Seduced by Form: Aesthetics of Spectacle in Contemporary Art Museum Architecture

by

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A Master Research Paper presented to OCAD University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)
in
CONTEMPORARY ART, DESIGN AND NEW MEDIA
ART HISTORIES

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, May 2013

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Abstract

Seduced by Form: Aesthetics of Spectacle in Contemporary Art Museum Architecture examines strategies behind the radical structural reshaping of contemporary art museum architecture in the last three decades. Focusing on exemplary art institutions such as the Pompidou Centre, the New Stuttgart National Gallery, the Bilbao Guggenheim, the Graz Art Museum and the New Hamilton Wing at the Denver Art Museum, a new paradigm shift in architectural aesthetics is being interrogated that positions contemporary art museum buildings (such as these) in an idealized state as objects of art; atmospherically enhanced and theatrically staged masterpieces.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those, whose contributions directly or indirectly affected the successful completion of this paper. Firstly, my principle advisor, Professor Marie-Josée Therrien, whose helpful expertise and guidance helped me to navigate the maze of modern and postmodern architectural discourses, and was invaluable in helping me to understand the ideological complexity of art museum architecture. Secondly, I would like to thank Professor Keith Bresnahan, my secondary reader for offering his expertise in the area of spectacle and atmospheric effects in contemporary architecture. Thirdly, I would like to thank Professor Michael Prokopow, Contemporary Art, Design and New Media Art Histories (CADN) program Director for his professionalism and moral support that helped to bring my stylistic, cognitive and argumentative skills to the required level. Finally, I would like to thank the Graduate Studies faculty at OCAD University for granting me the President's Scholarship, the award that set me on the path and mobilized my academic efforts.

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Dedication

To my husband Michael, for believing in me.

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Introduction

Fig. 1. Musée du Louvre, Paris. *Art as Spectacle*. Photo: Yvonne Nowicka-Wright, 2009.

Museums have been identified in recent decades as the most popular and frequently visited tourist destinations around the world.[1] In 1999, the American Association of Museums (AAM) reported that in the United States alone, an estimated eight hundred and sixty five million visitors[2] walked through museums' doors during the so-called 'golden years' of American museums (1997-98); undeniably evidencing a growing interest among the general public in museums as cultural and social institutions. The increasing popularity of these

[1] Pitman, Bonnie. "Muses, Museums, and Memories". *Daedalus* 128.3 (1999): 1. The MIT Press, accessed: July 18/12.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

historically designated guardians of cultural heritage may not be based in its entirety on their apparent and recently ‘re-discovered’ educational and social significance; rather, it is for the most part an outcome of various conceptual strategies that aim at securing the industry’s illustrious past with future stability. In steadily changing post-industrial cities art museums are moving away from the traditionally perceived image of a ‘stable container’ to that of an increasingly flexible, public space.

One of the most effective tools used for ensuring audiences’ ongoing interest and participation is the structural expansion and tactical transformation of museum buildings, as evidenced in recent years in various international art museum projects (particularly since the opening of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum in Spain). The new museum spaces have been repurposed, enhanced and aestheticized with an increasingly diversified vocabulary of sensorial stimuli that explore the spectacular and the atmospheric within architectural designs. Art historian Chris van Uffelen pointed out that the most elaborate "exhibit" into which [art] museums today invest for their future is their own museum buildings,[3] a genre which has become one of the most popular practice among architects.

Consistently, the world’s most innovative architectural concepts in

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[3] Van Uffelen, Chris. Ed. *Contemporary Museums: Architecture, History, Collections*. Secondary ed. Jennifer Kozak, Lisa Rogers, Sarah Schkolziger. Translation Talhouni. Salenstein: Braun Publishing. 2011: 8.

building design are represented by art institutions, some of which have undergone radical structural reshaping to communicate a shift in modern aesthetics from austere functionality (as privileged in the 1960s) to spectacular, multi-sensory "flash and bravura"[4] works of art (by the late 1990s), provoking fierce critical debates within the museological discourse. This change in building visualizations necessitates new research into the critical paradigm shift that signifies the ideology of *spectacle,* with the cult of image as its guiding principle.

The rejection of minimalist dogma in the years that followed the opening of the Centre Georges Pompidou a.k.a. Beaubourg in Paris in 1977 has resulted in a steady architectural and operational transformation of art museums around the world into successful, often multi-national corporations whose institutional practices have begun to overlap and blur ever expanding borders between culture, communication technology and savoir-faire business practices.

Focusing on the theory of *spectacle* as proposed by Guy Debord,[5] I will argue the notion of *spectacularized* aesthetics and their seductive powers to attract audiences as a dominant force behind several contemporary art museum projects - one that becomes an explicit goal in itself, and a critically important element in the overall art museum's architectural assembly. This theoretical argument will

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[4] Shiner, Larry. "On Aesthetics and Function in Architecture: The Case of the 'Spectacle' Art Museum." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 69.1 (2011): 31. Wiley-Blackwell. Nicolai Ouroussoff *A Razor-Sharp Profile Cuts Into a Mile-High Cityscape* New York Times, Oct. 2006, qtd. in Shiner.

[5] Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. Paris: Buchet-Chasel, 1967. Reprint, Paris: Champ Libre, 1971, trans. Black and Red, 1977. Reprint, Detroit: Black and Red, 2010.

be based on writings by art historians, theorists and architectural critics whose contributions to the scholarship on contemporary museum architecture was particularly informative (e. g., Hal Foster, Charles Jencks, Larry Shiner and Anthony Vidler, among many others).

Privileging museum buildings whose *spectacularized* structures exemplify the notion of an iconic landmark, the focus of this paper will be given to star designers whose key point of creative departure is modernist art (i. e., to an architectural practice that adopts an abstract language of Modernist paintings and sculptures). With the convictions of avant-garde visionaries seduced by the dynamics and possibilities of multi-sensory structural forms, leading architects have been successfully reconfiguring museum buildings since the 1980s. Rationalized on the persistent idea of *spectacle*, an unprecedented global proliferation of impressively unique art museum buildings has occurred; aided to various degrees by computerization of the designing process (e. g., CAD and CATIA three-dimensional interactive softwares), and most recent material technologies. It is here, in the area of architectural digitization, that the stunning and structurally most complex iconic buildings are realized. American art critic and historian Hal Foster, somewhat dismisses contemporary museum designs, relegating them all to a "digital period,"[6] and seeing them as a distraction-of-sorts in the overall intellectual process. Yet, I will argue that the emergence of new

[6] Foster, Hal. *The Art-Architecture Complex*. London: Verso, 2011: 85. Foster argues that Zaha Hadid might be considered along with Frank O. Gehry a prime architect of the digital period.

media, particularly in the area of three-dimensional drafting applications, has created an infinite number of possibilities for avant-garde architects who dare to test uncharted territories.

Exemplary art institutions like the 1977 Georges Pompidou Center (Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers), the 1984 New Stuttgart Art Gallery (James Stirling), the 1997 Bilbao Guggenheim Museum (Frank O. Gehry), the 2003 Graz Art Museum (Peter Cook and Colin Fournier) and the 2006 Frederic C. Hamilton New Wing at the Denver Art Museum (Daniel Libeskind) - all attest to art museums' dependence upon impressive structures. The prevalent discourse in the "experience economy"[7]relies on a strong and *spectacularized* corporate identity, which is paramount to the survival and growth of art museums in the twenty-first century. I will argue that art museum buildings have became more than just physical structures. They reflect the consumerist society accustomed to spectacle of which they are a part. Yet, they exist in an idealized architectural state as *objets d'art*, masterpieces, the creative signatures of architects of whose privileged activities they are testimonies.

It may be argued that such a sensorial play subverts the art museum's historically reflective and intellectual character by shifting audience's attentions from educational significance to the performative and entertaining. In the twenty-

[7] Pitman, Bonnie. "Muses, Museums, and Memories". *Daedalus* 128.3 (07/1999): 27. The MIT Press, accessed: July 18, 2012. The *Experience economy,* is a recent theory developed by B. Joseph Pine, James H. Gilmore, and B. Joseph Pine II, as well as current marketing and management theories, and has had a dramatic impact on the ways museums develop relationships with their visitors.

first century art museum architecture has positioned itself at an intersection of creative ingenuity and an ideological pragmatism[8] fueled by consumerism - reflecting back the prevailing mood of the world economy and culture within which art museums aim to establish a long duration.

[8] Sykes, Krista A. *Constructing a New Agenda: Architectural Theory 1993-2009*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010: 17. Pragmatism as a pro-practice or "intelligent practice" movement.

Part 1

THE STAGING OF MODERN MUSEUMS

Museums disarm us. [They] help us to forget, that we have forgotten who we are.[9]
(Preziozi 2011)

1.1 The Origins of Art Museums

The history of art museums as public spaces is a tumultuous one. Their modern function as cultural institutions with collecting and educational components is generally dated back to the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archeology in Oxford, founded in 1683 and later bequeathed to the Oxford University; a decision which created the first public museum in Europe.[10] It was also the first cultural institution characterized by scheduled accessibility, arriving from what American art historian Jeffrey Abt describes as the "efflorescence of social idealism" that began in mid-seventeenth century England;[11] although not significantly impacting the Continent for decades.

In 1793, the first major art collection in Europe was made available to the public, when the Bourbon Residence at the Palais du Louvre became nationalized

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[9] Preziozi, Donald. "Art History and Museology: Rendering the Visible Legible." *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Ed. Sharon Macdonald. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011: 56.

[10] Abt, Jeffrey. "The Origins of the Public Museum." *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Ed. Sharon Macdonald. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011: 124.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 123. Cochrane 1987 qtd. in Abt.

Fig. 2. Musée du Louvre, Paris. The Cour Napoleon.
One of the First State-Owned Art Museums (Since 1793).
Photo: Yvonne Nowicka-Wright 2009

during the French Revolution.[12] This historic wedging of the palace's gilded doors, at the time when the monarchy was being abolished, opened up the once-socially-exclusive Grand Galleries to the viewing pleasures of all French citizens (fig. 2). The new-found accessibility to the royal treasures laid ideological foundations for the future national patrimony of the arts[13] - creating a public museum in a modern sense with its urgency to educate and illuminate the minds of modern subjects. Within the context of Enlightenment culture, previously restricted cultural assets became tools for social change, economic opportunity

[12] *Ibid*., p. 115.

[13] *Ibid*., p. 128.

and political sovereignty; fueling the growth and spread of art institutions in France as promoters of social stability and growth. It was then, at this pivotal moment in museums' history that the Louvre was also recognized as an important social space, capable of accommodating large numbers of visitors of varying backgrounds.[14] Interestingly, the idea of a national art gallery originated forty years earlier with the King, Louis XV, whose wish to share his vast collection of paintings and drawings with a broader audience by displaying selected works of art "in a suite of rooms" at the Luxembourg Palace, established the so-called Luxembourg Gallery in 1750. It was opened for two days every week and assembled to inspire and educate French intellectuals and artists.[15]

The original beginnings of collecting and scholarly devotion to art is unclear; however, in time the pursuit of acquiring valuable manuscripts and objects of art became a popular activity among wealthy ancient Greeks and Romans, who contained their collections in specifically designated buildings. Romans called them *Musaeums*,[16] henceforth creating a legacy of buildings erected purposely to hold art.

Jeffrey Abs argues that the majority of Europe's most prestigious art institutions took their roots in the legacy of the Napoleonic wars. The widespread looting and confiscation of art by the French Great Army across Europe,

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[14] *Ibid.*, p. 127. "Public museum," the most commonly used expression today originated in 1700s

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 128.

[16] Abt, *op. cit.,* p. 115. "Rome became a museum of Greek art." Jerome Pollitt 1978: 157, qtd. in Abt.

ironically resulted in a future rise of national art galleries, born of plundered and repossessed works of art[17] long after Bonaparte's defeat. Such were the tumultuous beginnings of the Galleria dell' Academia in Venice, the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Museo del Prado in Madrid and many other nationalized aristocratic collections, modeled after the Louvre (or Musée Français as it was first called)[18] and made accessible as national treasures through a democratization processes. Not requiring at first an independent 'container' to hold the assemblage, the majority of European art collections remained housed in their original princely palaces,[19] inherently creating a lasting impression on museum audiences that art museum buildings were aesthetically refined and grand in scale - a perception which continued to define museum architecture well into the twentieth century, even when new, purpose-built art museums were created.

Historically significant is the fact that with the return of looted works from France, an unprecedented museum-building-boom took place in western Europe,[20] the consequences of which can only be fully comprehended from the historical

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[17] Abt, Jeffrey. "The Origins of the Public Museum." *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Ed. Sharon Macdonald. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011: 128.

[18] Giebelhausen, Michaela. "Museum Architecture: A brief History." *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Ed. Sharon Macdonald. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011: 225. (Part 3, Chapter 14: Collecting, Displaying).

[19] *Ibid*., p. 224.

[20] *Ibid*., p. 225.

perspective of the twentieth century. It transformed not only European urban centers, but also influenced future North American building projects that endorsed

Fig. 3. Metropolitan Museum of Fine Art, New York City. Built 1872-1902. *The legacy of Aristocratic Residences.* Photo: Jean-Chrisrophe Benoist 2012. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:NYC_-_Metropolitan_Museum_Carroll_and_Milton_Petrie_European_Sculpture_Court.jpg This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported.

the Enlightenment idea of the public's right to ownership and accessibility to cultural heritage[21] (fig. 3). During the 1870s and 1880s, in the so-called 'gilded age' of North America's prosperous economy, most major American art institutions were founded. The Museum of Fine Art in Boston (1870), the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Art in New York City (1870), the Philadelphia Museum of Fine Art (1876), the Art Institute of Chicago (1879) and the Detroit

[21] Abt, *op. cit.,* p. 128.

Institute of Arts (1885) opened their doors to the public for the first time. The cultural and economic importance of art institutions began to "define and reflect the [American] nation as a whole."[22] In 1835, on the bequest of French-born Englishman and scientist James Smithson, the Smithsonian Institution was founded in Washington "to increase and diffuse knowledge,"[23] communicating the apparent concern of the elite's at the time, about the inferiority of American culture as opposed to European.

Europe marked its own golden age of economic prosperity in the last two decades of the nineteenth-century, affectionately categorized today as *la belle epoque,*[24] which also witnessed museum constructions on a grand scale. This unique merging of art and commerce during the 1870s quickly established the 'Continent,' particularly Paris, as a cultural leader, a kind of *arbiter elegantiarum* for the Western world. The newly built national art galleries in Austria, Britain, France, Germany and Italy displayed cultural artifacts from Europe's past and geographically distant places, becoming repositories of objects that Walter Benjamin would later describe as having an auratic value. The nineteenth century art museums were shrines to unique and 'irreplaceable' objects,

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[22] Abt, Jeffrey. "The Origins of the Public Museum." *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Ed. Sharon Macdonald. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011: 130.

[23] *Ibid.*, p 130. Oeher 1983:15, qtd. in Abt.

