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FROM POLLINATION TO LIQUIDATION:

THE MUSEUM AS ORGANISM

A Thesis in

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by

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ABSTRACT

*From Pollination to Liquidation: The Museum as Organism* is an examination of developments in the Guggenheim Museum’s policies and practices under the directorship of Thomas Krens from 1988 to 2008. Krens’s policies are placed within the contexts of contemporary issues including globalization, the franchising of art museums, and the economic model of grow or die. Although the Guggenheim Museum is the focus, the issues examined relate to the increasing trends of art museums to expand and broaden collections, create bigger and better exhibitions, and compete within a global economy.
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To Joey Jacob, whose heart traveled faster than light and soared like a comet.

(1979-2006)

Crestwood Comets, Class of 1997

Close Friend
Introduction
Introduction

In the introduction to his 1990 book, *Nothing If Not Critical: Selected Essays on Art and Artists*, art critic Robert Hughes argues that the period between 1945 and 1970, which saw the center of the art world located in New York, had now collapsed. Due to demographic shifts and the emergence of a cultural economic sphere, the imperialism of place was reconstituted by the imperialism of the market. Hughes imagined an art world in which the center would suddenly give way, spilling out and running its course along gullies and tributaries. He writes, “When power declines and the center cannot hold, its works of art move into the eddy of the market and wash up where power is great, money is plentiful and order reigns” (Hughes, 1990, p. 25).

Although written almost two decades ago, Hughes’s introduction was a distant prophecy of the now globalized art world.

This thesis is a small treasure map of that art world. More specifically, it is about the positions the Guggenheim Museum has occupied globally since director Thomas Krens arrived in 1988. Since his appointment, the Guggenheim has openly sought to expand itself into a global franchise, leveraging its collection and name, in exchange for space and currency. The museum had received its share of criticisms and resignations under Krens. Critics were apt to point out the museum was operating more on the lines of a multinational business, like Wal-mart or McDonalds, as opposed to a public institution. They responded to exhibitions like *The Art of the Motorcycle* (1998-99) and *Giorgio Armani* (2000-2001) as if these shows catered solely to corporate sponsorships. While the critics have unfairly singled out Krens as the result of the Guggenheim’s current position, they have also not responded to the contemporary pedagogies,
postmodern practices, and broader understandings of culture that the museum is embracing.

The point of this thesis is not necessarily to defend a single argument for or against the museum’s policies. To do so would reduce these policies to a single narrative that does not take into account the multiple public and private interests that determine them. The process by which the museum has grown into a global enterprise is largely holistic, integrating wholes and systems, rather than treating them as separate parts. The research and treatment of the museum throughout this thesis will be similar.

If this thesis is a map, then it is a map of exploration, adolescent wonder, and incompleteness. It is not my intention to describe one particular event in connection to the museum, but rather to offer a rich tapestry of ideas. These ideas will provide a framework for looking at the museum’s critics, its economic growth and decline, and the exhibitions *The Art of the Motorcycle* and *Giorgio Armani*. Perhaps this thesis is only part of a map, a map that guides us through research, but whose treasures still remain buried. The work has been broken down into three detailed chapters, each leading into the other, and culminating in a thorough discussion of the exhibitions. The chapters are titled “The Guggenheim Museum and Its Critics,” “Pollination,” and “Liquidation.” There is also a concluding chapter and an afterword to my late friend titled “The Museum as Organism.”

Chapter One briefly examines the history of the Guggenheim Museum from its origins as the Museum of Non-Objective Painting to its current positions globally. A review of the major critics provides a theoretical and historical framework for assessing the museum’s growth.

Chapter Two carefully outlines the reasons for the museum’s expansion, from its initial 1990-92 renovation, to the bonds that plagued it throughout the 1990’s. Chapter Two also examines the economic model of “grow or die” formulated by George T. Lockland in his 1971
text, *Grow or Die: The Unifying Principle of Transformation* (Lockland, 1971). Lockland’s model, although unmentioned by the critics, adds poetic amplification to the museum’s growth. Lockland discusses the importance of reciprocal interaction between all growth forms, from unicellular organisms to social classes, communities, and nations. Coupled with Frank Gehry’s flowering, steel architecture and the museum staff’s own statements, I argue that the museum, as metaphor, has evolved through adaptive stages of pollination and liquidation.

Chapter Three examines the highly criticized, blockbuster exhibitions *The Art of the Motorcycle* and *Giorgio Armani*. The first two chapters serve as support for understanding how these shows came about and were received. The major critics’ assumptions are critiqued as misleading, insufficient, and rooted in Modernist conceptions of art and culture. I offer an alternative reading of these shows that takes into account popular culture as pedagogical and deconstructed within the space of the museum.

Finally, the concluding chapter re-addresses any misleading suppositions and clarifications. It points towards new ways of understanding the Guggenheim franchise as a metaphorical process driven largely by the importance of multi-national partnerships and postmodern understandings of visual culture.

The Guggenheim Museum has been expanding its image globally since Hughes’s initial statements in 1990. This thesis examines the museum more critically and in depth. It takes into account both the critics’ concerns and their lack of understanding of the exhibitions. I hope the readers can reflect on what is written, use the knowledge as a close friend or companion, and perhaps follow their own course.
Chapter I:

The Guggenheim Museum and Its Critics
Chapter I: The Guggenheim Museum and Its Critics

According to the Guggenheim Museum’s website, the Guggenheim Museum can be traced back to the 1930’s (http://www.guggenheim.org/history.html). Throughout the 1930’s Solomon R. Guggenheim, with the help of German artist and theorist Hilla Rebay, amassed a large collection of modernist works by painters such as Vasily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and Marc Chagall. Guggenheim later installed his growing collection at a private apartment in New York City, holding small exhibitions for the public. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation was formed in 1937 as the collection grew larger. The Foundation was chartered by the Board of Regents of New York State and was endowed to operate one or more museums. Hilla Rebay served as its initial curator and Solomon Guggenheim the first president of the Foundation.

By 1938 Peggy Guggenheim, Solomon’s niece, opened Guggenheim Jeune, a small, commercial art gallery in London. The gallery, like Solomon’s collection, represented a host of avant-garde and non-objective works. Within a few years the Museum of Non-Objective Painting (1939), under the support of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, opened in a rented quarters at 24 East Fifty-fourth Street, and Peggy opened her own museum-gallery, Art of this Century, on Fifty-seventh Street (1942).

A year later, in 1943, Rebay and Solomon commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright to design a permanent building to house the Museum of Non-Objective Painting. Over the next 15 years Wright made some 700 hundred sketches for the building on a tract of land between East Eighty-eighth Street and Eighty-ninth Street, Fifth Avenue. Both Solomon and Wright died before the construction of the museum was finished. Solomon died in 1949 and Wright in 1959, just six months prior to the museum’s opening on October 21, 1959. In the same year of Solomon’s
death, Peggy Guggenheim purchased the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni on Venice’s Grand Canal, installing her collection there, and opening it to the public.

In 1952, James Johnson Sweeney was named director of the museum. Its name was changed to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum as a memorial to its late founder. Sweeney only held the post of director until 1960, at which point Thomas M. Messer served as Sweeney’s replacement. Messer held the position for twenty-seven years presiding over a major expansion of the collection and establishing it as a world-class museum. After Peggy died in 1979, the Foundation took ownership of the Palazzo, with Messer serving as director of the Peggy Guggenheim collection, in addition to the New York Guggenheim.

By the time Thomas Krens arrived, an expansion program had already been underway in New York. The expansion program included an annex designed by Gwathmey Siegel and Associate Architects, a large acquisition of the Panza di Biumo Collection of Minimalist and Conceptual Art (1992), and a major restoration of the Wright building. In 1990, the Wright building closed to the public for restoration and expansion and was not re-opened until 1992. It was also during this time (1991-92) that agreements were signed between the Basque Administration and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation to create a Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain. The Guggenheim Bilbao would be one of many projects, throughout the 1990’s, designed to reposition the museum globally. Before speaking about those projects and the criticism they generated, I will say a few words about Thomas Krens. For a broader, more detailed account of the museum’s history and the Guggenheim family refer to Debi and Irwin Unger’s book, *The Guggenheims: A Family History* (Unger & Unger, 2005), or Peter Lawson-Johnston’s personal memoir, *Growing up Guggenheim: A Personal History of a Family Enterprise* (Lawson-Johnston, 2005).
Thomas Krens

Thomas Krens became director of the Guggenheim Museum in 1988, replacing the third director of the institution, Thomas Messer. At the time Krens was the director of the much smaller Williams College Museum in Williamstown, Massachusetts. As an undergraduate he majored in political economy at Williams College. Towards the end of his senior year he began to take an interest in art through a variety of art history courses. Upon graduating in 1969, he moved to Geneva, Switzerland where he served as a printmaker’s apprentice. Returning to the states a year later, he applied for a master’s degree in studio art from the State University of New York at Albany. He later returned to Williams College to teach art history courses and printmaking (Lawson-Johnston, 2005).

While Krens was serving on the faculty, the college announced plans for a major renovation of the Williams College Museum. Krens was asked to lead the project with the architect Charles Moore and Maurice Prendergast’s widow, Eugenie Van Kemmel, after the original director resigned. He envisioned a much larger plan than the college had originally intended. The plan was approved and Krens was appointed director of the museum in 1979. He later started work on his second master’s degree from the Yale School of Management, writing his master’s thesis on the Getty family and their involvement in the art world (Lawson-Johnston, 2005).

Part of Krens’s global vision of art museums would be influenced by his studies with Martin Shubik at Yale. Shubik, author of *Game Theory in the Social Sciences: Concepts and Solutions* (1982), taught courses on economic game theory and acknowledged that Krens understood its principles. Economic game theory could be compared to a game of chess in which
different players, such as the industrialist, the citizen, the financier, the artist, and the architect all determine a game’s outcomes and solutions (Shubik, 1982). Perhaps the global Guggenheim project is similar to a highly elaborate game, such as chess or monopoly.

The Williams College Museum of Art expansion project in 1983 led Krens to the attention of Thomas Messer. In addition, Krens was planning a large contemporary museum in an old, abandoned factory in North Adams, which is now the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASSMoCA). The museum director originally intended to use the space as a Williams College annex. It would serve as a large-scale contemporary art museum and provide economic re-development to North Adams. Although more will be said about this later, the museum became Krens’s first large-scale project and could be perceived as a precursor to the Guggenheim satellites. The building finally opened in 1999, and although Krens was appointed director of the Guggenheim in 1986, it delayed his arrival until 1988. MASSMoCA and the Guggenheim have gone their separate ways as institutions, but the former has housed and exhibited some of the larger pieces from the Guggenheim collection (Lawson-Johnston, 2005).

Since Krens’s arrival, the Guggenheim has created several cultural partnerships through Guggenheim satellites and corporate sponsors. These have included a separate Guggenheim Museum in Soho (1992-2002), The Frank Gehry designed Guggenheim Bilbao (1997), the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin (1997), and the Guggenheim Hermitage Museum in Las Vegas (2001-2008). Krens also established a partnership between the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Russia and Vienna’s Kunsthistoriches Museum, whereby the museums exhibit works from each other’s collections.

The Guggenheim Las Vegas was a joint venture between Russia, New York, and Las Vegas. Architect Rem Koolhaas designed the museum in two parts within the Vegas Venetian
Resort-Hotel-Casino. The museum included a large exhibition space called the “big box” that displayed large, traveling exhibitions like the 1998-99 blockbuster exhibition *The Art of the Motorcycle* and a smaller “jewel box” containing works from the core Guggenheim and Hermitage collections.

In addition to these partnerships, there have also been proposals and feasibility studies for Guggenheims in Guadalajara, Hong Kong, and a host of other places to be discussed in further detail. The most recent proposal to date has been the Middle East Guggenheim, on the island of Abu Dhabi, designed by Frank Gehry, and to be completed in the United Arab Emirates by 2012. The museum also owns an outpost at the Peggy Guggenheim collection in Venice. Each alliance has contributed to the global dissemination of the Guggenheim name, creating a cultural currency of the institution’s collections and image. For the most part they have strengthened the financial support of the museum, allowing it to compete within a global art world. Critics’ responses to the Guggenheim’s growth have been generally negative and framed within the contexts of global capitalism and postcolonialism.

**Global Visions: Satellites and Mega-Museums**

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, as an entity of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation (SRGF) has been “cloning” its image through international branch museums, so called satellites, which grow their own local hybrids while trading on the cachet of the Guggenheim name. (Rectanus, 2002, p. 177)

As early as 1990, Rosalind Krauss in her article, “The Cultural Logic of the Late
Capitalist Museum,” questioned the role of the late capitalist museum under the direction of Thomas Krens (Krauss, 1990). In her article, the Guggenheim Museum represents an industrial prototype with which to compete in an increasingly corporate art world. Krauss recalls an interview with Krens where the latter described his revelation for The Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, transforming the 750,000-foot factory space formerly occupied by Sprague Technologies Inc., into a museum complex.

Deborah Weisgall had interviewed Krens in the New York Times Magazine shortly after his revelation; and parts of Weisgall’s interview are reprinted in Krauss’s article. In Weisgall’s New York Times article, “A Mega-museum in a Mill Town, The Guggenheim in Massachusetts?,” Krens described the museum’s functions as though they reflected his Master’s degree from Yale in Business Administration. He constantly spoke of the Guggenheim not as a museum, but as the “museum industry.” In describing it, he used words like “overcapitalized,” in need of “mergers and acquisitions” and of “asset management.” He even referred to the museum’s collections and catalogues as “products” (Krauss, 1990; Weisgall, 1989).

