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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Psychoanalysis and radical philistinism in the museum

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Abstract This article proposes a psychoanalytic reading of 'radical philistinism' in museum contexts. Radical philistinism in the museum is defined as the proposition that curatorship can continue while civilisation falls and cultivation fails. The participation of museums in a cultural game that produces contingent bodily trauma in dominated groups, is contrasted with examples in which a psychoanalysis of the museum allows for a focus on curatorial acts that bring about a worsening or deterioration of the games of culture and civilisation in which the museum is enmeshed.

Keywords Museum · Trauma · Psychoanalysis · Philistinism · Auto-icon

Introduction

This article addresses two aspects of the theme of this special issue. The first of these is the trauma of the modern museum's dissimulated origins in violence and the characteristics of a decolonial response to this violence. The second aspect is the way that museums naturalise the sociocultural biases of the canon by inculcating standards of taste, aesthetics and value in their audiences. In what follows, these two themes are linked by the possibility of a psychoanalytic reading of 'radical philistinism' in museum contexts. Radical philistinism in the museum can be defined as the proposition that curatorship can continue while cultivation fails and civilisation falls. Using two examples of radically philistine curatorship, psychoanalysis is brought to bear in order to show how radical philistinism might assume the status of a curatorial act. The examples also demonstrate a 'before' and an 'after'

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for what Jacques Lacan referred to as the 'discourse of the analyst', which addresses trauma in particular ways that involve the renunciation of control and mastery. Within the four discourses identified by Lacan in his Seminar XVII ('master', 'university', 'hysteric' and 'analyst'), only the analyst's discourse 'is satisfied with the condition of traumatic disorder, seeing it as a place to begin, rather than as a terminal point. The analyst's speech, precisely because it does not aim at truth, allows truth to assume a causal or initiating role for the analysand' (Nobus & Quinn, 2005, p.132). As Lacan puts it in his seminar on the four discourses, 'knowledge falls to the rank of symptom, seen from another perspective. And this is where truth comes in … The effect of truth is only a collapse of knowledge' (Lacan, 1991/2007, p. 186). In the analyst's discourse, the analyst's interpretations are sidelined; what comes to the fore is how the analyst intervenes within the analysand's existing networks of representation, often in a seemingly crass or dumb way, rather than offering an informed 'reading' of them. This shift from interpretation to intervention within the analyst's discourse is central to an understanding of how radical philistinism works in a museum context. In this article, the two examples of radically philistine curatorship are used to define a 'before' and 'after' for the discourse of the analyst. This indicates the place of psychoanalysis in relation to games of culture and cultivation within an 'applied psychoanalysis' of the museum and, more specifically, the role of the analyst's discourse as an alternative to mastery that begins with symptoms of trauma and which employs intervention, rather than interpretation, to achieve an ethical aim.

The 'before' example of radical philistinism in the museum is related to the historical possibility of the discourse of the analyst as the alternative to a discourse of mastery that provides no access to the unconscious. It concerns the resistance of the museum to the possibility of a radically philistine curatorship and focuses on the display of Jeremy Bentham's auto-icon, consisting of the philosopher's skeleton, clothes and a wax head, in the exhibition *Like Life: Sculpture, Color, and the Body (1300–Now)* at the Met Breuer museum in New York (Syson & Wagstaff, 2018). In his seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan notes that Bentham's utilitarianism heralds 'a radical decline in the function of the master, a function that obviously governs all of Aristotle's thought and determines its persistence over the centuries' (Lacan, 1986/1992, p.11) and that this was 'significant for the new direction which culminated in Freud'. This assertion sits oddly with the claim, both within the literature on psychoanalysis and outside it, that Bentham's philosophy is essentially a discourse of power and control. As I will show, the curatorial and museological concept of Bentham's auto-icon is a form of radical philistinism that is directed against prejudice and which, rather than being a figure of instrumental control, anticipates the discourse of the analyst through Bentham's understanding of the relationship between 'fictions' and 'fictitious entities'. In his philosophy of language, Bentham opposes the social utility of the 'active nihilism' of the fictitious entities (abstract terms) through which social communication nonetheless takes place, to the social disutility of the 'passive nihilism' of fictions (for example, fictions of 'good taste' and 'bad taste') which attribute a real existence to non-entities. By means of fictitious entities, communication can continue even as the ruling ideals of ethical self-perfection supported by groundless fictions such as

'good taste', and the shame of the dominated that these fictions produce, disintegrate in the transition to a utilitarian ethical framework.

