ARTHUR C. DANTO

AFTER THE END OF ART

CONTEMPORARY ART AND THE PALE OF HISTORY

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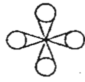

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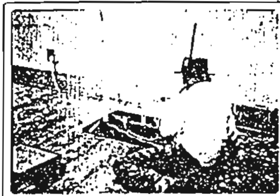

THE SCOTTISH SYMPHONY: CELTIC KINLOCH RANNOCK (1980) BY JOSEPH BEUYS. COURTESY: RONALD FELDMAN FINE ARTS, NEW YORK. PHOTO CREDIT: D. JAMES DEE.

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Museums and the Thirsting Millions

IN HENRY JAMES'S novel *The Golden Bowl*, one of the main characters, Adam Verver, is a wealthy art collector who accumulates artworks of the highest quality and in great quantity in order to stock a visionary museum in his own city—"American City," as James somewhat flatly calls it. He imagines an immense thirst for beauty on the part of the countless workers through whose labor he has become the wealthy man he is. As if in fulfillment of that debt, he will set up a "museum of museums"—a house on a hill "from whose doors and windows, open to grateful, thirsty millions, the higher, the highest, knowledge, would shine out to bless the land."[1] The knowledge was in effect the knowledge of beauty, and Verver must have belonged to a generation that still resonated to the stirring thought that beauty and truth were identical, and that "release from the bondage of ugliness" meant release from the bondage of ignorance, and hence that exposure to beauty was equivalent to a curriculum of knowledge. I think it unlikely that Verver greatly analyzed the theory that drove him, but "the urgency of release from the bondage of ugliness he was in position to measure," James tells us, for until Verver discovered the deep reality of artistic beauty, he had been "comparatively blind." At a certain moment, with the force of revelation, he discovered his own desire for perfection, to which he had previously been blind. His "museum of museums" was to be a "receptacle of treasures sifted to positive sanctity." The people of American City were to be the beneficiaries of what it took time and struggle for him to discover. I think it fair to say that something like the Verver spirit is palpable in the great museums erected in America in the *Golden Bowl* years (the novel was published in 1904).

The Brooklyn Museum, opened to the public in 1897, is a good example of Verver's spirit. It was designed by the great New York architectural firm of James's time, McKim, Mead, and White—they were responsible for Columbia University on Morningside Heights and many of the opulent structures of the city in that optimistic era—and was meant as a

museum of museums in two senses: it was to be the largest museum structure in the world, hence a museum of museums in the augmentative sense in which we speak of the "king of kings"; and it was a museum of museums in the aggregative sense, since it was to be made up of museums, each devoted to some department of knowledge (there was even, I learned, to be a museum of philosophy under its vast multidomed vault). It was to be set on the highest point in Brooklyn, and though only the west wing of the projected structure was in fact erected, it transmits its meaning through the classical temple inserted into its facade, with its eight colossal columns. There was something almost touching in the disparity between its architectural proclamation of grandeur and the limited extent of its fine arts holdings when it opened nearly a century ago. There is also something touching in the disparity between its vision and its incomplete state. The Brooklyn community clearly never rose to the tremendous vision embodied in its great architectural fragment. Its museum's circulating exhibitions are visited by the Manhattan art world; its permanent holdings are of the highest scholarly significance; its public collections are on the agenda of the Brooklyn public schools; it is a valuable resource for the increasing population of artists who live in Brooklyn but who would prefer, all things considered, to live in Manhattan if they could afford it. Yet Brooklynites who are neither artists nor scholars show no great evidence of the thirst that the high-minded Ververs of Brooklyn had in mind when they decided to build a museum "worthy of [Brooklyn's] wealth, her position, her culture and her people."[2] Aside from the throngs of schoolchildren that sweep through like flocks of shorebirds, its galleries are the kind of vast empty spaces those of a certain age are nostalgic for in the museums of their youth.