Krauss argues that marketing this product will require that its image be sold across a larger economic landscape (Krens referred to this as “market share”). She identifies three immediate requisites that would aid in economic growth. They include the expansion of larger inventories, such as the Guggenheim’s acquisition of over 300 works from the Panza collection, more outlets to sell the product, characteristic of Krens’s revelation for Massachusetts, and leveraging the collection in the form of credit or capital, as demonstrated in Krens’s decision to go global. By going global, the Guggenheim Museum simulates itself into a franchise or chain of commodities. Krauss writes, “Indeed, in the world of commodities it is this difference that is consumed” (Krauss, 1990, p.10).
Mark W. Rectanus in his book *Culture Incorporated* (2002) extends Krauss’s treatment of the late capitalist museum. He argues that the Guggenheim Museum as a franchise composed of satellites, corporate sponsors, and high profile buildings incorporates a globalization of the museum’s image and market. Rectanus describes at length the cultural politics and corporate sponsors that help maintain the museum’s expanded market.

For example, the Guggenheim Bilbao (1997) was constructed in a need to foster economic growth and urban redevelopment in the region of Bilbao, Spain. The high profile museum was part of a larger reconstruction project by the Basque and Biscay governments that included a rapid-transit system, a recreational and commercial harbor, waterfront entertainment, a shopping complex, and a concert hall. Rectanus states that in theory the satellite museums were allowed to maintain a regional identity while incorporating the museum’s image and merchandizing. However, maintaining a regional identity proved to be a problem.

The original contract paid the Guggenheim to construct and administer the museum for a twenty-year period. Central to this agreement was the Basques’ $20 million tax-free donation in exchange for loan privileges. Rectanus argues that the promotion of a regional image has been hard to maintain, largely because of the original agreements. He writes,

Despite the sizeable budget for acquisitions of Basque and modern Spanish art, both the exhibitions and the purchases for the GMB [Guggenheim Museum Bilbao] have been predominantly modern “masterpieces” that would either draw from or augment the Guggenheim’s own collection. Although works by some established Basque artists (Eduardo Chillida) and some in the younger generation (Juan Luis Moraza, Txomin Badiola, and Prudencio Irazazabal) were purchased or commissioned, many of the major
acquisitions to the Basque collection have been works that Krens believes will complement the SRGF’s [Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation] own collection and establish Bilbao’s international reputation through “signature works by foremost masters of modern art” (GMB press release), including Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, and Willem de Kooning. (Rectanus, 2002, p. 179)

Instead of maintaining its regional identity, the Guggenheim Bilbao assimilated into the SRGF’s own image.

Another curious case described by Rectanus involves the Guggenheim’s relationship to fashion designer Hugo Boss. He refers to this relationship as a prominent example of image transfer and dissemination. The Guggenheim provides artworks from its collection and library to the Hugo Boss corporate offices in Stuttgart and allows for the use of its name and image in conjunction with Boss’s sponsoring activities. In exchange, the Guggenheim receives financial assistance for several exhibitions each year and the Hugo Boss Prize ($50,000). The corporation also works with the Guggenheim to plan educational outreach programs for children. By associating itself with Hugo Boss, the museum links its own image to an array of consumer practices, including cosmopolitanism, fashion, and lifestyle.

These associations became a bit blurred when Matthew Barney was awarded the prize in 1995 for his series *March of the Anal Sadistic Warrior*. Barney’s series critiqued the institutionalized power of fashion, identity, and marketing as they are demonstrated in such things as sports. In an ironic twist of fate, the Guggenheim surprisingly awarded Matthew Barney the prize. This left many people wondering, including Rectanus, if the prize was given to Barney as a self-referential gesture. In other words, they awarded Barney the prize to avoid
criticism about their own image.

In addition to Rectanus and Krauss, Saloni Mathur’s article “Museums and Globalization” describes the “McGuggenheim effect” as it is embodied in the “mega-museum” and the over-marketing of its collections (Mathur, 2005, p. 698). For Mathur, the mega-museum is characteristic of an age where each new museum or blockbuster show tries to outdo the next. She references the Sensation exhibit (Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1999-2000), organized by advertising mogul Charles Saatchi, and the construction of always bigger and more spectacular museums like the Getty Center in Los Angeles, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, and the Tate Modern in London. Mathur argues that although some of these museums are responsible for urban redevelopment, it may come at the cost of sacrificing their institutional integrity.

Central to her analysis are the blockbuster exhibitions The Art of the Motorcycle and Giorgio Armani. The official sponsor for the Armani exhibition was In Style magazine, although the designer reportedly made an individual gift of fifteen million dollars (Mathur, 2005). Mathur argues that this marked a turning point in the corporatization of the Guggenheim Museum. Similarly, The Art of the Motorcycle was sponsored by BMW, one of the corporations on display. She states,

For a writer such as Walter Benjamin the museum was entirely enmeshed in the “spectacle of commodity” culture that transformed society in the nineteenth century, and arguably has more in common with its cousins—the department store, the arcade, the world’s fair—than it ever has wanted to admit. What is new, it seems to me, is not the fact that museums are behaving increasingly like corporations, regardless of their profitability, but that they are, in the case of the Guggenheim, behaving like multinational
corporations. (Mathur, 2005, p. 700)

According to Mathur, satellite museums have become the next multinational business in an increasingly corporate art world.

Mathur’s comments are insightful if we consider Paul Klebnikov’s 2001 article, “Museums, Inc.,” in Forbes magazine. Klebnikov asked Thomas Krens about his future plans for the expansion of the Guggenheim. When asked where else he would expand, Krens replied, “Two or three institutions in South America (including Brazil), East Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa” (Krens quoted in Klebnikov, 2001, p. 69). Reprinted in Paul Klebnikov’s Forbes article are also statements made by directors at such prestigious institutions as The National Gallery of Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In response to this kind of expansion J. Carter Brown, director emeritus of Washington’s National Gallery of Art, states, “This kind of commercialization devalues the coin” (Brown quoted in Klebnikov, 2001, p. 69).

In a similar tone Philippe de Montebello, former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, argues,

It’s a betrayal of public trust. Please! He exclaims. They (the Guggenheim management) are after the money. It’s certainly not the same thing as if they were to send their collection to the St. Louis Art Museum, where they would get zero, but they would reach a very large public also. (Montebello quoted in Klebnikov, 2001, p. 70)

Elsewhere, Montebello and a host of other directors attack Krens in a collection of essays titled, Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust (Cuno, 2004). For
instance, Glenn D. Lowry, director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, writes,

The Guggenheim Museum has moved from being a mission-driven educational institution devoted to the display and interpretation of its collection—that is to the realization of the ideas of its founders embedded in the art it holds in trust for the public—to an entertainment complex, a point that it is quite open about. (Cuno, 2004, p. 137)

He then goes on to quote Ben Hartley, former director of communications and sponsorship at the Guggenheim:

We are in the entertainment business and competing against other forms of entertainment out there. We have a Guggenheim brand that has certain equities and properties. By doing these cross fertilizations [with the fashion industry] we get a crowd that perhaps doesn’t typically come to Guggenheim openings, but if they are here for a party and happen to look at the art and come back again, that’s valuable to us. (Cuno, 2004, p. 137)

If that’s not enough, here is the director of the Courtauld Institute of Art, James Cuno, offering an alternative to Krens’s policies:

Thomas Krens, the director of the Guggenheim Museum, has codified the successful twenty first century museum experience as “great collections, great architecture, a great special exhibition, a great second exhibition, two shopping opportunities, a high-tech
interface via the Internet, and economies of scale via a global network.” I offer an alternative museum experience: the permanent collection and the opportunity it affords for sustained and repeated engagements with individual works of art, presented without the hyperbolic promotional apparatus of the temporary exhibition. In this case, the permanent collection one object at a time: nine objects, in fact considered objectively, for themselves, as objects in themselves. (Cuno, 2004, p. 55)

Paul Klebnikov points out that statements like Cuno’s, Montebello’s, and Lowry’s can be defended because the Guggenheim receives a much smaller endowment for the arts than the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Museum of Modern Art. Due to this smaller percentage, the museum’s staff relies on other sources to make money, including corporate sponsors and global franchising (Klebnikov, 2001).

Krens had stated his position quite differently in an interview in Art in America magazine from 1997. When asked what would happen if the Guggenheim Bilbao was a success, Krens replied, “If the GMB is successful, it will be admired and it might suggest some directions, but I don’t see an avalanche of institutions moving toward internationalization, because it takes lots of energy” (Krens quoted in Bradley, 1997, p. 53).

At the time of the Forbes interview, the construction of the Guggenheim Las Vegas was currently underway. Krens projected during this interview that the construction of a Guggenheim in Las Vegas would bring the annual attendance to about 6 million a year. Klebnikov makes clear that this increase in attendance would have put the Guggenheim ahead of the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art annually. In hindsight, however, this was not the case. The Guggenheim Las Vegas was not a big success and had many critics prematurely

Along with criticism from fellow directors, the Guggenheim had also witnessed resignations under Krens. Stephanie Cash and David Ebony’s article from the 2005 March issue of *Art in America*, titled “Guggenheim Chairman Quits in Protest,” highlighted the displeasure that Krens’s colleagues had with his vision. The person who resigned was board chairman Peter B. Lewis. Lewis had held the top post for the past six years. He was also one of the Guggenheim’s most distinguished benefactors. As chairman of the Progressive Corporation, Lewis had given 77 million dollars, largely surpassing that of the other trustees. Citing reasons for his resignation, Lewis stated that the museum “should concentrate more on New York and less on being scattered all over the world” (Lewis quoted in Cash & Ebony, 2005, p. 168). As of March 2005, plans for satellites in Taiwan and Rio de Janeiro had been on and off and a proposal for a satellite in Guadalajara was being undertaken (Cash & Ebony, 2005).

Given the *Forbes* article and the subsequent resignation of Lewis, it is necessary to return to some of the points raised earlier by Saloni Mathur. She questions whose interests these satellites will serve, stating that the Global Guggenheim contains an astonishing disavowal of the autonomous spaces of cultural activity that exist in the non-western world. According to Mathur, international biennial formats, which give voice to “other” cultures (Havana Biennial, Istanbul Biennial, Kwanju Biennial), would be threatened under the homogenization of Western satellites. Mathur extends Serge Guilbaut’s analysis of American Abstract Expressionism to discuss how western satellites are framed within the contexts of cultural and political power. In Guilbaut’s seminal book *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (1983), the author traces the rise of American Abstract Expressionism in
explicitly Cold War terms. Guilbaut argues that the aesthetic prominence of Abstract
Expressionism was due to an increase in American political and cultural power following World
War II. Mathur’s argument is similar, demonstrating how western satellites are shaped by
imperialism and American hegemony.

If the criticism that has been leveled at Krens has not reached a breaking point, that
breaking point may not be far off. Carol Vogel published an article called “The Guggenheim
Foundation and the Abu Dhabi Plan Museum There” in the July 9, 2006 issue of *The New York
Times*. In her article the government of Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates,
announced that it had signed a memorandum of understanding with the Guggenheim Foundation
to build a 300,000 square-foot, Gehry designed museum in Abu Dhabi. The Museum, called the
Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, would house modern and contemporary art and serve as a cultural
center for the new district of Saadiyat (Arabic for “isle of happiness”). Government officials
hope that the district will develop into a cultural economic sphere with residential housing,
hotels, restaurants, a golf course, a national museum, a classical art museum, a performing arts
center, and a park. They predict that the Middle East Guggenheim will be completed by 2012.

Krens states, “This is an extraordinary opportunity for the Guggenheim to become involved in
the Middle East...Our challenge now is to define the next generation of Guggenheim Museums”
(Krens quoted in Vogel, 2006, p.1.3).

Vogel also notes that as the Guggenheim in New York oversees the running of Bilbao, it
too would manage Abu Dhabi’s programs and educational initiatives. Her article was likewise
summarized in Stephanie Cash’s article “Guggenheim in the Middle East?” in the September
2006 issue of *Art in America*. Cash states that Abu Dhabi is the “glitzty, oil-rich capital” of the
United Arab Emirates (Cash, 2006, p. 37). In addition, her article mentions that it will be the
most costly of the Guggenheim satellites.

Before concluding this chapter, I would like to speak more specifically about two of the satellites and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. The Guggenheim Bilbao and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art generated heavy criticism at the time of their construction, while Frank Gehry’s Middle East project has already stirred some controversy. What these museums demonstrate is that cultural spaces are often, if not always, competing, symbolic spaces, where cultural identities are contested on regional and global levels.

The Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art and The Guggenheim Bilbao

The Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art was first conceptualized by Thomas Krens in 1985. At this time he was still director of the Williams College Museum of Art, and had just presided over a major renovation of the Williams College Museum. MASSMoCA was to be located in the factory town of North Adams, just five miles from Williamstown, where the college resided. Staring out of his office window, he may have envisioned, like Willy Wonka, a giant factory turned into an awe-inspiring spectacle. The sight he envisioned transforming was the location of Sprague Technologies, an old electronic industry. In her book, The Culture of Cities (1995), Sharon Zukin describes the decline of textile mills and factories in North Adams, while highlighting the complex local and global politics that affected Krens’s plan for urban renewal.

According to Zukin’s account, in 1980 fifteen percent of town residents were living below the poverty level, while in 1985, when Krens first conceived the plan, the unemployment rate was fourteen percent. Although living through two periods of industrial growth, by the 1980’s
most industries had shut down, including the Marshall Street complex that housed Sprague Technologies. It was estimated that the museum would create at least 644 new museum jobs, in addition to employment in restaurants, hotels, and shops connected to tourism (Zukin, 1995).

Zukin argues that from its start MASSMoCA was initially portrayed as both a local enterprise and an international one. In 1989, Krens described MASSMoCA as the world’s first “multi-national” museum (Zukin, 1995, p. 92; Weisgall, 1989, p. 35). The museum was supposed to partner with the New York Guggenheim and display works from minimalist, conceptual, and avant-garde artists, although the Guggenheim later withdrew as its operating partner.

Some critics responded harshly, when in 1992 the museum still had not been built, and controversy had now begun to stir over Krens’s satellite ambitions. They linked the project to a whole range of controversial policies including expansion, franchise museums, de-accessioning, and the acquisition of Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo’s Minimalist collection. Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo gave the museum 211 Minimalist pieces from American artists of the 1960's and 70's, but only half of them up front. The other half was to be paid for over the next six years, along with the count promising to donate 105 works over five years (Zukin, 1995).