A successful example of radical philistinism in the museum that comes 'after' the discourse of the analyst is the artist Sonia Boyce's 'Six Acts' intervention at Manchester Art Gallery in 2018.[1] In this intervention, the trauma caused by a particular work of art in a museum collection was allowed to assume the status of a causal truth by means of a curatorial act. On 26 January 2018, as part of her intervention, Boyce invited the museum to temporarily remove one of its signature objects, J.W. Waterhouse's painting *Hylas and the Nymphs* (1896). Showing Hylas, a character from Greek mythology who was lured to his death by a group of seven nymphs, it was installed opposite *Sappho* (1877), a painting by Charles-Auguste Mengin depicting the lesbian icon and poet, semi-naked and about to throw herself off a cliff because of her failed heterosexual love for Phaon. Boyce's intervention took place within existing games of culture and cultivation in which the museum was enmeshed, but its emphasis on the causal truth of trauma meant that curatorship continued in the cause of the fall of a cultural game. The removal of this painting took place as part of 'The Gallery Takeover', an ongoing programme that invites artists to engage with the gallery's collection of art. Prior to the event, Boyce initiated a dialogue with curators, technicians and volunteers at Manchester Art Gallery about the historical paintings on display. Waterhouse's painting stood out in these discussions; it was a focus for conflicting responses by the general public and was reported as eliciting uncomfortable feelings. In the final discussion session with the gallery staff, a consensus emerged to temporarily take down *Hylas and the Nymphs*. As context for the removal of the painting, Boyce developed an evening of performances to encourage public engagement with the gallery's permanent collection, including Lasana Shabazz responding to a portrait of the black Shakespearian actor Ira Aldridge and members of the drag collective Family Gorgeous improvising in front of other nineteenth-century paintings in the gallery, including *Hylas and the Nymphs*. 'The evening was one of "masquerade, dressing up, acting up, humour and anxiety", says Boyce. It was not just about taking Hylas off the walls; it was also about making gender mischief in the galleries' (Higgins, 2018). Six Acts also referenced a key event in the history of Manchester Art Gallery, which saw three women vandalise artworks in the gallery on the evening of 3 April 1913. By means of a curatorial act, Boyce disturbed the invidious relationship between the curation of the gallery and the uncomfortable feelings that *Hylas and the Nymphs* was known to elicit, which were grounded in cultural representations that link aesthetic standards to patriarchy and heteronormativity.

These two examples of Bentham's auto-icon and Boyce's Six Acts assume their 'before' and 'after' positions relative to the discourse of the analyst because they propose an 'ethics of the fall' as a direct response to the trauma caused by games of culture and cultivation. This fall is ethical because it proposes the dissolution of the controlling representations that produce trauma. In this regard, Bentham and Boyce

[1] Sonia Boyce's intervention is documented in her film and wallpaper installation *Six Acts*, see https://www.contemporaryartsociety.org/news/recent-acquisitions/cas-acquires-installation-sonia-boyce-manchester-art-gallery-based-takeover-gallery-january-2018/.

are also directly linked by an address to the cultural politics of pleasure, specifically in relation to the connection between heteronormativity and cultural norms. Recent scholarship by the Bentham Project at University College London (UCL) on Bentham's manuscripts on 'sexual irregularities' and an associated publication on Bentham, aesthetics and the arts, (Julius et al., 2020) allow us to revise the assessment of Bentham as someone who wished to assume control and mastery over the social field by reducing or eliminating contingency. In particular, this new scholarship and research has highlighted Bentham's rejection of any natural and assumed link between sexual pleasure and reproductive activity. This means that Bentham at once included sexual behaviour within a variety of human tastes and propensities and rejected the idea of 'good taste', on the grounds that it set up a baseless and therefore limitless antipathy to the pleasures of others, thereby reinforcing distinctions between dominant and dominated groups. Similarly, Sonia Boyce's intervention, which included the temporary removal of a heteronormative painting and an emphasis on its queer contexts, raised the stakes on the questions of who gets to define what counts as culture and what does not and correspondingly how people can 'consider these artworks in a non-binary way' (Boyce, 2018).

The manner in which museums narrow possibilities within the cultural field by inculcating standards of taste, aesthetics and value in their audiences has been rigorously analysed by Pierre Bourdieu and other sociologists who have adopted his 'socioanalytical' approach. With reference to the theme of this special issue, what is significant about Bourdieu's socioanalysis is that he notes that contingent bodily trauma in dominated groups (including 'shame, timidity, anxiety, guilt') is prepared for in advance by dominant groups who set the terms of a cultural game and, in so doing, produce 'visible manifestations, such as blushing, inarticulacy, clumsiness, trembling, all ways of submitting, however reluctantly, to the dominant judgement' (1997/2000, p. 169). This article explores the possibility of reversing this process by means of an intervention, a contingent response to trauma that assumes the status of a curatorial act and which therefore alters the parameters of a cultural game. This approach to an applied psychoanalysis of the museum is tied to the clinical practice of psychoanalysis by what Dany Nobus (Nobus, 2021) has called psychoanalysis as morosophy, in which 'what patients stand to gain from the process is tantamount to what the process allows them to lose'. What is lost in this instance, according to Nobus, is the authoritative, controlling force of a dominant representation. What Bentham's auto-icon proposes and what Six Acts realised, is a museological response to shame, timidity, anxiety and guilt that requires a loss of culture and cultivation. As I will show, this relates to the project of decolonisation and 'decolonial philistinism' (Pauwels, 2017) precisely because 'decolonization is not a metaphor' (Tuck & Yang, 2012). An original loss of power and agency in those who have been traumatised and dominated, must be redressed by a loss of agency in relation to the dominated by those who have dominated them.

