

Beyond the “McGuggenheim”: Museum Globalization and its Critics

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Over the past two decades, art museums have undergone what has been categorized as a radical redefinition of their function and meaning in society through the influx of corporate marketing and globalization in their operation. Throughout the boom and bust economy of the late-1980s and 90s, museums explored ways to develop and attract audiences to increase revenues and the museum’s place in society. These efforts followed a period of controversial deaccessioning at major museums, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Guggenheim, which funded the purchase of artworks by well-known, marketable artists and supported ambitious, on-site expansion projects. At the same time, the 1990s presented an existential crisis as to the mission and identity of museums as research and educational institutions (Harrison 2005). Facing a competitive tourism and cultural heritage industry, museums explored ways to optimize profits while attempting to define their character, particularly as they moved into the twenty-first century. Following the branding and marketing of museums as cultural staples, museums were seen as social tools that could be used to generate tourism, stimulate urban renewal and define cultural presents, pasts, and their futures.

By the end of the 1990s, with the increasing global interconnectedness provided by the internet and the dot-com craze, museums began to test their profitability within a global economy. Spearheaded by the Guggenheim Foundation under the leadership of Thomas Krens, the Guggenheim Bilbao demonstrated the profitability of the international expansion of museums and opened the door for future expansions under Krens’s ambitious master plan, which included various museums in Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and the Americas. This however, was halted by the post-9/11 economic crash, after which most of the Guggenheim’s projects were placed on hold. It was not until the past couple of years that the Guggenheim’s global expansion initiatives

were revitalized, particularly with its upcoming branch in Abu Dhabi – where it will be joined as well by the Louvre Museum’s first international branch.

The Persian Gulf states, primarily the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, have currently become the epicenter of this controversial globalization of the museum industry. Powered by oil revenues and in an alleged effort to lessen their dependence on this source of income, these Arab states are attempting to create an alternate source of income through urban renewal and cultural tourism that will make their cities cultural centers comparable to important cities, such as London, New York, Paris, etc. Qatar alone plans to build ten to twelve major museums within the next decade and comparable plans exist in Dubai and Abu Dhabi (Waxman 2009, 69). While the Guggenheim expansions in the United States and Europe caused outrage in regards to the alleged *selling-out* of cultural institutions, the expansion into the Arab world introduces an important post-/neo-colonial problem embedded within the already existing charges against the corporatization of cultural institutions.

Despite its criticisms, it is likewise impossible to deny that museums today exist in an increasingly globalized world, particularly after the rise of the internet over the past two decades. As one scholar has noted in his criticism of the Guggenheim Bilbao expansion, the agreement was being established during the Gulf War, in the immediate aftermath of the post-Cold War world, and the museum opened its doors just as the US policies of containment were being replaced in favor of transnational approaches to political and social interaction. This, he suggests, demonstrates that Krens intimately understood the dynamic and timely potential of international expansion (Guilbaut 2005, 134). Therefore, the Krens Guggenheim model cannot be so easily dismissed as the move rose to the challenge of a globalizing world with startling acuity. Since its opening, the Guggenheim Bilbao has flourished, achieving its goals in

redirecting tourism to the city and having a “stunning success in revitalizing Bilbao,” as observed by one of the museum’s major critics (Zulaika 2005, 149). Nevertheless, the model is still centered on New York. The majority of the events at the Guggenheim Bilbao are travelling exhibitions from New York City and as such, the museum earns its pejorative description as a franchise, providing the local audience with a standardized, universal commodity that is mass-produced for the world.

The existence of a global museum network is not the problem, the challenge is how this structure is used and operated. When describing the Guggenheim, former Guggenheim New York Deputy Director and Chief Curator, Lisa Dennison, wrote that the museum has worked toward “international cultural co-operation...through travelling exhibitions that it has sent to Europe, Asia, Australia [and] through major loan exhibitions that have brought art treasures from Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America to New York” (Dennison 2003). Dennison’s description, suggests an operation in which the museum brings to the capital a series of “art treasures,” while transmitting prepackaged theses on their cultural objects through their own travelling exhibitions. Nevertheless, this conceptual model demonstrates the shortfalls, not so much of a business plan, but rather of conception of art as a universal aesthetic to which Western museums have a privileged knowledge and power over. It is in this exportation of values without a de-centered discourse that museums risk being neocolonial entities of cultural colonialism.

This paper will discuss the discourse between power and knowledge in the international expansion of museums through a focus on the criticisms made by influential figures in the Western art world. I will begin by addressing these critics’ accusations that the globalization of museums inherently corrupts cultural heritage through commercialization in order to analyze the concepts of art, heritage, history and the museum upon which these criticisms are constructed. I

argue, however, that these perspectives undermine the function and practice of cultural heritage by attempting to apply universally a Western view of art and museums. The central problem that then emerges is that if international expansion is undertaken with the attempt to “preserve” the integrity of art and the museum by Western standards, then this leads to a neocolonial enforcement of how cultural heritage should be perceived and interpreted according to Western standards. I conclude by arguing that museum expansion needs to be being welcoming and open to change not merely in their exhibition programs and planning, but in the very manner in which they interact with and perceive themselves and their collection in foreign cultures.

Cultural Heritage and Commercialism: The Criticism

In an article appropriately titled, “Les Musées ne sont pas à vendre,” honorary director of the Musées de France, Françoise Cachin; curator and writer, Jean Clair; and professor at the Collège de France, Roland Recht, attacked the Louvre for its recent accord with a United Arab Emirate to create a branch of the Louvre Museum in Abu Dhabi. Various other French sources, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s former director, Philippe de Montebello publically attacked the Louvre’s actions, along with those of the Guggenheim Foundation’s revitalized expansion efforts for their corrupting commercialization of cultural institutions. Cachin, Clair and Recht criticize the Guggenheim for being the “*désastreux pionnier*” of the paid exportation of their collections via international expansion, mortgaging their holdings through loan fees, and promoting themselves as part of the “*entertainment business*” (Cachin, Clair and Recht 2006).

The problem here is that by commercializing cultural heritage, museums risk, quoting de Montebello, “*d’y perdre leur âme*” – “to lose their soul.” What the writers are addressing,

however, is a forced separation between art/cultural-heritage objects and consumer goods, which they interestingly describe in their conclusion as follows:

Qu'avons-nous en France de mieux à offrir que nos trésors d'art, qui attirent chaque année une grande partie des 76 millions de touristes, les plus nombreux du monde ? Que l'on puisse rêver d'un monde où circuleraient librement les hommes et les biens de consommation est légitime. Mais les objets du patrimoine ne sont pas des biens de consommation, et préserver leur avenir, c'est garantir, pour demain, leur valeur universelle. (Cachin, Clair and Recht 2006)

Cachin, et al. stress that the free exchange of peoples and consumer goods across the world is a legitimate goal, but objects of cultural patrimony are not consumer goods and to preserve them for the future is to guarantee their universal value.

This conclusion, however, which seems to posit cultural heritage as antithetical to the consumer good, interestingly begins by citing the amount of tourists that their heritage attracts every year. Earlier on, they mention that it also not just for the Louvre's *paying* visitors to be deprived of seeing the works that they came to see, because they are either in the High Museum in Atlanta, as per their travelling exhibition agreement, or in the Louvre Abu Dhabi. To pretend that these are not economic concerns would be insincere, and this double-edged argument is evident in most of the French critics' arguments against the Louvre Abu Dhabi who criticize commercialism, yet also stress the beneficial, financial, effects of cultural tourism on their own nation – one of their greatest national resources, even if not explicitly termed in this manner. Nevertheless, another French institution for cultural patrimony issued a statement, explicitly stating that, “works of art...are by definition, by nature, a universal characteristic and as such belong to world heritage. And, for the same reasons, they cannot be regarded and treated as commodities” [Translation Mine] (CGT-Culture 2007).

This alleged division between the artwork and the commodity needs to be critically reevaluated in the context of cultural heritage studies. David Lowenthal cites the medieval relic market as a past example of the commercialization of heritage, and observes that the commercialization of cultural heritage objects is not new. Instead, he argues, “What *is* novel is the mistaken notion that such abuses are new and hence intolerable” (Lowenthal 1998, 101). Deriving its power from human-object relationships, cultural heritage objects are subject to the manners in which societies apprehend their social lives and the objects that co-exist. These objects have fluid meanings that are always being constructed, de-constructed and re-constructed. As such, one needs to understand these “criticisms,” not as some quasi-divine, enlightened warning, but rather as one part of the construction of the identity of art objects – precisely at a moment where different interactions are being conceived and enacted.