To pay for the Minimalist series, Krens auctioned off Chagall’s *Anniversaire*, Modigliani’s *Garcon a la Veste Blue* and Kandinsky’s *Fuge*, but now faced the problem of storage. Two solutions were the 1990-1992 expansion and the site at MASSMoCA. Critic Hilton Kramer asked what the point was of the 1990-1992 expansion if the museum was just going to distribute the permanent collection among branch museums anyway (Zukin, 1995).

Zukin states that throughout its history MASSMoCA had been threatened by political and financial conditions in Massachusetts. The administration of Governor Michael Dukakis highly
supported the project and used it as an economic platform in his 1988 campaign. However, a severe fiscal crisis in 1988 and Dukakis's failed presidential campaign the same year threatened the original $35 million bond issued by the state legislature.

In 1989, a marketing study commissioned by the museum found that the concept of a contemporary art museum was too esoteric, stating that the public would rather see traditional crafts, landscape paintings, and folk arts. The public also made no distinction between the fact that MASSMoCA funds had nothing to do with state budget cuts, since the museum was to be funded by a bond issue, rather than the state's operating budget. Many people felt that spending money on a museum during a severe economic crisis was poor politics. When the state's arts budget actually decreased from 27 million in 1988 to 17.3 million in 1990, legislators became more persistent on checking the operating subsidies granted to the MASSMoCA staff. At one point MASSMoCA had to borrow $100,000 from the Massachusetts Industrial Finance Corporation to pay an outstanding gas bill. In addition, because of inflation, projected costs for the museum increased over $7 million (Zukin, 1995).

While local politicians still continued to promote the project as an economic strategy, MASSMoCA gained little support from local artists and patrons. Zukin states the original plan did not respond to local perception of needs. Input from the local community was minimal, although preservation of the industrial factories tended to work in Krens's favor. By 1990, Dukakis was replaced by Republican Governor William Weld and a tax revolt made it evident that the state would not commit more funds. The Weld administration proposed a much smaller version of the museum that relied more on private funds (Zukin, 1995).

In 1994, a new plan arose with new operating partners, including corporations like the Disney Development Company. This new plan also included having resident artists live and
work in North Adams, collaborating with the local community, an important component absent from the original plan (Zukin, 1995). Eventually in 1999, MASSMoCA celebrated its opening through a combination of public and private support.

The construction of the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art revealed that global art museums raise serious questions about local identity and support. As Zukin states, local audience was the least thought about issue in the first MASSMoCA plan. Primarily seen as economic redevelopment, its purpose was to create service sector jobs and class-specific tourism. It was intended to boost the local economy, while making real estate more profitable. Questions about whose culture would be represented were never addressed in the original plan. Similar problems arose over the construction of Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Bilbao.

Whereas MASSMoCA renovated the vernacular industries of North Adams, Gehry’s Guggenheim Bilbao implanted a highly stylized brand of architecture. In his essay, "Guggenheim Bilbao: Competitive Strategies for the New Culture-Economy Spaces," Jon Azua describes the invention of a new biology for economics and business that would provide new forms of international, community organization. These new forms, such as the Guggenheim Bilbao, would re-establish uncertain, waning economies into global cities, a term he differentiates from nation states (Guasch & Zulaika, 2005). Azua argues that economic recovery in Bilbao came at the expense of cultural recovery. He states that a permanent identity crisis in the Basque country was due to a series of factors. Of these the author lists several, including the succession of wars it has endured, a lack of territorial unity, the process of recovering its language, Euskara, the use of which was prohibited during the Franco dictatorship, and three periods of profound economic crisis (1975, 1980, and 1992).

Following Francisco Franco’s death in 1975, Spain began a process of transition toward
democracy. This process led to the creation of the Basque government and parliament. Throughout the 1980’s, Euskadi or the Basque Country, was attempting to modernize in the context of new political and economic opportunities represented by the European Union. Spain eventually joined the European Union, then known as the European Economic Community, in 1986 (Guasch & Zulaika, 2005). The construction of the Guggenheim Bilbao in 1996 was meant to position Bilbao as an international service city. Through a cultural avant-garde, the city would transform into a global city. For the museum it symbolized the power of architecture and urban renewal at the expense of the arts. What seemed like a beneficial plan had critics, artists, and citizens responding quite differently.

Perhaps the most outspoken critic was the Basque anthropologist Joseba Zulaika. He wrote quite extensively about the Krensification of the museum in his book *Chronicle of Seduction: The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao* (Zulaika, 1997). Zulaika states that so imperative was the secrecy of the initial 1991 contract, that when it was signed on December 13th of that year, the public had not been told until the last minute (Guasch & Zulaika, 2005). According to estimates at the time, the project was going to require 80 percent of Basque funding for all museums indefinitely into the future. After the signing, more than four hundred Basque artists and intellectuals presented a letter protesting the contract. Zulaika writes,

> The plight of local artists is therefore one more crucial aspect we learn from the Bilbao Guggenheim. What essentially happens in a Krensified museum is that local representatives lose the intellectual control to decide what is valuable art, the financial control of their own resources, and the institutional control to promote a given art by purchasing or exhibiting it. Local artists become far removed from the centers that directly
decide on the fate of their careers. (Guasch & Zulaika, 2005, p. 61)

In his book, *Bilbao: Pathways to Globalization* (2007), Gerardo de Cerro Santamaria offers a more balanced account of the project. Santamaria questions Zulaika, stating that Zulaika softened his critique of the museum’s value for Bilbao. In fact, Santamaria makes clear that it wasn’t Krens who approached the Basque negotiators, but they who sought him. According to Santamaria, before entering negotiations with Bilbao, Krens unsuccessfully established contracts with Boston, Venice, Salzburg, Lyon, Vienna, Osaka, Graz, Tokyo, and Moscow. Santamaria suggests that Zulaika’s portrayal of the negotiations stresses the symbolic interaction or seduction between Basque negotiators and Krens, but does not specify the historical and social contexts that led the Basques to build a Guggenheim satellite. Krens is portrayed as a smooth talker and moneyman. Yet, it was the Basques who approached the Guggenheim, not the other way around, which led to the negotiations. Santamaria describes these negotiations at length.

First, it is important to note that the main Basque negotiator was the Secretary of the Treasury, not the Secretary of Culture. His name was Juan Antonio Vidarte, and he later became the first and only director of the Guggenheim Bilbao. The original plan did not specify which works of art the museum would exhibit. The museum was conceived as a strategic plan that would restructure the city’s tourism sectors, along with the expansion of the airport, a new suspension bridge, a new transportation system, and a new central business district. Santamaria does highlight that the negotiation process was kept secret and was carried out by a few politicians of the Basque Nationalist Party, with the final approval given by the party’s chairman, Xabier Arzalluz, not the Basque government’s president, Jose Antonio Ardanza. The Socialist Party (which governed the Basque Country in coalition with the Basque Nationalist Party or
PNV) and the public were informed after the matters had been decided, giving rise to a string of outcries (Santamaria, 2007).

For example, the separatist group, Herri Batasuna (the political arm of the ETA), sent a letter to Krens’s New York office expressing their anger over the project. The ETA or Euskadi Ta Askatasuna are a terrorist group who originally organized themselves against the Franco dictatorship. At first aligned with the PNV, they later split, feeling that the Basque Nationalist Party was too moderate in its opposition to Franco. The ETA strongly opposed any colonial practices, or that which may be considered cultural imperialism. A few days before the museum’s inauguration in October 1997 a Basque police officer uncovered a plot by the ETA to blow up Gehry's building during the opening ceremony. The police officer was shot dead after he suspected ETA activists had hidden grenades within flowerpots next to the museum (Santamaria, 2007).

Like Zulaika’s account, Santamaria also mentions the 400 people, including artists, writers, and journalists, who formed the Kultur Keska, opposing the idea that the project would absorb 80 percent of Basque cultural funds. Santamaria states that the group opposed the project and the Basque Nationalist Party’s strategies because the PNV favored an approach based on class specific tourism and consumption, place marketing, and the culture of spectacle over grassroots organization and local artists.

Two of Spain's most prolific artists, Jorge Oteiza and Eduardo Chillida, also voiced significant protest over the construction of the museum. Oteiza was a Basque icon who introduced avant-garde art to the Basque region in the 1950’s, while Eduardo Chillida is a famous Basque artist today. Oteiza refused to donate his works to the museum or have them exhibited there. He wrote a letter to the Basque government stating that the museum was double-
dealing, something worthy of Disneyland, and completely anti-Basque (Santamaria, 2007).

Oteiza’s disapproval may have stemmed from his earlier involvement in the 1980’s designing a museum for Bilbao. The project failed because of disagreements between the Basque government and the mayor, and Oteiza’s arguments with local officials. Afterwards, museum negotiators approached the Guggenheim Museum. Zulaika states that the Krensified museum they brought to the Basque country completely clashed with Oteiza’s vision, although he doesn’t explain in detail how the museums differed (Guasch & Zulaika, 2005).

Along with Oteiza and Chillida, the Basque arts community had launched exhibitions protesting the official opening of the museum. A few days before the official opening 123 artists exhibited in a show at the Arsenal Gallery, titled Prometheus Bound (Guasch & Zulaika, 2005). The exhibition contained 155 works ranging in media. The exhibition was supposed to be an ironic gesture, reminiscent of a film forty years earlier by director Luis G. Berlanga, titled Welcome Mr. Marshall (1952). Berlanga used irony to comment on the cultural, political, and economic isolation that for two hundred years defined Spain, especially during the Franco dictatorship. The film also critiqued the tendency for governments to side with ruling empires. By re-appropriating the film, the artists at Arsenal Gallery critiqued the Basque Nationalist Party’s cultural policies. They brought to light the historical contradictions that arise when a country seeks independence, then relies on a major American museum for identity formation. As Bilbao clearly indicates, the buying, franchising, and trading of culture on a global scale creates tension between the different players involved. That tension is further demonstrated by Frank Gehry’s Middle East Guggenheim.
Abu Dhabi: The Middle East Guggenheim

Frank Gehry’s Middle East Guggenheim is one of a series of museum projects to be located along the waterfront of the Saadiyat Island Cultural District. It is part of a collection of high-profile art museums and entertainment venues planned off the shore of Abu Dhabi. The series includes an Abu Dhabi Maritime Museum by architect Tadao Ando, a performing arts center by Zaha Hadid, and a Louvre outpost by Jean Nouvel. In addition, architect Norman Foster will be presiding over a major transformation of Abu Dhabi’s historic Central Market.

A 2007 *Newsweek* article by Zvika Krieger titled “Buying Culture” describes how Abu Dhabi has been luring Western institutions into negotiations, hoping to transform the capital into a global arts center. Controversy has already generated over the negotiations with the Louvre and the Guggenheim, as well as over the franchising of American and French universities in the region, including NYU, Sorbonne, and Yale (Krieger, 2007). Abu Dhabi sits on ten percent of the world’s oil supply and had agreed to pay $520 million just to use the Louvre name and logo for the next thirty years. In addition, they agreed to pay $747 million more for art loans and advice (Krieger, 2007). The negotiations with the Guggenheim Museum were similar, involving the same process of image transfer and consumption. Abu Dhabi, led by its crown prince Sheik Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, opened negotiations with the Louvre a year and a half prior to the publication of the article, before finally coming to an agreement. Jean d’Haussounville, the social advisor to Frances’s foreign ministry, was blasted by French critics and the Louvre’s curators for finalizing the agreement (Krieger, 2007).

Krieger notes that only 30 years ago the United Arab Emirates were mostly a desert populated by Bedouin tribes. Throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s they began to capitalize on their
oil wealth. Parts of the United Arab Emirates built corporations, skyscrapers, and mega-malls and in 2004 the government established the Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority. He states that the ADTA began to study cities that had revitalized themselves through large-scale projects. On the top of that list was Gehry’s Guggenheim Bilbao. According to Krieger, since its opening Bilbao has generated more than 4,300 new jobs a year, while contributing 2 billion to Spain’s gross national product. The ADTA sought out Krens after seeing the benefits and began working on negotiations for another Guggenheim satellite. They later approached the Louvre with similar negotiations.

In addition to paying for the name, Abu Dhabi agreed to renovate a wing of the Louvre and the theater of the Chateau de Fontainebleau, as well as pay for an art research center in Paris. In exchange, France promised Abu Dhabi access to thousands of works from several collections besides the Louvre, including the Pompidou Center, the Muse d’Orsay, and Versailles (Krieger, 2007). Most of the critics’ remarks in response to these agreements, like the criticisms of Gehry’s Bilbao, have centered on issues of identity, the buying and trading of cultural heritage, and the commodification of contemporary art. The sharpest attack came from Franchoise Cachin, honorary director of the French Museum Association, Jean Clair, former director of the Picasso Museum, and the art historian Roland Recht. Cachin, Clair, and Recht published an op-ed in Le Monde titled “Museums Are Not for Sale,” claiming that artworks belonging to a particular heritage are not exchangeable commodities. Since then the article turned into a petition, garnering 4,500 signatures, while urging the government to stop the negotiations (Krieger, 2007).