Radical philistinism

Jeremy Bentham is infamous for the stark reversal of cultural values he proposed when he said that 'prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry' (1825, p. 206). It was this statement above all that has led to Bentham being accused of being an incorrigible philistine. Dave Beech, who with John Roberts issued a significant challenge to the received understanding of philistinism in articles in the *New Left Review* in the 1990s, wrote that 'both the assault on taste as prejudice and the avowed superiority of utility to taste confirm Bentham as a radical philistine – not in the sense of someone who lacks cultivation but someone who regards cultivation as lacking something' (2014, p. 242). Philistines lack cultivation because they view the current conditions of public culture as either fit or unfit for their own instrumental purposes. Bentham's auto-icon, on the other hand, is 'radically philistine' in the two ways that Beech draws our attention to – first, because the auto-icon was the first object in a proposed museum dedicated to eliminating the prejudice against dissection and the exhibition of the remains of the dead and, second, because its 'utility' is as an expression of Bentham's ethics rather than as a means for instrumental reason or social control. While the curators of the *Like Life* exhibition acknowledged that the auto-icon embodied a refusal of hierarchies of taste, they did not acknowledge Bentham as curator, that is, as offering a self-sufficient curatorial argument for the transition to utilitarian ethics. Later in this article, I use a psychoanalytic reading of the assemblage of the auto-icon as an example of a Benthamite statement on ethics in a museum context, in relation to Jacques Lacan's reading of Bentham's theory of language and the 'utilitarian conversion' (Lacan, 1986/1992, p. 11) in ethics. For Lacan, Bentham is significant for psychoanalysis not simply because Freud's pleasure principle is defined as a drive to obtain pleasure and avoid unpleasure, but because Bentham's emphasis on pleasure as public and political marks a decisive break with Aristotelian ethics. The ethical transition to aggregates of pleasure that Bentham sought refuses the possibility of a 'master ethics' that sustains a dominant class, even where this concerns the dominance of humans over other animals. The address to a 'master ethics', which defines notions of right and wrong from within the parameters of a cultural game, is also what informed Sonia Boyce's intervention in Manchester Art Gallery. Following the removal of *Hylas and the Nymphs* on 26 January 2018, Manchester Art Gallery (2018) archived public comments on the intervention, including one from 'Dr Leigh' posted on 1 February 2018, saying 'this is the height of the new philistinism, treating a painting as a mere ideological object, an excuse to indulge in 21st century identity politics'. The accusation of instrumentalism, of treating a painting as a mere ideological object, shows where radical philistinism differs from standard definitions of the philistine as a person who lacks cultivation. Boyce (2018) herself wrote about these kinds of distinctions in the context of Six Acts in an article in *The Guardian* entitled 'Our removal of Waterhouse's naked nymphs painting was art in action'. Noting that 'it is very rare that a range of museum workers (public events programmers, volunteers, gallery invigilators and security staff, conservation and gallery technicians and cleaners),

let alone visitors, are invited into a dialogue about what goes on or comes off the walls, or why', she remarked:

> Over a number of sessions since last summer, I have been involved with a group of Manchester Art Gallery staff wishing to take part in a dialogue about the works in the galleries. One session asked why a mythological painting is judged so differently to a photograph. Participants remembered the confiscation by police in 2009 of a photographic work in Tate Modern by Richard Prince, of child actress and model Brooke Shields aged 10, depicted with an oiled torso in a bathtub. Is it the classical story versus the documentary image that makes one kind of object charming and the other so problematic as to be judged illegal? (Boyce, 2018)

Here Boyce identifies a game of cultivation that can separate a classical story from a documentary image in such a way as to discount the contingent feelings of anxiety and discomfort that the depiction of the classical story had caused. Boyce's reference to 'art in action' in the title of her piece indicated the difference between a defence of art as curatorial intervention and a defence of cultivation. Following the publication of Sonia Boyce's article, this defence of cultivation was offered in an article by Jonathan Jones (2018), the art critic of *The Guardian*. It is important to note that in this article Jones did not defend *Hylas and the Nymphs*, which he said was 'very silly', adding that if he were placed in front of the painting he would be poking fun at it. What Jones was defending was his right to stand in front of the painting and laugh at it; in other words, the right of a cultivated spectator to dismiss the qualms of others in pursuit of a reliable distinction between the silly and the serious within the game of culture.

What was crucial in Boyce's 'radically philistine' intervention was the use of a dialogue with gallery staff to replace knowledge about cultural norms with a confrontation with trauma.

In 'The politics of museal hospitality: Sonia Boyce's neo-Victorian takeover in Six Acts', Felipe Espinoza Garrido and Ana Cristina Mendes argue for the locus of those cultural norms in the Victorian era (Garrido and Mendes, 2020). They refer to Six Acts' as an intervention that, while consistent with what they see as a preoccupation with nineteenth-century Britain in Sonia Boyce's work as a whole, nonetheless temporarily altered the coordinates of the comforting neo-Victorianism promoted by Manchester Art Gallery. This suggests another, specifically cultural historical, way to read the 'before' and 'after' positions I have indicated for Bentham and Boyce. Bentham's auto-icon is pre-Victorian, yet to eminent Victorians such as Thomas Babington Macaulay and Matthew Arnold, Benthamism represented the terminus of culture in philistinism and, for Macaulay in particular, the collapse of his dearly held distinction between European civilization and non-European barbarism (Macaulay, 1829). However, in this article, my emphasis is not on the historical dynamics of Victorianism and neo-Victorianism, but rather the specifically psychoanalytic question of how radical philistinism answers the trauma caused by the games of culture, as these are played out within the museum, with a disruptive museology that brings about a worsening or deterioration of these games. The next two sections introduce the radically philistine character of Bentham's auto-

icon and its inclusion within the terms of a culturally liberal museology, as well as the relationship of the auto-icon to the discourse of the analyst.