[24] Laquer, Walter. "Fin-de-siècle: Once More with Feeling." *Journal of Contemporary History* 31.1 (January 1996): 5.

functioning more like collections of curiosities than chronologically organized art institutions in the modern sense.[25]

Architecturally, in spite of their aristocratic roots and the Enlightenment's obsession with Greek and Roman temples, art museum buildings continued to evolve. Challenged at first by the *fin-de-siècle's* Historicism (fig. 3. p. 11) and Eclecticism, and later, by the early-twentieth century Modern, the processes of conceptualizing unique museum buildings continued - crowned first by the iconic Guggenheim Museum in New York and later the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. A new type of monumental ethos was being forged, the *ethos of spectacle*, denoting a paradigm shift towards seductive architectural forms that has come to symbolize contemporary art museums.

In the last two decades, surprisingly diversified architectural visualizations have developed outside of the predictable paradigm, materializing themselves in innovative, art museum buildings. The forward-thinking designs for such cultural institutions as the Guggenheim Foundation or the Denver Art Museum for example, have launched an increasingly debated phenomenon of the museum building as a sculptural work of art. Echoing the legacy of the 'princely palace' (or an ancient *Musaeum*), symbolically situated within contemporary design, the flamboyantly spectacular buildings seem to induce in their audiences a

[25] Zeiger, Mimi. *New Museums: Contemporary Museum Architecture around the Word*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc., Universe, 2005: 10.

sense of "privilege rather than a civic right"[26] as art historian and critic Michaela Giebelhausen noted, when strolling through their vast spaces. Yet, the museums' seemingly unsurpassed triumphant reign was briefly contested in the early 1900s, when art institutions were criticized and re-evaluated as social and cultural spaces by the new avant-garde. Italian Marxist and poet, Filippo Tommasso Marinetti, the author of the first *Futurist Manifesto,* insisted in 1909 on art museums' quick and final demise, comparing them to graveyards. "To admire an old picture [he wrote] is to pour our sensibility into a funeral urn instead of casting it forward with violent spurts of creation and action."[27] Later, when advocating the extinction of cultural institutions, Futurists proclaimed "the past" as dead: "let the glorious canvases swim ashore," exclaimed Marinetti, "[t]ake the picks and hammers! Undermine the foundations of venerable towns!"[28]

Mimi Zeiger argues that the rejuvenating power of the "new," found its advocates in a succession of avant-garde movements that opposed traditional cultural institutions, inadvertently setting the stage for art museums' future architectural development.

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[26] Giebelhausen, Michaela ed. The Architecture of the Museum: Symbolic Structures, Urban context. Manchester University Press, 2003: 224

[27] Marinetti 1909, translated by James Joll, qtd. in MacLeod 17. (MacLeod, Suzanne. "Rethinking Museum Architecture - Towards a Site-Specific History of Production and Use." *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions*. Routledge:Taylor & Francis, 2005)

[28] Zeiger, Mimi. *New Museums: Contemporary Museum Architecture around the Word*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc., Universe, 2005. Marinetti 1909, qtd. in Zeiger 7.

1.2 Museum as a Container

Art museums in the twenty-first century have been sites for specifically defined aesthetic values, with institutional agendas oscillating between education and entertainment fields. As cultural venues, they seek to serve communities that support them, often promoting urban re-development and economic revitalization. Not all contemporary art museums are sovereign new structures; many morphed from existing, older museum buildings that were perceived as outmoded and 'stagnating' the corporate vision of growth, and were therefore remodeled. With a widely held belief that the external update of the museum's shell provides an essential cultural and economic service, many art museum buildings have been effectively reconfigured and repurposed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, into iconic emblems of forward-thinking structures that fulfill institutional demands for unique brand identity not inhibited by the museum's historic past.

The design configurations of art museums have been guided by three key elements: lighting, security and flawless procession through space - all controlled and determined by the structural requirements of a communal building.[29] Yet, the relationship between the *content* and the *container* that defined and ruled museum architecture for the past two centuries, has become precariously unbalanced, particularly in the early twenty-first century. Canadian-born historian and

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

economist, Anthony King, believed that "buildings are informed by society's ideas, its forms of social organization, the beliefs and values that dominate at the particular [historical] moment."[30] Therefore, as social and cultural products they are continually "reproduced through use."[31] It has also been put forward by another architectural historian, Jonathan Hill, that the designer and the audience appear to produce architectural experiences simultaneously, which vary in intensity. The architect's contribution is direct and personal, through the structural design, while the audience's influence on a museum's building is indirect, accidental and on some level subconscious.

It is important to note that when in the mid-nineteenth century, revered early architects, Karl Friedrich Schinkel[32] and Robert Smirke[33] perpetuated the idea of a newly completed museum building as being in a kind of "ideal" architectural state, a "pure object, not yet tainted by the impure communities of use,"[34] the rather utopian perception of a museum building as an *art object* was established. This charismatic denotation of architectural form has persisted into

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[30] MacLeod, Suzanne. "Rethinking Museum Architecture-Towards a Site-Specific History of Production and Use." *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis, 2005: 13. King 1980, qtd. in MacLeod.

[31] *Ibid.,* p. 20. Jonathan Hill 1998: 6, qtd. in MacLeod.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 12. The Altes Museum in Berlin,1830.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 12. The British Museum in London, 1843

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 12. Jonathan Hill "Architecture of the impure community,*" Occupying Architecture.* 1998: 62-75, qtd. in MacLeod.

the twentieth century in museological discourse, contributing significantly to the development of a new type of building - the museum building as a masterpiece.[35]

Fig. 4. The New National Gallery, Berlin. 1968.
Structural Purity. Photo: Manfred Brückels 2010.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Neue_Nationalgalerie_Berlin.jpg, accessed 03/22/13.
This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported.

The idea of a "pure object" was reintroduced into architectural discourse in 1968 by German architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, whose New National Gallery (Neue Nationalgalerie) in Berlin (fig. 4) became a symbol of the modernists approach to cultural institutions. Conceptualized as a kind of universal space, a

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

"temple" to contemporary art,[36] the gallery launched an uneasy relationship between the museum building as an open-concept-exhibition-space and the art collection housed inside it. The increasingly debatable tension between materiality and 'dematerialization' of museum walls, exemplified by Mies van der Rohe's 1968 design, implied some form of negotiation between the physicality of museum structures and the phenomenal, often spectacular atmospheric readings created by them.

The American art historian Donald Preziosi, has proposed that art museums are not utopian constructs at all, but "heterotopic sites within social space," art objects or instruments to provide audiences with the apparent methods and means to master their lives and compensate for the "confusions" of their daily existence.[37]

> What [a] museum subject 'sees' in this remarkable institutional space is a series of 'mirrors' - possible ways in which it can construct or compose its life as one or another kind of centered unity or consistency which draws together in a decorous and telling order its sundry devices and desires.[38] (Preziosi 2011)

Preziosi refers to museums as staged hybrids whose duality oscillates between "determinacy and causality;"[39] to him, these buildings are both there and not

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[36] Zeiger, Mimi. *New Museums: Contemporary Museum Architecture around the Word*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc., Universe, 2005: 7.

[37] Preziozi, Donald. "Art History and Museology: Rendering the Visible Legible." A Companion to Museum Studies. Ed. Sharon Macdonald. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011: 52.

[38] *Ibid.,* p. 53.

[39] *Ibid.,* p. 53.

there, present and absent at the same time, directly and indirectly meaningful. George Brown Goode, the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution in the 1880s and 1890s, might have originated Preziosi's notion of the museum space as 'constructing' its audiences, when he developed in 1889 a working theory for the museums of the future,[40] later known as the theory of the exhibitionary

Fig. 5. Musée d'Orsay. Paris. *Art History - Engaging Local Communities.* Photo: Yvonne Nowicka-Wright 2009.

complex. "The museum is more closely in touch with the masses than the University or the Learned Society" declared Goode in 1894, and later adding that "exhibitions [...] minister to the mental and moral welfare of the masses and turn them into good citizens"[41] (fig. 5). The basic premise of Goode's "new museum"

[40] Rydell, Robert W. "World Fairs and the Museums." A Companion to Museum Studies. Ed. Sharon Macdonald. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2011: 139. Goode 1889, qtd. in Rydell.

[41] *Ibid.,* p. 137. Goode 1901:4 66, qtd. in Rydell.

idea was however, to run it more as if it were a world fair than a traditionally perceived cultural institution; a type of commercialized cultural engagement that was popularized in 1851 by the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London, and proven most profitable.

Goode proclaimed in 1901 that "to see is to know," a sentiment that expressed the apparent "tendency of the human mind"[42] and proposed that art institutions should be arranged with the strictest attention to "world fair operating systems," run by well trained and *intelligent* curators, capable of providing growing museum audiences with entertainment disguised as education. In this significant historical moment, writes political science and philosophy professor Robert Rydell, Goode structurally reconfigured and dogmatically underpinned American cultural institutions.[43] One could theorize that he also laid out an ideological framework for the twentieth century seductive discourse of *spectacle,* exemplified today among other things, by art museum architecture.

[42] *Ibid.,* p. 139. Goode 1901a: 243, "The Museum of the Future," qtd. in Rydell.

[43] *Ibid.,* p. 136.

1.3 Iconic Monument versus Tactical Instrument

Two distinct operational strategies inform museum architecture today: first, the museum building as an *iconic monument*[44] and second, the museum building as a *tactical instrument,*[45] both defining the complexity of relationship between a museum's content and its container. When one refers to the museum building as an iconic monument, it usually supposes the display patterns and housing practices it represents; the unchangeable state of permanency it signifies allows "very limited scope for expansion."[46] Museum building as an 'iconic monument' was most often represented by Greek-inspired buildings or princely residences (fig 3, p.11) that embody timeless validation alongside the symbolic marker of societal power. When Marinetti identified art museums as "cemeteries of wasted efforts"[47] he attacked the "past" with all its social failures (in keeping with the Futurist ideology), which identified the institutional role of museums as obstacle to progress. Marinetti reasoned that when a museum building functioned as an *iconic monument,* it ideologically defended and physically

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[44] Giebelhausen, Michaela. "Museum Architecture: A brief History." *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Ed. Sharon Macdonald. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011: 225.

[45] *Ibid.,* p. 232.

[46] *Ibid.,* p. 232.

[47] Vidler, Anthony. "The space of History: modern museums from Patrick Geddes to Le Corbusier." *The Architecture of the Museum. Symbolic Structures, Urban Context.* Ed. Michaela Giebelhausen. Manchester: Manchester University Press,2003: 161. (Modern Museums).

protected the cultural "past;" acting therefore as if a *monument à mémoire,*[48] no longer capable of representing progressive, social ideals.

The demands placed on designers to create buildings of unique forms encouraged the proliferation of more spectacularized structures whose iconic shapes have become architectural landmarks. The early examples of innovative museum buildings correspond to the beginning of postmodern which rejected the Miesian motto "less is more" and Fuller's dictum "do more with less" in favour of Robert Venturi's liberating counter-endorsement "enhance what's there" and "less is a bore,"[49] consequently initiating a new type of museum building.

The museum building as a *tactical instrument* (fig. 6 p. 23) possesses two significant features that are primarily characteristic of art museum buildings in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. They pertain to the way in which art collections are handled and displayed by museums, allowing various degrees of a) 'impermanence' of collecting components, b) 'flexibility' of spacial arrangements and c) 'adaptability' in institutional prioritizing.[50] In 1939, French architect Le Corbusier proposed a notion of the museum as "time's arrow," or an *instrument*, designed to display the "cumulative progress of humanity's achievements."[51] Art historian and theorist Anthony Vidler, suggests that the

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[48] *Ibid.,* p. 177. Monument to memories.

[49] Wigley, Mark. "Towards a History of Quantity." *Architecture Between Spectacle and Use.* Ed. Anthony Vidler. Williamstown: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2008: 161. Robert Venturi 1966, qtd. in Wigley.

[50] Giebelhausen, *op. cit.,* p. 232. International exhibitions created the demand for temporary display spaces.

[51] *Ibid.,* p. 232. (Le Corbusier's design for a Museum of Unlimited Growth, 1939).

notion of a building being an 'instrument' derives from the museums' use of modern technology. Agreeably, it seems as though contemporary museum buildings have became *technological instruments,*[52] especially in the areas of information and display, that coincide with various other services they support.

Giebelhausen presents the history of museum architecture as a shift from monument to instrument,[53] however the boundaries between these two distinct

Fig. 6. The Georges Pompidou Centre, Paris. 1977
Museum building as tactical instrument. Photo: Yair Haklai 2007.
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki File:View_from_the_Centre_Georges-Pompidou.jpg, accessed 03/22/13.
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[52] Vidler, *op. cit.,* p. 177

[53] Giebelhausen, Michaela. "Museum Architecture: A brief History." *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Ed. Sharon Macdonald. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011: 241.

modalities are blurred and the apparent return to the *monument*[54] has been noted in recent years in the architectural style of Daniel Libeskind. These two operational strategies, *monument* and *instrument,* have opened up an uneasy dialogue between functional needs and aesthetic values in museum architecture, highlighting buildings' relevance to the future success of cultural institutions as commercial fairs.

[54] *Ibid.,* p. 241.

1.4 Modern versus Postmodern

The term Postmodernism is generally attributed to Joseph Hudnut,[55] whose article "The Post-modern House" published in 1945, first used this classifying expression. Later, in his writings about architecture, American architectural theorist Charles Jencks, used the term 'postmodernity' as a kind of "temporizing label,"[56] and referred to it only when observing architectural practice that departed from Modernist canon. For Jencks, Postmodern became indicative of the architectural practice that rejected Minimalist simplicity, rather than suggestive of a brand new paradigm.

Today, contemporary art museum architecture builds on the creative legacy of late-modern and post-modern designs that deliberately resisted somber Minimalism, and challenged the prevailing architectural paradigm by introducing new, more structurally expressive forms. Where would innovative buildings be today, such as the Bilbao Guggenheim, the Graz Art Gallery or the Hamilton Wing at the Denver Art Museum, if it were not for their defiant forerunners: the late modern, High-Tech Pompidou Center or the postmodern "hybrid," New National Gallery in Stuttgart, to lay the groundwork for more sensorial concepts? Jencks credits British architect James Stirling with particularly

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[55] Jencks, Charles. "Postmodern and Late Modern: The Essential Definitions". *Chicago Review* 35.4 (Jan. 1987): 33.

[56] *Ibid*., p. 33. Jencks claims to be the first to use the term *postmodern*, circa 1975.

important contributions to the kind of *spectacularized* architectural language[57] for which late-capitalist aesthetics are now known; exemplified by his 1984 New National Gallery (Neue Staatsgalerie) in Stuttgart (fig. 11, p. 38). Its stylistic appropriation of various architectural elements added new *theatricality* to the otherwise functional forms, allegedly bowing a final "auf wiedersehen" to the ubiquitous International Style.