Commercialism is not acultural. Globalization is not even a foreign invention, at least not for Americans, therefore, one could conceive of the interpretation of cultural heritage as a commodity to be precisely a reflection of American materiality. This is not something to be judged, particularly, not by academics that are entrusted to *study* the world – not pass judgments on behaviors. Instead, these resistances to the museum as a business should be considered a step removed, using this historiography as an indicator of the conflicting *materialities* of objects in the present. These criticisms are excellent sources as to the academic perspective on the situation, but they should not be privileged and even most importantly, the arguments made by Thomas Krens, for example, should not be disregarded or demoted as less valid.

In his book on material culture and mass-consumption, Miller precisely argued that mass-consumer-goods and commodities are not only important because they figure into our landscape, but because they are just as responsible for the dialectic *objectification* that produces social

relationships (Miller 1987). Art is always given the prime place of “cultural heritage,” it is the example of cultural heritage par excellence, however, when it comes to conceiving it as a malleable category, it is repeated to be an untouchable and “sacred” aspect of culture. This is seen in the various criticisms to the expansion and commercialization of museum, despite the thought that the notion of art as sacred was an outmoded nineteenth-century fancy. This is very much with us, both academically and particularly, it seems, in the minds of most museum visitors.

At the center of the debate about museum globalization is an intrinsic tension between *history* and *heritage*,¹ following in the divide eloquently articulated by David Lowenthal (Lowenthal 1998). Heritage has often been conceived of as a misused, corrupted and “bad” version of history that has spoiled pure history with its purposeful distortions:

Heritage is scolded for swerving from the true past – selecting, altering, inventing. But history also does this. Like heritage, history cannot help but be different from, as well as both less and more than, the actual past. (Lowenthal 1998, 112)

While few scholars today would argue that objectivity is possible in the production of history, few would likewise think that no progress is being made to approximate the truth, observes Lowenthal. To distinguish heritage from history, Lowenthal then suggests that the difference lies in the intentions of the two. History does not differ from heritage in “telling” truth, but in

¹ Throughout Lowenthal’s volume, there is a dichotomous opposition of heritage based on intention and function – heritage is about making communities, and fostering a meaningful past; history is about desiring the truth, despite its quixotic nature. The tone appears to carry a postmodernist’s lament for the undeniable loss of faith in history’s truthfulness. Thus, while arguing against the objectivity of history, Lowenthal still seems to attempt to separate the two – even if always meandering back to the conclusion that history is beyond reach. This subtle anxiety is telling. It is indicative of the overall scholarly hesitation to relinquish one’s domain of history proper to the so-called, “heritage crusade.” One, however, could understand heritage not as an appropriation of history, but rather of heritage as being the overall culture that produces history as one of its various institutions. History is a manner in which one argues for a certain thesis in heritage, yet its products both emerge from the heritage into which its creators were enculturated and then go on to alter that heritage.

“trying” to do so (Lowenthal 1998, 119). Most importantly, however, is not the intentionality of the author, but rather their intentionality as perceived in their readers. The line between history and heritage best exists as blurred.

The American museum has allegedly corrupted heritage in its conceptual understanding. The Guggenheim is the one blamed for the “disastrous pioneering” of the commercial museum and its globalization. The use of terms such as “Disneylandisation”² of culture are not nation-neutral, they engender this issue as an American problem being exported to the world. Nevertheless, this trend has been occurring for decades now and truly goes back to the origins of museums from private collections and cabinets of curiosity. In a statement entitled, “Après Atlanta, Abou Dhabi, et bientôt Shangai, Saõ Paulo... Non à la « Disneylandisation » de la Culture !”, the association of employees of the French Ministry of Culture and Communication argued against the “touristification” of culture that sought to turn all their grand museums and cultural monuments into theme parks. Their list of grievances cited the creation of the Louvre’s

² The place of “Disneyland” in scholarly discourse, for example, is a fascinating subject, albeit beyond the scope of this paper. Briefly, however, one should note that while Disneyland is derided for its commercialism, mass-production, and revisioning and mythologizing of fanciful pasts, it is nevertheless a crucially important figure in the enculturation of American youths through films, television, music and its (in)famous theme parks. This demonstrates two things: firstly, that it is an important figure in need of serious study and analysis, without mere criticism, and secondly, that it is highly successful in its production of cultural heritage relationships. Is Mickey Mouse above commercialism? Of course, not, quite the contrary, he/it has become part of a cultural heritage because of its mass-production and commercialism.

In a world, increasingly globalized and technologized, museums need to adapt to the challenges. Disney theme parks, particularly EPCOT Center, have a similar connection to the universal museum through the World’s Fair tradition (Nelson 1986). Since the 1980s and 90s, these theme parks have competed with museums as they likewise provide immediate contact with certain cultural icons in new and innovative ways, which challenged the manner in which museums present themselves today (MacDonald 1988, Harrison 2005, 44). While these adaptations tend to be reactionary, and usually financially motivated, it is usually because museums have resisted change – after all they are institutions of preservation and conservation, lag, like patina, is part of their charm. When these organizations find themselves having to give in, this does not mean that the museum is losing its integrity, but rather that it is evolving along with socio-cultural change. Tourism and revenues are not syndrome, but symptom. With technology and globalism, the changes are not merely about a business plan, but rather they concern the very manner in which societies receive, collect, understand, and work with information, knowledge, visual cultures and objects. It presents fractures in the very semiotics of experience. To not adapt is dangerous and fails at the goals of cultural property.

relationship with the High Museum in Atlanta, the introduction of a Starbucks in the Louvre, the opening and popularity of Disneyland Paris, and even a passing mention of Dan Brown's popular novel, *The Da Vinci Code* (Cfdt Culture 2007).

The Louvre-Atlanta deal, the Louvre's Starbucks and Disneyland Paris often appear in the criticism of various sources. The Atlanta project, for example, sets up a system where travelling exhibitions and loans would be sent from the Louvre to the High Art Museum. This €13 million deal has been described as catering to "la riche cité du Coca-Cola" (Cachin, Clair and Recht 2006) and employing "frauduleusement américanisé" marketing schemes, such as "I Louvre Atlanta" t-shirts (Cfdt Culture 2007). Combined with the introduction of Starbucks at the Louvre, these behaviors have been understood as being distinctly American. While museums everywhere have cafeterias and small coffee shops, the introduction of a "Starbucks," an American brand infamous for mass-producing itself across the world, produces a very violent reaction. It is therefore not surprising that the attack on the Atlanta deal makes a jab at the city's involvement with Coca-Cola, who is subjected to many of the same criticisms as Starbucks.

The appearance of these trademarks in France suggests a reaction as to what could be likened to globalism's equivalent of "negative heritage," as discussed by Lynn Meskell. Negative heritage refers to sites that present a negative, problematic memory for a community that then attempts to rehabilitate them into the national imaginary by destroying them or using them as didactic tools (Meskell 2002). For French scholars of their cultural patrimony, these trademarks exist, often, as literal sites of an immediate and occurring negative memory, one that threatens to upset the socio-cultural meanings and behaviors of their institutions. Therefore, they need to be stopped and used as examples of a negative history, that is also somehow foreign – an invasion of American corporations, not a native French creation. In American critics against

museums, the same process is evident, however, the boundaries between us and them – museums and the corporations is produced through scholarship and academia, where art and even its own market, is separated from the megalomaniacal globalism of the Wall Street. Krens is not one of “us,” he did not have an art history doctorate, but rather an MBA.

This discussion is not only about who possesses an object, but also about who controls the knowledges that emerge from their materiality. Then, these criticisms are not debating cultural property ownership of objects, but rather the possession of the intangible heritage that flows through objects to produce relationships. A Starbucks in the Louvre, as a site, exists as an object subjected to objectification, which produces and receives meanings. The resistance against the globalization art and its institution demonstrates a power play over intellectual property, that is, the conceptualization of art and museums. By criticizing these brands, it is not merely commercialism that is attacked, but most importantly a local, nationalist heritage. In recent years, with anti-American sentiments across the world, following the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the looting of their museums, America has been greatly criticized for its actions concerning cultural heritage and its outlook toward the world in regards to its neo-colonial behaviors. It is not surprising that one critic went as far as to criticize the “foundation américaine Guggenheim” and its Abu Dhabi project as operating under the formula of “oil for art” – a reworking of the traditional anti-war criticism, “blood for oil” (CGT-Culture 2007). Cultural heritage debates are in the end rooted in this process of contesting the intangible materialities of objects and sites; it is as much about the material and intellectual ownerships rights.