Like Life

Between 21 March and 22 July 2018, Jeremy Bentham's auto-icon, consisting of the philosopher's skeleton, clothes and a wax head, posed 'in the attitude in which I am sitting when engaged in thought' (Bentham, 1832), was displayed in the exhibition *Like Life: Sculpture, Color, and the Body (1300–Now)* at the Met Breuer museum in New York. After Bentham's death on 6 June 1832, the assembly of the auto-icon followed his public dissection by his friend Dr Southwood Smith and was intended to be the first exhibit in a museum of auto-icons. *Like Life*, on the other hand, was a 'transhistorical' and trans-genre exhibition, curated by Luke Syson and Sheena Wagstaff, that combined contemporary and ancient works of art with waxwork models, dolls, dummies and religious relics. In her review of the exhibition for *The New York Times*, Roberta Smith (2018) noted that 'the Met clearly means to incubate a new at-home version of the international biennial, something with the combination of buzz, entertainment and historical seriousness that appeals to all levels of art appreciation, pro and layman'. Smith also noted that Bentham's auto-icon, which was kept on permanent display at Senate House, University of London, until it was moved to the UCL Student Centre in February 2020, was at the top of a list of 'flabbergasting loans and encounters' that had been brought together in the exhibition. This might suggest that Syson and Wagstaff had exceeded expectations in including the only material icon of the philistine cult of utilitarianism within their exhibition of cultural artefacts. Forty-four years before Jeremy Bentham's auto-icon was displayed in *Like Life*, the place of the auto-icon in the domain of art, and the particular characteristics of its modes of self-archiving and display, had been addressed by Marcel Broodthaers in his film *Figures of Wax, (Jeremy Bentham)* (1974). This film, made while Broodthaers was teaching at the Slade School of Art, UCL and shown to Slade students on 10 December 1975, juxtaposed the auto-icon with shop window displays and street scenes, and included a one-sided 'conversation' between Broodthaers and Bentham. In her article on Broodthaers' film, Shana G. Lindsay (2013a, 2013b, p. 107) argues that *Figures of Wax* stages a kind of stalemate, in which the auto-icon cannot escape being fetishised, while Broodthaers cannot sidestep the utilitarian argument that the auto-icon was intended to offer by presenting it within an artwork.

The stalemate to which Lindsay refers was amply demonstrated in *Like Life*. In her catalogue essay for the exhibition, Sheena Wagstaff suggests that *Life Like*, in emphasising an anachronistic, thematic approach that juxtaposed objects from contrasting periods, had ensured that 'the dominance of Western narratives of art and aesthetics has been – and continues to be – interrogated and disrupted' (Syson et al., 2018, p. 13). It did this, she claims, by 'foregrounding objects that both engage with the histories of classicism and contend with chromatic figuration: sculptural bodies rendered to evoke a sense of literal presence, like life' (Syson et al., 2018, p. 3). Wagstaff emphasises that the discovery of the polychromatic

character of ancient sculpture, in which the body appeared within the realm of art, constituted a profound aesthetic shock, because the presumption of the whiteness of these sculptures was revealed to be an illusion. In another essay in the catalogue, Brinda Kumar refers specifically to Bentham's auto-icon as a break with the history of religious relics, in which the preservation of Bentham's skeleton was intended to reflect an atheistic outlook. Kumar also refers particularly to the wax portrait head of Bentham by Jacques Talrich, a French military surgeon, later anatomical wax modeller for the Faculté de Médecine in Paris. It is worth noting that it was only the failure of Southwood Smith's procedure for preserving Bentham's head, which was intended to be treated in the Māori fashion (*mokomokai*), that meant that it was replaced with Talrich's waxwork, which undermined Bentham's intention to provide identity rather than similitude. The fact that Bentham proposes auto-icons of the head alone, immediately suggests the importance of displaying the actual head rather than a facsimile of it. (Prior to the Met Breuer exhibition, Bentham's actual preserved head had been displayed in *What Does It Mean To Be Human?*, an exhibition at the Octagon Gallery at UCL.) Although Kumar notes that 'Bentham was deeply committed to the theory of utilitarianism' she does not draw out the implications of that commitment for curatorial practice or museology. The inclusion of Bentham's auto-icon in the same exhibition as a statue of Hermes by Polykleitos (first or second century AD) and Jeff Koon's *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* (1988) places all these objects in the service of a cultural survey, 'juxtaposing objects from different eras to test our preconceptions about the human form, the canon of Western art, and our understanding of ourselves' (Syson et al., 2018: vi).

