Museums and the Nostalgic Self

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Abstract
The first part of this essay asks: What is the function, purpose and value of a museum? Has any museologist or philosopher given a credible account of philosophical problems associated with museums? Is there any set of properties shared by the diverse entities called museums? Overgeneralization is the principal problem here. The essay then examines a central kind of museum experience; one that invokes and relies upon nostalgia. I argue that the attraction of museums are varied but are best explained affectively and in terms of the orectic (appetitive, desiderative, wishing) rather than cognitively conatively (willing, deciding). Although this need not be taken as conflicting with the idea that museums are focused on scholarship, it is more consonant with the claim that exhibitions are central. Museums may at times both pique and satisfy our curiosity. However it is a mistake to see 'curiosity' as merely, or even primarily, a matter of cognition.

'*The imperative of a contemporary nostalgic is to be homesick and sick of home – occasionally at the same time*.'[1]

1. Museums?

This essay has two parts. Part II examines a central kind of museum experience; one that invokes and relies upon nostalgia. Part I sets the stage by contextualizing the discussion. This involves an account of some fundamental issues pertaining to philosophy and museums. The first issue concerns the 'nature' of museums (what is a museum?) – and includes questions about their function, purpose and value. Overgeneralization is the principal problem here. The second issue arises from the first – that is, from various accounts of the nature of museums. Has any museologist or philosopher given a credible account of philosophical problems associated with museums? There are significant grounds for doubt. Do prominent accounts of such problems involve questionable presuppositions? Undoubtedly so. Are any of the prominent issues intrinsic to the ways in which museums are conceived? It would be surprising if this were not the case. (I use 'museology' not to refer to the study

[1] Svetlana Boym, 'Nostalgia and Its Discontents', *The Hedgehog Review* (2007), 18.

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of museums as such but to reflect on the nature of museums and museum practice.)

Consider, for example, the question of whether or not the Parthenon (Elgin) Marbles should be returned to Greece. This is an ethical problem and a problem for at least one museum. But is it an intrinsic problem related to some understanding of a museum or museum practice? Or is it instead an extrinsic ethical problem; one that can and should be addressed in ethical, social and political philosophical terms as applied to museums, but without recourse to museology, or philosophical reflection on the nature of museums? Or consider the issue of whether objects should be restored or merely conserved. Is this an aesthetic problem pasted on to museum practice, or is it a question that has to be answered intrinsically – as inseparable from such practice? Is the distinction drawn here between intrinsic and extrinsic philosophically problematic issues sustainable, or is it – as many museologists would claim – ephemeral?

Compare these kinds of questions about museums to similar ones with regard to architecture. Lagueux (2004) argues for an intrinsic connection between architecture and ethics and distinguishes this from art forms and professions in which any connection with ethics is extrinsic.[2] He claims that architectural problems are at one and the same time ethical problems and that the two, being intrinsically related though not identical, must be solved not merely at the same time but also in the same way. This alleged connection between architecture and ethics can be seen as a formulation of the Vitruvian problem, where the notion of function or utility (or essential function) is interpreted as irreducibly ethical in part, and the 'ethical' is understood to include judgments about value – about what is 'good' as well as about what is right. Can Lagueux's claim regarding architectural practice and ethics be extended to include museum practice? This depends of course on how museum practice and museums are conceptualized.

If it is true that interventions in the urban landscape have ethical implications – or as David Brain puts it 'every design and planning decision is a value proposition … that has to do with social and political relationships'[3] – then Lagueux's claim that architecture should recognize its inherently ethico-political character is correct. But the

[2] M. Lagueux, 'Ethics Versus Aesthetics in Architecture', *Philosophical Forum* 35/2 (2004), 117–133.

[3] David Brain, 'From Good Neighborhoods to Sustainable Cities: Social Science and the Social Agenda of the New Urbanism', *International Regional Science Review* 28/2 (2005), 233.

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fact that those choices museums make regarding collections and exhibitions frequently have ethical implications (not *always* important ones), need not similarly imply that museum practice is irreducibly ethical in nature. Perhaps in the case of both architecture and museums the two sets of problems might best be kept separate and to a degree resolved separately.

Leaving aside the question of whether Lagueux is right – and one can guess that other disciplines (medicine for example) would reject such a claim – a similar argument may be constructed in regard to museum practice and ethics – perhaps even one that similarly seeks to connect aesthetics and ethics.[4] A racist display, or the refusal under pressure, to exhibit a controversial artwork, for example Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* (1987) is unethical and bad museum practice. It is bad museum practice in no small part because it is unethical. But are the ways in which such decisions are made intrinsic to museum practice? Are such museum problems at one and the same time ethical problems such that the two must be solved not merely at the same time, but also in the same way through resources constitutive of museum practice?