It is important to consider these intrinsic disparities on the perceived ontologies of art and cultural heritage, because it is through the performance of these debates that one realizes the

discussion is not merely about perceptions on these imagined, static essences, but precisely on the Foucauldian power-knowledge relationship that determines who controls these material understandings. This attack on the museum as a part of popular, mainstream culture needs to be reevaluated, because an accusation does not analyze the phenomenon. It rather circumvents the fascinating life of the museum institution against an allegedly timeless ideal of what it *should* be – just as *history* is inconveniently dichotomized against *heritage*. The incorporation of the museum and its artifacts into a popular culture implies a shift in the ontology of the museum and its artifacts.³

This requires then not a resistance, but rather an according epistemological angle through which to understand these issues and incorporate them into our discourses without deriding them as the mere influxes of perverse, foreign influences. This change in ontological perception appears to be rooted in the forced conception of a divide between history proper and cultural heritage that is enacted in the localized and global politics of scholarship and museum praxis. This is not to say that criticism is invalid, unnecessary, or that it should be ignored – these criticisms also reflect a certain group’s own understanding of the subject at hand. Instead, both arguments have to be studied as a meta-argument, as a historiography of our own work, in the immediate past. The struggle between the scholar who derides globalization and commercialism and the visitor who visits and consumes these attractions enact the same tension between the local and the global that appears to emerge in these situations of globalization.

Knowledge Power-plays: “Commercialism” as Tool to Protect Ownership over “Art”

³ To clarify, by *ontology* I do not imply an essential characteristic of the object, but rather the ontology that a group or person perceives and conceives an object as possessing.

This problem now brings this discussion to the dynamics between power and knowledge: the power created from knowledge and the power plays that emerge from knowledge. The former is often discussed in museum studies (Hooper-Greenhill 1992) and is important to the problem of museum globalization in the sense that the knowledges that these museums create set the foundation for the power structures that emerge, potentially leading to cultural colonialism. Nevertheless, these two categories are inexorably enmeshed, and here the latter becomes interesting in understanding a further dimension to the criticisms of museum globalization. In the forceful resistance to cultural heritage, being spoiled by commercialism there appears to be the enactment of the local resistance to globalization and colonization. The French critics seem to be responding not only to the loss of their own cultural heritage through its exhibition and housing in abroad, but also to the colonization of their cultural property by distinctly American notions of commercialism. Therefore, one can see this debate as a colonization of the materiality of cultural heritage, as a hostile take-over of its symbols and meanings. One could say that the debate on cultural property is really one concerned with the intellectual property rights associated in the apprehension of material culture.

It seems that at times it is not only a problem of commercialization, but also as to whom it is being sold. Commercialization caters to the masses, to the tourists that come in throngs and gawk at the circuit of key works: Mona Lisa, Venus de Milo, and Nike of Samothrace. It seems that the assertion of control of knowledge is precisely rooted in the notion of art as high culture. Rosalind Krauss, for example, was a follower of one of the most influential art critics of the late-twentieth century, Clement Greenberg. In his well-read article, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," Greenberg presents a notion where art's utmost goal, in its purest state, is to be completely self-reflexive (Greenberg 1939). He cites an imaginary Russian peasant for falling in love with

Realist paintings of Ilya Repin and disliking the purer art form of the Russian Avant-Garde because they were too uneducated to understand art. What Greenberg was addressing, however, was not some intrinsic truth about the nature of art, but rather that the concept of art is a cultural institution with its own processes of enculturation. While Greenberg has been criticized for these viewpoints, it seems that at the core of most discussions of art there is still the same regard for art as something for the educated and the refined.

Perhaps the most telling argument is found in art historian and critic, Rosalind Krauss's "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum," published in 1990, just as the Guggenheim Museum was deaccessioning works at auction for their expansion and planning Krens's global expansion plan. She suggests that the capitalist art museum emerges from Minimalism's own, internal criticisms on commercialization, whose ambiguity has been tapped through a "revisionist understanding" to validate the commercialized museum. Krauss writes,

[E]ven if Minimalism seems to have been conceived in *specific* resistance to the fallen world of mass culture – with its disembodied media images – and of consumer culture – with its banalized, commodified objects – in an attempt to restore immediacy of experience, the door it opened onto "refabrication" nonetheless was one that had the potential to let that whole world of late capitalist production right back in. (Krauss 1990, 10)

Where minimalism used the serial repetition of objects to stress a phenomenological experience that could not be readily apprehended and constantly shifting in meaning and understanding, Krauss says that the capitalist museum has understood these attacks on mass production as its own glorification. Rosalind Krauss produces an interesting analysis; however, one has to consider her methodology and her judgmental tone. I suggest we read Krauss's argument not only for its context, but most importantly as an art historian and academic's attempt at

repossessing a cultural heritage that appears to them as being removed from their field of power and knowledge through commercialization. Commercialization is merely an accusation that is being employed within a power struggle based on ownerships of knowledge.

As she suggests in her opening anecdotes, the museum has become the object itself. Krauss's argument methodologically describes the museum as an art object itself in order to perform art history's ownership over the museum through its intellectual possession within a teleological history of art – as an art object, according to the established notions of art, it must be inherently free from the effects of commercialism. Therefore, when she makes the claim that in the late capitalist museum model “aesthetic immediacy” has been replaced by “simulacral experience” (Krauss 1990, 17),⁴ she is commenting on art itself – the alleged corruption is thus conceived of as nothing but unacceptable. To tamper with the museum's aesthetics is now to tamper not with a business or even an institution, but with a work of art – this is the implication. Yet this argument is static. It studies the art museum and art, as well, not through an ethnographic approach, but rather as an intellectual conception contrasted with practice.

⁴ Her conclusion is that the “field of experience is no longer history, but space itself...” (Krauss 1990, 17). With this, she refers to the lack of a historical scope in these museums, but rather a focus on specific artists and intense experiential spaces, likeable to that of an amusement park – like Disneyland, the typical comparison. Her observation is correct: the museum no longer houses history, but rather is an experience. This, however, is not new. The museum has always been an experience in as much as it involves a social landscape of interactions. The shift from “aesthetic immediacy” refers to the fact that the system, which has tightly attempted to focus the receptions of these objects as purely aesthetic and educational, is giving way to other understandings – such as the object as commodity or as site of cultural heritage debates. The museum has been a site of heritage, although with the aspiration of history. This mere aspiration is not a failure. The historical meaning of any object is merely a fraction of its total understanding – in fact, static archaeological explanations of objects are quite simple and can become much greater and more developed (Leventhal 2007, 7).

To privilege the history over heritage, as has been argued above, would be short sighted, and likewise her attack against the “revising” of Minimalism is also an alleged abuse that demonstrates a misunderstanding of heritage and history. Her argument itself is a re-revision of Minimalism, to serve Krauss's own argumentative goals. Krauss also avoids the fact that throughout this period of her life, as a key champion of the Minimalist movement, she herself has also been romantically involved with one of its main proponents, Robert Morris (Chave 2000). In 1994, when the Guggenheim did a retrospective of Morris's work, Krauss commented to a colleague, that although she disliked the Guggenheim, she was contributing to the exhibition for Morris's sake. This is not meant to be a mere piece of gossip or an *ad hominem* attack on Krauss, rather it is merely meant to stress the fact that her own, supposedly proper history and interpretation of Minimalism has been affected and arisen through a deep personal involvement with the movement.

I believe that Greenberg and Krauss's arguments demonstrate the critical power-play over the category of "art" as way of ensuring that cultural heritage remains tied to academic discourse and is not possessed by other Western forms of cultural life. These debates do not consider that art as part of material culture is activated by social interactions and that this ontology of the *objet d'art* is only one field of interpretation, with its own variations and dimensions. This is not meant to be a populist argument for art, but rather an acknowledgement that artifacts deemed as art find their importance precisely because the social relations that are established with them – the fact that they are interacted with *as* art, or as cultural heritage. The control of art-artifacts from being incorporated into commercial understandings demonstrates a scholarly resistance to a mass or popular culture. Popular culture is not lowbrow.⁵

Art has never been a stable category, constantly changing according to socio-cultural factors, and across different geographies. Not to mention as well that most of the objects in museum collections today, where made before there even was a concept of "art." Likewise, one must also consider that historical and archaeological understandings are usually 'insincere' to the very lifeworlds they are attempting to recreate. They express information about the past that is based on modern perspectives, and most importantly, they at times produce too much information about these worlds. Michel de Certeau describes the difference between seeing the city from the sky versus the experience of experiencing the city as follows:

The panorama-city is a "theoretical" (that is, visual) simulacrum...
The ordinary practitioners of the city live "down below," below the
thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk – an elementary
form of this experience of the city; they are walkers,

⁵ Richard Leventhal credits art museums, in fact, as allowing for a more dynamic understanding of material culture precisely, because the focus on aesthetics lessens the institutional narratives that typically restrict meanings in archaeological or anthropological museums: "Art museums...have been much more successful in the creation of meaning for objections. Such museums and displays are not trying to (re)create the past but are rather creating a new context of the past within the present." (Leventhal 2007, 8).

