

A psychological view into the effects of art on the primordial mind.

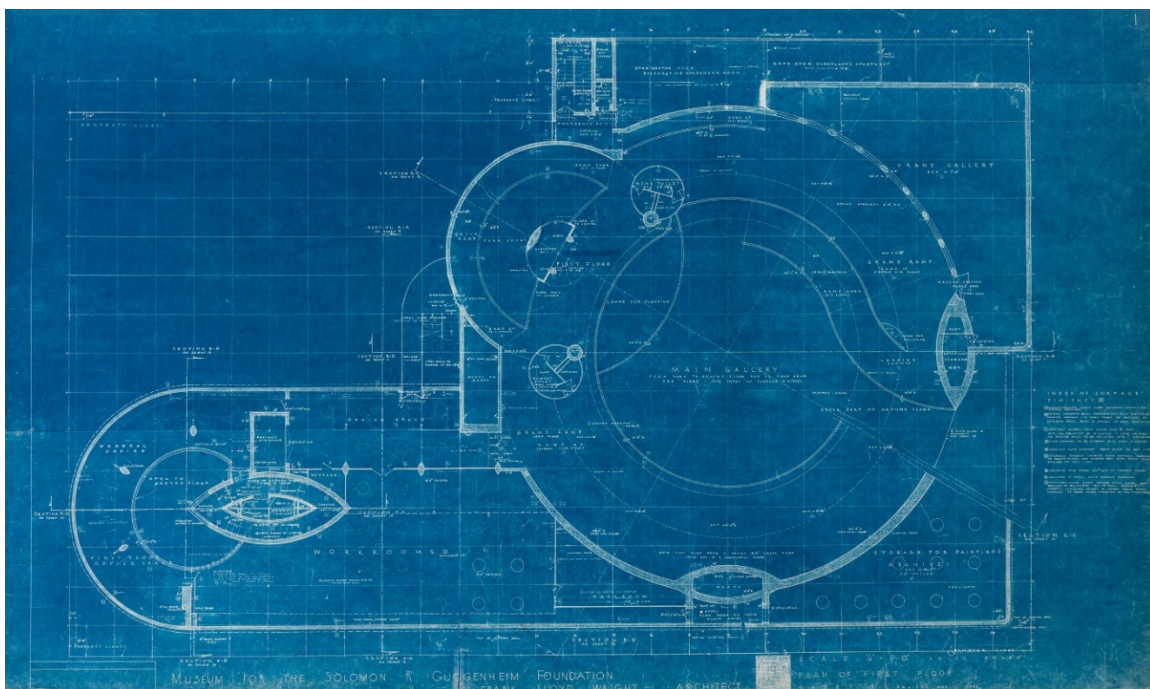
By Lauren Hoffman

1802043

1886 words

Julia Lockheart

The considered curation of exhibition spaces is increasingly important in the current age of postmodern art. Indeed, the experience of a gallery has significantly evolved as people increasingly take in the room as well as the exhibited pieces, which are accentuated by the surroundings and chosen placement of artefacts. As an example, for Tim Walkers' exhibition "Wonderful Things" at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2019, the curator Shona Heath said, *"I sometimes imagine the first person walking through this exhibition and I really hope that person will lose themselves in the pictures and the worlds we've created, so they feel transported."* (Walker, 2019, Pg 15). This gives a good indication of what galleries are trying to achieve, which is to increase the positive effect that the experience has on every individual. However, *"The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe in."* (Berger, 1972, Pg 8). This is called 'Affect Theory', which is how a person's experiences can profoundly alter how they perceive and furthermore, enjoy a specific gallery setting. This brings me to my intentions which will explain the direction that I shall be taking with my own curated space in modern-day. The challenge that I am exploring with my imagined exhibition is effectively speaking to people on the most primordial level, which would potentially mean that the influences regarding affect theory would be ultimately reduced. I will achieve this by researching into the primal instincts of the human brain and appealing to them individually within my curated space, resulting in an experience that is entirely unique and enjoyable for all.