As a global franchise, the Guggenheim Museum finds itself competing within a sensitive political climate, where museums are leveraging their names, expertise, and collections. Thomas Krens’s vision of a global franchise resembles that of other museums, such as the Louvre, and
American universities like NYU and Yale. Critics like Saloni Mathur, Francheise Cachin, and Mark W. Rectanus, and directors such as Philip de Montebello and James Cuno, are quick to align global museums with multinational capitalism. Mathur’s postcolonial critique is revealing, in that it questions whose benefits will be served by these museums, while highlighting the complex differences between “other” cultures and Western hegemony. Although I clearly understand the importance of their arguments, I hope to demonstrate in the following chapters where their criticism falls short or is misleading. The following two chapters will address the economic reasons for the Guggenheim’s expansion and the highly criticized exhibitions *Giorgio Armani* and *The Art of the Motorcycle*. Several factors provide a framework for understanding the museum’s growth, yet were not mentioned by critics like Mathur and Montebello. These factors include George T. Lockland’s philosophy of transformation, the museum’s financial difficulties, broader understandings of visual culture pedagogies, and the museum as organism, life cycle, and metaphor. We will first turn to Lockland’s unifying principle of transformation to begin our understanding of the museum as organism.
Chapter II: Pollination
Chapter II: Pollination

The Guggenheim’s critics share the common belief that the museum is behaving like a corporation. They have criticized the museum’s drives towards globalization, bigger and better growth, and blockbuster exhibitions. As stated in the introduction, the focus of this thesis is to present alternative narratives to these arguments. Focusing exclusively on the commodification of the museum does not explain the various stages of its growth. This chapter covers the monetary decline of the Guggenheim throughout the 1990’s to the present and the economic principles of “grow or die” (Lockland, 1973). By the end of the chapter the reader should be able to understand Lockland’s philosophy of transformation, the museum’s financial difficulties and cutbacks, and the Guggenheim’s growth as metaphorically and biologically driven. In addition, Hans Haacke’s critiques of biological and corporate systems and Frederic Jameson’s cultural logic of late capitalism will lead us into a further understanding of the museum.

Grow or Die: A Philosophy of Transformation

The economic principles of “grow or die” were first formulated by George T. Lockland in his 1973 publication Grow or Die: The Unifying Principle of Transformation. Lockland’s book established the economic model of “grow or die” used by the Guggenheim and corporations like MCI throughout the late 1980’s and 1990’s. Oddly, it reads much more like a philosophical treatise than a book specifically about economics. There are chapters devoted to evolution, cybernetics, biology, art, and patterns of human growth. My aim here is not to criticize
Lockland from a scientific or economic standpoint, but to provide a rich tapestry of ideas discussed in his book.

Lockland’s major thesis is that human beings at all stages of creative development, whether artistic, economic, or political, all follow the basic growth patterns of biological life forms. When Thomas Krens states to Kim Bradley in her 1997 interview that the Guggenheim Museum is behaving like an “organism” he is referring, arguably, to Lockland’s text (Bradley, 1997, p. 53). Throughout the book Lockland argues that cells and humans modify themselves and their cultural products according to responses from their environments. Growth cannot occur independently but requires interaction with the environment. He identifies three basic forms of cell growth that we can witness in all stages of life, whether they are mental or physical. These three major stages are accretive, replicative, and mutual growth transformations, whereby the basic units of life grow through extending their boundaries, reproducing likenesses, and reciprocally interacting. Mark W. Rectanus’s metaphor of cloning and his use of the word “hybrids” bears a similar likeness, although he makes no mention of Lockland’s book (Rectanus, 2002, p. 177).

Since Lockland’s book draws on several disciplines to support his thesis it is difficult to mention them all at length. A few examples will suffice here. The first postulate of his transformation theory states that human behavior has evolved naturally from biological behavior, and that the behavior of all living things is growth directed. He argues that growth, like Darwinian natural selection, aids in the assimilation of materials from the environment and the development of cultural products that contribute to growth. Pre-life growth forms, such as chemical crystals or cellular growth, interact through accretion, replication, and mutualism. For example, during the accretive stage of cell growth, self-expansion can happen by extending
boundaries, enlarging cell size, or through vegetative fission. Replicative growth takes place through asexual self-duplication. Finally, in the mutual stage cells grow through sexual fusion and gene recombination techniques (DNA and RNA), like conjugation and meiosis.

Lockland states that cellular growth forms then carry over into higher levels of life, such as the extension of families and societies. According to him, the same life cycles could be witnessed at microscopic levels of life. For instance, in the accretive vegetation growth of blue-green algae “daughter” organisms are created in the broken pieces of self-extension. The daughter organisms then begin to grow on their own. Elsewhere, the macromolecule of the nucleus of a mitotic cell supplies the information by which a cell can grow and reproduce itself. The reproductive process makes it possible for new information to be incorporated into the offspring, producing genetic mutations or replicas of the original cell. Higher life forms, like plants and animals, depend on the same organic processes. The cross pollination between flowering plants and insects is another example of mutual growth.

Lockland postulates that mutual growth is further witnessed in the cultural alliances between nations, cities, and world organisms. He argues that once written and coded forms of language supplanted organic information systems more information could be passed between social classes and cultures. At times this resembled parasitic growth in the form of colonialism, ideological influence, and absolute power, but at other times resulted in cultural hybridization and cross culturing.

In certain circumstances even technology and art could be viewed as a mirror of nature. Lockland draws on Leonardo da Vinci’s inventions of early tools to demonstrate his theories. For instance, Da Vinci’s drawings of flying machines show how the musculature of the arm was
copied into mechanics. Da Vinci investigated internal biological systems as extensions of man-
made forms.

In addition to Da Vinci, Lockland also states that art fundamentally follows the course of
biological evolution. He describes how artists like Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and other Bauhaus
teachers used the principle of “biological memory” as necessary to design. He writes that
abstract and impressionist approaches, such as those utilized by Teilhard de Chardin, have
followed the course of modern technology. For example, the impressionists separated color into
specific components, mirroring the functions of the human eye. In addition to these examples,
the author reproduces work by abstract expressionist Willem de Kooning along side microscopic
reproductions of nature. De Kooning’s work, like many works produced by abstract artists, at
times resembles biological growth under a microscope. Finally, Lockland draws on the organic
principles of form and function, declaring as Frank Lloyd Wright declared, that identical
functions emerge from a work’s form.

From these different examples we can gather that the metaphor of the organism, which
Lockland uses at length, has an extensive history. In fact, Lockland does mention several other
examples in passing. He mentions that the truly classic example of organic growth was the
“golden rule” of Greek buildings, based on human proportions, later stating that throughout
history we have created vast multi-cellular, inter-dependant human systems in cities, nations, and
world organisms. In addition, medieval worldviews like St. Thomas Aquinas’s (1225-1274)
integrated system of nature and society used biological metaphors as they relate to the
commonwealth. They were only to be replaced by more mechanistic worldviews like those
described in Thomas Hobbes *Leviathan* (1651). Without getting into these philosophies at length,
it is adequate to say here that Lockland’s model has its antecedents, although his is more
specifically about cellular and biological growth. The words “cloning,” “hybrids,” “organism,” and “cross fertilizations” are metaphors for the museum’s growth, and could be derived from Lockland’s initial 1971 text (Rectanus, 2002, p. 177; Bradley, 1997, p. 53; Hartley quoted in Cuno, 2004, p. 137). As we will see by the end of this chapter, Frank Gehry’s design for the Guggenheim Bilbao illustrates these metaphors more explicitly, drawing on different life forms and human anatomies. For now I should explain why the Guggenheim Museum, under the direction of Thomas Krens, chose to grow or die.

**Game Theory: A Museum’s Life Cycle**

As previously stated, when Thomas Krens arrived at the Guggenheim in 1988 the museum was facing problems with storage, decreasing endowments, and a deficit of two million dollars (Zukin, 1995). The 1990-1992 renovation of the Wright building and the construction of the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art were two possible solutions to the storage problem, although both generated heavy criticism, along with art sales of a Modigliani, Kandinsky, and Chagall. The works sold at Sotheby’s in 1990 for $47.3 million were meant to help finance the purchase of Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo’s Minimalist collection (Haacke, 2006). At this time the Guggenheim was also planning a 1992 Soho expansion, in addition to the Wright renovation.

In 1990 bonds were issued by the Trust for Cultural Resources of the City of New York, a New York state public benefit corporation and government agency (Rosenbaum, 2003; Haacke, 2006). The museum’s endowment was to remain above $35 million under the terms of the contract of credit that collateralized bonds for the museum’s 1992 Soho expansion (Rosenbaum,
These bonds would later plague the museum throughout the 1990’s and would lead up to the Guggenheim Bilbao contract, which had already been underway since 1992. The bonds issued in 1990 were $54.9 million, but by 1994, the museum had already accumulated interest and principle payments of $6.5 million (Haacke, 2006).

According to cultural journalist Lee Rosenbaum, the museum floundered in financial difficulties throughout the 1990’s. For example, the Soho construction project completed in 1992 was initially supposed to cost $40.3 million, but it went over budget by $17.7 million (Haacke, 2006). By 1993 the operating budget had risen to $23 million, more than doubling its operating budget from 1988 (Haacke, 2006). To cover expenses, former board president and CEO of the Revlon corporation, Ronald Perelman, donated 10 million in 1994 and 1995, before leaving the board in 1999 (Rosenbaum, 2003). Although the museum did receive $20 million from the Bilbao contract, much of the debt throughout the 1990’s would carry over into the new century, including the initial 1990 bonds.

A great amount of statistical information can be found in Lee Rosenbaum’s 2003 article for Art in America titled “The Guggenheim Regroups: The Story Behind the Cutbacks.” Rosenbaum summarizes some of the museum’s major economic problems and eventual downsizing between 1999 and 2003. According to Rosenbaum, by the end of 2001 the endowment had decreased to $38.9 million, down from a 1998 high of $55.6 million. The endowment would have only been $28.9 million but the museum generated $10.01 million from art sales in 1999 that they designated as an art endowment. The museum was criticized heavily in 1990 for the sales of the Kandinsky, Modigliani, and Chagall but stated that the 1999 sales were of low quality. This statement came only after museum officials refused to provide a list of the recent discards. Rosenbaum notes that the Association of Art Museum Directors ethical
guidelines state that the funds received from the sale of any works must be used only for the acquisitions of works of art. However, designating them as an art endowment allowed the museum to remain above the $35 million level required under the terms of the contract of credit that collateralized bonds for the museum’s 1992 Soho expansion and Wright renovation.

Rosenbaum also acknowledges that the controversial art sales from 1999 were not originally intended to cover the 2001 endowment. He states that if there is a default on the initial bonds the Guggenheim’s prospectus does not make clear whether or not works of art could be liquidated to satisfy creditors, while the Museum of Modern Art’s prospectus makes clear that no works could be liquidated to creditors. According to Judith Cox, the Guggenheim’s deputy director, the foundation’s endowment was supposed to reach $42 million by the end of 2002, but ought to be at least $100 million to stop emergency bailouts from donors (Rosenbaum, 2003).

Peter B. Lewis, head of Progressive Insurance Companies, had been a trustee of the museum since 1993 and its chairman for over six years, before resigning in 2005 (Vogel, 2005). Lewis gave $77 million in gifts to the museum since 1995 as a way to appease creditors, meet deficits, pay debt service on bonds, eliminate bills, and provide funds for operating expenses (Cash & Ebony, 2005; Rosenbaum, 2003). Lewis resigned as chairman in 2005, growing increasingly uncomfortable with Krens’s ambitions and economic strategies overseas. In an article in the New York Times, the former chairman stated that the museum should “concentrate more on New York and less on being scattered all over the world” (Cash & Ebony, 2005; Vogel, 2005, p. A1). At the time of his announcement in 2005, satellites in Taiwan and Rio de Janeiro were still pending and a feasibility study was under way for a branch in Guadalajara (Cash & Ebony, 2005). As stated by Rosenbaum, Lewis demanded a more conservative budget for 2003,
after which Krens traveled to Rio de Janeiro to promote a $250 million satellite for Brazil. The plan was never finalized and the dollar amount was more than twice the original.

Lewis’s major contributions included a donation of $30 million in 2000 (Rosenbaum, 2003). The money was originally intended for the endowment but went to paying past bills and debt service. Giorgio Armani’s pledge and subsequent exhibition in 2000 was likewise perceived as an economic strategy. That same year the Guggenheim launched a $950 million campaign for a Gehry designed Guggenheim in lower Manhattan. Lewis was to offer $250 million towards the project while the Giuliani administration was to offer $35 million in land and $32.8 million in funds. The rest of the money was to be generated through Bilbao’s $20 million fee and the proposed $40 million fee from Rio (Rosenbaum, 2003). In 2002 the plan was scratched because little money had been raised towards the $950 million dollar plan and the Rio satellite was never finalized. According to Rosenbaum, Krens would not disclose the amount of the Guggenheim Foundation’s 2002 deficit. The deficit was eventually paid off by a contribution from Lewis.

In addition, Rosenbaum states that in 2001 the Foundation was $6.7 million in deficit on a total operating budget of $57.71 million. This was $1.5 million more in the red than the Metropolitan Museum of Art operating on a 2002 budget of $228.8 million. The deputy director of finance, Marc Steglitz, explained to Rosenbaum that the $6.7 million 2001 deficit was substantially less than it appeared. The $5.6 million losses at the Guggenheim Vegas, primarily from lack of attendance, were actually paid off by the Venetian Resort-Hotel-Casino, operating under the Guggenheim name, where the museums are located. The Guggenheim Las Vegas and adjacent Guggenheim Hermitage finished the year 2001 with $8.6 million start-up expenses and only generated $3 million in income resulting in the $5.6 million deficit. Steglitz cited that these
museums are owned by subsidiaries of the foundation and are structured as limited liability corporations.

Finally, Rosenbaum mentions the downsizing of staff members and decreased audiences that have also hurt the museum. The Guggenheim Soho closed in 2002 primarily from lack of audience. Krens felt it wouldn’t be able to sustain its own identity and separate endowment. The Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin posted steady attendance records up until 2001 but Deutsche bank, which funds the Deutsche Guggenheim, posted losses at the time of Rosenbaum’s article. As a result, they were forced to reduce the number of commissioned works. Elsewhere, on the internet three outside investors (Pequot Private Equity, Softbank Venture Capital, and GE Equity) gambled $20 million on Guggenheim.com in 2001. It didn’t cost the museum any money since these companies were paying to use the Guggenheim name through a range of e-commerce, tourist information, and cultural sites, but the investment proved to be a failure. Along with these setbacks, attendance in Manhattan had decreased after the September 11th terrorist attacks, forcing the museum to reduce staff by 43% (Rosenbaum, 2003).

