MUSEUMS, PAINTINGS AND HISTORY

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Today's museum is permeated with history. So much so that the general public and probably the majority of both museum curators and historians seem to consider the connection between museum and history an obvious and a necessary one. Yet, if we look at the past of the museum and at that of history, we discover that during the early centuries of the museum's existence they had nothing in common with one another. How did the conjunction of museum with history come into being? How did the museum adapt itself to different types of history: to universal history, to national history, to local history? How did history become aware of the importance of museums for the study of the past? And how did the museum become aware of its own history? These are the questions included under the headline Museum and History. I cannot discuss them all. I shall concentrate on only one of them and even this one will not be treated exhaustively.

I

In contradistinction to a private cabinet, a museum is a collection which belongs not to a physical person but to some moral entity. It is preserved in an interior allotted solely for this purpose, it is ordered according to criteria whose validity is recognized by a community and it is open to the public on a regular basis. Museums corresponding to this description appeared in Italy at the end of the 15th century. From the end of the 17th they slowly spread across Europe. But until the second half of the 18th century museums, as well as private collections, did not know anything whatever about history.

However in the majority of cases, they indeed arranged the objects, which were exhibited so as to give pleasure to the eye. Paintings were hung so that the frame of one bordered the frame of another, composing a kind of tapestry in which one tried to harmonize subjects, figures and colours. Sculptures were placed either so as to form groups or, in galleries, in lines along walls but always so as to achieve the best visual effect. *Instrumenta* and small objects were grouped according to their appearance and the same treatment was applied to shells and other products of nature. Even coins were classified more often than not primarily according to the

62 metal from which they were minted. Only within this framework, were they arranged according to the dates of issue.

Certainly from the beginning there were some objects, the display of which took chronology into account. So it was with the busts of Roman emperors and empresses where one tried to preserve the order of succession. In the 17th century with the progress of numismatics the learned classified their collections of coins according to the authorities under whom they were issued, these authorities, in any country or city, being in turn placed in the order in which they succeeded one another. Similar attempts were made in different Italian cities with inscriptions concerning their past. But all this did not have much to do with history. For coins like inscriptions pertained to the province of antiquarians. And antiquarians were not historians because chronology despite its importance was not yet history, just as history was not yet the criticism of those remains of the past which enabled the historian to distinguish the true ones from the false ones and as history was not the study of the origins of collected objects nor a reconstruction based on the images they carried of ancient events, ceremonies, rituals, beliefs, customs and manners, weights and measures, etc.

In as far as it is concerned with the distant past, i. e. the past which cannot be remembered by a historian, the past which lies before his birth, history always deals with invisible objects. But these objects - events, persons, institutions, manners, etc. - which are invisible to a historian, arriving a long time after them, were nevertheless visible to those who were their contemporaries. There is therefore a fun-

damental difference between these objects on the one hand and on the other objects such as the Art, the Roman Empire, the society or the civilization, humankind, France or Germany, the nation, the people, the bourgeoisie or the working class, etc. The latter phenomena are indeed invisible as such, because nobody under any conceivable circumstances can see them or perceive them otherwise, unless we believe in extrasensory perception.

One can retort that such invisible objects are not real. To answer would be tantamount to starting a philosophical discussion in which I do not want to be involved. I do not here adopt a position on the reality of these invisible objects. My only point is that the reality of one or other of them is tacitly admitted by any author who is writing a history of it, in so far as he is aware of the difference between history and fiction. This is the case of Winckelmann who wrote a history of the Art in Antiquity, of Gibbon, historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, of Robertson when he described the progress of society in Europe, of Guizot when he taught the history of civilization in Europe and France, to give only a few examples.

