

JEAN-PAUL MARTINON

Inside Werner's World: a review essay

Paul Werner, *Museum, Inc.: Inside the Global Art Market*

Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press. Distributed by University of Chicago Press.

How is one to make sense of the effects of both ~~global~~ and corporate culture in relation to the museum? What form of effective resistance can one envisage in the face of transnational museological hegemonies? These are enormous questions that need to be addressed with a lot of care and attention. They call not only for the adoption of a

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thinkers are really the right ones for this topic. What do Schiller or Habermas really have to say about globalisation? Even if these references were relevant even if they were made to be relevant (which would have amounted to a great achievement), they're unfortunately left unexplored. It is as if these authors and their thoughts exist only to beef up occasionally a monologue and not as elements of an ongoing dialogue around the world. Werner is on his own telling us that, hey, he is the only one really to think about this. Not unlike an undergraduate essay, with its endless narrative diversions (do we need another account of the Motorcycle show?) and numerous sweeping statements, the book never manages to engage in any serious way with the issues developed by these authors. It's all slapstick commentaries that have no other aim but to draw the reader's attention, again and again, to the wittir or Cp(or)3(Cp(or)3(Cp(or)3(Cp(or)37)3(s)-1(.)-10(l:3(t)-2(

expansionist vision. At no point does Werner actually discuss what the word “global” means. Global? World? Mondialisation? Multitude? What’s all that? Everything is subsumed to pragmatic good-old-fashioned Werner sense. There is never any sense that the issue of cultural globalised economy has in fact a wider set of causes that have been addressed many times by many scholars and that no analysis on this topic can be done without some form of acknowledgement of how this issue is now treated.

The task for any reviewer of a book of this kind is not to fill in the gaps or re write the book. It can only be to rethink the premise of the book. This premise focuses on this simple question: how can one deal with the museum expansionist corporate greed? To ask this question is effectively to propose to rethink the political dimension of Werner’s book: how can one challenge or even react against K’s ambitious plans? If one is not going to simply moan or be jealous or envious, if one is not going to limit oneself to conventional museum histories, then, what position can one take? If it is indeed impossible to see any alternative to the corporatist tendencies of museums, then how can one react against it? These questions are not intended to provide answers, but to show that in the context of Museum Inside the Global Art World, one has no choice but to begin (again and again, for there is no end to this) by throwing the premise of a reflection on museums and the political.

In an age of savage capitalism, there is effectively no possibility for-a self defeating rant against enemy A or B, K or Gug. In fact, there is not even the possibility of balance or poised reflection on the issue of the political in relation to museums. We are faced with incalculable or unquantifiable forces rather than one identifiable enemy or adversary such as K or to take a parochial example for England: Nicholas Serota, Chief

Executive of Tate Enterprise. These forces in this case globalisation represent the real threat to the point where the very concept of political responsibility becomes potentially incalculable. Who is responsible for what, at what stage of planning, in the face of what juridical body? Is it really Thomas Krens and his nasty corporate ideas or is

money, but entirely dedicated to beauty and knowledge. But who, besides Werner obviously, can still base their thinking on such a premise? The idea of hanging onto an idealised vision of the museum today frayed to such an extent that it is no longer recognisable. The future (in a Hegelian-Marxist sense) is no longer an organising principle. However much we love it or hate it, we have no choice but to acknowledge that globalisation has forced us to an empty notion of progress, a purely economic notion that still attempts to answer the totalising question of history.

With this perspective, the question put forward above about a permanent call for war becomes this: what political gesture can one propose in a situation where there is no longer an ideal in the future and the future can no longer be articulated by the promise? In other words, how can one keep the struggle at the level of struggle when there is no longer the promise of an end to the struggle in the future? In other words, how can one resist K without basing one's resistance on simply rejecting his expansionist vision and naively embracing an idealised vision of the museum?

Perhaps the only answer to this question is to propose to recuperate this old and dusty future ideal (justice, liberation, egalitarianism, the proletarian state, absolute knowledge, museums as centres of learning and contemplation) from its state of always being yet-to-come or irretrievably past and to place it centrally and in all peripheries of human activities. The only way to do this is no longer to conceive the ideal (museum) as something lying dormant somewhere in the future awaiting its eschatological moment. It cannot even be conceived as structured by a promise of a justice to come in a Derridean sense. It can only be concretely acted out or taking place here and now with every human gesture and through every single political agency and this whatever its state of ideality.

In this way, the perfect museum becomes no longer a goal to be attained, but a presupposition that is not only always in need of constant verification, but is also in a constant state of verification.

From this presupposition, all forms of prognosis, projection, hope, etc. (and I include here both K's hopes of everlasting universal expansion and Werner's unacknowledged dreams of a less greedy museum) usually directed towards a time to come, expose themselves as occurring here and there, and at all times, in that other time but the present time. Political activism in return becomes not the pursuit of political or social ends (for example, calling for K's resignation or for the abolition of corporate culture), but the measurement of ideality itself: a measurement that is not dependent upon the coming of the future, but upon the performance of the world in general and of the museum in particular. This measurement of ideality represents all the actions that occur here and now, from the political agencies of artists, critics and lecturers all the way to the efforts of the majority world to stop the global economic dictatorship of both the US and the EU. This measurement is not conceived as the evaluation of a situation (Gug's expansionist programme) in relation to an imagined or real standard or principle (the Gug as it was originally conceived or as it "should" be in Werner's mind), but as the quick fading marking of the world, one that changes every second of time.

Conceived in this way, one can indeed say that there will never be a "better museum" or a "better Gug". There can only be an act of differentiation, an act that will make a difference, therefore a measurement of ideality. No matter how one positions oneself politically in the great swarm of possibilities and trends that constitute our contemporary world, one is always necessarily in a position of productivity and of

expenditure, over the edge of the abyss of the creation or invention of language. The result becomes a simple change of attitude. If we were to write a short book titled Museum Inc, one would have to begin with a discussion on the necessity of inventing new protocols (ethical or otherwise) to address the issue of our current globalised museum culture. To propose or invent these protocols is not to put forward the museum as an object of positivistic knowledge or of programmatic rationality, but to put the museum forward as a community of subjects (of bad, “cretins” (Werner, p.5) and geniuses) in which the thinking that makes the museum what it is today constitutes the performativity of ideality itself. In other words, this means not to put forward the meaning of the museum (in the past, the future or in an illusory “here and now”), but the museum as

is a course of action), or apoiesis(that is, an action in and for itself), but the possihrp-2(l)32(i)-2(o)-2y