For the moment I want to leave aside the thirsting millions of the borough of Brooklyn—and of all the communities in the nation which possess largely unvisited museums erected in the spirit of the museum of museums—and reflect on what the Ververs of the nation must have supposed justified their beliefs in the museum's value. Verver had certainly experienced art before he attained his revelation—before, in James's words, "he scaled his vertiginous peak." But he had not experienced it, as we might say, using an unfashionable word, existentially or transformatively. By this I mean that he had not experienced it in a way that provided him a vision of the world and of the meaning of living in the world. There are such experiences with art, none more compelling than the one Ruskin describes to his father in a letter of 1848. It took place in Turin, where Ruskin was distracting himself with copying a detail of Veronese's *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* in the municipal gallery. He wrote the letter after hearing a sermon, preached in the Waldensian faith, and the juxtaposition of sermon and the painting served to "unconvert" him.

> One day when I was working from the beautiful maid of honor in Veronese's picture, I was struck by the gorgeousness of life which the world seems constituted to develop, when it is made the best of. . . . Can it be possible that all this power and beauty is adverse to the honor of the Maker of it? Has God made faces beautiful and limbs strong, and created these strange, fiery, fantastic energies, and created the splendor of substance and the love of it, created gold and pearls, and crystal, and the sun that makes them gorgeous, and filled human fancy with all splendid thoughts; and given to the human touch its power of placing and brightening and perfecting, only that all these things may lead His creatures away from Him? And is this mighty Paul Veronese . . . a servant of the devil; and is the poor little wretch in a tidy black tie, to whom I have been listening this Sunday morning expounding Nothing with a twang—is he a servant of God?[3]

Ruskin underwent, through experiencing a great painting, a transformation of vision, and he acquired a philosophy of life. James has left us, so far as I can tell, no comparable episode for Adam Verver, though my sense is that it would probably have been equivalent in some way, even if it involved "the splendor of substance and the love of it—gold and pearls and crystal." Verver courts his second wife by taking her to Brighton to view a collection of Damascene tiles. James *does* describe these: "The infinitely ancient, the immemorial amethystine blue of the glaze, scarcely more meant to be breathed upon, it would seem, than the cheek of royalty." Perhaps because Adam Verver is going to propose to a young and beautiful woman, he thinks "perhaps for the first time in his life, of the quick mind alone, the process really itself, as fine as the perfection perceived and admired."[4] In any case, being struck by the gorgeousness of substance, Verver simultaneously sees the circumambient ugliness which, I at least infer, he must suppose irremediable, or he would, given his vast energies, have found some way to change those conditions directly. Instead he thinks of art as something that reveals and at the same time redeems the bleakness of ordinary life. He feels a certain bleakness even in his own widowed existence, for he would not otherwise risk so much in embarking on a second, dangerous marriage—unless he saw the beauty he would acquire as equivalent to what a great work of art would bring into his life.

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These are not what one might call routine experiences of art or, in the case of Ruskin, a routine museum experience. Verver and Ruskin have encountered works of art in some existential context which the art then throws into perspective, like a piece of philosophy read at just the right moment. It is difficult to know if any other works in Turin's Municipal Gallery would have done the trick, or the Damascene tiles at any other time. It is also worth observing that the experience did not especially make either man a better person. Verver really did try to use the model of the artwork and of the museum as a model for human relationships, marrying his daughter off to what she describes as a *morceau de musée*, and turning his own ornamental wife into a sort of docent for the museum of museums. The museum is probably a very poor model for a happy life. And Ruskin's sad, unconsummated marriage with the luscious Effie Gray suggests that the robust hedonism underwritten by Veronese did not dissolve his sexual inhibitions. Doubtless a psychologist would find it significant that the "detail" that obsessed him was the flounce on the maid of honor's skirt. Notwithstanding that their lives fell short of the art that redeemed them, both men felt it imperative to extend to ordinary men and women the benefits of art—Verver through the museum of museums, Ruskin through his writings and his teaching of drawing at the Working Men's College in London. Both were aesthetic missionaries.