In general, since the 16th century, hand in hand with the affirmation of its specificity and with its transformation from a branch of literature into an academic discipline, history tries more and more to reconstruct the changes in objects which are invisible as such and to describe these changes following the order of chronology. Here lies the essential difference between history and antiquarianism, the latter trying only to reconstruct objects which are now no longer visible, but

which were visible in the past. Hence another difference between antiquarianism and history is that the former is constrained to deal with a multiplicity of objects which can be ordered only according to some external criterion like the alphabetical order of their names or the order of their appearance in space or in time, while the latter can refer them all to the invisible objects which it describes, so as to treat them as its manifestations and therefore to unify them and to order them by virtue of some intrinsic principle.

How can a historian pass from a set of visible objects he is dealing with to invisible ones he is interested in? This is the central problem of historical method even if practising historians are not always conscious of it. Three solutions to this problem must be mentioned here.

In the first, the history of the invisible object, which the historian wants to study, is given to him by tradition or by common sense and/or is discovered through the speculation of theologians, philosophers or jurists; so it was with the Roman Empire, with civilization or with entities like England or France, nation or people. Once such an object is given, the historian has to find sources whose contents or features show their relevance for this particular object and their usefulness to the reconstruction of its successive changes. Such was the practice of French and English historians in the 18th and the first half of the 19th century, until the time when the intellectual leadership within history as an academic discipline passed to German schools of history.

The second solution is proposed by hermeneutics primarily as the art of understanding texts and later also any intention-

nal human product; this art, partly application of rules and partly a divination, enables a historian studying sources which are at his disposal to recreate in his mind the state of mind of their author. The latter is always an individual. But not only Homer or Raphael are authors. Alexander the Great or to an even greater degree Caesar are authors too and the same is true of such collective individuals as Rome, Germany or the Renaissance. Hermeneutics was the most important contribution of German philology and philosophy to the theory and practice of history. It made of history a *Geisteswissenschaft*. And it lay behind the achievements of Droysen, of Mommsen and of Ranke, all their differences notwithstanding.

The third solution is proposed by statistics which enables a historian to use the counting of visible objects and calculations with the quantitative data so obtained in order to arrive at some invisible object. To take the simplest example: you cannot meet an average Dane. But an average Dane is nevertheless a real being; you can describe his food consumption, his sexual behaviour, his political attitudes as expressed in his votes and in his answers to public opinion polls, etc. Such an invisible object as France, which may be considered as given by tradition or as an individual for whom one can ascertain the inner states through hermeneutics, may also be defined by a set of statistical data.

We have here three different objects with the same proper name. Objects like social classes, economies, public opinions, etc. are typical objects normally hidden from the view but made explicit by the use of statistics. As a study of such statistical objects, to which it turned in the last

64 decades of the 19th century, history became a social science. Max Weber in Germany, Simiand in France, Ashton in England or Beard in the United States played a particularly important role in this transformation of the practice of history which affected at the same time its epistemological status.

The word *history* therefore refers to practices and theories of history which are so deeply different from one another that they opposed each other in the course of memorable debates. In the first decades of the 19th century proponents of hermeneutics undermined the traditional idea of history. And at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century promoters of history as a social science questioned the very idea of it as a *Geisteswissenschaft*. Now these different ideas and practices of history have a direct relevance to our subject, because any one of them implies a different attitude on the part of the historian towards museums and of museums towards history.

II

In 1764, Pierre-Jean Grosley, a French financier and writer, published a book of observations on Italy and Italians made during his travels in the early 1760s. He describes among other things the cabinet of Abbé Jacopo Facciolati in Padua, where he saw:

.... a collection as scholarly as it is singular. It is a series of pictures which, so to speak, traces the history of painting since its Renaissance in Europe. It commences with Greek paintings, the imitation of which formed the apprenticeship of the very first painters in Italy. They depict Madonnas copied in a base fashion, with no taste for drawing; the aridity and platitude of their

execution matching in every way that of the crudely illuminated wood-block prints our peasants use to decorate their huts. This art develops little by little in the following painters, and after Giotto, Mantegna and the Bellinis we finally come to Raphael and Titian...