The “spiraling” deficit that had critics asking for Krens’s resignation is again examined from another perspective in Deborah Solomon’s article “Is the Go-Go Guggenheim Going…Going” (Saltz, 2002; Solomon, 2002). Although her numbers are slightly different from Rosenbaum’s, they still point in the same direction, as well as offer new insights. For example, she states that Krens used money from the endowment to pay for higher operating expenses in 1999 (9.7 million), 2000 (13.6 million), and 2001 (13 million). Due to insufficient funds, the 2002 Kasmir Malevich and James Rosenquist retrospectives were bumped and the Matthew Barney Cremaster Series postponed. Instead the museum exhibited *Brazil: Body and Soul*, which cost more than $7 million, running from October 2001 until May 2002. The exhibition was
sponsored by Friends of BrasilConnects, an organization headed by Edemar Cid Ferreira, a banker who supported a $200 million feasibility study for the Rio satellite. The same satellite received outcry in 2003 because Rio’s public felt money being generated towards the huge, mega-museum would be much more beneficial if it went toward health care and fighting poverty and crime in the region (Anonymous, 2003). Solomon also mentions the exhibition *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* shown at the Brooklyn Museum in 1999. According to Solomon, the initial venue was supposed to be the Guggenheim Museum, although Krens was asking for a pledge of at least $1 million. When asked about this pledge, Krens jokingly denied, stating, “Oh, no, we never do exhibitions for the money” (Krens quoted in Solomon, 2002).

Another account of the museum’s deficits is offered by the German conceptual artist Hans Haacke. Haacke, who is not only an artist, but writer and critic, lectured at the University of Nevada in 2004. The university held a conference called *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim* in which Haacke delivered a lecture titled, “The Guggenheim Museum: A Business Plan.” The location of the lecture may seem fitting since Nevada was the site of the Guggenheim Las Vegas. The lecture recounted some of the principle problems Rosenbaum documented in his earlier article, including the 1990 bonds issued by the Trust for Cultural Resources of the City of New York and the Soho construction project that went over budget. Haacke states that when the Soho branch finally opened in 1992 museum goers had to traverse through a museum gift shop that occupied nearly the entire ground floor. There were so many scarves, mobiles, dolls, and shopping bags that a grandson of the painter Joan Miro put an end to selling cheap commodities of his grandfather’s images. Haacke’s numbers for the 2002 downsizing of staff are a reduction from 391 to 181. He also mentions that since Lewis’s resignation as President of the Board of
Trustees on January 19th, 2005, the board declared William Mack acting chairman and president (Haacke, 2006). Mack is a highly competitive real-estate developer. As the Guggenheim expands globally, real estate developers like Mack could profit from the museum’s tourist locations.

Haacke’s work as an artist draws similar connections between art, powerful business elites, and real estate developers. His work in the late sixties explored physical and biological phenomenon and their underlying systems (Grass Grows, 1969; Water in Wind, 1968). Throughout the 1970’s his interest shifted to studies of institutions and power. Similar to Lockland, his ideas organized both natural and man-made systems. Since the mid-sixties Haacke has identified his work with the ideas expressed in General Systems Theory, particularly the writings of biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy (Haacke, 1975; Bertalanffy, 1969).

In the Spring of 1971 Haacke was invited to install a one-man exhibition at the Guggenheim with the curator Edward Fry. His presentation was divided into three parts including Physical Systems, Biological Systems, and Social Systems. Krens’s predecessor, Thomas Messer, grew uncomfortable allowing Haacke’s Social Systems to be incorporated into the show. The third piece to the exhibit titled, Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real-Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, traced the holdings of two New York State real-estate groups. One of the groups represented the largest private real-estate conglomerate in Manhattan, while the other dealt with slum properties. Through public records, the artist depicted relationships between real-estate groups, business associates, names of relatives, and dummy corporations. Properties were accompanied by photographs of each site, addresses, legal owners, corporate officers, mortgages and their holders, property values, and maps revealing their locations. Messer cancelled the show and then later fired Edward Fry after he took Haacke’s side. In an editorial response to Arts Magazine Messer asserted that the work stood in opposition to the political neutrality of the
museum, referring to it as an “alien substance” that had entered the “art museum organism” (Haacke, 2006, p. 101).

As a response to the cancellation of his show, Haacke exhibited *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Board of Trustees* in 1974 at the group show *Live!*. The show was a collaboration between Allan Kaprow, Les Levine, and Dennis Oppenheim at the Stefanotty Gallery in New York. *Solomon R. Guggenheim Board of Trustees* exhibited framed charts that detailed the Guggenheim Museum’s Board of Trustees and their corporate affiliations. Haacke’s findings revealed that the President of the Guggenheim Board of Trustees, Peter O. Lawson-Johnston (Peter Lewis’s predecessor and Barbara Guggenheim’s son) was a member of the Board of Directors at the Kennecott Copper Corporation. Likewise, the President and Chief Executive Officer of Kennecott, Frank R. Milliken, was a member of the Board of Trustees at the Guggenheim Museum. Haacke’s piece was a reference to Kennecott’s expropriated and exploited copper mines in Chile. Kennecott was a multi-national corporation that gained much of its mineral wealth by operating in Third World countries. The artist’s work quotes Chile’s President Salvador Allende’s address to the United Nations in 1972 accusing the multi-national International Telephone & Telegraph Corporation and Kennecott Corporation of having “dug their claws into my country” while proposing “to manage our political life” (Haacke, 1975, p. 65).

As the Guggenheim expands into the Middle East, it will be interesting to see how William Mack’s real estate group Apollo Real Estate Advisors pursues assets and investments overseas. Mack is senior partner at Apollo Real Estate and his company already owns large investments in the United States, the Middle East, and Europe. Haacke’s critiques of real estate systems reveal that these networks are often closely aligned with socio-cultural power structures.
The Guggenheim Museum is operating as both a biological and corporate entity, lending itself to Haacke’s analysis of General Systems Theory. Lockland’s philosophy of transformation reveals that the unifying principles of all systems can be traced back to unicellular organisms and biological growth. As will now be demonstrated, the biological and corporate growth of the museum is further reflected in Frank Gehry’s design for the Guggenheim Bilbao.

**Hybrid Architecture**

Contributing to the biological and corporate model used by the Guggenheim has been Frank Gehry’s massive, hybrid forms of postmodern architecture. His buildings fashion both an organic and mechanical aesthetic. Gehry’s masterpiece to date has been the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. The most extensive account of the museum and Gehry’s treatment of it can be found in Coosie Van Bruggen’s *Frank O. Gehry: Guggenheim Museum Bilbao* (1998).

The Guggenheim Bilbao occupies a riverfront site on the Nervion River. Gehry’s preliminary sketches and final conception were based on references to the river’s shipping history and natural growth forms. Gehry’s scrawled sketches, reproduced in Van Bruggen’s book, are reminiscent of oceanliners and large, curved ships. The architect states that he often uses the scale-like and coiled shapes of fishes and snakes in his buildings. The Fishdance restaurant he designed for Kobe, Japan in 1987 is modeled on both these forms. He has also used them in other works like the fish sculpture for the Villa Olimpica complex in Barcelona (1992) and his proposals for a prison for an exhibition called *Follies: Architecture for the Late Twentieth-Century Landscape* presented at the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1983. Early preliminary sketches of the Guggenheim Bilbao show Gehry experimenting with fish forms and a restaurant
in front of the Great Hall coiled like a snake. Other sketches allude to sail-like coverings and skylights in the shape of flowers. Many of these forms were retained in the final conception including the skylights and fish and boat-like forms accompanying the side galleries.

Descending from the floral, unfolding skylights into a water garden is a gallery in the shape of a boot. The water garden and gallery are both on the side of the waterfront which also includes a bridge. The whole series of undulating forms, engineered in steel, glass, and other materials from the architect’s palette, pays homage to the city’s cultural history and the zoomorphic forms Gehry believes are the primitive beginnings of architecture.

The interior of the Guggenheim Bilbao offers the museum visitor a similar experience. An official audio tour guide for the museum asks the visitor to proceed to the high space of the building’s atrium. It refers to the atrium as the “heart” of the museum, “pumping” the visitors around the different galleries. The walkways, elevators, and stairways spiraling around the walls of the atrium are referred to as the “arteries.” Viewers are then asked to admire the sensual curves of the building. They are encouraged to go up to the gentle, curved walls and touch them as if warm flesh. The texture and scale are referred to as “astronomical,” especially since the building’s panels were designed by CATIA, a specialized software package originally developed for the aerospace industry.

Performance artist Andrea Fraser offers an institutional critique of the official audio guide. The guide and quotes above are reprinted in her essay “Isn’t This a Wonderful Place? (A Tour of a Tour of the Guggenheim Bilbao)” (Karp, 2006). Fraser states that inside the Guggenheim Bilbao viewers become formless matter pumped through the building’s corporeal passages. According to her, the fluidity of the building’s interior and exterior offers a different kind of museum experience from those analyzed by Tony Bennett or Douglas Crimp. Bennett
and Crimp identified the museum through Foucauldian theory whereby the museum, much like the prison, asylum, and clinic, became another modern institution for controlling social behavior. As an alternative, the Guggenheim Bilbao offers “escape” in the form of corporeal euphoria, fluidity, and freedom. Fraser argues that 19th century conceptions of museums as containers of taste and aesthetic neutralization are succeeded by architecture that accommodates viewers’ pleasures and desires.

Although there are differences between Bennett’s and Crimp’s arguments and more contemporary paradigms for thinking about museums, there are also similarities. For instance, Frazer recognizes that 19th century ideas concerning civic pride and national identity and museum construction are far from outdated. She remarks that the construction of the Guggenheim Bilbao served as a symbol of the Basque region’s economic, political, and cultural freedom. The Basque Nationalist Party and the Autonomous Community of the Basque country financed the project in hopes that it would bring tourism and jobs to the ruined mining, steel, and shipbuilding industries. It was listed alongside of other redevelopment plans including the revitalization of the stock exchange, redevelopment of the port, a new urban train system, and a new airport. Frazer argues that although these constructions were part of an economic strategy they also symbolized a neo-liberalist freedom corresponding to the Basque government’s independence. They were still tied to conceptions of the museum as a symbol of national or civic identity, but corresponded to economic and social conditions belonging to later forms of capitalism.

While critics and Krens have praised Frank Gehry’s conceptions of the Guggenheim Bilbao referring to it as a “miracle” and a “Cinderella story”, others have remarked on its massive architecture, treating it as a Disneyfication of culture (Muschamp, 1997; Hoge, 1999). In
his 1991 magnum opus, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederic Jameson argues that architecture, out of all the arts, is the closest form of aesthetic production linked to the economic sphere in terms of commissions, land values, and the patronage of multinational businesses. He states that much of what is considered aesthetic production today has been integrated into commodity production where architecture serves as the symbol of late, multinational capital. Jameson perceives this as a whole new economic system in which the experience of built space and architecture forms a mediated relationship with capital.

According to Jameson, the new hyperspace of the postmodern can be grasped or grounded in a new culture of the image of the simulacrum. The simulacrum is a depth model originally introduced by Plato, but which gained more attention after Jean Baudrillard’s publication *Simulations* (1983). The simulacrum is a copy of the original, which in turn replaces or questions the legitimacy of the original because of its identical nature. In the case of the Guggenheim Museum, the original simulates or copies itself as it reproduces its image across a global map. The simulacrum is a response to the overproduction of capital in a world increasingly marked by the liquidation of cultural products and commodities by multi-national corporations.

Drawing on John Portman’s Westin Bonaventure Hotel in downtown Los Angeles, Jameson further illustrates the logic of postmodern capitalism. He argues that Portman’s hotel aspires to be a total space or complete world in itself, a kind of miniature city. The glass repels the city, yet is emblematic of the reproductive technologies that constitute its fabric. We can draw similarities to Gehry’s Guggenheim Bilbao. Clad in all its organic metaphors, rippling with movement and gorgeous sublimity, the building sits on the banks of the Nervion River like a spaceship. Its skin repels and reflects the surrounding city, acting as a self-contained planet and
mirror to the processes of multinational capital. The river even offers a faint reflection of the building, a simulacrum or transparent copy of the original.

Gehry’s architecture as a hybrid form of capitalism is also a zoomorphic hybrid, drawing similarities to Lockland’s biological model. Reinforcing this dichotomy are Jeff Koons’s giant Puppy (1992), at the entrance, and Louis Bourgeois’ enormous, steel spider, Maman (1999), adjacent to the river. The sculptures are consistent with metaphorical themes of pollination and organic growth. One is a huge insect and the other is a puppy made of flowers. They are organisms, much like the museum itself, with its floral atriums and steel skeletons. Yet the sculptures also remind us of the childlike appeal of Disneyland. It is no wonder that one of the major works within the museum is Richard Serra’s Snake (1994-97). Snake, a large steel sculpture bordering on the architectural, occupies a portion of the Fish Gallery, the largest gallery in the museum. The snake, fish, spider, and puppy are like the silly animals tourists can view at Disneyland.

