There is, one could conclude, consistency in Hegel’s endorsement of the museum. This consistency is not in the service of idealism, that is, it does not secure the hold of the Hegelian Spirit over art, culture, and history. To his credit, Hegel does not speak in the interest of Spirit alone. Nor is the museum justifiable for Hegel simply because it seems to reproduce Spirit’s triumphant summation of all preceding history. Hegel’s defense of museum culture stems from the work of art itself, as it eludes the interests of both materialism and idealism, Quatemérien contextualism and Hegelianism. The artwork’s restless movement between the sensate and the conceptual means that it belongs neither to the ground of nature nor to the home of culture. By putting art in museums, culture perhaps acknowledges the rebellious, uncategorical nature of art, its non-identity. Any protest against the museum’s program of uprooting unknowingly amounts to an attack on art’s non-identity. To complain, like Quatemérié, that artworks lose all value upon being removed from their context is, in the end, to subordinate the restlessness of art to the identity principle (place, nation, people, and historical setting). One should not forget that the romantic museum once was deemed to stand against such subjugation. The real lesson of Quatemérié is that he reminds us museums were once called anticultural for practicing a systematic uprooting of culture. This accusation underscores the revolutionary dimension of museums and their invitation to rethink culture apart from the pathos of roots, belonging, and identity.

In ungounding art from the common run of existence, the museum officially makes room for the restless drive of culture. Museums are paradoxical; they shelter restlessness but, in doing so, they build a home around it. Curating the inventive drive of culture is a contradiction, for it destroys exactly what it means to preserve. In so doing, the museum embodies the antagonistic nature of culture, at once striving for self-invention and pulling backward to self-preservation and the status quo. The great paradox of museums is that they implement culture’s program of self-preservation by preserving the very thing by which culture ungrounds itself, the artistic gesture. The museum thus manifests modern culture in the grip of a capitalist dynamic of historical production. Museums replicate the tensions of capital, with its fits of accumulation and expenditure, stockpiling and liquidation: museums preserve culture in a permanent state of rootlessness, that is, they choose rootlessness as the principle by which to conserve culture. In capitalism as in the museum, rootlessness turns into a principle, into permanent impermanence. It is a culture at once oblivious and remembering, one whose means of commemoration entail a forgetting, liquidation. As such, the museum shows that there is no culture without uprooting, without forgetting, and that consequently culture is always, in a (Nietzschean) sense, artistic culture.

The Art Police

Enclosing art inside the museum walls no doubt removes it from the participative life of the polity. It brackets artworks off as qualitatively different from other objects: more precious, more fragile, more unusual, more ill-suited to survival, more alien, perhaps in a troubling way. The museum is not only the place where art is curated; it is also where art is imprisoned. Society locks away those elements deemed either too dangerous or too precious to move freely in the public domain. In the case of art, the distinction between the dangerous and the precious, or between the defensive and the protective, tends to blur. It does not seem far-fetched, as one critic proposes, to liken the museum to its nineteenth-century cousin, the prison. This quarantining of art constitutes a political gesture because it defines social spaces, their mode of integration and their contents. In this respect, the argument regarding the socialization of art in the museum age is irrefutable: museums have contributed to the alienation of art. They remove artworks from involvement in the polis, neutralize their political thrust, freeze their contents as esthetically remote forms. By its very existence, the museum legislates against the direct participation of art in the polis.

Putting art behind bars, the museum protects us from art. A naked plump beauty in Rubens causes no stir among the museum visitors, whereas similar nudity on a billboard would call for an emergency session of the city council. This shows that the museum shields the visitor from the nudity in Rubens. It erects an aesthetic barrier behind which the work of art is as surely neutralized as the sociopath is behind the prison bars. The museum secures the concrete foundation of esthetic detachment,
with the warranty that one may feel safe around artworks (it is only when artworks directly challenge the convention of the esthetic neutral gaze that the citizenry calls for more energetic measures of confinement. The Mapplethorpe affair, a few years back, is a case in point: witness how the curators, caught in the crossfire, scrambled to convince everybody that the photographs showed undeniably esthetic features and that, as a result, they could be relished with detachment, thus bypassing their challenge to the neutrality of the esthetic gaze).