Wandersmänner, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” they write without being able to read it. (de Certeau 1984, 93)

One can liken the process of historical inquiry and archaeology to the process of seeing the city from above, perhaps even better, on a cloudy day. Archaeologists and historians know both too much and too little. They know details about daily life and artistic production that usually is not known to those who interacted with these artifacts. I, for example, do not know who designed my iPod, where it was produced, how the workshop structure looks like, or the history of it. Nevertheless, this object is enmeshed in my daily life and has a deep materiality that is constantly changing, not only my perspective towards it, but to the world around it. The factors that make an iPod, a computer, a work of art, important to a person today goes well beyond its material creation, which is often even unknown, to its contemporaries.

Therefore, to restrict notions of art and artifacts to the limits of scholarly, academic discourses is terribly detrimental, because it negates the actual problems with cultural heritage by glossing over them as being slippages into popular misreading and misconceptions – “bad” history. As Lowenthal suggested, this hostility against de-centered, popular readings of material culture, particularly in the case of art, I would argue, stem from scholarly envy (Lowenthal 1998, 170). This forceful belief that “good” history has a privileged role in the understanding of artifacts can be attributed to the academic’s envy at the power of “bad” history, heritage to produce dynamic social realities from objects. It is a way of asserting their own authority and intellectual ownership over objects, no matter where they came from or where they are. In this quest for a “pure,” non-commercial art world, however, the arguments that have emerged against the international expansion of museums has demonstrated a dangerously colonialist perspective on the Arab World and the “Non-Western.”

I wish to present a comparative example: In her recent studies on the art market in Egypt, Jessica Winegar's research demonstrates a push to foster local artists by the Egyptian ministry of culture, which is also adjoined by possessions to the intellectual understandings of these objects. Claims and assumptions of authority as to the presentation, study and practice of local artists produces tensions between the foreign, usually Western, curator who claims to have the intellectual breath of global art history and museology to make judgments and interpretations about Egyptian artists. Both the local and international authorities stress their knowledge and expertise. The local Egyptian curators, in many instances, feared the push to "Americanize" Egyptian art (Winegar 2006a, 188). While this problem features more the problem of a developing art culture, it also has an implicit tie to the understanding of objects already produced. It demonstrates a situation that emerges in the juncture between American globalism and national contestations to rights over the conceptions and readings of cultural artifacts based on claims to expertise, both local and global. The tension demonstrates a contestation over who gets to control the process of objectification, either the global or local agents. Furthermore, however, as in the issues being discussed, this expands to cover the very basic understanding of the entire category of objects classified as cultural heritage.

For the French critics, "commercialism" is not merely perceived as an internal (national) problem, but it is most importantly an American import.⁶ Therefore, this debate, which seems at

⁶ It is interesting to note that by the time that the Guggenheim Bilbao opened its doors the Hermitage was already planning parts of its expansion projects, the majority without the Guggenheim's aid, and had already opened their Hermitage-Kazan Exhibition Center in Tatarstan. The now defunct Hermitage-Guggenheim Las Vegas is widely addressed in passing in relationship to wider Guggenheim criticism, but the Hermitage also has a thriving exhibition center in Amsterdam that has recently opened an adjacent Children's Hermitage. They briefly had an exhibition gallery in London's Somerset House and in 2007 opened the Hermitage-Italy Center in Ferrara to study Russian-Italian connections. The Vilnius Guggenheim was also a joint project with the Hermitage. Although the Guggenheim has put this project on hold, it seems that it is still being considered an Hermitage project. The fact that the Hermitage's international expansion campaign has received little to no attention suggests to me that the criticism against the Guggenheim are motivated more for its position as a global *American* museum, rather than for just being

first to be about the ethics of museum commercialization and expansion, reveals itself to have an important dimension as a debate on cultural ownership. Although it would seem to be otherwise, there is no problem when art is a tourist attraction that generates revenues for (and within) the French state. In fact, as Cachin, et al. wrote, “What do we have in France better to offer than our treasures of art, which attract each year a great part of the 76 million tourists, the most in the world?” [Translation Mine] (Cachin, Clair and Recht 2006). To summarize, as a reaction to globalism these criticisms are not merely pinned on social definitions and practices of cultural heritage, art, commercialism, etc, but rather are using them to enact their intellectual ownership over their cultural heritage objects in the face of a museum movement, per se, begun by foreign agents and for foreign audiences. Therefore, for one to criticize these debates as being shortsighted or poorly developed would be equally problematic. These debates are not historical scholarship, but instead are an important part of the discourse that empowers cultural heritage (they are themselves cultural heritage).

Colonial Logic against Globalism

Through their inclusion and exclusion of audiences and agents, they enact the unifying function of cultural heritage in society. The problem one must be cautious of, however, is that in carving this nationalist niche and performing their cultural heritage claims, they are producing a logic that translates as neo-colonial and imperial. In an attempt to keep art and museums from “losing their soul,” the criticisms have interestingly made assumptions about the target audiences that at times are colored by neo-imperial notions about these host countries as somehow debased,

an international museum. Albeit much lesser in scale, the Hermitage provides a more vibrant expansion campaign than even its Guggenheim partner has.

uneducated and underdeveloped – *nouveaux riches* of culture, excessive and somewhat primitive.

In an interview addressing museum expansion, Philippe de Montebello commented on the Abu Dhabi expansion by the Louvre and Guggenheim by saying that the security of works of art was the key issue, “Laisser sortir un tableau qui risque de se détériorer dans un climat chaud et humide parce qu’il y a un gros contrat à la clé...” (de Montebello and Herzberg 2007). His comment that it is dangerous to send paintings to hot and humid climate presents a criticism that portrays the Emirates as an underdeveloped country incapable of caring for works of art. The fact of the matter is that the new museums being build in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Qatar will probably have climate control systems more advanced than those in most Western museums. Not to mention, as well, given the relative stability of temperatures in that region of the world, there is less of a seasonal variation, which truly causes some of the most damage to art. The other sources cited here previously have also expressed a concern for security, which seems unsubstantial. Works of art are always at a constant risk when they travel, even when loaned for the most research-based exhibits and to the largest museums. Art travel is problematic, but rarely are works irreparably damaged or lost, it is common in almost all exhibitions to show loaned works. This is not an unheard or new conservation challenge.

In fact, de Montebello later in the interview encourages the travel of works of art to Asia and Africa, for example – do these not have regions that are hot and humid? Here de Montebello goes on to say, that Asia and Africa, “...non seulement ont retrouvé de l’intérêt pour leur art, mais aussi pour celui du reste du monde” (de Montebello and Herzberg 2007). This statement demonstrates a problematic way of thinking about foreign communities and their engagement with art. The notion that Asia and Africa “ont retrouvé” presupposes that these regions had a

Euro-American notion of art before colonialism and that somehow they have now re-found it, a paradise regained that follows in an argument for the universality of art, one that was equally voiced by Krens (Krens, Knöfel and von Dewitz 2008).⁷ This is not to say other cultures do not value their material culture, no one would argue that, however, to impose Western notions of aesthetics and art on other cultures demonstrates the true colonialism of culture – again a colonialism that is not dealing merely with physical actions, but rather in the power-knowledge dialogue.

As addressed previously, this contestation of different meanings for objects has been at the core of the arguments against expansion, however, in de Montebello's comments it is no longer a mere methodological structure behind the thinking that produces the criticism. Instead, the criticism itself states that some regions have lost interest in their art, but now have regained them, and suggests that Western museums should help them restore this interest. This feeds into colonialist notions of the uneducated savage who cannot appreciate its treasures and must be taught by the empire how to appreciate their own creations. As Edward Said observed, the Orient cannot represent itself, but must rely on the expertise and internationalism of the West to represent its nature and essentials (Said 1978, 26), similarly noted in Egypt's contemporary art market and its 'authority' politics by Winegar's studies, cited above. The criticisms and observations that have been discussed here appear to take for granted the claim to a "universal" cultural heritage, with a very specific and regulated range of social behaviors, practices and conceptions that are acceptable for them. Nevertheless, the notion of heritage, like that of the museum, is not universal. It is in itself fostered in a Western image of cultural heritage.

⁷ It is dangerous to believe, as de Montebello suggested, that Africa and Asia have now "rediscovered" interest in their art, without first examining under what categories these "art"-objects existed before this alleged Renaissance, how the current notions of "art" bear traces of these non-centered materialities, and how this (re)discovery has occurred. Interest in art is not a creation, but rather a shift in the perception of material culture(s) that requires a socio-cultural understanding – it is not autonomous to the object, it is a semiotic transformation.