I think it is the possibility of such experiences as those I have described that justifies the production, the maintenance, the exhibition of art, even if the possibility, for whatever reason, is unactualized for most persons. Experiences of art are unpredictable. They are contingent on some antecedent state of mind, and the same work will not affect different people in the same way or even the same person the same way on different occasions. This is why we go back and back to the great works: not because we see something new in them each time, but because we expect them to help us see something new in ourselves. *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* is difficult to find in color reproduction because it is now, as a result of scholarship, believed to be mainly or altogether the work of Veronese's workshop: it does not figure as one of the mandatory Veroneses. And one wonders, had Ruskin known that, whether he could have been transformed as he was. There is, so far as I know, no special condition an artwork must satisfy in order to catalyze the reaction: few works have meant as much to me as Warhol's *Brillo Box*, and I have spent a fair portion of my waking time in working out the implications of my experience of it. I would only say that art can mean very little to someone who has so far been, as Adam Verver had been while he was amassing his

great fortune, "blind" and numb to art, even if they have experienced it or even lived with it. And the museum itself is justified through the fact that whatever else it does, it makes these kinds of experiences available. They have nothing to do with art-historical scholarship, nor with "art appreciation," whatever the virtues of these. And in truth the experiences can take place outside museums as well: I sometimes think my entire involvement with painting was abruptly determined when, as a soldier in the Italian campaign, I came across a reproduction of Picasso's blue period masterpiece, *La Vie*. I thought I would understand something profound if I understood that work, but I also know that I formed the resolution to make the pilgrimage to experience the painting itself, in Cleveland, whenever I were to return to civilian life. Still, typically, it is in museums that most of us encounter the works that affect us in the way the Veronese affected Ruskin. At a press event, not long ago, someone confessed to the curator of an exhibition of difficult photographs that he could not envision living with one of them, and her response seemed to me very deep. She observed that it was after all wonderful that we have museums for work like that, work that demands too much of us to be able to contemplate having it confront us in our homes.

At the same time, these experiences now seem to many to make the museum vulnerable to a kind of social criticism. They are not what the thirsting millions thirst for. With this I return to the vast populations of Brooklyn for whom the museum is at best a childhood memory, or, at worst, an architectural pile on Eastern Parkway of no particular significance to their lives. There is a radical vision in the air these days, certainly in the United States, which shares at least a premiss with that of Adam Verver: the thirsting millions thirst for art. The art for which they thirst, however, is not something the museum has so far been able to provide them with. What they search for is *an art of their own*. In an exceptionally searching essay into what is called "community-based art," Michael Brenson writes,

> Modernist painting and sculpture will always offer an aesthetic experience of a profound and indispensable kind, but it is one that can now do very little to respond to the social and political challenges and traumas of American life. Its dialogues and reconciliations are essentially private and metaphorical, and they now have limited potential to speak to those citizens of multicultural America whose artistic traditions approach objects not as worlds in themselves but as instruments of performances and other rituals that take place outside institutions. . . . Certainly images whose homes are

galleries and museums can do very little to respond to the present crisis of infrastructure in America.[5]

This essay appears in a volume which describes and celebrates a rather extraordinary exhibition which took place in Chicago in 1993 called *Culture in Action.* For the exhibition, a number of groups about as far in social distance from, let's say, The Art Institute of Chicago, as it is possible to imagine, were led by artists to create an "art of their own," which in its turn was about as far in terms of artistic distance as could, with qualifications, be imagined from what that great and imposing structure houses as great and imposing art. Brenson, who had been a distinguished art critic for *The New York Times*, is spiritually at home in such institutions, and he speaks about the art they contain, even in this essay, in ways that Adam Verver and John Ruskin would recognize and endorse:

> A great painting is an extraordinary concentration and orchestration of artistic, philosophical, religious, psychological, social, and political impulses and information. The greater the artist, the more each color, line, and gesture becomes both a current and a river of thought and feeling. Great paintings condense moments, reconcile polarities, sustain faith in the inexhaustible potential of the creative act. As a result they become emblems, inevitably, of possibility and power.
>
> ... To audiences who love painting, the experiences this kind of concentration and coherence offers can be not only profound and poetic but also ecstatic, even mystical. Spirit is incarnated in matter. ... Not only does an invisible spiritual world seem to exist, but it seems accessible, within the reach of anyone who can recognize the life of spirit in matter.
>
> Painting points toward the promise of healing.

