

The Museum of Change

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The museum of the future, if it is still a museum, will find its material not only in its future present, but also in its past, in its future past. And a part of the past of the museum of the future is our present time. And thus, we cannot think about the museum of the future without thinking about our present. The museum of the future is not only a construction of the future; it is a construction that takes place in the middle of our present. The museum of the future then is a task with which we have to begin in our present thought of the museum.

If we want to develop in the following some points regarding a museum of the future, we will take it to be a project that is actually the construction of a present thought, the construction of a thought of the present. We will need a specific background for this endeavor, some remarks that are necessary, as in the question of the museum of the future a certain implication is valid that needs to be unfolded. It seems that to ask for the museum of the future implies that this museum of the future has to be a different one than the contemporary museum. Why else would we seek to enquire the museum of the future? The museum of the future thus ought to be a different museum than today. This raises the impossible challenge of an adequate account of the museum of our days – impossible, because many different kinds of museums exist, and perhaps such a thing as *the* museum of today cannot even be addressed. Therefore it is then perhaps also difficult to think *the* museum of the future. But even if we may not be able to give an account of these aspects of our question, we can stick to the implied antagonism, to the expression of a will to change an institution, we can hold on to the demand that the museum of the future ought to be different. We do not understand it as an ethical challenge, but rather as a challenge to thought. Finally then, we might render the question differently and ask: Can we think differently of the institution called museum, and can we even think of the museum of the future in a relation of difference to the contemporary museum.

In the next step, we see then that such an antagonism between the future of the museum and its presence is already inscribed in its presence, if the museum of the future begins within the present thought of the museum. This is where we should start. Let us begin with three introductory remarks on this point.

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1. The museum, the modern museum in its western tradition has always been a battlefield, and one of the main stakes of this battle is to be found in relation to the question of change. If we go back to the early 20th century, we find a harsh criticism of the museum for example in the thought of the avant-gardes. For the avant-gardes, the museum serves the conservation of the old, it does not only exhibit, but it perseveres in conserving, it continues the past into the present, and as such, from the viewpoint of the new, it proves an unavoidable reactionary character. The outcry of

Kazimir Malevich lends a representative voice to this concern. In his text "On the museum", which he wrote in 1919, Malevich takes a clear stance against the museum. The message is as clear as it can be, and it illustrates very distinctly a problem the revolutionary avant-gardes had with the museum. Malevich writes:

"Our contemporary life should have as its slogan: ‚all that we have made is made for the crematorium.‘ The setting up of a contemporary museum is a collection of contemporaries' projects and nothing more; only those projects which can be adapted to the skeleton of life, or which will lead to the skeleton of new forms of it, can be preserved for a time."¹

And later he continues:

"We must not allow our backs to be platforms for the old days.

Our job is to always move toward what is new, not to live in museums. (...)

And if we do not have collections it will be easier to fly away with the whirlwind of life. (...) Instead of collecting all sorts of old stuff we must form laboratories of a worldwide creative building apparatus, and from its axes will come forth artists of living forms rather than dead representations of objectivity. Let the conservatives go to the provinces with their dead baggage—the depraved cupids of the former debauched houses of Rubens and the Greeks. We will bring I-beams, electricity, and the lights of colors."²

We find in Malevich a very succinct account of the radical new avant-garde, embracing technology and the speed of the new world, but also seeking to interrupt all links with the past. The dead and conservative is to be done away with, only what serves the construction of life can be preserved, and even that only 'for a time'. The new, the new life, is defined as the destruction of the old – as the destruction of what is, in fact, already dead. The old and dead has to be abandoned. But the paradigm of the old art is the museum.