In an interview by *Der Spiegel* with Krens about the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, his interviewers were very determined to champion the imagined other's perspective by asking him, "...it's hard to imagine a museum for the sometimes drastic art of the modern age and the present side-by-side with strict Islamic culture, which permits only purely ornamental art" (Krens, Knöfel and von Dewitz 2008). In defending against potential colonization, the interviewers have actually subjected themselves to making gross-generalizations, similar to those by others that depict the Arab-Islamic nations as too traditional or extremist to understand or care for art and its practices (de Montebello and Herzberg 2007, Waxman 2009). As a timely case-in-point, art historian Finbarr Barry Flood precisely criticized this alleged notion of a unified perspective of Islamic iconoclasm as being atemporal condition by looking at the case of the Bamiyan Buddhas. Rather than as a continuation of distinctly Muslim iconoclasm, Flood typifies their destruction as a socio-politically motivated performative act, intended to stress the Taliban's hegemony in front of a global audience – not some arcane hatred of images (Flood 2002).

Flood stressed, following Carl Ernst, that such depoliticized perspectives on Muslim iconoclasm, do "not acknowledge its subjects as actors in historical contexts" (Ernst 2000, 116). To consider merely an ageless iconoclastic bend not only denies cultural change, but it also dangerously ignores the active potency of cultural heritage sites and attempts to unify a wide and diverse region under the same theological restrictions. Saadiyat Island and its museums were planned by the Emirate government, are they conceived of as so poorly educated that they petitioned for art without realizing that there will be the presence of the human figure? Homi Bhabha criticized Edward Said's monolithic 'Orient' (Said 1978) precisely for its similar depiction as a unified racial, geographical, political, religious and cultural segment of the world

(Bhabha 2004, 101). In fact, the situation in the Emirates could not be less monolithic, as the community is one sharply fragmented between religious sects, ethnicities, sexual identities, class and wealth (Waxman 2009, Elsheshtawy 2008).

At times, postcolonial debates on neo-colonialism tend to limit reductively the imagined agency of the colonial subjects; I offer the following example as a case in point. Following September 11, a photograph series of the recovery efforts at Ground Zero travelled the world as a form of international cultural diplomacy. In different cities, it was paired with adjacent photo exhibits that featured disasters in the host countries in order to force a sense of camaraderie. While the exhibit had a perfectly normal run in London, it was derided in Bangladesh where it was interpreted as shameless propaganda and in Nairobi, it was read as insulting – the glorious images of the New York photographer dwarfed the apparent heroism of their own compatriots depicted in their photographs of the 1998 US-embassy bombings recovery (Kennedy 2003, 323-26). Again, this makes it very clear that the moment that one attempts to limit understanding, material culture severely loses its power or elicits a vicious response from those denied their own agency in interpretation. While cultural colonialism is always a threat, it is perhaps more of a problem for the imperialist, rather than the colonized.

Above I focused on two trends in Western critics: to see the Other as incapable of understanding their art, particularly in a global context, and the Other as a monolithic and unchanging society with fundamental characteristics. What then would happen if one were to move forward with global expansion with this logic that fosters the criticisms above? In this section, I have discussed the colonial logic within the criticisms of Western museum officials perceiving the Other. What then is the threat of this logic enacted in foreign cultures? I believe that the claim for a “universal” cultural heritage, which I have alluded to previously, becomes the

critical component of the global expansion of a colonialist museum and thus must be addressed as these programs move forward.

The Colonialism of Universal Cultural Heritage

The process of appropriating objects into the history of Western Art, from the colonies has been paralleled to some as a form of non-destructive iconoclasm. Fabio Rambelli and Eric Reinders in their studies on iconoclasm suggest that the presentation of a Chinese ‘idol’ in the Church Missionary Society of the Church of England, for example, can be considered a form *iconoclastic preservation* or *negative cultural redefinition* (Rambelli and Reinders 2007, 21). The act of presenting an object in a negative context, i.e. as an idol rather than as an icon, according to them is a form of *iconoclasm* where the object is preserved, but its meaning, here a religious function, is destroyed. It is likable to the notion of *semiosis* (meaning-making), described by Richard Clay in the same volume, where iconoclasm produces new meanings for the object pre- and post-iconoclasm (Clay 2007, 117). An object in an art museum is to be regarded as an aesthetic product by contemporary standards. It is about the superficiality of the material and one is suggested that nothing is to lie beyond the object – its materiality is precisely about lacking a materiality, even if this is not the case. When one takes pieces of a material culture and appropriates them into a context of “art,” one disrupts the social functions that these objects had in the culture. Through the imposition of a different system of comprehension, an object’s meaning and function is destroyed.

Our charters, policies, advertisements, museums, writings, and so on, all suggest that “cultural heritage” is a shared, universal value. This assumption validated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the “Convention Concerning the

Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage” (1972) that begins with the consideration that natural and cultural heritage is of “universal” value (UNESCO 1972), as well as earlier in 1954 Hague Convention (UNESCO 1954). This, however, emerges from the very politics of an institution that aims to see the world under a rubric of global cooperation and unity. This is not to say that material culture does not matter globally, but rather that the value and concern for preservation comes from an organization created by Western nations. Therefore, the limitations of use and meaning that it gives to these objects are precisely limited to the prescribed ideas toward archaeology, art, history and science that factor into Western epistemologies.

In his important argument against nationalistic heritage claims, in favor of a global heritage, James Cuno criticizes the UNESCO charter for favoring what he calls the “perversion” of “nationalist retentionist cultural property laws” (Cuno 2008, 155). He attacks the charter, in particular, for being incapable of stopping the Taliban destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas and much of the Kabul Museum’s collection (Cuno 2008, 148).⁸ This reveals an important clash between globalism and localism, or nationalism, within the very category of heritage and our contemporary notions as to how it should be treated. James Cuno attacks nationalism as elitist; however, heritage is based precisely on the inclusion and exclusion of groups – the very process that he participates in by voicing his argument. His own notion of globalism is based on

⁸ Richard Clay, in his chapter on the destruction of an eighteenth century Parisian sculpture, laments its loss as a twenty-first-century art historian, but makes it clear that the destruction of cultural property entails a socio-cultural transformation of signs, addressed previously. Likewise, the destruction of cultural heritage, such as the Bamiyan Buddhas, is always lamentable, yet destruction is a very important part of cultural heritage’s engagement with the present. While the loss of the physical object is a loss to those who are concerned with art, archaeology and history, destruction entails one of the most powerful engagements with cultural heritage, usually more important than any that occurs with most objects in a museum collection. The Bamiyan Buddhas were greatly ignored by the world until their destruction, and now they have become great arguments for the need to preserve heritage. In the local politics, their destruction played a role precisely in *constructing* a community identity by a transformation of objects that served as part of the culture’s “negative heritage” (Meskell 2002). While we, as Western scholars, may see great value in the preservation of cultural heritage, for others, preservation is antithetical to their overall cultural heritage and destruction functions as a way of rehabilitating their material-cultural landscape.

including those who wish to participate in a global world, and excluding those who seek either national alliances or other perspective of material culture that defy those in service of globalism.

Philippe de Montebello, who supports Cuno's argument, and Cuno himself disagree with the international expansion of museums. Therefore, they seem to argue for a global culture, but one that is precisely controlled by museums in the West, or at least, by Western ideals of what museums should be. The Met can open gift shops across the world, tailor their Costume Institute's exhibitions to the New York, *Vogue*-led fashion industry, but making a museum in the Gulf for "petrodollars" is wrong. In my opinion, there is no problem with catering to the New York fashion scene or opening gift shops across the world. If anything, these things activate the objects in the museum's collections and encourage more interesting lives for them. The problem is not the structure of the system, but rather how this is used. There must be dialogue not only *within* the categories of cultural heritage and art, but also about what these terms mean and how they exist across the globe.

For the past ten years, the Metropolitan has had as a division of its External Affairs and Communications department, the Audience Development sub-department that runs the Multicultural Audience Development Initiative that aims at attracting multicultural visitors to the museum. Many times, I have heard this program advertise the Museum, quoting de Montebello, by saying that the Met is a place where anyone can come and see their cultural heritage by virtue of its *encyclopedic* collection. If the global, universal heritage argument were taken literally, then this would be true of *any* museum. In this statement, however, is the implicit acknowledgement that cultural heritage, no matter how global its exchange, presence and respect may be, it is implicitly rooted in localized ties. This does not mean that these ties are fostered by blood, DNA, nationalism, or any other definitive rooting, but rather emerges from group and

personal teleologies. We may conceive of ourselves as a globalized “we,” but it is not a global “I” – globalism is about collaboration not consolidation.