In any case, such an argument will depend upon prior museological considerations. They assume that decisions regarding what is of value, or about what is right and wrong, will follow naturally (or are intrinsically related to) a 'proper' understanding of what a museum is – or of what their particular kind of museum (e.g. the British Museum) is. It is (mistakenly) supposed for example that all one needs to do is to understand and so accept the nature of the British Museum as a 'world museum' and repository to see why it would be wrong – ethically wrong – to return the Elgin Marbles to Greece. Museologists do at times appear to conceive of what they are doing – and who and what they are doing it to – in ways if not identical then not dissimilar to Lagueux's claims regarding architecture. Others, Maleuvre (1999) for example, see museums as tied to history rather than ethics in ways that have or should have normative consequences for museum practice. Similarly, those who see museums as essentially heterotopias – that is, a space of difference and cultural contestation – see the job of museums and museum practice as one of enhancing their heterotopic rather than their ethical character.

[4] For a discussion of Lagueux see W. Taylor and M. Levine, *Prospects for an Ethics of Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 54–62.

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While not denying that philosophers have engaged with questions about museums in interesting ways, and that museologists have at times taken up philosophical questions insightfully, such considerations lead me to think that as a field of inquiry, philosophy and museums, or a museology that is inherently philosophical – is nascent.

Turning now to the issue of overgeneralization that I claim is problematic for a philosophy of museums. Is there any set of properties shared by the diverse entities called museums? Are accounts of the scope, nature, function, value and experience of the range of institutions that are sometimes called museums (galleries, institutes, 'spaces', exhibitions, foundations, exploratoriums, etc.) compatible with essentialist accounts, or do all such accounts eschew reductive essentialism?

Philosophers who eschew various essentialist accounts of the nature of things often substitute a Wittgensteinian 'family resemblance' or a cluster account instead. Thus, while there is no essential property of what it is to be a 'game' or an 'emotion', instances of games or emotions will generally have properties associated with the 'family resemblance' concept that are sufficient but not necessary to count as instances of those things. So the most central instances of games will have rules, along with other properties like a playing field or board belonging to some but not all games. Central examples of emotions will generally, though not always, be accompanied by distinctive bodily feelings.

When it comes to museums however, it is arguably the case that not even a family resemblance notion is applicable. The idea of a 'museum' is too capacious and disparate for 'family resemblance' to apply.[5] Maleuvre for example defines museums as 'institutions devoted to the protection, preservation, exhibition, and furtherance of what a community agrees to identify as works of artistic or historical value. In them, the artistic and the historical fuse into one seemingly immanent essence'.[6] Even as a characterization of art museums, this fails to account for much of what it intends to define.

Particularly of late, the fluidity in these various institutions' self-understanding complicates the issue of their characterisation. If museums were once distinguishable from galleries and contemporary

[5] Some support for this may be found in the fact that efforts to bring such organizations under some umbrella organization (Museums Victoria in Australia) directed by even broad common interests have at times failed.
[6] Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 9.

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art spaces partly by the fact that they had collections, one now sees museums who eschew collections and arts spaces and galleries that collect. Museums are infringing on each other's conceptual space – borrowing ideas, vision statements, financial plans, employees – and ways of doing things. Those trying to characterize definitively what these places are or should be doing, or how they are to be understood, must be procrustean and governed by preconceived ideas rather than what is in front of them, and they aim at a moving target.

Even those who explicitly acknowledge that there are different kinds of museums with different purposes and values often go on to adopt an essentialist position – over-generalizing in ways that even superficial examination proves false. For example, Maleuvre, a doyen of museology, claims that

> What one says of museums of aeronautics, farming instruments, or folk dress can-not directly apply to the art museums. Art warrants a different historical thinking because the work of art *makes* history in an essentially different way than other artifacts do.[7]

Yet six pages later he begins his book with the assertion that

> One must look at museums historically not because method dictates it, but because they are *essentially* historical. By putting forward an image of the past and managing the handing on of tradition through artworks and artefacts, museums participate in a historical production of history.[8]

Supposing Maleuvre to be referring only to art 'museums' of a type, and his claim (reminiscent of Foucault's description of museums as heterotopias)[9] that 'Art constitutes a *caesura* of history' proves a useful way of theorizing *some* art, it nonetheless remains problematic. What keeps one from rejecting the claim outright is that it isn't clear what it means to say that museums are essentially historical. Is it, for instance informative or merely trivial to say that museums participate in a historical production of history? Can't the same be said of any

[7] Ibid., 3.