(Fig .1)

The basis for any highly commended exhibition is the careful choice in location, to which the curator has selected. After much research, I decided on the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and built by George N Cohen. For my imagined event, it is crucial that the location is an organic piece of architecture, as I aim for the exterior to feel like a second epidermis; as natural as possible, while still conforming to a functional piece of architecture. *"Dr. M.-L von Franz has explained the circle as a symbol of the self. It expresses the totality of the psyche in all its aspects, including the relationship between man and the whole of nature."* (Jung, 1964, Pg 266). What this tells us, is that it is essential for the person to have a connection with the location as much as the artwork being viewed, and using somewhere which resembles the circle is a viable choice. The idea of

constructing my own building, which would be primarily cylindrical with a spiral staircase was appealing, however there are many aspects which make the Guggenheim the more appropriate choice. One of them being that the central element of the building is a spiral ramp leading upwards, creating an appealing circle repeated pattern within itself. There is something very satisfying about ascending upwards, as it relates strongly to the unconscious connection with being closer to heaven the higher one arises. *“Yet our eyes tell us that the heavens revolve in a circle, and by argument also we have determined that there is something to which circular movement belongs.”* (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E, Pt 5) This tells us to which depths that the human mind has connections with the circular shape, and furthermore why I believe it is vital for me to consider this within my curated space. Being that the circle form is ingrained into the primordial unconscious, this would therefore mean that I am able to steer the person away from feeling as though they are in a heterotopic space; one that is not familiar or is abnormal. A location further in amongst nature was also considered, however *“With these forces nature rises up against us, majestic, cruel and inexorable.”* (Palmer, 2003, Pg 35). Being as I want to make the space the most emotionally comfortable, potentially exposing people to underlying feelings such as these, was not an idealistic option. Therefore, I can confidently conclude that the Guggenheim would be one of the best locations for the direction of my curated event.



(Fig .2)

Taking the focus away from the sense of sight, I am going to divulge into how I will use sound to further enhance the experience within the event. Inspired by Janet Cardiff and her Audio Walks, I investigated how I could bring this wonderful and unique experience to my imagined exhibition. Again I researched into how sound is perceived by the primordial human mind, and how I can translate this into my resulting experience. *“In this case the bird is the most fitting symbol of transcendence.”* (Jung, 1964, Pg 147). This tells us that the sounds of wild birds successfully encourages the feeling of freedom, and escape from the human body. *“We have been talking of wild birds as symbols of release or liberation. But today we could as well speak of jet planes and space rockets, for they are the physical embodiment of the same transcendent principle, freeing us at least temporarily from gravity.”* (Jung, 1964, Pg 156) This, combined with the ascending of one’s self in the building, could further encourage the feeling of uplifting spirits and peacefulness within. Wild birds are also relaxing to the primordial senses as they reassure the notion that there are no predators

around, which puts the mind on low alert. The installation would consist of speakers spaced evenly around the building on every level, each playing individual bird calls. This also appeals to the ideas surrounding the circle which I was discussing earlier, as being evenly surrounded by comforting audio would further increase relaxation within the body.



(Fig .3)

Some of the most interesting and widely appreciated artistic pieces of the current era are installations and more specifically ones in which the audience can interact with. For another piece within my exhibition, I wanted to include one in which the persons' senses are significantly deprived, to create an entirely new experience. The piece that I am referring to is "Your blind passenger", created by Olafur Eliasson in 2010. *"The nervous system, particularly the cerebrospinal system whose final exponent is consciousness, is an organic product of the unconscious, designed to hold the balance between the outer world and inner."* (Neumann, 1995, Pg 296). Removing the external effects of the outside world, means that the experience can be tailored to create emotions that range just within the piece itself. The main ideas behind the installation is to remove the sense of sight and touch, to bring the person closer to their other senses. *"The task of a phenomenological study of the body is to bring out a level of experience where the experiencing subject can be said to BE its body."* (Dreyfuss, Wrathall, 2006, Pg 253). This investigates the possibilities of becoming a third person viewer on the emotions and sensations, therefore potentially being able to achieve higher enlightenment. I would have this installation curtained off, spanning one of the floors in the central building, and I can confidently say that it would be a unique experience that would ultimately elevate the emotional mind of the viewer.