The exclusion of art from the participative life of the polis is therefore tantamount to its estheticization. As museum culture develops, so the political thrust of art is dulled and weakened. In screaming blue murder over an art he did not understand, the nineteenth-century bourgeois implicitly acknowledged the power of art to intervene forcefully in the community. Art was not so estheticized that it could not, on certain occasions, still poke through the exhibition walls and spark social controversy. Today, exhibitions of fierce political intent, artworks that strike out against the separation between art and the polis, artistic forms that rampage through self-congratulatory bourgeois culture—all this is taken in stride by the museum mind. Esthetic detachment guarantees that, however loud the work of art shouts, its protest will be met with deadeningly polite applause.

In fact, however, the estheticization of art—its bracketing-off and silencing—does not begin with the museum proper. Plato's animus toward artists already contains the seeds of the future preservation of art behind the gilded bars of museums. Plato banishes artists from the Republic for peddling a second-rate reality among the community. This tarting up of truth, for Plato, amounts to prevarication:

We should be justified in not admitting him [painter, mimetic poet] into a well-ordered state, because he . . . sets up in each individual soul a vicious constitution by fashioning phantoms far removed from reality, and by currying favor with the senseless element that cannot distinguish the greater from the less, but call the same thing now one, now the other.  

Blurring the distinction between truth and its facsimile, the work of art tends to become indistinguishable from what it mimics. The political stakes implicit in this blurring of model and copy are what condemn art and artists to isolation. Hence, we note, the Republic only seems to discuss artworks for their illusory nature; in reality it banishes them because of their excessive reality, the fact they can take the place of the real thing. This is more explicit in the Laws. There, the truth-claim of art not only upbraid the truth-claim of politics, but also forces the legislator to recognize in politics a production of truth inherently akin to the one effected by artists. As a result, art is ostracized for being a competing form of truth-production. Politics, as the officially sanctioned form of truth-production, does not tolerate competition. To the artists' query whether they may enter the city, the legislator responds thus:

Respected visitors, we are ourselves authors of a tragedy, and that the finest and best we know how to make. In fact, our whole polity has been constructed as a dramatization of a noble and perfect life: that is what we hold to be in truth the most real of tragedies. Thus you are poets, and we also are poets in the same style, rival artists and rival actors, and that in the finest of all dramas, one which indeed can be produced only by a code of true law—or at least that is our faith. So you must not expect that we shall lightheartedly permit you to pitch your booths in our market square with a troupe of actors whose melodious voices will drown our own. 

In declaring that the tragedy of politics is the most real tragedy, the legislator recognizes that the difference between art's ability to create reality and that of politics is only a matter of degree. Politics, like art, produces truth through mimesis. Hence art is cast out of the polis because it resembles politics, and rivals politics in the production of truth. The make-believe dimension of art (whether mimetic or otherwise) is therefore tied to the place of its appearance: outside the polis—in the museum, for instance—the image-making aspect of artistic mimesis is benign because it is perceived as unambiguously illusory and apocryphal; in the forum, it is easily mistaken for politics, that is, for the "real" production of reality. Hence the creation of museums: they do not so much protect art from politics as politics from art.

Plato puts the work of art away so that its semblance may be recognized as just that. The work's mimetic character becomes politically weak in the museum, where mimesis loses its ability to produce truth; mimesis, formerly a species of truth, is reduced to mere representation, a copy. The
museum perpetuates the make-believe status of art: whatever is circumcribed within a purely esthetic sphere is branded as illusory and representational—not the truth, but its image. This constitutes the imagistic dimension of museums, one which has been a bountiful source of inspiration for the avant-garde (for example, Duchamp’s ready-mades). Sealing the make-believe status of art, the museum also cements the opinion that, on account of its illusory character, art need not be taken all that seriously. Or so the Platonic legislator hopes.

The assumption that art is placed in museums in order to be recognized as illusion implies that, outside of its esthetic confines, the work of art may exist in another form and might, as Plato feared, merge with life, with the production of social reality. In ostracizing art, Plato is perhaps responsible for the rupture between art and existence in Western metaphysics, the discordance before which Nietzsche stood in “holly dread,”40 the “distressing severance [pénible scission]” endured by Artaud.41 Plato stands at the juncture where Greek art gives way to the beginning of metaphysics. Heidegger writes:

Aesthetics begins with the Greeks at that moment when their great art and also the great philosophy that flourished along with it comes to an end. At that time, during the age of Plato and Aristotle, in connection with the organization of philosophy as a whole, those basic concepts are formed which mark off the boundaries for all future inquiry into art. (Nietzsche I, 80)

The ability to perceive art unethetically ends with metaphysics, with Plato and Aristotle. It grants the philosopher-king a monopoly over truth while stripping art of its relevance to life: art is what is illusory, deceitful, and second-hand. Truth is a transcendence to which the work of art, bound as it is to empirical existence, can have no access. Politics alone has a legitimate claim to the production of truth. In the meantime, outside the city limits, the fate of the work of art as disenfranchised, apocryphal, and derivative is sealed.