Postmodernity also indicates a time of "de-industrialization" in western countries and their continuous attempts at recovery. This seemingly up-hill battle was recognized eloquently by contemporary museum institutions in the context of addressing rather than challenging business environments. In architecture, economic necessity brought dramatic changes in museum building visualizations that moved away from austere functionality, privileged by Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, to more imaginative, multi-sensory forms said to have started with Sterling's postmodernist evocation of Schinkel's Altes Museum, and followed by Gehry's and Libeskind's array of atmospheric effects that were made possible through advanced technologies - a new trend in architectural visualizations initiated by Piano and Rogers high-tech Pompidou Centre in 1977 (fig. 8 p. 31). Arguably, this "poetic"[58] postmodern, as Jencks coined it, inspired powerfully

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[57] Jencks, Charles. "Postmodern and Late Modern: The Essential Definitions". *Chicago Review* 35.4 (Jan. 1987): 34 (Postmodern - new technologies, old patterns, a touch of irony and parody for added complexity).

[58] *Ibid.,* p. 55.

seductive designs that have firmly situated museum buildings as leaders in a competitive world of architecture.

Foster regards contemporary art museum architecture as physical structures that exist in a "particular historical period" and communicate with their viewers as "symbols in space rather than forms in space,"[59] breaking further away from the geometric purity[60] of the International Style. The expressionless and often predictably formulated building designs enjoyed a long duration, influencing the Western canon since the 1930s. Yet, museum architecture of that period had performed a rather subservient role in the over all cultural experience.

There was one museum building, erected in New York City that defiantly stood out from the collection of dominant Modernist Style - the Guggenheim Museum on Manhattan's Fifth Avenue (fig. 7, p. 28). It opened in October 1959, six months after the architect's death and was quickly regarded as the crowning jewel of Frank Lloyd Wright's achievements. Instructed by the first museum curator Hilla von Rebay, to create "a temple of spirit, a monument!" Wright translated it into a ziggurat-like, cylindrical structure that signified novelty and progress. His innovative use of spiral ramps inside the museum to connect five levels of barrel-shaped galleries with outwardly-tilted walls proved visionary - heralding a new and more innovative museum architecture. It took sixteen years

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[59] Foster, Hal. *The Art-Architecture Complex*. London: Verso, 2011: 6. Robert Venturi 1972 "*Learning from Las Vegas*", qtd in Foster.

[60] Merkel, Jayne. "The Museum as Artifact". *The Wilson Quarterly* 26.1 (01/2002): 72. MoMA opened in 1929. (18 July 2012)

for the Guggenheim Museum to be completed and required seven hundred forty nine drawings to visualize its final shape.[61]

Fig. 7. The Guggenheim Museum, New York City. 1959.
Museum Exterior. Photo: Finlay McWalter 2004.
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Guggenheim_museum_exterior_retouched.jpg, accessed 03/22/13.
This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported.

Today, the official Website of the Guggenheim Museum in New York quotes the words of Paul Goldberger who claims that "Wright's building made it socially and culturally acceptable for an architect to design a highly expressive, intensely personal museum. In this sense almost every museum of our time is a child of the

[61] Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Website © 2013, accessed March 24, 2013, http://www.guggenheim.org/guggenheim-foundation/architecture/new-york.

Guggenheim."[62] To concur with this statement, it needs to be added that the museum's exterior was conceptualized as a work of art, a dynamic sculpture and a spectacle capable of attracting, drawing audiences for the first time, before they even entered the building to see its collection.

Surprisingly, it took another twenty years for museum architecture to reveal itself in equally exciting and visually *seductive* sculptural forms. Not until the Centre Georges Pompidou was erected, and the Bilbao Guggenheim two decades later, was there an end to the prevailing Modernist paradigm for museum architecture to function as merely an unobtrusive physical support to an art exhibit, having limited capacity for attracting attention unto itself.

[62] *Ibid.,* Website © 2013 The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

Part 2

ARCHITECTURAL PRECEDENTS

Life is chaotic, dangerous and surprising. Buildings should reflect that.

(F. Gehry)[63]

2.1 The Georges Pompidou Centre (a.k.a Beaubourg)

When the Georges Pompidou National Art and Cultural Centre (Le Centre national d'art et de culture Georges-Pompidou) opened in the Marais district of Paris, in 1977, it was quickly and broadly proclaimed to revolutionize the meaning and function of the contemporary art museum.[64] Its creation resulting from the winning design submitted to the jury by two upcoming architects, Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers, for the 1971 international architectural competition in Paris[65] consisted of 100,000 square meters[66] of industrial-looking surface - an innovative architectural visualization anchored on economic efficiency and supported by technological advancements. British art historian Reyner Banham speculated that *"*the French have always held modern architecture at arm's length:

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[63] Shubow, Justin. "Gehry in His Own Words". *The Gehry Towers Over Eisenhower: Report on Frank Gehry's Eisenhower Memorial*. (2012): 96. Washington: The National Civic Art Society. (Chaos and Danger) 1: 439. Accessed: 18 July 2012. http://www.eisenhowermemorial.net/docs/NCAS_Report_on_the_Eisenhower_Memorial.pdf.

[64] Giebelhausen, Michaela. "Museum Architecture: A brief History." *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Ed. Sharon Macdonald. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011: 233. Davis 1990: 38, qtd. in Giebelhausen.

[65] Agnoletto, Matteo. *Renzo Piano*, trans. Clarice Zdanski. Ed. Giovanni Leoni. Milan: Motta, 2009: 34.

[66] *Ibid.,* p. 34. (there are 50 meters in depth and 170 in length support-free floors)

Fig. 8. The Georges Pompidou Centre, Paris. 1971-1977.
Techno-Architecture. Photo: Leland 2004.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki File:Pompidou_center.jpg accessed 01/22/13. Permission is granted to copy, distribute and/or modify this document under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License, the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

they have done as much modern building as anybody else; but they regard it, not as part of *la culture française* but as an unavoidable evil, to be kept as far as possible to the peripheries of their historic cities."[67] Yet today, it can be credited to the city's foresight that the Centre Pompidou was commissioned (fig. 8), marking it the apex of the late Modern Movement.[68]

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[67] Reyner Banham and John Partridge. "1977 May: The Pompidou Centre, the 'Pompodolium'" *The Architectural Review*, published online March 2, 2012, accessed March 23, 2013, http://www.architectural-review.com/archive/1977-may-the-pompidou-centre-the-pompodolium/8627187.article.

[68] *Ibid.,*

From the beginning, the Piano and Richard's megastructure with its engineering innovations resonated throughout Europe. The Musée National d'Art Moderne (MNAM)[69] is located there, one of the most important museums of modern and contemporary art in the world, along with the Musical Institute (IRCAM), the Public Information Library,[70] the Centre de Création Industrielle (CCI)[71] and several cinemas[72] - all conspicuously contained within eight floors that offer multifunctional spaces, divided by adjustable walls. Today, the Centre Pompidou is recognized for its uniquely exposed structural elements that wrap around the building to create its iconic exterior shell. The outside ramps and "caterpillar" escalators (fig. 8, p. 31) offer visitors panoramic views of the city. The museum's megastructure brings to mind Goode's "new museum" idea based on the *world fair.* The Centre Pompidou is juxtaposed against the city's historic landscape (fig. 6, p. 23) like a futuristic machine worthy of Marinetti, where the conveniences of cutting-edge technologies are re-purposed and 'exposed' as new architectural tools. Conceptualized to promote a democratization of culture, the complex plays a pivotal role in the Marais district of Paris' urban regeneration efforts. Its uneasy fit among the city's narrow streets was aided by creating a large public square in front of it (a project which required demolition of some heritage

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[69] "Centre Pompidou, Paris." *Centre Pompidou Foundation*. 2011, accessed February 6, 2013. http://www.centrepompidoufoundation.org/Centre_Pompidou_Foundation/CENTRE.html.

[70] "Centre Pompidou." *France Monthly*. October 28th, 2012 accessed May 6, 2013. http://www.francemonthly.com/centre-pompidou-modern-art-in-the-heart-of-paris/

[71] *Ibid.,*

[72] *Ibid.,*

buildings) - a difficult decision that over the years has proved invaluable, turning the square into one of the most frequented public spaces in Paris and an open-air stage for street artists.[73]

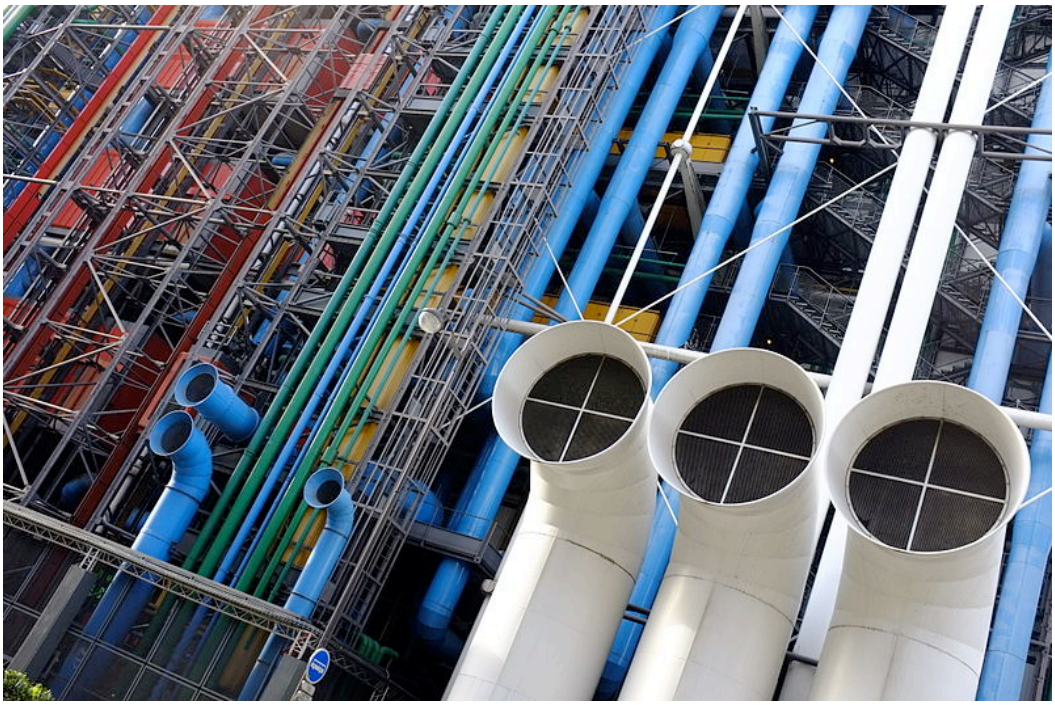

Fig. 9. The Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.
The East Façade (Detail). Photo: Hydromel 2012.
http:/commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DSF1634.JPG., accessed 01/22/13.

Decades later, "the Beaubourg" appears to exist in a realm of a unique technological and architectural "hybrid" that has morphed into a Pop symbol in its own right. As a type of museum building it has distanced itself clearly from the traditional notion of a building as a *monument*,[74] and represents instead the notion

[73] Agnoletto, Matteo. *Renzo Piano*, trans. Clarice Zdanski. Ed. Giovanni Leoni. Milan: Motta, 2009: 35.

[74] Giebelhausen, Michaela. "Museum Architecture: A Brief History." *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Ed. Sharon Macdonald. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011: 232.

of a museum as an *instrument*. As such, the building simultaneously enables "the production, collection, dissemination and consumption of culture"[75] and promotes the idea of a cultural institution as participatory and fun, attracting remarkable numbers of visitors each day. According to the Centre Pompidou Foundation's website, in 2011 alone, over three-and-a-half million visitors walked through their doors.[76] What makes Beaubourg unique and sets it apart from other cultural institutions is its fostered interaction with the visiting audience, facilitated through uniquely designed spacial configurations that connect the inside and the outside in a playful way. The Centre's brightly painted exterior pipes (green for water, blue for air conditioning, yellow for electricity and red for elevators)[77] are juxtaposed against the reflective, gray metal surfaces of the walkways and ramps. Large, wall-size windows add an airy feel to the architectural maze - giving it structural lightness. The network of terraces and outside mounted escalators offer spectacular views of the city; stretching exponentially with each floor.

Architects Piano and Rogers, whose creative departure for this particular structure appears to have been inspired by modernist art, expanded the language of museum architecture into the realm of sculpture. A close parallel can be drawn between the Beaubourg's architectural elements, such as industrial piping in bright colours (fig. 9, p. 33), and the 1919 Cubist work by French painter Fernand

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[75] *Ibid.,* p. 232.

[76] "Centre Pompidou, Paris." *Centre Pompidou Foundation*. *op. cit.,*

[77] "Centre Pompidou." *France Monthly*. *op. cit.,*

Léger (fig. 10), which marks an enormous conceptual ‘leap’ in architectural visualizations away from objective neutrality towards subjective individuality; opening thereby architecture to unorthodox, avant-garde interpretations. The idea of sensorial seduction through museum structure as part of the overall cultural experience is strongly affirmed.

Fig. 10. Fernand Léger *The Railway Crossing*, 1919. Oil on canvas. The Art Institute of Chicago. http://en.wikipedia.org/wikiFile:Leger_railway_crossing.jpg., accessed 01/22/13. This image is in the public domain in the United States. In most cases, this means that it was first published prior to January 1, 1923. Other jurisdictions may have other rules, and this image might not be in the public domain outside the United States. This work of art is copyrighted in its source country until after August 17, 2025.

Piano and Rogers re-configured art museum architecture and managed to defy the supremacy of the ‘white cube’ as an elitist gallery environment. They introduced a new, more embodied museum experience that helped to empower visiting

audiences[78] to be more interactive within gallery spaces, instead of remaining traditionally passive. By contesting the white cube's paradigm, Beaubourg's techno-spaces rendered it outmoded, subverting the reign of pristine, sanctuary-like gallery environment. A new, closer to 'life' and 'democratic' ambiance was introduced for viewing modern art.

Conversely, "driven by historical necessity as well as technological advance,"[79] the Centre Pompidou's arrival has forever changed the museological and architectural worlds of the late twentieth century. With its *techno*-form, the building became an example where "a symbolic ideological separation has occurred between a museum building and its art content."[80] It has become evident that contemporary art museums could be places where visitors value their structural forms as much as the collections offered within. Considering alluring architecture as an additional asset, the Centre Pompidou has established a double cultural experience worth exploring. Encouraged by the successful transformation of the Marais district, consequential to the arrival of Beaubourg, the global development of art museums as spectacular, physically imposing and boastfully sensorial buildings began to be recognized as an important factor in urban economic and social rebirth.

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[78] Schuld, Dawna. "Lost in Space: Consciousness and Experiment in the Work of Irwin and Turrel." *Beyond Mimesis and Conversion.* Ed. R. Frigg and M.C. Hunters. Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science 262. Springer Science +Business Media B.V. 2010: 234.

[79] Foster, Hal. *The Art-Architecture Complex*. London: Verso, 2011: 63.

[80] MacLeod, *op, cit.,* p. 13.