The diverse collection of objects in *Like Life* also included a flayed (écorché) figure by Alphonse Lami from 1857. Lami's anatomical study provides a clue to the actual historical tension at work in including Bentham's auto-icon in this transhistorical exhibition. In one sense, the heterogeneity of *Like Life* kept faith with Bentham's intention that his auto-icon should offer an alternative to statues of human beings, since 'what statue of a human being can be so like him, as in the character of the Auto-Icon, he or she will be to himself or herself. Is not identity preferable to similitude?' (Fenn, 1992, p. 4). In another sense, Bentham's intentions for the auto-icon were lost in this heterogeneity, since he proposed that this radical act of self-publication would lead to the establishment of museums of auto-icons that would be superior to current systems of cultural classification. The auto-icon would require a public institution in which a utilitarian ethical standard could be sustained by 'virtuous curiosity', that is, the pleasure of curiosity as this appears within an ethics of utility, in which social arrangements are defined by pleasure and pain, rather than aesthetic norms:

> It would set curiosity in motion – virtuous curiosity. There would be pilgrimages to Auto-Icons, who had been living benefactors of the human race – not to see miracles – not for the purposes of imposture – but to gather from the study of individuals, benefits for mankind. The Auto- Icons of the virtuous in their silence would be eloquent preachers. "Go thou and do likewise," would be the lessons they would teach. New motives will thus be brought into

> the field of thought and action – motives both moral and political. (Fenn, 1992, p.11)

Such a museum of auto-icons would be devoted to the recruitment of reconstructed dead bodies to the further uses of the living, as a logical extension of their public dissection for the purposes of instruction and medical research. In the auto-icon, Bentham contested the mores of public monumental sculpture, but only as the corollary to an operation intended to show that 'the primitive horror at dissection originates in ignorance and is kept up by misconception' (Fenn, 1992, p. 42). The mode of social observation that would be appropriate for a public dissection was also the correct mode for viewing a museum of auto-icons. Bentham's own public dissection took place on 9 June 1832, two months before donating bodies for dissection became legal in Britain. In the preface to his privately printed edition of Bentham's text on the auto-icon, Robert A. Fenn refers to Lenin's auto-icon, but it is Bentham's philosophical 'object lesson' that differentiates Bentham's auto-icon from Lenin's mausoleum – like Bentham, Lenin cannot be replaced by a copy, but the relationship in Bentham's auto-icon is between the pose and the material elements. Fenn is more accurate when he says that 'the will provides the evidence of [Bentham's] last attempt … to ensure that he would survive in both a physical and an intellectual form' (Fenn, 1992, p. v).

When Bentham describes himself as existing in the auto-icon 'in the attitude in which I am sitting when engaged in thought' and also as identical to himself, his demand is that the attitude in which he is posed should be a means of communication and (self)publication, not a means of self-representation. In the auto-icon museum, the conventions of statuary will be those of utilitarian philosophy rather than aesthetics. The curiosity of visitors to the auto-icon museum is virtuous, in a utilitarian sense, because it relies on the social utility of conventions of portraiture that nonetheless provide access to real bodies, such as might be viewed in an anatomy theatre. The social utility of these functional conventions opposes the social disutility of fictions such as conventions of beauty, which exist in order to maintain the status quo, but which, Bentham argues, can also be the source of unremitting social violence. This apparently contradictory combination of identity (Bentham's actual body) and artifice (this body posed as if in thought) is also a philosophical proposition on how to respond to the prejudices of taste by establishing a point of contact with a real entity. It was this contact with a real entity that offered opposition to the groundless antipathy or aversion that characterised judgments of taste. Bentham argued that while taste in the sense of an inclination towards pleasure was grounded in actuality, notions of good and bad taste offered illusory moral distinctions between individual inclinations towards pleasure.

On several occasions, Bentham cites aesthetic practices, and in particular distinctions between good and bad taste, as a kind of barbarism that leads, inter alia, to cultural critics robbing individuals of their means of enjoyment and depriving artists of their means of subsistence. In his manuscripts dealing with 'sexual irregularities' Bentham also links the strictures of good taste to prejudice against homosexuality, noting that such groundless aversions continue unabated precisely because they have no basis in any actual injury or affront. Bentham argues that the

only way to appease the critics of taste, or the opponents of homosexual pleasure, is to succumb to their normative judgment: 'Produced by contrariety of opinion or of taste, the appetite of vengeance is even more difficultly [*sic*] to be satiated or appeased than when produced by injury: in case of contrariety, if appeased at all, it is by manifestation or declaration of conformity that it must be appeased' (2014, pp. 10-11)

In stark contrast to Bentham's challenge to aesthetics in his criticisms of the groundless antipathy brought about by what he saw as a social distinction between good taste and bad taste, in *Of Sexual Irregularities*, he nonetheless refers to homosexuality as 'the Attic taste' (Bentham, 2014, p. 144). Bentham's ethics required that both sexual objects and objects of art should be seen a matter of taste, that is, defined as an individual inclination or disposition towards pleasure**.** In *Of Sexual Irregularities,* he writes: 'Taste for any object is an aptitude or disposition to derive pleasure [from] that object' (Bentham, 2014, p. 4). In a note added to this sentence in the manuscripts, Bentham states: 'Here give illustrations from other objects of taste – ex. gr. subjects of the fine arts.' Bentham's inclusion of sexuality as a 'sixth sense' alongside the five senses that are generally recognised, allows him to place the choice of sexual object as a matter of individual taste that is not aligned with reproductive activity. Moreover, Bentham's alignment of sexual activity with the physical gratification afforded by the senses of taste, sight, touch, smell and sound puts him at odds with an aesthetic understanding of taste as sensibility and judgment. Gratification presents a problem for the integrity of aesthetic judgments for other philosophers of Bentham's era such as Hume and Kant; in contrast, Bentham uses gratification to explain aesthetic activity (see Ferguson, 2019).