This excursion into Plato’s account of the polemical origin of the esthetic work of art shows that art’s severance from life is a historical product. Museums were created because art is political (in the Greek sense of the term), because it is so deeply political that it risks being confused with life (as in Plato’s Laws). The Platonic edict against art shows that the mystification of art started long before its full manifestation in the modern age. Although the rationalization of art does act in accord with the one that reorganized the world of knowledge during the Enlightenment, it is not entirely reducible to it. Museification occurred with the advent of metaphysics, in the act of declaring art’s mode of making truth improper. In the day art became a mere copy of truth, and no longer its effectuation, the first museum was founded.

Plato’s banishment of art bespeaks the concrete political thrust of aesthetics. It is no longer possible to answer the question “why do we put art in the museum?” with the type of curatorial good conscience that blocks out any reality outside the mission of safeguarding artistic objects. As is apparent in the Platonic edict, art is evicted from immanent life in order to protect the legislator’s exclusive right to the production of truth. The museum forces art to abnegate history, that is, to relinquish the power of truth-making. The latter becomes henceforth the privilege of politics and, later, of the scientist. The museum keeps art at a remove, not for the sake of enshrining its “eternal” essence, but for the sake of the practitioners of social control who, in creating an esthetic niche, secure the irrelevance of art in the face of dominant rationality.

The Origin of Museums

The Platonic legislator exemplifies the claim that museums coincide with the esteticization of artistic experience and thus with art’s neutralization. A problem arises at this point: if indeed Plato was among the first to banish art to a second-hand existence, it follows that museification originated simultaneously with the discourse on art in Western culture. The autonomization of art thus corresponds historically with the appearance of art as art. While the Platonic legislator undoubtedly does art great injury, we owe to him the first formal reflection on art. That the political neutralization of art is entailed in art’s emergence in discourse may serve as confirmation that any historical trace is the product of coercion: whatever leaves a mark rules out all other marks. Art’s marked entrance into philosophy is such a forceful negation of art’s claim to being. Without that negation, perhaps, art would still have to be known as art by us.42
Art began to leave a trace when it was pulled from the praxis of existence and shifted down to the status of image, that is, falsehood. This coincidence stems from the nature of art itself. Whether this is to be bemoaned is moot. The point is to see that art itself makes traces. Perhaps a non-esthetic appearance of the work of art is not to be found because art is an activity of making traces and leaving records. What was art before Plato and Aristotle? This question prompts Nietzsche to delve into the dark reaches of the Dionysiac, into the womb of art itself. What he finds there is hard to describe: it is all fleeting traces, rapture, oblivion, formlessness. There is no Dionysiac language as such. The roots of art extend into chaos, the night of the unshaped. Dionysus, who does not leave records, needs Apollo, the god of form, to shape the sheer unbound energy of artistic genius. In fact Dionysus's unrecorded rapture is known only through Apollo's restriction, neutralization, perhaps even denial of it. What emerges from Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy is that, if indeed the Dionysiac is the earliest, most original mode of artistic expression, it is only thanks to the Apollonian that it comes to form. The Dionysiac frenzy may embody the truest form of living art; yet it stands in need of the Apollonian drive to reach representation. As Nietzsche writes, the Dionysiac undifferentiated chorus "discharges itself in Apollonian images." The Dionysiac can only appear by grace of its interpreter, Apollo, who gives it shape and form, in a word, a voice (Birth of Tragedy 66). This realization in Birth of Tragedy informs Nietzsche's subsequent meditation on art, particularly about music. Even at the heart of musical expression (which, especially in its Wagnerian form, Nietzsche had hitherto taken to be the Dionysiac itself), Nietzsche writes that there lies the mediation of the Apollonian, the maker of traces:

Music is, of and in itself, not so significant for our inner world, not so profoundly exciting, that it can be said to count as the immediate language of feeling: but its primeval union with poetry has deposited so much symbolism into rhythmic movement, into the varying strengths and volume of musical sounds, that we now suppose it to speak directly to the inner world and to come from the inner world. . . . In itself, no music is profound or significant, it does not speak of the "will" or of the "thing in itself"; the intellect could suppose such a thing only in an age which had conquered for musical symbolism the entire compass of the inner life. It was the intellect itself which first introduced this significance into sounds."