Facciolati's collection was not the only one of its kind, at least in Padua and Venice. Nor was it the oldest. It is quite probable that the man who created the example of a collection of pictures conceived and arranged so as "to trace the history of painting since its Renaissance" was Carlo Lodoli, a Franciscan, architectural theorist and educator very influential in Venice in matters of taste and who was also a friend of Facciolati. According to his biographer, Lodoli

.... decided to form a collection which could be different from those to which we are accustomed, but perhaps more useful, in the belief that pictures should show each stage of the progression of the art of drawing from its Renaissance in Italy as far as Titian, Raphael, Correggio, Buonarroti and Paolo Veronese...

In the 1770s and 1780s, after the publication by Anton Maria Zanetti the younger of his book on Venetian painting, we find in Venice several collections which follow the examples of Lodoli and Facciolati. John Strange, the British resident in Venice from 1774 to 1790, formed a collection of pictures of which we are told that it was *la storia visibile della pittura Veneziana* and in which the 'primitives' occupied an important place. Later Girolamo Manfrin, a businessman

.... opened a gallery comprising several rooms filled with paintings by the most renowned artists, ranging from the very earliest painters to those of the present day: he had hoped, providing death did not strike him too soon, to display works from different periods according to their different schools and dates, so that we

might recognize at a glance the faults and splendours of this art throughout the different periods.

These quotations have already been referred to in my book *Collectors and Curiosities*. I come back to them now, because I could not discuss there the full range of changes produced in the art collections by their 'historicization', if such a barbaric word may be allowed. The first of these was the arrangement of collected objects - pictures, drawings or prints - according to the order of chronology or, in other words, according to periods and dates. This new arrangement affected the display of any collection to which it was applied. It modified the image of such a collection taken as a whole as well as the expectations with which one had to approach it and the standards by which one had to judge it. An important step in this direction was a requirement for some order, whatever it may be. It expressed the growing discontent with the display consisting of the succession of beautiful coups d'oeil, which, in the course of the 18th century, was perceived more and more often to be simply meaningless. Listen to the Président de Brosses who describes the gallery of the Duke of Modena which was eventually to be sold to the King of Saxony and incorporated into his gallery at Dresden:

This is certainly the most beautiful gallery in Italy not because it is the most numerous but it is the best kept, the best distributed and the best decorated one. It is not this hotch-potch of pictures one upon another, mixed without order, without taste, without frames and without space in between, which stuns the sight without satisfying it. Yet so it is the most often in Rome at Justiniani's, Altieri's and elsewhere. Here everything is selected. Pictures are in small numbers in

every room, superbly framed and displayed without confusion on damask hangings which bring them out well; they are distributed in gradation so that when you enter a new room you find there more beautiful pieces than in the previous one.

De Brosses here criticizes the traditional display of paintings intended to compose a beautiful tapestry but which he sees only as a 'hotch-potch'. What he is looking for is order - any order, but order. So in Modena he is happy to discover one. Not the order of time - we are in 1740 - but an order based on the progression of beauty which increases as the visit proceeds to reach a culmination at the very end of it. He is also looking for the choice of paintings which was less important when one wanted to compose a tapestry out of them but which becomes crucial when every painting is looked at and appreciated for its own sake. In Modena the preference is accorded to artistic quality or, if you wish, to beauty over number. This shows that there is a connection between the type of order introduced into a collection and the criteria which preside over the choice of objects considered as deserving the honour of being included in it.

And indeed, from what Grosley says about Facciolati's collection it appears that it included paintings which according to 18th century standards of artistic quality were valueless. So much so that Grosley not only stresses their ignorance of drawing and their rudimentary execution but even compares them with prints used by peasants to decorate their huts. Yet, in spite of his negative judgement of these Madonnas, he does not deny that they are legitimately present in a collection intended to show the progress of painting not

66 with respect to some eternal scale of beauty, as in Modena, but parallel to and as we may assume also produced by the passage of time which appears henceforth as oriented towards the improvement of all things human.