[8] Ibid., 9.

[9] Beth Lord writes: 'What are we to make of Michel Foucault's claim that the museum is a heterotopia? When reading Foucault's description of the heterotopia in his 1967 essay "Different Spaces", we are left with the impression of something negative, uncanny, and disturbing: a heterotopia is a space of difference, a space that is absolutely central to a culture but in which the relations between elements of a culture are suspended, neutralized, or reversed'. Beth Lord, 'Foucault's Museum: Difference, Representation, and Genealogy', *Museum and Society* 4/1 (2006), 1.

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other institutions, schools, factories, businesses, the corner store, or families? All put forward an image of the past and manage the handing on of tradition, often by means of artefacts if not artworks. Assuming that museums are essentially historical – whatever such a characterization may reveal – or relatedly that they are sites of contestation and occasions for instantiations of the subject's cultural (as well as personal, social, political and economic) alienation and isolation, this is not what one thinks of when conceptualizing museums. Collecting and exhibiting are closer to the common understanding of the ordinary word 'museum'.

Things get worse. Some generalizations are, or purport to be, embedded in a theoretical edifice that provides insight even if they cannot sustain the generalization. Others relate to a narrow idea of what a museum is or should be. Theoretically induced or not, as Silver points out, the generalizations are insupportable.

> Carr…asserts that 'the great museum…sustains itself for use by the whole culture, inviting every possible user,' and that 'to know courage and fear, let people come to a museum'…. Hein suggests that because the concept of museum aims at a mix of non-utilitarian Aristotelian wonder and Dewey-like aesthetic experience, the museum's practical failings…cannot impugn the museum's 'intrinsic value'…. Preziosi…sees – behind the attempt to define a timeless concept of 'the museum' – a nineteenth-century institution that…remains an 'instrumentality of the nation-state'… [supporting] 'hyper-commodification, super-hyped consumption, and…existing hegemonic relations of power'…. [Mares] claim[s] that museums are primarily the foundational 'database[s] of life…[and] regards as "philistines" those who do not find museums sacred.'… Martinon [claims]…museums 'have no future,' [and] can 'no longer rescue [the masses] from their miserable existences'…[or] provide 'redemption'…. Maleuvre…says that if we turn 'art loose into the street…it will likely founder in the noise and distraction of modern life.'[10]

Leaving all but the final assertion aside, one wonders just what art Maleuvre is talking about and why he supposes it will 'founder' in the noise and distraction rather than flourish?

Generalizing about art museums as well as art, Maleuvre says

[10] Daniel Silver, 'Review of *Museum Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century*', *Curator* 50/2 (2007), 270–271.

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> The estheticization of the artwork in the museum parallels an estheticization – neutralization and autonomization – of the bourgeois subject in industrial society. The museum constitutes a formidable model of civic membership, a ritual of social identification, in short, a technology of the subject. What must be uncovered is the link between the ideology of art's presentation and the ideology of autonomized bourgeois existence. In pointing out the repressive dimension of the museum's model of identification ... [Maleuvre] to delineate the possibility of a museum and of a museum subject that would be attuned to the emancipatory thrust of art itself.[11]

Even in a museum as relatively staid as the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, neither 'the link between the ideology of art's presentation and the ideology of autonomized bourgeois existence', nor 'the repressive dimension of the museum's model of identification' or the alienation are readily apparent. Silver also finds difficulty with generalizations that are less problematic.

Timothy Luke suggests that, in order to move from an idea of 'clashing civilizations' to a 'civilizing clash,' we must reform museums to become 'crucibles of conceptual, ethical, and aesthetic confrontation' rather than 'white cubes' confidently projecting pure truths. 'Open, inclusive, and controversial' museum displays that invite individual visitors to affirm their particular identities without denigrating others is what we need in order to overcome Western hegemony and preserve 'civilization'.[12]

Silver criticizes this on the grounds that 'this idea is itself Western ... [and] ... is arguably tied ... to the very "hegemonic" idea of the European nation-state that Luke wants to dethrone in the museum'.[13] So what if it is? It takes only a moment to see there is no real contradiction here – just as there is no contradiction in Foucault employing certain Enlightenment concepts and language itself (the ultimate bourgeois tool of imprisonment!),[14] to critique the hegemony of Enlightenment values and perspectives.

Silver also takes issue with Sherene Suchy's claim that 'art museums ... help us to develop a greater sense of self – that creativity and self-expression is important for wellness'. He says 'These are all comforting thoughts ... But they seem blissfully unaware of the fact that a great deal of twentieth-century art – most of it, perhaps – has

[11] Maleuvre, *Museum Memories*, op. cit., 3–4.
[12] Silver, 'Review of *Museum Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century*', op. cit., 269.
[13] Ibid., 269.
[14] My thanks to Gary Kemp here, and for comments throughout.