This is a fairly exalted characterization of the art of the museum, and there can hardly be any measure by which it can be rendered commensurable with "an art of their own" of the kind to which *Culture in Action* dedicated itself. Probably the most controversial such art was a candy bar called *We Got It!* produced by the Bakery, Confectionary, and Tobacco Workers' International Union of America, Local No. 552, and described in the text as "The Candy of their Dreams." There is, as I say, no scale which would have this at one location and Veronese's *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* at another. There is a response to this, which I regard as dangerous, but it has to be faced. It is the response that renders all art compatible through relativization: Veronese is to the group represented by Verver and Ruskin—and by Brenson in one of his aspects—what *We Got It!* is to

the group represented by the workers of Local 552. So just as the candy bar is "an art of their own" for the latter group, *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* is an art of *their* own for—let us use the familiar expletives—the well-off white males for whom, in Brenson's explicit terms, painting is, as well as an emblem of possibility, an emblem of *power.* This position has the instant consequence of tribalizing the museum. It is valid for the group for whom the objects in it constitute an "art of their own"—and this leaves out that vast population of Brooklyn I described earlier who thirst, according to the premisses of this position, for an art of their own.

Because of the issues it raises, it seems to me that *Culture in Action* was a landmark exhibition. It crystallized so many of the issues which divide us into factions today that I hope it will be discussed until those issues are resolved. Some of them involve the museum, inevitably, and it is these about which I want to make a few comments. They are issues in which I myself have been involved in various ways, and so in part I am speaking out of my own experience.

1. *Public Art.* There has always been a certain kind of public art in America, namely, the erection of commemorative monuments. But in relatively recent times the Verver spirit has sought to meet the fact that public would not go to the museum by getting the museum to go to the public, putting nonmonuments in public spaces to which the public was to respond in the same way—aesthetically—as they would respond to works in the museum. This strategy was subtly architectural, in that it created a museum without walls by colonizing spaces in the name of the museum, ostensibly for the benefit of the public. The public itself had no say in the choice of art, which was determined by what I term the curatoriat—art experts who knew, as the public in general did not, what was good and what was not. There can be no question that this could be read as a play for power on the curatoriat's part, and it emerged as such in one of the great artistic dramas of our time, the conflict over Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* in Federal Plaza in New York. I am fairly proud that I argued for the sculpture's removal in my column in *The Nation*—a position I think could not have been argued for in any art publication in America. I remember Tony Korner, the publisher of *ArtForum*, saying that a great many there agreed with me, but there was no way the magazine could say as much. The art world drew its wagons in a circle at the hearings over the matter, though to no effect: the piece was removed, and the ugly emptiness of Federal Plaza was restored to the public for its own unexalted uses. In my own view, that controversy did more than

any single event to reveal the power component in museum reality to the larger public. Well, temples have always been emblems of power, but in a way disguised by the spirituality of their practices and their claims. As long as the museums were represented as temples to truth-through-beauty, the realities of power were invisible.

2. *The Public's Art.* There would be two ways to address this issue. One would be to give the public some greater say in the art that it was going to have to live with in extramuseal spaces. This should not present inordinate difficulties: it should indeed be one of the places where participatory democracy might in fact have a chance. The public to be involved with the artwork should participate in the decisions that are to affect their aesthetic lives. Christo engages the relevant public all the time, and indeed the decision-making process is part of the work he does, which is also, and importantly, ephemeral—later generations are not stuck with it. This decision is still, however, based upon the idea of the museum, which is wherever the art in question is to be: the extramuseal spaces are, for the duration of the art, detached museum precincts, the responses are museum responses, and the public has had input primarily as a consulting body—as a body of experts, in effect, on the subject of their own wishes, preferences, and desires. The response of some of the California landowners to Christo's *Running Fence*—which was achieved partly through their allowing it to be achieved—compare in poetry and intensity to Ruskin's response to Veronese, for those who have seen them in the Meisels Brother's film. I will return to the idea of participatory aesthetics later on.

