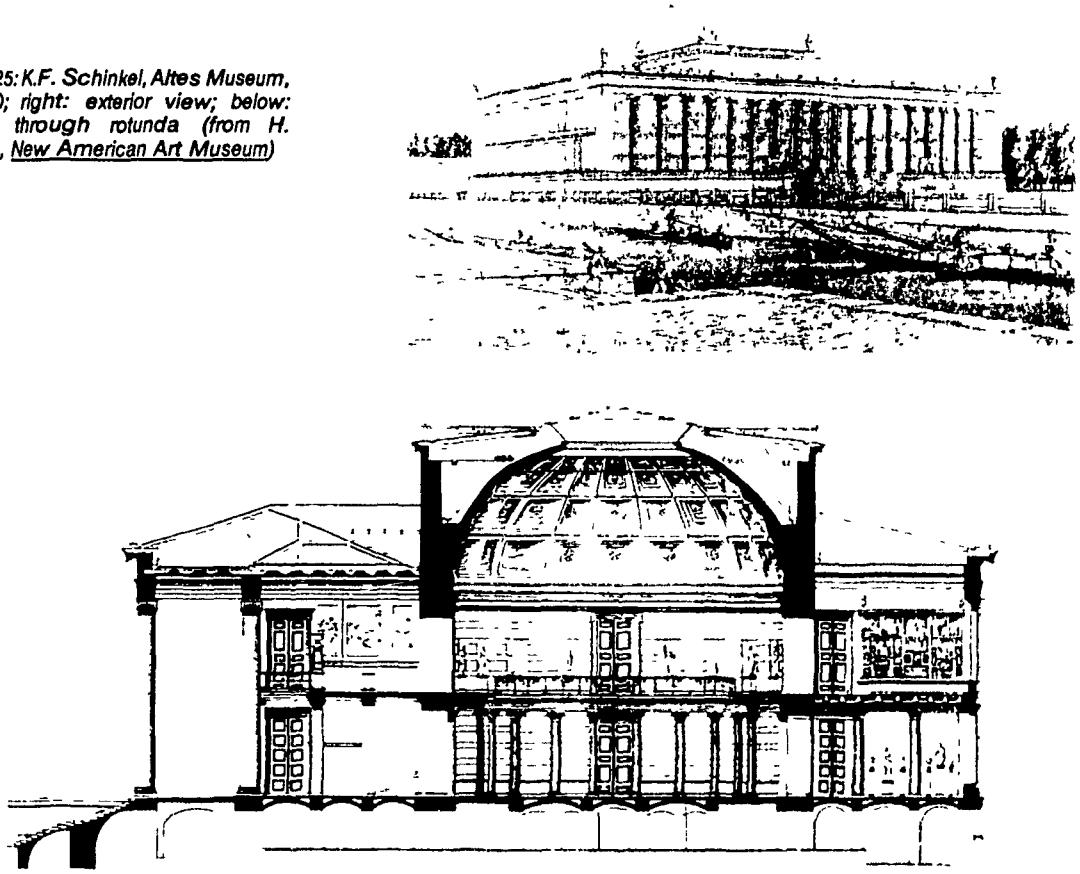

Fig.24-25: K.F. Schinkel, Altes Museum, 1823-30; right: exterior view; below: section through rotunda (from H. Searing, New American Art Museum)

* Searing, New American Art Museum, pp. 18-20.

In America, the architectural imagery of the museum fluctuated between the theme of the castle and that of the temple. It was the dissolution of the authority of classicism that unleashed this unparalleled eclecticism of style By the end of the nineteenth century, following the lead of the firm McKim, Mead and White, and the influence of the compositional method of the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* - where an increasing number of American architects were being trained - the image of the museum found the ideal of its expression in the classical mode.*

Fig 26: C F. McKim, Walker Art Gallery, Bowdoin College, Maine 1891-93 (from H Searing, New American Art Museum)

From the early modern period onward (the *recent past* started just before the Great Depression) interests began to shift from concern with style and monumentality as established previously, to establish the museum as the ideal place to show, enjoy and study works of art. Pevsner's comments about the buildings of this period, especially those designed after the second world war, are instructive.

> In fact no new principles have turned up, except that the ideal of the museum as a monument in its own right has been replaced by the ideal of the museum as the perfect place to show, enjoy and study works of art.**

The works of great pioneering architects - who layed down the principles of an architectural revolution - have been interpreted as responses to purely functional and programatic problems rather than to symbolic issues. Yet it is the symbolic dimension that gives true significance to their works.

If one was, like Lupertz, to advocate an architecture that is more concerned with function, refuting any symbolic significance that would *compete* with the work of art, then one

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* See Searing, op cit., pp. 29-35.

** Pevsner, op cit , p. 136

would have to design "a room with four walls, light coming in from above a door to enter and one to exit."* However, considering for instance the project of Le Corbusier for the Mundaneum in Geneva, there seems to be more to architecture than the functional articulation of a *circulation path.* Francis H. Taylor draws a symbolic parallel between this very ambitious project and the Tower of Babel.** The resemblance is not a formal or visual one but one of intentions, where the Mundaneum, like the ancient tower, was meant to justify the presence of man on earth, through the "gathering of his achievements," to assert the triumph of good over evil, of genius over mediocrity. Consistent with this point of view, the project of Le Corbusier can be seen as reaching back to Boullée's concept of a monument, but with a major difference: now the central idea of the creation was no longer Nature and God, but Man in the greatness of his achievements and his evolution. The image of Le Corbusier's "machine à exposer" reflected more than a simple concern for function; it may be considered as the last manifestation of monumentality committed to a humanist vision.

That Le Corbusier's scheme inspired Frank Lloyd Wright's design for the Guggenheim Museum can be seen in his use of a similar form. However, Wright was concerned solely with the expression of movement. The building's very expressive sculptural shape, conceived as an object standing by itself, established little or no relationship with its environment. The imagery speaks of technical prowess and of the significance inherent in the form.

Also modernist in spirit and sculptural in shape, the museum by Mies van der Rohe approaches the problem of imagery in a totally different way. As Searing puts it, Mies "pushed to its outer limits the modernist repudiation of typological representation."*** Even though he had been concerned with the problem of the relationship between inside and outside, the result achieved is of a *generalized* and *neutral* image which expresses the fascination with new technologies.****

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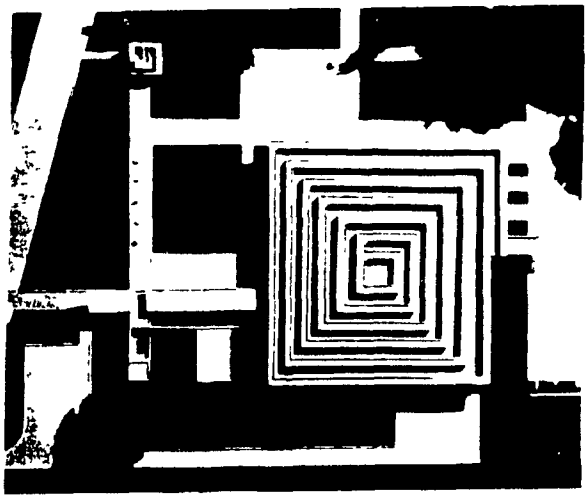
* Lupertz, M. "Art and Architecture," in New Museum Buildings for the Federal Republic of Germany, p. 32.

** Taylor, Babel's Tower: The dilemma of the Modern Museum, p. 5.

*** Searing, op. cit., p. 51.

**** See Norberg-Schultz, La Signification de l'Architecture Occidentale, p. 396.



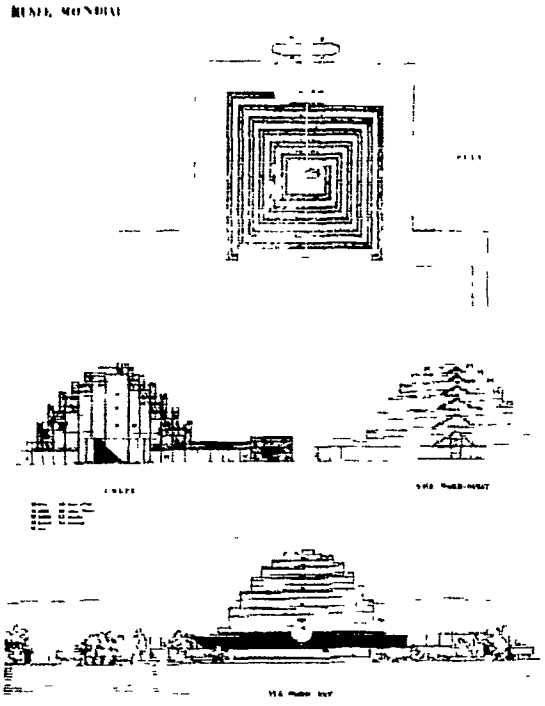


Fig 27-28: Le Corbusier; top left: Museum of indefinite growth, 1930 (from S von Moos Le Corbusier); top right: the Mundaneum, 1927 (from H Damisch, 'The Museum Device')

Fig 29: F.L. Wright, Guggenheim Museum, New york 1959 (from H. Searing, New American Art Museums)