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aimed to shock and disgust audiences, to make them *un*well'.[15] Insofar as a great deal (surely not most) of twentieth-century art 'has aimed to shock and disgust' it has not likewise aimed to make audiences 'unwell'. And the idea that art has aimed to shock is perfectly compatible with Suchy's claim.

In his review of Genoways's (2006) edited collection (*Museum Philosophy for the Twenty-first Century*[16]) (he calls it a 'hodgepodge') Silver claims that the central question Genoways asked contributors to address – 'What underlying philosophy/mission should museums pursue in the first half of the twenty-first century?' – is unclear. Silver says '[T]his question is confusing. Is it asking for a theory of museums? A museum mission statement for the next century? A philosophically informed defence or critique of museum practice? Or something else?'[17] Whatever difficulties the volume has, they do not stem from Genoways's question. All of Silver's interpretations, and more, are rightly implied in that question. Can one address the question without some kind of 'A museum mission statement', 'theory of museums', and a 'philosophically informed' [or assumed] account of museum practice?

Accounts of the philosophical issues related to museums stem largely from the ways in which museums are conceptualized. For example, the problems Gaskell (2012) lists are aligned with his account of the primary function of museums and the issues he raises are applicable to only some museums. However they are not even applicable to all art or natural history museums. Gaskell seems to think the sets of problems he delineates under six broad categories are philosophical and in some way intrinsic to museum practice – thus making museum practice intrinsically philosophical. But there is little explanation as to the connection, and indeed his purpose seems prescriptive and normative.

Gaskell claims that 'scholarship – not exhibition – is central to all museums'.[18] Whether this is right depends on what one means by 'scholarship' and of course by 'museum'. In fact, as his essay in this volume clearly illustrates, Gaskell has a broad understanding of research and its role in contemporary museums. In any case, the

[15] Ibid., 271.

[16] Hugh H. Genoways (ed), *Museum Philosophy for the Twenty-first Century* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2006).

[17] Silver, 'Review of *Museum Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century*', op. cit., 268.

[18] Ivan Gaskell, 'Museums and Philosophy – Of Art, and Many Other Things', Parts I and II, *Philosophy Compass* 7/2 (2012), 74.

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dichotomy should be rejected – and would be by museologists – since exhibitions not only involve a good deal of scholarship, they are also, and should be seen as, a form of scholarship.[19] Just talk to a few curators. While scholarship – as traditionally construed, figures prominently in some museums' (the British Museum) self-conception and mission statements, it does not with others. If looking at budgets is any indication, scholarship would not be shown to be the focus of most museums. Most curatorial positions are not about scholarship but about exhibitions that involve scholarship broadly understood. Even most educational programs in museums are not about scholarship *per se* but about education linked to exhibitions.

Gaskell claims that 'museums certainly have a future as sites for scholarship … if they are recast as far more adaptable institutions not held back by the constraining aspects of their collections'.[20] He sees the move of scholarship from museums to the university as largely undesirable. But surely such a recasting is well under way, and he doesn't consider the fact that universities are no longer hospitable to scholarship of a certain kind, so that some work in the humanities must find, and already has found, a different setting – one in which some museums, far from lagging behind, already play a role.

Virtually all of the generalizations about museums Silver (2007) cites are reductive and are tied to normative accounts of museum experience – to what one should experience in a museum. These in turn are often connected to reductive explanations about the attraction of museums – why people go. (If the museum's role is scholarship, then people will go because they want to learn something.) Carrier for example says

> Hegel wants the museum to show not only the external history but the essential progress of the inner history of painting … That we walk through a museum – walk past the art – recapitulates in our act the motion of art history itself … Insofar as the museum becomes pure path, abandoning the dense spatial rooms of what were once homes or, of course, the highly sophisticated space of a cathedral, it becomes a more perfect image of history…. How you see one painting depends in part upon what is in the room where it is hung. How you view that room influences what you expect to see when you walk further. And how you look at art in those galleries, in turn, is affected by the

[19] My thanks to Amy Barrett-Lennard, director of PICA (Perth Institute of Contemporary Art) for this point.

[20] Ibid., 91.

