

and results can be given by the artists, the curators, or the museum guides. It is in this sense that the exhibition itself and the works reconciled art and democracy, or somehow gave a new vision for the old dreams of utopia in modern art.

SEDUCTIONS, ASYMMETRIES, GLOBALIZATIONS:
LEARNING FROM THE GUGGENHEIM BILBAO MUSEUM

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The Guggenheim Museum is carrying out the most important experiment of museum globalization ever attempted. To its New York headquarters –Frank Lloyd Wright’s famous spiral- and the Peggy Guggenheim Museum-mansion in Venice, the Guggenheim has added branches in Soho, Bilbao and Berlin during the 1990s and, last fall, in Las Vegas. Rumors of other possible Guggenheim have spread in dozens of cities all over the world, including Venice, New York, Lyon, and more recently in several Brazilian cities. Of all these franchises, Bilbao, with architect Frank Gehry’s spectacular building, is the one that has most clearly evinces the risks taken and successes achieved by its director, Thomas Krens.

This essay examines the procedures, premises, controversies, ironies, risks and achievements of the agreement between the New York City-based museum and the Basque municipality. Faced with the final question as to whether the experiment was a failure or success, our answer demands that we distinguish the Bilbao Guggenheim’s various aspects: architecture, town planning, image, flagship project, tourism, museum organization, art, means of communication, etc.

Can a museum be tremendously successful in terms of architecture and advertising for a city, and at the same time be a questionable contribution to art or even to museums as cultural institution?

Innovation and Criticism

Krens' main innovation was to conceive a transnational museum that would have franchises on various continents. Host-cities would pay for building's construction and all of the museum's expenses in the purchase of new work and maintenance, and the Guggenheim would lend- besides its name and its collections of classical modernism- its experience and savoir-faire in the programming of exhibitions as well as in all decision concerning the museum's architecture and art. Though it was consistent with the time of cultural globalization, in the early 1990s this implied a radical innovation for an institution such as the museum, which had distinguished itself for collecting domestic artwork and being emblematic of a particular city (like the Louvre in Paris or the Prado in Madrid).

From the outset, the mega-project of creating a galaxy of Guggenheims directed by Krens from New York was severely criticized in New York City itself. The notion of museum franchises soon drew the comparison with a chain of McGuggenheims. As the Cleveland Museum of Art's retired director Sherman Lee has said "I don't think anyone wants a uniform, homogeneous museum system, with London indistinguishable from Rome, like the American supermarket system".¹

Krens was deemed a megalomaniac and his interest in the museum seen an entrepreneurial rather than artistic. A typical opinion, among many other possible ones, was that of the *New York Times* critic Michael Kimmelman: "(Krens) is obsessed with making business and with courting prominent businessmen, curators and politicians who could help him carry those businesses. The (Guggenheim) museum has become more concerned about money, power and prestige than about art".² From the right-wing Hilton Kramer added: "Krens has so far proven himself to be complete disaster. His conception of the museum is all about expansion. He is a complete example what happens to a major cultural institution when it is given over to a bureaucrat."³ From the left, John Richardson soundly concluded:

"The inordinate importance that Krens chooses to attribute to conceptual art and minimalism –the consummate manifestation of the modern movement, he would have us believe- seems much more a matter of entrepreneurial chauvinism than of any deep artistic conviction. Like most other American businessmen Krens is out to promote superseded by imports from abroad –most recently from Germany. Hence his takeover of a Massachusetts factory site: a testing-ground and a showcase for new lines and a warehouse for obsolete stock. Hence, too, his worldwide franchises and the establishment of potentially lucrative links (shades of Disneyland) with hotel and tourist interests, Hence above all his corporate approach to his museum, which is as conceptual as the merchandise that it has been tailored to market. Kren's incessant talk of 'strategies' recalls the 1980s (so does his taste in art movements), when some financiers devised strategies- not least that of junk bonds, which are in effect a form of conceptual art- to enrich themselves at the expense of virtually everyone else. Indeed, the current Guggenheim schemes can best be understood as a new kind of conceptual art: a combination, perhaps, of Boesky and Beuys".⁴