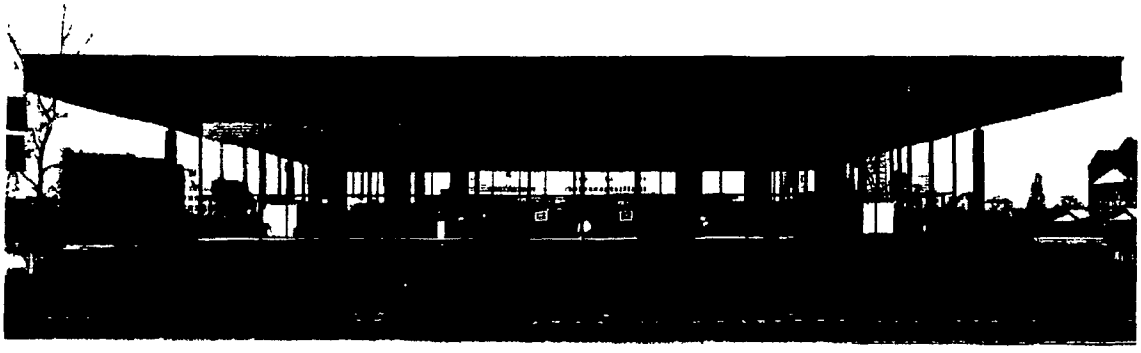


Fig 30. bottom, L. Mies van der Rohe, Berlin National Gallery, 1962-68 (from Klotz, New Museum Buildings in the Federal Republic of Germany)

Concluding Discussion

In the light of what has been said above, one has to carefully consider the significance of the museum's image. The museum is the symbol of the modern era *par excellence*, an era where man has turned to historical artifacts as the embodiment of his obsession with time. Having been able to grasp and control space, time is the only physical dimension he has yet to contain When one thinks of museums one tends to think of the masterpieces that they possess as being monuments.[12] However, the museum itself converges around the idea of gathering different world views, regardless of their own time and space of conception, what Donato calls "heterochronias" and "heterotopias "[13] For this reason one could consider museums as living organs of our epoch rather than sarcophagee of other ages to which nostalgic people would come to mourn the death of an art of the past or a "superseded style "[14] Although monuments in the etymological sense of the word - i e devices of memory - museums do not fulfill the pre-condition of praising an ideal, or remembering an event or person. Their statement of non-commitment to any single idea or ideal succeeds in achieving just the opposite

Making a meaningful architecture that opens a dialogue with its cultural environment, and which reflects the society that shapes it, should be the task of the architect It is thus imperative that the museum be recognized as one of the last public institutions that involves a sense of *place* as opposed to being just a supplier of *public services.*[15] This involves a sense of immediacy as well as an active participation of body and mind that could be a theme to develop in the architecture of the museum Furthermore, museums should be considered, in the final instance, for what they stand for culturally: a society and a city of fragmentation. Instead of presenting a stagnant facade, a *pseudo-sphinx* standing on a pedestal, museum "image-makers" may contemplate the possibility of being more articulate, echoing the anachronistic modern city, the *surrealist vision* that has somehow become our reality: a fragmented city for a fragmented society *

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* See Rella, op. cit., pp. 55, 56.

If one accepts the idea of the museum as a microcosm of the city the question is whether one should apply this statement literally.[16] Isn't the city after all a macrocosm of Man and like men themselves, is full of complexities, contradictions and ambiguities which make it difficult to grasp?[17] In that sense, one could go beyond Venturi's idea, which is limited to the complexities and contradictions of form and purpose, by looking more deeply into man's mind and intuition.* The contradictions inherent in man's psyche have been made more apparent since Freud and Jung's study of the hidden aspects of man's psychology [18]

As an institution, the museum has to consider its urban responsibility as a place to the public, and, in doing so, it may be more critical about being a "monument" in a world which does not acknowledge the original significance of such a structure. All that our own culture retains from the idea of the monument seems to be the effect that its sheer size triggers in us, the feeling of deference. The monumentality of a facade or a mass has today an altogether different meaning. Monumentality, in this era, gives rise to a feeling that is at odds with the ideals of democracy that gave birth to the museum It is often associated with authoritarianism. Colin-St-John Wilson writes

> ..the drama of confrontation ( )can take place between the facade of a monumental building and the visitor who, is compelled to stand off a respectful distance and, in that intuitive act of deference, is made to feel vulnerable. (...)The figural presentation of a building can take two main forms of 'presence'. One is the form of assertion, of a confrontation whose challenge is instantaneous It is addressed to you, and what it demands of you is a certain submission by threatening to overwhelm your self-possession. The theatricalities of Speer and of Piacentini are clear cases in point**

Monumentality creates in the viewer two kinds of reactions one is a feeling of something past, that will never be retrieved and of which we have to be reminded by the monument. And yet art, I believe, is far from being dead. The other is the feeling of admiration, of blind acceptance of what is stored, hidden inside the monumental envelope as superior, the fruit of *Geniuses* or *Super-humans* This second notion must also be rejected if we accept the idea that the museum is a gathering of different world views, thus expressing the cultural reality of pluralism.

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* See Venturi, note to the second edition, Complexities and Contradictions in Architecture, p 14

** Wilson, C.St J. "The Natural Imagination: an Essay on the Experience of Architecture," Architectural Review, January 89, p 68.

In conclusion, Douglas Davis' comments on the monumentality of the museum are important to consider:

> The democratic transformation in the last hundred years has been so complete that we still don't act or think on the basis of its implications. In an era when universal education and instant communication thrive, the art, the sciences and the crafts are all intimately intertwined with a public larger than ever imagined in the past It is exactly this condition that requires the architect to create something beyond that Miesian cypher, in the interest of art as well as its public The American Museum is a celebrative icon, a totem. This does not, it should not, dictate monumentality But it demands that a visual statement be made, that the building 'mean' as well as be or simply provide shelter.*

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* Davis, "The Museum Impossible," Museum News June '83, p. 36.

ENDNOTES

1. Pérez-Gómez writes about the ancient city and how it was underlaid by the ritual, the latter giving it a symbolic order in which the monument highlighted the procession. Until late eighteenth century the order of the city was the embodiment of that ritual, was it through procession (the hierarchy of rituals), geometry (refering to the universe), or the design of the city as a stage-set. Always inherent was the social dimension of the ritual of which the buildings were the background. (see Pérez-Gómez, A. "The city as a Paradigm of Symbolic Order," in The Carleton Book.)

The street is now often seen as a connecting corridor, a circulation area which would disappear should the fiction in the movie series "Star Trek" become real and people be "beamed" from one place to the other. We must remember here that the street is traditionally, as Louis Kahn says, "a place of meeting by agreement," and it is only then that it has a meaningful and constructive existence. (see Kahn, L. Between Silence and Light.)

2. Riegl defines the intentional monument as the one that is created as a reminder of an event or person. He defines the unintentional monument as that which was not erected with this specific goal in the mind of its creator, but was associated later on to an event or person. Such would be the case of the buildings which epitomize the work of a specific architect and thus stand metaphorically for him. Finally the monument which has an age-value is the one that is considered only for being a reminder of a past epoch, a monument to time itself.

3. This attitude reflects the new dimension of historical consciousness that the modern city has achieved. The layers of history represented in the shape of buildings are now part of the soul of the city. They are perceived as unintentional monuments whose value is of being witnesses to a by-gone age. The city is thus transformed into a museum in situ (see citation by Louis Mumford chap.3).

Alan Colquhoun writes, "Historical works have here (in the Modern Movement) lost their meaning as part of the fabric of time and space, and are preserved as emblems of a generalized and superseded past." (in "Thoughts on Riegl," Oppositions 25, p. 79.)

4. Commenting on the pluralism of belief of our epoch and its cultural effect, George Steiner states, "No textuality, no art form, no mayfly of literary, musical or material contrivance is, a priori, ruled out of court. (...)The axioms of the transcendent in the arts of understanding and of judgement are invested in the overnight." (in Steiner, Real Presences, p. 33).

Thus, in the city, people being deprived of a public place to meet and share the feeling of belonging to the same world, they erect monuments which are becoming mere images; images that are self-referential and which have lost their metaphorical content.

With respect to this situation, Pérez-Gómez' comments on the ideological shift between Boullée and his disciples reveal its effect on architecture. "With the increasing irrelevance of metaphysical speculation in science, rationalized symbols became allegories. Boullee's disciples covered the facades of their buildings with emblems and inscriptions, while their master was still confident in the effective symbolic nature of his elemental geometric bodies." (in Pérez-Gómez, Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science, p. 146.)

5. The differences depend on what is emphasized: they may refer to its intentionality; or else to its importance in examplifying the work of an artist or architect; or finally to its aesthetic effect regardless of its external meaning. (see Gass, "Monumentality/Mentality", Oppositions 25, p.143)

6. George Steiner criticizes, for instance, positivism and scienticism as applied to research in the liberal arts. (in Real Presences, p. 36)
Also see Pérez-Gómez, "Introduction," Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science

7. As an example of the attempt to establish the museum as epitome of taste we can think of Schinkel whose admitted intentions were to "delight" the visitor by the exceptional works of classical art that were exhibited in the rotunda of the Altes Museum in Berlin, and then to "instruct" him. (see Douglas Crimp, "The Post Modern Museum," Parchute 46, p 65)

8. In 1770 in England, architect Robert Adam designed Newby Hall which was typically attached to a private country house. In Italy the Museo Pio-Clementino built in 1773 was an extension to the Vatican palace Pevsner writes that, "the new rooms were in their shapes inspired by the palaces and baths of ancient Rome" (Pevsner, A History of Building Type, p.116) In Germany, the Fridericianum in Kassel (1769-77) kept the architectural expression of a palace where we could even find private studies despite the fact that it was a seperate building open to the public at certain hours. In France, the Louvre, opened to the public for the first time in the 1790's, and was to become the major example.
See Pevsner, N. A History of Building Type, for a complete historical account

9. See Pérez-Gómez, chap. 4 on Boullée's symbolism, Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science, p. 142 & seq

10. Pérez-Gómez writes in his book Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science: "In one rather terrifying paragraph Durand summarized the basic precepts of his value system 'In all times and all places, the totality of man's thoughts and actions were generated by two principles Love of well-being and aversion to pain.' This materialistic premise became the basis of the ethics and aesthetics of technology, and it still underlies the most popular historical and ideological conceptions inherited from the nineteenth century. Only after Durand would it become important for architecture to provide 'pleasure' or that it be 'nice' rather than truly meaningful" (in chap 9 "Durand and functionalism," p 299)

11. i.e. the prevailing functionalist approach so current in western architectural firms

12. The physical presence of the museum could be seen as having a commemorative value but this has nothing to do with any event or person. At best it can be considered as celebrating the advent of a cultural phenomenon: the acknowledgement of the importance of history, an era of which we still partake.

