



TOURISM AT THE MUSEUM AND THE LIFE-WORLD

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Museums are designed to foster tourism and thus minimize controversies. Political maneuvers are a part of this process. The type of politics that is exercised, however, is often quite subtle; control is imposed through minimally invasive practices. Museums, after all, are expected to be neutral sites of discussion and information dissemination. But in the end, museums remove knowledge from the life-world and create a sterile image of culture. To reverse this trend, and enable museums to be culturally relevant, the creative influence of the life-world must be restored.

Keywords: alienation, cultural politics, cultural reification, life-world, symbolic violence.

Introduction

Museums play a large role in practically everyone's travel plans. There are many reasons why persons visit these places, although education is probably at the top of the list. In this regard, museums are a repository of culture. Travelling through a museum, therefore, can provide an introduction to foreign lands and people. A museum can be thought of as a gateway to the cultural storylines that have both inspired and frightened humanity.

But there is a problem with this scenario. Theodor W. Adorno (1967), for example, has described museums to be sepulchers. In view of his Marxian outlook, this charge can mean that culture has been transformed into a fetish. As a result, persons have become alienated from their creations and treat them as objects or artifacts. Culture is thus external and something to be analyzed, much in the same manner that Émile Durkheim (1938) describes facts. Those who enter museums, accordingly, are confronted by a lost and vaguely understood heritage.

What Adorno also has in mind, however, is that the productions found in museums are dead. His point is that these objects are de-animated and removed from the blood and sweat of actual history. In this form, visitors are offered a shortcut to understanding. In other words, they can become knowledgeable without having

to take any risks or confront anything new. Persons can acquire cultural capital, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu (1986), with minimal effort. With little effort, they can become cultured.

In this sense, persons flock to museums to be entertained. They can simply bask in the light of genius, or become knowledgeable enough to impress their neighbors. But very little effort is spent on real self-improvement. Either way, in a manner similar to a guided tour, persons can acquire culture and perhaps bring home a souvenir.

And while they may be alienated, as Adorno maintains, museums offer persons a respite from their daily grind. They can believe, at least for the moment, that they are part of something important, yet at the same time mysterious or sacred (Durkheim 1915). A trip to a museum holds the promise of personal enrichment and the spread of culture. In some circles, this view of the museum is known as “patron-centered” (Asma 2001).

A cultural package

As part of a tourism motif, museums offer persons a cultural package. Upon entering the door, practically everything is arranged (Tröndle 2014). Nothing is left to chance! Almost effortlessly a visitor is directed through a seamless array of exhibits, rest stops, cafeterias, and gift shops, very similar to how grocery stores are arranged. Nothing seems to be out of place; everything fits together. Art styles, for example, flow together that, in fact, are contradictory, while commerce is treated as a natural part of the art world (Becker 1982). In today’s museum, the so-called clash of cultures is treated as an anachronism. Persons are whisked from one reality to another with no fanfare.

But what else should be expected? After all, most of these visitors are on holiday and demand a leisurely experience. The museum, in this regard, has a different function than work or school. Indeed, an escape is desired that is entertaining but informative. Personal improvement is expected without any stress or strain. For example, people do not want to be confronted with how they have contributed to the subjugation of other cultures, or serious questions about race or heritage.

Persons anticipate having fun at a museum. In fact, some critics have compared a museum to Disneyland (Ames 1986). As a result, information has to be easily obtainable. Not much effort should be involved. In a variety of ways, every presentation is summarized, so that visitors are not challenged or made to feel inadequate (Nardi 2010). Aesthetics, for example, is no longer philosophy but easily digestible. Everyone is smart enough to enjoy a museum!

Every bit of the experience is neatly packaged. Brochures, for example, provide a snapshot of a current exhibit. Dates, key names, and events are mentioned, but with little theory provided. Maybe even an example or two is supplied. The purpose of any display is made obvious to everyone. The goal is to make cultural consumption quick and easily digestible, while providing very little substance, similar to people’s experience with fast food (Ritzer 2004). And just like this style of dining, people are left culturally malnourished, yet the visit and the accompanying experience of culture is better than starving.

Along with this sort of introduction, every work or artifact is clearly labeled. Although minimally informative, every experience is “framed” for visitors (Entman 1993). Furthermore, any history that is involved is outlined in easily delineated stages. In this sense, a faux holism is adopted. Persons are thus able to leave a museum feeling that they have an adequate picture of an art movement or historical period.