Neither was there a dearth of criticism in Bilbao, where from the outset, it focused above all on the atmosphere of absolute secrecy imposed by both the Guggenheim and the Basque government. This is the first fact we must take into account concerning the reactions in

favor of or against the Bilbao museum: the mandatory absence of public debate about the museum's desirability (or lack therefore) by merely imposing absolute secrecy. Though the media did its best to inquire, the people or even opposition parties and art and cultural institutions were cheated out of any information about the museum. Thus, not only was there no discussion, but any reaction whatsoever to the museum was avoided. It was only after the agreement between the museum and Basque political institutions was signed on December 13, 1991 that the Basque Parliament obtained a copy of the documents and that the press was able to make them public. Ever after the *New York Times* announced several months earlier that the agreement was about to be signed, the Basque public was denied any information regarding the project. Once the signing had become public knowledge, a long list of Basque artists and intellectuals signed a letter of protest. All of this would be course be useless.

McDonaldization and the Asymmetries of Power

The critics' derogatory characterization –that what basically interests Krens was a museum version of McDonald's- was not entirely false. In an evermore globalized world, we had to expect that the logic of what Ritzer has termed the *McDonaldization* of society would also affect museums. This phenomenon “not only affects the restaurant business, but also education, work, travel, leisure-time activities, dieting, politics, the family, and virtually every other sector of society”⁵ and is paradigmatic of what we understand as globalization. Its basic principles are efficiency, measurability and control. The McDonald brothers simply applied to the restaurant business the principles of speed, low cost and mass-production which were typical of industrial assembly lines when the McDonalds opened their first establishment in Pasadena in 1937. Nor were they pioneers in the franchise concept, as it had already been implemented by other businesses. The McDonald's innovation consisted in maximizing central control of the system and imposing a minimum fee of 950 dollars per franchise, and then adding to their profits by requiring periodical payments equivalent to 1.9% of sales.

Krens decided it was time for museums to also follow the principles that McDonaldization had implemented so successfully in other fields. He began spreading his notion of satellite museums through the globe's capital cities and found that the world was not prepared for his revolutionary idea. Until –after many unreturned calls, and almost unintentionally- he landed in Bilbao. “Bilbao? Are you crazy?” was his first reaction when an advisor told about the industrial Spanish city's interest in a Guggenheim. He added: “I'm not going to Bilbao unless there are 15 million dollars on the table”. When he was assured that this sum of money was indeed available, Krens chose to pay the city a visit. Bilbao (then a city with an unemployment rate of over 20%) would end up paying 20 million dollars in franchise fess –money that was spent on enlarging and renovating the New York building.

We have thus already reviewed the first of the decision-making and power asymmetries which we could consider vital for the new cultural globalization to be feasible: locals have to pay for every last cent of the construction but have no right to be informed in order for

them to opine or decide. In other words, the whole process is carried out in the name of democracy but with a ruthless control over information, not to mention the right to decision-making, imposed by a private New York-based company that was going to pocket 80% of Basque public funds destined to museums.

But let us not misconstrue the aforesaid –we are not facing here a sinister plot hatched by American neo-colonialism. What draws our attention above all is the periphery’s pressing desire to be controlled artistically by New York, perhaps dreaming that this is but a first step in gaining access to another New York territory, the one that really matters, none other than Wall Street. The greatest irony was, on the one hand, that a New York museum was so close to bankruptcy that it needed a post-industrial city in ruins such as Bilbao to get back on its feet, and that on the other hand, Bilbao desperately needed to reinvent a whole new economy after the collapse of heavy industry and was willing to associate itself with New York no matter what the conditions were.

Kren’s first visit to Bilbao took place in April 1991, by the end of the year they had already signed a binding contract whose spirit can be summed up in two following clauses:

4.3 Reimbursement of Expenses. (a) The Basque Administration hereby agrees that it shall reimburse SRGF (Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation) for all internal and external costs and expenses incurred by SRGF in connection with the preparation of this Agreement and the performance of its obligations hereunder...

