

The avant-garde movement's artistic experiments in trying to express life through the medium of art do not acquaint well with the museum system, mainly because the definition, or shall one say defining attitude, of the avant-garde is the idea of escape from the "box" of the museum. So, with the works created by the avant-garde so definitively located outside the walls of museums, can it be that museums become the institutions that preserve their work as part of the historical record?

The first issue is whether the museum exists within real life as a space of friction, that is to say a space where one is exposed to the frictions of everyday life. It has come to be compared rather to the contrasting idea of the "other space." Through the modernist reexamination of the ideas of the fringe and the other, problems of place (location, site) have been debated. For example, Michel Foucault proposed the utopia and the heterotopia as "other spaces"—places that, although they had some connection to other locations, were at the same time strangely different from them, deviating from the everyday. Utopias are places that exist nowhere but in thought, while heterotopias exist within real establishments and institutions but transport people away from reality. Foucault offered several examples of spaces that, although they have their roots in everyday society, are essentially different spaces: museums, libraries, oriental gardens, amusement parks, colonies, brothels, ships, etc. (1). He discusses heterotopias as places on fringe of modernity, where modernity's closures and certainties are regularly exposed to the danger of collapse.

In this paper I discuss the function of the museum as heterotopia in the context of its relationship to the avant-garde. Through this I intend to propose a model for the twenty-first century museum that will critique the avant-garde concept and at least partially inherit its successes and its role. Although this will probably not exceed the bounds of orthodox museum theory, perhaps a "contemporary" proposal can be formed even out of that orthodoxy and topos. We know that the evolutionary view of history is not all-capable, and

that everything leading up to today is juxtaposed on a line of simultaneity. However, post-museum and post-avant-garde—the terms themselves an indication of how out of date the original concepts have become—may still lead to a surprisingly fruitful relationship.

According to Peter Bürger, "the European avant-garde movement can criticize and condition the status of the arts in civil society. However, what is negated in the process is not the format of artistic expression in the next age, but the (artistic) system that removes Art from the realities of life and makes it into a special occasion. The avant-gardists seek an art that becomes experimental once more, but this quest is not a call for the content of artistic works to take up a social meaning" (2). The avant-garde is "an experiment in constructing a new kind of practice of living out of art," with the caveat that if it is completely absorbed by the practice of living it loses its distance from and thus its ability to critique it. Maintaining the possibility of real critical understanding while seeking to return art to the processes of living—with the qualification that the process of creation and acceptance of art must be free and neverending—is an inherent contradiction, which undeniably presents difficulties.

The avant-garde did not, in the end, achieve their goal. The methodology created by the avant-garde with anti-art designs is now used to artistic (systematic) ends; in other words, by assimilating it the system actually reinvigorated itself. The great success was causing the system (art) to be recognized as a system, and causing the relative unendingness of art within society to be the root principle of this form of art. The importance of having a system (art) for the real, social purpose of the resulting individual works became clear, and a new kind of relationship between works of art and reality, one of mutual influence and mutual penetration, came to be. There are also those, who like Adorno, recognize that through the avant-garde movement the historical order of various techniques and styles came to be rearranged and made use of freely amid the simultaneity of extremely different things.

The concept of the heterotopia is not a Museum as "system" for the purpose of criticizing the avant-garde, but the surfacing of a Museum as an actual "other space." The functions of the Museum as heterotopia are: dissimulation through the acceptance process; preserving, as a shelter, things of distinctive value; and as an open space, a nexus in a network of "selected and gathered information."

What kind of dissimulation could be possible in this space? It is a space not of the everyday, perhaps as the quintessential white cube, perched above the moon. It has the function of disconnecting those who enter it from their everyday consciousness, while at the same time contributing to artistic autonomy. The space functions as a catalyst for reacting to substances one does not react to in everyday surroundings; it pulls and expands ordinary consciousness and conditions acute reactions. Yet it is not a place wholly described by the laboratory metaphor. The temperament of the museum space is "not of the everyday" in much the same way as a religious place of worship.

Just as Boris Groys discusses in more detail in this publication, the Museum space is one which continues to create the "new." To put it in twentieth-century language, one might say that it is a place that simultaneously forms a critical entity. To those who enter wanting to see opposition to Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans*, the critical entity which "does not embrace anti-consumerism" discovers "the new," while to other entities there might be no difference whatsoever between ready-mades and regular products.

The twentieth century was a process of developing the nineteenth century educational museum while adding a variety of approaches to the educational methodology. It was a process of one-way transmission of information, and a process of developing the modern critical entity. The twenty-first century museum can break from this unilateral educational model and create a dynamic framework of bilateral exchange and communication. It corresponds to a cultural

# The Avant-garde and the Museum: Intermixing Heterotopias

Hasegawa Yuko

transition that consists of moving from things to information, from individual intellectual creative activities to a more proper form for communal knowledge, from a unity of viewpoints and values to a plurality.