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2. We can determine a similar thought in some of Walter Benjamin's notes in his *Arcades Project*, in which he mentions the museum from time to time, calling it a 'dream house'. Benjamin's unfolds a very specific understanding of the dream: In the Paris of the 19th century he observed the mysterious threshold on which things of everyday life turned into objects of the market, became commodities. This not-yet-fully-defined-sphere of an object on the threshold to becoming a commodity is what Benjamin attempted to capture by understanding it as a dreamlike reality. Thus, if the museum is called a dream house, then this is in Benjamin's sense an indication that the museum forms a part of the dream world of the early capitalism in which the borders between the interior and the exterior are abolished, the usual thing is on the threshold to becoming a commodity, and therefore everything is surrounded with a dream-like aura.

¹ Kazimir Malevich, „On the Museum“, in: Arseny Zhilyaev (ed.), *Avant-Garde Museology*, p. 267-273, p. 270.

² Ibid., p. 272-3.

In one of the rare passages that directly refer to the question of the museum, Benjamin quotes the architectural critic Sigfrid Gidieon, who identifies the museum as the central architectonic problem of the early 19th century. Gidieon ascribes to the early 19th century a "regressive tendency to allow itself to be saturated with the past."³ Thus, for Gidieon, the museum is the architecture of this regressive tendency. Benjamin adds a very interesting comment to this: "This thirst for the past forms is something like the principal object of my analysis – in light of which the inside of the museum appears as an interior magnified on a giant scale. In the years 1850-1890, exhibitions take the place of museums. Comparison between the ideological basis of the two."⁴

'Exhibitions take the place of museums', Benjamin argues, and with 'exhibitions' he is referring to the world exhibitions that interested Benjamin strongly. One might even say that Benjamin was far more interested in the question of the world exhibitions than in the question of the regular museum. The large shows of the technical and industrial development, dedicated to the global development of the industrial forces and to the global circuit of commodities, one of which took place in Paris 1867, provided an antidote to the arcades and their commodification of the private. Moving beyond Gidieon's point, Benjamin emphasizes a different aspect of the museum, namely the relation between the exhibition of artistic or historical objects and the fact that capitalism strips these objects off their artistic or historic value and turns them into commodities, strange objects that become objects of a dream world. It is this relation, which is being brought into a material presentation in the form of the world exhibitions. A world exhibition is what a museum has to become after the thing turned into a commodity.

But Benjamin also compares the museum directly to the market and emphasizes a parallel between the museum and the department store:

"There are relations between department store and museum, and here the bazaar provides a link. The amassing of artworks in the museums brings them into communication with commodities, which—where they offer themselves en masse to the passerby—awake in him the notion that some part of this should fall to him as well."⁵

It is not only the world exhibitions that present things as commodities, but it is already the museums that presents the world of historic and artistic things just like a department store presents its commodities. And in this wake, the desire of visitor is being created as the desire of a consumer.

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3. For the third point, let us simply recall one central feature of the origin of the modern museum. The Louvre can serve as the central paradigm in this case, being one of the first national public museums. As such, it was founded by the revolutionary state that turned the former palace of the

³ Sigfrid Gidieon, in: Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, MA, London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1999, p. 406-7.

⁴ Walter Benjamin, *ibid.*, p. 407.

⁵ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 415.

king into a public place of the arts. The European tradition of the huge national galleries begins at this point: National museums spread all over Europe, often put into place by the revolutionary French themselves. The national museums can be said to have played a major role in the representation of the modern state. To underline this point, let us take short quote from Carol Duncan's book on the history of modern museums, entitled *Civilizing Rituals. Inside Public Art Museums*:

"The Louvre was the prototypical public art museum. It first offered the civic ritual that other nations would emulate. It was also with the Louvre that public art museums became signs of politically virtuous states. By the end of the nineteenth century, every western nation would boast at least one important public art museum. In the twentieth century, their popularity would spread even to the Third World, where traditional monarchs and military despots create western-style art museums to demonstrate their respect for western values, and – consequently – their worthiness as recipients of western military and economic aid."⁶

To put it in other words, we can say that the modern museum is from the beginning on a proper ideological institution. With reference to Althusser, we might even call it an 'Ideological State Apparatus'⁷: It is an institution that not only actively promotes an ideology of the young, civic nation state, but it is precisely in this sense a part of the state itself, it is a practical ritual in which the public subject educates itself about its own history. And this history is, not to forget, the history of the break with the ancient regime. Therefore it coincides with the beginning of our democratic tradition and the modern national museum is from the beginning on a – more or less – democratic ideological state apparatus, an ideological state apparatus that creates the public as its subject.