6.2 (ii) As operator of the Museum, SRGF shall have the exclusive right to determine the planning, development and operating policy, standards of operation, content and art programming and all other matters affecting the management and operation of the Museum...

Krens calls this document “the Constitution”, though there is a slight difference if we should compare it to the model of the American Constitution, and that is that the document includes a clause forbidding either party from making any part of the text public without the other party’s prior consent. In other words, the contract is binding but secret. Each one of over two million Basques had to shell out a hundred dollars for this agreement which has however never been published. This is how the new politics of global culture become feasible, and all within the context of a strict formal democracy. (Krens had learned the lesson of absolute secrecy in Salzburg: before Bilbao, he had presented his project there, naively believing the Austrian public would support it; however, faced with Krens’ and personality local resident said no. after Bilbao, Lyon also almost decided in favor of another Guggenheim franchise; Krens blamed this failure on the fact that Lyon’s did not heed the press blackout.

How does one explain the working relationship between two parties when it is so asymmetrical? That is to say, how can a common global culture arise when economic differences are so brutal? Here we have to call upon notions such as the game, faith and seduction to explain global power's asymmetries.

Seduction

The strategy to convince the Baquets of the museum's benefits was one of seduction, as Krens himself summed it up when I saw him the summer before the museum opened, in the following words: "Seduction: that's my business. I am a professional *séducteur*. I don't earn money but I collect it, and I do it by seduction. I seduce people to give me donations of 20 million dollars. Seduction consists in that people desire what you desire without asking them for it. It is a transference of desire. I am in a sense the greatest prostitute in the world".⁶

How does this seduction strategy work? In creating from the outset relationships in which I promise, and you have faith in my promise; I make a wager, and you pay for the chip; I allow myself to be postmodern and play with the self-referentiality of language, and you remain modern and keep believing almost fetishistically in the great values of modernist art. Terms such as "wager", "faith", "future" and "strategic investment" became the new discourse's central concepts.

Talking about the new Guggenheim museum, the Bilbao city councilor in charge of urban renewal told me: "It's like playing in a casino." And a casino's costs, like the lottery's, or stock market bets, are known to be anything but "expensive". The player's central premise is the utter denial of the reality of the money. Whether you win or lose, the money itself does not count, it is only useful insofar as it lets you know whether you are winning or losing. This same notion of "costs" was ridiculed by museum promoters. The museum's costs were conceptualized as "strategic investment". (However, the funds allocated to local culture were no more than "studies.") Krens also told me: "Money is not important. What is important is that now we know that transnational museums can work." In other words, he had invented the new museum. This has required that the whole politics of culture be permeated with auction-house psychology, at some intermediate point between the museum and Wall Street, between history and faith, aesthetics and wagers. But it had all been well worth it.

The relationship between the international art community and auction houses has been examined by Nancy Sullivan, who concludes that "what defines this community as a whole is its proximity to the auction market, which is itself based in New York auction houses."⁷ Auctions are basically a public acknowledgment of secret decisions –something that has recently put the two most famous auctioneers, Sotheby's and Christie's, in serious legal trouble. An artist's triumph or downfall is decided at auctions. The groups who have access to these spheres of influence include auctioneers, art critics, the known players, elite artists, curators and museum directors. This world does not exist in some virtual location of the global village, but quite simply in New York.

Krens is a hero to this international art community based on auction houses. He was the only director who dared to put masterpieces from his collection on the auction block. The 50 million dollars that Bilbao allocated to the purchase of new work Krens wanted to spend to Sotheby's.

It was in the Vienna auction house that Krens bought the Beuys for Bilbao which, after being shown in New York, turned out to be a fake.

But as we all well know New York's real auction house is the Wall Street stock market. In case there was any doubt as to where the brand-new Bilbao museum would be administered from, two months after signing the contract in Bilbao the Basque Country's President traveled to Wall Street to give Merrill Lynch a 20 million-dollar check.