13. See Donato, E. "The Museum's Furnace. Notes Toward a contextual Reading of *Bouvard et Pecuchet*, in Textual Strategies: Perspective in Post-Structuralist Criticism, p. 214 & seq
This is undoubtedly the fruit of a logocentric civilization that is trapped between the aberration of a rational system -that does not reflect man's nature - and the individualistic attitude where everything becomes personal, where "every head is a world "

14. See Tom Sherman, "Museum of Tomorrow," Parachute 46, pp 78-81

15. Our cities have changed so radically that we can hardly relate to the traditional way of building and living. The modern period was characterized by a new vision of life defined by human activities. One has to acknowledge the fact that the citizens have lost the social dimension of the city.

16. Moshe Safdie applied this idea in his project for the National Gallery in Ottawa in a formal and simplistic way, recreating the major elements of a city: piazzas, streets, small parks and even a church. See the article by Ricardo Castro in The Gazette (Montreal, January 23rd, 1988).

17. Such a vision of the city is well anticipated in Laugier's description of how a city should be. He writes, "There must be regularity and fantasy, relationships and oppositions, and casual, unexpected elements that vary the scene; great order in the details, confusion, uproar, and tumult in the whole."

Tafuri comments: "Selectivity and criticism (...) signified the introduction into urban planning of a fragmentation that places on the same level, not only Nature and Reason, but also natural fragment and urban fragment." (in Architecture and Utopia, p. 5-6)

18. See George Steiner, Real Presences, for interesting remarks on the influence of psychology on modern artistic production. (pp 45-47)

CHAPTER 5

LIGHT AND ARCHITECTURE

Introduction

Since the foundation of the museum, architects have shown a special interest in its lighting; be it to do justice to the works exhibited or, from a conservationist position, to protect them from the damaging effects of light. Light contributes to the character of the building, sometimes creating a dramatic and enriching environment and sometimes immersing art and the visitor in an ethereal atmosphere. With the invention of electricity and artificial light, in opposition to daylight, a new dilemma was introduced. Twentieth century Modern movement was to witness major debates with regard to the concept of light inside the exhibition rooms. Nevertheless, what is more relevant to architects is the role and importance given to the use of light, that is to say, its significance in the process of designing the museum.

Meaning of Light in Architecture

> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, and God's spirit hovered over the water God said, 'Let there be light', and there was light. God saw that light was good, and God divided light from darkness.
>
> Genesis, The Jerusalem Bible

Since the beginning of humanity, aside from its functional qualities, light has been attributed a symbolic significance and has had a powerful impact on the life of man-kind The sun for instance, the ultimate source of light, was perceived as the embodiment of divine truth, at which no human dared to approach. As in the legend of Icarus, all ancient mythologies referred to the primordial theme of the religious rituals related to light and acknowledged the sun as a regulator, on the perceptual level, of human participation to the world In the Judeo-Christian culture light was

perceived as the materialization of the divine. The Gothic Cathedral, "the city of God on earth," was built with the intention of presenting light as the manifestation of the presence of God.[†] This symbolic dimension of light has been a constant in the Christian faith, and has been a preoccupation of the church builders from the Renaissance and the Baroque to the present. Indeed, architects who strongly believe in the power of man to control his own existence (with the help of science and technology) have also shown a great sensibility to, and grasped the connotations of the presence of light and its importance This is particularly the case of the church of Notre-Dame-du-Haut at Ronchamps by Le Corbusier or the cathedral of Brazilia by Oscar Niemeyer. Light had also been central to the concerns of Boullée and Ledoux in their theoretical projects, whether these were closely connected to the religious rituals or to the more secular activities of the daily life. God was not only identified with the immensity of space but also with light [*] Ledoux, for instance, had planned his "ville de Chaux" in an oval shape, which imitated the orbit of the sun, "mère de toutes les ressources qui répand l'influence qui donne la vie."[**] By creating effects of "lumière mystérieuse," John Soane's use of light provides for yet another of its particular features. It was intended to trigger in people a feeling of terror and intrigue - another aspect of "sublimity," serving his "grand manner" design [***]

Fig 31 Sir John Soane's Museum-House (from J. Summerson, "Union of the Arts," Lotus International 35)

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[*] See Pérez-Gómez, Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science, p. 157

[**] Ibid , p. 161.

[***] Du Prey, John Soane's Architectural Education, 1753-1780, p 346.

At first glance, the present-day architect seems to be more concerned with light as an *amenity*, a controllable physical element which beautifies and enhances the perception of our environment, but which has no symbolic significance This situation probably originated with the revolutionary ideas of Durand who stated that the architects' sole objective ought to be that of providing comfortable and economical construction.* Despite such radical changes in the approach to architecture and design, light has retained a transcendental dimension which is closely connected to man's perceptual experience of the world, a concept that involves subjectivity Le Corbusier, for instance, saw in light a *maker* of architecture, stating, "l'architecture est le jeu savant, correcte et magnifique des volumes sous la lumière." Such a poetic attitude clashes with the pragmatic position that emphasizes the importance of light's immediate function or usefulness over its inherent or symbolic significance. The controversy is clearly acknowledged in the works and writings of Louis Kahn who opposes those preoccupied with mere efficiency of lighting techniques. He supports a *humanist* approach that is based on his belief that a man-made environment should be in harmony with nature. He values the mutable quality of light that produces variety thus positively affecting man's psyche.

Fig.32· L Kahn, The Yale Centre for British Art, New Haven 1969-77 (from L Kahn, Between Silence and Light)

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* See Pérez-Gómez, op. cit., p 303

Kahn's concern is at the centre of the architectural discourse of the museum; i.e the opposition of natural light to artificial light [2] His design for the Yale Centre for British Art proposes a solution that ignores the usual apprehensions of architects and museum administrators. He writes,

> .. where one can realize that natural light, whatever degree you can get, from which you can feel the mood of the time of the day. And the cloud that passes over gives the room a feeling of association with the person that is in it, knowing that there is life outside of the room, and it reflects the life-giving that a painting does, because I think that a work of art is a giver of life... So light, this great maker of presences, can never be in any way brought forth by the single moment of light which the electric bulb has; and natural light has all the moods of the time of day, the seasons of the year, and that year for year and day for day, be different from the day preceeding.*

Clearly, this matter goes to the heart of the problem of modern existence and experience of the world The philosophical concerns of Louis Kahn are undoubtedly rooted in the fact that modern man lives in a totally man-made environment, which is not in harmony with nature anymore, but rather has replaced it. However, Kahn's attitude is not to be confused with the paranoia of some critics or artists towards technology.[3] Kahn's plea is to return man to a reality where he is part of the world rather than outside, controlling it; but without denying man the benefit of his actions and creations. Ultimately Kahn envisions the possibility of man acting together *with* his environment. A similar attitude characterizes the work of Carlo Scarpa, who considered the movement created by natural light as a major element of the sought-after theatrical dimension **

Having presented the mainstream and competing perceptions of the role of light in architecture, and how this debate is part of the much longer issue of man's relationship to his environment as affected by the ideology of rationalism, let us now turn to the ways in which light, throughout history, has affected the architecture of the museum

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* Quoted in Global Architect 38

** See M.A. Crippa, "An Architectural Theme: Exhibition and Museum Arrangements," in Carlo Scarpa: Theory, Design, Projects, pp. 49, 79.

Museums and the Use of Light

The origin of the use of light in museums has to be traced back to those eighteenth century architects who were part of a dramatic change in architectural intentionality that occured as other events were revolutionizing society and man's existence Two actors represent the crucial period in the history of the western civilization that was characterized by the loss of the mythical dimension of life: Etienne-Louis Boullée, who may be considered to be the *last hero* of a passing epoch, and Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand who announced the new era of functionalism which has now culminated in a *cul-de-sac* Even though his concept of the museum is quite different from the contemporary one, Boullée's project gives us the measure of the possibility of a symbolic significance depicted in light which manages to move us Boullee intended the light coming in through the central dome of his museum as an experience underlied by mysterious connotations, celebrating the wonders and magic of nature Durand, on the other hand, was not as much concerned with the presence and meaning of light as he was with its functional effect, that is its efficiency, which could be justified, in his own terms, as serving some kind of *salubrite*