That there is a divergence between what we usually call aesthetic criteria and those of history has been well known since at least the 16th century. Accordingly some objects were considered valuable, not because of their beauty, but because, while being strange if not ugly, they were relics of ancestors, testimonies of their bizarre taste. It did not follow from this that such objects may be introduced into a collection composed not of curiosities but of works of art. Only when objects have a value for historical reasons and objects which are valuable because of their beauty are put on an equal footing; and when the relation between them begins to be conceived as that of a progression from the former to the latter, which unfolds itself with the passage of time, can we safely affirm that we are dealing with a collection arranged in conformity with the historical principle. Such was obviously the case of Facciolati's collection and some other collections of paintings in Venice and Padua from the fifth decade of the 18th century.

An essential intellectual prerequisite of this integration of the historical perspective into collecting was the thinking about the history of painting as if it was the development of an individual from his birth through adolescence and maturity until the age of decay. Such an idea was not new; as far as universal history was concerned, it was rooted in the tradition of Augustine and in a secularized form -

in which history is the development of an immortal, if not an infinite individual - it laid the very foundation of the idea of progress. But in the collections I alluded to, it could not but be implicit. And it was still implicit in the history of Venetian painting published in 1771 by Anton Maria Zanetti the younger. Yet seven years earlier another book had appeared which was to have an incomparably greater impact on dilettanti all over Europe. It was Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*.

The importance of it for our subject cannot be overstated. Winckelmann was indeed the first to transform the study of ancient art, until then the province of antiquarianism, into history in the sense that I have tried to describe. We find in his book the idea of Art - with a capital A - as something which can be grasped not so much by the eyes as by the mind, this invisible entity becoming manifest in the masterpieces of great artists. But the capacity to produce masterpieces which express as fully as possible the very essence of Art does not depend only on the gifted artist himself. It is also necessary for him to live in his own definite period of history and in his own specific country. For Art, as Winckelmann understands it, develops like a human individual and its development is conditioned by the natural environment as well as by political institutions. Ancient Art, whose childhood was in Egypt, attains its maturity in 5th century Athens and later enters into decay.

But Winckelmann succeeded not only in giving a new content to the idea of Art and to its history in Antiquity. He also introduced a new approach with respect to Art. Instead of limiting himself to

external descriptions and to technical analysis as did Caylus, he tried to arrive at the recreation of the state of the soul or of the mind of ancient artists and of their contemporaries in order to grasp the masterpieces of ancient art from the inside. In other words Winckelmann was the first to conceive of a hermeneutics suitable for the Art and to use it to study its past. It is true that his hermeneutics was more akin to divination than to scientific method and that his book for this reason sometimes was nearer to poetry than to history; he was criticized for this almost immediately after his death. Indeed, to Winckelmann an aesthetic and a historical point of view did not have the same validity; the latter was subservient to the former. Nevertheless history extended with him over the field of Art or, if you wish, the Art was included into a history. The way was opened for the entrance of history also into the art museum.

III

In the catalogue of the imperial gallery at the Belvedere in Vienna published in 1784, Christian von Mechel presented it as "a deposit of the visible history of art". This formula which we already met in a Venetian context, merits a brief comment. For what it insists upon is the difference between the history as displayed in a private cabinet or a museum and the history about which we can only read and which is therefore an invisible history. And it implies the superiority of the former over the latter. In the Belvedere gallery paintings were arranged in accordance with the chronology and with the division into 'schools' corresponding to different coun-

tries or, in Italy, to different artistic centres. The gallery was then an equivalent of the book telling the history of painting. But it was superior to any book because, making possible the direct contact with original masterpieces, it put before the sight of the beholder the past and the present of this art. It enabled him to see its history.

When in 1792 the opening of a museum in the Louvre was at last inscribed on the agenda of the French government and scheduled for August 10th 1793, one of the problems to be solved concerned the principle of the arrangement of paintings. This was one of the focal points in the bitter battle of polemics fought by the famous Parisian art dealer, Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Lebrun, against Jean-Marie Roland, then Minister of the Interior in charge of the museum. The documents related to this polemics were recently reprinted with a remarkable comment by Edouard Pommier. I follow in his footsteps.