At the same time, this is consistent with the current trend in contemporary art itself. In contrast to autonomous, organic works of painting or sculpture, there has been an increase in heteronomous, open and particularly inorganic works that conclude as works, through involving the viewer intellectually or physically. The creator and viewer do not stand in opposition; rather, the viewer is involved in creating the work. These characteristics first appeared with the advent of conceptual art and performance art in the 1960's. However, in most cases, the viewer involved in creating the work was someone within the critical entity and privy to its shared body of knowledge. The movement since the 1990's to return art yet more to the processes of everyday life, in the context of the activities of the avant-garde, can be seen as an increase in works that tie into the relationship between the receiver/viewer and the work, or works that aim to make easier the process of interfacing with the work, while preserving the autonomy of the artist as regards the work's contents.

The attempts to deviate from the narrowly specialized artistic vocabulary and context and recreate art as a high order psychological communication tool promoted a radical drive towards mass cultural platforms such as entertainment and the mass media. Through appropriation, ready-mades, reenactments of everyday actions and other methods, the non-differentiation of artistic representation and everyday existence maintained its critical distance over the late 80's and the early 90's, but in the late 90's the criticism became more transparent, and works appeared that, without the context of a museum space, or perhaps the context presented by an "art project," were indistinguishable from ordinary life. Much of this is due to the flourishing of "action art," what in this publication Sumitomo

Fumihiko calls "ready-made actions," or the inorganic creations (immaterial art) the author of this article calls the "re-territorialization" of everyday actions.

Looking at the situation as regards the change undergone by museums which display these works, there has been a constant metamorphosis from "exhibition space" intended for the showing of objects, to "environmental space" intended for the showing of performances and installations, and finally to an immaterial, "relationship-showing" space. Showing relationships means creating relationships, showing the process of the viewer encountering the work and thereby creating it. So in this "relationship-showing" space what kind of forms can be pursued? Showing, forming relationships requires, in addition to the space, most of what can be called personal installation infrastructure. As a simple example, a workshop goes beyond the scope of today's common programs, becoming part of the form of a work. If one continues this line of reasoning, the question becomes whether it is necessary to show this kind of work in a museum—the question of intervention in towns or other existing outside spaces.

Here I survey the progression in a series of exhibitions apropos of the shift towards "showing relationships," and pursue the question of how museums are involved in art in everyday life from the point of view of shared creation.

There are more than a few examples of contemporary art installations within everyday spaces, but the first instance of the form must be said to be the 1986 *Chambres d'amis* exhibition curated by Jan Hoet at the Ghent Museum of Contemporary Art. Breaking out of "the museum as place of isolation," Hoet planned the exhibition as an "attempt to (re)place art simply within society," coordinating installations by fifty-one artists both at the Ghent and inside fifty-four dwellings around the city. The project sought to create a dialogue between artworks and locations in actual life, but did not seek the active involvement of visitors beyond traveling to and seeing the works in a

milieu of everyday life.

Forming relationships between the four elements of creator, work, visitor and place. This audacious matrix was structured by none other than the curator of the Ghent Museum of Contemporary Art, Bart de Baere, in his *This is the Show and the Show is Many Things* (1994). In fomenting a continuous dialogue between thirteen artists and putting the process itself on display, the exhibition evolved as works were continually created (most during the run of the exhibition) and modified by other artists. With no titles or explanatory panels for the works, the space took on aspects of a communal studio, or a warehouse. Visitors could also participate in the process, but under the oversight of the curator de Baere, who was walking patrolling the exhibition floor.

A place where relativity is created takes on aspects of laboratory, workshop studio and festival spaces.

The heteronomous work formed with the (partial) participation of others is intimately connected to the question of the relationship between Art and everyday life that has received so much attention since the 1990's. There is an experimentality to this question, through its relationship to the concept of true originality, which is part of a series of questions raised by the work of Marcel Duchamp and John Cage, among others. The Duchampian relationship between participation of the viewer in the work and the degree of its existence as a work of art, and the models for entrusting creative autonomy to the visitor and incorporating accident into the creative process devised by John Cage — in works that remodel everyday activities and cause the viewer to experience them in the gallery, the combination of these elements is the most striking. For instance, in the latter half of the 1980's, Felix Gonzalez-Torres created a minimalist installation out of candy which visitors were supposed to take home with them. The owner of the work must continually replenish the work with the same candy as long as they own it. Here is an example of the everyday activity of shopping re-modeled; conceptually it suggests a shift away from the capitalist structure

of “give and take” to a system that values the one-sided relationship of “give-and-give” (the work thrives as long as the giving continues). The installation is made up of the avant-garde action (contents) of continually giving the “work,” which functions as a surrogate for the artist’s body; the simple action of fulfilling the desire of the visitors, the take-away (interface one) and the fragments of everyday life that are the candy and posters with pretty photographs attached (interface two). Torres was a member of a group of artists centered in New York called Group Material (1979-1997), which, responding to various social problems, created an “interventionist” exhibition concerned with the state of society based on a relational structure of collaborative partnerships between artist and visitor that placed both on equal footing. The above stated are activities that bring art into real life, with many cases where artistic expression and the process of curation come together and function as one through the methodologies of “intervention” and “participation.” As well, the majority took place in museums.

