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Anne d'Harnoncourt, Paul J. DiMaggio,
Marilyn Perry, and James N. Wood

Anne d'Harnoncourt

I will endeavor to get a few thoughts across about the very large issue of museums and the public. One thing that has struck me in the last couple of years is the importance of getting a *qualitative* sense of who the public are, what they want, and what we could do not only to give them what they want, but also to give them more ideas about what they *could* want. This has been brought to the fore particularly by the study sponsored by the Center for Art and Education at the Getty that has been going on for the last year and a half.

Looking at the quantitative aspects of museum attendance, I was fascinated to learn that attendance at the British Museum was about 4 million people in 1978 and 4 million people in 1987, both of which are impressive figures and suggest a kind of grand constancy to that audience. One of the most overwhelmingly visited museums in the world is the Hermitage in Leningrad, which has in the range of 4 to 5 million visitors—and until very recently, that was without any significant role of special exhibitions. Maybe we have been infecting our Soviet counterparts somewhat with our concentration on exhibitions. What always interests me when we measure museum attendance is that even though it appears to be very high today, in fact, if you look back at the history of museums, it has been high for a long time. I looked at the figures for the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876: hundreds of thousands of people came over the span of six months.

I think that we as museum directors always face the question: What do overall attendance numbers actually mean? It seems to me that in fact part of what we need to think about are the qualitative questions: who the visitors are, where they come from, how they are changing over time, what they want, and what their experiences are.

One of the things that is most interesting about museum publics is their

diversity. The Getty-sponsored study of eleven art museums, which brought together directors, curators, and educators at a recent conference, explored what museum audiences want or what we might want them to want, in terms particularly of education and information. However, the study told us a lot more than that. In watching one of the focus groups from this study recently, seeing a probation officer in the city of Philadelphia experiencing three minutes of ecstasy in describing Turner's *Burning of the House of Parliament* was pretty amazing. It was an extraordinary experience for him: he was enraptured with the painting, he had not read the label, he did not know exactly what it was. Although he knew it was a picture of an historic fire, it took us a while to realize what he was actually describing. But one of the things that we learned from seeing people describe their fundamental experiences in art museums is that not only are museum publics very diverse in themselves—where they come from, who they are, their age, their economic background, and so forth—but you never know who is going to have what experience in front of what object at what time.

That unpredictability affects the whole issue of what exhibitions museums present. You can market exhibitions, you can advertise them, but you do not really know if they will catch people's imagination, and whose imagination they will catch in what way, until they happen. Further, a great deal of what affects the attendance is word of mouth, which is not something that the museum controls at all. So I ask the question about exhibitions in general, and about blockbusters in particular: Don't we think that museums' continuing to be inventive in presenting works of art that they think are important—from all kinds of fields, in a diverse and lively way—is a terribly important thing if the museum public is to develop a continued interest in the museum as a whole?

I think that museum directors at the Getty conference were asking themselves: What do we as museums want? Do we want *more* public, do we want a *wealthier* public (as is implied in some of the studies I have read), do we want a *more diverse* public, or do we want the public that comes to have the *best possible experience*? If you have an exhibition that is enormously successful, there is a point at which it becomes really more uncomfortable for people to see the exhibition, because of its popularity. On one hand, you can be coldblooded about it and say, great, the more people you can cram through the door the better off you are. On the other hand, a museum's ultimate mission is not to have as many people as possible see the exhibition, but to have as many people as possible see the exhibition under circumstances in which it is possible for people to have a good experience, and that is something rather different.

I was quite disturbed by the background paper for this conference that posited the possibility or the necessity of museums' addressing two very different kinds of audiences. The paper argued that there is the collector-donor, sophisticated audience, and there is the general public audience, and museums ought

to divide what they do and divide their resources to serve those two audiences quite separately. It seems to me that that may possibly undermine the whole mission of a museum, which is to bring as many people as you can to a kind of experience that they can only get in an art museum: direct contact with a work of art. You do not know what that experience is going to be and who will have it. So you have got to provide it, in a sense, with equal potential intensity for as many people as possible. You might not have expected that the probation officer would be excited about the Turner instead of something else, but he definitely was, that was the picture he picked, and people pick very surprising things with which to have very strong relationships.

So I think the idea of dividing our resources to cultivate donors on the one hand, and to please a general public on the other, is dangerous. Obviously, of course, we all do that to *some* degree. Every curator, every director, every educator, everybody in the museum, makes a choice as to whether to spend the next half hour persuading somebody to give you a picture, or working on an audio tape for an exhibition which you hope will make it a lot clearer to a lot of people. However, somehow it seems to me that these choices are still perceived as part of one activity, and not as two profoundly different ones related to two different audiences. My perception, at least, is that the audience, insofar as you hope it will grow and enrich itself (and the museum) in many senses of the word, is the same.

I am fascinated by the issue of museums struggling in their vision of themselves between being purveyors of education and of entertainment. How does the public see us? Do they see us as educating or as entertaining? Another thing that emerged from the Getty focus group study was that those two aspects of museum visits are not mutually exclusive; they blend together in individuals' minds. When people who had never been to the museum before talked about what it might be like to go, they talked about the fact that it was probably full of history and they wanted to learn. And the same people in response to the next question said, oh, I just want to let my mind go, and sort of drift with pleasure. It seems to me that knowledge and enjoyment, which have always been goals that museums have talked about, are intimately related to each other and should not be divided. We should not do one thing because we think it is educational and another thing because we think it is entertaining. If people know more about the art you are showing, they often get more excited about it.

The issue of marketing is a fascinating one, and one that raises every museum hackle that I know. It is an issue that we keep coming back to because no curator and no museum director wants to hang a gallery full of objects or install an exhibition and have nobody there. However, marketing has to do with products, and if you say, let us change the product to fit what the audience wants, that makes everybody nervous. This is further complicated because the audience changes over time, partly *because* of what products (i.e., what exhibitions, what works of art, what programs) you make available. I

would love to know more about the long-term impact museums have upon their audiences, in terms of their collections, in terms of their philosophies, and in terms of their programs.

I believe that the impact will depend to some extent on geography. The Cleveland Museum, for example, has very consistently over a long period of time emphasized its collection. Among the great museums of this country, it is the one that has probably done more of that than any other—only recently has it become really involved with special exhibitions, and in still a relatively restrained way. There is probably no question that the public, the audience let us say, of Cleveland has rather different expectations, attitudes, interests, and experiences of art and of museums than the public in another city in which the museum does not have such great collections or focus on them with such intensity. Another example would be the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, which has created avant-garde exhibitions, film series, performances, and mixed media events with a very deliberate and energetic attitude toward contemporary art: not just showing it, but showing it in particular ways, and concentrating on design and architecture at the same time. My guess is that the audience in Minneapolis have become not only accustomed to that over time, but their expectations and their interests—in short, they themselves—have expanded and changed because of exposure to the Walker. When you come to issues of how museums should deal with their public, obviously you want attendance to be high for many reasons; ultimately, though, it seems to me that you want the public to have an increasingly large sense of what art and museums can contribute to their lives and to their enjoyment—not only their enjoyment of art and museums, but of other aspects of life—and that is a very hard thing to put a number on.