2.2 The Stuttgart New National Gallery

Arguably, by the early 1980s, a new ideological momentum was gaining its potency with the return to historical references, while at the same time some art historians appeared unfazed. Among a new generation of architects, the search for subjective individualism was beginning to influence museum designs, privileging "deconstructive" thinking outside the dominant Minimalist dogma. Charles Jencks argues that such tendencies permeating the creative considerations in the 1980s and 1990s turned museum architecture into more forward thinking, sometimes "poetic," but never predictable institutional statements that oscillated between historical references and contemporary interpretations of the dominant International Style.[81]

Under the leadership of James Stirling, one of the most iconic, early Postmodern art museum buildings was created in Stuttgart (fig. 11, p. 38). The new addition to the historic National Gallery was the winning design of a national architectural competition in the early 1980s. The museum's website claims today that Stirling's controversial architectural proposal produced a wave of "furor worldwide"[82] once the museum opened in 1984. Yet, looking at the New National Gallery today, it is evident that the architect successfully responded to the

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[81] Jencks, Charles. "Postmodern and Late Modern: The Essential Definitions". *Chicago Review* 35.4 (January 1987): 45

[82] Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. "*Museum Introduction*," accessed February 13, 2013, http://www.staatsgalerie.de/rundgang_e/aus_rundg.php?id=1

challenging urban and cultural environments. Topographically, Stirling positioned his new art gallery on two different levels that architecturally follow the terrain.

Fig. 11. The New National Gallery, Stuttgart. 1984.
Front Entrance. Photo: Mussklprozz 2004.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Staatsgalerie1.jpg. accessed 01/22/13
This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported.

A set of terraces, podiums and ramps were built to integrate the museum building with its sloping landscape, while at the same time, a large courtyard platform was designed for the main building to perch it on, a pedestal-like elevation to double-function as an underground garage enclosure.[83] The overall design of the New

[83] Cannon-Brookes, Peter. "The post modern gallery comes of age: James Stirling and the Neue Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart." *The International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship* 3.2 (June 1984): 161, Butterworth & Co., Ltd.

National Gallery (Der Neue Staatsgalerie) in Stuttgart can be described as monumental, incorporating irregular geometrical forms that are juxtaposed against each other and oddly protruding. Large and partitioned windows bend in waves at various angles, while Stirling's daring use of pink and blue on steel railings and bright green on window frames alludes to an industrial site rather than an art museum (fig. 12). The architect once stated, as quoted by art historian

Fig. 12. The New National Gallery, Stuttgart. 1984.
The Ramps. Photo: Veuveclicquot 2010.
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki File:Neue_Staatsgalerie_Stuttgart.jpg, accessed 01/22/13.

Peter Cannon-Brookes, that "monumentalism [has] nothing to do with size or style, but entirely to do with *presence*."[84] Stirling's playful use of colour and

[84] Stirling qtd. in Cannon-Brookes 179. Cannon-Brookes, Peter. "The post modern gallery comes of age: James Stirling and the Neue Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart." *The International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship* 3.2 (June 1984): 159-181. Butterworth & Co., Ltd.

architectural detail added welcomed contemporaneity to a rather weighty sandstone cladding covering the museum exterior. The truly "theatrical drama," begins within the high, cylindrical walls of the central Rotunda, where the barrel-shaped courtyard walls are punctuated by arched and slightly in recess windows - agreeably, Sterling's postmodernist evocation of Schinkel's Altes Museum. Stylistic references to Neoclassicism (fig. 13) announce with a fanfare an eclectic

Fig. 13. The New National Gallery, Stuttgart.
Meeting at the Rotunda. Photo: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart 1984
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Christian_von_Holst_und_James_Stirling,_Foto_Staatsgalerie_Stuttgart.jpg, accessed May 8/2013. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported

architectural narrative of the Postmodern, which uses a "hybridized" design language to achieve the foremost of visual complexity. One could argue that although Stirling's architectural signature references past historical styles, it

also decisively embodies contemporaneity with its purposely atmospheric and 'loosely' negotiated historic styles - indicative of the designer's subjectivity, not necessarily accuracy. The New National Gallery in Stuttgart represents the first wave of art museum buildings purposely *spectacularized* for the sensorial pleasure of looking at them. Peter Cannon-Brookes theorized that such a design, as the first Postmodern art museum building, may have been "fully in tune with [its] visitors' aesthetic frames of reference in the early 1980s and thus the excitement which it engendered was positive in effect,"[85] however, Cannon-Brookes concluded that it was very unlikely for postmodernism to become a "definitive architectural style for the next century."[86] He supposed incorrectly, because upon completion of the Neue Staatsgalerie, Stirling created a reference point of fundamental importance for future generations of architects to follow worldwide.

> We live in a complex world, where we cannot deny either the past and [its] conventional beauty, nor the present and current technical and social reality.[87] (Stirling 1984)

The Pompidou Centre was designed as a contemporary and democratic public space to work for the public good; utilitarian, functional and fun.[88] Stirling

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[85] Cannon-Brookes, Peter. "The post modern gallery comes of age: James Stirling and the Neue Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart." *The International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship* 3.2 (June 1984): 169

[86] *Ibid*., p. 169

[87] Jencks, Charles. "Postmodern and Late Modern: The Essential Definitions". *Chicago Review* 35.4 (Jan. 1987). James Stirling 1984, qtd in Jencks 37.

[88] Foster, Hall. *The Art-Architecture Complex*. London: Verso, 2011: 33.

attempted an Enlightenment notion of art museum as an intellectual gathering place, an art institution full of visual anecdote and mystery. Stirling's vision solidified what was later described as a "fusion"[89] of architecture and art into one, seductively choreographed assembly of forms.

[89] *Ibid.*, p. 95.

Part 3

THE AESTHETICS OF SPECTACLE

In a spectacle, one part of the world 'presents itself' to the world and is superior to it.[90] (Debord, 1967)

3.1 The WOW! Factor

One could argue that in the last three decades, art museum buildings have successfully imprinted their audiences' perception of museum architecture as signifiers of world trends in building visualizations. As art institutions in the twenty-first century, they have became increasingly self-reflective, well-manufactured, highly spectacularized, sometimes chaotic and certainly uniquely branded - well capable of applying *seduction* in the service of a culture industry. The generalized perception of museum architecture as being most fashionable reached such an extent that it turned the majority of visitors into apparently indiscriminate participants in the picturesque "scenographic kitsch" of the Postmodern. Hal Foster sides with Aaron Betsky, an art critic and curator, who argues that the majority of today's designers can be simply described as "display engineers, contaminating and complicating intrinsic and supposedly pure architectural forms and techniques"[91] by allowing themselves to serve the

[90] Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. Paris: Buchet-Chasel, 1967. Reprint, Paris: Champ Libre, 1971. Trans. Black and Red, 1977. Reprint, Detroit: Black and Red, 2010 (chapter 1, paragraph 28)

[91] Foster, Hall. *The Art-Architecture Complex*. London: Verso, 2011, Aaron Betsky qtd. in Foster 95.

globalized culture of consumerism. Too much focus has been given to the "symbol and surface," Foster bemoans, rather than "structure and space"[92] which conspicuously interfere with the audiences' perception of art, turning contemporary art museums into "gigantic spectacle-spaces."[93] Architect Rem Koolhaas, who is categorized by Foster as "one of the greatest stars in the architectural firmament of the last 30 years"[94] described contemporary museum buildings as sanctimonious *junkspaces* and overwhelmingly banal at that. Clearly art museums have become "sites at which some of the most contested and thorny cultural and epistemological questions of the late 20th century are fought out."[95]

The growing need for more inclusive and publicly accessible spaces has opened museum architecture to interpretations in which new projects challenge traditional understanding of museum buildings and suggest unconventional possibilities for display and cultural experience - at the core of which, *spectacle* has found its prominence as a dominant, ideological force. Spectacularized aesthetics, or as philosophy professor and design engineer Baz Kershaw calls it "the WOW! factor"[96] can be understood as most effective when "it touches highly

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[92] *Ibid.,* p. 96.

[93] Shiner, Larry. "On Aesthetics and Function in Architecture: The Case of the 'Spectacle' Art Museum". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 69.1 (2011): 31-41. Wiley-Blackwell. Foster 2002: 37, qtd. in Shiner 31.

[94] Foster, *op, cit.,* p. 10. (Pop Civics).

[95] Macdonald, Sharon. "Expanding Museum Studies: An Introduction" *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Ed. Sharon Macdonald. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011: 4.

[96] Kershaw, Baz. "Curiosity or Contempt: On Spectacle, the Human, and Activism". *Theatre Journal* 55.4 (12/2003): 592. The John Hopkins University Press, accessed 18 July 2012.

sensitive areas in the changing nature of the human psyche."[97] The postmodernist concept of the museum as a *mass medium* has let to the construction of vessels that allowed the "spectacular, mise-en-scène and operatic exuberance."[98]

For Debord and Baudrillard, writes Kershaw, the notion of *spectacle* is constitutive of the *performative society,* where persons or things can be exhibited as objects "either for curiosity or contempt."[99] Debord and Baudrillard both suggest the binary aspects of spectacle which can attract and repel the perceiver simultaneously. Allegedly, the power invested in spectacles tends to diminish the human factor, objectifying it. "If spectacle is everywhere," argued Baudrillard, "then we, as the performative society, are constituted through it with a new kind of significance; the spectacle becomes a flexible force for change transforming humans into something more or less than themselves."[100]

When evaluating contemporary museum architecture, four types of spectacles need to be considered which indirectly influence the designing processes. These are: a) the *spectacles of domination* which are most commonly associated with the rituals of the 'powerful' (e. g., the church, the state, etc.); b) the *spectacles of resistance* also called 'carnivals of the weak' and are associated with the revolutionary avant-garde; c) the *spectacles of contradiction*

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[97] *Ibid.*, p. 592.

[98] Rees Leahy, Helen. "Producing a Public for Art. Gallery space in the 21st century." *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions*. London: Routledge, 2005: 109.

[99] Kershaw, *op., cit.* p. 593

[100] *Ibid.*, p. 593. Baudrillard qtd. in Kershaw.

or ‘festivals of division’ that negotiate power through festivities and saturnalias; and finally d) the *spectacles of deconstruction* which displace the nature of the "real" with whimsical masquerades, shamanic tricks and *trompe l'oeil* effects that veil the ambiguities of such entertainments[101] and their inherently manipulative potential. The *spectacles of deconstruction* situate themselves therefore, in the realm of ‘seduction’ where its more creative and ephemeral embodiment, the atmosphere, found its natural niche in contemporary museum architecture.

The historical definition of *spectacle* is generally attributed to Aristotle and his famous work “Poetics,” where Aristotle is credited as saying: "the spectacle [*opsis*]...of all the parts [of drama] is the least artistic, and connected least with the art of poetry."[102] Not surprisingly then, a majority of modern scholars reference the idea of *spectacle* as an intellectually inferior form of cultural expression, and promote separation of *spectacle* from the other arts.

There has been a logical association between *spectacle* (performed or created) and its size. Almost habitually, most people think of a spectacle as an event persuasive in scale. In art museum architecture, the idea of *spectacle* has been transparently connoted in structural ‘greatness,’ the audience size and flow, and “the exponential increase in bandwith.”[103] New Zealand born architect and author Mark Wigley described it perfectly when stating that “today’s [museum]

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[101] *Ibid.*, p. 595

[102] *Ibid*., p. 592. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S. H. Butcher (New York): Hill and Wang, 1961: 64 qtd in Kershaw.

[103] Wigley, Mark. “Towards a History of Quantity.” *Architecture Between Spectacle and Use.* Ed. Anthony Vidler. Williamstown: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2008: 155

projects turn into projectiles [...] judged by the number of images [they inspire] that land around the world."[104]

Conversely, while playing a part in the *spectacle of deconstruction*, art museum architecture disperses its allure through contemporary culture like "performative [mass] mediatization," using modern technology to effectively 'seduce' the human subject. Wigley points out that the resulting spectacle "services the machinery of the global marketplace by distracting us from the realities of contemporary socioeconomic life."[105] At the same time, Kershaw warns that highly performative audiences are being constituted, "predominantly through spectacles of deconstruction"[106] giving human agency to the capitalist market at the core of contemporary culture. "In this age of uncertainty," Kershaw writes, "if subjects are constituted through spectacle then humans will need to develop an especially reflexive take on how they appear between themselves, in order to get anywhere near to a sense of the commonly human in the contemporary world."[107]

Likewise, contemporary media increasingly entices cultural institutions such as art museums, to extend their impact into an ever larger field of influence, magnifying museums' celebrity power to act accordingly. Museum architecture

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[104] *Ibid.*, p. 155

[105] *Ibid.*, p. 155

[106] Kershaw, Baz. "Curiosity or Contempt: On Spectacle, the Human, and Activism". *Theatre Journal* 55.4 (12/2003): 606. The John Hopkins University Press, accessed 18 July 2012.

[107] *Ibid.*, p. 595.

therefore becomes increasingly dependent on enhanced physical properties, with each generation of architects cherishing and cultivating that image - progressively giving way to the seduction of representational systems.

Not all contemporary art museums have been *spectacularized*, but there is great proliferation of "dizzying variations of architecture offered,"[108] since the opening of the New National Gallery in Stuttgart. Okwoi Enwezor, an Igbo Nigerian-born American curator and writer, questions the cultural implications of American art museums' operational "independence," their local context in relation to the globalized art market and the effect such independence has on a culture that is currently "free-floating and experienced, superficially."[109]

Contemporary art historian Terry Smith declared in 2009 that the western world is "living in the regime of the representation,"[110] consumerist culture which evolved from the aesthetics of an image-based economy and whose key drivers are: reflexivity, experimentality and conspicuous consumption (all prone to excess). I will argue that these key economic drivers have been pressuring contemporary museum architecture to relentlessly undertake "remodernizing and contemporizing projects"[111] that connote the dominance of superficial

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[108] Enwezor, Okwoi. "The Contemporary," *Questionnaire on 'the Contemporary'* . Ed. Hal Foster. *October Magazine Ltd.* Volume 130, (Fall 2009): 33. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

[109] *Ibid*., p. 33

[110] Smith, Terry. "The Contemporary," *Questionnaire on 'the Contemporary'* . Ed. Hal Foster. *October Magazine Ltd.* Volume 130, (Fall 2009): 49. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

[111] *Ibid.*, p. 50

spectacularism in contemporary culture. French Marxist theorist, Guy Debord wrote:

> Spectacle presents itself simultaneously as all of society, as part of society, and as an instrument of unification,"[112] [and] "in all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or entertainment, the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life.[113]
> (Debord 1967)

It appears today as though the goal of art museum architecture is to stand out and command attention as a socially unifying cultural spectacle of *auratic* value. Leading international designers pursue building visualizations to reflect their own understanding of what the new cultural industry is, its shifting role and function. Presumably, as Associate Director at the Whitney Museum, Johanna Burton, argues, behaving more like any other forms of entertainment and retail industries in the hopes of retaining relevance and currency in the prevailing world economy.[114]

Persuaded by the dynamics and possibilities of multi-sensory forms, leading star architects such as Frank O. Gehry, have been reconfiguring museum architecture since the early 1980s, with the apparent success of establishing a new power relationship between the art collection and the formal qualities of the museum building itself. Contemporary architectural practice has became

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[112] Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. Paris: Buchet-Chasel, 1967. Reprint, Paris: Champ Libre, 1971, trans. Black and Red, 1977. Reprint, Detroit: Black and Red, 2010: paragraph 3

[113] *Ibid.*, paragraph 6

[114] Burton, Joanna. "The Contemporary," *Questionnaire on 'the Contemporary'*. Ed. Hal Foster. *October Magazine* Volume 130, (2009): 22. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

emblematic of an unleashed individualism marked by new creative freedom enjoyed by designers that support the unique, exuberant and increasingly *entertaining* within the cultural experience.