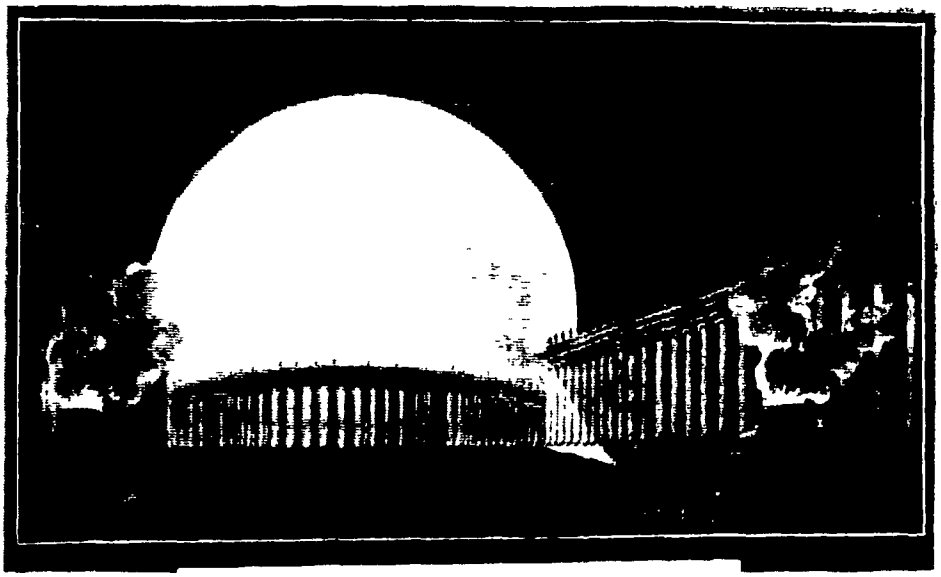

Fig.33· E.L. Boullée, project for the Museum, 1803· "Une lumière, qui en se répandant produise les effets les plus frappants, les plus varies et les plus multipliés" (from S Cordier, La Séduction du Merveilleux)

Starting then with Durand and his contemporaries, the primary quest was for new devices to control light in the exhibition rooms. It is in this context that we can understand the

frequent use of the skylight, oculus and translucent glass in museums from Hubert Robert's project for lighting the *Grande Galleria* of the Louvre, to John Soane's specific quality of light in his private residence and the Dulwich Gallery, to Schinkel's lateral windows - which resulted in the appearance of the light-weight partitions Nineteenth century use of light was meant to produce a dramatic effect that would trigger memories of the ancient world (classical revival), and the mystery and mythical dimension of history

Fig 34 Hubert Robert, "Project for lighting the Grande Galerie of the Louvre," 1796 (from Pevsner, A History of Building Types)

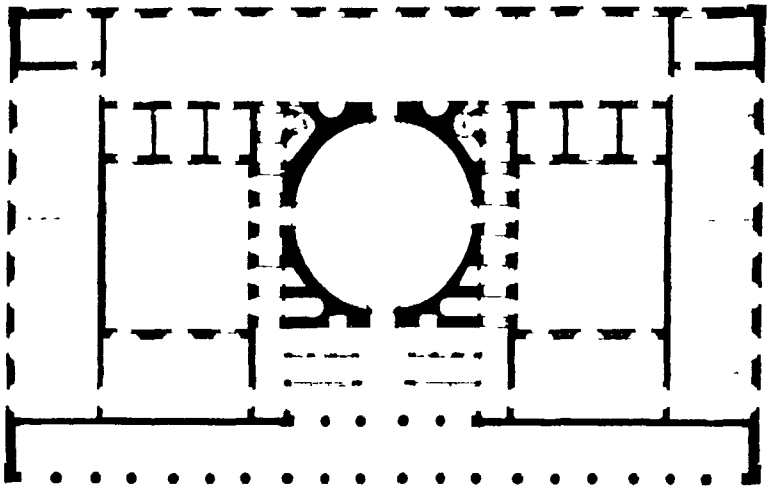

Fig 35 K F Schinkel, Altes Museum, Berlin 1823-30, note the partitions perpendicular to the walls

Nevertheless, there were some marginal disputes about the quality of light in the museum reflecting in its architecture the groping as to the role of the museum. There was for

instance, the argument between Wagner and von Klenze; the former wanted a diffuse light from the north, while the latter argued for a more transparent building which would not be meant for the training of artists, but intended instead for all people to enjoy the objects * These quarrels are to be placed in the context of the philosophical discussions of the time about the aim and role of the museum These debates are still echoed in the contemporary architectural discourse which is polarised around two themes that of the "neutrality" or discrete presence of light, and that of natural versus artificial light.

Few architects in the first half of the twentieth century engaged in a profound rethinking of the relationship between light and architecture in the design of their museums The first moderns - having just thrown off the yoke of historicism - were too busy investigating new schemes, contemporary architectural language, and writing new manifestos The second generation, with the exception of a few architects such as Louis Kahn and Carlo Scarpa, followed the steps of their predecessors, elaborating on the first very radical schemes They were concerned mainly with the functional relationship between light and the work of art. The stated principle was that since natural light damaged the paintings it had to be replaced by an artificial light which could be controlled And since polluted air damaged all works of art it was preferable to have a *sanitized* space, air, and light for the museum This eventually led to the "brutalist," hermetic architecture of the fifties and sixties.

Starting during the second half of the twentieth century the trend began to reverse, and a relationship between the museum and its environment was sought The immediate surroundings of the museums were no longer backdrops for national monuments, serving to separate the museum from its environment, but instead they began to be seen as connecting elements playing on the theme of external and internal space. The exhibition spaces were put in visual contact with the bustling city, and therefore received a certain amount of natural light that was to add a feeling of movement and life However, the theme of neutrality was still strongly emphasized in the design of space and light This attitude is epitomized by the Whitney Museum for American Art in New York

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* See Pevsner, A History of Building Types, pp 124, 126.

city designed by Marcel Breuer. In this museum, although a visual connection with the street was wished, it was very important to be able to control the light. Therefore the sources of natural light were reduced to the minimum required.

It is only very recently that architects have started to realize how important it is to make light's presence felt and very much part of the experience of the museum, regardless of whether the source is a natural or artificial one.

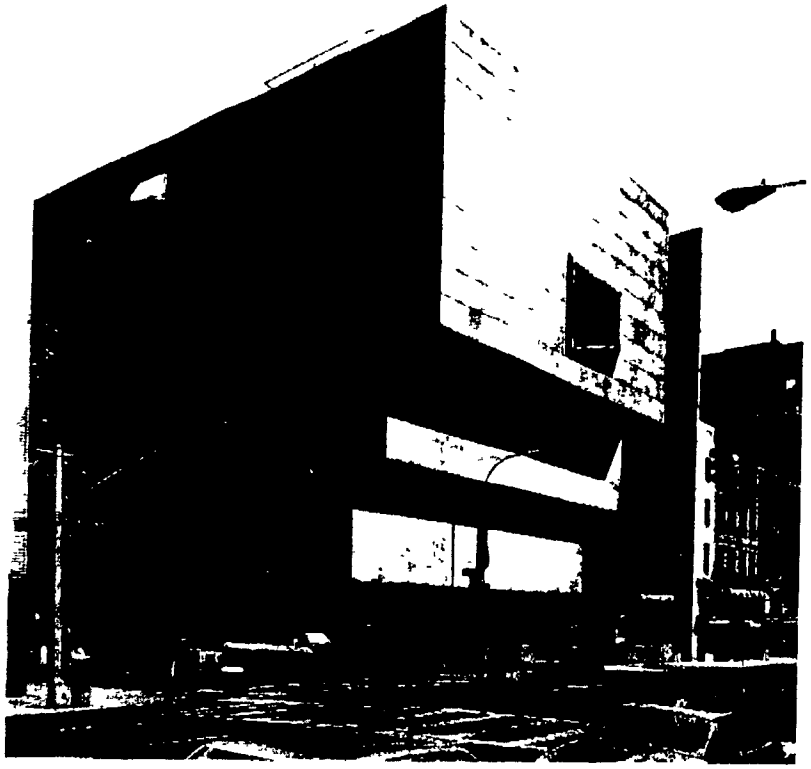

Fig 36 M Breuer, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 1963-66 (from H Searing, New American Art Museums)

Concluding Discussion

Trying to give light a mystical connotation under the pretext that it ought to retrieve a transcendental significance would be superfluous and meaningless And yet, while it would be unjustified to present art works as sacred objects and museums as the temples in which to worship them, the common approach that reduces light to its functional role is unimaginative and dull. In

such a case light would not express the museum's specific cultural significance, nor would it give the place its particular character.

Whether natural or artificial, light does have a specific code of significance that, although interpreted differently by different people, has a strong impact capable of touching our psyche Light, as a giver of presence, touches our poetic sensibility but, as Gaston Bachelard puts it in La Poétique de l'Espace, a phenomenological approach would have to overcome the sentimental *résonances* with which we apprehend art works Bachelard explains that,

> Les *résonnances* se dispersent sur les différents plans de notre vie dans le monde, le *retentissement* nous appelle à un approfondissement de notre propre existence Le retentissement a un caractère phenoménologique simple dans les domaines de l'imagination poétique Il s'agit en effet, par le retentissement d'une seule image poétique de déterminer un véritable réveil de la création poetique jusque dans l'âme du lecteur *

Thus the poetic dimension of light is revealed through the *résonances* and *retentissement* of the perceptual experience in the soul and spirit Only after that do we experience the sentimental repercussions, the reminders of the past Many museum professionals have advocated a "neutralization" of museums, be it through the layout of the exhibition spaces (squarish rooms *en suite*,) the materials and their textures or the ambience conferred by light However they should keep in mind that, regardless of the kind of light the museum would use (natural or artificial), in the final instance the outcome can be considered only in the way it affects us The fact that a neutral lighting concept is most likely to contribute to the creation of a "boring," undifferentiated environment, should be seriously examined

Museums have often been compared to theaters in the sense that they provide the public with a different world which contains its own internal rules and points of reference Like the play which does not have a unity of place and time, the museum presents a mass of artifacts - fragments - that confront each other, placing us in a heterotopic and heterochronic place And like the theatre which uses light as a space and time device, that highlights interesting areas of the scene and creates dramatic effects, the museum, as a place created first and foremost for the public, might have to use the same *play* of light to communicate the idea of confrontation that

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* See Bachelard, "Introduction," La Poetique de l'Espace, pp. 6-7

underlies it Thus we can better understand Scarpa's design when it is explained by Maria-Antonietta Crippa in the following terms,