I am trying to think about what you could compare museums to, because they are even hard to compare to each other, let alone to other kinds of institutions. Would we all say that museums have more in common with libraries than with orchestras, for example? Museums and libraries both have vast resources, so it matters what you put on your front shelf and what you put on your back shelf. Also, libraries do fundamentally presume to offer knowledge and enjoyment in the same kind of proportion, so it is an interesting analogy to make. There has been a fair amount of discussion of deaccessioning, but I think it would not quite occur to people to sell books in the library in order to make the library more successful; on the other hand, books do not have yet anywhere near the value of the works of art we were talking about.

Finally, it seems to me that the relation of museums to their public is one of the most interesting questions that any group can discuss. One of the most interesting comments in one of the recent Getty-sponsored sessions was from an historian of museums who said that thirty years ago, the people sitting around the table—the museum directors, the educators, the curators—would have had no doubts as to what the public ought to want, what their mission was, or what their relationship with them was. Our discussion today reflects the kind of existential anxiety that we all have about our survival, about our

mission, about all of those people who are coming through our doors, and about how we are dealing with them. I do not say that our predecessors would have had no doubts, but they would have had far fewer questions and doubts, say forty years ago, than we do today.

Paul J. DiMaggio

My topic, the relationship between the art museum and the public, seems innocent enough. But, it is more complicated than it sounds, for the museum has several relationships with several publics. How an art museum chooses to allocate attention and other resources among them follows from how it chooses to organize itself and to define its mission.

Let us begin with the most straightforward dimension of the relationship: who visits U.S. art museums, and who does not. We know a lot about this, thanks to the National Endowment for the Arts' Research Division, which sponsored two studies undertaken by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the 1982 and 1985 Surveys of Public Participation in the Arts. These studies provided the first reliable information on many of the cultural activities of Americans, including their attendance at art museums and art galleries. The following account of their findings relies heavily on an excellent report by Mark Schuster of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and on additional analyses that Francie Ostrower and I conducted at Yale.¹

The findings of the SPPAs, as the surveys are called, are not surprising, but they are worth keeping in mind, because they tell us whom art museums are reaching, at least in some fashion, and whom they are not. In 1985, just over one in five adult Americans visited an art museum at least once—more than attended a jazz concert, listened to live classical music, saw a play, and attended a musical, and almost as many as visited a history or science museum. The major difference between the people who visited art museums and the ones who did not is that the visitors had spent more years in school. Almost half of the college graduates, and more than half of Americans with at least some graduate education, visited museums, compared to just one in twenty-five people whose schooling stopped in elementary school, and one in ten high-school dropouts (see table 2.1 for exact figures).²

1. J. Mark Davidson Schuster, "Perspectives on the American audience for art museums," report prepared for Research Division, National Endowment for the Arts (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1987), available on microfiche through ERIC system, ED294780; Paul J. DiMaggio and Francie Ostrower, "Race, ethnicity and participation in the arts: Patterns of participation by black, Hispanic and white Americans in selected activities from the 1982 and 1985 surveys of public participation in the arts," report prepared for Research Division, National Endowment for the Arts (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 1987).

2. Schuster, "Perspectives," 12–13.

Table 2.1 **Percentage of Selected Groups Reporting Attendance at Art Museums or Galleries in 1985**

Family income	
less than \$5,000	16%
\$5,000-\$9,999	11
\$10,000-\$14,999	15
\$15,000-24,999	19
\$25,000-49,999	28
more than \$49,999	45
Highest level of schooling	
Grade school	4
Some high school	11
High-school graduate	14
Some college	29
Four-year college graduate	45
Graduate school	55
Age	
18-24	22
25-34	25
35-44	27
45-54	23
55-64	18
65-74	16
over 74	10
Gender	
Women	23
Men	21
Race	
African-American	11
Euro-American	23
Other	25
Place of residence	
Central city	25
Metropolitan area but not central city	26
Not in metropolitan area	14
Occupation	
Professional	49
Managerial	37
Sales/clerical	27
Craftsmen	14
Operatives	9
Laborers	10
Service workers	16

Source: J. Mark Davidson Schuster, "Perspectives on the American audience for art museums," table 1a, report prepared for Research Division, National Endowment for the Arts (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1987), ERIC document ED294780. The author is grateful for Professor Schuster's permission to draw on this material.

Occupation and income are also related to visits to museums and galleries. Nearly half of people with family incomes of \$50,000 a year or more visited, compared to 15 percent of those with incomes of from \$10,000 to \$14,999. Almost one in two professionals and three in eight managers visited museums, compared to one in six service workers and just one in ten operatives and laborers. Euro-Americans were twice as likely to have visited as African-Americans: 23 percent compared to 11 percent.³

One can use statistical techniques to assess the relative importance, in an explanatory sense, of the various attributes associated with museum visiting. When one does that, schooling emerges as by far the most important, dwarfing the effects of income, occupation, urban residence, race, gender (women visit more than men), and marital status (single and divorced people are more likely to attend than people who are married or widowed). Nonetheless, all of these factors are statistically significant predictors of attendance.⁴

There are several points worth making about these statistics. First, the SPPA data tell us about visitors rather than visits. That is, they tell us who attended at least once, but not how often they attended. On the basis of other research, we know that frequent visitors tend to be more upscale than occasional visitors.⁵

On the other hand, people who visit art museums are a more diverse lot than differences in participation *rates* might lead one to expect, because, as Schuster points out, many of the groups with the highest rates of visitation are smaller than groups with lower rates. For example, although people with family incomes of more than \$50,000 a year are more than twice as likely to visit than people who earn between \$15,000 and \$24,999 per year, the latter constitute a larger proportion of the museum-visiting population because there are so many more of them. For similar reasons, more museum visitors have only a high-school degree than have attended graduate school, even though the latter are four times as likely to visit museums.⁶

Third, the visitor profile seems not to have changed much over the past thirty years or so: the museum public has remained substantially better edu-

3. Ibid.

4. DiMaggio and Ostrower, "Race, ethnicity, and participation." See table 2.2. Because of the focus of the report from which table 2.2 was taken, respondents were disaggregated by race/ethnicity and results reported separately for (non-Hispanic) Euro-Americans, African-Americans, and Hispanic-Americans. Although significant levels vary, due to the smaller numbers of respondents in the latter two groups, only the effects of gender (a dummy variable where 1 = female, between African-Americans and Euro-Americans) and SMSA (a dummy where 1 = resides in a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area or SMSA, between African-Americans and Hispanics) differed significantly, and these only in 1982. None of the differences in coefficients within groups for 1982 and 1985 is statistically significant, except for the greater effect of SMSA for whites in 1985.

5. Paul J. DiMaggio, Michael Useem, and Paula Brown, "Audience studies of the performing arts and museums: A critical review," Research Division Report no. 9. (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 1978).