(Fig .4)

Another example of a successful showcase of the primitive response of man is Tim Walkers' photoshoot titled "Lord of the Flies", which was based off the original film directed by Peter Brook (b.1925). *"People humanize nature, personalise the forces that threaten them, turn them into gods, and thereby hope to gain some control over them."* (Palmer, 2003, Pg 35). This tells us in more detail about the extents to which the film, and consequently the photoshoot, has strong symbolic links to mans spiritual connection to their primordial senses. This exhibition of the images would fit well into my curated space, as it will provide connections with modern-day society, and the most basic traits of our human mind. By doing so, I am further able to create an experience for the person which removes the stresses of postmodern life, and connect the individual back to their primitive senses. *"The wish to preserve oneself is the symptom of a condition of distress, of a limitation of the really fundamental instinct of life which aims at the expansion of power."* (Nietzsche, 1974, Pg 291). This further explains the constant desire for personal growth, both mentally and physically, and the battles that this may produce consequently. From this, I can decipher that this particular exhibit would be best placed at the beginning of the curated exhibition, this way it creates the base upon which the person will start their journey of enlightenment throughout the event.



(Fig .5)

The final piece that I would have exhibited at the very top of my exhibition is an installation untitled by Robert Gober, currently on display in the Haunted House at the Prada Foundation – Milan. It features a small drain in the middle of the floor, running water enveloping small pebbles visible, and a glowing anatomically correct heart in the centre. *“Even today, the primitive body scheme of belly, breast, and head is used in ordinary psychology, where ‘belly’ is an abbreviation for the instinctual world, ‘breast’ and ‘heart’ for the zone of feeling, and ‘head’ and ‘brain’ for the zone of spirit.”* (Neumann, 1949, Pg25). This tells us, that putting a person in view of a part of their own anatomy, could insight the feeling of greater connection with the physicality of the human body. This evidence is substantiated by Aristotle, who relates: *“For grant that feeling pain, especially, and enjoyment, and cognition are movements (that is, each of them is a way of being moved), that the movement is due to the soul (for example, being angry or afraid consists in the heart being moved in a particular way,)”* (Aristotle, 2018, Pg 14). This explains further that emotions are felt physically within the human body, specifically in the heart and by exposing someone to that, they can create a link closer to their own feelings. *“Here all contradictions exist side by side... Yes, man is broad, too broad, indeed. I’d have him narrower... God and the devil are fighting there and the battlefield is the heart of man.”* (Dostoyevsky, 1996, Pg 117-18). This supports my idea of placing the installation at the highest point of the gallery, to bring the heart closer to the unconscious connection with God and therefore, inviting positive emotions within the body.

Reflecting on the decisions that I have made throughout this investigation, and the relevant sources that I have cited to back up my ideas, I can confidently conclude that I have successfully created an experience that supports my motives. It was important that the event was curated in such a way that it becomes a journey of the viewer’s emotions and is entirely focused on connecting them with their physical body, and the unconscious influence of the spiritual world. This is to create an experience which is entirely unique, and to better insight certain emotions which would potentially create a mnemonic experience that would last much further than just inside the walls of the physical building. I feel that touching on the subjects of religion, senses, and the integral physical organs of the body, which has potentially even higher symbolic significance, has helped me to achieve this.

Bibliography

Tim Walker, Wonderful Things, 2019

John Berger, Ways of seeing, 1972

Carl G. Jung, Man and his symbols, 1964

Aristotle, On the heavens, 350 B.C.E

Michael Palmer, Freud and Jung on Religion, 2003

Erich Neumann, The origins and history of consciousness, 1949

Hubert L. Dreyfus, Mark A. Wrathall, A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism, 2006

Nietzsche, The Gay science, 1887

Aristotle, On the soul, (Translated by Fred D. Miller, Jr) 2018

F. Dostoyevsky, The brothers Karamazov, 1880

Images

1. <https://www.guggenheim.org/blogs/checklist/illuminating-details-from-frank-lloyd-wrights-guggenheim-blueprints> (Accessed on 15/04/20.)

2. <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/janet-cardiff> (Accessed on 08/05/20.)

3. Thilo Frank / Studio Olafur Eliasson (Date Unknown)

4. Tim walker, V&A Publishing, 2019

5. <https://culturalitaly.com/italy-travel-blog/what-golden-building-haunted-house-fondazione-prada-milan> (Accessed on 10/05/20.)