

Rethinking Museum and Collective Memory: A Sociological Consideration of Art and its Public in a Media-saturated Society

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Abstract

This article revisits the necessity of a sociological understanding of art regarding new forms of artistic creation, the cultural politics of collective memory, and the changing relations of art and its public in society at large in which media play a significant role of facilitating communication and interaction correlating to visual representation and identity. Since the 1990s, the sociologists of the arts have established research inquiries by exploring the institutions and processes of art registered in society and by examining the relations of art and its public as attributes to status reproduction and taste. However, along with advances in technology and communication, the art world has transformed: new media provide refreshing projects and concepts for the production, circulation and reception of the arts; new technologies are adapted not only for displaying the arts either in reality or in virtuality but also for accommodating the public that is now more varied and diverse; the audiences also face challenges as those changes demand new understandings of the arts and visiting experiences. In order to reconsider how relevant the established sociological inquiries are today to the understanding of art, taking the art exhibition, *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Image/Recent Art*, held at The Jewish Museum in New York in 2002, as example, this article puts the role and function of museum in society under scrutiny. The focus here is the question of what and how an art museum is meant to be for a culturally diverse public when we confront the controversies surrounding the art exhibition of the Holocaust left us behind the cultural landscape of “fascinating fascism.” Through my discussion of the conflicting views between the new, media-savvy generation of artists and the old generations of the Jewish community, it would become clear why art matters in society only if we were able to take a sociological consideration of art and collective memory more seriously.

Keywords: Contemporary Art, Ethnography, Museology, Representation, Collective Memory