And if a visitor becomes confused, experts are available to offer a definitive answer. The information presented in brochures and signs are thus rehashed slightly, so that clarity is achieved. But much more important, visitors are touched by expert knowledge and enlightened. An informed guide is available who escorts persons, keeps them on the well-trodden paths, and brings them back safely to everyday life.

At this juncture, Adorno’s image of the sepulcher is obvious. Knowledge is neatly sequestered, properly interpreted, and quietly neutralized (Vásquez Rocca 2008). Any shocks are muted, while controversies are minimized. And if anyone happens to be offended, these difficult events are placed in a context that renders them harmless. Visitors might be told, for example, what better place is there to deal with these issues, removed from daily affairs with no serious consequences. In other words, visitors do not have to confront how they may have been complicit in supporting certain injustices or crimes against humanity.

Intellectual tourism

Given the way that culture is packaged in a museum, the accompanying experience almost epitomizes tourism (Krukar 2014). Visitors are passive, do not know their way around, stick to the main streets, and hope for the intervention of a knowledgeable guide. Nothing spontaneous or different is likely to occur. In museums, for the most part, everything is orderly and serene, while persons are ushered through a series of well-planned presentations and interludes.

Based on this imagery, a museum could be compared easily to a cathedral (Dobrzynski 2010). An almost sacred space is provided, where icons of art or history are venerated. But, like devotees, visitors are kept at a distance. Ropes, protective cases, and security personnel protect the relics. Nothing is ever touched or examined closely. Warning bells sound in many museums if the inner sanctum is breached.

Persons are allowed to enter a museum and genuflect before the masters. And with their experiences certified, visitors can begin to feel fulfilled. Their lives have been elevated in a way that changes their overall outlook. Simply put, they have had the requisite experience to become better persons. Their lives are now more complete.

But like much of tourism, the museums provide a fairytale. And similar to modern fairytales, which have been edited to tone down evil and other unsavory elements, they provide a gentle and palatable version of history and culture (Zipes 2008). Events, persons, or history, for example, are approached in an idealized manner. An almost virtual experience is provided – there is no strife or debris (Dorrian 2014). Persons encounter a definitive story about histories, art, or nature, and leave the museum blessed by the experience.

This mode of escape, however, is reminiscent of the history of Western philosophy (Bordo 1987). Take Plato's cave, for example. In order to achieve true knowledge, persons must flee to a higher realm of Ideas that is unsullied by daily concerns. Only opinion is found in this lower domain; truth resides elsewhere. This scenario has been replayed many times. The result in each case, however, is the same: valid knowledge is divorced from everyday existence. As should be noted, the museum is based on a similar premise (Lui 2005). However, what is often forgotten in this scenario is that the attainment of truth is meant to be a painful, uncomfortable experience, one that is mitigated by the arrangement of most museum exhibits. Finding truth for Plato and many other philosophers was expected to require a life-long struggle.

Obscuring the life-world

What the museum does is remove knowledge from the life-world. Or, in terms used by Jürgen Habermas, the life-world is colonized by the museum (Habermas 1987). But what is the life-world, and how does the colonization of this realm affect culture?

The life-world is a term that has been popularized by phenomenologists. They adopted this idea to refer to the domain of direct experiences. Throughout the history of philosophy, however, experience has been defined in many ways. Behaviorists and other empiricists, for example, tie knowledge to experience. But their usage is the antithesis the intentions of phenomenologists.

Whereas empiricists view experience to be an encounter with an objective reality, divorced from values or perspectives, phenomenologists base knowledge on intentionality. As Edmund Husserl declares, consciousness is always conscious of something (Husserl 1964). What might at first appear to be a banal phrase marks a dramatic change in thinking about experience. Specifically, the Western dualist tradition is challenged, and experience participates actively in the generation of knowledge. Experience taints every aspect of reality.

Nonetheless, the cornerstone of the standard tradition is the prospect of encountering pristine knowledge divorced from daily affairs. The proposal advanced by phenomenologists, accordingly, undermines this trend. Because consciousness always mediates everything that is known, escape from experience is impossible. Consequently, knowledge associated with Platonic ideas or similar abstractions is a myth. All that is available is information that is shaped by experience (Merleau-Ponty 1968). Remember that, according to phenomenologists, intentionality is active and marks whatever is known.

The life-world represents a confluence of various modalities of intentionality. In less esoteric language, the life-world consists of values, beliefs, and commitments, for example, which guide the lives of persons or a community. The acquisition of knowledge is thus seldom neat, but often reveals contradictory values, different interpretations, and multiple conclusions. What is sanctioned as rational behavior, or a sensible conclusion, may vary greatly in different communities.