In conclusion, the museum's satellites are results of hybridization and cross-pollination and should be interpreted as a growth directed. They are a global community that reciprocally interacts through stages of replication and assimilation. Thomas Krens may have conceived this in an interview with Van Bruggen in 1997 when he replied that the Guggenheim Museum is one museum that has a “constellation” of spaces (Krens quoted in Van Bruggen, 1997, p. 96). Each satellite is a celestial body or organism that orbits a larger celestial body or organism. The museum’s growth and community outposts depend on life cycles of transformation and economic game theory. While critics have interpreted the museum's growth as a reflection of an imposing mass culture industry, it is also a process driven largely by metaphor.
The last chapter of this thesis will engage in this society of mass culture and blockbusters, at the same time demonstrating how exhibitions like *Giorgio Armani* (2000-2001) and *The Art of the Motorcycle* (1998-1999) made efforts to critique the corporate media, while engaging viewers in broader, more critical understandings of culture, class, and gender. The exhibitions were criticized because they were viewed as part of a liquidation process that involved class-specific consumption, popular culture, and cosmopolitanism. I will argue that the criticism these shows provoked was mediated by outdated Frankfurt school ideologies and an appeal to culture that reduces its production and meaning to the realm of high art. Instead, I will examine how the study of popular culture could be advanced pedagogically.
Chapter III: Liquidation
Chapter III: Liquidation

Victor J. Danilov, the former president of Chicago’s Museum of Science and Industry, provides a short history of corporate sponsorship and blockbuster exhibitions in an article for the journal *Curator*. According to Danilov, the beginning of the big show era was the late 1960’s when the Metropolitan Museum of Art, under director Thomas P. F. Hoving, launched *In the Presence of Kings* (1967). This was followed in 1968 by *The Great Age of Fresco*, a collection of frescoes from Giotto to Pontormo rescued from the 1966 floods in Florence. Danilov states that *The Great Age of Fresco* was the first exhibition to have major corporate support from Olivetti of Italy. Throughout the 1970’s The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D. C. experienced similar growth. IBM contributed $200,000 in 1974 to *Archeological Finds from the People’s Republic of China* and Exxon provided $225,000 for *The Eye of Thomas Jefferson* in 1976.

Danilov calls the period between 1976 and 1986 the decade of the big-show bonanza. The first and one of the largest Hollywood-like blockbusters to open was *Treasures of Tutankhamun* in 1976 at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, one year before Phillippe de Montebello became acting director. The show featured 55 Egyptian objects discovered by archeologist Howard Carter in the 1920’s. It opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and then traveled for two years to six other museums, averaging more than 1 million in attendance for each location (Danilov, 1988). Corporations also funded many other large-scale exhibitions of that period including *Treasures from the Bronze Age of China* (Coca-Cola), *A Day in the
Country: *Impressionism and the French Landscape* (IBM), *Gold of El Dorado: The Heritage of Colombia* (Chemical Bank), and *5,000 Years of Korean Art* (Chevron Company). For an extended list of these exhibitions, their museums, and their corporate sponsors consult Danilov’s article.

*Giorgio Armani* and *The Art of the Motorcycle* were blockbuster exhibitions that would likely have been mentioned by Danilov if his article were written today. They generated large crowds resulting in *The Art of the Motorcycle’s* record-breaking attendance of 301,000 people (Cash & Ebony, 2003). The shows also mirrored Hollywood-like blockbusters such as *Star Wars* (1977), *Titanic* (1997), and *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1984), and were sponsored by corporations whose products were displayed. Armani’s private pledge of $15 million, like Bilbao’s signature fee of $20 million, helped appease creditors and pay debts that had accrued throughout the 1990’s. *BMW* and *In Style* magazine’s sponsorship of *The Art of the Motorcycle* were perceived by critics as an economic strategy, leaving many of them confused as to the objects on display. A closer look at the Guggenheim Museum’s website reveals the corporate image and cosmopolitanism critics felt influenced these exhibitions.

While the Guggenheim Museum may be promoting diversity internationally, its website caters to a corporate elite and younger audience of predominantly middle class socialites. The museum is depicted as a venue for popular entertainment and class specific sociability. The homepage of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum has several links that closely associate the museum with its trends towards commercialization. One link from the homepage directs eager viewers towards opportunities for corporate entertaining and product launches. Two of several locations for such opportunities include the Frank Lloyd Wright rotunda and the Peter B. Lewis Theater.
The images of the rotunda and theater connote specific ideological codes. The image of the Peter B. Lewis Theater includes a board of corporate directors clad in white-collar suits. The rotunda image follows the same pattern of class-specific codes. At the center of the rotunda image, occupying the space of the gallery floor, is a sports car. This is most likely a product launch for the corporation attending the event. Equating the car with the space of the museum allows the product to elevate to the status of high art. Here divisions between high and low are blurred as the sports car acquires characteristics of aesthetic rank.

Another link that incorporates images of class-specific codes is “First Fridays” at the Guggenheim. The link leads viewers to an advertisement for “Art After Dark: First Fridays at the Guggenheim” where they are invited to enjoy a drink with friends, explore the galleries, and listen to some of the best DJs in town. Although the advertisement is directed towards anyone willing to pay the $25 fee, the images supporting the text depict cosmopolitan twenty-somethings. The only exceptions to these codes are the two DJs who function like stand-ins for real economic and class issues. The images from left to right include a DJ spinning records, two young, attractive females flirting with a man, a group of inquisitive gallery seekers, and what appears to be a dance pit or throng of aggressive party goers.

The image of the DJ does not fit neatly into any class. He is wearing a suit and tie but they function much more like bricolage where cultural signifiers are reused for new purposes (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). His suit is difficult to read as a sign because it has been dislocated or removed into a subculture of hipness and urban youth. His outfit, which may have begun as a political statement or a strategic alteration of meanings, has been re-appropriated through counter-bricolage by the museum. By dislocating the suit and tie from an elite reading to an alternative connotation of hipness or coolness the man partakes in an oppositional practice. Only
his practice is then reused again to support the corporate and consumer interests of an elite museum. His class position within this economy of images is likewise hard to determine because he is the only one who appears to be working. He can represent both the hip, urban spinster and the hobo in a cheap suit.

The other three images in the group subscribe to the same ideological undertones. The Guggenheim is marketing a venue for escapism for young career men and women on a Friday night. In another image a young DJ spins records below the gallery’s spiraled walkways. Similar to the previous male DJ, he may represent the only traces of a working class culture. Although they both signify urban or regional marketing, their class position is hard to determine and their ethnicity hides the African American culture largely responsible for hip-hop.

Finally, the museum offers corporations different opportunities to use the Guggenheim image in their sales campaigns. The image of the museum functions via “promotional transfer” through location shoots and licensing projects (Rectanus, 2002, p. 188). Rectanus describes “promotional transfer,” a term which he borrows from Andrew Wernick, as a role reversal between museum and corporation (Wernick, 1991). He argues that the Guggenheim’s relationship with Hugo Boss has the effect of promoting the museum as a fashion and trendsetter with a sense of sophisticated style (targeted to younger, culturally sophisticated, affluent audiences), while the corporation is projected as an arbiter, filter, and reservoir of cultural goods. In addition, the museum has a licensing program that deals with proposals for film shoots, advertising projects, and business affairs. This includes the trademark of the Guggenheim image and its use for noncommercial purposes such as stock photography. Although it claims to extend its services to those companies whose standards match their own, it is only through image transfer that this equality is made possible. The images on the website for the Lincoln Mercury
Mountaineer and Hausbrand use the image of the museum to elevate consumer products to superior standards. Placing the image of the truck or the expresso system in front of the museum changes the meaning of these products. A similar case of promotional transfer occurs in the opening sequences of the 1999 James Bond film *The World is Not Enough*. The Guggenheim Bilbao appears in the opening sequence of the film where Bond steals a case of money from a corrupt Swiss banker affiliated with a terrorist network.

From its website we can gather that contemporary museums like the Guggenheim or the Centre Pompidou in Paris are transforming into multi-use cultural centers that incorporate wealthier audiences into the global flow of entertainment. Particular locations like the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and the former Las Vegas satellite function as sites for tourism and cultural consumption. Part of the problem facing contemporary museums will be finding a balance between expansion, entertainment, and education. As museums grow into commercial franchises they will be integrated into a marketplace with transnational audiences and corporate sponsors. When *The Art of the Motorcycle* was shown at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in 1999 collectible helmets were worn and signed by international celebrities like Jeremy Irons, Lawrence Fishburne, and Frank Gehry, evidence that globalization is often accompanied by cultural capital (Rectanus, 2002). Critics of these shows such as James Cuno and Eleanor Heartney argued that they catered solely to corporate growth (Cuno, 2004; Heartney, 2001). In order to understand these shows more completely it is necessary to frame them within contemporary paradigms of visual culture.

In their book *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright make clear that visual culture is a pedagogy that analyzes meanings, ideologies, and myths inherent in the global flow of mass media, consumer culture, and visual
technologies (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). They argue that it is not enough to say that visual culture is the same as popular entertainment or even particular forms of postmodernism. Where postmodern critics like Fredric Jameson have hailed the death of the subject, the passivity of consumer culture, the waning of historicity, and the power of spectacle, visual culture theorists have sought to move beyond these paralyzing, over arching claims (Jameson, 1991). In their analysis the world of visual culture and postmodernism is something that we could come to terms with, appropriate, deconstruct, and challenge. The study of visual culture is generally a field that consists of some combination of art history, art education, philosophy, anthropology, and critical theory. Much of what is considered the study of visual culture today can be traced back to Jon Berger’s 1972 publication *Ways of Seeing*. Visual culture is a contemporary pedagogy that is not only concerned with the cultural production of images (advertisement, film, painting), but the mediated relationships these images have with their audiences.

In addition, visual culture methodologies are used to question how specific groups are depicted and how viewers can account for them. Since Berger’s initial publication, visual culture has relied closely on deconstruction, feminism, and Marxism as methods for understanding how we look at images. As opposed to modernist frameworks that seek to isolate the art object as an autonomous form, visual culture places objects within specific cultural and historical contexts. While even fine art may be subsumed under this framework, visual culture analysis is primarily concerned with broader, interdisciplinary understandings of culture outside the traditional canon of Western art history. The study of visual culture can provide a critical framework for examining the exhibition catalogs that accompanied these shows as well as the critic’s own statements.
The Art of the Motorcycle:  

_The Art of the Motorcycle_ catalog opens with an extended statement by Thomas Krens. Krens declares, “*The Art of the Motorcycle* is an obvious challenge to the conventional mission of the museum to present those objects of high material culture that are authentic, unique, and grounded in tradition and history” (Krens, 1998, p. 18). He openly addresses the need for art museums to continually evolve to changing times, infinitely complex cultural forms, and more demanding, sophisticated audiences. Krens argues that institutions are transforming and artists have been shaped by MTV, rap music, the Internet, and critical theory. It was Walter Benjamin, according to Krens, who hailed the gradual evolution of aesthetic values observed in exhibitions like *The Art of the Motorcycle*. The museum is no longer an institution for sacred, auratic objects but must respond to broader audiences and contemporary culture. Krens writes, “*The Art of the Motorcycle* is part of that trajectory of exhibition programming at the Guggenheim that will broaden the museum’s cultural reach and engender its more active participation in the interpretation of contemporary art” (Krens, 1998, p.19).

While Krens has acknowledged the expanding frame of contemporary institutions, he has also organized these exhibitions as “cultural events” (Krens, 1998, p. 18). For *The Art of the Motorcycle*, Frank Gehry covered the interior of the Guggenheim rotunda in reflective stainless steel, suggesting the industrial surface of the motorcycle design. Krens states that the museum became a space upon which to signal more active participation from the viewer and the motorcycle signified the desires of consumers, the ebb and flow of national economies and histories, and the freedom of technological progress. He remarks that as a possible metaphor for
the twentieth century, the motorcycle connotes themes of speed, rebellion, progress, freedom, sex, and danger. His statements exoticize a working class object allowing it to function as both myth and other. The essays in the catalog critically argue that most of these myths have been created by representations of the working class and motorcyclists in the corporate media.

Charles M. Falco’s essay “Issues in the Evolution of the Motorcycle” traces the origins of the bike back to 1868 when Louis Guillaume Perreaux patented a design for a steam engine to be installed on a pedal bicycle. Falco states that at its core the motorcycle is both an object of commerce and fetish. Certain cultural, sociological, and gender related factors have determined why particular technologies appeared in certain bike designs.

For example, the author examines the influence of Art Deco and developments in engine technology originating in the aircraft industry of World War 1, and compares these with bike designs. In addition, the open loop frame of the 1922 Monet & Goyon Moto Legere was designed specifically for parish priests in France, allowing them to ride while wearing their cassocks. Although its light design may have appealed to women, Falco adds that most motorcycle designers have been male and today women account for less than 10% of riders in the U.S. He argues that unlike the automobile or other industrial objects such as pens or razors, the motorcycle is not gender neutral. The sheer physicality of the machines attributes it much more to male consumers and audiences.

Falco’s essay about the evolution of designs is just a small section of an extensive catalog that covers over 400 pages. Much of the latter half of the catalog is devoted to different kinds of designs with pictures and historical and technical descriptions. The first half of the catalog contains descriptions like Falco’s and other eccentric essays and poems from such easy-riders as Dennis Hopper and Hunter S. Thompson. Although the latter half of the catalog is devoted to
aesthetic comparisons, it is juxtaposed with smaller essays that provide a historical timeline (1868-1998) and connect the designs to cultural and historical shifts. Like Falco’s essay, these connections strip the objects of their autonomy. Some of the smaller essays include Sarah Bott’s “The Consumer Years: 1982-1989,” Greg Jordan’s “Popular Culture/Counterculture: 1960-1969,” Jordan’s “Freedom and Postwar Mobility: 1946-1958,” and Matthew Drutt’s “New World Orders: 1930-1944” and “The Machine Age: 1922-1929.” In these short essays the history of the motorcycle is compared to developments in the economy and consumerism, working class rebellion, industrial development, and technological power. In addition, developments in European Modernism like Futurism, the Bauhaus, and Russian constructivism are used as frameworks to discuss machine aesthetics and evolutions in design. Anything from the Tiller Girls to Frederick Taylor’s ideas on scientific management situate the motorcycle within larger cultural developments.