> The chronological order of the exhibits records historical time external to the visitor, while the setting stages a performance of objects in dialogue, offering the possibility of an inner experience of temporality outside the dimensions of Bergson's duration of consciousness*

Fig 37 C Scarpa, Castelvecchio Museum, Verona 1958-64

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* Crippa, op cit , p 149

ENDNOTES

1 See comments on Panofsky by Cornelis van de Ven in Space in Architecture, p 26

2. Kahn's ideas seduced some museum directors such as Dr Richard F Brown, director of the Kimbell Art Museum, who wrote in 1966, "Natural light should play a vital part in illumination . the effects of changes in weather, position of the sun, seasons, must penetrate the building and participate in illuminating both art and observer. We are not after a measurable physical quantity, or a physiological reaction, we are after a psychological effect through which the museum visitor feels that both he and the art he came to see are still a part of the real, rotating, changeable world " (Quoted in Global Architect 38)

3 This is the case of Tom Sherman who in "Museums of Tomorrow," in Parachute 46, goes to the extreme of proposing a technology free zone for the historical museum where the work of the contemporary artist plays the role of a buffer showing the discrepancy between past and present life

We should bear in mind that Kahn has always showed continuous interest for the themes cherished by modern architecture· a special concern of his is the problem of spatial and structural expression of a building with which he dealt in a very poetic way

CHAPTER 6

MUSEUM'S SPACE

Introduction: on Space and Architecture, and its Significance

The act of experiencing and creating space stems mainly from an empathic understanding of the subject, for it has substance yet is ungraspable in itself. Space can be conceived in our mind as an idea but cannot be experienced - and therefore remains irrelevant - as long as it does not reveal itself to our consciousness through perception Thus the many *dimensions* of our world are uncovered through our ability to move and memorize, allowing us to grasp its depth.

The inescapable subjective dimension of our experience of space constitutes the richness of everyday's perceptual experience. That process of empathy allows man to adapt to the constraints and the realities of the existing as well as to his own psychological needs. By making those continuous *adjustments* man turns architecture into a living thing, establishing a dialogue with his environment.

Space was first a spiritual and intellectual concept quite remote from any theory of architecture. When it was applied to the world of man, as in the poem of Lao Tzu, it was always referred to as an ungraspable *matter* (defined by opposition to something familiar) rather than as the locus of our presence.[1] Cornelis van de Ven, author of Space in Architecture, explains that it is only towards the end of the nineteenth century that the principle of space as the "content" of architecture was fully adopted, leading in 1908 to Berlage's statement that "the aim of our creations is the art of space, the essence of architecture."[2] Nonetheless, Hildebrand had formulated, by the end of the eighteenth century, the concept of "kinetic vision" (vision in motion) and "perceptual form," which acknowledged implicitly the role of space in our perception of the world. Since then,

space - understood in the aristotelian tradition as an anthropocentric place - has constituted the most conscious experience in our conception and perception of architecture Whereas the concept of space was previously considered to be either purely metaphysical or used as a link between spiritual and physical existence (as was the case for the Gothic cathedral), it was only with the advent of positivist knowledge, which has become dominant in our culture, that space was turned into a material concept deprived of transcendental significance.[3]

As space became one of the main concerns of architectural theory, it has become impossible for the modern architect to deny or neglect this ideological shift to positivism in the making of architecture Yet, it is dangerous to accept without criticism the aspects of the change which seem to announce the demise of architecture, its replacement by other technical specializations, namely the tendency to consider space in mere functional terms

Throughout the ages architecture has always borne a symbolic dimension which gave it significance; and space, as an architectural medium, ought to express that In contrast to the materialist reduction of space as inherited from the *Ecole des Beaux Art*, the architect must give credence to the phenomenologists' claim that the experience of space is rooted in the perceptual consciousness of the world.[4] Hence the preoccupation with space would come from the possibility of an interaction between its psychological effect and its symbolic content, the perceived space carrying significance by pointing to an order higher than its own qualitative attributes

The primary universal significance of space ought to be its specificity in terms of lived experience: the idea of *place*, the here and now. This implies a perceptual participation of the beholder as well as a personal *contribution* involving culture and memory However, it is the architect's responsibility to claim a higher goal for his work, one that transcends immediate usefulness, aiming towards a meaningful presence Boullée's work illustrates this effort In his project for a "Museum"* - as in that for the cenotaph for Newton - it is evident that the single most important feature is the nature of the space that is created by the combined effect of size and light, and the response it triggers in the viewer. We had seen in a previous chapter that Helen Searing,

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* It should be noted that the french word "museum" is translated in the dictionary as "museum of natural history."

describing Boullée's spaces as megalomaniacal, erroneously compares it to Durand's museum project Yet knowing Boullée's intentions of creating a metaphor of the universe, illustrating the greatness of nature, it can hardly be equated to the pragmatic work of Durand Boullée made his intentions clear. his architecture was a mimic of the work of God, his space, a metaphor of the universe a priori [5]

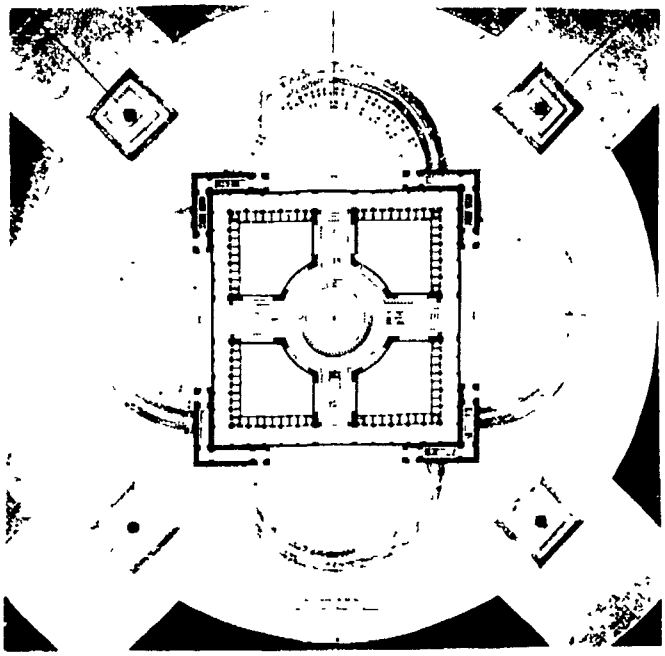

Fig.38-39 E L. Boullée, project for the Museum, 1803, top section (from H Rosenau, Boullée's Treatise on Architecture), right plan (from H Searing, New American Art Museum)

There is no doubt that Boullée's work was an expression of his epoch in the same way as contemporary art and architecture are representative of our own. It seems however that we have lost an essential factor in the making of architecture.[6] Most contemporary works deny architecture

its role of *story teller,* a story that would speak of myth, fiction, history, in brief a building that would speak of Man and his ontological concerns. The point is that space, as an architectural medium, can give the work a significance, and that it is up to the author to underline it.

Now we come to the heart of our inquiry. The museum, as a public place, required a spatial concept different from that of the previous, rather domestic atmosphere of the exhibition galleries of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century. Until recently, the museum was considered as a "space" for exhibition in the narrowest sense of the word. Such functional determinism turned the museum into a *machine à exposer*, dismissing the palatial model of the galleria Currently, the question most often raised is whether the museum's space should make a statement by consciously asserting itself, or be discreet, neutral, and fading, receding as a backdrop to the work exhibited In order to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this issue, one must understand the origins and the development of the concept of space as applied to museums

Museum's Space: an Analysis of Precedents

As previously mentioned, the museum as a building type originated in the Renaissance gallery and the "cabinets of curiosities" (*wunderkammers*), and, in both cases, it was a part of a larger entity, most often a residence. As the museum gained its independence, the functionalist concept of space was being introduced into architectural theory By the twentieth century, functionalism was on its way to becoming the only way of dealing with the spatial problem of museums.

Influenced by the teachings of Durand and Guadet, nineteenth century museum architects were concerned primarily with the issue of plan organization. Since Durand was mainly interested in the economy of building form and was obsessed by the idea of providing salubrity - in this specific situation a *decent* exhibition space - one can argue that his designs go no further than being a mere expression of the programme.[7] His publication of comparative plans shows that his main interest lay in organization rather than in a meaningful representation of space; he shows no concern for the transcendental values of architecture in general, or for the significance of the

museum. Nonetheless, his *vision* of architecture did announce an innovation and his influence has continued to this day. Ven comments on Durand's influence,

> Durand did not express any subjective perceptual aspirations The expression of space as such was not defined particularly as an aesthetical principle in his design theory . By the teachings of Guadet the clear separation of being and movement spaces took its shape; ...finding its final crystallization, several generations later, in the charter of athens, in 1933 *

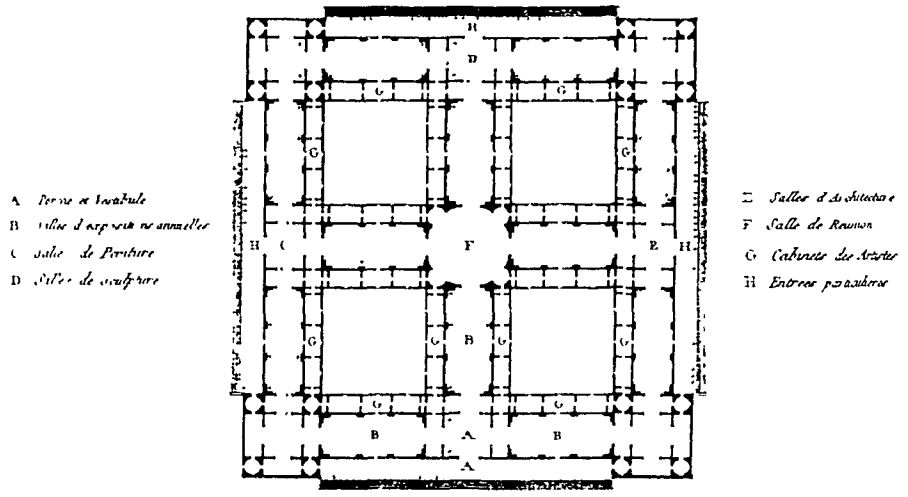

Fig 40· J N L. Durand, plan for a museum, 1783 (from H Searing, New American Art Museums)

Searing states that Durand's project, in its layout, was paradigmatic for architects such as von Klenze and Schinkel ** However, in the same way as Durand had reinterpreted Boullée's work, diverging from the intentions of his master by "scaling down" the original scheme, the same could be said of von Klenze and Schinkel Durand never showed real interest in what was going to be exhibited, limiting himself to providing identical spaces for painting, sculpture and architecture in addition to a temporary exhibition area and rooms for artists Von Klenze, on the other hand, provided us with a museum that reflected, through the nature of its spaces, nineteenth century prevailing trend in art history classification the rooms *en suite*. He provided a chronological arrangement, winning his case against Wagner whose preference was for the typological one.[8]

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* van de Ven, Space in Architecture, p 59.