In many ways, however, a museum attempts to dismiss the complexity associated with the life-world. The tale that is told in a museum tends to ignore conflicting inter-

pretations or the suppression of select explanations. Although part of the life-world, these clashes are usually omitted from the streamlined presentations given to visitors. How artistic or natural phenomena may have been experienced by different social classes or cultural groups, for example, is not regularly on the agenda (Msila 2013).

In this way, museums are consistent with the trend in Western philosophy to treat these interpretations, along with other apparently subjective factors, as impediments to achieving valid insight. Tourists, likewise, seldom delve into this experiential domain. In order to make museums and the associated culture meaningful, or at least consistent with a range of experiences, the life-world must be resurrected. Instead of ignoring how reality is experienced by different persons or groups, these variations and their social implications should be elevated in importance (Griswold *et al.* 2013). More valid insights can thus be gained into how persons define key aspects of their lives and relationships.

From a phenomenological perspective, museums offer not only a narrow discourse on their displays, but overlook the origin of their meaning and significance. Most tourists, likewise, are not aware of this realm. The result of this omission, however, is that standard attributions are substituted for the intentions of the original actors and the relevant meaning of their productions. In other words, the influence of the life-world is dismissed.

Creativity is belittled

What happens in museums, to borrow from Walter Benjamin (1969: 217–251), is that the “aura” is stripped from art or artifacts. In this context, aura does not refer to some mysterious element but the absence of *praxis*. Because everything in museums is treated as a-historical, in many ways exhibitions constitute a virtual reality. In this space, nothing is hidden or spontaneous. Rather than a happening, information is displayed. Autonomous objects are simply made available for perusal by the public.

In this regard, an interesting but deadly message is conveyed about culture. That is, culture is ready-made rather than created. Culture is thus encountered and, if persons are intelligent, adjustments are made. In their current state, most museums serve to instill in persons the notion that culture should be preserved rather than (re)invented. If culture transcends daily concerns, and serves as a primordial foundation of civilization, only gods or their representatives can be creative. The masses are certainly not a part of this scenario.

At best, persons are enlightened by culture. If they are lucky, they are lifted to another, more profound plateau. As a result, creativity is belittled. Specifically, mimicry is encouraged rather than invention (Kuhlken 2007). In this situation, creativity is something subjective, inward, and possibly emotional. After all, the world is immune to the effects of *praxis*; culture consists of things that have their own identities. The direction of culture is certainly not altered by creativity, but only brought to fruition.

A distinction is often made at this juncture between convergent and divergent thinking (Cromptley 1998). As the term suggests, convergent thinking sticks to the facts. Creativity action, accordingly, consists of rearranging the elements of any issue, while a basic framework is accepted that guides this entire process. Convergent thinking,

on the other hand, begins with interpretation; facts are not simply encountered and copied. Additionally, a new framework is envisioned that constitutes a novel conceptual scheme. Originality is stressed, along with independence.

As should be noted, due to the rendition of culture involved, thinking in a museum is mostly convergent. In terms of politics, this image of culture is disastrous. Most important, creativity is a supplement, that is, something that helps persons to adjust to culture. Those who are insightful are able to discover productive ways of assimilating to the prevailing cultural standards or conditions. If they are creative, they can find a niche and survive, maybe without too much degradation. Nonetheless, they are alienated, as Karl Marx suggests: their creations reappear as foreign entities and demand to be appeased.

Restoring the life-world

In order to provide more significant insights into culture, and enhance creativity, a particular theoretical maneuver must be made. That is, rather than a pristine space, museums should be viewed as a product of the life-world. Rather than an escape from contingency, and the daily experiences that allegedly cloud sight and thinking, the museum should be viewed as a particular way of organizing and interpreting reality. The culture that is presented, accordingly, is understood to be enmeshed in this unique world-view (Hall 1997).

Rather than a universal sphere, a museum embodies a particular standpoint. When thought of as a universal framework, however, other perspectives are marginalized and likely misinterpreted. Bourdieu refers to this process of inferiorization as “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu 1990). On the other hand, acknowledging the museum’s standpoint opens up the possibility that other, currently hidden interpretations might be able to emerge and be appreciated. No rendition of culture has to remain in the shadow cast by the museum.