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> experience of entering the museum and, sometimes, even by what you see in the streets outside.[21]

No doubt 'How you see one painting depends in part upon what is in the room where it is hung', and there are times when 'How you view that room influences what you expect to see'. These observations are allegedly grounded in Husserl's concept of 'a horizon of expectations' and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology – though they need not be. But their application to museums, and museum experience is negligible. The phenomenological notion of 'horizon' – the idea that 'a perceived thing is … a totality open to a horizon of an indefinite number of perspectival views which blend with one another'[22] – is alleged to be true of everything we perceive. What then is its particular relevance to museum experience?

Carrier goes on to assert the importance of entrances to museums, the buildings and how their galleries are arranged, for the way we see what is inside and the museum experience in general.[23] The staircase from Fifth Ave to New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Louvre's pyramid prime the museum-goer for a certain kind of experience to come. No doubt these things affect experience, but then so too does the kind of building one works or lives in and its arrangement. Neither ingresses, egresses, nor the fact that the arrangement of galleries at times constitutes a narrative – for example, an historical or stylistic progression – tell us much about museum experience. Surely there are many kinds of experiences? What the museum-goer experiences and what draws one to a museum cannot be explained in terms of gallery arrangements, museum buildings – even if iconic – and the like.

Nor does architecture and layout of museums tell us much about 'art museums as memory theatres'. Carrier says 'there is an important conceptual relationship between … memory techniques and the complex narrative orderings provided by our art museums. A museum aims to provide a lucid plan, making its presentation of art clear in our memory'.[24] Even if some art museums do aim to provide such a plan, or lesson in art history, and even if they are successful, its significance is likely marginal to museum experience.

[21] David Carrier, 'Remembering the Past: Art Museums as Memory Theatres', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 61/1 (2003), 62–63.

[22] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, translated by James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 15–16, quoted in Carrier, 'Remembering the Past', op. cit., 63.

[23] Carrier, 'Remembering the Past', op. cit., 63–64.

[24] Ibid., 64.

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2. Museums and the Nostalgic Self

In Part II I argue that the attraction of museums is varied but is best explained affectively and in terms of the orectic (appetitive, desiderative, wishing) rather than cognitively or conatively (willing, deciding). The attraction is to be explained in terms of the desires and wishes, conscious and unconscious, that museums can transiently satisfy by means of phantasy – much as wish-fulfilment occurs in dreams. Although this need not be taken as conflicting with the idea that museums are focused on scholarship, it is more consonant with the claim that exhibitions are central. Museums may at times both pique and satisfy our curiosity. However it is a mistake to see 'curiosity' as merely, or even primarily, a matter of cognition.

Art museums in particular may well be described as memory theatres of a certain kind but for reasons different than those given by Carrier (2003). Art, but also other objects, exhibitions, and performances as well, elicit emotional, wishful, as well as cognitive responses best characterized as nostalgic.[25] Of course, formalists, among others, disagree. Museums afford their audiences opportunities to engage with their nostalgic self and this results in a variety of responses. On this view it can be said that were it not for our orectic (driven by desire and wish-fulfilment) natures there would be no art museums – if for no other reason than that there would be no (or little) art. It might be thought that we could still have natural history museums, miniature railway museums and the like. But if it is the case, as I think it is, that even here our orectic natures and nostalgic selves are in charge and are directive, then these kinds of museums as well would fall by the wayside.

Nostalgia can be seen as an orectically driven way of engaging with the past – both real and imagined. If it is not itself a regressive defence strategy, then it operates in concert with ego defence mechanisms such as denial, repression, displacement, regression, projection and others.[26] Nostalgia makes, or seeks to make, the past palatable in

[25] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nostalgia. '1: the state of being homesick: homesickness. 2: a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition; *also*: something that evokes nostalgia'. Tamas Pataki (correspondence) usefully distinguishes between the affective (emotion, feeling etc.), the orectic (appetitive, desiderative, wishing) and conative (willing, deciding etc.).

[26] In the Freudian scheme of things there are three general ways in which the ego copes with and deflects the instinctual drives of the id (drives that demand satisfaction in one way or another): by repression (blocking); by substitutive satisfaction or wish-fulfilment (which involves

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ways that satisfies both past and present wishes. The two are often the same.

David Sachs's summary of Freud emphasizes a nostalgic engagement with the past that is useful for our purposes.