However, what really matters in Krens' discourse is not money but the conceptual and symbolic leap in the museum's conception, the absolute historical novelty of a museum franchise in which the director can manage a branch from New York, 4000 miles away across the Atlantic. The Guggenheim Bilbao is proof positive that the global museum can work. And tis means that architectural designs, museum programs, art shows, art purchases and the entire operation of museums can be commercialized throughout the world from Wall Street/Manhattan. One of the benefits of this is shared exhibition costs. But more importantly, this kind of internationalization of museum franchises makes the Guggenheim the most attractive museum for international capital. Wall Street sharks like Ronald O. Perelman or Peter Lewis explicitly mentioned this when they helped the Guggenheim. Due to a dearth of public subsidies, it is hard for museums to resist the *Who-Wants-to-Marry-a-Multi-Millionaire* syndrome –the television special that the Fox Network broadcasted during the winter of 2000 from Las Vegas. (Las Vegas is, of course, the location of the Guggenheim's latest franchises.) In the end, above and beyond the player's psychology, the mutterings we hear at the back of casinos and auction houses could not be more explicit: money has become the driving force and the central idea of the world of art and architecture.

The Success of Seduction

A month before the museum opened, the cover of the all-powerful *New York Times'* Sunday magazine bore a spectacular full-page photograph of the brand-new Gehry building lit in yellow, ocher and white, with the first lines of an article entitled "Miracle in Bilbao" as a caption: "The word is out that miracles still occur, and that major one is happening here... 'Have you been to Bilbao?' In architectural circles, the question has acquired the status of shibboleth. Have you seen the light? Have you seen the future?"⁸

It was Gehry the architect's apotheosis in Bilbao. Thanks to the photographer's tricks, the pale white titanium building was turned, on the cover, into a blazing hearth of yellows and whites. The *New York Times* critic knew nothing at all of the local blast furnace industry's history, though the photographic unconscious allowed it to reemerge here on the cover in the shape of a museum. The New York City critic's

only concern –amidst Bilbao’s ruins, which he compared in the first paragraph to Bosnia –was his quest for “American art and architecture”. The new aura-enshrouded miracle was in his mind “a Lourdes for a mutilated culture”.

The important thing was that seduction had begun to work like a house afire. A promise is above all a verbal action, and language is for Don Juan something performative rather than informative. He uses language as an instrument of action and enjoyment, not as method to acquire knowledge. For the seducer the verbal act is based on a commitment that goes beyond simple diction. With his promise the seducer is only playing with the self-referentiality of language. Though he is not thinking of keeping his promises, the seducer is merely playing with language and is not –strictly speaking- a liar. His verbal art, his villainy, is based on making others believe his promises without having to believe them himself.

What Krens promised the Basques –if they dared believe him and risk everything in the museum-franchise sweepstakes- was that Bilbao would become an important spot on the international art map, and that this would bring about a new image and a new economy of tourism, leading to the city’s urban regeneration. Krens often compares the Guggenheim Bilbao –without the slightest hint of irony- to the pyramids of Egypt, China’s Forbidden City and the Taj Mahal. Only a lover, someone overwhelmed by his own desire, does not concern himself with the negative reactions that such hyperbole can cause in these frivolous times. The cover of the *New York Times* was the first warning that Krens was going to keep his promise and that the wager going to turn out all right.

1.3 million People visited the museum during the first year. In each of the following years there were close to a million, an extraordinary figure for a marginal city such as Bilbao. In proper style, the museum’s managers began to reckon up what the museum meant for the local economy. The fact that the museum is 70% self-financing –and not just 50% as they had expected- is proof of its great success. With a couple of years they had concluded that the museum had paid the entire cost of its construction.

In other words, seduction was working perfectly and the aforesaid asymmetries –in information, in performative actions, in decision-making process-, in Bilbao’s case, have made it possible for a contemporary politics of global culture to benefit New York as well as Bilbao.