Thus even music's sensual immediacy is the product of an intellectual inscription into rhythm and harmony. In itself music does not express spontaneous, the unbridled, the liberated, and the true; it does it only symbolically. Nietzsche goes even further: it now appears that the Dionysiac side of music is a retroactive invention of the Apollonian. Only a thoroughly esthetic mind, says Nietzsche, would invent the raw unesthetic immediacy of Dionysus ("the intellect could suppose such a thing only in an age which had conquered for musical symbolism the entire compass of the inner life"). The untrammelled beginning of art is a fantasy created by the master of form, the negator of the freedom of beginnings.

Nietzsche's dialectic of the Dionysiac and the Apollonian thus concerns art's historical emergence. Historically, that is, in the realm of traces, art can only begin with the Apollonian, the moment art casts itself in clear and permanent forms. Nietzsche's scheme no doubt looms large in Heidegger's history of the esthetic idea. The idea of the Dionysiac frenzy, the plunge into pure sensuous knowledge, the tumult and delirium of sheer expression, creeps through the Heideggerian evocation of the non-esthetic work of art, that is, the original work of art before Plato and Aristotle. Yet, as Nietzsche himself intimated in the early Birth of Tragedy and spelled out in the later Human, All Too Human, the Dionysiac or non-esthetic work of art is mediated through and through by its representation in the Apollonian, a representation without which there would be no trace of the Dionysiac.

Thus it is a telling fact that Heidegger says precious little about what the pre-esthetic work of art was for the ancient Greeks. In contrast to Plato, Heidegger offers only a negative esthetics: he tells us only what non-esthetic art was not. For example, Heidegger states that that art before metaphysics did not have a discourse corresponding to it ("the magnificent art of Greece remains without a corresponding cognitive-conceptual meditation on it," Nietzsche 80), that, having no esthetics, the early Greeks still did not wallow in immediate sensuousness ("the lack of such a simultaneous reflection or meditation on great art does not imply that Greek art was only 'lived', . . . On the contrary they had such an originally mature and luminous knowledge . . . that they had no need of 'esthetic,'" Nietzsche 80). But as for positive statements about the early non-esthetic work of art, Heidegger only says that it is a "luminous state of knowing."
mysterious gnosis is all the more remote as it eludes the very name of esthetics:

The name “aesthetics,” meaning meditation on art and the beautiful, is recent. It arises in the eighteenth century. But the matter which the word so aptly names, the manner of inquiry into art and the beautiful on the basis of the state of feeling in enjoyers and producers, is old, as old as meditation on art and the beautiful in Western thought. Philosophical meditation on the essence of art and the beautiful even begins as aesthetics. (Nietzsche 79)

Trying to pinpoint the birth of esthetics, Heidegger is forced to push it back as far as philosophy’s first meditation on art. This seems to imply that, even before Baumgarten coined the name in 1750, esthetics already existed as an unnamed reflection: before the age of esthetics still lies esthetics as its own unrecognized substratum. It is as though the origin of esthetics was endlessly retroactive, or abysmal. Because of this, Heidegger is forced to recognize the pre-esthetic moment as already belonging to esthetics: in Heidegger’s own words, there is no relation to art that is not “aptly” described by the name of esthetics. This is a tremendous admission: the pre-esthetic meditation on art was an esthetic that did not know its name. This perhaps explains the difficulty experienced by Heidegger in describing this non-esthetic pre-Platonic and pre-Aristotelian moment of the work of art as “luminous knowledge,” about which it is said that it is neither absolute sensuous abandonment, nor the alienated discourse of criticism. The pre-esthetic moment is impossible to figure because it is only knowable from the standpoint of esthetics.