To summarize: In our analysis, we obtained three paradigmatic problems that characterize the early debates about the modern museum. First, its inherent conservatism and its antagonistic position toward political, but also toward artistic change, as we found an example of it in Malevich text "On the museum". Second, the difficult relation of the museum to the market of commodities: Not only do exhibitions of commodities overcome the classical museum, but already the structure of the museum itself resembles, mirrors the structure of the things on the market. The museum apparently disrupts its objects from their history as the market alienates its products. And third, the modern museum stands in an ideological relation to the figure of the state. It does not only promote the state, it forms a part of the state. It is, so to speak, a state apparatus. These three paradigms might then further be distinguished as they follow three different modes of connection: The first – the question of the old and the new – presents an antagonism. The second – the question of the market – presents a question of similarity and equivalence. The third – the question of the state – presents a question of representation and reproduction.

⁶ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals. Inside Public Art Museums*, London and New York: Routledge 1995, p. 21.

⁷ See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", in: *Lenin and Philosophy, and other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, New York and London: Monthly Review Press 1971, p. 127-186.

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Regarding our situation today, we can note that two things have essentially changed in comparison with the situation of the early 20th century. The most evident fact is that the necessity as well as the possibility for an antagonism, as it had been presented in the 20th century, has become obscured. This antagonism was actually a doubled antagonism: The antagonism as presented by Malevich, the antagonism of the old and the new, is strictly related to art. But at the same time this antagonism cannot be understood without the political antagonism that shaped the world of the early 20th century. The avant-gardes established precisely the program of the dialectical intertwining of two essential antagonisms: an antagonistic art that presented an antagonistic politics.

In the world that followed upon the avant-gardes, in the 20th century, the conflict remained a central paradigm. Even a work considered to be neutral would present this neutrality as a claim in the direction of the political conflicts that divided the world. In our contemporary situation, this prevalence of the conflict has disappeared. At the beginning of the 21st century, we are living in a time in which the possibility of a political contradiction, of an antagonism, has become uncertain. But a contradiction is today not only uncertain in politics, it is also not certain in the field of arts. In both fields, in politics as well as in the arts, the results therefore are similar: contemporary politics does not follow the lines of a contradiction; as well as contemporary art does not follow the lines of a contradiction. Rather the contrary is the case: the structure of our situation is not only not focused on the centrality of a conflict, it seems rather to result from an opposition to such an antagonism.

Here it is important to emphasize the difference between the explicit structure of the conflict and its reality, for the remark about the absence of a central conflict does by no means imply that we would be living in a world without conflicts. We experience a world full of multiple and very different conflicts, but at the same time these conflicts are not explicitly connected along the lines of a central antagonism. It might be said that one side or one 'pincer' of a possible general contradiction can be denominated 'capitalism', as the common threat that combines the conflicts we are living in. But on the other side it is fundamentally unclear whether any possible general alternative to capitalism as such is conceivable. Instead of living in a situation in which an antagonism is the real, we are living in a situation in which the possibility of political change, the possibility of something else than capitalism is fundamentally obscured. And if it were possible to link the existing conflicts along the line of a central conflict, then this would demand at the same time to be able to declare its contradictory part, its opponent. To summarize, we might say that we are living in the time of a broken conflict, and that it might be the precise political question of our time to inquire whether there is any alternative to capitalism possible, thinkable, constructible. As long as this is fundamentally unclear, the destruction of the old in itself does not lead anywhere, it might finally only continue the existing capitalist destruction.