6. Schuster, "Perspectives," 12-13.

Table 2.2 Logistic Regression Analyses Predicting Visitation of Art Museums and Galleries for (Non-Hispanic) Euro-Americans, African-Americans, and Hispanic-Americans

Independent Variable	1982			1985		
	Euro-American	African-American	Hispanic-American	Euro-American	African-American	Hispanic-American
Women						
b	.436	-.157	.101	.383	.276	.141
se	.047	.177	.202	.052	.203	.203
sig	d	NS	NS	d	NS	NS
SMSA						
b	.245	1.364	-.071	.495	.362	-.083
se	.051	.297	.298	.060	.269	.286
sig	d	d	NS	d	NS	NS
Age						
b	.001	-.000	-.012	-.001	-.007	.007
se	.002	.007	.009	.002	.008	.008
sig	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Education						
b	.320	.279	.279	.312	.272	.155
se	.011	.040	.042	.012	.044	.037
sig	d	d	d	d	d	d
Income						
b	.115	.152	.226	.097	.208	.114
se	.015	.068	.076	.015	.065	.072
sig	d	a	a	d	a	NS
Occupation						
b	.255	.710	.444	.257	.385	.688
se	.050	.197	.219	.058	.217	.224
sig	d	b	a	d	NS	a
Marital status						
b	.415	.194	.019	.297	.252	.125
se	.056	.193	.234	.063	.218	.228
sig	d	NS	NS	d	NS	NS
Constant	-6.29	-7.07	-5.02	-6.23	-6.34	-3.98
Number of observations	13,905	1,656	941	10,872	1,385	790

Source: Paul J. DiMaggio and Francie Ostrower, "Race, ethnicity, and participation in the arts," appendix tables 3-1 and 3-2, report prepared for Research Division, National Endowment of the Arts (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 1987).

Note: *b* = logistic regression coefficient; *se* = standard error; *sig* refers to level of statistical significance, where a = probability less than .05, b = less than .01, c = less than .001, d = less than .00005, and NS = not significant. Coefficients and standard errors of the income variable are multiplied by 10,000.

cated, better paid, more professional, and more likely to be white than the population at large. How can this be the case even though museum attendance has galloped upwards during this period? For one thing, more Americans fit the visitor profile now—for example, more have college educations, fewer are blue-collar workers—than in 1960. For another, a larger proportion of the core public may be attending than did in the past, and they may attend more often.⁷

Fourth, the people who do not visit are not necessarily uninterested in art; many of them report watching shows about art on television, for example. Yet they do not appear to harbor a great sense of deprivation. People who already visit museums are far more likely to tell researchers that they want to visit more frequently than are people who do not visit museums at all. Nonetheless, if all the nonvisitors who reported wanting to visit did so, the proportion of Americans attending exhibitions would double. In other words, art museums may have a large untapped audience, but tapping it will require much effort.⁸

Statistics such as these provide a useful baseline for talking about the museum's relationship to its public, if only because it is difficult for museums to *have* relationships with people who do not enter their doors. But there is much more to the topic than such statistics imply. Indeed, all three of the terms in our topic—"public," "museum," and "relationship"—possess a variety of meanings, each related to different conceptions of the art museum's mission.

The museum public is what Walter Lippman called a "phantom public," an abstraction more useful for its ambiguity than for its denotative capacity.⁹ Is the art museum's public the one in five Americans who visit museums? Is it the two in five who either visited in 1985 or told the Census Bureau's interviewers that they wished they had? Is it the three in five who neither entered an art museum nor regretted their failure to do so, and who therefore, some would argue, especially need to be awakened to the value of art? Or does the museum public consist primarily of organized stakeholders, visitors and nonvisitors alike, who make their voices heard in public controversies?

For most art museums, at least three publics are salient.¹⁰ The first, and in some ways most important, consists of patrons: wealthy individuals with a strong commitment to the visual arts, often as collectors, who are, or give some promise of becoming, committed to the museum as an institution. Such patrons are the major source of the private share of museum revenues: it is

7. Schuster, "Perspectives," 12–13. DiMaggio, Useem, and Brown, "Audience."

8. DiMaggio and Ostrower, "Race, ethnicity, and participation," ch. 4.

9. Walter Lippman, *The phantom public* (New York, 1925).

10. The first two categories are similar to those discussed by Professors Robert C. Blattberg and Cynthia J. Broderick in their contribution to this volume (ch. 11). The third is not included in their typology. Of course, many museums have more publics than this: students and art history faculty for university museums, artists for many museums of contemporary art, and so on.

they upon whom the museum counts for donations to capital and endowment campaigns and for gifts of art.

The second public comprises the many visitors who do not collect art, will never have the wherewithal or commitment to make major gifts, but who nonetheless visit museums, pay their admissions, patronize museum shops, possibly take out a membership, and account for the lion's share of attendance figures. Increasingly, museums, like other nonprofit organizations, are coming to see this group as a "market" for their services.

The third public is less tangible and more difficult to define than the other two, but no less important. In a sense, it can be said to consist of the 60 percent of American adults who neither visit museums nor want to, and who, by virtue of this omission, are believed by some to constitute a silent reproach to the art museum in its current form. Yet this 60 percent is notable for its *disengagement* and thus cannot be called a public in the usual sense. Rather it represents a point of symbolic reference for a proxy public of organizations, agencies, and associations who seek to influence the art museum to widen its scope. Such corporate actors could not be more different from one another: some are artists, eager to expand the social impact of art; some speak for ethnic and racial minority communities whose cultures have been excluded from the fine-arts canon; some are agencies of government, concerned about what public grants to art museums are buying and whom they are serving; some are reformers working from within the museum community.

If the museum public is a multifaceted abstraction, so, in a way, is the museum itself. To be sure, art museums have charters, hold property, and take corporate action. But most museums lack that coherent core of undivided purpose that economists call a "utility function"—that is, a consistently ranked set of objectives, and rules for making tradeoffs among them. The problem is not that the museum lacks a mission, but that it has too many of them: acquisition, conservation, exhibition, and education, to mention a few. Some of these goals (education, for example), actually comprise several different objectives. To make matters worse, there is little general agreement as to how such objectives can most effectively be achieved, and a museum's performance in pursuit of most of them can be judged only indirectly.¹¹

Art museums, like most other kinds of nonprofit enterprise, have developed a distinctive set of solutions to the problem of living with multiple goals. First, they have developed organizational structures that allocate different goals to different departments and different kinds of personnel: acquisition to curators, conservation to conservators, education to educators, maintenance activities to development officers and marketing departments, and so on. Second, they have staffed these positions with professionals, men and women