The position of Roland is contained in the letter he sent on December 25th 1792 to the commission responsible for the organization of the museum:

A museum is not exclusively a place of studies. It is a flower-bed which must be scattered with the most brilliant colours. It has to interest the dilettanti while at the same time amusing the simple visitors ('les curieux'). The museum is everybody's property. Everybody has the right to enjoy it. It is your duty to put this enjoyment, as much as you can, at the disposal of everybody.

Lebrun's *Réflexions sur le musée national* dated January 14th 1793 may be considered an answer to this. Indeed, expressing his idea of the museum, Lebrun states in particular:

68 *All paintings must be arranged following the order of schools and they must point out, by the very place assigned to them, different epochs of the infancy, of the progress, of the perfection and finally of the decay of art.*

We assist here at the clash of two principles concerning the organization of the art museum: the age-old principle of the tapestry - or, as Roland says, of the flower-bed - of paintings is attacked in the name of the historical principle tacitly backed by the example of Vienna and the authority of Winckelmann. Roland did not mention this principle. But he certainly had it in mind when he opposed studies to pleasure, for the studies he is speaking about could not be those of painters who come to the museum to copy masterpieces. It could only be those of antiquarians and other people approaching paintings from the historical perspective. This is corroborated by Roland's translation of the opposition of study to pleasure in terms of a social division between the dilettanti and the simple visitors, because we know that painters were for him not just the dilettanti but even more: the true connoisseurs.

When Lebrun is speaking only about the arrangement of paintings Roland sees it as connected with the purpose of the museum and the definition of its public. For him, the giving up of the principle of the tapestry of paintings, would be tantamount to the disappearance of the pleasure visitors have when gazing on pictures. It would therefore jeopardize the accessibility of the museum to everybody, limiting its public only to dilettanti. The position of Roland is therefore not so conservative as it seems. What he defends as a good

minister of a revolutionary government is, as he says himself, the museum as everybody's property, the museum as open and pleasant to everybody. This is the requirement a display of paintings must satisfy in order to be accepted by him. But this is a requirement of no importance to Lebrun, seeing the museum from the point of view of the connoisseur.

After Roland had resigned, his successor, Dominique J. Garat, who also inherited the task of opening the museum on the scheduled day, wrote to the commission on April 21st 1793:

You have to inquire whether we have to choose the system of different schools, that of the chronological and progressive history, that of genres, that of styles or that of a simple picturesque variety of curiosities or of views ('simple variété pittoresque de curiosité ou de coup d'oeil').

The commission answered June 17th in a long report of which the principal sentence was:

The arrangement we have adopted is that of an infinitely varied flower-bed ('L'arrangement que nous avons adopté est celui d'un parterre de fleurs varié à l'infini').

With such an arrangement of paintings which was a posthumous victory for Roland, the Louvre was opened to the public. Later Vivant-Denon who was its director from 1802 until 1815, imposed the classification of paintings according to different schools. And so it remained until 1848.

At the beginning of the fifth decade of the 19th century the artistic and intellectual climate in France was completely different from what it had been during the Revolution. The art of the Middle Ages

was henceforth recognized as having not only a historical value due to its being a relic of the national past, but also an aesthetic value as an example of beauty at which the moderns must look for inspiration. This promotion of medieval art received its final consecration in 1844 with the opening of the *Musée de Cluny* after the National Assembly had bought the collection of Dusommerard. At the same time, the lasting popularity of the historical novel and the deep influence exerted on a general opinion by the romantic historians resulted in the attainment by history of a dignity it never had before. In 1852, in the preface to his book on Averroes, Renan declared:

The distinctive feature of the 19th century is the replacement of the dogmatic method with the historical method in all studies concerning the human mind. (...) History is indeed the necessary form of the science of everything which is submitted to laws of variable and successive life. The science of languages is the history of languages. The science of literatures and philosophies is the history of literatures and philosophies. And the science of the human mind is, let me repeat, the history of the human mind and not only the analysis of mechanisms of the individual soul.

