

The Outsider Manifesto

An appeal for Cathectic Art Experience

Cathectic Experience Visceral

To become free of any (over)interpretation – Brian Holmes introduced the idea/concept of ‘artistic activism’ – which opens expanding territories in order to split the private self from the social order one is being part of.

So, to become free (really free) to form one’s own meaning – and escape the doctrine of capitalism and institutionalism – one has to move outside the hierarchy of disciplines, recuperate from any institutionalism and recover one’s own senses again. In other words – to be able to forget and to build one’s own ‘imaginary museum’ of aesthetic experiences.

One ought to be able to actively – and individually – experience art again. Meaning-making should therefore not just be a mere experience – but physically, emotionally, visually or otherwise sensually experienced – without barriers and the semi-religious doctrine(s).

This is my point of departure – to explore these problematics and to come up with an ontology of individual meaning-making. Visceral and Cathectic.

I appeal to the sleeping consciousness and conscience of the senses.

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“Capitalist civilization, which has dominated the economic, political, and cultural life of continents (...) burdens upon the mass of the world’s population. The general crisis of capitalism is reflected in its culture. The economic and political machinery of the bourgeoisie is in decay, its philosophy, its literature and its art are bankrupt.”

These words are part of the John Reed Club ‘Draft Manifesto’, dated June 1932.

Almost a century later our era is still dominated by capitalism. Therefore, our focus should not be on the good old days, but the bad new ones (Brecht). According to Lipovetsky (2005), today’s cultural practices have become ‘so intrinsically meaningless that they evoke hedonistic ecstasy as much as existential anguish’.

Many of what is or has been entitled as art in this era of post-modernism, meta-modernism, pseudo-modernism, alter-modernism or even post-postmodernism has its focus on the experience of the experience (Note: hence the contradiction of Dewey’s aesthetic or sensuous experience!). Consequently, any reception or interpretation of art is limited – as art is capitalised or even commodified – as to the same degree public space is highly commodified.

The gallery/museum as White Cube instead of Black Box

Brian O’Doherty (1976) described the gallery as ‘a construction build along the same laws as rigorous as those for building a medieval church: the outside world must not come in. – so, windows are usually sealed of. Walls painted white. Wooden floors polished so that [heels] click along. An ashtray becomes almost a sacred object – as does the fire extinguisher.’

Visitors read the signs as if they chew gum: unconsciously and out of habit.

As such, these spaces are what Augé calls non-places. Spaces that not have enough (or any?) significance to be regarded as a place.

Meanwhile – the spectator, viewer, sometimes observer or perceiver – has no face. He/she bends his/her body forward and downward – inelegantly blocking the view for others. Directions and responses are provided by the institution: ‘the viewer feels..’, ‘the observer notices...’, ‘the effect on the spectator is...’.

The Eye can be directed, but with less confidence than the Spectator – who, unlike the Eye – is rather eager to please (O’Doherty).

To attempt to preserve the sanctuary feeling – there are barriers everywhere – through glass cases, do-not-touch signs and outlined paths.

Barriers that mostly root in a Western European world view, which divides art from primitivism.

As Susan Sontag already clearly declared: ‘Interpretation, based on highly dubious theory, present a work of art as composed of items of content. It is making art into an article, to fit into a mental scheme of categories’.

As capitalism makes life a commodified experience, art institutions take interpretation through sensory experience of art for granted!!