11. See Paul J. DiMaggio, "Nonprofit organizations in the production and distribution of culture," in *The nonprofit sector: A research handbook*, ed. Walter W. Powell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

whose technical training enables them to function, presumptively at least, without close supervision, detailed rules, or rigorous performance evaluation. Third, many art museum directors favor a management style and way of speaking that deemphasizes tensions among multiple missions (for example, by focusing on abstract goals with few operational implications or by avoiding explicit discussion of trade-offs among functions), both within the museum and in communicating to the outside. (Indeed, two Swiss economists have suggested that the role of the director is to ensure “that the production function connected with the museum’s services is actively hidden . . . and cannot easily be detected”—a polite use of economics jargon to say that the director’s job is to make sure that no one can figure out what the museum is up to.¹²)

The result of these devices is that the museum can be seen as a confederation of groups of departments, staff, and trustees organized around different publics and objectives, overseen, in most cases, by the director and the board of trustees. At the cost of being exceedingly schematic and neglecting considerable variation within the art museum community, I would suggest that three such coalitions or “submuseums” are to some degree present in most large art museums:

Coalition I: The Patron’s Submuseum. Here the patrons are the public, the curators (supplemented perhaps by development staff) are the heart of the museum, and acquisition, conservation, and research are the key functions. Curators serve patrons in a variety of ways, and patrons, in turn, donate objects and funds. Art historians and conservators are often a part of this coalition. The museum’s relationship to this public is concrete, personal, and often intimate.

Coalition II: The Marketing Submuseum. Here the public, ranging in commitment from occasional visitors to members, is the “market.” The key staff are marketing or membership personnel and their allies in other departments. This coalition’s objective is to lure the market to the museum. In some cases, getting people inside the doors is equated with public education; in others, marketing is viewed as a means to ends that membership and admission income (and grants contingent upon robust attendance figures) can support. Although the market consists of concrete persons, this coalition views them abstractly as consumers.

Coalition III: The Social Submuseum. The key departments in this submuseum are education and outreach. The coalition’s objective is to provide educational or social services to groups that are viewed as disenfranchised. The public consists of people who do not visit museums, or who do so rarely, and are defined categorically as children, minorities, the elderly, or the poor; and

12. Bruno S. Frey and Werner W. Pommerehne, “Economic analysis of the museum,” in *Economic policy for the arts*, eds. W. S. Hendon, J. L. Shanahan, and A. J. MacDonald, 248–59 (Cambridge: Abt Books, 1980). On the issue of multiple goals, see Vera L. Zolberg, “Tension of mission in American art museums,” in *Nonprofit enterprise in the arts: Studies in mission and constraint*, ed. Paul J. DiMaggio (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

of the staff of government and private agencies that claim to represent such groups, who are often served through special programs supported by soft money. If the language of coalition II comes from economics and business, the discourse of coalition III more often derives from politics or the social services.

This characterization of the staff and departments that belong to each of the three coalitions, or submuseums does not describe all art museums and may not fit the particulars of any museum perfectly. Although I have placed educators in coalition III, they are really a kind of swing group: in some art museums, education staff belong to the patron's museum, focusing their attention on relatively sophisticated programs for collectors or members. Similarly, although I identify public agencies with coalition III, they are likewise a swing group, at times contributing to scholarly or aesthetic goals that are unattractive to other publics.

But if the particular alliances vary from museum to museum, the tensions among these three relationships, publics, and missions are endemic and long-standing. Two of them—the patron's museum and the social museum—have vied for supremacy at least since the 1920s. The third—the marketing museum—is a product of changes in art museums, and in the world around them, that followed the Second World War.

The modern American art museum has many predecessors. Some, like the art academies, were coalitions of artists and patrons, with little interest in the public at large. Others, like Barnum's museums, anticipated contemporary theme parks in their concern with enticing the masses. But the most important early museums—the Boston Museum, the Metropolitan, the Art Institute, and a few others—were distinctively American in their orientation to public education and the common good. In those early days, education often held a rather precise meaning. Art museums, in many cases allied to local arts-and-crafts societies, would address the practical needs of designers and retailers, providing access to the best art works and designs in order to set a standard to which American craftspersons and manufacturers might aspire.¹³

As these institutions matured, however, European fine art became available, and acquisition drove out education as the primary mission. In many cases, when the founders died or retired, and a second generation of trustees took control, coalitions of patrons and curators redefined the art museum as a temple of higher learning. In some cases, as in Boston, the animating philosophy was frankly aesthetic and antagonistic to broad public participation. In others, as in Chicago, where the founders' generation lingered longer and connections to the settlement houses focused attention on public service, the

13. See Neil Harris, "The gilded age revisited: Boston and the museum movement," *American Quarterly* 14 (1962).

art museum was somewhat less insular. Nonetheless, few art museums were unaffected by the shift in priorities.¹⁴

By the 1920s, a movement to replace the patron's museum with the social museum had gathered force within the museum community. In part, this was a rear-guard action mounted by an older generation, whose background was not, like many younger museum people, in art history or architecture, but in library work (like the Newark Museum's John Cotton Dana, the movement's leading figure) or in the arts-and-crafts societies (like Frederic Allen Whiting of Cleveland). In part, however, it represented a prescient drive to adapt the art museum's mission to the circumstances of a changing world.

The reformers, who came together in the American Association of Museums and who received considerable philanthropic encouragement, especially from the Carnegie Corporation of New York but also from the Rockefeller philanthropies, were united in their support of professionalization and their conception of the museum as "a social instrument," devoted to educating the public, broadly defined. Their program, to the extent they can be said to have had one, looked back to the charters of the 1870s: less attention to fine art, more to the decorative arts and design; more attention to local working-class publics and immigrant groups, less to the patrons and collectors; more accessibility, and less grandeur. At the same time, they recognized that the art museum had lost its chance to lead in the area of industrial design. Whereas the founders wanted the museum to set a standard for manufacturers and retailers, the reformers of the 1920s saw in the attractive exhibits of the modern department stores a model for the art museum to emulate.¹⁵

The reformers and their image of the social museum lost the battle of the 1920s and 1930s to a new alliance. The patrons accepted professionalism, but it was the congenial professionalism of the art historians, not the radical professionalism of the educators. Acquisition would remain the museum's primary function, even during the Great Depression.¹⁶

Yet the reformers set the terms of a debate that has persisted to the present; and the patron's museum would make room for the social museum, albeit in a subordinate role. If Dana was the exemplary reformer, a more viable model was the Pennsylvania Museum's Fiske Kimball, president of the American Association of Museums during the late 1920s. Kimball made Philadelphia a showplace of professionalism: it was he who, with Carnegie Corporation backing, gave Yale's Edward Robinson a place to do his research on visitors

14. See Paul J. DiMaggio, "Cultural entrepreneurship in nineteenth-century Boston" parts 1 and 2, *Media, Culture and Society* 4 (1982): 33–50, 303–22.