In a 2005 interview with Charles Jencks, Canadian-born architect Frank Gehry stated that "the whimsical buildings, when successful, [put] architecture on a par with the best [of] contemporary art, to explore freely, the possibilities of open-ended creativity."[115] Such a change in understanding of what architecture is, or can be, compels critical evaluation of museums' increasingly mediated roles as cultural institutions. Their structurally experimental forms subvert museums' traditionally reflective and intellectual characteristics and shift their role and function in society towards amusement and entertainment.

Foster theorizes that the apparent morphing of art and architecture into so-called *art-architecture* has become an integral part of "image making and space shaping" in today's culture. The computerization of the designing process, "the automatic option"[116] as Foster calls it, supported by most advanced material technologies have enabled the unprecedented proliferation of innovative museum buildings, realized on a persistant idea of inter-weaving of high culture and Pop spectacle. It is here, in the area of digital rendering, used broadly today in

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[115] Jencks, Charles. *The Iconic Building. The Power of Enigma*. London: Frances Lincoln Ltd. 2005: 8 (interview with Frank Gehry).

[116] Foster, Hall. *The Art-Architecture Complex*. London: Verso, 2011: 85. Critical invention of modernism, montage is now absorbed by computer programs.

architectural designs, that stunning subjectivity, the earnestly sought-after agency of the structurally complex iconic museum building, is achieved. Shiner warns us that this architectural practice interferes with the audiences attention to art,[117] and Foster relegates contemporary museum designs to a "digital period,"[118] somewhat dismissing their artistic contributions. Yet, the development of CAD and CATIA softwares has presented architects with boundless possibilities for structural explorations; helping museum architecture to emerge triumphantly as expressive, iconic, one-of-a-kind buildings - embodied most significantly by the Guggenheim Museum of Contemporary Art in Bilbao.

[117] Shiner, Larry. "On Aesthetics and Function in Architecture: The Case of the 'Spectacle' Art Museum". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 69.1 (2011): 31-41. Wiley-Blackwell.
Foster. *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes* 2002: 37, qtd. in in Shiner 31.

[118] Foster, Hal. *The Art-Architecture Complex*. London: Verso, 2011: 85. Foster argues that Zaha Hadid might be considered along with Frank O. Gehry a prime architect of the digital period.

3.2 The Bilbao Guggenheim Museum

Fig. 14. The Guggenheim Museum of Contemporary Art. Bilbao. 1997.
View from the River Bank. Photo: Ardfern 2010.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Guggenheim_Museum,_Bilbao,_July_2010_(06).JPG, accessed 01/22/13.

A small trickle of tourists visiting Bilbao became a flood, when the Guggenheim Museum of Contemporary Art (Bilbao Guggenheim Museoa) opened in Spain in 1997 (fig. 14). The museum's triumphant inauguration signaled the inevitable end to what German historian Wolfgang Schievelbusch called "the supremacy of shoe-box architecture, impressive primarily for its astounding lack of fantasy and aesthetic worth."[119] Built at the cost of $100 million US, it was hailed as an absolute masterpiece, the first "global museum"

[115] Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. "Epilogue: On Falling," *The Culture of Defeat.* London: Picador, 2004: 289

and an "instant landmark"[120] of the twentieth century that brought a "new sense of relevance to architecture."[121]

From the project's onset, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao was expected to perform for the Spanish Basques the same way Utzon's Sydney Opera House had done for the Australians twenty years earlier: that it would bring urban renewal through tourism to a stagnant city. Gehry's building however, accomplished much more than that. Spanish art historian Anna Maria Guasch and Basque anthropologist Joseba Zulaika, have concluded that Frank Gehry's masterpiece introduced a new form of globalization of art systems, the "globalized museification."[122] The authors argue that since Bilbao, contemporary art museums have stopped being neutral containers with their art collections stored and preserved within them. Instead, art museums have been transformed into "places," where cultural institutions forge a new kind of relationship with their public, and to the extent that today's "exhibits are transformed into the most powerful legitimizing discursive practice within art system."[123]

Charles Jencks, for his part, concluded that in Bilbao, the relationship between "power [cultural institutions] and meaning [cultural product] was

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[120] Anna Maria Guasch and Joseba Zulaika. "Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim: The Museum as a Cultural Tool." *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*. Ed. Anna Maria Guasch and Joseba Zulaika. Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2005: 7.

[121] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[122] Anna Maria Guasch and Joseba Zulaika. "Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim: The Museum as a Cultural Tool." *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*. Ed. Anna Maria Guasch and Joseba Zulaika. Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2005: 8.

[123] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

altered,"[124] driven by forces that seek instant fame and financial gratification, competing for attention in the global marketplace. By creating the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Gehry introduced a new kind of architectural aesthetics, provoking a paradigm shift in building visualizations towards the symbolic and today highly privileged *iconic* building.

It all began in Spain, with a small architectural competition in which Frank Gehry participated with two other international star-designers, Arata Isozaki and Wolf D. Prix of Coop Himmelblau. Thomas Kerns, Director of the Salomon R. Guggenheim Foundation at the time, and the Basque authorities in Bilbao desired a "hit;" but what they got was a change in the course of postmodern architecture. Gehry candidly commented years later that he won the competition because his project was the least conservative in design and the most economically conservative to execute.[125] Yet, the truth was, Gehry was chosen by Kerns and the Basques primarily because of the novelty of his design, and his innovative foresight. "The door was opening," reflected the architect in his 2005 interview with Jencks "maybe I pushed it over the edge a bit."[126]

Initially, Frank Gehry was resistant to the idea of computerization, because CATIA (Computer Aided Three-dimensional Interactive Application) the multi-platform computer program developed for the French aerospace industry, seemed

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[124] Jencks, Charles. *The Iconic Building. The Power of Enigma*. London: Frances Lincoln Ltd. 2005: 7.

[125] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[126] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

somewhat limiting for his designing purposes. “I just didn’t like the images of the computer,”[127] Gehry admitted, frustrated by limitations imposed on him by the program. Local contractors and manufacturers assumed that Gehry’s sculptural idea simply could not be built.

> I don’t know where you cross the line between architecture and sculpture, [ ] for me, it’s the same. Buildings and sculptures are three-dimensional.[128] (Gehry 2004)

However, the Spanish Guggenheim would not have stayed within the constraints of time and budget if the French aerospace industry had not facilitated help with the execution process.[129]

The brand new construction material used in Bilbao was *titanium* (fig. 15). It offered the kind of atmospheric effect Gehry was looking for as a replacement material for lead copper, outlawed as toxic. Titanium turned out to be the kind of product that “could play with the light the way lead copper did.”[130] In the 1990s, titanium metal had rarely been used in civic building projects; Gehry took the chance and the rest was a history-defining moment. It allowed the exterior walls of the building to be covered with one-third-of-a-millimeter thin metal sheets that

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[127] Van Bruggen, Coosje. Frank O. Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. 1997: 136. An Interview with Frank Gehry.

[124] Welchman, John C. “Architecture :: Sculpture.” L*earning from the Bilbao Guggenheim.* Ed. Anna Maria Guasch and Joseba Zulaika. Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2005. Gehry 2004, qtd. in Welchman 238.

[129] Van Bruggen, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

[130] *Ibid.,* p. 141. Interview with Frank Gehry, 1997.

Fig. 15. The Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao.
The Spectacle of Titanium Sheets. Photo: Georges Jansoone 2006.
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bilbao.Guggenheim15.jpg, accessed 01/22/13.
This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported.

"do not lie flat, but flutter,"[131] and still achieve an effect of desirable permanency and spectacle. The sculptural effects that were achieved in the Guggenheim project developed from what American art historian John Welchman describes as "a different interpretation of what exactly sculpture is."[132] The museum's innovative form is the product of flamboyant, art-like assembly in space "with materials delivering to a building an aesthetic condition beyond its function;"[133]

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[131] *Ibid.*, p. 141.

[132] Welchman, John C. "Architecture :: Sculpture." L*earning from the Bilbao Guggenheim.* Ed. Anna Maria Guasch and Joseba Zulaika. Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2005: 242.

[133] *Ibid.*, p. 242.

a sculptural spectacle offering an enclosure within which other designs are displayed.

At the opening ceremony in October 1997, the powerfully performative spectacle of wiggling and protruding titanium walls shimmering in the Iberian sun greatly impressed the elite audience. The building's sophisticated interplay of light against texture, colour, shiny materials and imposing structural volume stopped even the most skeptical critics from expressing their professional opinions; many of whom were content simply to praise.

King Carlos of Spain crowned the opening night,[134] along with the world's select group of celebrities who made the A-list: artists, movie stars, intellectual elite, bankers, politicians and corporate moguls - all gathered to witness the unveiling of the museum that was to become, literally over night "the most famous building in the world of the twentieth century."[135] Kerns compared Gehry's design to "works of Gaudi, whose architectural style showed similar willingness to transgress norms."[136] Like Gaudi's, the Bilbao Guggenheim is similarly "timeless in its architectural contribution to Western achievements."[137]

However, Charles Jencks claims (without giving specifics) that some scholars bemoaned the opening of the Spanish Guggenheim as representing a

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[134] The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. (2004). *Frank Gehry: Architecture as Art* [CD-ROM version]. Princeton, N.J.: Film for the Humanities & Sciences (division of Films Media Group). Transcript Jan. 2013

[135] Jencks, Charles. *The Iconic Building. The Power of Enigma*. London: Frances Lincoln Ltd. 2005: 9.

[136] The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao [CD-ROM]. *op. cit.,*

[137] *Ibid.*, 1997 opening night, interview with Thomas Kerns.

Pandora's Box of aesthetic values that should not have been unleashed. Others, believed that Frank Gehry finally "destroyed the box of taboos, the constraints of decorum, square architecture and the right-angled world"[138] of predictable Minimalist thinking.

A historically significant moment had occurred in Bilbao in 1997, heralded decades earlier by the first Guggenheim Museum in New York (1959) and the Centre Pompidou in Paris (1977), both of which have long established permanent collections - with the Spanish Guggenheim, the architecture of an art museum took indisputable central stage, presenting itself to the world as a unique cultural experience in its own right and a formidable subject matter for academic debates.

Gehry's design in Bilbao epitomizes the reality of art museums in a world of new, globalized cultural industry, where the need for identifiable, unique buildings precedes over the need for outstanding (and frequently temporary) collections inside. The dominant message here is the container, the content is just an added bonus. Bilbao demonstrates that *spectacularized* architectural forms have the power to promote art museum's holdings beyond art collections, epitomizing postmodernity's struggle and the symbolic relationship between form and context. In contemporary museum designs such as in Bilbao "architecture and sculpture meet in anxious and uneasy confrontation;"[139] a difficult aesthetic play that Gehry made his own vocation.

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[138] Jencks, *op. cit.,* p. 9.

[139] Welchman, *op. cit.,* p. 240. Huxtable 2005 qtd. in Welchman 240.

Van Uffelen points out that the most elaborate "exhibit" into which museums today invest for their future is their own buildings.[140] Whether a new building or an extension, contemporary museum architecture “has become one of the most popular genres among architects.”[141] Leading designers frequently employ *spectacle* and ephemeral effects to ‘fortify’ their assemblies, manipulating the overall phenomenological experiences of the museum buildings with an extra-visual, almost spiritual dimension.

[140] Van Uffelen, Chris. Ed. *Contemporary Museums: Architecture, History, Collections*. Secondary ed. Jennifer Kozak, Lisa Rogers, Sarah Schkolziger. Translation Talhouni. Salenstein: Braun Publishing. 2011: 8.

[141] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

3.4 Atmospheric Effects in Museum Architecture

Fig. 16. The Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao.
The Spectacle of Nightly Illuminations. Photo: Mikel Uzkudun 2010.
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gugeenheim_by_MikelUzkudun.jpg, accessed 04/28/13.

Building designs based on the principle of interplay between varying mood inducing elements can *seduce* audiences into intense psychological states ranging from euphoric and uplifting to sublime, depending on the preferred institutional agenda. When visitors to the museum get stimulated by the allure of the building, it metaphorically elevates such a structure to a performative work of art (fig. 16) - signifying a construct that is ruled by an independent set of aesthetic values, parallel to the institution traditionally designated functions. One of the most eloquently negotiated ephemeral effects can be experienced in contemporary art

museum buildings, often achieved by the controlled amount of light inside their spaces and skillful use of texture, colour, air circulation and building materials to enhance the overall 'presence.' Broadly employed 'moodiness' in art museum projects reflects society's apparent need for more *spectacularized* cultural experiences that privilege sensorial readings over intellectual. In various buildings (especially the Bilbao Guggenheim), the inherent 'atmosphere' of the place is skillfully produced by architects to accentuate, diminish or purposely distort structural detail (fig 17).

Fig. 17. he Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao.
"The Neo-Baroque" Aesthetics. Photo: Andrew Brown 2003.
http://wikitravel.org/shared/File:Guggenheim_Bilbao.jpg accessed 01/22/13.

Mark Wigley, defines the atmosphere of a building as something which surrounds its physical form, being produced by it and unique to it, seemingly emanating its "sensuous emissions from the very point where the building's physical

dimensions end"[142] and audiences perception begins. In his essay on "Architecture of Atmosphere" Wigley argues that the "climate of the intangible effects" created by the specific circumstances around and within architectural spaces envelops the perceivers (audiences) with its projected effects. The audiences have their emotional responses triggered by the otherwise 'neutral' materials, which supports the idea of atmosphere as an explicit object in itself, and a critically important element in the overall architectural assembly.

The general term "atmosphere" comes from the Latin word *atmosphaera*, said to have been coined in the 1600s, from two Greek words: ἀτμός [atmos] meaning "vapor" and σφαῖρα [sphaira][143] and used in describing a round object, a "sphere," surrounded by a layer of air. The word *atmosphere* has also historically alluded to a dominant tone or mood in a work of art, a 'vapor' of creative genius as it were that was often associated with a particular person, object or geographical place and representative of a distinctive aesthetic quality pleasing to a viewer.[144]

German Philosopher Gernot Böhme, theorizes that *atmosphere* is an informal term indicating a spatial ambiance, created by ambiguous and often

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[142] Mark Wigley, "The Architecture of Atmosphere". *Daidalos*. 68, June 1998: 18.

[143] Oxfort Dictionaries. *Atmosphere*, accessed Nov. 23, 2012. http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/atmosphere

[144] Answers. Section: American Heritage Dictionary. *At-mos-phere,* accessed Nov. 23, 2012, www.answers.com/topic/atmosphere.

intangible properties as they appear in a particular three-dimensional space.[145] As an aesthetic concept, the atmosphere mediates between a product and its reception, allowing an individual as a recipient to intuitively recognize an atmospheric place and be "assailed" by its content. When a museum audience is seduced by the charismatic properties of a contemporary art museum building, the registered impressions of it can allegedly affect the recipients' state of mind.[146] Therefore, Böhme argues, the atmosphere of a museum exterior or the *ambiance* of its interior can be described as an inherently subjective experience, one which cannot be communicated easily to others.