Lessons of the Guggenheim Effect on Various Social Discourses

The Guggenheim effect is paradigmatic of several of the most significant social and economic discourses. It initially affects the museum world, but its most significant lessons seem to center on the influence of art and architecture on the economy and culture in general. Now every city wants to have a Guggenheim museum. For better or for worse, we have to take into account the lessons that the Guggenheim Bilbao has taught us. To begin with, the Guggenheim effect forces us to relocate architecture and art within other fundamental discourses such as town planning, economics, tourism, information, entrainment and culture in general. The relationships between creation, exhibition, “objecthood”, fame, “museification”, community, etc; are not the same as they were barely a few decades ago. A fundamental aspect of the great

transformation we are undergoing in present-day society is that the meaning of these fields and the rules of the games they involve are changing.

One of the basic discourses that leads us to reevaluate general principles is that the original –in the etymological sense of *archos* or “source”- role of architecture as the leading art according to the classical definition of the arts. More than anything, the Guggenheim Bilbao is a great example of architectonics. This draws our attention to the singular importance architecture is acquiring in contemporary town planning and culture. Formerly, museums were usually seen as neutral buildings in which paintings could be hung. This has been museum directors’ preferred definition. This point of view has been radically changed by the Guggenheim Bilbao. Now architecture has begun to play a central role. Thus, architecture is also the artistic discipline that is most closely tied to power, since it requires huge amounts of public funds. We could say that Bilbao has made architecture fashionable and thus topical. As a consequence of this, now every city is dreaming about finding an emblematic work that might lend it an iconic identity and allow it to achieve the recognition of global culture as the Guggenheim has for Bilbao.

This building presents us with the most impressive case of architecture as spectacle and also as ideology. Its ideological function basically consists in the belief that soon an emblematic building will resolve all our needs in terms of the economy, town planning, culture, the arts, etc., and that it is our only alternative. Everyone in Bilbao knows the men who form part of architecture’s star system –Gehry, Foster, Calatrava, Pelli, Isozaki, etc.- and who have been carefully chosen so their names may be present in Bilbao’s urban landscape. They have thus been used as ads to “sell” the city, the same way that one might use Calvin Klein as a famous brand name if one wants to sell jeans.

Another basic discourse which has to do with the functions one expects a museum to fulfill nowadays is that of urban regeneration. In this sense the Guggenheim is doing wonders for Bilbao. Bilbao had to involve itself in a risky museum venture such as the Guggenheim’s precisely because it urgently needed to regenerate its urban fabric after the closing of the Abandoibarra docks, the shutdown of the blast furnace industry and the dismantling of miles of industrial facilities along the left bank. Due to its state of industrial, urban and demographic decline, the city had to make a high-stakes gamble. The industrial model had to be replaced by a service-based economy. Thus, a city-planning infrastructure for waterworks and new thoroughfares had to be created, leading to the building of the subway, a new airport, a suburban train, new bridges, as well as plans for a transportation terminal.

All this is related to the phenomenon of gentrification –the process of taking an industrial city in a state of decline whose urban fabric is decaying and revitalizing it on the basis of the new investments.⁹ The topic of gentrification has to do with the global city and the reorganization of international capital. It is a complex process which is preceded by an area’s breakdown: the difference between what a given derelict plot of land or building now costs and what it could be worth once renovated has to be large enough to rouse the interest of capital in investing in a given city. Without the ruins of the Abandoibarra docks and Euskalduna shipyards, what is being done now could not have been

done. The process of dilapidation is therefore a fundamental condition for the process of reconstruction to take place. In a way this entire urban dynamic outlines the cutting edge of international capital.

Related to all of the above, another primary discourse is that of cultural industries as economy-shaping factors. Its general premise is that a gallery, a museum, a library, a concert hall, etc., plays a fundamental role in reviving a city's economy. This has been done in many cities –Glasgow, Cleveland, Baltimore, Lille are a few of the most notorious cases.

To talk about the museum's influence in the local economy is of course to speak of tourism. The obvious evidence is the number of visitors to the museum. Collaterally, however, the Bilbao museum is also forcing the city to create a new culture of tourism where facilities and adequate services for foreign tourists become a priority. Newspapers publish the names of famous visitors who would never have come to Bilbao if it had not been for the museum. All this fosters a new mentality welcoming of foreigners of all nationalities and tongues who become the local economy's driving force and promote Bilbao as a tourist destination.