Before turning to the other alternative—to create nonmuseal art by transforming the public into its own artist—one should recognize that once the public has been given entry to the decision-making processes of the museum, both museum and public are going to have to determine where if anywhere a line can be drawn in what can and cannot be exhibited. In the United States, our public has been greatly exercised over art with sexual content, and the concomitant issues of censorship. But in Canada, recently, there was a tremendous outcry over the acquisition of art of the most critically esteemed order—Barnett Newman's *Voice of Fire* and Mark Rothko's *Number 16*. Now one clear advantage of tribalizing the museum—of saying in effect that the museum is for *their own art* for a given "they"—is that it is up to "them" to determine what "their" art should be, and this is not the business of the public that stays out of the museum. This might make an end run around the issue of censorship and

the like, except that the burden of taxation falls on all the "theys" alike. This would not have been a problem with the museum of museums, which the Ververs of the community could support out of their deep pockets. They would have to deal with their consciences in allocating their dollars to art rather than to other good things. On the other hand, not even shows like *Culture in Action* could take place without tax considerations involving groups other than those empowered by the funding to produce an art of their own. There was major support from the National Endowment for the Arts, not to speak of a pageful of tax-exempt organizations. The text does not give us the budget for the entire operation, so I have no idea what it cost the taxpayers to produce *We Got It!* candy bars. The latter did not make much money, for all the effort that was made to sell them to the candy-hungry population of Chicago. They tasted not one bit the better for being art. On the other hand, the candy could not have been made as art had the candy-making plant not been in place, which the confectioners were able to use for the time it took to produce *We Got It!* Of course, Richard Serra was not obliged to set up a steel-rolling plant in order to get the immense plates of weathering steel *Tilted Arc* required. But that is by the way.

Now there is one feature of contemporary art that distinguishes it from perhaps all art made since 1400, which is that its primary ambitions are not aesthetic. Its primary mode of relationship is not to viewers as viewers, but to other aspects of the persons to whom the art is addressed, and hence the primary domain of all such art is not the museum itself, and certainly not public spaces constituted as museums by virtue of having been occupied by works of art which are primarily aesthetic, and which do address persons primarily as viewers. In an essay in *ArtForum* in 1992, I wrote as follows: "What we see today is an art which seeks a more immediate contact with people than the museum makes possible . . . and the museum in turn is striving to accommodate the immense pressures that are imposed upon it from within art and from outside art. So we are witnessing, as I see it, a triple transformation—in the making of art, in the institutions of art, in the audience for art."[6] I was not surprised to see this passage quoted as an enabling text in *Culture in Action*. In part I was unsurprised because my thought was in some measure inspired by the previous endeavor of the chief mover of the exhibition, Mary Jane Jacob, an independent curator of immense energy and social vision, whose exhibition of site-specific art in Spoleto-USA I thought remarkable.

Extramuseal art ranges from certain genres not easily regarded as belonging to museums, like performance art, or through art—*We Got It!* is

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a signal example—which is addressed to a particular community defined along racial, economic, religious, sexual, ethnic, or national lines—or along such other lines as may come to identify communities. The notorious Whitney Biennial of 1993 was an anthology of extramuseal art suddenly given exhibition space in a museum which acknowledged through that exhibition the trend I had in mind. I am afraid that, ready as I was to support such art, I hated seeing it in the museum. But that shows my politically retrograde nature. The natural outcome of an art of their own is almost certainly a museum of their own—a special interest museum, typified by the Jewish Museum in New York in its return to tribalism, or in the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, where the experience of the art is connected to the way individuals identify with the community whose art it is, and which split the audience into those whose art it is and the others.[7] (The claim that "the" museum is already tribalized rests on the claim that it is just like museums-of-their-own for various "theys"—splitting the audience between the white male or empowered class on one side and the disempowered and marginal on the other.)