Of particular importance is Ted Polhemus’s essay *The Art of the Motorcycle: Outlaws, Animals, and Sex Machines*. Polhemus recounts how the mythology of the modern motorcyclist or outlaw biker became an iconographic focus. In July 1947 the rural California town of Hollister held a motorcycle rally that resulted in several press reports. The reports, like those published in *Life* magazine, claimed rowdy motorcyclists got drunk and terrorized citizens. Images from the Hollister riots of July 6th were reprinted in *Life* and showed motorcyclists on one side of the street and citizens on the other, with cops in between. According to Polhemus, the article, images, and subsequent apology of the American Motorcycle Association created an image of the outlaw biker or rebel. The AMA responded by saying these few individuals in no way represented the larger percentage of motorcyclists. In a press release the AMA stated that “the disruptive cyclists were possibly one percent of the total number of motorcyclists at the time.”
(Krens, 1998, p. 50). They went on to announce that they would “outlaw” such hoodlums and “troublemakers” from their membership. Unfortunately, an immediate reaction to the AMA’s press release was to bring together warring factions of motorcyclists in opposition to the AMA. In their attempt to eradicate this image, groups like the Gypsy Jokers, The Hell’s Angels, Satan’s Slaves, and the Booze Fighters regrouped as that official 1%. Gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson recorded his fear, loathing, adventures, and misadventures with the Hell’s Angels. Thompson points out in *Hell’s Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs* that the image of this subculture was largely derived from representations in the media, particularly film (Krens, 1998; Thompson, 1967).

Polhemus’s essay offers several examples of the vilification of the biker as western outlaw, savage, and exotic “other.” Films like *The Wild One, Easy Rider,* and *Rumble Fish* depict bikers as defiant nonconformists, social outcasts, and hipsters. Nonconformist subcultures such as the Beats and the Hell’s Angels defied the status quo of post-war America. This status quo stated that in order to be successful you needed to acquire a white-collar job, a family, and a house with a two-door garage and picket fence. Polhemus writes that they were reacting to a system of franchising and products that swept across the American landscape in the nineteen forties and fifties. Ironically, like the Guggenheim’s critics, they were responding to the commodification of culture and lifestyles. According to Polhemus, in 1954 *The Wild One* gave viewers two types of outlaw motorcyclists. On the one hand there was the image of Lee Marvin’s character Chico who represented the delinquent animal on a machine. On the other hand, there was Marlon Brando’s character Johnny, the existentialist and confused escapist. In comparison, Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda of *Easy Rider* (1969) brought us the image of the biker as outlaw and dreamer. Polhemus states that Captain America and Billy represented modern day
Robin Hoods operating between courage and chivalry. He argues by the time Francis Ford Coppola’s *Rumble Fish* was made in 1983 we have the image of the biker as not only hero and outlaw, but god. The author writes, “Mickey Rourke’s Motorcycle Boy is so mythic that he doesn’t even need a real name” (Polhemus in Krens, 1998, p. 54).

Finally, Polhemus defines the motorcycle as a symbol of pure erotic lust and sexuality. He continues, “Transcending everyday reality and the impotence of conformity, not containable or castrated by social forces, the outlaw—whatever his mode of transport—has always possessed tantalizing erotic power” (Polhemus in Krens, 1998, p. 54). Dressed in leather and colored in tattoos the motorcyclist represents danger, exoticism, and desire. He signifies the last glimpse of masculinity not tied to the grey flannel suit of the middle class male.

Ted Polhemus’s essay is the seminal essay in the catalog, bearing the name of the exhibition. There are several other essays as well as images from these films and popular press depictions that have vilified the motorcyclist. Art Simon’s “Freedom or Death: Notes on the Motorcycle in Film and Video” also discusses the image of the motorcyclist in films like *The Wild One*, *The Terminator* (1984), *Mad Max* (1979), and *Scorpio Rising* (1963). In addition, his essay offers examples of films that have sought to debunk the biker image of motorcyclist as male outlaw. These include videos such as *Women and Motorcycles* (1990) produced by Courtney Caldwell, founder of the American Woman Road Rider Alliance, and Dave L. Perry. Another example is Alice Stone’s *She Lives to Ride* (1994) which documents women riders and the association of motorcycles with sport.
The exhibition catalog for the Giorgio Armani retrospective also opens with a statement by Thomas Krens. Krens states that spanning Armani’s twenty-five year career, the exhibition will demonstrate how Armani’s innovations have inspired an entire generation to rethink conventional, gender specific codes of dress. According to Krens and several contributors in the catalog, Armani’s designs are synonymous with androgyny and his appropriation of men’s suits for women marked a turning point in women’s wear. The essays, as in the previous catalog, connect Armani’s designs to broader understandings of culture, gender, and the media. There are essays devoted to orientalism, photography, and cinema. The exhibitions when placed within the framework of visual culture studies draw upon postmodern understandings of art and cultural analysis. Much of what is written in the exhibition catalogs could be derived from postmodern and contemporary theories including feminism, postcolonialism, film studies, and deconstruction.

For example, Germano Celant’s essay “Giorgio Armani: Toward the Mass Dandy” opens with an analysis of Paul Schrader’s 1980 film *American Gigolo*. The film used Armani’s suits, shirts, and ties, as a means to portray the male gigolo. Celant identifies Richard Gere’s character of the gigolo as today’s dandy. Celant writes of Gere,

> Compared to his nineteenth century referents, who refused to be part of the multitude and thought of the “fashionable” as something surprising and unusual and of refinement as the “high life,” the gigolo is neither original, nor unique, nor rare, nor disturbing, nor
different. Rather, he repeats gestures and behaviors he assumes will please others and lead to triumphs. At the same time, he is a multiple being; his existence depends on the assent of many people and on the plurality created by his expansion in space and time.

(Celant, 2000, p. xv)

Celant argues that this ability to transcend class boundaries and to mingle with the masses was part of a renewal that occurred in fashion in 1975 when prêt-a-porter was born. Prêt-a-porter transformed haute couture into mass fashion. Its birth signaled a shift towards an egalitarian mentality where fashion left the ranks of the few, spreading to the masses. Celant states that aside from being a way to manage one’s desires and appearances, prêt-a-porter fashion was also a way to free oneself from social definitions based on age, class, and gender, which high fashion had previously enforced to maintain the appearance of power.

Celant positions Armani’s clothing as gender neutral, a concept that embraces both masculinity and femininity, rather than treating them as separate poles. This concept is addressed in several essays throughout the catalog, including Suzy Menkes’s “Liberty, Equality and Sobriety.” Menkes traces Armani’s androgynous style back to the introduction of tailor made outfits in Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel’s styles of the 1920’s-30’s and Yves Saint Laurent’s of the 1960’s-70’s. Their styles mirrored women’s liberation movements such as Feminism and The New Woman and often appropriated elements of male clothing, like sweaters and cardigan jackets. The jackets and cardigans found their compliment in women’s boyish cropped hairstyles reminiscent of flappers. Menkes argues that the androgynous style reached its peak in the 1980’s with the unisex pantsuit. Several of Armani’s designs reprinted in the catalog deconstruct gender as a cultural construct. Like the DJ mentioned above, his designs rely on cultural appropriation
or bricolage as a way of changing the meaning of fashion and empowering women with oppositional statements about gender roles. As Catherine Perry points out in her essay “The Armani Look,” many of his designs from the fall/winter 1990-1991 and fall/winter 1992-93 collections used slick backed shoe polish hair influenced by theater and film in the 1930’s, particularly the androgynous look of Marlene Dietrich.

Several essays by Susan Cross also negotiate the meaning of gender. Cross argues that the inversion of customary gender roles is evident in several ads for the spring/summer 1989 and 1991 and spring/summer 1992 collections. Women dressed in tailor suits are accompanied by more casually dressed men. Cross states that the women appear more worldly than their boyish counterparts whose school boy suits infantalize them. They are also elevated above the men, depicting a reversal of normal gender roles.

In other essays Armani’s designs are discussed in the contexts of orientalism, architecture, and cinema. Susan Cross’s essay “A Place in the Sun” and Caroline Rennolds Milbank’s “The Sands of Time: Historicism and Orientalism in Armani’s Designs for Women” treat Armani’s designs as a collage of Eastern and Western cultures. Cross argues that Armani’s juxtapositions of historical styles mirror the characteristics of a postmodern society. They define themselves through pastiche, multiculturalism, and the understanding that Western culture is part of a larger global community. Several collections throughout the catalog illustrate the author’s statements more clearly. For instance, the fall/winter 1994-95 collections suggest the clothing of North Africa and the Near East, while fall/winter 1990-91 allude to the Islamic world, as well as Persian and Mughal miniatures. In a woman’s evening jacket and pants from his spring/summer 1994 collection the designer borrows motifs from Chinese artifacts and costumes, including Ming ceramics and Manchu robes. Elsewhere, Armani creates evening ensembles that recall
Pacific Basin Dress and a woman’s blouse, pareo, and skirt, that resemble the paintings of Henri Rousseau and Paul Gauguin. The catalog is rich with colored photographs of Armani’s collections that borrow from Orientalist traditions and various historical styles. The collaged designs could be read as a semiotic system of language like that described in Roland Barthes’s *The Fashion System* (Barthes, 1983). Cross refers to Armani’s designs as an “archeological dig” that erases lines equally between genders, social strata, and cultures (Cross in Celant, 2000, p. 163).

In the section on cinema the relationship between Armani’s fashion and Marlene Dietrich is given considerable attention. Valerie Steele’s essay “Armani, Film, and Fashion” considers how academic discourse on cinema costume or masquerade has grown out of feminist film theory. Steele writes, “By deconstructing this image, feminist film theory unveiled the fabrication of femininity” (Steele in Celant, p. 206). She argues that theoretic paradigms for voyeurism, such as the “male gaze,” made possible alternative readings of filmic imagery. Significant to many of these theoretical texts were analysis of Marlene Dietrich’s films. Armani has stated in several interviews that Dietrich’s style has had a powerful influence on his own work, particularly her androgyny and gender ambiguity.

For example, in Josef von Sternberg’s classic example of German cinema *Der Blaue Engel* Dietrich appears as the femme fatale (Von Sternberg, *The Blue Angel*, 1930). Her character Lola cunningly entices Professor Emmanuel Rath, played by Emil Jannings, out of his prep school into the lower class underbelly of Germany’s cabarets. Her position in the film is highly feminine. She is an erotic object whose pleasure and desire are signified by her overexposed legs. Later in that same year she appears in Von Sternberg’s *Morocco* clad in a top hat, white tie, and tails. Steele states that the film was notable for its gender ambiguity and for its appeal to both men and women. Reproductions of Armani’s fall/winter 1990-91 collections are
juxtaposed with images of Marlene Dietrich from the 1930’s. The resemblance between Armani’s suited model and Dietrich are analogous.

Both exhibition catalogs connect Armani’s designs and the history of motorcycles to broader cultural developments, not isolating them as autonomous objects. The catalogs treat their objects as constituent parts of visual culture. They are objects whose meanings are determined by particular classes (working class, mass dandy), forms of representation (films, posters, advertisements), and the interaction between the viewers and what is being viewed. The catalogs serve as a point of interaction that deepens the viewers’ understanding of the objects on display. The objects’ meanings are negotiated, deconstructed, and at times framed within the ideologies of the corporate media. The exhibitions not only looked at the objects but the institutional practices that regulate, frame, and further our understanding of those objects. A closer look at how critics reacted to these exhibitions will give us further knowledge of visual culture studies. It will also help us address what ideologies may have undermined these exhibits and how visual culture studies could be advanced pedagogically.

**Visual Culture: A Contemporary Pedagogy**

Krens’s initial statements for *The Art of the Motorcycle* catalog are worth revisiting if we reconsider the evolution of aesthetic values observed by Walter Benjamin. Benjamin argued in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” that the advent of digital reproductions, such as film and photography, would eliminate the authenticity or aura of an object (Benjamin, 1968). Changes in the medium of perception brought about by digital technologies would destroy the aura of the object, overcoming the uniqueness of the object, and
dismissing concepts of creativity, originality, and genius. According to Benjamin, the ubiquity of the art object in the form of reproductions and film is consumed by the masses, changing the way the public receives and looks at it. In exhibitions like *The Art of the Motorcycle* and *Giorgio Armani* the ubiquity of the art object is characterized by its reproduction in advertisements, Hollywood cinema, and posters. According to Krens, art museums should respond to these increasingly complex cultural forms characteristic of an age shaped by the mass media. As demonstrated above, *The Art of the Motorcycle* and *Giorgio Armani* were meant to reposition art within broader frameworks of visual culture, drawing on different ways audiences negotiate meanings between the commodities and cultural products they consume.

Benjamin’s contemporaries Max Horheimer and Theodor Adorno saw mass-produced culture as a threat to the high arts. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Adorno and Horkheimer argued that all forms of popular culture belong to a single culture industry whose purpose is to placate the masses with banal and barbaric forms of entertainment (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1986). The result of such an “iron system” would be to reduce the masses to obedience and passivity, whereby leisure time would be filled by consuming products that had no real use value, only an exchange value that continued to appease the masses, while supporting capitalism (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1986, p. 120).

If we treat these exhibitions as a reflection of Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s theories we are left with the view of popular culture as mass deception. Given this view it would be easy to relegate the exhibitions to an all-consuming culture industry in which even art is subsumed under the umbrella of commodity fetishism. This reading would be easy to assume given the high profile exhibitions, the corporate sponsorship, and the museum’s global image. However, an alternative reading of these exhibitions that considers popular culture as pedagogical could
advance shows like *Giorgio Armani* and *The Art of the Motorcycle* in the direction of visual culture studies.

For example, scholars Henri Giroux and Roger I. Simon argue against outdated Frankfurt school ideologies, repositioning popular culture pedagogically. They argue that the concept of popular culture proposed by Marxist theory reduces cultural expression to uniformity and passivity. The paradigmatic example of this Marxist position comes from Adorno and Horkheimer, two major theorists of the Frankfurt School. Giroux and Simon state that in Adorno’s theories popular culture becomes commodified and reproduces people like standard products. People are synonymous with the products they consume, and moreover cultural dupes, incapable of resisting or negotiating the dominant culture. The authors write,

> For Adorno, in particular, popular culture is simply mass culture whose effects have no redeeming political possibilities. The people or masses lack any culture through which they can offer either resistance or an alternative vision of the world. (Giroux & Simon, 1989, p. 4)

For Adorno, the only refuge from the standardization of products and thought is the realm of high art. According to Simon and Giroux, this elitism has a tendency that is characteristic of conservative ideologies that treat mass culture as barbaric.