> [U]nconscious items and processes dominate psychic life … we are creatures curiously heedless of time, creatures fixed in our early if not earliest ways … Among its [the unconscious]achievements are these: we try to gratify wishes that are opposed to each other, indeed wishes whose descriptions may be paradoxical; we mistake as meaningless what is intelligible, and as trivial the important and even portentous; we confuse the scope and character of our acts and intentions; our denials can often be better understood as affirmations, and often too, the converse obtains; again more or less unbeknownst to us, our lives are largely spent in the quest and avoidance of persons and experiences past, in pursuit of and flight from an array of surrogates for those persons and experiences, including even antithetical surrogates. Then, too, prominent if not paramount in any résumé of Freud's thought will be statements about his extensions of commonplace notions of sexuality; that among unconscious entities those which enjoy pride of place and power are dispositions to affects or emotions that derive from early erotic experiences and fantasies. Any adequate abstract of Freud's work will also observe that, according to him, everyone is either neurotic or troubled by neurotic tendencies for some appreciable phase or phases of his life.[27]

A psychoanalytic account of art – its nature, function, value, and the experiencing of art – goes some way to furthering an understanding of art museums and museums generally. It can also explain aspects of their attraction. In what follows I refer to Freud's aesthetics, but it should be understood that he does not have a theory of aesthetics but a psychoanalytic view about art. The focus here is largely on Freud's views but it is worth noting that much psychoanalytic commentary on art has moved away from a focus on wish-fulfilment to Kleinian themes about reparation (which isn't far

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distortion); and by sublimation. Melanie Klein's notion of reparation can also be added here. My thanks to Tamas Pataki (correspondence).

[27] David Sachs, 'On Freud's doctrine of emotions', in Richard Wollheim and James Hopkins (eds), *Philosophical Essays on Freud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 92.

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from wish-fulfilment) – as in Segal,[28] Winnicottian ideas about transitional objects,[29] and various other things as well.[30]

Before explaining Freud's ideas about art, the artistic process, and one's reception of art, it is worth citing a few common criticisms and misconceptions. Here are two. The first is that if there are exceptions to Freud's claim that art is orectic, driven by desire and wish-fulfilment and functions so as to satisfy certain psychological needs of artists and audiences, then one will have shown Freud's views about art to be mistaken (even outrageous). The second objection is based on the assumption that we need to take artists at their word. Thus, if artists tell us that the reason why they pursue art is not to fulfil unconscious wishes, negotiate the demands of reality and satisfy desires they could not otherwise satisfy, then it is not. These objections are briefly addressed below.

As informed by psychoanalysis, aesthetics has a unique – though by no means univocal – set of insights to the questions of how art is to be judged; good art *vs*. bad art; low art *vs*. high art; objective aesthetic judgment; and the relation of ethics to aesthetic value ('ethicism' *vs*. 'aestheticism'). On Freud's account, to understand art it is necessary to focus on the artistic process as psychoanalytically conceived. And in view of all of the aforementioned issues, Freud's aesthetics, as opposed to other philosophical accounts of art, is worth reflecting upon both for itself and its implications for museums.[31]

'Psychoanalysis' refers to both a theory and a practice: (i) to a theoretical account, based originally on Freud's, of the structure and

[28] Hannah Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art* (Hoboken, NJ: Routledge, 1990).

[29] See, for example, D.W. Winnicott, 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena – A Study of the First Not-Me Possession', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 34 (1953), 89–97.

[30] T. Pataki writes: 'Heinz Kohut [1978, p. 821–822] has put forward the idea that the work of art is an extension of the self, more specifically of the perfect or ideal self. We create for ourselves idealised representations of how we would like to be, using the material of admired or envied others, and in fantasy elaborating our own features. Such representations, because they are often radically incompatible with reality, are largely unconscious, but nevertheless play a very important part in the regulation of self-esteem. Falling short of the ideal self in appearance, action or virtue, causes pining and suffering; approaching it enhances self-esteem and the sense of well-being'. T. Pataki, 'Some Aspects of Writing', *Quadrant* 41 (1997), 48.

[31] See Michael Levine, 'Freud's Aesthetics: Artists, art and psychoanalysis', in Simon Boag (ed), *Psychoanalysis and Philosophy of Mind* (London: Karnac, 2015), 137–162.

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workings of the mind, and (ii) to the psychotherapeutic method employed in clinical practice. Freud thought that both aspects of psychoanalysis, though particularly theory, are useful in understanding visual art, literature, and theatre. Art could be used, much as the psychopathology of everyday life, to further support the validity of psychoanalysis.

On the psychoanalytic view, art is not all about self-expression and so neither is understanding art. Nevertheless, on Freud's account a great deal of art can only be understood as the result of sublimated libidinal energy and desire. Frustrated in reality, the artist seeks satisfaction in phantasy and wish-fulfilment, and in doing so, some satisfaction and success in the real world may also be obtained.[32] This includes 'honour, power and the love of women'.[33] Segal believes that '[t]his … leaves Freud open to attack, since it is well known that true artists often sacrifice money, power, position, and possibly love of women, for the sake of the integrity of their art'.[34] But even if it were true that artists often do make those sacrifices (and it probably isn't), it would not conflict with Freud's claim. Artists, like academics, may like to *believe* that they are sacrificing money etc. for the integrity of their art or intellectual pursuits. But that is another matter. In any case, when Freud talks about seeking honour, power, and women he is talking about internal ends, satisfying narcissistic needs, the internal mother etc.