The mass media has played a fundamental role in all aspects of the Guggenheim effect. The discourse of the "Guggenheim miracle" promoted in newspapers such as the *New York Times* has been decisive in fostering interest in the museum. In cities like Barcelona or Madrid who receive 10 to 15 million tourists a year, "miracles" do not happen. In Bilbao, on the other hand, half a million tourists per year entails a miracle and, to quote the *New York Times*, can be termed a Cinderella story. The marriage between New York and Bilbao is so unequal that, from New York's point of view, it can only be seen as a fairy-tale wedding in which Prince Charming stumbled upon his lowly peasant bride by a sheer twist of fate.

This leads us to question up to what point Bilbao's miracle is the product of media and discourse. In the contemporary world, discourses often create the reality. Bilbao is an exemplary case of media success managed from New York in order to, as they say, put a city on the world map of architecture and art, so that this might then be translated into an image, fashion, tourists. This extraordinary success in terms of image is, above all, what Bilbao owes to New York.

This is tied to the phenomenon of so-called "emblematic buildings" or "flagships", which have become indispensable bait to lure tourists. The most often-cited case of such an emblematic building is the Sydney Opera house. This is about having an iconic building so singular that the city is identified with it. In global postmodern space where everything seems to be undergoing homogenization, these emblematic buildings' value in attracting travelers in search of something special is incalculable. The Guggenheim Bilbao has managed to become the most emblematic building of late twentieth-century architecture. It is on this level of discourse that the Bilbao's success is matchless, and this has made it the model to follow for any post-industrial city that needs to regenerate its image and urban fabric. This strategy is the one that really matters to politicians and city planners.

There is also a clearly political aspect to Bilbao's success. The fact that the Basques went to New York and negotiated directly with an elite museum's managers, sidestepping Madrid's mediation in the process, is an affirmation of Basque nationalism. One of the thousand ironies of this franchise museum is that Basque nationalism, which is supposed to be such a backward, rural movement, uses precisely this discourse of culture as spectacle and of emblematic architecture to gain access to an international platform and thus strengthen local nationalism. There is in this sense a clear political intention –a “post” phase in its relationship of dependence upon Madrid- through which the Basque Country reasserts itself as a totally autonomous agent in the postmodern global space of art and architecture. The Guggenheim is the most important Basque achievement on an international level during the post-Franco era. At the same time, Bilbao also reasserts itself on the home front vi-a-vis the other Basque cities –San Sebastián and Vitoria- in relation to which it was losing power.

If you will notice among all of these basic discourses to understand the transformations caused by the Guggenheim Bilbao, we have not yet mentioned the one that is supposedly the first and most important: that of museums. In other words, the Guggenheim Bilbao is *also* a museum. The same thing happens here as in Magritte's famous parody of the pipe with the caption “This is not a pipe”; we could also say of the Guggenheim Bilbao that “This is not a museum”,¹⁰ but for all those other iconic, media-related, artistic, city planning-related and tourism-related implications to have an initial referent, we must add that the Bilbao Guggenheim is indeed initially a real museum. We say “also” because the museum's traditional functions of housing collections, showing art, facilitating the aesthetic contemplation of the paintings it owns, educating the public in art history, etc. –functions which have classically been considered fundamental to a museum –become secondary in the face of the building's awesomeness and its ability to attract tourists. In classical museums what is truly valuable are the collections of masterpieces that visitors go to contemplate religiously. At the Guggenheim Bilbao the permanent collection is altogether secondary. To begin with, Krens wanted to turn it into a traveling collection and show it in various satellite museums. Crowd-pleasing temporary exhibits are the sexy part of the museum, as Krens has pointed out. For instance, the motorcycle show, or the Armani suit exhibit, in which the effect of entertaining tourists is as important as the art itself. It is not idly that Krens has redefined the museum's function as that of a theme park. From this show business perspective, if an exhibition like Rauschenberg's attracts no more than 200,000 visitors it is seen as a flop; it has to draw between half a million and a million people to cover costs and be considered a success.