American architect and painter Steven Holl, who considers himself a phenomenologist, advocates for clean and simple shapes in architecture over complex and flamboyant. In dealing with museum spatial perception, Holl understands space in phenomenological terms as "reality [that] consists of objects and events as they are perceived or understood in human consciousness."[147] In 1993 he challenged museum audiences to experience architecture through physical contact only, by walking through it, touching it and seeing it[148] therefore, emphasizing the importance of a sensorial experience over emotional. Conversely,

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[145] Böhme, Gernot. "Atmosphere as an Aesthetic Concept." *Daidalos*. 68, June 1998: 112. Reprinted in OCADU, VISD 2012: 21.

[146] *Ibid.*, p. 114

[147] Phenomenology (architecture), *The Free Dictionary by Farlex*, updated 2013, accessed March 25/2013 http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Phenomenology

[148] Holl, Steven. "Pre-theoretical ground." *Steven Hall*. Zurich: Artemis & Arc en rêve centre d'architecture, 1993: 21.

the aesthetics of contemporary museum architecture often require (or provoke) physical as well as emotional engagement to fully comprehend and enjoy their concepts. Yet, one could argue that a less spectacular approach to art museum designs, stripped of all atmospheric layering, could keep a visitor's mind liberated from such highly entertaining 'manipulations' and therefore more focused on the art collection itself.

Postmodernists obsession with art museum architecture has turned once traditional looking public buildings into 'flashy' exhibitionary complexes of geometric, biomorphic or otherwise complex structural forms, imbued with a powerful allure. However, the practice of creating highly impressive public buildings is not new, as British architectural critic Peter Buchanan points out, and was always intended to promote particular social and economic agendas. Evidenced in architectural productions of previous historical periods, particularly the 1600s,[149] architecture proved to be a useful 'tool,' when skillfully applied. The *spectacles of domination* played an important part in the 1600s' public strata, capitalizing on well staged sequences of theatrical 'tricks.' Since the Baroque, architects have provided the elite with tools for exerting dominance based on sensorial stimuli as privileged cultural milieu.

Buchanan theorizes that the reductively rational Modernism of the twentieth century rose in part in reaction to atmospheric manipulations of the past

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[149] Buchanan, Peter. "Musings about Atmospheres and Modernism". *Daidalos*. 68, June 1998: 80.

centuries, intentionally applying neutralizing and defetishizing aesthetics against exuberant excesses.[150] Yet, the apparent return to the Baroque-frame-of-mind in the late 1990s, perfectly embodied by Frank Gehry's architectural style, has indicated once again the apparent need in contemporary culture for structural tensions, dynamic forms and atmospheric staging of public spaces - most transparently expressed by art museum architecture. There seems to prevail an inherent need for powerful public dramas and seductive cultural spectacles as exemplified by the "Neo-Baroque"[151] Guggenheim in Spain (fig. 14, p. 52 and fig. 17, p. 51). Italian installation and video artist, Fabricio Plessi, one of the invited guests to the opening of the Bilbao Museum, summed up contemporary architectural style as:

> We are living in a baroque period. Gehry's is the kind of work, where the eye never rests-on in one spot, but rather slides and moves.[152] (Plessi 1997).

The atmospheric effects of sunlight, as it glows, shines, shimmers and reflects in the window glass sheets, titanium plates and limestone surfaces of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum exterior shell can simply be described as a sensorial feast. Considered by many critics, architects and architectural theorists as the most admired work of contemporary architecture and "unsurpassed in its commanding

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[150] *Ibid*., p. 90

[151] Foster, Hal. "Crystal Palaces," *The Art-Architecture Complex*. London: Verso, 2011: 36. (Part One: Global Style).

[152] The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. (2004). *Frank Gehry: Architecture as Art* [CD-ROM version]. Princeton, N.J.: Film for the Humanities & Sciences. Transcripted interview. Accessed Jan 2013.

theatrical presence to date,"[153] the Bilbao Guggenheim's exterior indeed comes alive with the vitality of its interlocking, organic-like architectural forms. It creates ever changing sensorial stimulants further enhanced by the fluctuating intensity of shadows throughout the day (fig. 15, p. 56).

The abundance of sunlight that soaks the city of Bilbao for the most part of the year, consciously incorporated into the museum design, is made to function like another formal element of the building itself. Magnified by titanium used for the exterior, the Guggenheim building absorbs, reflects and disperses the immersing rays of the sun off its smooth surfaces. An array of atmospheric effects has been created by multilayered and constantly fluctuating structural forms, intentionally designed to bemuse the beholder. The museum building exudes a Baroque-like dynamism as the sun accentuates architectural overlaps, conceals pressure points and 'distracts' the gazing eye from the constraints put on various architectural points.

The seemingly random folding and unfolding of the Guggenheim's form is intensified and effectively extended almost 'beyond' its physical limits by strong, ever present shadows. This rather convoluted mass of structural elements is only sparsely opened up, here and there, by a series of partitioned and randomly angled windows to invite penetrating sunlight inside. Silvery-blue tints, subtle pinks and

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[153] Vanity Fair, "The World Architecture Survey June 30, 2010 - The Most Important Works Since 1980," accessed October 10/2012, http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2010/08/architecture-survey-list-201008. The Survey included fifty two respondents.

green hues bounce off the surrounding city intermittently, washing and reflecting themselves in the exterior's titanium paneling and limestone cladding.

The spectacular nightly illuminations turn the Bilbao Guggenheim's metallic shell into a 'gold-plated,' jewel-like, oversized sculpture (fig. 16, p. 60)

Fig. 18. Umberto Boccioni *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space.* 1913. Bronze sculpture. Museum of Modern Art, New York City. Image: Wmpearl, 2008. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:%27Unique_Forms_of_Continuity_in_Space%27,_1913_bronze_by_Umberto_Boccioni.jpg, accessed 01/22/13.

that brings to mind Umberto Boccioni's work, the 1913 "Unique Forms of Continuity in Space" (fig. 18) with its dynamically animated architectural forms. As a massively imposing structure, contemporary art museum buildings, such as

Bilbao, can be viewed from a considerable distance, as if taking on the role of glowing beacons for the multitudes of tourists flocking in to town.
The atmospheric mood becomes an 'object' in itself, a goal of a deliberate creative visualization and as such, an agreeably fleeting and changeable phenomenological experience. The nineteen century German art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, described a rather short-lived ethos of *spectacularized* experience in 1888 as most fittingly applicable to Baroque (and today Neo-Baroque) architecture when he wrote:

> The momentary impact of baroque is powerful, but soon leaves us with a certain sense of desolation. It does not convey a state of present happiness, but a feeling of anticipation, of something yet to come, of dissatisfaction and restlessness rather than fulfillment. We have no sense of release, but rather of having been drawn into the tension of an emotional condition.[154] (Wölfflin 1888)

New building technologies can effectively enhance the already existing atmospheric potential within an architectural complex, or, it can be artificially created with a variety of ephemeral props for the most effective staging and uniquely personal experience. Such a mood-staging 'razzle-dazzle,' whether employed as an uplifting, sobering or simply whimsical narrative, "gives museum buildings their unique *radiance*"[155] therefore becoming a fashionable delegacy.

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[154] Vidler, Anthony. "Dead End Street. Walter Benjamin and the Space of Distraction". *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology (the MIT Press), 2001. Wölfflin 1888, qtd. in Vidler 89.

[155] Gernot Böhme. "Atmosphere as an Aesthetic Concept." *Daidalos*. 68, June 1998: 115. Reprinted in OCADU, VISD 2012: 25.

Holl argues that today's architects are very well versed in creating the truly 'experienceable' aura, the kind of "building's *soul"*[156] that intensifies architectural assemblies by becoming an integral, yet invisible part.

In his 1886 essay "Prolegomena toward a Psychology of Architecture" Wölfflin debated weather it was possible for an architectural form to be capable of expressing an emotional mood, and if buildings possessed such abilities, on what principle could an art historian make an aesthetic judgement.[157] Wölfflin believed that the recipient of the mood conveyed by a structure could judge the *vital feeling* of such architectural form, according to the physical state it induced in him;[158] the mental outcome of a direct bodily experience. For his part, Hal Foster theorized that the phenomenal in contemporary (museum) architecture was:

> [I]ntensified as the brilliant or, as the obscure effect to dazzle or to confuse, as if the paragon of architecture might be an illuminated jewel the production of which is mystified, a commodity-fetish at a grand scale."[159] (Foster 2011)

Wigley, on the other hand, supposes that many contemporary architects, routinely deny their conscious involvement in producing intangible effects,[160] seemingly

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[156] Holl, Steven. "Pre-theoretical ground." *Steven Hall*. Zurich: Artemis Arc en Reve Centre d'Architecture, 1993: 23

[157] Wölfflin, Heinrich. "Prolegomena toward a Psychology of Architecture" (1886). *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics*, 1873-1893. Getty Centre 1994: 149.

[158] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

[159] Foster, Hal. "Crystal Palaces," *The Art-Architecture Complex*. London: Verso, 2011: 125.

[160] Mark Wigley, "The Architecture of Atmosphere". *Daidalos*. 68, June 1998: 25. OCADU, VISD 2012: 8.

determined to perpetuate the idea of architecture as discipline based on (neutral) logic. They allegedly reject the presence and importance of *atmosphere* in their projects, rendering it a “sentimental deception” and therefore rejected as a rule. Yet, it appears that Piano, Stirling, Cook, Gehry and Libeskind most convincingly gave in to the production of intangible effects - clearly mastering in their works the aesthetic of *seduction by form.*

3.5 The Bilbao Effect

In the spectacle, which is the image of the ruling economy, the goal is nothing, development is everything.[161] (Debord 1967)

Fig. 19. The Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao.
Areal View of Nervion River and the Museum Complex from the Iberdrola Tower.
Photo: Mario Roberto Durán Ortiz. 2012.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bilbao_05_2012_Guggenheim_Aerial_Panorama_2007.jpg., accessed 01/22/13. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported.

Leading the parade of uniquely avant-garde contemporary art museum buildings, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao has came to signify a multiple-phenomenon of experiences as only an iconic, one-of-a-kind, "flash and bravura" museum building is capable of offering. Jon Azúa, a former Basque deputy Prime Minister and currently a member of the board of trustees of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, writes that ever since the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum's physical incarnation the building has not only become an avant-garde embellishment of its surroundings, but a messenger of change, locally and

[161] Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. Paris: Buchet-Chasel, 1967. Reprint, Paris: Champ Libre, 1971. Trans. Black and Red, 1977. Reprint, Detroit: Black and Red, 2010 (Chapter 1 paragraph I4)

internationally - almost instantly influencing cultural trends, encouraging regional development (fig. 19 p. 71), attracting intellectual properties, fostering art communities and recovering the self-respect of the population that brought the museum about; becoming their prime capital.[162]

The "Bilbao effect" epitomizes the desire for transformation and re-birth of urban centers in decline, through a heightened role and visibility of a local art museum, to create a broad public interest and revenue. Giebelhausen, argues that in the late 1990s:

> The global shift of the dominant urban paradigm occurred, [...] which reconfigured the city as a marketplace and spectacle [...] and provided a larger context in which the reshaping of many European cities took place.[163] (Giebelhausen 2003)

I would argue that the significance of contemporary art museums in post-industrial, urban revitalization schemes cannot be overstated, and the effectiveness of 'fashionable' buildings in providing a welcomed solution to economically challenged regions is still crucial. Evidenced in Beaubourg, Bilbao and Graz, a single cultural institution by the means of its very existence has the power to transform stagnating city quarters into vital tourist destinations. Since the opening of Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim in 1997, a new era in museum

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[162] Azúa, Jon. "Guggenheim Bilbao: "Coopetitive" Strategies for the New Culture - Economy Spaces." *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim.* Ed. Anna Maria Guasch and Joseba Zulaika. Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2005: 74.

[163] Giebelhausen, Michaela. "Symbolic Capital: the Frankfurt Museum Boom of the 1980s". *The Architecture of the Museum. Symbolic Structures, Urban Context.* Ed. Michaela Giebelhausen. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003: 76.

architecture was launched that boldly supports innovative and one-of-a-kind building structures, hence the name "the Bilbao Effect." It also fostered a new kind of art museum institution that is more performative and flamboyant than reflective and intellectual, offering a cultural product validated by its architectural aesthetics. Azúa theorizes that as a result of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and its impressive, performative record, many art museum buildings around the world have become sculptural exhibits in their own right, works of art created for the sake of their own unique, iconic worth[164] and strategized at capturing the central cultural stage in support of the local economy.

The museum industry was inspired when just under one year after its opening in the heart of the Basque Country, the Guggenheim Museum broke all projected estimates, attracting the largest number of daily visitors in all of Spain (Museo del Prado included).[165] It became apparent that in an economic climate where shipyards were closing and manufacturing jobs were vanishing, a contemporary art museum was capable of offering a powerful alternative for urban sustainability .

In the year 2000, the old port-city was marking its seven hundredth birthday, and it had a lot to celebrate. Up until the mid-1990s, Bilbao has endured and survived a succession of wars, a lack of territorial unity, various identity crises and profound de-industrialization that brought severe economic instability.

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[164] Azúa, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

[165] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

At the same time, Bilbao's cultural institutions "were being progressively abandoned."[166] In 2000, only three years after the inauguration of Gehry's signature building, the city's 'Guggenheim franchise' was hailed as a tremendous, if overtly expensive gift to the Basque nation. So huge was the gift, in fact that "it can never be repaid" as some Basques despair.[167] Those sentiments echo however, Walter Benjamin's observations that he expressed in 1936:

> One of the most promising cultural developments of modernity lay in the way in which [it] allowed for the development of art forms that serve to distract working people from the trials and tribulations of their work-a-day world.[168]

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation in New York was experiencing its own crisis, during the 1990s. As a major cultural institution, it "had sunk into a profound operating deficit."[169] Internationally perceived as a leader in the cultural avant-garde, a sentiment symbolically connoted by Frank Wright's iconic building on Fifth Avenue (fig. 20 p. 75), the Guggenheim Foundation's leadership needed a financial and directional boost. Its director at the time Thomas Kerns, saw Bilbao as a promising solution. In the meantime, "the art of the 1990s had ceased to be a

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[166] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[167] Guilbaut, Serge. "Sleeping in Bilbao: The Guggenheim as a New Cultural Edsel?." *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim.* Ed. Anna Maria Guasch and Joseba Zulaika. Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2005: 143. The Bilbao Guggenheim is a museum that functions like a momentous gift.