The difficulty of locating or picturing a pre-historical age of art replicates the tension in the concept of esthetics itself. Esthetics, as aesthtics, is the discourse of the senses, of feeling, of emotions, of matter as opposed to spirit. It is a language about that which has no language, about the prelinguistic pulse rippling beneath the linguistic, about matter erupting through spirit. To conceive of the prelinguistic as truly prelinguistic would be to adopt the standpoint of the prelinguistic, that is, to become speechless. But since it cannot do that, or even if it wants to speak about pure sensuousness, esthetics must leave the sensuous. Like the work of art that, in order to speak about sensuousness, must articulate it into the language of sensuousness, so esthetics cannot relate to that which it is about—the speechless language of the sensate—without entering speech, that is, without silencing that to which it purports to give speech. The speechless is always stamped by language, inasmuch as the absence of language is a part of language. As a language of the speechless, esthetics is always confined to this side of language. Esthetics, like the work of art, must leave behind the unmade in the very act of bringing it to the fore. In order to conceive of an unesthetic reception of the work of art, one would have to conceive of a speechless way of talking about art (this is the path bravely taken by poetry and—one may add—by modern art itself).

Heidegger encounters the same paradox in his own attempt at an overall philosophical description of art, “The Origin of the Work of Art.” In it, Heidegger argues that the connection between art and being, the “work-being” present in the great Greek work of art, is a thing of the past. The museum, and esthetics in general, have snuffed out art’s claim to being. Art is now a mere esthetic object, an “object-being.” Even the most dedicated and sensitive approach to the work of art, Heidegger writes, cannot overturn what, in the work, has become sedimented into thinghood. All that is left of artworks is their objective shell, their object-being: “The whole art industry, even if carried to the extreme and exercised in every way for the sake of works themselves, extends only to the object-being of the works. But this does not constitute their work-being” (Origin of the Work of Art 41). The work of art’s work-being is its potential for immediacy, for reaching into existence and shaping the look of what is. However, the work of art’s work-being has been silenced by its museified object-being, by its estheticization:

The works themselves stand and hang in collections and exhibitions. But are they here in themselves as the works they themselves are, or are they not rather here as objects of the art industry? . . . Even when we make an effort to cancel or avoid such displacement of works—when, for instance, we visit the temple in Paestum at its own site or the Bamberg cathedral on its own square—the world of the work that stands there has perished. (Origin of the Work of Art 41)

In the world of esthetics, the work of art is replaced by its “thingly” element. It is no longer a mode of creating being:

Works are made available for the public and private art appreciation. Official agencies assume the care and maintenance of works. Connoisseurs and critics
busy themselves with them. . . . Art-historical study makes the works the objects of a science. Yet in all this busy activity do we encounter the work itself? . . . As soon as the [works] are captured by the sphere of familiarity and connoisseurship, . . . all scientific efforts to regain them no longer reach the work's own being, but only a recollection of it. (Origin of the Work of Art 40; 68)

Art's relegation to the domain of esthetics is collusive with its reification. Heidegger shares in the belief that the museum erects a barrier between the work of art and its true artistic nature, that is, that of being at one with the praxis of existence, of Being. The esthetic, mystified appearance of art silences the real work of art and makes the object triumph over the work. The form is there but the real work of art, what Heidegger calls the "work-being," has vanished. The spirit of art, as Hegel already said, has flown out of the statue.

Once again esthetic philosophy seems to be suffering from a severe bout of nostalgia. Heidegger's premise is that the work of art is the emptied hull of its former being. In this sense, Heidegger's discussion departing from the end of art to describe what the work of art once was. It is as though he could only discover what living art is by examining its corpse. It is noteworthy that mystification so thoroughly determines our esthetic experience that even a critique that seeks to go beyond esthetics must use it as a point of departure. Where one starts, as Heidegger himself instructs, continuously changes, or haunts, the place where one ends up. The separation between being and art, between praxis and the esthetic object, is therefore considered, not from the side of being, which is forever unattainable, but from the side of the esthetic object. In other words, even the discussion concerning the non-esthetic work-taking place, for Heidegger, from the standpoint of its esthetic object-being; the origin of the work of art is only known through its end, in the museum.