The message to tourists of all kinds is quite simple: any culture should be viewed as a unique facet of the life-world. What the museum obscures, and the guided tours skirt around, holds the key to understanding properly a culture. The life-world, in this regard, represents the creative exposition that provides order and makes life meaningful. True cultural understanding requires entry into this domain and an appreciation of how culture can be invented in a variety of ways.

Equally important is reflection on how a particular expression of the life-world, such as the museum, becomes a dominant framework. In other words, how is the museum able to tell a story devoid of contingencies, and thus present a sterilized rendition of culture? To borrow from Paul Gilroy, visitors should begin to recognize their complicity in enabling the interpretation promoted by a museum to masquerade as an absolute or neutral description (Gilroy 1993).

Persons can begin to realize that tourism, in general, is antithetical to *entrée* into the life-world. Although no-one seems to be immune to this outlook, which is sometimes even satisfying, the expressions of the life-world are sacrificed. To remedy this situation, the imagery supplied by Maurice Merleau-Ponty is very important. Specifically, the interpretive “flesh” must be restored to culture, so that persons

can witness how tourism strips reality of its significance (Merleau-Ponty 1968). Why worry about what is lost in a museum, if the life-world, overall, has been concealed?

The life-world, however, is messy. What is revealed is that reality consists of various, and often conflicting stories. Any attempt to ignore these experiences results in serious misrepresentation and the alienation of persons from their creations. When severed from the life-world, culture confronts and dominates persons. Culture is then simply an array of events and artifacts that can be captured easily by a brochure or itinerary. The accumulation of these experiences can thus be arranged without much effort. This outcome is no surprise, but rather the nature of tourism.

Conclusions

Many critics have proposed that museums are political (Luke 2002). The collections represent, for example, the history of colonial power and the evisceration of the exploited cultures. Although this portrayal is true, the hegemony that is exercised is not always so visible (Laclau, Mouffe 1985). Indeed, museums take pride in their avoidance of ideology. The story they present of culture is presumed to transcend these controversial issues.

But is ideology really avoided? After all, certain stories are told and given the legitimacy to expand at the expense of other, equally valid ones. What the museum does, in fact, is provide a context of authority. A cultural viewpoint is imposed silently, but powerfully, in a manner that will not rile any tourists. This process of neutralization is designed to allow everyone to leave happy.

In this sense, culture and creativity are eviscerated at least in two ways. The story about an exploitative past remains intact, while any challenges to this standpoint are easily deflected. The colonization process thus continues under the guise of civility, the presentation of culture, and the dispersion of information. The tourist industry is thus hardly neutral in this practice of enlightenment.

Resurrecting the life-world, however, provides and opening to critique this hegemony. The key implication is that human praxis and cultural creation are elevated in importance. As a result, the story presented by a museum is exposed to be an invention, even a product of convention, and subject to critique and modification. The competing stories, especially the underside of colonization, can be revisited in the life-world, revealed, and rewritten. When grounded in the life-world, the authority of the museum cannot protect information from this fate.

On the other hand, recognition of the life-world enables a culture to be understood properly, severed from the dominant explanations. Tourists are thus no longer simply visitors but can become integrated into the real meaning of a culture. They have a rationale, in other words, to question the legitimacy of the usual portrayals and explore new, possibly contentious, storylines.

When immersed in the life-world, tourists lose their innocence. They have the responsibility not to fall prey to ideology, even one perpetuated by venerable institutions such as museums. Tourists must now be archaeologists, in the sense intended by Michel Foucault, in that they are expected to penetrate layers of interpretation to

discover the truth that is currently in play (Foucault 1993). Consequently, the stories designed for tourists lose their attraction and thus begins the hunt for more relevant documentation and understanding.

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MUZIEJŲ TURIZMAS IR GYVENAMASIS PASAULIS

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Santrauka

Muziejų paskirtis yra skatinti turizmą ir taip mažinti kontroversijas. Politinių manevrų arena yra šio proceso dalis. Naudojamos politikos tipai dažniausiai yra ganėtinai subtilūs, o kontrolė taikoma naudojant mažiausiai invazines praktikas. Galų gale tikima, kad muziejai yra tokia vieta, kurioje vystoma neutrali diskusija ir informacijos sklaida. Tačiau galiausiai muziejai pašalina žinias iš gyvenamojo pasaulio ir sukuria sterilios kultūros įvaizdį. Norint pakeisti šią tendenciją ir suteikti muziejams kultūrinio svorio, būtina atkurti kūrybinę gyvenamojo pasaulio įtaką.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: susvetimėjimas, kultūros materializavimas, gyvenamasis pasaulis, kultūros politika, simbolinis smurtas.