In the same year, 1852, Benjamin Guérard published an article on the Louvre which he had recently visited and which he left very dissatisfied. Anything but an average visitor, Guérard was one of the most distinguished French historians of the Middle Ages, famous for his editions of medieval documents, member of l'Institut, the most prestigious French scientific body, and professor at the Ecole des Chartes, then as today a nursery of historians, keepers of public records, librarians and museum curators of the highest

calibre. He seems to have addressed his article to readers professionally interested in museums as he published it in the journal of this school.

Guérard went to the Louvre for the first time since the revolution of 1848 and he did not recognize it:

The revolution also left its imprint on the palace of arts,

he says at the very beginning of his article. And he explains what is new:

In the past the paintings were classified according to schools, something I was already not very happy with. Now they are classified according to schools as well as to chronological order, a thing which seems to me to have an execrable effect. Men of learning like classifications and everybody must like them when science is concerned. But here the case is different. If the classification has the advantage of putting before the eyes the entire history of painting in any country and of being very useful for the research of erudites and even of artists, it is faulty with respect to the art and harmful for the public. One cannot indeed arrange a museum like a library or a cabinet of geology. For the great majority of persons who visit the Louvre the principal problem they expect that the administration will solve is how to please and to move; to educate is only secondary. These persons cannot therefore accept the system which completely sacrifices the art to the science.

Sixty years after Roland an eminent professional historian is exhumating the idea of the superiority of the arrangement of paintings according to aesthetic criteria over the one which proceeds from a historical perspective and he justifies it by the respect due to the public. But Guérard has other arguments too. He contends that

.... all essential laws of art are obviously violated because of this double geographical and historical arrangement. And it is not only to the general sight that the scientific requirement inflicts injury, it is also

and primarily to the effect of any painting in particular. As the neighbouring paintings are not related one to another, instead of putting themselves mutually forward, they mutually depreciate themselves.

Guérard therefore proposes the replacement of the *arrangement of the scholar* by the *arrangement of the artist*. How should it be done? According to him, the Louvre is now composed of two museums in one: it is the museum of art and the museum of archaeology. Yet, as he says

.... beauty does not tolerate blending and the public who comes to see it, is deceived when one is showing to him, with the beautiful, also things which are only old.

It follows that the Louvre must be divided into two different museums. In that of art, one has to place all masterpieces, ancient and modern, which are objects of admiration. And in that of archaeology *it will be possible to study Egyptian, Assyrian and even Mexican monuments, even if I believe that the latter do not yet deserve the honours of a palace.*

Only provided that such a division is achieved, it would be possible to solve the problem of the arrangement of masterpieces.

To do this one has to imagine that all pictures were painted at the same place, in the same time and by the same hand. Then one would display them all exclusively for the greatest delight of the eyes and of the imagination.

One cannot be more clear. What Guérard is advocating here is the visible relation between paintings which involves their subjects, compositions, colours, drawing, etc., and which manifests itself in their similarity or their contrast, in their nearness or their remoteness. This relation

immediately grasped by the eye is destroyed when the proximity of one painting to another is determined by the relation between them which consists in their provenance from the same period or the same place and which is invisible unless one assumes that their common provenance imposes upon paintings some common features. If one looks on paintings with this assumption in mind, one sees their affinity as due to their common origin. Or rather, one attaches to signs of such an affinity more importance than to exclusively visible references of one painting to another which from this perspective appear as superficial and accidental. But such an attitude requires the admission of the legitimacy of an historical approach to art. And this was exactly what Guérard was struggling against.