Heidegger runs into the same paradox in the structure of the work of art itself. As an illustration of the work-being, Heidegger explains that the temple reveals the earth: it makes the earth appear by standing on it and makes the sky appear by standing against it. Art thus installs the world, and makes it appear as this world. A truly heteronomous activity, art thrusts into the world. Yet, obviously, the separation between the temple and the earth does not precede the temple itself, since there has to be a temple for the sky and the earth to appear as such. Thus Heidegger con-

cludes that separation between the world and the work, between the unmeasured and the measured, between the ground of being, already belongs to the work:

We at once raise the counterquestion: how can the rift-design be drawn out if it is not brought into the Open by the creative sketch as a rift, which is to say, brought out beforehand as a conflict of measure and unmeasure? True, there lies hidden in nature a rift-design, a measure and a boundary and, tied to it, a capacity for bringing forth—that is, art. But it is equally certain that this art hidden in nature becomes manifest only through the work, because it lies originally in the work. (Origin of the Work of Art 70)

Art is the name to describe being's ability to come forth. The being that the work of art reveals, then, is from the start a product of the work: there may be being all around the work of art—an earth and a sky around the temple—but these only appear by contrast with the work of art. Being is not an environment that the work of art runs into. Being always exists in relation to the work, that is, in a mediated state. Perhaps, then, art never reaches being itself. It reaches, rather, a production of being: the surroundings that it makes appear are just that: a production and not the primal ground of being. To pine after an effusive rapport between art and life is illusory, for life as it connects with art is always already a product of the artwork and, as such, severed from the primitive ground of being.

In a sense, Heidegger reiterates what Nietzsche had said before him—that the immediacy of non-esthetic art depends on the esthetic to convey it. Heidegger only seems Quatemarian in his nostalgia for a reconciliation between art and being, the mending of the raging discordance that so terrified Nietzsche. In reality, he concedes that such pre-esthetic, premuseum fusion of art and existence is ultimately the product of work, or more exactly, of art. Being, like the pre-esthetic work of art, is an idea of esthetic consciousness, of the museum mind. As Nietzsche himself stressed, the "in-itself" in art is always inscribed as such by the "for-itself," by consciousness. The work of art is mediated in relation to being. The image of pure being, in art, is the construction of mediated being, of created production. This dialectic also applies to the esthetic discourse on art. It begins with Plato and Aristotle, when art begins to leave a trace. This trace is a departure from being, from the non-esthetic, truly politi-
The Avant-Garde Attacks

The esthetic exclusion of art from praxis became the object of a fierce counterattack around the time of the first avant-garde. This is when estheticism's glorious separation of art comes under fire for inflicting a debilitating wound on the work of art. As Peter Bürger argues, the first historical avant-garde gathered momentum by challenging the separation of art from the praxis of life. It denounced artistic autonomy as a sinister swindle: what enlightened rationality intended as art's freedom and self-determination increasingly looked like a prison. Artistic autonomy, it held, is in fact the result of an injurious trade-off. Art was given its autonomy only on the conditions that it relinquish its power over the polity. The museum may well be art's gift of exclusivity, but it is the clause of a settlement drafted by the enemy. The avant-garde thus appointed itself the bad conscience of the institutionalization of art. The museum became the effigy of everything in esthetic autonomy that was injurious to the individual artwork. From the right-leaning Marinetti to the socialist Malevich, no solution was found except to burn down the museum.

The avant-garde's originality consisted in assimilating its protest against the museum to art itself. The reconciliation between art and praxis was not attempted on the side of praxis (by militating politically against museums) but in the work of art proper. Art was entrusted with the means of breaking out of its own prison. From this derives the iconoclastic and confrontational aspect of the first avant-gardist works. The artwork itself cries against Art. This perhaps constitutes the greatest strength of the avant-garde but also its Achilles' heel. For in shaping itself after its protest against esthetic institutionalization, the iconoclastic work of art unwittingly chains itself to the museum. No provocation is ever
categories which esthetics used to uphold art's autonomous status. Anti-
esthetic art concedes the fact that the anti-esthetic message can only be
spoken *intra mores*, from within the museum. This co-optation by the
museum supports the idea that the artwork's attachment to praxis is most
powerful when it speaks, not from the fray of social forces with which the
avant-garde work dreamt of merging (but in which it would end up
drowning), but rather from the fracture of alienation. Only in alienation
does art stand in its indictment against the state of social alienation that
keeps art and politics separate.