As Stella Sandford (2020) has noted, Bentham's manuscripts on sexuality agree with Freud's later writings, insofar as both adopt 'a clear-eyed, non-moralistic acceptance of the fact of human sexuality in all its diversity and a basic understanding that the pleasures of sexuality are experientially separate from the function of reproduction' (p. 72) In this context, Sandford refers to Freud's conclusion in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* that 'our experience teaches us that the sexual drive and the sexual object are merely soldered together' (Freud, 1905/2016, p. 11). Bentham's inclusion of sexual objects and objects of art in the same category of taste as a disposition or inclination towards pleasure, suggests that his reputed philistinism should be seen in a new light, that is, as a means to defeat prejudice. The auto-icon museum is a museum in which a social prejudice (against dead bodies) has been overcome.

Psychoanalysis and the utilitarian conversion

Bentham's auto-icon, as it was displayed in *Like Life*, was the fragment of a project to offer identity rather than similitude, and, in so doing, to found a new kind of museum whose regime of vision would be derived from the live anatomy lesson rather than the contemplation of works of art. If that was all there was to Bentham,

he might simply be seen as a precursor to the 'Body Worlds' entertainments of Gunther von Hagens.[2] However, it is more important to consider the auto-icon as an aspect of Bentham's philosophy, that is, as the emblem of a new form of ethical agency within Western culture. As Jacques Lacan observed, something is at stake in Bentham's ethics that is also at stake for psychoanalysis. What is at stake, as was mentioned in my introduction, is the possibility for

what Dany Nobus calls psychoanalysis as morosophy, in which what is gained from the analytical encounter is tantamount to what the encounter allows us to lose. According to Nobus (2021), what psychoanalysis allows the patient to lose is the power accorded to a core representation in the patient's mind, as the analytic process results in a gradual dissolution of this representation's authoritative, controlling force: 'Patients are thus not being given the key to unlock their secrets and the key to their destiny, but relieved (delivered) from the injunction that has been keeping their secret under lock and key.'

At first sight, Jeremy Bentham's ethics seems to place us very far from this kind of deliverance. In his manuscripts on logic and language, Bentham (1814) celebrates the moment in which 'the precision, clearness and incontestableness of mathematical calculation is introduced for the first time into the field of morals, a field to which, in its own nature, it is applicable with a propriety no less incontestable, and when once brought to view manifest, than to that of physics, including its most elevated quarter, the field of mathematics'. Bentham's reference here is to his reading of Cesare Beccaria's comment that the legislator should be 'a cold examiner of human nature, who in one place concentrated the actions of a multitude of men, and considered them in this point of view: the greatest happiness divided into the greatest number' (Bentham, 1814). However, what is it at issue in Bentham's utilitarianism is not number as such, but the transition to a new form of ethics in which happiness could be conceived 'in the character of an aggregate or compound, of which pleasures and the exemptions corresponding to pains are the sole elements' (Bentham, 1814). It is this ethics which, famously, enabled Bentham to argue that the pertinent question that comes to bear in the treatment of animals is not 'can they *reason*? nor, can they *talk*? but, can they *suffer*?' (Bentham, 1907, p. 245, original emphasis). From Bentham's perspective, the notion of 'animal rights' would be evidence of a compromise, in which ethical consciousness extends from a dominant group (humans) to a dominated group (other animals) without establishing a common ethical framework. Instead, the 'aggregate or compound' condition of utilitarian ethics must be witnessed in our encounter with other animals, who suffer as we do. In a psychoanalytic context, Slavoj Žižek (2001) has differentiated Bentham's ethics from those of Levinas 'who wrote so much about the face of the helpless other as the original site of ethical responsibility, [but] explictly denied that an animal's face could function like this' (p. 411). Elsewhere in this text, Žižek, following Lacan's reading of Bentham in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* and elsewhere, claims that Bentham's theory of language contributed to a more exact

[2] Gunther von Hagens (born Gunther Gerhard Liebchen, 10 January 1945) has pioneered the technique of 'plastination' for preserving specimens of human tissue and has organized numerous Body Worlds exhibitions to demonstrate this technique.

definition of the unconscious, in which we can communicate to others 'things we do not know we know' rather than the unconscious being defined more simplistically, as something we know but cannot communicate (2001, p. 76). This possibility is demonstrated in Lacan's focus on Bentham's ontology and theory of language, which, as I have noted, distinguishes 'fictitious entities' from 'fictions'. Fictitious entities were abstract terms (such as 'matter', 'time', 'place' and 'action') that had no physical existence, but were necessary for communication to take place through the construction of linguistic statements. Fictions, on the other hand, were deceptions in which real existence was attributed to a fictitious entity that had none.