Simon and Giroux propose that popular culture be reconsidered as a site where the production of subjectivities is produced by pedagogical processes. They state that advocates of high culture do not regard popular culture as a field of social practice where a particular set of ideologies points towards political action. In contrast, the authors argue for the study of popular
culture as a site of cultural politics where the ideologies of the dominant classes are reproduced. They characterize it as a site where identities are inscribed according to a process of consent. Giroux and Simon write,

Within this position we are emphasizing popular culture as a site of differentiated politics, a site with multiple ideological and affective weightings. It represents a particular historical place where different groups collide in transactions of dominance, complicity, and resistance over the power to name, legitimate, and experience different versions of history, community, desire, and pleasure through the availability of social forms structured by the politics of difference. (Giroux & Simon, 1989, p. 11)

As compared to its Marxist predecessor, a critical pedagogy of popular culture would take into account how identity is reproduced and mediated through mass culture, and how subjectivity could be negotiated and understood.

Several critics’ reactions did not take into account contemporary frameworks for understanding Giorgio Armani and The Art of the Motorcycle. Their criticism was largely rooted in Modernist ideas about art and Enlightenment culture and an understanding that the museum was sacrificing its institutional integrity at the cost of corporate sponsors. For example, Roberta Smith published a scathing critique of the Armani exhibit in an article for the New York Times titled “Memo to Art Museums: Don’t Give Up On the Art.” In it she writes,

We needn’t worry about museums lending their vaunted imprimaturs to dubious art forms of visual and material culture or inferior artworks. Any museum that does so often
enough will lose that imprimatur. A few more shows like Armani and it won’t matter how many architectural masterpieces the Guggenheim can afford to build; they will just be rentable exhibition halls. (Smith, 2000, p. 2.1)

Smith’s criticism implies that forms of visual and material culture are questionable, if not barbaric, and furthermore inferior to works of high art.

A similar response came from Eleanor Heartney in her 2001 article for *Art in America* titled “The Guggenheim’s New Clothes.” Heartney states that the Armani exhibition placed emphasis on themes instead of the chronology of the designer’s development. Themes addressed included the designer’s influence by non-Western cultures and his relationship to cinema. She writes,

> Meanwhile, no effort was made to place the work in any larger historical or social context or to link it with contemporary art. Instead, the garments were treated as autonomous objects to be appreciated purely for their esthetic qualities…Matters weren’t helped by the massive catalogue which accompanied the Armani show. Instead of scholarly critique, it tends toward celebrity endorsements. (Heartney, 2001, p. 61)

Heartney’s comments about the Armani exhibition are misleading given the analysis of the catalogs above. The essays in the Armani catalog clearly reflect scholarly critique, placing his designs in the contexts of history, feminism, and world culture. Heartney’s statement that the catalog tends towards celebrity endorsements is a reaction to several celebrity quotes and paparazzi-like photos that accompany the essays. One section of the catalog is entirely devoted
to celebrity photos of stars and famous people like Jodie Foster, Matt Damon, Pat Riley, and John Travolta. Accompanying each celebrity photo is a quote that endorses the Armani brand.

For example, actress Jodie Foster states, “I suppose I wear Armani because it suits who I am, someone who cares for comfort, fit, and subtle fabrics. I don’t need to be the flashiest person in the room, just the most confident” (Foster in Celant, 2000, p. 39). In another example Lee Radziwill states, “The enormous contribution Armani has made to my life has been to give me the freedom from having to make a decision. Any other clothes feel foreign to me. It goes without saying that his impact and influence on the way we dress have been revolutionary” (Radziwill in Celant, 2000, p. 42). Radziwill is identified as a socialite who bears no real occupation and is obviously of high-class status. The photos and quotes have a tendency to undermine the scholarly essays, but the essays clearly contradict Eleanor Heartney’s statements.

At last we could return to James Cuno’s statements printed in chapter one. In response to exhibitions like Armani and The Art of the Motorcycle, Cuno writes,

I offer an alternative museum experience: the permanent collection and the opportunity it affords for sustained and repeated engagements with individual works of art, presented without the hyperbolic promotional apparatus of the temporary exhibition. In this case, the permanent collection one object at a time: nine objects, in fact, considered objectively, for themselves, as objects in themselves. (Cuno, 2004, p. 55)

Cuno’s statements are dogmatic reflections of high Modernism, particularly formalism and the modernist theories of Clement Greenberg. In essays like “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” and “Towards a Newer Laocoon,” Greenberg argued for the redeeming value of high art over kitsch
or mass culture (Greenberg, 1939; Greenberg, 1940). Central to Greenberg’s analysis of formalism was the autonomy of the art object. His theories emphasized the compositional elements of a work of art such as color, line, and shape. Formalism is the concept that a work’s artistic value is determined by objectivity alone. The social, historical, and political context of the work of art is considered secondary. In contrast, contemporary pedagogies like visual culture broaden our understanding of art to consider digital technologies, advertisement, design, and film. Visual culture understands that meaning is determined by the signifying practices that represent the art object, not by form alone.

This position is taken up at length in Eilean Hooper-Greenhill’s book *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*. Hooper-Greenhill defines visual culture as a field of study that raises theoretical questions about the practices of looking and seeing. She argues that the practices of looking and seeing are pedagogical because they are related to learning. According to Hooper-Greenhill, 19th century museums displayed objects as if they were neutral and autonomous, whereas visual culture approaches provide theoretical tools and analytical methods that may be used for the analysis of objects in a museum. Objects are not neutral but rather tied to exhibitionary practices that involve a cultural politics of exclusion and inclusion, ethics, power, and consumption. She writes,

> The metaphors and rhetorics, the content and the style, of displays play pedagogic roles in the construction of knowledge and identities, in producing potential for learning, and in the mobilization of desires. (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 20)
Hooper-Greenhill argues that if exhibitions involve a sense of cultural politics then they imply the possibility of agency and action.

_Giorgio Armani_ and _The Art of the Motorcycle_ advanced popular culture pedagogically, but were also transmitted through the signifying practices of the museum. The museum’s corporate image, blockbuster audiences, and high-profile sponsors made it difficult for critics to understand the exhibitions as anything other than a capitalist ideology. In order to understand the exhibitions more critically it is necessary to view them as part of a sociology of learning and culture like that advanced by Giroux, Simon, and Hooper-Greenhill. They are part of a contemporary framework concerning visual culture studies. _Giorgio Armani_ and _The Art of the Motorcycle_ contributed to the museum’s growth mentioned in the previous chapters, while pointing towards new ways of understanding art, visuality, and cultural consumption.
Conclusions
Conclusions

On February 28th 2008, the New York Times announced that Thomas Krens would be resigning as director of the Guggenheim Museum (Vogel, 2008, E.1). The museum would be changing its course after 20 years of pollination, renovation, and liquidation. Thomas Krens’s resignation will have left the museum’s trademark across a night sky stretching from Berlin, to Vegas, to the Middle East, to the heart of Bilbao, and to the global spaces in between. The resignation may not come as a surprise. His disagreements with trustees like Lewis and the controversy surrounding shows like Armani and The Art of the Motorcycle generated criticism, while attempting to re-define museum practices.

Several chapters of this thesis documented the museum’s history, major players, and critics. Through a tapestry of ideas I was able to weave together important facets of the museum’s growth, aligning it with metaphor, while taking into account the advantages and disadvantages of cultural franchises. As museums like the Guggenheim expand into larger venues for entertainment and culture they will need to consider the benefits of global partnerships in a historical period marked by increasing consumerism, globalization, and popular media. Museums will need to reconsider how broader understandings of culture will be exhibited in an age of global capitalism and how cultures compete over global and local spaces.

Recently in an article James S. Russell listed over 30 major American museum projects that will be completed in the United States by 2009 (Russell, 2005). Among these large scale expansion projects are the Art Institute of Chicago, the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, and smaller venues such as the Crystal Bridges Museum in Bentonville, Arkansas, and the Parrish Art Museum in Southampton, New York. Russell determines that the Bilbao Effect
has become more prevalent as museums become symbols of civic identity, attracting donors, businesses, and board members. In certain cases like the Guggenheim Bilbao they also raise questions over whose cultural identities are being represented.

Other scholars like Hooper-Greenhill have pointed to changes that are taking place as we reach the historical period of the post-museum (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). Where 19th century modernist museums transmitted knowledge and facts through encyclopedic classification, corporeal discipline, and expert to novice transmission, the era of the post-museum is taking into account the various narratives that compose museum experiences. This has allowed for exhibitions like *The Art of the Motorcycle* and *Giorgio Armani* as museums exhibit broader definitions of art and culture, for wider audiences.

At the same time that museum projects are expanding globally and marketing to wider audiences they must take into account the class specific sociability of those audiences. Museums will have to respond to the pluralization of identities in an international art world that witnessed a growth in global art biennials throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s (Havana, 1984; Dakar, 1994; Johannesburg, 1995). Although this may represent a further niche in the art market in terms of tourism and a “biennial industry,” it also demonstrates the heterogeneity of international cultures (Bydler, 2004, p. 150). The homogenization of Western culture criticized by Saloni Mathur in chapter one demonstrates that global culture hinges on political power and dominance. Complex processes of heterogeneity and homogeneity will need to be addressed by the exhibitionary and pedagogical practices of museums.

Museum practices are pedagogical practices and Krens’s twenty-year post as director pointed towards new ways of organizing and experiencing culture. Visual culture exhibitions like *Armani* and *The Art of the Motorcycle* contributed to the corporate growth and “grow or die”
model of the Guggenheim, but they also advanced popular culture pedagogically. The exhibitions used the museum as a venue to deconstruct how certain classes are stereotyped in the media, how fashion influences gender, how art influences everyday objects, and how design can be analyzed not solely as an aesthetic practice, but one that is anchored in social and historical conditions. Rather than treat these exhibitions solely as corporate growth we should analyze them in terms of how meaning is negotiated between objects. This would include the study of visual culture as a pedagogy that addresses the mediated and underlying relationships between visual representations and their audiences.

Each cell or chapter of this thesis contributes to our understanding of the museum as organism. Lockland’s model of biological growth, coupled with Frank Gehry’s zoomorphic architecture, adds poetic amplification to processes of growth and decay. Lockland’s philosophy of hybridization and cross pollination depends on mutual growth transformations. The Guggenheim Museum as organism replicates the basic growth patterns of biological life forms, resulting in satellites or hybrids that bear a similar likeness, yet extend the boundaries of the museum across space and time. Where critics like Mathur or Rectanus have argued that cross pollination results in cultural homogenization, supporters such as Peter Lawson-Johnston argue that the satellites are part of a larger global community (Lawson-Johnston, 2005). Each is encouraged to maintain its own regional identity, while reciprocally interacting within an exchange economy.

Throughout this thesis, I have tried to reach a point where extended research would later inspire practice. If this thesis has been about the Guggenheim Museum, it has also been about growth and death, renewal and loss. The metaphors used to describe the museum throughout the thesis have varied. The museum has been referred to a heart, flower, fish,
constellation, and organism. Although the terms slightly differ, each in its own way reminds us of life. The terms represent basic patterns of biological and human activity. The Guggenheim Museum as a global museum should be interpreted as a life cycle. It is a process that is constantly changing and extending its boundaries in search of definition.

In conclusion, the extent of this research has been a shared effort between the artists, critics, and scholars discussed. Throughout several chapters I offered a more complete picture of the museum with the understanding that all research is left incomplete, like a point of departure and return, or a river that leads back into itself. If we consider the drawbacks and possibilities of what has been written, we could arrive at museum practices that are educational, balanced, and defined by large-scale community organization and responsibility. This would be an ethics and pedagogy of care determined by global communities and world organisms. It would be an ethics of care that comes less from pedagogical theory and more from the heart, the basic unit of life. If the Guggenheim Museum occupies a small amount of global space, it is a small amount of space among limitless Time. Time moves swiftly, like light across water, soaring beyond boundaries and converging on distant stars. Looking ahead, towards the birth of new organisms, will depend on how we learn to flow through and with each other.
Afterword: The Museum as Organism
Afterword: The Museum as Organism

Joseph Jacob died suddenly on August 9th 2006, at the age of twenty-seven. Many of the circumstances surrounding his death have been left unanswered in the hearts of those close to him. I last heard he had completed his student teaching and Masters degree, and was working as the wrestling coach at my former high school. Joey was a close childhood friend. I knew him since about the age of seven. The details of our lives cannot be sketched within the limited space provided here. We grew up on the same block, living only houses apart. We played in the creeks, streets, and lakes in our neighborhood. This thesis is in honor of Joey who died a tragic and premature death days before my arrival at Penn State University.

Throughout the thesis I spoke in detail about how cultural and political forces shape different aspects of our lives, such as identity. Yet smaller, more intimate portraits also shape these things. Sometimes experiences we have with people later influence our roles as artists and students. These experiences serve as threads that hold our work together, binding it like a book, and making it more meaningful. Several metaphors used throughout this thesis are references to my friend’s death. Metaphor, when placed within the larger context of life, determines how we understand life.

As a final note, I would like to send my deepest respect to Joseph Jacob and Susan Williams, Joey’s mother and father. Although they are not my parents, they still had a lot to do with how I was raised. I would also like to send my respect to Brad Williams, Joey’s cousin and long time friend. All three of us were very close as kids but our lives have grown up around us. What follows is a short farewell to Joey Jacob, perhaps a search for definition and completion.
Throughout the cities of the world constellations are dissolving. Friendships grow, transform, and crumble, while fish swim together beneath rivers. Their tails splash the air innocently, like small children. These children are not quite sure where they are headed... they just swim. They understand, if only briefly, each other’s course. All rivers are left undetermined. All rocks, gullies, and shores are possible. Only the burning light of the comet will guide them through darkness.
Bibliography