Thus, in a sense, the museum preserves the memory of the mem-
ory of art's long-lost heteronomy (its immediate rapport with life) as an
impossible realization. This is why any criticism of the museum runs the
risk of losing touch with what the work of art seeks to achieve: the in-
manence of art to life. Such immanence cannot be simply posited by fiat.
Art cannot wake up one day and decide it is one with life. What impels
art to reach out of itself, and thus imbues form with its endless possibil-
ity for self-renewal, is the fact that art is not one with life in the first place.
Art can only approximate the unmade, the immediacy of life, by making
itself, by being made. Thus the task of reintegrating life is always undone.
Similarly, it is only due to art's estheticization that the question of its im-
mediacy to existence first occurred (just as, one may say, the image of na-
ture arose, pressingly and vividly, after it had succumbed to its industrial
looting). It is a good bet that in a world without museums, art would lose
the drive to reach back into life. Indeed an art that is content with its
own existence, an art that is totally reconciled with the polis, would run
the risk of sinking into a sort of terminal form of classicism. This is why
the reaction against autonomous art launched by the modernist avant-
garde still sought refuge in the museum, rather than joining a world in
which they would lose the will to outdo themselves.

The museum thus participates in the historical dynamic of modern
art. It embodies a dynamic pole in the dialectic of the individual work
of art. Art's "museal" moment is that by which the artwork itself recog-
nizes its apartness from praxis (from life, being, nature, or immediacy) as
constitutive of the work. Art perpetually moves beyond itself because it
perpetually protests against what it does to nature in order to be. Indeed,
if art did not see itself as autonomous (that is, as tragically cut off from
the "unmade") it could never have the will to recover the state of
immediacy with life (to be one with the "unmade"), a will which fuels its
historical progress as well as its artistic dynamic. In that sense, it is be-
cause art is museumlike that it strives toward life, and remains a living or-
ganism, a form-producing entity. Modern art derives its extraordinary
power from such deep dissatisfaction with art. This discontent with its
own museum nature, with its being a museum piece, accounts for art's
being progress toward the unmediated, toward the raw pure matter,
which characterizes so much of modern art. Art's self-acknowledged se-
quence from mere existence, and its desperate attempts at mending this
separation, fuel in large part the impetus behind modernity's experiments.

Rodin's work is an instance. The tension between the necessity of
being made and the necessity of staying true to an immediate experience
of being constitutes the burden of the work of art. This burden is the
dynamic drive behind many of Rodin's most accomplished pieces. His
*Cariatides* eternally shoulders, and buckles under, the burden of the stone
out of which it sprang. The ontological ground of stone is clearly not only
what the figure stands on, what it had to leave in order to be, it is also
what the figure has to support, Atlas's ontological task. The ground of be-
ing becomes a burden of being: being is something toward which the
work of art is responsible, something whose weight the work of art car-
ries. The stone out of which the *Cariatides* is made is neither left behind
nor completely subsumed by the figure; it is shouldered like a duty. Na-
ture in the work of art is a pending debt, forever unsettled, not the fecund
ground out of which the work grows. Had the avant-garde's claim that art
can be at one with life been proven right, and had it succeeded as an artis-
tic form, art would have died there and then. Similarly, if the Surrealists
had made good their claim that the subject can be at one with language,
and that language can therefore speak unmediatedly with existence, no
literature could have gone beyond *écriture automatique*. It is because artis-
tic expression is autonomous, because no language can ever escape its
own museum, because no sculpture or painting will ever have the ontol-
ogy of mere life, that art still exists.

Consequently, any temptation to demonize the estheticization of
the work of art also goes against art itself (which, in its effort to break free
of esthetics, ties itself to esthetics). This is most evident in modernist
works of art, which, perpetually responding to esthetics and the museum, would become unrecognizable even to themselves if the museum were simply abolished. In rejoicing the principles it sought to oppose, the avant-garde confirms the argument that the relation between the museum and the artwork cannot be thought to be merely external or contextual. The museum cannot be taken out of art, any more than a piece of music can be played without signifying its difference from the din of the city or the quiet of the countryside. The museum in the work of art is the realization that the work of art is distinct from life in the very moment it seeks to be like life.

Duchamp’s ready-mades highlighted the fact that institutional placing is crucial in bestowing an artistic character to the object. This observation, however, only sheds light on half of the dialectic between the museum and the work of art. The work of art becomes art in the museum space; yet this raises the question as to what creates this space in the first place. For, surely, if objects become art only by being in the museum, the museum would not exist without its works of art either. The museum affords the theoretical space in which esthetic being is preserved, but only works of art make the museum’s space artistic. Like Duchamp’s urinal, Andy Warhol’s stacks of Brillo boxes would lose their esthetic character outside of the gallery. This, for Warhol, was perhaps the signal that the work of art must eternally annex the space of exhibition. The critic-philosopher Arthur Danto pointed out that “we cannot readily separate the Brillo cartons from the gallery they are in.” The museum space around the Brillo boxes is not one into which the work of art merely fits as in an encasement. The Brillo boxes participate in the space of exhibition and in fact draw it in as a part of the exhibit proper. In the case of installation art, the space between the museum and the work of art is intensely interpenetrable (hence the absence of barriers: one can even walk through the Brillo carton pyramid).