But not only the reality of the conflict has changed, what also has changed is the role of the state – in its figure as well as in its positioning within the society. In its consequence, a contemporary museum could no longer understand itself to be a representational emblem of a nation-state. A museum of contemporary art for example, if it represents anything, than it is rather the reality of the democratic discourse that enables the general public to participate in aesthetic experiences. But it is the state that is diminishing, because the museum did represent the democratic participation from the beginning on, and it the state that is withdrawing its symbolic power. The museum has not lost its ideological form, but it has lost the strong symbolic state in its back. However, the withdrawal of the symbolic state – the visibility of its forces, the organization of the public, the power of its administration – does not necessarily imply the withering away of the state as such. We witness today the symbolic forms of the state being transferred onto smaller or even private structures as well as onto different ideological structures. The organization of public life becomes more and more privatized, while at the same time the imaginary illusion of a general public is upheld: Any mall can serve as an example here. The appearance of the state is thus reduced and maximized at the same time: It appears scarcely, but if it shows up, then it will be in its full force – and here the borders might be taken as the primary example. The state appears scarcely, but intensely, at its borders, while on the inside we find a public life organized by private institutions. Private galleries, to give another example, unfold an increasing influence and normalize themselves by more and more addressing the general public, as well as by taking part in exhibitions. Thus galleries more and more turn into equivalents of regular museums. The museum has not lost its function, rather the function of the museum is not ideologically guaranteed by a strong state any longer, and in its consequences this function can be fulfilled by different parties.

Thus two of three moments in relation to the museum at the early 20th century have fundamentally changed, and this leaves us finally with the third point we have been mentioning, namely the question of the equivalence between art works and commodities. In distinction from the first two points, this aspect can be assumed to only have increased: The intersection between art works and commodities has only intensified, but not changed.

So, for the museum of the future, as we have to think as a thought in our contemporary time, we will have to start by thinking a time, which is marked by an obscurity of any antagonism, presents a strong equivalence between the art objects and the commodity, and shows an apparent disappearance or difficulty of the figure of the state. In the following, three point and one additional point will be presented that might serve as point of departure.

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1) Another Modernity

We will have to rethink our relation to modernity. If modernity, and especially the 20th century can be characterized by a certain duality – opposing the old and the new, capitalism and communism, politics and art – then this duality is spelled out in the 20th century as the duality of an antagonism: The old against the new, communism against capitalism, and art against politics or

politics against art. And finally, modernity itself is conceived as an overcoming of the ancient times. Instead of continuing this actually modern scheme by inventing another time that would be directed against modernity, we might propose another way and instead redirect our interest to the center of modernity, just to find another conception of modernity right at its inner core. This different conception of modernity is what Alain Badiou has presented with the gesture of affirmationism. In his "Manifesto of Affirmationism", in which he refers to modernists such as Malevich, Mondrian, Rothko, Pessoa, Stevens, Berg, Woolf and others, he emphasizes a very different trait of their work than the usual accounts of these artists would consider – namely their affirmationist and non-antagonist side.

„This is, then, the axiomatic of an art that is neither ethnic nor egoistic. It is the axiomatic of an art that is as delocalized, as ambitious, as impersonal, and as naked for universal thought as the trait by which, thirty thousand years ago, the non-temporal signs of bison and tigers were etched in the shadows of caves - a trait which, in its very nakedness, forever affirms the inhumanity of the Beautiful. The affirmationist axiomatic only sets out the minimal but still

entirely abstract conditions that were actively distributed in the still non-sketched constellation by the artists of the century, conditions under which art remains rebellious to imperial power, at the same time as it overcomes the romantic duplicity of the funereal and the playful."⁸