3. *But Is It Art?* Part of what makes community-based art possible, at least of the sort exemplified by *We Got It!*, are certain theories which really had not been articulated before the early seventies, or the late sixties at the earliest, though an argument can be made that the ground was laid for these theories as early as 1915, when Marcel Duchamp advanced his first ready-mades. The most radical statement of the enfranchising theories would be Joseph Beuys's, who believed not only that anything could be a work of art, but, even more radically, that everyone was an artist (which of course is different from the idea that anyone can be an artist). The two theses are connected. If art is narrowly understood in terms, say, of painting or sculpture, then the latter thesis is that everyone is a painter or a sculptor, and this is as false on the face of it as that everyone is a musician or a mathematician. No doubt everyone can learn to draw or model up to a certain point, but usually rather short of the point at which painting or sculpture as art begin. There is, so far as I can tell, no room for such invidious gradations in the Beuysian enfranchisement. It is art if it is art, otherwise it is not art. There may be special criteria by which we can tell *We Got It!* from other candy bars, but certainly not the criteria by which candy bars themselves are graded into better and worse—by taste, size, nutritional considerations, or whatever. *We Got It!* may fall short of these on all candy-bar criteria and still be art while *they* are merely candy

bars. A candy bar that is a work of art need not be some especially good candy bar. It just has to be a candy bar produced with the intention that it be art. One can still eat it since its edibility is consistent with its being art. And it is worth observing that the first in a series of what are called "multiples" by Beuys consisted in a piece of chocolate mounted on a piece of plain paper. There would certainly be a value in working out the differences between this work and *We Got It!*—and between both of these and the immense block of chocolate the young conceptual artist Janine Antoni incorporated into her 1993 work *Gnaw*. It is to begin with a difference between subsistence, snacking, and gluttony, and hence between the nutritive conditions of a soldier, someone with a sweet tooth, and a bulemic. Meanwhile, it is something of an irony that there is a sense of "quality" which derives from connoisseurship and the dynamisms of the secondary market, where someone might advertise one of Beuys's chocolates as of "especially high quality." This would mean, among other things, that the corners are sharp and the edges clean. But that has nothing, one would think, to do with the spirit of the multiple as art. It would be like asking a high price for Duchamp's snow shovel on the grounds that "they don't make shovels like that any more"—i.e., on grounds of its workmanship and the thickness of its metal. Nor has it much to do with the array of meaning made available to art when artworks themselves are made out of chocolate.

It is easy to see that "quality" has nothing to do with being art under Beuysian considerations, and it is in these terms that "quality" was questioned in a famous, controversial piece by Brenson in *The New York Times*, published under the title "Is Quality an Idea whose Time has Gone?" It is worth stressing, I think, that the irrelevance of the concept of quality is not as such a mark of "an art of their own." Women's art—and I am thinking not of the fine art women have made but of traditional women's art like quilts, which did not gain initial entry into museums of fine art—was clearly subject to assessment by reference to quality. Because of iconoclast prohibitions, Jews and Muslims did not produce painting and sculpture, but there can be little doubt that what they did produce as art was marked by criteria of quality. Even the work of Beuys, "the most prophetic voice," according to Brenson, for *Culture in Action*, is sometimes better than at other times, by criteria that the repudiation of the idea of quality threw into question. I think there would be consensus on which of Beuys's works were best and why, and what makes them good when they are good. And indeed, Beuys's work provides experiences of the same order as that provided by the Damascene tiles or Veronese's

Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. In 1970, for example, Beuys put on a performance (he used the term "action") called *Celtic (Kinloch Rannoch) Scottish Symphony* at the Edinburgh College of Art. There is a photographic record of him, in his characteristic felt hat and hunter's vest, standing in a large bleak room, or kneeling on its paint-encrusted floor, surrounded by some electronic equipment. Here is a description of part of the performance:

> His actions are reduced to a minimum: he scribbles on a board and pushes it around the floor with a stick in a forty-minute circuit of Christiansen [i.e., the pianist], shows films by himself (not entirely successful as the editing destroys the rhythm), and of Rannoch Moor drifting slowly past the camera at about 3 mph. He spends something over an hour and a half taking bits of gelatin off the walls and putting them on a tray which he empties over his head in a convulsive movement. Finally he stands still for forty minutes.
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> Thus told it sounds like nothing, in fact it is electrifying. And I am not speaking for myself alone: everyone who sat through the performance was converted, although everyone, needless to say, had a different explanation.[8]

I draw attention to the word "conversion," which echoes Ruskin's "unconversion." And I think everyone who reads the description wishes they had been there to experience it for themselves. There is sometimes a tendency to think about Beuys as if he were someone who had been influenced by Beuys's ideas. But he was an astonishing artist with a compelling style and capable of amazing effects on people.