Museums: Moving Beyond (and Against) their Colonial Pasts

Museums, both in the United States or in Abu Dhabi, always have been and always will be vestiges of colonialism because of the institution’s history. Finding their roots in royal cabinets of curiosity and flourishing in the public art museums of the 18th and 19th centuries, the institution has been centered on national and local socio-politics with a strong and articulated colonial program (Impey and MacGregor 1985, Duncan 1995). Museums have even been typified alongside census taking and cartography as part of the rhetoric of colonial power (Anderson 1991, 163). The universal museums that collect and present the spoils of a nation’s conquests and endeavors are always guilty of imposing a certain perspective of the other, their self, and the world. To even have a museum in a non-Western country demonstrates an imposition of Western values on the rhetoric of memorialization, commemoration and even the structure by which cultural heritage is conceived.

One, however, cannot consider these crossovers from cultural contact to be “colonialist,” even if having direct links to colonial enterprises. As Lynn Meskell has suggested, globalization is no longer synonymous with Westernization when one considers the prominent role of the Asian markets and the “indigenization of the West” (Meskell 1998, 8) – not to mention as well the Emirate agents whose oil-fueled economic power makes them powerful agents in the global stage. While these market players may have emerged from their colonial histories, they have come to be critical players in their own right.

The same is possible with museums; in fact, expansion offers an exciting opportunity to experience a reinterpretation of museums and their use in new and creative ways. Rwanda, for example, has commemorated its 1994 Genocide with “memorial centers,” such as the Kigali Memorial Centre, that preserve and display mass-grave sites and present audio-visual exhibitions on the genocide as vivid memorial and museum. These museums follow in the pattern of what a Western tourist would expect of most international sites of atrocity (Field 2007). At the same time, their gruesome presentation of corpses and presentation of full genocide sites as they were found capture a form of monument making that is radically different from those in the West. These institutions demonstrate the Western import of the museum into the local methodology of commemoration. These centers have become sites of contested memories and have developed in unique ways unlike the typical forms of commemoration that are seen in the traditional West. Through their own experience and concepts, however, Rwanda has been able to elaborate on the museum to produce something that is socially active and congruent within their own ontology of cultural heritage. This should be the aim of all museums expanding into the Emirates and beyond.

As centers of Western scholarship, museums traditionally come with the very conceptions of cultural heritage and art, which I have argued to be precisely detrimental to their survival and efficacy abroad. Simply stated: museums should not be undergoing global expansion – that is, not the museum as it is conceived by most art historians, museum directors, and curators today – and for that matter, neither should “art.”⁹ Individual loans can circulate the world with *less* trouble. They do not come with long theses attached, as is the problem in the

⁹ In my opinion, the greatest neo-colonialist threat is not to ignore the socio-cultural complexities of the alleged colonies, but rather to ignore the socio-cultural complexities of the alleged colonizers. To privilege the other as the object of study assumes that the other is somehow unnatural – strangely unique – as if having a culture that is lacking in the observer’s imagined self. This is precisely the way that the globalization of museums has been depicted.

case of an entire museum or a travelling exhibition. The museum as an institution, however, risks displacing colonialism action into the cultural through the very act of preserving and proselytizing that alleged “soul” on which they thrive in the Euro-American nations. How then does one successfully expand without sacrificing our own education and beliefs?

Museum Expansion and a New Methodology

Museum globalization requires a new methodology. It is easy to believe that scholarship is privileged and that art is a removed and universal ideal, because it provides stability and comfort in a postmodern world where all scholarship is needed to be self-reflexive and self-critical. Cultural heritage cannot be apprehended through the rhetoric of a historical or scientific argumentation that aims for original contexts and static facts.¹⁰ Instead, this discussion requires

¹⁰ In recent debates as to cultural heritage ownership, DNA has been used as a mode of argumentation for the rights of ownership. While DNA is indeed a biological system through, which genotypes and phenotypes are passed down, it cannot be translated into the cultural with the same scientific veracity. Our belief in DNA as an absolute determinant of lineage emerges from certain epistemological faiths related to the function of science in our society as an argumentative strategy for our origins and futures. Kwame Anthony Appiah has called the focus of biological descent a “distraction.” In his argument on *cosmopolitanism*, the belief that humanity exists as belonging to a single, global community, Appiah suggests instead that objects belong to the world. Then, as relationships are fostered through the “imaginary connections” that peoples construct around objects, notions of heritage ownership are produced – despite of any scientific argument of lineage or property ownership (Appiah 2006, 115-35).

Recently, Richard Leventhal has developed this argument further by arguing that the argument for biological descent assumes that DNA and genetics are “real and matter” for cultural identity (Leventhal 2007, 11). This argument implies that DNA would become relevant to cultural heritage, only if the culture’s system of beliefs is structured around science as the absolute determinate – if the society structures their notions of identity through genetics alone. The focus on genetics in cultural heritage debates within recent years demonstrates a conflict of cosmologies, in the sense that it speaks to the rise in scientific conceptions of personhood, origin and being. Nevertheless, this science is just as embrocat in the politics of identity as an archaeological site or a work of art. It cannot be used as an absolute across or even within societies, because it speaks to a very restricted form of argument, just as heritage, religion, theoretical physics and other origin mythologies explain descent and lineage.

History “proper” could be paralleled to DNA in the construction of heritage narratives and claims, whereby, in a specific epistemological mythology, history serves as a perceived absolute for the creation of a cultural legacy. Despite this primacy in a given frame of reference, history likewise cannot be considered to determine of what rightfully belongs to a certain people. As Leventhal has also observed, “Cultural heritage is not about the past, nor about the present, nor the future. Rather it is about the relationship between the past and the present, and about the relationship between the past and the future. It is not a statement of truth nor in any sense of reality. Rather, it is a relationship built upon the constructs of identity in the present and future, from the past” (Leventhal 2007, 2). Cultural heritage is then not about idealized or even subjective truths, but rather about the relations that are structured between individuals, groups, knowledges and objects. Even if Truth were attainable in an objective manner, cultural heritage is not concerned with those truths but rather the performances and conceptions that structure these objects in the contemporary landscape.

the flexibility to account for the social lives and cultural biographies of things (Kopytoff 1986) and the cultural relationships between peoples and objects, both material and immaterial (Meskell 2005, Miller 2005). As Miller has written,

The authenticity of artifacts as culture derives, not from their relationship to some historical style or manufacturing process – in other words, there is not truth or falsity immanent in them – but rather from their active participation in a process of social self-creation in which they are directly constitutive of ourselves and others. (Miller 1997)

Cultural heritage has brought to light, in anthropology, the immense power and effects of the relationships between peoples and things, which upsets the study of objects as one looking exclusively at them as a history of form or as referring exclusively to the past. It is not merely coincidental that the methods of anthropology have developed to focus on this interrelationship. The development of material culture studies and materiality in the last two decades presents a re-centering of the study of archaeology and art history. While these problems can be considered for cultural systems in the past, overall they raise questions as to the object of study – especially, after decades where good archaeological and anthropological scholarship of art was characterized by studies on original context and intent. Essentially, cultural heritage is about *materiality*.

The materiality argument, inseparable from cultural heritage, gives primacy to the contextual enmeshing of objects *beyond* their “original,” archaeological and historical context. This is not to say that these pieces of information are not valid, quite the contrary, they often contribute to the production of contemporary relations. Nevertheless, they are only a portion of the overall understandings of an object. I believe that it is precisely the rupture of methodologies that exists behind the criticisms and handlings of museums today. In most art historical

literature, these concerns are rarely addressed, and in the widespread education of the field, I can say from recent experience, these subjects are completely inexistent. Additionally, one must keep in mind that most museum professionals, particularly, museum directors, have traditionally been trained as art historians – not anthropologists. Coincidentally, the most outraged, well-known and vocal critics of museum commercialization and expansion, cited in this paper, have been art historians. Their arguments, for the most part, have not addressed issues of neo-colonialism, but focused rather on their concern for the museum as an institution of a universal and timeless appreciation for “art.”

The minute that archaeology and “original context” is no longer the absolute, it becomes difficult to know when to criticize and when to praise. My argument here seems to suggest that anything goes, everything from rampant commercialism to iconoclasm, and perhaps as looting, torture, war, etc are also cultural events then they are permissible as well. In the end, they are fascinating phenomena that must be carefully studied, and this is truly, where the difficult problem emerges for the scholar – if we accept everything as worthy of study and important of cultural situations, in what manner is it proper for us to contribute to the discussion and when is it necessary to intervene?