[168] Moxey, Keith. "Gehry's Bilbao: Vistas and Visions." L*earning from the Bilbao Guggenheim.* Ed. Anna Maria Guasch and Joseba Zulaika. Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2005: 176. Benjamin 1936, 1968: 215, qtd. in Moxey 176

[169] Azúa, Jon. "Guggenheim Bilbao: "Coopetitive" Strategies for the New Culture - Economy Spaces." *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim.* Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2005: 77.

bohemian activity"[170] writes art historian Robert C. Lamm, and New York City was no longer the primary center of artistic production. Such cultural changes

Fig. 20. The Guggenheim Museum, New York City. 1959.
Museum Exterior (Detail). Photo: Mangus Manske 2007.
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Guggenheim_01.jpg, accessed 05/22/13.

brought about international negotiations in which museum buildings began to play an increased role in shaping transcultural spheres. The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao was an outcome of such negotiations, and its subsequent cause and effect: the "Bilbao Effect," resulting from a unique convergence of several strategies that contributed to its success. One of them was the Solomon R. Guggenheim

[170] *Ibid.*, p. 82. Robert C. Lamm 1996, qtd. in Azúa.

Foundation's decision to lead the international art world[171] in outsourcing museum collections. Today, writes Javier Olloqui, Basque-born art critic, "anybody in Bilbao can see first hand a Picasso, Kandinsky, Klee, Mondrian, Rothko or Kiefer without leaving the city."[172] Another important factor was the Basques' foresight in financing the Guggenheim project, a decision which indirectly has influenced various outcomes; most importantly, modernization and internationalization of their country, its people, and their economy."[173]

Azúa believes that the Bilbao project has created an environment of mutual benefits, a model for the "museums of the future" and a template for a building as a "trademark." Its timely construction has also revealed the power and capacity of local firms and workers' skills, long deemed irrelevant as serious business partners. Considered an international marvel and a museum model for the future, the Guggenheim in Bilbao represents the globalization of partnerships and internationalization of art collections that fostered a more "optimized management" of art resources and welcomed reductions in operating costs. Bilbao introduced a more *spectacularized* art programming, keeping it in line with a "culture-leisure-entertainment" ideology that supplies the audiences with a museum format the world is allegedly seeking in cultural and economic options. However, one might recall Guy Debord's cautioning words that "[u]nder

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[171] *Ibid.*, p. 85.

[172] Viar, Javier. "The Guggenheim Bilbao, Partner in the Arts: A view from Fine Arts Museum in Bilbao." Learn*ing from the Bilbao Guggenheim.* Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2005: 107.

[173] Azúa, *op, cit.,* p. 85.

the shimmering diversions of the spectacle, *banalization* dominates modern society the world over [...]."[174]

The ripple effect has generated a renewed interest in art museum construction projects. In the decades that followed the opening of Bilbao, an estimated one hundred fifty cities worldwide[175] have engaged in an urban revitalizing frenzy. The so-called "cultural gambling" has indeed delivered on its promise, even though the Basque arts community launched numerous campaigns against the Guggenheim, protesting the apparent "surrender to an international culture with an American veneer."[176] In spite of the activists' efforts, the museum of contemporary art in Bilbao did not become the Basque Museum of Contemporary Art, nor did Basque artists influence the Guggenheim's international exhibition plans,[177] further contributing to "a greater and greater deviation between the museum [as iconic and universal entity] and its location."[178]

Labeled by Guasch an all-purpose "deconstructionist" building site, Gehry's Guggenheim does not cease to provoke both critical debates and

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[174] Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. Paris: Buchet-Chasel, 1967. Reprint, Paris: Champ Libre, 1971. Trans. Black and Red, 1977. Reprint, Detroit: Black and Red, 2010 (Chapter 3 paragraph 59).

[175] Azúa, Jon. "Guggenheim Bilbao: "Coopetitive" Strategies for the New Culture - Economy Spaces." *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim.* Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2005: 75.

[176] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[177] Guasch, Anna Maria. "Global Museums versus Local Artists: Paradoxes of Identity between Local and Global Understanding." L*earning from the Bilbao Guggenheim.* Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2005: 192

[178] *Ibid.*, p. 192

applause. While some critics, like architect Philip Johnson, consider it "the greatest building of our age,"[179] and architectural historian Kurt W. Forster reads in its spectacularized shapes the Baroque tradition of Borromini;[180] others, like Swiss architect Jacques Herzog considers Bilbao "a cynical example of a global company's global behavior, where work such as Gehry's [...] makes sense only from the logic of modernity."[181] Joseba Zulaika goes even further by calling the Guggenheim Museum project "the decline and fall of the museum as we know it, and [...] an example of cultural imperialism."[182] In the end, the intentionally revered museum building continues to attract multitudes of spectators, decades after Bilbao's promotional campaigns subsided.

At the forefront of it all lies the universality and internationalization of culture[183] or "Guggenheim experience,"[184] which symbolizes a particular application of various arts and humanities in an economically impactful manner for the benefit of a society as a whole. The "Bilbao effect" epitomizes the forging of a new kind of co-operation between culture and commerce that, in the eyes of many, has beneficial effects clearly outweighing its argued disadvantages.

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[179] *Ibid.*, p. 195.

[180] *Ibid.*, p. 195. Kurt W. Forster 1999, qtd. in Guasch 195. Bilbao museum in shape is resembling Gaudi's modernism and the Baroque tradition of Borromini. (Kurt W. Forster's biography. "9th International Architecture Exhibition in Venice, Italy, 2004" *designboom*, 2010, accessed March 27/2013. http://www.designboom.com/snapshots/venice04/forster.html.)

[181] Guasch, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

[182] Moxey, *op, cit.,* Joseba Zulaika, qtd. in Moxley 175.

[183] Guasch, *op. cit.,* p. 190.

[184] Azúa, *op cit.*, p. 86.

In spite of criticisms of contemporary art museums' *spectacularized* cultural identity, the decades of accumulated evidence support the iconic buildings' social and economic significance; not illusionary in attributes but grounded in an earlier tradition of a museum as an *exhibitionary complex* and a democratic public space created and used for the public good.

Some light needs to be briefly shed on the phenomenon of *etherealization*, a contemporary art museum discourse that is indirectly linked to the "Bilbao Effect," in which some art institutions today privilege the idea of no permanent collections, or are extremely light in their collecting component (e.g., Bilbao, Graz, etc.) - a trend towards which contemporary museum industry gravitates and new 'spectacularized' architecture supports. There has been no comprehensive national study done on museum *etherealization*, but allegedly, there are some North American museums that boast to have no collections of any note and use temporary exhibits to generate revenues.[185] The so-called "post-Bilbao" era supports 'light' and transitory displays (e. g., "the King Tut" traveling show) which secure large attendances and promise rewards. New York based architectural writer, Mimi Zeiger, describes these constantly globetrotting art exhibitions, as merely making a fashionable "pit stop on the grand tour,"[186]

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[185] Pitman, Bonnie. "Muses, Museums, and Memories". *Daedalus* 128.3 (07/1999): 11. The MIT Press. Print. accessed July 18/2012)

[186] Zeiger, Mimi. "Kunsthaus Graz". *New Museums: Contemporary Museum Architecture around the Word*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc., 2005: 11.

perpetuating the postmodern museological discourse of *entertaining*, but offering rather fleeting cultural experience.

3.6 The Graz Art Museum

Fig. 21. The Art Museum (Kunsthaus), Graz. 2003.
View From the Mur River. Photo: Marion Schneider & Christoph Aistleitner 2006.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Graz_Kunsthaus_vom_Schlossberg_20061126.jpg,
accessed 01/22/13. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.5 Generic license.

The "Bilbao effect" has become a trademark for art museums in the twenty-first century and represents the kind of architectural visualizations that morph museum buildings from 'traditional' structures to elevated works of art. One such iconic visualization landed in Austria in 2003. Like an inflated, oversized balloon, the Graz Art Museum (Kunsthaus Graz) projects an aura of an otherworldly descent with its rather peculiar, biomorphic form (fig. 21).

Designed by Peter Cook and Colin Fournier of the London group Spacelab[187] and fondly nicknamed the "Friendly Alien," the building's soft contours have imposed themselves on the surroundings, oozing its translucent blue and highly reflective Plexiglas body over the pastel coloured Baroque buildings nearby, with claustrophobic proximity. Realized for the most impactful visual effect, as museum architecture it subverts the city's landscape, and is seemingly 'wrestling' with its intended purpose as an art gallery.

Hal Foster has declared that contemporary museum buildings such as this one: "inflate contemporary art museum[s] into gigantic spectacle-space[s] that can swallow any art, let alone any viewer, whole."[188] The Graz Art Museum appears particularly capable of that, with its hugely protruding bulge. It illustrates what Wigley calls "a lack of definition" in contemporary architecture, created by the difficulty to address and control the play between ephemeral and material elements.[189] Cook and Fournier's use of architectural ingenuity and technological know-how met with Graz's need for contemporary art, commerce and prosperity - with particular attention given to notoriety.

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[187] LeFaivre, Liane. "Yikes! Peter Cook's and Colin Fournier's perky animistic Kunsthaus in Graz recasts the identity of museum and recalls a legendary design movement." *Architectural Record* (January 2004). ©The McGraw-Hill Companies. Inc., accessed October 17/2012, Website: http://archrecord.construction.com/projects/bts/archives/museums/0401_kunsthaus/photos.asp

[188] Hal Foster *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes* 2002: 37, qtd. in Shiner 31.

[189] Mark Wigley, "The Architecture of Atmosphere." *Daidalos*. 68, June 1998: 27. OCADU VISD 2012: 10.

Wigley sees it as a "fragile illusion"[190] and argues that a successful museum institution cannot fulfill all of these requirements without considering its building as some kind of powerful device. Zeiger explains the apparent need for more *spectacularized* architecture as a necessity in the current economic climate, because of its "rejuvenating power of the new."[191] The controversy about contemporary art museum architecture may not, however, lie entirely in their theatrical exteriors (at times upstaging the art collections inside); rather, as some critics point out, it is the buildings' considerable height and 'airiness' that generates the powerful feel of *spectacle-space* (fig. 22, p. 84), interfering with audiences' "immersion with the exhibits."[192]

It can be argued that a more intimate meeting between the audience and a work of art has been lost in certain contemporary art museum settings, or is considerably reduced by the openness of spaces, long ramps, bright lights and the increased flow of visitors. The tendency in twenty-first century museum architecture is to indulge in exuberant forms at the price of dwarfing the art and the subject. In turn, contemporary art productions, have become more reflective and accommodating, privileging works of increased size and added architectural volume to counterbalance this new, exhibitory reality.

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[190] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

[191] Zeiger, Mimi. "The 'New': Invention and Reinvention of Museum". *New Museums: Contemporary Museum Architecture around the Word*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc., 2005: 7.

[192] Shiner, Larry. "On Aesthetics and Function in Architecture: The Case of the 'Spectacle' Art Museum". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 69.1 (2011): 31.

The Graz Art Museum, like its predecessor in Spain, embodies the idea of an iconic building that has been created to rejuvenate an old, down-on-its-heels district into a popular tourist hub.

Fig. 22. The Art Museum, Graz.
Spectacle-space. Photo: Zeljko 2010.
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:GrazIMG_5018.jpg., accessed 05/08/13.
Licensed under the GFDL by the author; Released under the GNU Free Documentation License.

Zeiger described the structure poetically as "an expressionist gesture"[193] in the post-industrial city; Cook and Fournier's "psychedelic fantasy,"[194] which is sublimely defying the predominantly Baroque presence all around it. The "Friendly Alien" came about when Cook and Fournier won the Kunsthaus

[193] Zeiger, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[194] *Ibid.*, p. 66.

competition in 2000,[195] it took another three years to complete. Art historian, critic, curator and architectural theorist Liane LeFaivre, wrote in 2004 that the Graz Art Museum's form reflects "a ludic and optimistic mood" [that has characterized Western culture for the past three decades. Today, the building is] "an anachronistic creation of [...] a cultural optimism in a world now so terribly different;"[196] "an arresting [creation] and strangely moving."[197] The main aesthetic principle of Graz's unique art museum building appears to be light fracturing form. Effects achieved with daylight as well as artificial illumination intermittently, it subordinates the first and focuses on the latter. As an art museum whose external shell (in this case, referred to as the "skin") absorbs little natural light[198] the building uses, for the most part, a technologically advanced system of artificial lighting. Sunlight penetrates some of the interior spaces, the closest to the "skin," and especially evident near ground level, where translucent museum walls are a *calculated spectacle* to entice passersby.

Yet, the most spectacular effects produced by the building are observable at night, when the computerized lighting scheme illuminates the museum's exterior from the inside out in geometrical configurations. The Kunsthaus' plexiglas façade is a 148-foot wide and 66-foot-high[199] shiny aqua-marine,

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[195] LeFaivre, *op. cit.*

[196] *Ibid.*,

[197] *Ibid*.,

[198] Zeiger, *op. cit.* p. 66.

[199] LeFaivre, *op, cit.*,

and oddly bulging wall. It turns at night into a pulsing screen (fig. 23). A glowing geometrical pattern fluctuates "at an infinite variability eighteen times per second."[200] Each of the fluorescent lamps acts like an oversized computer pixel

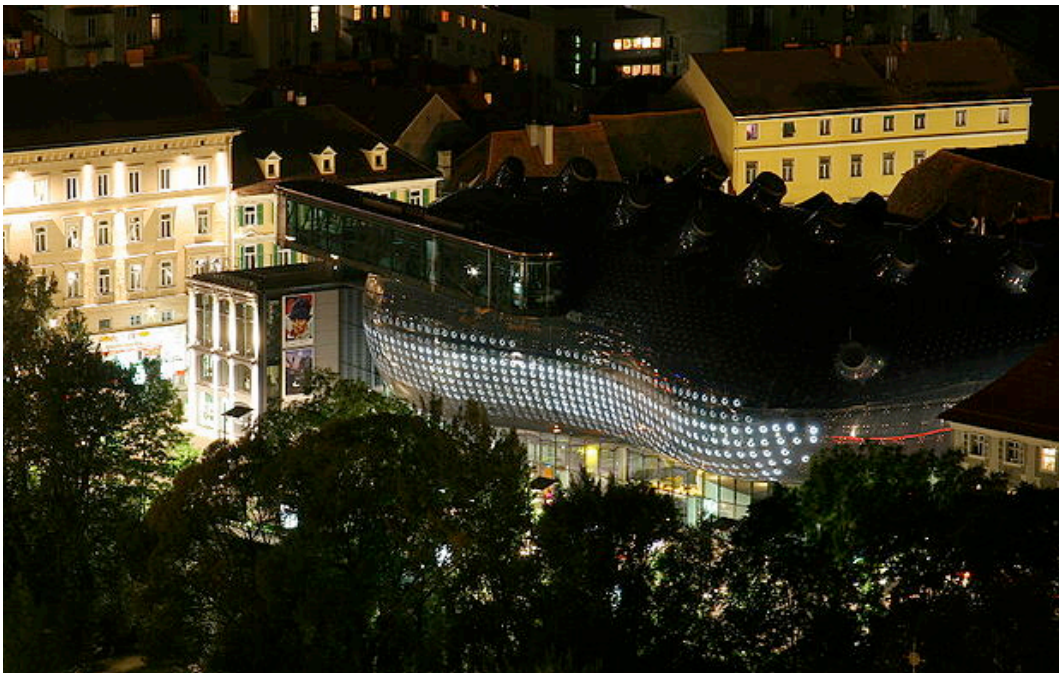

Fig. 23. The Art Museum, Graz.
Computerized Daily Projections. Photo: Mark St 2008.
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Garzer_Kunsthaus_bei_Nacht.JPG, accessed 03/22/13.
This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported.

and can be separately dimmed at various levels to animate graphics and text.[201] A spectacularly hallucinatory effect can be created with 930 fluorescent lamps glowing across an Acrylic museum façade during free, nightly performances, expanding the building's parameters deeper into public space. These daily

[200] *Ibid.,*

[201] Zeiger, *op. cit.*, p. 66

amusements, intensified by the darkening sky, can effectively manipulate audiences' perception of the building's already fluid physicality.

