

The Exhibitionist or The Man Who Hoarded Exhibitions In His Head

There was this very compulsive brain that collected artworks by memorising them.

It was not just an experimental brain in a jar. The brain was located in a head, of course. The head most probably belonged to a person. Let's call him/her the Exhibitionist from now on.

The exhibitions virtually bubbled in the Exhibitionist's head. It looked like the head was almost full, fuller than the most comprehensive art history which is always finite on its chosen levels of resolution. The head was practically full with accumulated artworks and exhibitions and no new ideas had a way into the person's brain. Instead of exchanging greetings this machine or 'beast for creating immaterialised exhibitions in an instance,' as the person called himself/herself, would only invite you to vernissages. The Exhibitionist would spit out phrases that only later were understood to be or resemble the concept of exhibition titles. The phrases like "Salon des Refuses", "The Last Futurist

Exhibition of Pictures”, “Degenerate art”, “La spécialisation de la sensibilité à l’état matière première en sensibilité picturale stabilisée, Le Vide (The Specialization of Sensibility in the Raw Material State into Stabilized Pictorial Sensibility, The Void)”, “Les Immatériaux”, were mixed with some words or idioms that might be considered by some to be banal, empty, ironic, or meaningless:

MORE OR LESS

THE TITLE AS THE CURATOR’S ART-PIECE

A LIST OF LISTS WHAT SHOULD I CALL IT?

ART ABOUT PEOPLE AND
THE THINGS THEY DO AND STUFF

CONTINUALLY REVEALING
MULTIPLE ROUTES OF ENTRY AND EXIT

GALLERY HALF OPEN, HALF CLOSED

EXHIBITION HALF OPEN, HALF CLOSED

HALF OPEN, HALF CLOSED

SHOW HALF OPEN, HALF CLOSED ^[1]

It was one of his closest friends who first noticed that there was something wrong with the Exhibitionist. Brain imaging studies using positron emission tomography (PET) scans that detect the effectiveness of long-term treatment showed that the cerebral glucose metabolism patterns seen in obsessive–compulsive disorder (OCD) hoarders were distinct from the patterns in non-hoarding OCD.

The consciousness is never empty — predicate some scientists in an attempt to explain the origins, motives, *raison d’être* of this extraordinary behaviour. Most art critics agree that the Exhibitionist did not come out

of nowhere and that this personality phenomenon was influenced by a crowd of thinkers who had possibly already crowded the filled head.

The Exhibitionist must have at some point stumbled upon the associative iconographic atlas “Mnemosyne-Atlas” by Abby Warburg (1866-1929) who also showed signs of obsessive–compulsive disorder (OCD). OCD is associated with compulsive hoarding (or pathological hoarding or disposophobia) also defined as the excessive acquisition of possessions. We may remind ourselves of the case of Abby Warburg, the famous art historian:

“Already convinced (despite parental objections) of his future as an art historian, he struck a deal with his younger brother Max, who would inherit the family business on condition that he agreed to supply the elder Warburg with as many books as he required. (Max

later wrote: ‘I gave him what I must now admit was a very large blank cheque.’) When Warburg died in 1929, his library contained 60,000 volumes (...)” [2]

Another inspiration must have been the imaginary museum by André Malraux, who conceived of art as a twentieth-century feast for the imagination and proposed that one can put together one’s own ideal museum at any moment in one’s head. Some of these proposals stress the influence of an idea of reactivating photographic reproductions of art thus creating new contexts by Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), others accentuate further developments of modern art towards the immateriality of conceptual art, and others emphasize Allan Kaprow’s happenings, events by Fluxus. Also recalled are the numerous language-based art practices, and a variety of artworks that are initiated by, and take place in, a seemingly casual conversation, phrase,

or simply take place within someone's head.