Freud's account of art is artist-centric. To understand or in some ways even appreciate a work of art, anyone, including the artist, must know something about the artist from a psychoanalytic perspective. From an epistemological standpoint an artist will not be particularly privileged in terms of interpreting their work since they may not

[32] L. Fraiberg notes: 'Generalizations are risky here, but as Freud points out, the relation between possible sublimation and indispensable sexual activity naturally varies very much in different persons, and indeed with the various kinds of occupation. An abstinent artist is scarcely conceivable: an abstinent young intellectual is by no means a rarity'. L. Fraiberg, 'Freud's Writings on Art', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 37 (1956), 94. [Cf. S. Freud (1908), '"Civilized" Sexual Morality and Modern Nervousness', in J. Strachey (ed), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (Volume 9)*, translated by J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1974), 192.

[33] S. Freud (1916–1917), 'The Paths to the Formation of Symptoms', in J. Strachey (ed), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (Volume 16)*, op. cit., 377.

[34] Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art*, op. cit., 63.

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be cognizant – not consciously at least – of some significant aspect of what their work is expressing or what they intend to express.

Despite it being often seen as derogatory,[35] Freud's account of art and artists is extraordinarily favourable. Artists are, no more than the rest of us, generally happy, untroubled, or neurosis free. But in some respects they are lucky – luckier, that is, than most. As Fraiberg says:

> [T]o those who are not artists the gratification that can be drawn from the springs of fantasy is very limited … A true artist has more at his disposal … *he understands how to elaborate his day-dreams so that they lose that personal note which grates upon strange ears and become enjoyable to others*; [my emphasis] he knows too how to modify them sufficiently so that their origin in prohibited sources is not easily detected.[36]

The pleasures art affords artists and audiences alike are, it should be pointed out, temporary (hence the need for museum membership!). Freud says 'Art affects us but as a mild narcotic and can provide no more than a temporary refuge … from the hardships of life; its influence is not strong enough to make us forget real misery'.[37]

Whether or not psychically emulating artists or the artistic temperament is even possible, there is little doubt that on Freud's account most people would be better off if they were more like artists – by being less repressed, better at positively engaging with repression, and by obtaining a level of satisfaction through their work otherwise unavailable – thereby avoiding the quite different substitutive satisfaction neuroses bring.[38] In a sense, museums make such emulation possible. The satisfactions provided are not vicarious but one's own.

Like many other theories of art, Freud not only accounts for the function of art, but also how art is able to elicit the audience response it does. It is here that this theory of aesthetics bears down on the

[35] For example, in R. Fry, *The Artist and Psychoanalysis* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924).

[36] Fraiberg, 'Freud's Writings on Art', *op. cit.*, 94–95. [Cf. S. Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (Garden City, NY: Garden City, 1943), 328.]

[37] S. Freud (1930), 'Civilization and its Discontents', in J. Strachey (ed), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (Volume 21)*, op. cit., 134. Quoted in Fraiberg, 'Freud's Writings on Art', op. cit., 93–94.

[38] 'Neurosis is not a condition of artistic creativity.... In Freud's view the artistic gift is as likely to be used for the purpose of avoiding neurosis as it is for augmenting it'. Ibid., 94.

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nature of museum experience. The present account is limited to art museums (works of art) but the relevance of psychoanalytic accounts need not stop here. Psychoanalysis also has an account(s) of why people like to collect and like to see collections. This may involve intimations of mortality and feelings of warding off death and anxiety via recourse to an illusion of control, or internalizing a perceived or hoped for sense of order. Compensatory or reparative feelings may be involved. Sufficiently elaborated, these may go some way to explaining the attraction of natural history museums. Furthermore, just as horror and other films may transiently satisfy certain sadistic, masochistic, voyeuristic needs of spectators (which does not make spectators sadists etc.), museums too may temporarily assuage desires normally regarded as unwholesome or worse. It would be odd if they did not.

The psychoanalytic account is likely to be considerably more detailed as well. Just as in the case with prejudices, where each character type responds to what they need to protect themselves from in ways suited to their character – so that the obsessional's anti-black prejudice is actually different in nature from that of the hysteric or narcissist, so too different character types will respond *characteristically* to museums, collections and exhibitions differently.[39] Not only is ego-defence tuned to character type; so too are pleasures, satisfactions and anxiety reducing phantasies.