The largest exhibition space at the Kunsthaus (called Space 01) is located immediately under the bulbous roof. Natural light enters the top gallery through a network of sixteen nozzels (fig. 21, p. 81), science fiction-like *oculi*[202] that protrude from the top of the museum's roof, playfully designed to resemble biomorphic, tentacle-like forms - hence perpetuating the "Friendly Alien" metaphor. The function of the nozzels is to funnel northern light inside. Equipped with louvers to modulate the amount of brightness, the nozzels disperse sunlight throughout the exhibition space, acting in a similar fashion as the glass ceilings at the New National Gallery in Stuttgart - they minimize the presence of shadows by 'flattening' them; an effect complementary to the exhibited works.

The *spectacularized* art museum buildings such as the Graz Art Museum shift our attention away from *what* they represent to *how* they present it, mediating our senses and engaging our intellectual responses through a set of atmospheric effects. Architectural historian Krysta Sykes calls such manipulation an "intelligent practice"[203] in which a practical application of a tangible product is put to action. For Anthony Vidler, the phenomenon of such "Baroque effects," in contemporary museum architecture is indicative of "a breakdown of form,"

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[202] *Ibid.*, p 66

[203] Sykes, Krista A. *Constructing a New Agenda: Architectural Theory 1993-2009*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010: 17.

which is associated with the structural fits, breaks and openings that inadvertently denote "anxious relations between the material and metaphysical worlds."[204] Others, like Polish-American architect and author Witold Rybczynski, disagrees with the favorable recognition of spectacular effects in art museum buildings. Since the Bilbao's success, Rybczynski bemoans, municipalities are increasingly seeking renown architects to deliver eye-catching signature buildings for media publicity.

> Flamboyance rather than careful thought, [and] it favor the glib and obvious over the subtle and nuanced. 'The wow factor' may excite the visitor and the journalist, it does not necessary make for a good architecture, which should have more to say to us than 'look at me.'[205] (Rybczynski 2010)

However, first in Bilbao and later in Graz, the increasingly popular and clearly infectious *politics of seduction*, or *cultural gambling*[206] have proved time and again the seductive powers of a single, avant-garde building to ensure commercial benefits and prosperity for the host city. The old urban fabric is re-appropriated[207] as *spectacle* space aligning itself with a new type of cultural institution.

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[204] Vidler, Anthony. "Dead End Street, Walter Benjamin and the Space of Distraction." *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture*. Cambridge: First MIT Press (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), 2001: 91

[205] Sykes, *op. cit.,* p 25. Witold Rybczynski qtd. in Sykes.
Rybczynski is an architect and Emeritus Professor of Urbanism at the University of Pennsylvania.

[206] Zulaika, Joseba. "Desiring Bilbao: The Kernsification of the Museum and Its Discontents." *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*. Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2005: 149

[207] Zeiger, Mimi. "The 'New': Invention and Reinvention of Museum". *New Museums: Contemporary Museum Architecture around the Word*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc., 2005: 9.

Gernot Böhme theorizes that in the aesthetics of architecture, the enhanced atmosphere is "the only area in which a desired transformation of art into life takes place."[208] However, today's aesthetics are no longer just for the beautification of life, cautions Böhme, but can be used also as a political tool and economic factor through which a broader "aestheticization of nation's politics and the staging of everyday life takes place."[209]

[208] Böhme, Gernot. "Atmosphere as an Aesthetic Concept." *Daidalos*. 68, June 1998: 114. OCADU, (VISD 2012): 23

[209] *Ibid.,* Benjamin, qtd. in Böhme 115. OCADU, (VISD 2012): 24.

3.7 The New Frederic C. Hamilton Wing at the Denver Art Museum

Forms are not bound by their physical limits. Forms emanate and model space.[210]
(Giedion 1941)

Fig. 24. The Denver Art Museum. 2006.
The New Frederic C. Hamilton Wing. Photo: Hustvedt, 2009.
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wikiFile:Denver_Art_Museum_Frederic_C._Hamilton_building.jpg.,
accessed 03/22/13. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons
Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported.

In 2006, the New Frederic C. Hamilton Wing at the Denver Art Museum opened, offering a unique type of relationship between the museum building and the procurers of art. Designed by Daniel Libeskind, a Polish-born American architect, the new addition to the Denver Art Museum (fig. 24) is a building indicative of an increasingly more complex interweaving of interests between

[210] Wigley, Mark. "The Architecture of Atmosphere". *Daidalos*. 68, June 1998. Sigfied Giedion 1941, qtd. in Wigley 18.

museum architecture and its content. As a flexible and adaptable public space, the new addition serves cultural product from a populist perspective, offering art exhibition spaces wrapped in a structural marvel. With Libeskind's addition,

Fig. 25. The Denver Art Museum.
The Aesthetics of Dysfunctional Form. Photo: J. Miers, 2010.
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Denver_Art_Museum_2.jpg., accessed 03/22/13.
This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

the overall dimensions of the Art Museum have changed, clearly increasing in volume; yet, at the same time, the building's practical functionality was contested by its form, as if determined to amuse audiences rather than to serve (fig. 25). Privileging architectural experimentations that warp structural elements, the New Frederic C. Hamilton Wing was designed as a kind of performative, massive

sculpture. Vidler recognizes this as a "language necessary to construct a space of post-psychoanalytical, post-digital world of simulacra" - perfectly embodied in Bilbao and now in Denver, where dramatically juxtaposed shapes and voids undermine visitors' spatial awareness and manipulate their art experience. At the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, for example, the curvilinear interior space known as the Fish Gallery, destabilizes not only its visitors but also the works of art. Approximately the size of a football field (fig. 26), the gallery space is capable of

Fig. 26. Richard Serra *The Matter of Time.* The Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao. 430 feet long Installation. Photo: Zarateman. 2010. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bilbao_-_Guggenheim_21.jpg., accessed 03/22/13. This file is made available under the Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication.

overpowering almost anything put on display there - unless intentionally procured by the artists on a much more monumental scale, to offset the Fish Gallery's imposing dimensions.

The New Hamilton Wing at the Denver Art Museum is also perceived as a challenging exhibition space. The dramatically angled walls and oddly protruding structural supports, that are sagging or seemingly collapsing onto themselves, "perform" museum spaces characteristic of Daniel Libeskind's architectural style. His New Hamilton Wing can be described as a building "on a slant" and a rather Futuristic interpretation of an art museum, where institutional functionality is secondary to the creative vision. The museum's administrative staff finds it unmanageable, with gallery spaces "poorly suited for displaying works of art."[211] The *Wall Street Journal* described the New F. C. Hamilton Wing as "working despite Libeskind's best efforts," praising museum curators for the "heroic job of making several [...] odd shaped galleries function as well as they could."[212] Larry Shiner noted, when visiting the museum:

> Paintings were held vertical by obtrusive metal brackets protruding from the walls and visitors had to be protected from hitting their heads on the more seriously inward-sloping walls by pieces of lumber laid on the floor. Two years later, these highly distracting solutions had been replaced by raised panels built up on the sloping walls to create vertical surfaces to accommodate paintings and horizontal panels on

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[211] Shiner, Larry. "On Aesthetics and Function in Architecture: The Case of the 'Spectacle' Art Museum". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 69.1 (2011): 31. Wiley-Blackwell. Accessed July 18/2012.

[212] *Ibid.*, p. 34. David Littlejohn, 2007, qtd. in Shiner 34.

the floor to keep visitors at a safe distance.[213] (Shiner 2007)

Yet, the iconic building continues to attract audiences with its visually seductive exterior wedged into Denver's urban landscape. It can be argued that like most publicly-run art museums in the twenty-first century, the Denver Art Museum has been defined and driven by an aggressively consumerist cultural environment, using Libeskind's iconic building as leverage against the industry's fluctuating finances. Clearly, it has become a profit-oriented and consumer-driven cultural institution, with operational strategies tailored to suit its forecasted longevity; therefore subordinating the experience of pure art as secondary to consumerist spectacle. It is pertinent in the current economic context to wonder if these highly curved, trapezoidal and otherwise convoluted shapes that dominate contemporary art museum architecture should be in fact tolerated as aesthetically necessary. Do such architectural designs affect the overall future respectability of the museum as a cultural institution?

The answer is not simple. When evaluating art museum architecture in the twenty-first century, one could advocate the importance of aesthetics that give the museum building its priority, reasoning that successfully spectacular architecture can "override its otherwise dysfunctional"[214] form by offering its audience a stimulating sensorial feast. An alternative approach to a museum

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[213] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

[214] *Ibid*., p. 31. Edward Winters, 2007, qtd. in Shiner,

building may emphasize its "functional beauty,"[215] pronouncing practicality as a more suitable architectural prerogative to better satisfy the museum's traditional needs as cultural institution.

One could argue, however, that contrary to some art historians like Hal Foster, who critically evaluated the cross-over between architecture and sculpture in contemporary art museum buildings and wished for the return of Minimalist museum architecture with its anti-auratic, anti-symbolic forms of expression - the *spectacularised,* Pop architectural designs produce decisively more imaginative and aesthetically engaging museum environments.

I would contend that the characteristically multisensorial and multilayered qualities of postmodern and post-postmodern architecture offer contemporary art museum visitors exciting, challenging and even elevating experiences that are difficult to duplicate with less alluring narratives. Therefore, 'atmospherized' museum architecture has been more successful at generating large audiences, *seducing* them by form, as it were, that otherwise would not visit an art institution. In so many ways, the iconic Frederic C. Hamilton Wing at the Denver Art Museum, like the Bilbao Guggenheim or the Art Museum in Graz, draws on its strong iconic presence, inadvertently promoting art exhibitions housed inside rather than overshadowing them. It is truly a fusion of art and architecture into one, somewhat fragile union based on mutual rewards.

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[215] Shiner, *op. cit.,* p. 31. Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson, 2008 qtd. in Shiner.

Conclusion

Fig. 27. Musée du Louvre. *The Ethos of Spectacle*. Yvonne Nowicka-Wright, 2009.

Paintings, sculptures, even film media have been traditionally linked with (and are often physically dependent on) supportive and stabilizing architectural frames. With Baroque's theatrical flamboyance,[216] re-enforced by the Enlightenment's grand formality, strongly *spectacular* and structurally monumental narrative was introduced into art museum architecture. Continuing right into the twenty-first century, the *seduction by form* privileges and defines museum projects with theatrical vocabulary.

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[216] Barogue period is Peter Buchanan's selected point of referance in terms of spectacle in architecture, other than Gothic cathedrals. "Musings about Atmosphere and Modernism." *Daidalos*. 68, (06/1998): 80-90.

I theorize that while the highly variable journey in the service of cultural product symbolized by an art museum building began in the aristocratic setting of princely palaces, it has inevitably led to Bilbao in Spain, with its deeply rooted elitism masquerading as populist spectacle. Detouring via various architectural styles, ideologies, and operational strategies, art museum architecture as a cultural product has culminated in the iconic presence of the Spanish Guggenheim.

Created by Frank Gehry in 1997 and now perceived as Postmodernity's embodiment, it has communicated a shift in late twentieth century aesthetics towards amusement that echoes the legacy of George Brown Goode's *exhibitionary complex*. Bilbao's flamboyantly spectacular exteriors and aesthetically refined interior spaces set precedent for future museum buildings to follow. Agreeably, since 1997, many art museum directors have privileged and revered *spectacularized* exteriors to connote the arrival of a new era in architectural visualizations - the museum building as a self-professed work of art.

As a result, contemporary art museums, have positioned themselves squarely within the binary aspects of spectacle. On the one hand, art museum institutions seem capable of inducing in their visiting audiences a feeling of betterment and elevation in their social relevance; on the other hand however, the *spectacularized* structure simultaneously projects an allure served with an uncanny sense of granted "privilege rather than a civic right,"[217] a duality of

[217] Giebelhausen, Michaela ed. The Architecture of the Museum: Symbolic Structures, Urban context. Manchester University Press, 2003: 224

perception experienced by art museum visitors that connotes a psychological separation under cultural unification; general accessibility with underpinned exclusivity.

The contributions made by the Pompidou Centre, the New National Gallery in Stuttgart, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, the Art Museum in Graz and the Denver Art Museum to the discourse of *spectacle,* have created a venue for renewed interest in cultural institutions that goes beyond museum collections and enters social and political context. Through a *seduction by form*, contemporary art museums bridge and connect fractured public spheres, under the umbrella of mutual interest in art. As on the day the Musée du Louvre first opened in 1793, contemporary art museums offer their entranced visitors a new kind of visual and social experience, one that can only be accomplished through atmospheric properties of a perfectly staged architectural drama.

Audiences are seduced today, as much as they have been in the past, by a spectacle of artworks put on display by a highly reputable "place" (therefore presumed valued and desirable), particularly when framed by a monumental embodiment of customary formality. I would hypothesize that the relation between the value of a work of art and the physical dimensions of the gallery space within which it is presented increases exponentially, hence influencing the spatial volume of contemporary art museums.

Arguing against the notion, put forward by some critics, that contemporary art museum buildings are 'disposable' objects, not meant to survive for more than fifteen years, I suggest that contemporary art museums have already succeeded in creating satisfying and far-reaching cultural, social and economic impacts, in spite of being faulted for overlooking practical needs while privileging aesthetic values. Iconic museum buildings have launched an unprecedented era of one-of-a-kind structures contributing greatly to cultural progression and architectural development, turning leading designers into "professional séducteurs;"[218] while their dazzling structural aesthetics are readily available for inspection, openly embracing the voyeurism of consumerist spectacle.

On the flip side, contemporary museum architecture has positioned itself firmly in the new landscape of cultural wealth ruled by the impermanence of *fashion*. The accelerated consumption of their iconic images has created an overt emphasis on the buildings' structural allure rather than their architectural functionality; characteristics which architectural historian William Saunders criticizes: "a design that seduces, discourages independent thought, and *art* depends on it."[219] Yet, the museum audience may side with architect Phillip Johnson**,** who proclaimed that "if the architecture is as good as in Bilbao,

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[218] Zulaika, Joseba. "Desiring Bilbao: The Kernsification of the Museum and Its Discontents." *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim.* Ed. Anna Maria Guasch and Joseba Zulaika. Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2005: 149-170. Thomas Kerns 1990, qtd. in Zulaika 152.

[219] Saunders, William S ed. *Commodification and Spectacle in Architecture.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005: vii

f#%$ the art!"[220] Clearly, sensorial stimulation wins out over intellectual contemplation, a trend fostered by the values and principles in contemporary culture within which art museums strategize to establish a long duration, while competing for the attention of the world, in a game of *seduction*.

[220] Shiner, *op cit.,* p. 31.

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