One does not need to say that this *combat d'arrière-garde* was lost. But the problem did not disappear. In 1987 when the Musée d'Orsay was opened in Paris, the critics of it attacked in particular what they believed to be a concession made to history to the prejudice of aesthetic criteria. It was this time the display in Orsay of painters who were indiscriminately disparaged as *pompiers* by influential representatives of the 20th century avant-garde. As with the passage of time, the opinion of the avant-garde acquired the dignity of an aesthetic norm, any deviation from it was considered inadmissible. Yet the painters qualified by the avant-garde as *pompiers* were very different not only from the historical but also from the strictly artistic point of view. The label was indeed attached to conventional academic painters and producers of titillating nudes, as well as to realists like Jules Breton and other

painters of rural life, or symbolists like Puvis de Chavannes and Gustave Moreau. The staff of Orsay did take care to distinguish among these alleged *pompier*s good and important artists to be put on display and it stressed the difference between their works as bearers of aesthetic values and the specimens of the official art of the Third Republic which it was decided should be shown only as historical documents. This notwithstanding some critics perceived the new image given by Orsay of French 19th century art as an illegitimate intrusion of history into matters of taste and as an outrage to the aesthetic canon allegedly valid forever.

IV

The entrance of the historical perspective into the museum of European paintings of the modern era makes up only a part of the story of its entrance into the museum of art, which makes only a part of that which describes the impregnation of the museum with the historical approach to the most different objects it is interested in. And this story in its turn makes only a part of that of the changing relations between the museum, which during the last two centuries of its existence lived through several metamorphoses, and history as at first the branch of literature, later also a *Geisteswissenschaft* and at least in addition a social science. I cannot tell these stories here. I only want to stress that what I have outlined is incomplete and limited.

Instead of general conclusions which would be unjustified under these circumstances, let me set forth some final remarks. As I said at the very beginning,

the present day's museum is permeated with history. But this does not mean that the historical perspective exclusively determines the arrangement of the objects displayed, even of paintings, because it depends also upon the decisions of persons who leave their collections to the museum provided that their integrity or some presentation which corresponds to their wishes will be preserved. So if we take the circuit proposed by some museums - particularly great museums - as a whole, we sometimes find inside it spaces where objects are organized according to very different principles and which therefore preserve a history of the museum itself and of collections it is an heir to. In Orsay for instance there are, included in a historical arrangement, collections of Chaudard, Moreau-Nélaton, Mollard, Personnaz, Gachet, Max and Rosy Kaganovitch.

An historical perspective which the curators most often adopt when they have a free hand, does not in a unique way determine the arrangement of objects they are dealing with, even of paintings. One may or may not distinguish among them different schools or currents, but one may also decide to show the evolution of some genre, say the still-life or of the landscape, despite this being done rather in temporary exhibitions. And if one has to display different types of works of art or different human productions, one may choose, so to say, to tell many different stories with them either putting together paintings, sculptures, jewellery, furniture, fashion, etc., in order to make the visitors aware of their interdependencies, or, on the contrary, showing changes of any type of these objects isolated from others. In any case an arrangement once adopted is destined

72 to last a long time simply for material and financial reasons. Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris was rearranged after twenty years of existence. And in the Louvre some 'temporary' arrangements of paintings installed in the late 1960s survived for almost a quarter of a century. They are only just being modified now.

Whatever the importance of the historical perspective, as far as the museums of art are concerned, the aesthetic principle is never completely abandoned. It expresses itself in the choice of objects put on display. And in the set of operations which contribute to the imposition on objects of an artistic hierarchy. Such a role is played by the spacing of them; as a general rule the greatest masterpieces, if they are not alone on their walls, are separated by a good distance one from another. Such a role in the case of pictures is played by their frames which are often, to quote an 18th century catalogue, "proportioned to their merit". But any curator knows this much better than I do, because this constitutes an important part of his art of solving the problems he is confronted with.

One of these is the problem of relations between museum and history. It does not belong to the past. It is still with us. And it concerns not only historians and theorists of museology, but also curators in their everyday practice.

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LITTERATUR

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