** Searing, New American Art Museums, p. 17.

According to Searing, von Klenze borrowed a portion of Durand's scheme to accommodate a sculpture gallery. Searing's statement, however, stems from her disregard for the intentions of both architects. In the text accompanying the project, Durand wrote that since the museum was a "public treasure-house" housing works of different kinds, it had to provide several entrances thus allowing the visitor to view one section without going through the whole building.* It is clear that, in von Klenze's design, the museum is served by one entrance, giving access to a sculpture museum. Yet a sculpture gallery does not reflect the spirit of Durand's museum which was meant to house *different kinds of works* - an idea Durand had most probably inherited from the Baroque tradition of the *wunderkammer*. Regardless of how close the form of von Klenze's Glyptothek is to Durand's project, we can conclude that the intentions underlying both designs, as well as their cultural significance, are very different

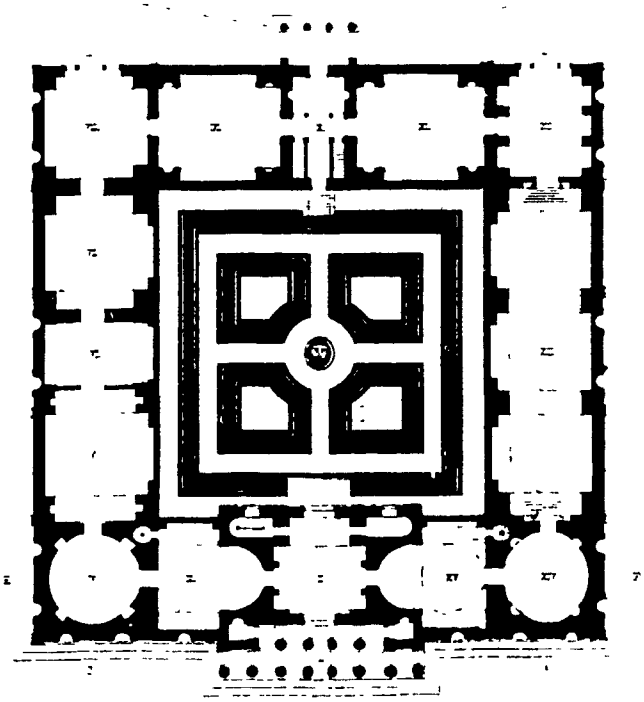

Fig.41: L. von Klenze, Munich Glyptothek 1816-30 (from Searing New American Art Museums)

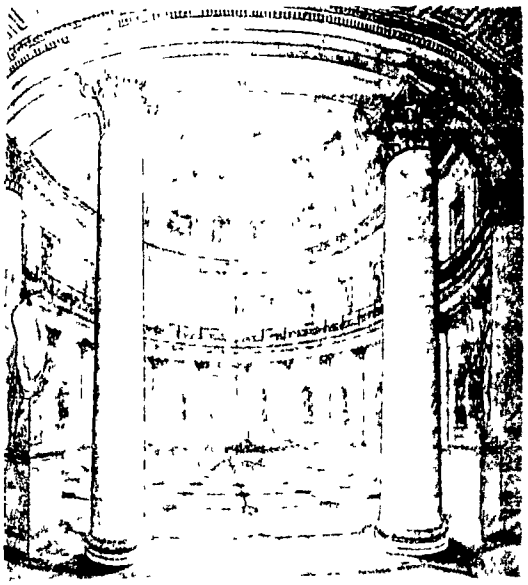

Fig.42: Schinkel's rotunda, Altes Museum, 1823-30 (from Crimp, "The Post Modern Museum")

In Boullée's *Museum*, the rotunda was conceived as the place to put the statues of great men, who were considered as a manifestation of the greatness of mother nature In Durand's

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* See Durand, J.N.L. Précis des Leçons d'Architecture

work, the rotunda is merely a compositional geometric centre that serves as a meeting hall, the precursor of the large lobby of the modern museum. Schinkel's rotunda, currently popular in the architectural circles, is the realization of yet another concept; Schinkel intended it to house works of art considered to be aesthetically superior This was cearly expressed in his motto, "first delight, then instruct."* Of course, such a position can barely be sustained given the *objective* museum that curators vainly struggle to achieve today.

One may conclude that the nineteenth-century museum reflects trends of organization in art history. As for the construct, it was a metaphorical representation of the "myth-history" of the nineteenth century, first mentioned in the work of Fischer von Erlach [9] As for Durand's influence on the practice of architecture - as well as on the perception of history - it has been considerable during the twentieth century.[10]

From embodying the scientific approach to art history and its methods of categorization, the twentieth-century architectural concept of the museum has slowly shifted; the major preoccupation of recent architecture involves the relationship between man and his environment. We have tended to regard the museum as a device· a machine [11]

Where the museum was viewed as a *machine à exposer* that exhibited an objectified history, it became possible to transfer the idea of *institutional neutrality* onto the space embodying it. For this reason then, architects ceased being interested in the way art history ought to be interpreted, and instead became fascinated with the way to reflect the viewing and experiencing of art in their architecture. For modern architects man became the centre, the very *raison d'ètre* of any work of architecture The famous dictate that "form follows function" expresses this ideological attitude

This led to ideas such as the "universal space" of Mies van der Rohe, which he best expressed in his "Museum for a Small City" (1942) which was eventually built in Berlin (1962-68) Mies' statement that "even though the functions of a building were in constant mutation, one could not afford to demolish them," in conjunction with the modern concept of "open space" resulted in

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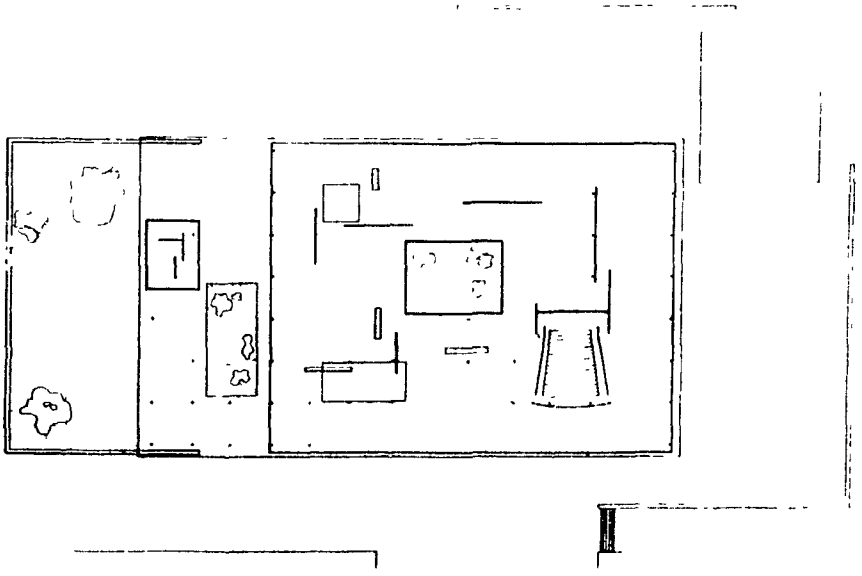
* Quoted by Douglas Crimp in "The Post Modern Museum," Parachute 46, p. 65.

the "free plan." Mies' vision, which could be considered as one of the first attempts to create a *neutral space* within the museum, nevertheless fails to satisfy the environmental needs of the visitor Despite efforts to give character to his *box* by way of an articulated structure, the viewer finds himself in a space delineated by the works of art themselves, an ambiguous environment where art becomes both stage-set and actor, container and content

Fig.43-44: Mies van der Rohe, "Museum for a Small City," 1942; right: Interior; below. plan (from H Searing New American Art Museums)



Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum (1943-59) demonstrates yet another functionalist aspect of architecture. Intrigued by space and motion, the architect conceived of his museum as an organic representation of the flow of visitors moving through the museum From the

perspective of perceptual experience, the space created is interesting; but yet has no transcendental significance, especially when compared to such works as Le Corbusier's "Mundaneum" of 1928 or Reclus' "Terrestrial Globe" for Paris Universal Exhibition of 1900.[12]

Fig 45 F L Wright, Guggenheim Museum, 1959 Interior (from H. Seaning, New American Art Museums)