Lacan, at the prompting of Roman Jakobson, refers extensively to Bentham's ontology and theory of language. The significance for psychoanalysis of 'the utilitarian conversion', which Lacan identifies with Bentham in particular, is twofold. First, it contests the idea that the capacity for ethical thought resides solely in members of the dominant social class, and, second, it situates ethical thought in the context of a theory of language. The latter has had more attention, but my focus on the problems of applied psychoanalysis in the museum show that the issue of social class is equally important, insofar as Bentham's ethics challenges the situation in which the game of cultural inclusivity contributes to the moral consciousness of the dominant class, while continuing to produce shame in the dominated.

Lacan notes that 'it is in the dialectical relation of language and the real that Bentham tried to give place to the real good, i.e., to the pleasure which … he ascribes a function that differs radically from what Aristotle meant by this' (in De Kesel, 2001/2009, p. 61). In *A Fragment on Government*, Bentham notes that Aristotle's distinction between freemen and slaves is based on an *ipse dixit* assertion that certain men were born to be slaves, and ought to be slaves. It is this distinction between freemen and slaves that informs the Aristotelian conception of the good, which depends on the judgments of the virtuous individual for whom pleasure is the indication that he is on the correct path to happiness and for whom happiness is defined as the realisation of his full potential. This means, among other things, that for Aristotle amusements cannot be fulfilling, as they can only be a rest from the work of self-fulfilment and that slaves can experience pleasure without ever attaining happiness. As I have noted, the ethical transition to aggregates of pleasure that Bentham sought, refuses the possibility of a 'master ethics' that sustains a dominant class. It is this refusal of a master ethics that determines Bentham's reading of culture, and his radical philistinism. With the notable exception of Žižek, those who have commented on Lacan's interest in Bentham, have tended to focus on what is assumed to separate Bentham's philosophy from psychoanalysis. The common factor that is assumed to separate Bentham and Lacan is that of contingency – for Marc De Kesel (2001/2009), 'psychoanalysis can take no satisfaction in Bentham's utilitarianism' because, he claims, Bentham's notion of pleasure is based on conscious, rational choice, whereas for Freud pleasure emerges from a pre-conscious drive (p. 66). In *Read My Desire* (1994) Joan Copjec argues that, despite Lacan's observation that Bentham had occasioned 'a revolution in ethics that unseated Aristotelian ethics in the nineteenth century' (note 29, p. 249). Bentham's philosophy is dedicated to the elimination of contingency: 'Once it was

decided that the goal of man was known (that goal being pleasure), utilitarianism thought it could regulate and manipulate man through this goal, or motivation. The belief that man is basically and infinitely manageable turned the utilitarian into an engineer, a designer of machines that would quadrate man's pleasure with his duty' (Copjec, 1994, p. 85).

In contrast to this image of Bentham as the architect of systems of power and control, recent scholarship by the Bentham Project at UCL on Bentham's manuscripts on 'sexual irregularities', and an associated publication on Bentham, aesthetics and the arts, offers an alternative to the idea that Bentham wished to reduce or eliminate contingency. Jacques-Alain Miller (1987), who edited Lacan's seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, delivered a sustained attack on Bentham in which he at once asserted that 'the calculation of pleasures, on which Bentham's fame is to a great extent based, is the necessary postulate to the rationalization of politics … an ideal means of achieving absolute mastery over individuals and communities' (p. 29) while also noting that for Bentham 'pain, in fact, is more reliable than pleasure (less dependent on circumstances, susceptible to greater scope …)' (p. 27). Even Miller's concession to the idea of pleasure as 'dependent on circumstances' elides the ethical character of Bentham's cultural politics of pleasure. In *The Rationale of Reward* (1825), Bentham notes that 'punishment may be applied in all shapes to all persons. Pleasure, however, in the hands of the legislator, is not equally manageable' (pp. 17–18). He offers as an example the notion of warriors being rewarded with the favours of women:

> How could they speak in praise of a law which supposes the slavery of the best half of the human species? How could they have forgotten that favours not preceded by an uncontrolled choice, and which the heart perhaps repelled with disgust, afforded the spectacle rather of the degradation of woman than the rewarding a hero? (Bentham, 1825a, 1825b, pp. 17–18).

Bentham's argument is, first, that the possibility of defining social standards of beauty vanishes when we examine our predilections and second, that we have to name what is actually barbaric, such as rewarding warriors with women, rather than concerning ourselves with a dubious bid for civilisation by naming what is in 'good taste'. In so doing, Bentham loosens the grip of representations that link aesthetic standards to heteronormativity.