Ian Hodder’s work at Çatalhöyük has demonstrated that various perspectives can operate together and co-operate as well. With Çatalhöyük, Hodder and his team has had to confront local communities, state politics, commercial forces, globalism, urban renewal – all the buzzwords that characterize contemporary archaeology and museum debates. From his experience, Hodder has observed the dynamics between commercial global forces and localized engagements with the past, noting that:

Some of these engagements are highly commercial and disinterested – the past as play, the Orient as theme park. Others are motivated by specific highly charged interests. But passion and play are not opposed in some simple opposition. In the global process they interact and feed off each other in myriad ways, equally emboldening and undermining the other. (Hodder 1998, 138)

As I have attempted to argue here, the processes and institutions of nationalism, globalization, commercialism, museums, archaeology, art history, and anthropology are not opposed to one another, but rather symbiotic agents in the production of cultural heritage and its complex and diverse materialities. In Çatalhöyük, Hodder has actively allowed various groups to coexist in the contemporary life of the site, such as New Age Mother Goddess groups, Credit Card companies, government officials, local communities, internet communities and archaeologists. Not only have these various theoretic approaches and their social practices been able to co-exist, they have also contributed to one another.

As an academic, Hodder has acknowledged that his own interaction with the site is one of “a past appropriated for intellectual gain” (Hodder 1998, 135), which has permitted him to move forward by understanding his own approach to the site not as universal or privileged, but rather contributive. When the problem of putting theory into practice is presented, such as in the case of international expansion, the scholar needs to contribute to the debate, not as an “expert” per se, as if having some superior knowledge of the past, which validates him to prescribe actions for the present and the future. Instead, the scholar should see their contribution as that of a commissioned writer or architect that is producing an artifact in the context of their own training and the given situation. The product should then be considered alongside other debates, economic, political, cultural, etc, each a valid medium. These suggestions should always be considered as constructive and based not on ideals or notion of what things should be, but rather

taking as a given the social realities and providing the best course of action in the given circumstances.

From my analysis of the current situation of the globalization and commercialization of museums and art, it appears to me that the most important thing to keep in mind is that sites and objects, even situations, are not autonomous works. They do not have preset meanings and when one tries to regulate their reception one greatly reduces their potency and risks becoming imperialistic. With global museums, the problem is not the *what*, but rather the *how*. The goal should not create the Guggenheim New York across the world: it is impossible and would not work.

A Model for Expansion

We should approach cultural heritage, particularly art, as one would a religion, believing in it ourselves, while respecting others' perceived atheisms – with minimal proselytizing. It can be generally accepted that cultural heritage is radically different from place to place, with many examples even within individual nation-states. Particularly, in the United States, Native American repatriation efforts have forced many institutions to reevaluate not only what is rightfully theirs, but more importantly, how artifacts can be conceived in radically different ways and how practices around them differ accordingly. Reburying bones of ancestors may seem acceptable in a Western mindscape that features elements such as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, where unnamed, national ancestors are treated with respect and honor. Repatriating a totem pole, for example, where it will be (re)installed in the community to serve its life cycle of decay and fulfill its purpose, demonstrates, however, a radically different approach to the life, materiality and practice of a cultural heritage object that in a Western museum would be

considered “art.” The expansion of museums provides institutions with the unique opportunity of taking their collections and expanding, not only physically, but in the theoretic conceptualizations of the objects they already possess.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Guggenheim both have over ninety-nine percent of their collections in storage. What museum expansion truly offers the institution is the opportunity to produce more outlets for the potential capital they already possess – this is a profitable business model. It is not necessarily about accessioning new objects, but rather looking critically at their possessions and seeing what interesting and alternative narratives they have to present. Museum storage sequesters objects away from experiencing a rich materiality and interrupts their active social lives. After decades or centuries of isolation, a scholar may be able to appropriate them into their narratives, but as cultural heritage they would require some form of an event or prized location to reactivate them. These new museums should be utilized as sites of divergent and alternative narratives in order to revitalize their home-institutions’ existing holdings.¹¹

One does not need an expanded art market and culture for the same art. Rather than increasing the demand for the X number of Picassos, Rembrandts and Rubens that exist in the market, it would be wise for auction houses and museums to foster local histories for the globe’s

¹¹ The masterpieces of the Guggenheim New York will not, and should not, be the masterpieces of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi – if this occurs, the museum has failed. The idea that Western universal museums would be emptied by international satellites demonstrates a crucially wrong (business) plan. Again, it follows in the notion of a universal concept and taste for art, which likewise suggests that if the masterpieces of Western art are not admired in Arab nations, it is because they are not well versed in its history (Winegar 2006b). Even at the Metropolitan, however, not everyone should like the same works of art – it is through museum tours, labels and exhibitions that the museum “educates,” but this education would best be referred to as an “enculturation.” It teaches visitors “how to look at art,” and the universal museum’s implicit teleology, associates objects as if somehow related to one another. While the similarities will be the same in a single nation, museums should still seek to foster variety in their own exhibitions that change according to demographics and cultural trends. The goal of the art museum should not be to exist as acultural history, distinct from the follies of heritage, but rather actively try to engage itself in cultural heritage.

art. By being locally rooted, these new tastemakers will expand not only the buyers available, but also the supply.¹² This is not about “dumping” lesser works into the Middle East, but rather producing notions of “art” that are engaged with the actualities of heritage. Only through this process can these Western institutions develop a sustainable art market and museum audience there. External, Western tourism may help feed Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Qatar for some years, but relationships have to be fostered at a local level if these museums are to be at all successful.

The Metropolitan Museum’s Costume Institute, for example, caters to the New York fashion industry. Naturally, such practices are attacked as overly commercial, such as when Krens did his *Art of the Motorcycle* exhibition funded by Harley-Davidson. The Costume Institute, however, has commercialized in a very acute manner by purposely tying exhibits into current trends in popular culture, such as their *blog.mode: addressing fashion* (Spring 2008) exhibit, which encouraged visitors to blog about their exhibit pieces, or their *Superheroes: Fashion and Fantasy* (Summer 2008) exhibit, supported by Giorgio Armani, which also coincided with the release of Batman. While commercially stimulated, it has been wisely incorporated into society in a manner that attracts audiences and promotes interest. This may not be appropriate or possible with all art, the connections would be forced and farcical – such as a credit card company urging Hodder to do a show that showed the emergence of credit cards from

¹² Auction houses are currently engaging in what I consider a dangerous proselytizing of “art history” in Abu Dhabi that aims at giving the potential-buyers, the Emirate elite, a crash course in the history of art and Western connoisseurship to stimulate the local market. I do find this practice to be colonialist, but rather than fearing that it will enforce Western values on the Arab nations taste, I fear that it will elicit backlash or just sterilize the development of museums in the region. Currently, museums and art are a new and fashionable development in the Emirates that is truly connected to a vision for the nation’s future. Undoubtedly, it is tied to a developing sense of nationalism. To infiltrate this nationalism with a narrative of Western art theory, history and practice is unwise. Not only does it risk deactivating the nationalistic undercurrents of art development, when perceived as purely a Western import, it also risks being seen as shameless American arrogance and imperialism. As was demonstrated by the September 11 case, American imperialism and post-colonial ideas are not only present in the Western spheres, but in those nations. This past is part of our global heritage and the former-Other will react to anything that even suggests to have a neo-colonial or propagandistic intent.

the Çatalhöyük obsidian trade (Hodder 1998). Nevertheless, local engagement can be used to increase visitorship and most importantly, enrich the lifeworlds of artifacts.

Local Control

These goals, however, require genuine local control. The Guggenheim New York, or the Guggenheim Bilbao, should not do all the planning for the Abu Dhabi branch. Curators have yet to be selected for the Abu Dhabi museum, but most in control are not from the region (Waxman 2009). This is not the way to proceed. The museum is not merely an exhibition space for the pre-packaged travelling exhibitions of the central museum – this must be a de-centered system, with perhaps even a rotating directorship for the overall Foundation. The Guggenheim New York should produce travelling shows, but likewise do the other Branches. Krens has often discussed the expansion of the museum in surprisingly exciting ways, where he stresses that each museum is tailor-made for their site and where this will foster a system of cultural diplomacy and exchange (Krens, Knöfel and von Dewitz 2008). This, however, has not always been the case and the majority of the Bilbao shows are travelling exhibits. Cultural diplomacy develops out of mutual respect and we should be developing not only art markets, but art scholarships and methodologies that are unique to the region.