15. Paul J. DiMaggio, "Progressivism in the arts," *Society* 25 (1988): 5; and Paul J. DiMaggio, "Constructing an organizational field as a professional project: The case of U.S. art museums," in *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis*, ed. Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

16. Lawrence Vail Coleman, *The Museum in America* (Washington: American Association of Museums, 1939).

and museum fatigue, and opened what was hailed as the first satellite museum in the growing commercial suburb of Upper Darby.¹⁷ Yet Kimball's first priority was the collection: when the Depression hit, he closed down the branch and, eventually, the education department itself.¹⁸

If the educational museums of the 1870s were succeeded by the patron's museums of the 1910s, what Kimball and his contemporaries did was to internalize the opposing forces within the museum, divide them into different departments, and, as much as possible, deny the opposition. As long as the patrons could finance the art museum (or prevail upon local governments to subsidize the functions that they could not), this strategy was a success. But changes in the postwar era brought this accommodation under stress. As museums expanded, as state and federal subsidy came to supplement local subvention, as their needs surpassed their patrons' resources, a new public, defined first as a membership and, eventually, as a more diffuse market, took on increasing importance. Today few museum people would question the importance of the market that has flocked to their exhibitions and their stores. Yet the rise of this market has raised new questions about what business the art museum is in.¹⁹

The relative importance of the three museums and their publics has shifted with the museum's economic environment. When patrons could provide financing and art, they were the salient public. To the extent that government financing has been important, as it has been in many cities and was during the Great Depression and during the 1960s and 1970s, the social museum and the "disenfranchised" receive special attention. During the 1970s and 1980s, the market assumed new importance, both as a source of admissions and retail revenues and because attendance figures could bolster applications for government and corporate grants.²⁰

Although many would argue that the museum's first responsibility is to art, the press of economic considerations is inescapable. In the short run, the inability of private patrons to meet escalating prices for art, and the political and fiscal agonies of the federal arts-policy enterprise, can only increase the salience of the public-as-market.

17. DiMaggio, "Constructing an organizational field."

18. This summary is based on research on the branch museum in the archives of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Archives of American Art in New York City. The author is grateful to the staff of all of these institutions for permission to use the collections and help in doing so.

19. See Vera L. Zolberg, "Conflicting visions of American art museums," *Theory and Society* 10 (1981); and Vera L. Zolberg, "Tensions of mission in American art museums," in *Nonprofit enterprise in the arts: Studies in mission and constraint*, ed. by Paul J. DiMaggio (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

20. See Paul J. DiMaggio, "Can culture survive the marketplace?" *Journal of Arts Management and Law* 13 (1983); and Paul J. DiMaggio, "The nonprofit instrument and the influence of the marketplace on policies in the arts," in *The arts and public policy in the United States*, ed. W. McNeil Lowry (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall).

Space does not permit a thorough discussion of strategic issues here. I would only suggest that, quite aside from the problems a market-centered strategy raises for the museum's mission, such a strategy is unlikely to be viable in the long run. For one thing, income earned through admissions and retail operations represents a limited, if indispensable, part of the art museum's operating budget—far smaller than is the case for theaters or symphony orchestras, for example. What this means is that large and hard-won percentage increases in admissions and retail income yield small increases in operating budgets. Altering this situation would require changing the museum's mission, structure, and mode of operations, and going into head-to-head competition with department stores, motion pictures, and theme parks. It is not obvious that museums would fare well in such competition (especially given their limited access to capital markets) or that they would willingly make the changes such a strategy would require.

For another thing, art museums, like other cultural institutions, benefited from a demographic windfall during the 1960s and 1970s that will not be repeated. Individuals with almost all of the characteristics associated with museum attendance—relative youth, college educations, white-collar occupations—became far more numerous than they had been before. During the past decade, real incomes and educational attainment have stopped growing, the baby-boom generation has reached middle age, and labor-force growth has shifted to low-income service occupations. In other words, the United States produced typical art museum visitors at an unprecedented rate for approximately twenty years, and now the growth has stopped. Art museums can no longer count on steadily increasing demand for their services.

The patron's museum is also unlikely to make a resurgence. As museums have expanded, they have priced themselves out of the market for Medicis. Moreover, stable, local, self-renewing upper classes—the most fertile soil for patrons of the arts—have been in decline, losing ground to a national corporate elite with different agendas. And uncertainty in the art market may jeopardize traditional relationships between curators and collectors.

I suspect that the potential of the social museum, of the museum as an educational force, has been underestimated during the past decade of federal retrenchment and social conservatism. Public art budgets, which have not really declined even though the federal share has fallen sharply, may rise significantly again; and, as always, public support will bring with it new opportunities for educational initiatives. On the other hand, government will not become so important a source of revenues as to displace the patron or the market.

In other words, in the short run, the art museum will remain a conglomerate: three museums serving three publics, the balance among them shifting with changes in the economy and public policy, and exhibiting considerable local variation. In the long run, there is substantial room for entrepreneurship; and, as other institutions have done in the past, the art museum may trans-

form itself, for better or worse, into something quite different from what it is today.

The long run is beyond the scope of these comments, however. What is important for now is to recognize that the art museum has not one public, but several; that it is organized to carry on several kinds of relationship with these several publics; that the museum's allocation of attention among them is shaped by its fiscal and political environment; and that the museum's strategies towards these publics follow from and shape its conception of the purposes it seeks to serve.

Marilyn Perry

In the mid-1960s, as a young graduate student in London, I lived for several months in a damp and dingy eighteenth-century basement just off Baker Street that cost five pounds a week and stank of mildew. This in itself is hardly noteworthy, but the total lack of physical comfort compounded the stark realities of an extremely difficult period. I was penniless and as yet without friends. I had left my husband for a course of study for which I was inadequately prepared, and my mother was dying of cancer 5,000 miles away. What saved me—it is not too strong a word—was the proximity of the Wallace Collection, and, in particular, two paintings that I went to visit almost daily: Velasquez's *Portrait of a Lady with a Fan* and Poussin's *Dance to the Music of Time*. When I think of that period, its terrors and uncertainties are countered by the welcoming warmth of the Wallace Collection and the beauty of the pictures that had become my dearest companions. It was my first intimate experience of the consolation of art.

The Wallace Collection, of course, is a very select, even privileged, art museum, in that it exists solely to look after its holdings. It neither acquires nor lends; it is without novelty (except for the recent rehangings) or impending expansion. It is large enough to contain a great many treasures of very high quality, and small enough to feel at home in, to browse, to imagine that you know, or could know, every work. And, like our Frick Collection and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, it preserves something very special that we have had to sacrifice in our larger institutions—the inescapable fact that these are works of art that have been lived with and loved. That they have served, in other lives before our own, as they will serve in others after ours, to comfort, or to challenge complacency, or simply to delight.

It is the capacity to move us, to inspire love, that distinguishes art from all other objects. At the inauguration of the National Gallery of Art in March 1941, Franklin Delano Roosevelt rose to accept, for the people of the United States, the new art museum built by Andrew Mellon and with the founding donations of old master paintings from Mellon, Samuel Kress, and Joseph

Widener. "Great works of art have a way of breaking out of private ownership into public use," he said. "They belong so obviously to all who love them—they are so clearly the property not of their single owners but of all men everywhere—that the private rooms and houses where they are hung become in time too narrow for their presence. The true collectors are the collectors who understand this—the collectors of great paintings who feel that they can never truly own but only gather and preserve for all who love them the treasures they have found."