Decolonial Philistinism

In the previous section, I showed how Bentham's theory of language refuses the possibility of a 'master ethics' that sustains the fictions of a dominant class, while supporting the continuity of social communication through the active nihilism of the fictitious. In this section, I will show how this question of how a structure can be put in place that supports a fall also relates to the decolonisation of the museum. A complex and significant relationship between the cultural orientation of the museum and the ethics of its fall was shown in Sonia Boyce's Six Acts intervention. Boyce's intervention was not decolonial in any obvious sense, but it showed how a structure

of support can be provided for an ethics of the fall. Through her work, the fall of the museum as a cultural entity was nonetheless supported by a curatorial act: the temporary removal of one of its signature objects. By means of this curatorial act, Boyce disturbed the invidious relationship between the curation of the gallery and the uncomfortable feelings that *Hylas and the Nymphs* was known to elicit. In contrast to Boyce's Six Acts, the display of Bentham's auto-icon in *Like Life* did not trouble the cultural mores of the Met Breuer. Nonetheless, it exposed the ethical problem of museum exhibition that 'cannot lose' because it is all-inclusive and, as Roberta Smith (2018) noted in her review, 'appeals to all levels of art appreciation'. This liberal utopia of the museum is increasingly challenged by the discourses and practices of decolonialism. The question that decolonialism raises, is how trauma and loss can be accounted for within new forms of museum ethics. This question can also be used to understand what is at work in the 'decolonial philistinism' discussed by Matthias Pauwels (2017). At the centre of Pauwel's discussion is 'the theatrical burning of twenty or so paintings taken from several of UCT's [University of Cape Town] residences and other buildings by student protesters on February 16, 2016' (2017, p. 327). Pauwels claims that those who sympathised with the protest at a distance, as well as those who condemned it, have to confront the manner in which the action was framed by the question of a philistine indifference to art and culture:

> It might thus be argued that sacrificing art for the larger purpose of achieving a fully transformed, decolonized university runs the risk that, once the latter is achieved, it will be an aesthetically impoverished, artless environment that lacks in creativity, imagination, and sensory richness. It could establish behavioral patterns and attitudes—hostility against art, aesthetic insensitivity, cultural barbarism— that might prove to be difficult to reverse after the revolution. (2017, p. 333).

Pauwels discusses the question of philistinism in the context of Adorno's comments on philistinism and Frederic Jameson's reading of Adorno: 'In the Adornian-Jamesonian framework, the truth of philistinism crucially lies in its sobering insight into the guilt of art' (2017, p. 341). This guilt concerns the role of art in perpetuating social division. In this context, and with reference to the problem of 'decolonial philistinism', it is useful to turn to Adorno's comments on the philistinism of psychoanalysis, which, Adorno argues, treats artworks as mere documents. Adorno's suspicion of Freud does not consider the ethical dimension of psychoanalysis that is taken up by Lacan, the historical origins of which he locates in the utilitarian conversion. What characterises this ethical dimension of psychoanalysis, as this is brought to bear on the issue of trauma and repair in the museum, is the question of how support is offered for the fall of culture and civilisation through acts of curatorship. Museums must not become repositories for fallen objects, such as the statue of the slave trader Edward Colston. Instead, museums need to be supported in confronting an ethics of their fall, which should also be the purpose of any 'decolonial philistinism'.

This question of how to account for loss has become crucial to recent debates on decolonialism in the museum and also shows the importance of psychoanalysis to these debates. In his recent book *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes,*

Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution (2020), Dan Hicks employs Achille Mbembe's notion of 'necropolitics' to suggest a museum collection policy in reverse, a 'necrology' of death and loss in which the anthropological museum makes an account of its own violence and the trauma that it has brought about. The methods Hicks favours for the accumulation of necrological knowledge are those of the forensics lab and the criminal tribunal. At the close of his book, he offers a vision of repair by asking us to 'imagine anthropology museums where nothing is stolen, where everything is present with the consent of all parties' (Hicks, 2020, p. 227). While Hicks rightly emphasises the importance of curatorial acts rather than fine words, his evocation of an imaginary museum suggests that necrology as a 'knowledge of loss' would have an end point, in which a museum where nothing has been stolen would 'be able properly to fulfil their [anthropology museums] central, critical function – to bring a sense of other ways of seeing, knowing, living and making into the Euro-American consciousness' (2020, p. 228). Hicks's focus is on what does and does not belong in an individual museum within a global network of anthropological museums. Sonia Boyce's focus, in contrast, was on what may or may not belong in a museum of art, a possibility that was kept open between the removal of *Hylas and the Nymphs* and its replacement, thus suspending the cultural game that elicits shame, timidity, anxiety and guilt.

Through the two examples I have discussed, which I have located 'before' and 'after' the analyst's discourse as this was defined by Jacques Lacan, I have shown that a psychoanalytic mode of accounting for loss in the museum begins with a loss or a fall of cultural knowledge and that this fall has an ethical dimension that must be assumed as a curatorial act. The curatorial argument of Bentham's auto-icon is based on a philosophical proposition in which the ideals supported by social fictions such as good taste can lose their consistency in a situation where, nonetheless, social communication can continue. Sonia Boyce's intervention in Manchester Art Gallery showed how the opportunity to achieve ethical consciousness of a 'knowledge of loss' depends on a loss of knowledge about cultivation. Rather than opposing curatorial care to philistine 'indifference', the radical philistinism of Sonia Boyce's Six Acts showed that the social value of curatorship can be affirmed through the loss of the cultivated sensibility that had maintained the presence of *Hylas and the Nymphs* on the wall at Manchester Art Gallery.

Declarations

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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