**The Evolution of Museums**

**‘Liminality’ allows the visitors to transition beyond the realms of mundane life and attain a greater understanding of the deep-rooted history.**

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Carol Duncan, known for her insightful work in the field of Museum Studies, explores art museums in the light of both anthropological and philosophical literature to establish its ritualistic significance. The evolution of museums from a mere cultural site to a complete ritualistic structure is quite intriguing.

The author seems to delve into the liminal effects of art museums by establishing a sense of decorum implied by “clearly defined precincts” and “grand doors” in order to “appreciate the works of art”. She seems convinced that museums are the primary channel for transferring the history of civilizations to future generations, however, this is marred by intervening political powers. She is honest in highlighting the effective use of order effects by political powers and social institutions in shaping historical narratives.

She begins by making a comparison between museums and religious places, however seems to give more importance to art museums by referring to them as “complex entities”: offering a blend of art, values, and beliefs. Moreover, Duncan has defined the structure of museum as a ritual by citing examples of various museums. It is further strengthened by describing the evolution of the Louvre museum: a symbol of the French monarchy, converted into a public place. Thus, touching upon the “civic” function of a ritual.

On the contrary, Duncan seems to give more emphasis on the Western perspective of looking at museums as she did not include any example of non-Western art and she seemed to diminish their significance by calling them “minority cultures” in the text. Further, she is convinced about the supremacy of Western cultures in shaping the identity of others. However, she presents a weak argument by not highlighting any particular areas of intervention.

In addition to this, Duncan has vividly portrayed the concept of the ‘liminality’ of a ritual as the visitors follow a guided tour suggested by a “structured narrative route” and prescribed forms of conduct. Moreover, she builds on her argument by citing the works of two anthropologists, Turner and Schmidt and presenting their new perspectives as implied by “turn the world upside-down”. Moreover, ‘liminality’ allows the visitors to transition beyond the realms of mundane life and attain a greater understanding of the deep-rooted history. The connection between visitors, art, and structure further establishes the ritualistic nature of the museum as conveyed by reference to “an imaginative act of identification between viewer and artist”.

Duncan clearly points out political powers and social institutions’ intervention in shaping the historical narratives by effectively using order effects by using the reference of “natural”, “legitimate” and “aesthetic experience” to the visitors. These powers dictate what to show and what to conceal. Therefore, it brings into question our identity as well as who we really are. By using strong words such as “obscure” she is emphasizing the amount of influence of these political powers in redefining the historical contexts. Moreover, by adding the aesthetic touch, completely different meanings have been assigned to these objects which in turn destroy the representation of a specific community.

Duncan provides a strong case of art museums being ritualistic structures particularly emphasizing the effects of liminality in terms of both anthropological and philosophical perspectives. However, the writer seems to be influenced by the domination of Western cultures over others. Further, she has raised valid questions on the meanings we assign to historical narratives shaped through art museums thus, doubting the existence of our identity.