The purpose of the art museum, in Roosevelt's felicitous phrasing, is to place works of art "into public use . . . for all who love them." It is a high and noble charge, for both museum and public, pronounced in an hour when the fundamental values of western civilization stood in jeopardy. Half a century later, it bears revisiting.

Consider the predominant current activities in our larger, more comprehensive museums. To judge from their own press releases (a selective but indicative source), two approaches characterize the ways that art is presented to the public: as trophies, and as entertainment. Both patterns have evolved from premises about the nature and function of the art museum that would have been foreign to Roosevelt's generation, but seem now to be largely taken for granted.

The first presupposes that the art museum must continually acquire more art. I do not here wish to debate the merits of the proposition, but rather to consider the consequences when—as increasingly seems to be the case—it is accepted without argument that regular acquisition of more art is one of the museum's key responsibilities. This is an activity that makes enormous demands upon the limited resources of available funds, staff time, trustee interest, and publicity. Repetition of the processes of acquisition tends to demote works of art from treasures of the human spirit to specimen types with price tags or glamorous prizes pursued through subtle campaigns involving owners, dealers, auction houses, and donors. Novelty, cost, and possession become the primary values. Ironically, and sadly, the more the collection—and, eventually, the building—are expanded, the more the public use of the art, in Roosevelt's sense in which art is treasured, familiar, and beloved, is diminished.

If possession of more works of art is the first issue, display of more works of art is the second. The constantly changing, mammoth special exhibitions of the last two decades have whetted the public appetite for borrowed art expensively packaged and marketed as sophisticated, revolving, popular entertainment. Nor is the public disappointed, since, so primed, it arrives in record numbers, diligently follows the "acoustiguide," and agrees that it has enjoyed a privileged and unrepeatable cultural experience—a perception reinforced by queues, crowds, publicity, and merchandise. No wonder that special exhibitions are widely perceived as the art museum's chief attraction.

Inevitably, these patterns affect the public's understanding and use of its art museums and its art. Presenting works of art as recently acquired trophies taking their places among earlier spoils emphasizes the least important ele-

ments of the preciousness of art—namely, current assessed valuation and the uniqueness of physical possession. Great works of art have always been collateral in games of power and social prestige, but today's spectacle of museums ceaselessly courting collectors and announcing donations, or *partial* donations, at market value in formal press releases, demeans an act of philanthropy to the level of a tax maneuver and compromises the dignity of the work of art. The public is invited to gape at a publicist's icon, and to marvel at the incomprehensible value of paint on canvas. Neither donor nor public enjoys the rewards of Roosevelt's "true collectors", who knew themselves as temporary stewards of great works of art "for all who love them."

Other dangers attend the special exhibition. Here, it is the massing of art under a guiding rationale that creates the event. Interpretation is central, even crucial, since objects have been assembled according to an interconnecting (and occasionally tenuous) principle that usually requires explication. The necessity of justifying the purpose of the show tends to encourage hyperbole, just as its transience promotes a certain urgency. In effect, works of art are set performing, on limited engagement, in front of crowds that gather for an expensively produced event that is often both wonderful and unrepeatable. Perhaps even too wonderful. The public is quickly spoiled when art comes so beautifully prepackaged, ordered, and interpreted, with an entry, a middle, and a signposted exit near which the cash registers ring. You are told what is important. You do not get lost. It does not take all day.

Special exhibitions can be highly informative, stunningly beautiful, and unforgettable. But they are also, of necessity, a programmed experience, in which the viewer is essentially a passive spectator, enjoying the conglomeration of objects temporarily brought together for education and delight. The larger and more popular the show, the less opportunity for quiet contemplation. In consequence, as the special exhibition has come to dominate the public's expectation of its art museums, it has also tended to undermine the highest use of art.

An analogy may serve. Attending a performance of *Hamlet* without prior knowledge of the play may be a deeply moving experience, but one that is altogether different from knowing the great passages by heart. Only the solitude of personal reflection can move great art from the public to the private domain, to console our most intimate fears and longings, to comfort the loneliness of mortality.

Art's highest reward is personal discovery. Like falling in love, the experience is unique to the individual. It cannot be programmed. But it can be encouraged.

My hope, for the future of our art museums, is to find the permanent collection returned to center stage. This is not to abandon special exhibitions or even the quest for new acquisitions, but to refocus these activities in relation to the works of art at the heart of the institution—the masterpieces overlooked because they are always there. And this, of course, is precisely the point. We

must return the great art in our public collections to what Roosevelt so aptly called public use.

There are heartening signs of change, of new or improved efforts to invite the essential discovery that works of art can enrich the pleasure or diffuse the pain of being alive. Very little is required: curiosity, imagination, longing, accessibility, and encouragement. New modes of presentation quickly kindle new ways of looking and response. Nor does it take long to realize that the more we explore, the more we discover. The greatest wonder of great art, always, is that it is at once timeless and timely. If we will but give it time.

Must we justify? Some years ago, a BBC commentator queried Kenneth Clark about the purpose of art. Lord Clark responded, "I can only ask you, what is the purpose of love?"

James N. Wood

In spite of the title of this conference, the museums here are represented by directors and presidents, not by chief financial officers. I take this as recognition of the fact that, while the public is an essential component of the economic life of the art museum, the complex and dynamic relationship between the two can only be grasped in the context of an institution's purpose and philosophy. And today, the pressure for change in the way we perceive the public, define our purpose, and solve the economic challenge is, I believe, greater than at any time since the creation of our original bylaws in the late nineteenth century.

When The Art Institute of Chicago's first major building was completed on Michigan Avenue in 1893, it was intended to express permanence: architectural permanence in a city conscious of its unsophisticated youth and a cultural permanence that presented the values of the founders as the goal towards which the public should strive. Its cornice was proudly adorned with names of the great figures of western art (Apelles, Giotto, Leonardo, Velasquez), most of whom are, one hundred years later, still not represented in the permanent collection. This facade advertised a product that did not then exist in Chicago. It was a litany of cultural heroes that the museum and the public were to venerate without the benefit of original works of art. Today, our priorities and goals for the public are the reverse. The originality and quality of the actual work of art are now paramount. Judging our founders by today's values, they appear authoritarian and often condescending to their public. But while that may have been the case, their sense of civic responsibility and their extraordinary generosity have become increasingly rare. Today when a name is carved on a facade it is far more likely to be that of the donor than of an artist.

One hundred years ago our collections were meager but there was a funda-

mental, and not entirely imposed, consensus of purpose among the museum, its supporting elite, and the public. Today, swollen as we are with rich and diverse collections, that consensus has broken down. This change presents us with both a major challenge in determining the future of our art museums and an indication of our success in including a new cultural diversity and developing a sense of personal taste in our public. The names on the Art Institute's facade now misrepresent the breadth of our aspirations as well as our collections. Clearly the role of the museum and the expectations of the public have changed in our society. However, the full implications of these changes are still unclear, and the longer we take to comprehend them, the greater the risk we run, both philosophically and economically, of losing our bearings and jeopardizing our future.

