

Of crypts and other spaces for art

In David Lynch's television series *Twin Peaks*, the following scene occurs: the small town's business magnate Benjamin Horne undergoes a temporary stint of psychosis, under the effect of which he begins to assemble a number of objects found in his office, rearranging them in a peculiar manner. When asked what he is doing (by those around him whose personal interests prevent them from openly calling him mad), he replies that 'if one could find the perfect arrangement of all objects in any particular space it could create a resonance', of which 'the benefits to the individual dwelling in that space could be extensive, far reaching'. According to Horne, there is something magical about specific assemblages of objects in space, which can come to enact certain effects.

The interrogation of the particular assemblage of works of art that is attempted under the title 'displays' is bound to stumble into and face a series of questions, some of which are to be addressed by this text. There is a sense in which the questions are an effect that is caused by this particular assemblage of objects in space (though not exactly Horne's hypothetical benefits of a perfect gathering). Once things are put together in space in a particular way, then some of these questions arise.

The first of these questions directly relates to this quasi-magical effect of gathering. It is the question 'what is a collection?'. At least in name, what we are faced with here is thought to be a collection. It is not only private individuals, but also states that engage in this activity of selectively gathering, of bringing together such works ('of art'). Talk of 'the collector' as such a private gatherer, of the psychopathologies that accompany such private functionaries, is difficult and problematic enough in itself. The boundary that separates the collector from the hoarder or the connoisseur is delicate enough when these are somehow characteristics of individuals. Is there connoisseurship involved in what here goes by the name of a 'collection', supposedly undertaken on behalf of more than just a private gatherer? And what about hoarding? There is, one suspects, a multiplication of derangements in the move from the problematic of the individual collector to that of a 'state' collection.

In other words, if it is already difficult enough to answer 'why collect?' for an individual collector, then it is almost impossible even to pose such a question for those who collect in the name of others. 'In the name of whom?' might be another question that arises. Are there particular ways in which this collecting addresses such questions? Should there be? If so, can they be made out through an interrogation of that which is collected itself?

This question renews our line of questioning by leading us to some more basic problems to be faced. I cannot here touch on the question of the accessibility of the collection itself, in order for such an interrogation even to begin. It should suffice to say that it is in the name of *others* that things are collected.

The question of authorship lingers close by: is there a way of uncontroversially establishing that the works collected are what they are? It seems like one of the magic functions peculiar to this particular assemblage of objects in space (the state 'collection' of the Republic of Cyprus, that is) that it causes the objects involved to lose the potential of being unfalsifiably identified. Some of the works seem to have been able to do this themselves prior to being delegated to the space of oblivion that their collection forges.¹ But this collection appears, in a quasi-Benjaminian manner, radical in attempting to seek to destabilise the notion that an artwork's originality matters.² It threatens future historians of art in Cyprus with their potential transformation into archaeologists faced with an alien culture.

No wonder, then, that very little, almost no dialogue, and much less critical inquiry (but, perhaps, more complaining that there are no such things) revolves around the space that is forged by this assemblage. Should this be just a matter of complaint? Such complaints might come from instrumental concerns regarding the immediate devaluation of cultural capital, another magical effect of its entrance into the space of oblivion. Should this remain a matter of a small complaint that gets superficially addressed, only to say that there has been a response to it, only to be forgotten?

No. By displacing the works in order to display them, by re-collecting them from their delegated space (of oblivion), by writing, some of these questions come to the fore, and begin to be addressed.

¹ Kashiallos, for example, as the visitor of the National Gallery might notice upon entrance, seems to have made up 'ancient' Cypriot artifacts. But do we know that Kashiallos made these himself? There doesn't seem to be adequate proof of authenticity for many of the works in the collection.

² The underlying cause for this might, nonetheless, be completely un-Benjaminian, in that the relevant information seems to presume a kind of verbal tradition. Rather than an attempted enactment of the 'death of the author' (which, in a radical manner, it is unavoidably heading towards), here one might diagnose a scheme based on the contingent imagined availability of a living author, who is always supposedly willing to testify to his work.