The wishes that the artist temporarily satisfies in a work of art often mirror the audience's own wishes, and satisfies them as well. Freud: '[W]hat grips us so powerfully can only be the artist's *intention* in so far as he succeeds in expressing it in his work and in getting us to understand it … this cannot be merely a matter of *intellectual* comprehension; what he aims at is to awaken in us the same emotional attitude, the same mental constellation which produces in him the impetus to create'.[40] Fraiberg says, 'They become a work of art

[39] See Tamas Pataki, 'Introduction', in Michael Levine and Tamas Pataki (eds), *Racism in Mind* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 17. In very general terms racism is a defensive reaction of some sort, related to denial, repression, guilt, self-hatred, narcissism, sexual frustration and rooted further still in problematic aspects associated with specific character types. As Young-Breuhl argues, all character types have some predominant form of prejudice associated with them. See Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *The Anatomy of Prejudices* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 200–252.

[40] S. Freud (1914), 'The Moses of Michelangelo', J. Strachey (ed), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (Volume 13)*, op. cit., 212.

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through alteration which softens objections to them, disguises their personal origin and, by observance of the principles of aesthetics, offers the onlookers or hearers attractive pleasure-premiums'.[41]

The satisfaction is not vicarious but direct – dependent on recognizing an expression of one's own desires in the work of art. Some wishes will be more or less specific to individuals with certain character types and contoured to them. But others, like those associated with the Oedipal complex, Freud takes to be universal. It is because Oedipus's wishes are also our own, we can obtain a satisfaction much like that of the artist when they are represented as fulfilled in a work of art. Hence, Freud explains the appeal of not only Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* but also Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* in terms of Oedipal wishes.

If Freud meant his claim that unfulfilled wishes are satisfied in the work of art is to be taken as universal, then it seems plainly false. Here Fraiberg is correct: 'What Freud did was to establish the principle that evaluations of art fall within the purview of psycho-analysis only as they reveal the psychic needs out of which art arises, the psychic materials which it uses, and the psychic purposes it serves'.[42]

But the fact that artists produce art in which no unfulfilled wishes are satisfied; and/or cases in which they consciously address an issue, express emotion, a moral position, or further a cognitive goal, does not undermine claims regarding the role of the orectic and the unconscious in much art, and why psychoanalysis is therefore essential to understanding it.

Sterba says, 'The dynamic effect of the work of art upon those who enjoy it consists in the fact that through the hallucinatory participation in the artist's infantile fantasy, the wishes of the person enjoying the work of art are at the same time also satisfied'.[43] Audiences at first resist works of art – and not just disturbing works such as horror films. So for a work of art to be enjoyed, barriers between the egos

[41] Fraiberg, 'Freud's Writings on Art', op. cit., 95.

[42] Ibid., 82.

[43] R. Sterba, 'The Problem of Art in Freud's Writings', in *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 9/25 (1940), 263. See S. Freud (1907), 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming', J. Strachey (ed), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (Volume 9)*, op cit., 141–154. Sterba says 'The possibility offered by the work of art of an identification with the hallucinatory wish fulfilment – on the basis of kindred wishes – one can even say, the urge of the work of art to this identification, must be considered as a condition of the work of art.' Sterba, 'The Problem of Art in Freud's Writings', op. cit., 264.

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of the artist and audience must be overcome.

As Sterba says:

> Analysis maintains that the immense dynamic effect of the work of art, the satisfaction which it brings not only to the artist, but also to the spectator, is produced though the fulfilment of the repressed infantile wishes: that the latent part, as Freud calls it, of the pleasure of art is in the opinion of psychoanalysis far greater than the manifest and aesthetic part.[44]

This is a remarkable claim. The source of a great deal of intense aesthetic pleasure is discovered to be other than what it may appear to be, or what aesthetic theorists have taken it to be: 'The amount of pleasure radiating from these unconscious sources is automatically [and incorrectly] ascribed to the processes which bring about pleasure consciously, that is, to the aesthetic features of the work of art. The result of this is the overestimation of the aesthetic side'.[45]

A psychoanalytic view of the nature and value of art is distinctive. It gives a special account of the kinds, types, and origins of emotion that artists at times seek to express in some art and that may at times be necessary to understanding, experiencing, or appreciating a work of art. It gives a unique account of ways in which *some* art furthers our understanding of the world and ourselves. And it gives a distinctive account of aesthetic pleasure in ways that partly accounts for other significant aspects of the value of art. Additionally it explains a great deal about museums.

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[44] Ibid., 261.
[45] Ibid., 268.

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