In order for transnational museums to exist in a post-colonial world, it is necessary for them not to establish franchises, but rather networks of cultural exchange with worldwide institutions that become centers of interaction with different societies and their cultures. It should stress linked localities, not homogenous globalism. Taking the momentum of the reaction to a museum that purports to be “global,” institutions should redirect these drives to foster local scholars, curators, marketers and businesspersons to provide each institution with its

own mission and style. The “Guggenheim” and the “Louvre” are brands. Whether they like it or not their name, even when they only had one museum, is a brand that people purchase through publications, reproductions, movies, tickets, tourism, etc. They are well-known and popular cultural institutions.

The museum visitor does not only visit to see a work of art, but rather for an overall experience – to see a certain perspective on works of art that is contextual. The Louvre is the Louvre because of a combination of its collection, architecture and site. Overall, it is a syntactical experience composed of various elements in a specific arrangement. The brand name is only a selling point, but that does not provide sustainability, or a proper museum environment, alone. The Louvre Abu Dhabi should never try to imitate the Louvre. The expansion here demonstrates an exciting opportunity to re-conceive the way that museum exhibitions are constructed and experiment precisely with commercial models of product testing. In the goal for fostering an active cultural heritage, one should seek to have displays that encourage discussion and are actively engaged by its audience. Rather than producing an internal, purely scholarly teleology or mission and then translating that into an exhibit, artifacts should be tested and the goal should be to create heritage, not a Western image of art for the Emirates and their tourists. This has the potential of revolutionizing the way in which museum exhibitions are conceived and how the process of art history is produced and transmitted. Recent experiments in community- and online-curated shows at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian or the Brooklyn Museum, respectively, offer good examples.

For this Utopian populism to be even attempted, however, it is necessary for the museums to have the places for debate and discussion – it should be the museum as forum, not as temple (Cameron 1971). The Abu Dhabi Guggenheim should precisely develop a strong

“Education” program based on discourse and open forums for the public and regional scholars to be engaged. Expansion is not an action, but rather a long performance and process. It is a performance in as far as it has the potential of opening a much needed cultural dialogue, strengthening regional relationships, and hopefully educating Western audiences about Arab and Islamic culture. It is a process in that it cannot be merely drafted on a drawing board and blindly executed, it will require years of cooperation and sincere respect. The Louvre and the Guggenheim will not be the only museums in the region, but will be accompanied by museums on Islamic religion and local history. Thus, there will be a great environment for curators of different museums to interact and work toward a program that is not stilted, but loosely unified across the city and the region, with a clear local character.

The Emirates and Beyond

Abu Dhabi was not the ideal place to expand, but it offered the monetary resources needed – the need for funding cannot be disregarded, nor is there any reason to do so – it is a part of the art world and our contemporary culture. The true problem is the current state of human rights in Abu Dhabi, which depends on a foreign indentured-slave system to support its ambitious projects. Today, only 34% of the Emirates population is Arab, 50% is South Asian. This is a disturbing statistic and raises important concerns that have to be addressed by all institutions constructing in the Emirates, however, I have not discussed this here, as it is a problem wider than just museums. Nevertheless, it presents an added challenge as to whom these museums will be for and how will South Asian arts figure into the permanent and temporary displays – will this subaltern speak in this museum? With the emergence of a horrific torture video by a member of the royal family who brutally abused a man accused of stealing from him in a business deal, the structure of the law is becomes a concern from an ethical

standpoint and for those who will be working in the region. These problems will have to be addressed and the appropriate human rights groups are currently undertaking initiatives to stop such violations, though immediate change is highly unlikely.

Despite these problems, Abu Dhabi has undeniably become an epicenter of change. Nevertheless, other important players will surely emerge in the coming decade as sites for expansion. Israel, for example, is currently undergoing a massive renovation of its cultural infrastructure and developing what has been called the “next generation” of Israeli museums (Wise 2009). Beyond the Middle East, Latin America has a strong emerging culture of museums, particularly geared toward ethnographic and local connections that offer much potential for growth and for interacting with new perspectives about art and constructions of identity in the museum.¹³ This does not mean that museums need to be built at these sites under the aegis of an American brand, but rather that cooperation agreements, such as that between the Hermitage and the Guggenheim, should be actively pursued without the stigma that afflicted the Krens-led efforts.

The Getty Center and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), under the leadership of Krens protégé, Michael Govan, present exemplary cases for the operation of international museums. The Getty Center’s multifaceted operation makes it truly a site of exchange with an active fellowship program, research in various countries, and a wide variety of

¹³ In art history, for example, Spain and Latin America are greatly underappreciated as Krens pointed out in his interview – however, not as much in the art market, as in scholarship. The mandatory languages of art history are German and French, and sometimes even Italian – this is mandatory of most doctoral students in American art history departments. Spanish, however, is only necessary for the field, like Ancient Greek, Latin, Arabic, Japanese, Chinese, etc. It is a travesty if an art historian cannot read French and German, but no one expects a non-expert to know Spanish. As such, an entire region of the world, including within the United States, that has a rising art scene, developing museums, and scholarship is deprived of having a voice – unless they adhere and learn English. One cannot expect scholars to speak all languages, but there should be a capable enough body of scholars versed in different languages to make cross-cultural scholarships possible. It is this form of development that international museums have the responsibility of pursuing.

free, online publications (Duke 1983, Rush, Greer and Feinstein 1986). Their special collections library has some of the best archives in the nation and their research and conservation institutes produce exemplary work that should serve as a model to most American museums. LACMA under Govan's leadership has particularly worked toward making art and the museum truly a part of a multicultural heritage, which is a problem faced in conceptualizing a Los Angeles museum model (Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach 2004). His projects have had a strong commercial support, exhibited exemplary fundraising success, and have performed a renewal of the museum's site in Los Angeles. Govan understands precisely the tools of marketing and branding, yet also has a strong intellectual grounding that has lead him to produce an interesting museum plan that engages the multicultural character of Los Angeles. One should not be surprised if Govan were to explore an expansion project in Mexico during his tenure there.

Cultural Property: Looting and Reclamations

This rise of museums in the Emirates and Qatar, however, raises important questions as to the archaeology in the region that will have to be closely watched. Particularly, it is important to see that the proper anti-looting laws are put into place and are enforced. One of the major problems in the field has been the lack of trained archaeologists with the proper education; most come from other states, such as Egypt, and have no knowledge of local history (Potts 1998, 197-99). With a rise in the demand for museum objects that will naturally arise with these institutions, looting will probably emerge as an important problem that should be preempted. Currently, there is already an ongoing debate concerning the looting and sale of artifacts by the Barakat Gallery stationed in Rodeo Drive, London and Abu Dhabi (Pittman 2009). With the establishment of museums, education programs for archaeology should be encouraged not only at local universities, but also within the museums themselves and their education departments –

training archaeologists, and educating against the illicit trade and looting of antiquities. The expansion of museums is also accompanied by the expansion of many American institutions, such as New York University in Abu Dhabi (interestingly with Philippe de Montebello as key Humanities adviser), which should likewise aim at being more than a mere playground for American students studying abroad and address precisely the educational needs of local peoples, particularly in terms of archaeological sciences and anthropology.

While there will always be a drive to accession objects of questionable provenance, stronger relations between nations such as Greece and Italy can be pursued. Museums should not only have to talk to these countries after they have violated a law. Producing stronger exchange agreements where works of art and exhibitions can circulate through museum networks would be ideal and can help lead to a better dialectic between national and global claims on antiquity. While one cannot expect a “British Museum Athens” for the Parthenon Marbles, one can look to a more structured system of exchange that is not remedial and that can offer options for shared ownership of cultural property. Perhaps this will encourage museums to stop accessioning looted heritage and help quell the drives of the antiquities market that wreaks havoc not only on archaeological sites, but is also very much involved with illicit drug and armaments trade.

Conclusion

As we move forward, it is critical to remember that objects of heritage are not final, autonomous statements with privileged narratives, but that their understandings begin always in the present and are about relationships to the past. The system is composed of various *materialities, ontologies* and *knowledges* that constantly are producing, re-producing and

revising. The international expansion of museums needs to be seen not as a mere franchise, but must do justice to its title as a cultural institution. Expansion is not about “art,” it is about cultural heritage – however, that develops. We cannot look to Abu Dhabi and expect to see a museum made to our models and standards, but rather observe and study the development to make judgments that accept difference with respect, not just tolerance. Acknowledging that the heritage industry is not opposed to historical scholarship, but rather mutually dependant on each other is the first step in this process. The international expansion of museums must be seen not as a recipient of criticism, but an opportunity of putting into practice the theories of *post-colonialism* and *post-modernism* with *globalism* with the hopes of inaugurating whatever *-ism* lies beyond.

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