Let us summarize the most essential points: The main idea is that the gesture of affirmationism is inherently already present in the works of the modernists, but that it needs to be revealed or even to be declared. Affirmationism then denotes an art that is universal in its very nakedness, thus it is universal, because it is precisely not linked to any ethnic or egocentric paradigm; it is 'delocalized' and 'impersonal'. Affirmationism denotes an art that is 'rebellious to imperial power', precisely because it cannot rest upon the secured grounds of some established power or its negation. Thus, affirmationist art rests only upon its own work; it is a construction fully relying on its own grounds. In different texts Badiou has unfolded in detailed examples how this can be understood. One of the examples he gives are the poems by Mallarmé: Poems that create their own real content with the sole reference to their own structure – there is, one could say, no exteriority to a poem by Mallarmé.⁹ Affirmationism presents a trait of modernist art in which this art proves to be completely detached from any references to its social, political, artistic outside. It presents the art of a pure construction of a form. From this point of view, we get two different understandings of the modernism of the early 20th century. On the one hand, we see the problem of the antagonistic duality, on the other hand we find the attempt of the construction of a pure form, a form that is not defined by a relation, but that rather defines its own, inner relations as its form.

A first point of departure is then to be found in the attempt to rethink our understanding of modernity in terms of the affirmationist art, because the antagonism of the old and the new is not

⁸ Alain Badiou, „Third Sketch of a Manifesto of Affirmationist Art“, in: *Polemics*, trans. Steven Corcoran, London / New York: Verso 2006, p. 133-148, here p. 142-3.

⁹ See Alain Badiou: „Mallarmé's Method: Subtraction and Isolation“, in: *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran, New York / London: Continuum 2008, p. 49-67

ours any more. One concern that might be raised is that this might imply kind of relativist approach to art, as we would change our understanding of the art of the 20th century as a consequence of the situation of the early 21st century. But the question might also be put in another way. The question might rather be whether the problem of the antagonism and the presupposed inherent link between the destruction of the old and the construction of the new really is the central problem even in the frame of the 20th century. As alluded to some lines above, we might fundamentally doubt the possibility to destroy the old without already having the idea of the new. If this is impossible, then we would have to concede that even in the antagonistic model the creation of a form logically precedes the antagonistic opposition to the old.

However this might be, in our contemporary situation, we are in the urgent need of understanding the process of the creation of new forms. And as we are missing the means to create new forms of political alternatives, we should carefully watch and understand early modernism, as we find in it not only the capacity to destroy, but also the capacity to build a pure and new form. It is not evident, though, why the answer to a certain political problem can be found in the context of art. But we are only pointing to the formal side – to the formal capacity to think, to build, to create forms. This is what we can learn from the early modernists.¹⁰

Again, and as variant of the first concern, another objection might directly follow, namely that this procedure would reinterpret our understanding of modernity simply for political reasons? This would in itself be a weak instrumentalist understanding of modern art. But it is more difficult than that. What, in the end, does provide us with the certainty that destruction precedes construction? As long as we subscribe to the prevalence of destruction, we subscribe to the modernist paradigm, as we know it. In a paradoxical sense, establishing our own time implies changing our past. But as long as we subscribe to the modernist paradigm as we know it, we still partake in the paradigm of the early 20th century itself. We haven't moved forward, although our reality in political terms has completely changed. And it is an important change that has taken place, because the paradigm of the early 20th century implies a political relation, it implies not only the complicated relation between politics and art, but it also implies a relation between the antagonism in art and the antagonism in politics. Thus, we still partake in a paradigm that essentially builds on a political antagonism while our contemporary political situation has fundamentally changed. Once we change the orientation of our thought by looking into the origins of our modernity, we might find in the early modernism a specific trait that proves to already have been there.