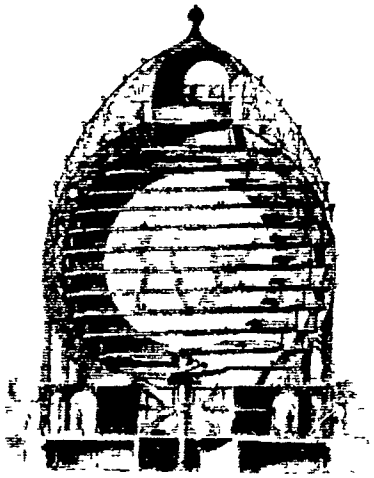


Fig 46 E Reclus, Terrestrial Globe, Paris 1900 (from A. Ponte, "Thinking Machines")

One of the characteristics of modern civilization is its sense of limitlessness, derived from scientific positivism This attitude is reflected in the architecture of the "Centre Pompidou" (Beaubourg) in Paris Here the architects expressed their philosophy by building a structure that, in theory, could grow endlessly Apart from the subliminal message of its "Hi-Tech" expression, it shows how convinced we are of the fact that we can predict future needs, and therefore go beyond statistical speculations, foreseeing how the endless structure will be built[13] Beaubourg's architectural language makes a very strong statement about the building as a machine, literally applying the principle of the *machine à exposer*. Spatially, however, the concept leads to a feeling of impermanence and of a lack of presence that is uncomfortable This fact was acknowledged when the "Musée National d'Art Moderne," located within the building, decided to redesign its premises and gave the mandate to Gae Aulenti, architect of the "Musée d'Orsay." The objective was to create an environment in which the visitor develops a feeling of permanence and stability.[14]

Concluding Discussion

While this last decade has seen the creation of works that challenge established concepts, most museum architects are still designing *containers* devoid of any poetic vision Even the typical modernist space, derived from the obsession with the machine, has lost its significance It appears now that the concerned parties are uninterested in patronizing an architecture which goes beyond the level of material, countable presence of space, witness the programs handed to the commissioned architects, and the public hearings and discussions that paralyze the design process [15] The situation is thus worsened by the fact that the circle of decision making has grown to disproportionate dimensions, and the consensus between the various groups is often reached at the expense of the building The current spatial concept of the museum is still based on the functionalist predominance of the programs submitted (often filled with unjustified constraints) and the illusion of being able to create a neutral space

Functionalism has encouraged the architect to look at the museum building as merely a *physical place* in which the institution operates Accordingly, space is bound to serve the different functions constituting the body of categorized activities called the institution From here it is only a small step for the building to be turned into a cluster of contained spaces linked in the most efficient way. And the spatial division has its parallel in the subdivision (and maybe isolation) of the various museum roles: that of storage (to safeguard), of academic research (and the *scientific* advancement of art history), and that of the promotion of art and leisure through exhibition

Commenting on the implications of functionalism on architecture, Alan Colquhoun suggests that the word function has two meanings: first, it means that the building satisfies a number of pragmatically fixed uses, second, it refers to a certain architectural language that represents a postulated relationship between human society and the mechanical and material foundations of its culture * Functionalism, according to this definition, is therefore reductionist in that it fails to acknowledge the existence of what is reduced, i e the *values* represented by the artistic production

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* See Colquhoun, Recueil d'Essais Critiques: Architecture Moderne et Changement Historique, p. 125,126.

the symbolic significance Functionalists' denial of the forces underlying the creation of any work of architecture is especially deplorable when it is applied with such determination to a building whose spaces express (as much as its other constituents) more than a single function of storage or exhibition The museum must offer very special technical features to accommodate treasures of the past, but when these constraints tend to overwhelm the other more *human* characteristics of a building - namely the spatial quality that establishes an identity between the place and the beholder - then the building looses its humane qualities Seeing space as a functional tool is very narrowing, even when this approach is seen as a way to solve the problem of subjectivity - that is inherent to any artistic creation - which is considered as contradicting the definition of architecture as an applied science

The problem of space's function is an illusory one, for the real function of a museum is simply to provide a place for the exhibition of works, assuming the link between the work and the public This primary goal is achieved in all museums whether they are "functional" or "non-functional " Following from the primary aim is the so-called "essential" requirement of "adequate environment," necessary for a "better understanding" of the work of art An indication of how important the so-called functional design of a museum is, can be obtained by comparing those buildings that were originally designed as museums - in a functionalist spirit - to structures that were built for other purposes and were later used to accommodate a museum It is my belief that the latter are often equally if not more successful than the former, regardless of the difficulty of administering them Consider all the palaces, houses, factories, warehouses, and train stations that now house an engaging and enriching space where an empathic dialogue has been established between the viewer, the object viewed and the environment The principal role of a museum can always be accommodated by making minor alterations which make the architecture more intricate, and therefore more likely to create an environment to which one can emotionally and perceptually react and identify Function, especially that of the museum, should never dictate the spatial character of the building, unless one wants the museum to be a dull, grim and boring environment, which some have called "neutral space " Hubert Damisch's comments on the idea of the museum's neutrality could be applied to its architecture as well

> ...the museum space is no more neutral than a book, and the notion of the 'imaginary museum' is a contradiction in terms. In its structure, as in its functioning, the museum belongs first of all to the symbolical sphere museums [ ] are constructed, devised, and it is only on this basis that they can function as a device of memory and expand their effects to include imagery and myth "*

There are both symbolic and pragmatic reasons behind the attempt to create neutral space Perhaps the museum's erroneous belief in its own neutrality, reflecting society's obsession with objectivity has inspired the quest for a "neutral space " However once it becomes obvious that the museum is not and will never be able to sustain such a utopian project since it is devised and managed by man, and is therefore *subjective,* then the effect of such an architecture will become obvious. a dull ambience, a lack of character and of true and meaningful significance

The pragmatic reason is that neutral space would interfere as little as possible with the exhibited objects In some cases, museums were conceived around a dialogue between specific, known objects and their physical environment - including the viewer The architecture, in all its components - space, light, form, matter, color, and acoustics - were orchestrated to exhibit these objects in particular However in most cases, architectural commissions for museums come without any specific collection, thus leading to the suggestion that architects should provide a characterless, neutral box that would *suit* all works [16]

With the exception of some enlightened curators such as Johannes Cladders, director of the museum in Monchengladbach, most of the art critics do not really trust the architect who, they feel, is always trying to go beyond the prerogatives of his own art, creating a space overwhelming the exhibited work [17] Yet such limitations have often resulted in a banal work which contradicts the exciting nature of the task Some of the concerns of the curators and artists are voiced by Markus Lupertz, a Neo-Expressionist German painter

> This trend, killing architecture with art or, vice versa, architecture's attempt to be more artistic than art, is the problem facing us today The classical museum is built like this four walls, light coming in from above, two doors, one for those coming in, the other for those going out This simple principle had to give way to art, the art of architecture**

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* Damisch, "The Museum Device notes on institutional changes," Lotus International 35, p. 9

** Lupertz, "Art and Architecture," in New Museum Buildings in the Federal Republic of Germany, p. 32

In response, Douglas Crimp criticizes Lupertz and the museum to which he seems to allude the rooms *en suite* of Sterling's New Municipal Gallery in Stuttgart [18] Crimp reminds us that Lupertz' statement is a rephrasing of Alois Hirt's accusations aimed at Schinkel's Altes Museum in Berlin some hundred and fifty years ago Hirt had argued that, "Schinkel had subordinated the art to the architecture rather than putting the architecture at the service of art " The response to this accusation was that, "the plan was a totality whose parts work so precisely together that nothing essential can be altered without throwing the ensemble into disarray an inviolable Gestalt "* The question for Schinkel, who, writes Crimp, adopted a Hegelian approach to the problem, was to transcend the antithesis of whether art or architecture were to be privileged by attaining a "higher unity" or synthesis

Today, Lupertz' restatement of the same dispute can be seen once again as a false problem Architectural space is the locus of our existence, it has a symbolic dimension which makes its presence meaningful rather than arbitrary Art, in the same way, has a symbolic significance that is somehow independent from its environment, a *window* onto another world A strong spatial presence does not compete with or antagonise an art work that has its own life As Robert Stern suggests, "art has its own day in court" and while "art should move you, architecture should make you stand still "**

Louis Kahn was reported to have once said, "I asked myself why I was fatigued within fifteen minutes by every museum I ever entered," and what would make somebody rush out of a place if not the lack of empathic dialogue?***

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* See Crimp, "The Postmodern Museum," Parachute 46, p 65

** "The Robert Stern's Conversation," Interiors Nov. 1984, p 148

*** In a private conversation, quoted by Douglas Davis, "The Idea of the Twenty First Century Museum," in Art Culture Essays on the PostModern, p 109

ENDNOTES

1. "We make vessel from a lump of clay,
it is the empty space within the vessel that makes it useful
We make doors and windows for rooms,
But it is these empty spaces that make the room livable
Thus while the tangible has advantages,
It is the intangible that makes it useful"

Lao Tzu (550 BC)

2. It is only in the theory of late Nineteenth-century that we find the unquestionable statement that space is the essence of the perceptual experience of architecture Cornelis van de Ven, in his book Space in Architecture," leads us through the historical transformations of the concept of space from Plato to the Modern movement

3 For the medieval believers space was a common thread connecting spiritual life to perceptual existence According to Ven the space achieved in the Gothic cathedral was the necessary condition without which the concept of space would have never been introduced into architectural theories. See van de Ven, C. Space in Architecture, p 28

4 Ven writes: "Contemporary Phenomenological and Existential philosophers question the relevance of the scientific knowledge of the universe, since the concretely experienced space to be lived in does not have the character of infinity but that of a finite enclosed interior, a hollow concavity that has to protect us and make us feel secure " (in Space in Architecture, p 19)

5. van de Ven writes that Boullée "succeeds (in his cenotaph for Newton) in an architectural way, in the reconciliation of the classic paradox of finite and infinite, of measurable and immeasurable, of relative and absolute space, visualized in one spatial and simple volume, the sphere." (in Space in Architecture, p 54)

Pérez-Gómez also writes that the megalomaniacal preoccupations of Boullee manifested in his theoretical projects were part of this profound desire to give physical shape to infinity See Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science, p 149

6. Here, we must bear in mind that the architect's role ought to be of "building the world" rather than simply of building in the narrowest physical sense

7. By "decent" the author has interpreted the theme of "*salubrite*," one of the major concerns of Durand.

8 Discussions of the classification system to be adopted is reflected in the fierce fights between Rumohr and Waagen Pevsner gives us an account of their litigious debate "Rumohr stated in opposition to the display principle of the Pio-Clementino, that an arrangement by subject-matter would be 'to seek art outside the field of art' So Rumohr in advocating display according to history instead of iconography yet means to advocate the aesthetic value of art and the importance of aesthetics for *bildung* in the broadest sense." (in Pevsner, A History of Building Types, p 128)

Humboldt, who chaired the commission, commented "The gallery here is distinguished

by systematically extending through all periods of painting. Hence it was beneficial but also necessary to fill the true and significant gaps."