I do not presume to have any profound answers. What I would like to do is to look briefly at our public and then ask several questions that I feel may help us at least to focus the issues before us. Of the public visiting the Art Institute, over 65 percent have a college degree or higher, and over 60 percent have white-collar occupations. The average age appears to be slowly rising, and women outnumber men by a substantial margin. The annual attendance of between one and a half and two million fluctuates in response to the special exhibitions in any given year, but the total, as for most American art museums, appears to have plateaued. When the attendance of the Art Institute is combined with the attendance of the other institutions in the metropolitan area, culture in Chicago, as in most major American cities, consistently outdraws sports events. What is important for us however, is that it is not just on the size of these numbers that we, and many of our funding sources, judge our impact, but on their socioeconomic distribution. The result is that while our popularity is at an all-time high, we are criticized from within and without for not meeting our social obligations. This coincides with the final stage in a one hundred year evolution, from the authoritarian assumptions of the founding generation to the pluralistic goals and tolerance for ambiguity that characterize the profession today. In addition, the continuing erosion of the American public's leisure time, which had already shrunk 31 percent between 1973 and 1984, means those that do not receive exposure to the arts through family or school at an early age, have even less probability of discovering them later in life. Therefore, as we approach the financial problems that most of us forecast for the 1990s, we will be under the pressure, much of it self-imposed, to assure that time and resources go to increasing the breadth of our audience as well as its size. The audience growth targeted by fund-raisers and merchandisers has little in common with that demanded by our educational purpose, and it will take concerted effort to prevent our museums from developing serious cracks along this fault line.

Just as the question of who the museum's public should be changed dramatically in the 1960s, the self-image the museum presented to the public was transformed in the 1970s. Spectacular loan exhibitions and ambitious building programs attracted a new and larger audience and convinced the media that

the visual arts and museums had a mass appeal and were even capable, on occasion, of creating celebrities. The simultaneous emergence to positions of authority of Tom Hoving and Andy Warhol saw the elimination of the last taboos separating art and museums from the media. With this transformation and the parallel explosion of the art market—with its succession of front-page, record-breaking sales—more and more of the public formed their opinions of museums and certain high-priced periods of art from the media, unencumbered by any firsthand experience of actual institutions or specific works of art. This has led to a dramatic increase in public awareness and fascination, but not necessarily understanding and support. While attendance has certainly been affected positively—and without that motivation for a first visit our collections have no chance to speak to a new audience—we have also become politically attractive, which is to say that we are seen as generating issues that can stir the emotions of a mass audience. As a result, long before the current debate on obscenity, museums were becoming increasingly subject to both liberal and conservative political pressure, the former advocating social and educational usefulness and the latter searching for deviation from moral, religious, and patriotic standards. The public that is aware of our existence has vastly increased, but so has the challenge and enormity of the task of transcending the impressions made by money and politics and providing educational opportunities that will convey our true purpose.

A final observation concerning our public is that it and the museum world we operate in are becoming increasingly international. Two recent quotes from *The New York Times* capture the dizzying pace of change. Demonstrators in Moscow besieging KGB headquarters “urged that the Lubyanka prison be turned into a museum of Stalinism,” and Christopher Burge, president of Christie’s, commenting on the projected total of possibly \$1 billion from the November New York auction sales said, “It’s a huge sum of money in art world terms, but in real world terms it really isn’t that much.” Clearly today anything, anywhere could and perhaps will become a museum, and claims for the monetary value of art can only be understood in terms of international investment strategies rather than the number of American dollars paid.

The erosion of the American museum’s former position of international dominance has paralleled the decline of American political and economic power abroad over the past decade. Gone are the heady days of “American cultural Imperialism” to quote Jack Lang, when exhibition loans flowed basically one way from Europe, Asia, and Latin America, and little was sent back in return. While it was easy to dismiss Lang’s complaint as inconsistent with French history and aspirations and to see it as motivated more by envy than by moral superiority, we now have no grounds for complaint as the rest of the industrialized world’s major museums are rushing to adopt high visibility programming and pursuit of corporate sponsors coupled with the inevitable growing dependence on earned income. In several countries, and Margaret Thatcher’s England is only the most apparent, the Americanization of a centuries-old support system is creating direct competition not only for loans, but for pri-

vate and corporate support as well. Who among us has not been repeatedly besieged by the charming delegates of the "The Friends of" some French, Dutch, or British museum, requesting access to the choicer levels of our mailing lists?

It would appear that we have little choice but to compete gracefully by the free-market standards we have pioneered. Or, in the case of the Japanese, by a variation on these standards that is particularly seductive, but potentially more dangerous in the long run. Given their willingness to pay substantial outright fees for loans, fees that they invariably recoup through sale of tickets and catalogues (and obviously much more when the venue is a department store), the Japanese have set an example that, while we have not hesitated to profit from it, would if adopted here, be highly destructive to the whole not-for-profit structure that is central to the tradition and purpose of the American art museum. These changes in the international museum world are absolutely central to our subject, the museum and the public, and demonstrate clearly that this subject can only be fully understood within the context of the changing economics of art museums.

In my opinion, what is at stake as we enter the 1990s is the basic relationship between the public and the museum. The evolution over our 100-year history of the concept of who the museum's public should be; the growing role of the media in shaping the public's perception of the museum; and the advent of strong international competition for art, funding, and ultimately the public, all lead to a fundamental question: What is the authority we want our art museums to project and operate under today? To limit the question to a somewhat simplistic, but essential, choice: Should our authority be educational or economic? Are we to be justified by the merits of the experience we provide or by our ability to survive in a free-market economy? Are we to view our public first as citizens or as consumers?

The way we answer these questions, and clearly there are many options in addition to a straight either/or response, will determine both the economic choices we offer our museums and the way we define their purpose. The founding generation saw their public as potential converts, while we are under a growing pressure to treat them as potential customers. Economics are only the surface of the debate. The fundamental question is one of purpose. The authority of an institution which serves customers is derived from the belief that the customer is ultimately, if not always, right and that current sales and attendance figures provide the ultimate measure of success. The authority of an institution which provides an opportunity to experience art is derived from the recognition, over an extended period of time, by a critical mass within the society, that this experience is essential and enduring and deserves to be made a priority. If we treat our public as consumers we will target very different audiences (upscale women from 30 to 50 will undoubtedly head the list) than if we see our public as citizens equally deserving of an opportunity. In addition, I am very concerned that a narrow focus on economics at the expense of

education will push museums to follow the disastrous tendency of our economy as a whole to pursue short-term goals and profit, rather than long-term investments.

To view the public as consumers is really a throwback to the museum's more authoritarian past. The customer is encouraged to accept the product that is offered, while a museum dedicated to an educational purpose will encourage a far more complex response. Its goal will be to develop critical appreciation where enjoyment and understanding are combined with the self-confidence to exercise an informed personal taste. The goal of such a museum is not a herd of customers but an individualized public which has learned what it *does not*, as well as what it *does* like.