Some Robert Barry fans raised the hypothesis that the Exhibitionist is constantly telepathically experiencing the "Telepathic Piece" by Robert Barry (conceived in 1969) of which the artist (Robert Barry, not the Exhibitionist) said: "During the exhibition I will try to communicate telepathically a work of art, the nature of which is a series of thoughts that are not applicable to language or image". The main conclusion of the aforementioned hypothesis is that the Exhibitionist is looped in a constantly resuming circle of experiencing the "Telepathic Piece". This conclusion was criticised by others as inconsistent. The critics declared that if the Exhibitionist was looped in permanent reception of the famous work by Robert Barry he would not immerse himself into the language based actions, as the "Telepathic Piece" is "not applicable to language".

Contrary to art historians, literary theorists brought forth one of the most

inspiring short stories of modern literature - "Funes the Memorious" by Borges, as possible inspiration. Here a fictional version of Borges himself meets Ireneo Funes, a teenage boy who lives in Fray Bentos, Uruguay, in 1884. Funes reveals that, since his fall from a horse, he perceives everything in full detail and remembers it all. He remembers, for example, the shape of clouds at all given moments, as well as the associated perceptions (muscular, thermal, etc.) of each moment. Funes has an immediate intuition of the mane of a horse or the form of a constantly changing flame, that is comparable to a normal person's intuition of a simple geometric shape (such as a triangle or square). Funes finds it very difficult to sleep, since he recalls "every crevice and every moulding of the various houses which [surround] him".

What about the general leanings and addictions of the Exhibitionist? Are these visible in a crowd? For example, can he be identified in a never-ending group of art

tourists? Well, the Exhibitionist identifies you first. The body with the brain containing an enormous amount of exhibitions does not feel like going to see more exhibitions. The Exhibitionist prefers lurking outside any kunsthalle, contemporary art centre, museum of modern art, project space, gallery, you name it. Here he stands on the corner, showing his back to a contemporary art scene.

However, while standing on the corner, the Exhibitionist may see and contemplate different works and exhibitions. When he witnesses a discussion in the street for him it may seem to be a piece by Ian Wilson. When he sees two people meeting, for him this could be a work by Jonathan Monk from monk's "Meetings" series (where the artist meets collectors of his works according to the time and place of the appointment they bought). If someone's phone is ringing it may be a call from Douglas Gordon – his gallerist may be calling to transmit a spoken text: "I believe in miracles". Passers-by may be

the actors hired by Pawel Althamer for his "Real Time Movie" which consists of a performance of a 30-minute segment of daily life, and a one-and-a-half minute film trailer created to promote that performance. During the performance, which is set on a busy corner in front of a chosen museum, actors assume the roles of typical passers by, crossing the street, waiting for a bus, or idling in a car at a traffic light. But if he/she isn't standing alone, if he/she is standing in line at an entranceway, the person may be presumed part of the performance by Slovakian artist Roman Ondák entitled "The Good Feelings in Good Times", which formally consist of a line of people suspended in action, moving no closer to entry or corner. And If he/she is occasionally gazing through the windows into the gallery, but never enters it, the person might be performing "The Stray Man" by the same artist.

The last time the Exhibitionist was seen on the same corner he was murmuring

figures of speech. Surrounded by some young art critics and curators with banknotes, all willing to witness what was yet to happen, he prefigured a few spoken phrases someone later thought to be predictive:

(...)

CLOSED

(...)

REDUCED

SMELTED

SMUDGED

PAINTED

MINED

BRACKETED

CABLED

LOCKED^[3]

(...)

FIVE WORDS IN A LINE. ^[4]

(...)

OPEN

(...)

[1] Also attributed to Stefan Brüggemann (b.1975, Mexico, lives and works between Mexico City and London) who is an artist known for creating show titles. His "Show Title" series is a work in progress and consists of a list of over 1200 possible exhibition titles. So far he has compiled a list of 1,271 of them ('Show Titles vol. #1', 2000–6), creating for himself an index of imaginary exhibitions. These titles are available for use by any artist, curator or institution, and the only requirement is, if used, to identify and credit them as a piece by the artist.

[2] Dillon, Brian, *Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas*, Issue 80, January-February, 2004.

[3] Also attributed to Lawrence Weiner, from *Tracce/Traces*. 1970

[4] Also attributed to Gertrude Stein, from *Five Words in a Line*. 1930

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Text by Valentinas Klimašauskas