There is a response to these objections. It might be argued that members of marginalized communities that produce art to which value is relevant have internalized the values of the dominant but essentially alien artistic culture, and that Beuys, for all that he was a prophet, remained contaminated by the institutions that formed him. True community-based art is subject to criteria, but they are not of the kind that apply to the dominant artistic culture enshrined in museums and their satellite institutions.

But it is not my aim here to protract the argument. It is possible to suppose that the kind of art the museum defines has had its day and that we have lived into a revolution in the concept of art as remarkable as the revolution with which that concept emerged, say around 1400, and which made the museum an institution exactly suited to art of that kind. I myself argue here, and in a number of places, that the end of art has come, meaning that the narrative generated by that concept has come to its internally projected end. When art changes, the museum may fall away as the fundamental aesthetic institution, and extramuseal exhibitions of the sort *Culture in Action* exemplifies, in which art and life are far more closely intertwined than the conventions of the museum allows, may become the norm. Or the museum may itself become aesthetically marginalized as it becomes tribalized to what might still remain the dominant artistic culture, understood now as the province of certain sexual, economic, and racial types. That would certainly take a lot of pressure off the museum, but at something of a price.

Before speaking of that, let me take up the "But is it art?" question, with reference particularly to such works as *We Got It!* It is certainly not art by "museum of museums" criteria, but to the degree that we allow the possibility of conceptual revolutions in art, that need not count for a lot. What we can say is that there has to be some extrahistorical concept of art for there to be conceptual revolutions in, and the analysis of this is a task for the philosophy of art, a task in which I feel some steps have been taken, some by me, and that enough is understood to be able to say that *We Got It!* quite plausibly qualifies as art under an adequate philosophical definition which nobody so much as surmised had to be given before relatively recent times. There will be a lot missing from it by criteria appropriate to the concept of art that has prevailed for some centuries. But then there may be a lot missing from work enfranchised by that older concept which *We Got It!* has got by criteria suited to the concept of art that work like it enables us better to understand.

4. *The Museum and the Public.* In saying that the museum is limited in what it is able to do for multicultural America, I tend to think the museum is a bit undersold. I do not think the experiences communicated by Ruskin to his father, or by James to us in describing Adam Verver, or by the witness to Beuys's action in Edinburgh in 1970 really are quite as restricted by class, gender, race, and the like as the theses of multiculturalism make out. One needs of course to have some knowledge in order to have those experiences, and that is the kind of knowledge that has to be conveyed to people if they are to have those experiences. That is knowledge of a different order altogether than art appreciation of the sort transmitted by docents, or by art historians, or by the art education curriculum. And it has little to do with learning to paint or sculpt. The experiences belong to philosophy and to religion, to the vehicles through which the meaning of life is transmitted to people in their dimension as

human beings. And at this point I return to Adam Verver's conception of the thirsting millions. What they thirst for, in my view, what we all thirst for, is meaning: the kind of meaning that religion was capable of providing, or philosophy, or finally art—these being, in the tremendous vision of Hegel, the three (there are only three) moments of what he terms Absolute Spirit. I think it was the perception of artworks as fulcrums of meaning that inspired the templelike architectures of the great museums of James's time, and it was their affinity with religion and philosophy that was sensed as conveying knowledge. That is, art was construed as a fount rather than merely an object of knowledge. I think other expectations must have replaced it, reflected in other architectures, like that of Rogers and Peano's masterpiece in Paris, the Centre Pompidou. These other expectations, whatever they may be, are probably good and valid reasons for making, supporting, and experiencing art, but perhaps the museum is more and more an obstacle to be gotten round, predicated as it is on the possibility of the kind of meaning I have sought to illustrate. My own sense is that these expectations are dependent upon that kind of meaning, and hence on the museum as dedicated to making it available. The museum has meanwhile sought to be so responsive to so many other matters that it is a tribute to Adam Verver's intuition—that there is something for which the millions thirst—that their galleries are still hung with paintings, their cases filled with marvelous objects of the kind he negotiated for with his intended betrothed in Brighton a century ago.