The very concept of the museum is therefore changing substantially. Krens' great originality lies in having invented the first transnational art museum. The McDonalds' model affords efficiency, strict control, is very predictable and allows Krens to direct the Bilbao museum from New York. Organizing the same shows for New York and Bilbao implies making use of an economy of scale (or cost-sharing) whereby expenses are reduced at both ends. The criticizable aspects of this model are the ones we mentioned before regarding the asymmetries of the power to make decisions on anything that has to do with purchases or exhibition programming. The only thing left for peripheral branch offices to do is pay the expenses and serve as a screen for artistic interests projected from New York.

Krens is demonstrating that this global museum model can succeed. To begin with, it is a model well suited to capitalism, which becomes more globalized everyday. Several members of the Guggenheim's Board of Trustees are Wall Street sharks and they love this culture of the supranational company. In the case of a crisis, they are responsible for the Guggenheim's operation. The New York City media were very critical of Krens' projects at the outset but, when they realized what direct and indirect benefits it brought their city, they joined the Krens camp. Moreover, what news item could be more visually stunning than Gehry's fantastic building photographed from a thousand angles?

Another fundamental discourse we have not dealt with at all is that of art. Can a museum do miracles on the level of tourism, city planning, image, economy, and at the same time be irrelevant to art? I got an affirmative answer from most Bilbao artists I asked. A revealing fact: the Guggenheim's motorcycle show was visited by 900,000 people two years ago; however, the work of the winner of the most important prize for emerging artists, shown in an outstanding Bilbao gallery, only drew 300 visitors. In fact, art in and of itself does not seem to be enough to draw people to museums. We now need other attractions such as motorcycles, Armani suits, Famous people's clothes, or historical exhibitions to woo mass audiences.

The question more than one of us has asked is whether the "Guggenheim effect" is in the end good for the world of art and culture. We should begin by acknowledging that the prevalent definition of culture today is very much unlike the traditional definition of culture in the 1960s and 70s, when the main challenge of cultural politics was to figure out a way for the majority to have access to culture, books, movies, theater, etc. Nowadays these social interests are deemed secondary. Today what really matters is a concept of culture whose boundaries blur with information, news, showbiz, leisure and entertainment. These changes have been prompted by new technologies, television, and the new age of information. We cannot afford to lose our critical sense in the face of these profound re-definitions masquerading as globalization and technological innovation. The redefining of culture, art and museums that suits Krens or the US film industry does not necessarily suit the rest of us. In brief, the Guggenheim has created a new transnational museum model establishing several franchises designed and controlled from New York. The Guggenheim Bilbao has been a stanchion of Krens' global project. Spectacular architecture and the skillful use of mass media are the basis of his success. For Bilbao the new museum implies a radical change of image and is the flagship of an ambitious project of urban revival that forms the basis for a new service-based economy. Though it was a great success on the level of tourism, city planning and the media, the Guggenheim Bilbao's consequences for the art world and for the museum as an institution are more questionable.

¹ Quoted in Robin Cembalest, "The Guggenheim's High-Stakes Gamble", ARTnews, May 1992, p.86.

² The New York Times, June 21, 1992, p.27.

³ Hilton Kramer quoted in *Crónica de una seducción*, p. 68.

⁴ John Richardson, "Go, Go, Guggenheim", *The New York Review of Books*, July 16, 1992, p.22.

⁵ George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, Pine Forge Press, London, 1993, p.1.

⁶ Thomas Krens quoted in *Crónica de una seducción*, Nerea, Madrid, 1997, p.11.

⁷ Nancy Sullivan, "Inside Trading: Postmodernism and the Social Drama of Sunflowers in the 1980s Art World" in G. Marcus & F. Myers, *The Traffic of Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1995, p.257.

⁸ Herbert Muschamp, "The Miracle in Bilbao", *New York Times Magazine*, Sept. 7, 1997.

⁹ For an example of this kind of thinking, see Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, Routledge, London & New York, 1996.

¹⁰ I owe this idea to Nancy Faires.