To assume that the work of art is one with the museum just because the museum insures the esthetic ontology of the object is to overlook how the space of the museum is itself molded and sculptured by art. Just as the work of art structures the space around it, it structures its own relationships to the viewer. Hans-Georg Gadamer uses the theater as a case in point. In theater, the beholder is drawn into the rules of the artistic cir-
cle which, like a game, includes the participants. As Merleau-Ponty noted once, we do not see a work of art, we see according to it. To some degree, the space in which art is experienced belongs to the work of art. This principle is evident in performing arts, where the spectator has to inhabit the unfolding time of the performance; it is also evident in architecture, where the work models the space in which it is perceived; or again in a piece of sculpture which, as Warhol’s Brillo boxes show, does not simply take place in space but molds the space around it, gives it texture and visibility, and “situates” us in that space. Warhol’s Brillo boxes ask us to consider the esthetic space of art not as something extraneous to the work of art, but rather as an effect of the work, one of its creations. Thanks to the work’s thrust into its surroundings, the museum is always de facto a place of praxis, not a neutralizing force field. It is an effect of the work of art, not a prior situation to art.

Perhaps then can we begin to reconcile art with its estheticization by seeing that the museum is part of the work’s praxis, and therefore part of art’s thrust into political existence, into “life.” Art’s reinsertion into life can occur, not by destroying the museum, but in making the museum the place where art takes part in praxis. If anything, the avant-garde should have taught us that the museum is not that autonomous to start with. It, too, is part of social life. The museum creates a public and publicness, it is itself the product of social forces and economic determination. Art in the museum is eminently socialized: after all, it publicizes art. Hence there is a way in which museums can be regarded not as a symbol of art’s estrangement, but as the laboratory of art’s abrogation of esthetic apartness. For museum art still models the ways in which we come to art and abide in art. As such it is heteronomous, a denial—quixotic as it may be—of the esthetic barrier.

Monumental Time

Halfway between the temple and the bank vault, museums aim at safeguarding the artwork’s undervalued physical and spiritual standing. No doubt, in purporting to offer a permanent safe haven to artworks, the museum also enthrones the surrounding social order—bourgeois democ-

larity and capitalism—as being itself cut from the same eternal cloth. The burgeoning of museums throughout Europe at the time of the industrial revolution reveals the new bourgeois order’s need to anoint itself with the halo of the “eternal.” Appointing itself the guardian of all past ages, bourgeois society hallows itself; it becomes the reason of history, its telos and purpose. By objectifying the past, the modern mind devises an antidote to the secular view of history as progress and contingency. The foundation of the Louvre Museum in 1793 belongs to a revolutionary era which, in the midst of upheaval, needed to fashion a stable image of history. The museum lifts history itself out of temporal becoming. From this stems the messianic, eschatological character of museums. The museum believes in history, yet behaves as though history were over. Perhaps it holds onto history as something that is also of the past, and secretly believes that time itself has come to an end. It builds a secret monument to the end of history.

In lifting art out of the hurly-burly of historical survival, the museum strips the artwork of its historical existence. It replaces historicity by historiography. Living historical existence turns into historiographic timelessness. This contradiction explains the twofold character of museums. They have been accused of being both too heavy with historical dust and too historically spotless, excessively historicizing artworks while cutting them off from the historical life in which artworks are born. Museums are historical insofar as they exhibit artworks according to historiographic principles (using such criteria as period style, chronological markers, and technique). On the other hand, they are ahistorical inasmuch as they raise artworks above the flow of historical becoming. The museum seems contradictory because it lectures about the historical nature of its objects while denying the very same objects the immanent historical connection about which it seeks to educate.

Yet the antinomy of the museum only depends on a particular concept of history. Museums are historically contradictory only if one holds that history exists in homogeneous time, that is, only if history is assumed to coincide with the scientific, chronological notion of continuous time. If anything, the apparently contradictory character of museums indicates a continuing need to reflect on history. We thus begin by asking what constitutes a historical object.

It is commonly said that the museum turns artworks into monu-