What we see in the work of Torres and Rirkrit Tiravanija, i.e. a physical and emotional incorporation of the visitor on the level of the everyday (a sensual and ultimately sympathetic incorporation) unconfined by the intellectual participation of the modernist critical entity, is also well exhibited in the 1995 exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery curated by Hans-Ulrich Obrist, *Take Me, I’m Yours*. Secondhand clothes in the installation by Christian Boltanski are taken home as souvenirs, and the lottery drawing for visitors by Douglas Gordon offers a metaphorical “blind date” with the artist. There are similar experiments involving the use of sympathetic methods to question the idea of value, such as the exchange projects by artists like Japan’s Yamaide Jun’ya and Fuji Hiroshi, the Camvalache Collective and Surasi Kusolwong.

The shape of the work constantly changes through the involvement of the visitor, and while a certain atmosphere emerges within the museum, the museum space is actually just a point of transit

between people and the work.

Entering the latter half of the 1990’s, the format of visitor participation and vicarious experience of remodeled everyday experiences progressed to entertainment works. Works on exhibition literally began to resemble storefront windows, movie theaters, party halls or amusement parks, and museum exhibition spaces began to overflow with mirror balls and music, bars, dolls and balloons, play equipment etc. Although it is debatable whether they deal with the question of the metamorphosis of the museum in order to bring in works of art, or the question of expanding and developing the museum interface in order to bring in more visitors, examples such as *Let’s Entertain* (Walker Art Center and others), *Abracadabra* (Tate Gallery) and the 2000 Taipei Biennale must be mentioned. This trend also began to appear in Japan in the late 1990’s and today enjoys widespread penetration (3).

Most of the methodologies related to this shift to entertainment-oriented works take as their departure point the pursuit by artists of the best form for art as a tool to induce communication, and the attractiveness and accessibility of an entertaining interface. Perhaps one could rather say that most of the works are unconscious appropriations from the living environment that surrounds the artists. Cafe, club, massage room installations, amusement sites created by installing play equipment — most of the ready-made “place” works created as artist’s projects or installations in cities are reversing the age-old relationship of protector/protected between the museum space and the fragile avant-garde work that was limited to the protective space of the museum. In other words, the fragile “museum” is given, through these works that might best be termed a moderate avant-garde, an alibi for existential meaning.

These so-called “party exhibitions” that incorporate elements of participation and entertainment address an overwhelming equalization of artist, visitor, museum (exhibition space) and everyday spaces outside museums, and inspire questions as

to whether a space can maintain as a heterotopia the critical nature inherent in its conventional function. Naturally, presenting work of critical content merely with an interface that methodologically incorporates elements of entertainment does not make a museum an entertainment facility. Much of the criticism that such is the shape of pandering to capitalism confuses this point. Insofar as one can define content and interface, the structure and strategy of the museum and the structure and strategy of the work itself are remarkably similar.

Museums have experimented with bringing contemporary works into the process of assigning historical value. Through this the avant-garde has been absorbed into the system, meaning it will be collected and archived. When rethinking the relationship between the museum and the avant-garde, we must consider the idea of escaping old models like *Zeitgeist* as exhibition and *zeitlos* as collection.

Would a museum opened in order to keep the avant-garde alive, to be a heterotopia, be a “mixture”? Many kinds of places coexist without any exchange between them. Were we to decide to concoct such a mixture, the goal would be to detach from the “system” and revisit our understanding of the museum space, without establishing a hierarchy between the museum and other heterotopias. While (museum) space, idiosyncratic and subject to location politics, and the museum as system continue to combine to produce a “fantasy,” in them is a mutually conflicting relationship. Islands in the same sea—the archipelago model is also applicable here.

The currently proceeding the 21st Century Museum of contemporary Art Kanazawa Project, while on the one hand recognizing the processes of equalization and leveling and incorporating them as structure, has as its goal what might be called the existence of multiple heterotopias. That in itself is an indication of tolerance, and conflict.

(Translated by Miki Associates.)

- (1) Based on an idea from a lecture, "Of Other Spaces," given by Michel Foucault in 1967. Published in French as: Michel Foucault, "Des Espace Autres." *Architecture/Mouvement/ Continuité* , October 1984. Published in English as: Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", *Diacritics* , 1986, pp. 22-27.
- (2) Bürger, Peter , *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984.
- (3) In Japan, one could offer as an example the 1996 exhibition "Art Life 21: Join me ! " (the planning of which the author was involved in) at Spiral / Wacoal Art Center (Tokyo), which consisted of both visual art and performance art. Other examples of exhibitions known for their participatory form are "Releasing Senses" (1999) at the Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery and "Game Over" (1999) at the Watarium Museum of Contemporary Art; "Nagomi's Hint" at the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art (2000) and "The Gift of Hope" at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (2000) could also be said to follow this trend.