9. See Pérez-Gómez, Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science, p. 315.

10. Positivist science had denied the viewer the possibility of an imaginative interpretation by accepting only "knowledge that is scientific, insight that is somhehow verifiable as are scientific hypotheses " Such an interpretation of the significance of the work would have reflected the viewers own concerns.

George Steiner criticizes scientific research methods as applied, in our culture, to the humanities. He writes, "...In their eager pretence to theoretical rigour and cumulative discovery, the humanities ...strive obsessively to rival the high good fortunes of the exact and the applied sciences. This striving, and the mendacious notion of research which it entails, are themselves founded in the positivism and 'scienticism' of the nineteenth century. They ape the aspirations to exact wissenschaft - 'knowledge that is scientific', 'insight that is somehow verifiable as are scientific hypotheses'. (...) Not one [of the scientific methods] is genuinely applicable to aesthetic study and pronouncement, except at the most formal, linguistic-textual level. (in Real Presences, p. 36)

11. Hubert Damisch analyses the idea of the museum as a device, a machine, stating that from its beginning during the industrial revolution the museum "appeared in space as a productive organism;" the museum-machine supplanting the collective worker as subject of production. (in "The Museum Device: Notes on Institutional Changes," Lotus International 35, p. 11.)

12. see Part One of this thesis; also see the article by Alessandra Ponte, "Thinking Machines: from the Outlook Tower to the City of the World," Lotus International 35, p. 47.

13. The poetic expression of tectonics as meant by modern movements such as De Stijl, Futurism and the Russian Avant-Garde, once the very heroic moments of the new discovery had faded away, was entangled in the tentacles of Functionalism.

14. For a critical discussion of the "Centre Beaubourg" see Alan Colquhoun, "Le Plateau Beaubourg," in Recueil d'Essais Critiques: Architecture moderne et changement historique; french translation by Michele Osborne.

See also Manar Hammad, "Semiotic Reading of a Museum," in Museum 154.

15. One can consider for instance all the discussions that went on indefinitely in the case of the extension of the Whitney Museum in New York; or, even closer, in the case of the re-location of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Montreal, or for the extension of the Montreal Museum of Fine Art.

16. Even when the collection is known, the objects outnumber the places available for exhibition making it impossible for the architect to rely on their specificities.

17. In a lecture given in the fall of 1987 at the Montreal Museum of Fine Art, the ex-director of the new museum of Monchengladbach stated that for him, as well as for the architect Hans Hollein, neutral space was only a theoretical concept. For him "a cubic volume with white walls is not neutral; nor is a loft which is reminiscent of an industrial space." As a result, Hollein's commission was to create a work of art.

18. Douglas Crimp's case against James Sterling's museum in Stuttgart is that the architect provides a "suite" of rooms in continuity with the old museum It shows a history of art that is biased since it skips the artistic movements that deny such a continuity. See Douglas Crimp, "The Postmodern Museum," Parachute 46 p. 62-65.

CONCLUSION

We have seen, in the first part of this essay, how the museum is, in a sense, the institutionalization of the practice of collecting which originated with man's realization of his mortality. In addition to creating a time machine, man had used this habit of collecting in order to grasp his environment and to belong to the world. The institution has extended this idea to become "a collection of collections," a *teatro mundi* or theatre of the world.

It can be said that the exhibited work is influenced by the institution. The transformations that have occured in the understanding of art with the advent of the museum are numerous. The art work has diverged from the initial function given by the artist by losing, on the one hand, its inherent qualities at the benefit of an "economy of the history of art;" and by being reduced, on the other hand to its aesthetic appreciation. It has become, through its being in the museum, a metaphor for the aesthetic of its epoch instead of being understood in terms of what it tells us about past civilizations through the elucidation of the intentions of the artist, and a proper understanding of "the world of the work."

Furthermore, the museum environment encourages a metamorphosis of the work, not literally, but in the minds of the visitors who, by wandering in "treasure houses," draw conscious or unconscious parallels between the works, perceiving them differently, forging in their minds new significances. These are born out of the simultaneous effect of the received experiential and intellectual information The institution will always be, like any other thing conceived by man, a non-objective device open to questionning and interpretation.

Society ought to recognize the potential of the physical presence of the institution in the city. Museums could give us an opportunity to reintegrate art in society in the terms of its traditional active role. They could give modern man the possibility of an active participation of his

body, mind and soul in the process of interpretation.* However, these underlying possibilities are often undermined by society's conception of the art museum, an understanding of it that is rooted in its nineteenth-century origins. To consider art for art's sake is diminishing for the work, the author and the viewer

Of course, basic solutions can be sought through public education; teaching people how to visit a museum and what to seek and expect from it Yet the physical presence of the museum, that is, its architecture, must overcome many preconceived ideas that have gone hand-in-hand with the nineteenth-century museum. Instead of seeking an unjustified monumentality whose significance is not necessarily shared by everybody - and even if it were, the concept of monumentality takes a totally different significance in our democracies - the museum, by means of a new poetic imagery, must reflect the actual cultural meaning of this institution: the *fragmented vision of the world* and the fascination with the idea of the "time-machine "

One of the most crucial elements in the museum's design is lighting It is an essential aspect in the creation of this poetic vision. However, when lighting is considered according to the dictates of functionalist principles, the result is a negative, characterless ambience that contradicts the exciting and stimulating nature of the museum The creation of a *homogeneous* and *neutral* environment undermines the vision of fragmentation which is what the museum really stands for, thus turning the museum into a "place of confinement "** Light's specific qualities are closely involved in our perception of time and space, and should be used to draw the *theatricality* of the museum.

Similarly, the functionalist approach to the conception of space is to be rejected. Directed by the material aspect of human life, a functional space that provides mere rooms loses all possibility of reaching into the essence of man· touching, to quote Bachelard, to the "*retentiss-ement*" of his soul ***

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* Gluesberg, Cool Museums and Hot Museums: Towards a Museological Criticism.

** See Crimp, "On the Museum's Ruins"

*** Bachelard, "Introduction," La Poétic de l'Espace.

In a modern world driven by the concern for comfort and efficiency, few architects have really grasped the poetics of the human condition, where nothing stands between man and his world. Ruskin, Le Corbusier, Aalto attempted to replace the theme of the mystery of life with their poetic vision of the relationship of man and his environment This happened at heroic times of modernity where few resisted the purely positivistic approach. Now, with the advent of post Modernism there is a concern for the return to a traditional imagery of architecture combined with a very materialistic philosophy, the condition of architecture stands to be reassessed *

Man lives in an anthropocentric world towards which he has been drifting since the Renaissance. The fact that his sole concern is himself and his earthly life, is reflected in his actions The work of Michael-Angelo and the writings of Gotfried Semper illustrate the impact of this evolution of society on the work of architecture. For Michael-Angelo, architectural forms were an expression of the androgynous nature of things that he understood as being of the body and flesh Semper saw architecture as a "cartesian spatial extension in three directions generating from the erect human body" Ven writes, "Judging from Semper's theoretical expositions all tectonic-stereotomic distinctions sprang from characteristics of matter and not from space ** This anthropocentrism of western civilization that has started during the Renaissance might induce us to think that the current materialist ideology is only one step further in a logical development However, we should be reminded that until recently the human body retained a quasi sacred significance as the ultimate creation of God, whereas we tend to think of the human body as an objectified mechanical system

Pérez-Gómez writes that "architecture is poetic, necessarily an abstract order, but in itself a metaphor emerging from a vision of the world and the being." *** Yet it seems now that architecture can no longer refer to the *Great Creator* or to cosmology through a "*géometrisation*" of the world, as was the case until the end of the eighteenth century The *mythos* and the *logos* were seen until recently as complementary, reconciling the perceptual world of man with the sacred,

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* See Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," New Left Review 151, pp. 53-92

** Ven, Space in Architecture, p 77

*** Pérez-Gómez, Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science, p 325

geometry was a representation of the invariable, the ideal existing only in the supralunar cosmos. The era of scientific determinism and pragmatism has driven the myth away from our lives in an attempt to resolve the contradictions inherent in man's existence. However, we are not living in a coherent world, and the source of complexities and contradictions is man's nature itself. One need not study psychology or psychoanalysis to have a measure of the complexity of human psychology, each one of us experiences it in his everyday actions and thoughts. And since we live in a world where "thought and reflection have spread their wings over fine art,"* as well as other actions of man, it is toward this *new humanism* embeded in the complexity and contradictions of man that I suggest we turn, in order to reflect metaphorically our cultural anthropocentrism in our architecture.

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* Hegel, Aesthetics, quoted by D. Crimp, "The Postmodern Museum," p. 65

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