I realize that I have strayed from a narrow focus on what our public is. However, we tend to define our public in accordance with the goals we derive from our purpose. Therefore, a frank look at our changing purpose is essential if we are to speak meaningfully of the public in relation to the economics of art museums today.

Summary of Discussion

Robert C. Blattberg began by saying he was disturbed to hear that the Metropolitan Museum of Art does not use the word "marketing" any more. He believed that museums should separate the two issues of defining their mission and obtaining the means to accomplish that mission. Museums also must decide whether their primary goal is to generate converts or to meet the needs of their current "customers." These goals are related, but they may also be in conflict in some ways. In any case, marketing can be a valuable tool for reaching whatever goals are chosen.

Harold M. Williams argued that the distinction between winning converts to art and satisfying the existing demands of the public is not as extreme as had been articulated. Museums need, first, to attract people into the museums. Then museums may decide that they want those people, or "customers," to "consume" something other than what they would choose to consume themselves. Traditional marketers try to serve a need or create a need, and they try to encourage repeat buyers. These goals apply to museums as well.

James N. Wood commented that he used the word "convert" to talk about the authoritarian past of the late nineteenth century. He contrasted that period with today's situation, when the question is whether to consider the audience "customers" or perhaps "citizens."

Richard N. Rosett related his experience as dean of the University of Chicago Business School, when he realized that a critical feature of a well-designed course is that at the last meeting students will understand a manner of discourse or language that at the first meeting they would not have compre-

hended at all. If museums want to educate people to comprehend the art that is exhibited, they need to do more than simply hang the pictures on the walls. They should direct the attention of young children, or of people who have not been to museums before and do not know about art, to works that are especially accessible to them, in the cause of getting them hooked on enjoying art. In other words, Rosett argued, there are people who can walk into a museum and find the paintings they are going to fall in love with, and there are other people for whom an art museum is new and mysterious. This segmentation of the market is not permanent—through education, museums can move people from the second group into the first one.

William H. Luers said he had learned that the words “customer,” “asset,” “product,” and “market” accentuate the cultural differences between economists and museum curators and directors. For example, referring to a work of art as an asset emphasizes its monetary value or its place on a balance sheet, a perspective that is hostile to the way museum people view art and hostile to the way they want the public to view art. One example of this divergence of views is the recent effort by the Financial Accounting Standards Board to have museums declare their works of art as assets on their balance sheets and then depreciate them. Most people who go to museums refuse to accept the concept of art as a commodity. Luers also contended that museums are undertaking the kind of education and introduction to art proposed by Rosett. *Rosett* responded that even though museums do those things, many museum directors resist speaking about their audience as composed of disparate groups.

Neil Rudenstine said that one of the definitions of an educational institution is that it has a claim to know something that the students do not. This mission of transmitting knowledge makes a university different in many respects from other kinds of institutions that sell “products” in ways that are far more customer-driven. Museums, like universities, are educational institutions, broadly defined. They have some important responsibilities and functions that are not directly related to their larger public audiences. They must be market-sensitive, but that is very different from simply asking, “what does the customer want?” If we believe this, then we can try to clarify the answers to some questions that were raised earlier in the discussion—what do museums know, and how can they teach it? Because museums cannot offer courses per se, they have often defined their educational mission in a rather amorphous way, and the result is sometimes an amalgam of special exhibitions, lectures, catalogues, videos, school programs, and so on.

Peter Temin returned to the question of language in referring to “assets” and “customers.” He felt that the choice of language mattered when people use language; they are formulating a way to think about a problem. The premise of the conference was that it would be useful for art museum directors to think about their museums from a different point of view from their accustomed one. He argued that a useful economic model of a museum with distinct audiences is the model of a multiproduct firm. This is the common situation in

U.S. firms. The function of central management in such a firm is to balance the resources devoted to the products, which requires understanding both the short-term and long-term relationships among them. One specific example for museums is that educating the less-informed public today will increase the number of museum members in the future.

Alberta Arthurs felt that museums should be encouraged to find places where the three markets identified by Paul J. DiMaggio can come together and reinforce each other. The Rockefeller Foundation funds special exhibitions which reach out to communities and try to extend the definition of art, instead of funding exhibitions that reinforce the image that the museum has already. The foundation also funds curatorial experiments within museums, that is, exhibits that reexamine and use permanent collections in various, innovative ways.

Martin Shubik said that it was very tricky to use loaded words such as market or customer because there is a fundamental psychological difference—a difference in “gestalt”—between viewing museum visitors as customers or as patrons. He felt also that the dichotomy that had been introduced between education and entertainment was totally false; anybody who is in education is in show business. The issue is to determine the right mix of show business. Finally, he said that museums must be clearer about whether they are educating the public for taste for yesterday’s art, taste for today’s art, or taste for tomorrow’s art.

Blattberg emphasized the difference between museums catering to people’s current taste in art and museums playing a missionary role with respect to people’s tastes. He wondered if the current staff and organization of museums could play that missionary role, or if another form of organization could meet that goal more effectively.

Martin Feldstein asked what would happen to the number of visitors to museums if the admissions charge were raised by \$1. Presumably the number of visitors would fall somewhat, but he wondered whether the directors had a quantitative sense of what the relative reduction would be.

Wood felt that attendance would fall very slightly at the Chicago Art Institute, but he was concerned that people would hear that “it costs \$6 to get in,” although that is just the recommended admission. *Anne d’Harnoncourt* thought that the effect would be relatively small at the Philadelphia Museum of Art as well. She noted that admissions increases are timed usually to go into effect when there are special exhibits occurring, in the hope that people will not notice as much. *John Walsh* said that Mr. Getty had specified free admission, but Walsh would like that extra dollar.

Harry S. Parker III noted that an increase in the daily admission fee would encourage people to become members of the museum, which would mean a partially offsetting rise in revenue.

Luers felt that a \$1 change would not affect attendance significantly but would affect the willingness to pay the full suggested contribution.

Anne Hawley said that the Gardner Museum just started charging for the first time in many years, and although overall attendance is little changed, the charge has been a barrier to students with whom the museum is very popular. *Rudenshine* added that other museums have lower rates for students, with the long-term goal of building an educated audience.

Bruce H. Evans said that the Dayton Art Institute had just started charging admission, and most people whom they asked as they left the museum thought the visit was worth more than the fee. He suggested reserving the additional dollar for admission for something specifically to benefit museum visitors. *Feldstein* said that might be a useful way to market the increase but was probably a bad way to manage funds.

John Hale believed that the British public was much more price-sensitive than the American public, based on the comments of the other museum directors.

Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr. said that the Boston Museum of Fine Arts expected no decline in attendance from the recent increase in fee from \$5 to \$6.

J. Carter Brown said that when the Museum of Fine Arts first instituted an admissions fee, attendance fell sharply. *Feldstein* wondered if there could be a big effect of moving from free admittance to paid admittance but a small effect of marginal changes in the fee once it exists.