To rethink our relation to modernity becomes an idea with far reaching consequences. It is not about overcoming modernity, and not about coming up with something new against the old. It is rather to say that we need a sort of intervention into our relation to modernity, to change the form of a relation presented by it. And second, this intervention does not simply add or inscribe a different view on modernity from the exterior, but it is an intervention built on a different moment

¹⁰ Badiou has at several occasions referred to this difficult relation and possibility to learn. It should not be mistaken as an aesthetic aspect of politics, it is only about a formal repetition of the process of creating forms.

that is found inside, in modernity itself. We return to the beginning of a radical modernity, and we will have to reaffirm it. This will open a truly universalist modernity, freed from any reference to the realm of bodies or to the realm of certain ethnicities, and this return will set free a modernity that fundamentally differs from the account of the so called 'contemporary art' we are dealing with today.

To finish the remarks on our first point, we might close with the note that modernity is of course the epoch in the middle of which we are still thinking. So while our question is the question how we think modern, the museum in its most elementary sense has always been the museum of the prehistory of the modern. The museum in its definition is the museum of the history of our time. And here we see, that the construction and understanding of modernity is the key to the construction and understanding of historical time as such. Once we introduce a second cut into modernity, the cut of affirmation, we open up the multiplicity of times – we have modernity itself as a time of destruction and as a time of affirmation – and thus modernity is the kernel around which the linearity or multiplicity of historical times is built. Once we reconstruct our understanding of modernity we might be able to perceive a multiplicity of times instead of the one general modern cut that opened the view back one the one history of its development.

2) We need the militant art of the invisible

Let us continue with a point that was already briefly mentioned in the thesis on the question of modernity before: Namely the question of art as being rebellious to imperial power. Once again, I would like to refer to the work of Alain Badiou, who has offered a distinction which is of a very central importance today, and that is the distinction between official and militant art.¹¹ 'Official art' is the art that glorifies, illustrates, or represents an existing power. 'Official art' glorifies, illustrates, or represents what exists, the world as it is, its facts and facticity. 'Militant art' on the other hand rather works on the in-existent, it works on the things, forms that are only about to become. This opposition between 'official art' and 'militant art' might then easily be misunderstood as the usual distinction between a subversive, independent art on the one side and the established, accepted and uncritical art on the other side. But the central point of this distinction lies elsewhere.

„So, in official art, ideology is realized in an objective form: the inscription of the work of art in the space of that sort of objectivity. In a militant art, ideology is a subjective determination, not of an artist, but of a process, or struggle, of resistance. Official art describes the glory of what exists. It's an art of victory. I think that is the most important point. An official art with an ideological determination is an art not of weakness but of strength. A militant art is the subjective expression, not of what exists, but of what becomes. It's an art of the choice and not an art of victory. An official art is an art of affirmative certainty. A militant art is an art of contradiction, an art of the contradiction between the affirmative nature of principles and the dubious result of struggles. The

¹¹ This distinction is made in a talk given in New York in 2010. See http://www.lacan.com/thesymptom/?%20page_id=1580 (last retrieved 02/05/17).

point where ideology is inscribed in the work of art is not at all the same. In official art, the place of ideology is the glory of the work of art itself. In a militant art the place of ideology is the place of the contradiction and of the dubious results of the struggle."¹²

The actual important point about this distinction is the different place of ideology: Both types of art act upon an ideological determination, only that 'official art' is an art of the given, while 'militant art' is an art of becoming. 'Militant art' is thus by no means subversive, it is not critical, and it does not even necessarily have a political implication. Instead it is directed towards the creation of forms. It is a very interesting question to ask what kind of forms the realm of existing forms in our contemporary world does really comprise. Maybe we cannot rely on the distinction between forms of nature and forms of the social any more, as the contemporary capitalism has since long been working on and recreating the forms of nature. If this is the case, then we will rather have to think of the realm of existing forms as the realm of the existing *capitalist* forms. And this realm of forms is no longer limited only to the western world – we know that capitalism was from the beginning on a global project and that today its formalization, its rules of inventing and creating forms, has extended far beyond the west. The existing forms of today might then be forms of a capitalist globalization, subsuming all the forms that directly answer to this paradigm, such as those forms that seek their inscription into this capitalist globalization.