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5. *Art after the End of Art.* That *We Got It!* should be a work of art and not a mere bar of chocolate is possible only after the end of art, enfranchised as such by certain powerful theories which emerged in the 1970s to the effect that anything can be a work of art and everyone is an artist. Its being "community-based" art rather than the work of a single individual is the achievement of certain enfranchising political theories which held, as one of their programmatic corollaries, that groups of individuals alleged to find no meaning in the art of museums should not be deprived of the meanings art might confer upon their lives. *We Got It!* does not redeem for the status of art every candy bar in creation, anymore than Duchamp made artworks of every snow shovel by making an artwork of one. Having conceded as much, let us ask ourselves where the museum stands after the concept of "an art of their own" has been accepted.

I think the first thing to be said is that not everyone for whom *We Got It!* was art belonged to that group for which the bar of chocolate was an "art of its own." As with all such cases, the work split the audiences

between those whose identity as a community was embodied in the art, and those who were no part of that community but who perhaps believed in community-based art—like Michael Brenson, for example, or the various art-world-based individuals who worked with the various communities to facilitate the different artworks which made up the exhibition *Culture in Action.* These were individuals who were themselves thoroughly at home in the world of the museum and the art gallery, the art exhibition and the art periodical. *We Got It!* was in no sense an art of *their* own. And indeed, they stood to *We Got It!* in very much the same sort of relationship in which Ruskin stood to Veronese's *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* or in which Adam Verver did to the blue tiles of Damascus, which instantly helps to detribalize that art: it was not an "art of their own" for comfortable white males. They just happened to be the ones who appreciated it, the way the not altogether uncomfortable white men and women who formed the audience for works such as *We Got It!* appreciated that work, to be sure not on aesthetic but on moral and political grounds. So *We Got It!* is in no sense an art exclusively to those for whom it is an art of their own. It belongs to everyone, as it should, being art. Indeed, it is fair to say that while the art world did not make the chocolate bar, they made it possible for it to be art when the confectioners made it under certain auspices, and at a certain moment in history—i.e., after the end of art, when in a sense everything is possible. Whether *We Got It!* will ever yield anyone the kind of experience *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* yielded Ruskin is quite unpredictable—after all, to how many did that very painting yield an experience comparable to Ruskin's? To someone who knows the art history of the candy, it is imaginable that they should be moved to think of all those men and women, far from the art world, thinking of what gave meaning to their lives and deciding that they could make art out of that and at the same time the best candy bar in Chicago! The mere possibility of that more than justifies putting the work in the museum. How else are we to preserve it for the edification of future generations?

NOTES

1. Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*, ed. Gore Vidal (London and New York: Penguin English Library, 1985), 142–43.

2. Linda Ferber, "History of the Collections," in *Masterpieces in the Brooklyn Museum* (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum, 1988), 12. See also "Part One: History," in *A New*

Brooklyn Museum: The Master Plan Competition (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum and Rizzoli, 1988), 26–76.

3. John Ruskin, communication to his father, in Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Early Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 256.

4. James, *The Golden Bowl*, 220.

5. Michael Brenson, "Healing in Time," in Mary Jane Jacob, ed., *Culture in Action: A Public Art Program of Sculpture Chicago* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 28–29.

6. Arthur C. Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1992), 12.

7. I discuss this in my "Post-Modern Art and Concrete Selves," in *From the Inside Out: Eight Contemporary Artists* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1993).

8. Caroline Tisdale, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1979), 195–96.