Let us take a short look at these forms. For Badiou they present a "democratic materialism" relying on the sole instances of "*bodies and languages*".¹³ The direct translation of this materialism is to be found in an art that is either based on the differences of existing bodies – which is related to the body, to the exploration the body, to the praise the body in its glory and grief – or that relates to the multiplicity of languages and stresses the necessary tolerance demanded for by these differences. Now under the reign of this metaphysics – there are only bodies and languages – Badiou has identified two different main variants of contemporary art: Romantic Formalism, as Badiou calls it, celebrates the richness of the individual bodies, it pretends to withdraw itself from the general circulation, while pseudo-classicism is a certain renewed version of the culture industry, it is an art of the empire, a festivity of the given rules and things.¹⁴

'Militant' in this sense is first of all an art that does not believe in bodies and languages to be the only things there are. 'Militant' is then further the belief that there is something else, something that cannot be accounted for in the empire. 'Militant' is finally rather the designation of an exceptional act, instead of the negating practice of a subversive act. Militant art is not subversive, but constructs a different universalism, different from the reigning capitalist globalized perspective.¹⁵

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds, Being and Event 2*, trans. Alberto Toscano, London/New York: Continuum 2009, p. 1.

¹⁴ See Badiou's „Third Sketch of a Manifesto of Affirmationist Art“ (footnote 8).

¹⁵ As Badiou puts it in the Manifesto, thesis 15: „It is better to do nothing than to work formally toward making visible what the West declares to exist.“ Ibid., p. 148.

3) We need a localized universalism

In the same text in which Badiou proposes to distinguish between the 'official' and the 'militant' art, he also addresses the contemporary situation. The problem of the distinction between official and militant art is, according to Badiou, that it is actually only possible against the background of a strong ideology.

„When there does not exist a strong ideology, it is much more difficult to explain what is precisely, first, a militant art, because the subjective conviction is unclear, and second, to explain what is different between official art and militant art, against the same ideological background. This is the first point of difference. The second is that today, as a result of history, there is no charismatic power. And so there is no possibility for a strong official art, because there is no space of power, space of the state, where something like an official revolutionary art can be revealed. So, the two major conditions of militant and official art and the distinction between the two are not realized today.“¹⁶

This analysis can be taken as an analysis of the current dominant of democracy in the western societies: As an ideology it is weak, as it does not have its own proper antagonist, and it does not unfold its own clear symbolic spaces. In the sense of the symbolic structure, we are living in a different world – and the question becomes how we can proceed in times of an absence of any strong ideology. Here, Badiou proposes four points, which we might quickly summarize: The first point is an answer to the absence of strong ideological organizations – if we think of a Party for example, we see that an organization is always also the creation of a space. Without this space, Badiou concludes, it becomes necessary that the artist enters into a relationship with a very concrete local political experience. Second, it will be necessary to organize the return of a strong ideology: It is a kind of intellectualism that is needed for a new art to be active in the attempt to create new forms of a strong ideology. Third, we need to be in a distance to forms of representation, which means in the end: we need to keep distance from any form of the state. Rather, art should attempt to make something visible that is only about to become. And fourth, the artist attempts to connect all the first three points in an actual artwork: “Local transformation, which is intellectually ambitious and which is formally avant-garde in the classical sense of the substitution of presentation for an ornamental vision of representation.“¹⁷

The main point is that in the absence of any possible orientation by a strong ideology and a paradigmatic contradiction, we need to think and act on a local basis: To think and act in local contradictions that allow to construct a new universal contradiction as well as to think of a new ideology.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

4) Museum as a Philosophical Institution

To change our relation to modernity, to observe the militant art of the invisible, and to finally strengthen the work on the localized universalism – we see that the museum can play an important role for a vivid connection of these three points. For it is the museum that helps us to restructure our understanding of modernity, for it is the museum that has the possibility to gather the weak arts of the invisible and to offer them a place of shelter, for it is the museum that can direct us to the arts of a localized universalism.

But the museum as an institution faces a set of problem in relation to these tasks. First, the museum is inherently conservative. Second, the museum places its objects in a parallel to the market. And third, the museum is established in a direct link with the state. To begin with the first: If we attempt to change our relation to modernity in the direction of the inherent affirmation, we are actually attempting to also change our understanding of the cut between the present and the past. Not only will the museum of modernity have to display two different variants of modernity, namely its destructive and its affirmative version, but at the same time its presents a different access to the notion of time. That is to say that with a different notion of modernity a different notion of our understanding of time is opened, modernity itself is being split into two times. The account of the past– the prehistory of modernity if you will – then will follow this account, is influenced by this account.

As we are living in the moment of the reconstruction of modernity, we are precisely living in the time of the reconstruction of the notion of time. The point is then, that from this angle, any museum, even a museum on the ancient history, but also a museum on a specific kind of art or a specific kind of science, is at the same time a museum of modernity: It presents our modern understanding of time, and it presents our understanding of negativity and affirmation, our understanding of differences and relations. Any museum in this sense presents a reconstruction of contradictions and antagonisms.

The second consequence for the museum is about the question of the market.

Here it is important to underline the fact that the invisible is not exchangeable. Of course, we have developed forms in which especially contemporary art that is working in the realm of the invisible is still manageable as an object of the market. But the invisible is a category that pertains to all works of art, not only to those that materially do not leave traces. The invisible is the moment in a work of art that cannot be exchanged. It is the singularity of form that is missed by the commodity form because it is useless and inobjective as we might call it. The task of the museum is not to reproduce the object, but its invisibility, it's becoming. The museum therefore needs to become a force that is explicitly directed against the force of the market, only then might it be able to abstain from being a representative institution of official art only.

Third, we get to the question of the state, maybe one of the most difficult questions today. If we understand the state as a form of representation, we will have to ask what an institution could be

which is not bound to task of representation. One answer would be to understand the museum as a site of presentation instead of representation, i.e. as a site of the becoming of art. But maybe this is too quick, as we should admit that there is also the function of conservation that belongs to the museum. How can we conserve an art in its becoming? Once we change our understanding of modernity and focus on its weak side of affirmationism, we open a subjective relation to this art that enables us to understand it in its quality of becoming again. Thus, the museum undermines its function as an ideological state apparatus by a constant intervention against the dominant forms of what exists, by emphasizing the weak forms of becoming.

Finally, we can propose to understand the museum as a site of an intervention. From the point of modernity – from the point of a different modernity – the museum intervenes in the regime of time, it intervenes in the reigns of the existing forms, and thereby presents something inexchangeable and withdrawn from the market of exchangeable commodities. The museum, then, as an institution, will not be able to rely on a set of facts, on the rules of the canon, or on the consensus of the public opinion. It will have to create its own practice that is in fact the practice of an intervention. The museum thus presents a highly problematic scene. As it is an institution, it is necessary at the same time that the museum rests on a *stability* of its judgment; it is necessary that it is *recognizable* in its stability, and it is necessary that it creates a *fixed localization* for the stabilized judgment and the recognition of this judgment. The museum, in other words, is inherently conservative. It needs to have a building, its rules, its permanence, and its duration. But this inherent conservatism does not all contradict its function as a shelter that attempts to gather its objects without knowing what they are – and thus to gather them solely for the structural point that these objects present new forms of intervention into the realm of the existent. This conservatism of the museum does not contradict its function to gather those objects without producing any knowledge, which would integrate those objects in the existent. This conservatism of the museum does not contradict its function to address the inobjectivity of its objects. Rather, the museum as a conservative shelter of the inobjective would be a poor and naked place, the only task of which would be to permanently intervene in its own setting, disrupting the stonework of knowledge that time has built around it.

As such, the museum would be a proper philosophical site.