

Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk

Andrea Fraser

Posters, placards, signs, symbols must be distributed, so that everyone may learn their significations. The publicity of punishment must not have the physical effect of terror; it must be an open book to be read. Le Peletier suggested that, once a month, the people should be allowed to visit convicts, “in their mournful cells: they will read, written in bold letters above the door, the name of the convict, his crime and his sentence . . .” Let us conceive of places of punishment as a Garden of the Laws that families would visit on Sundays . . . a living lesson in the museum of order.

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 1977

In every home in Philadelphia, youth will be taught to revere the things that are housed here.

Mayor Harry A. Mackey, at the opening of the new Pennsylvania Museum building,
March 27, 1928

The West Entrance Hall of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, February 5, or 11 or 12 or 18 or 19, 1989. Two or three dozen museum visitors are waiting in the southeast corner of the visitor reception area; some are waiting for a Contemporary Viewpoints Artist Lecture by Andrea Fraser; some are waiting for one of the Museum’s many guided tours; some are just waiting for friends.

At three o’clock, Jane Castleton enters the West Entrance Hall and begins to address whoever appears to be listening. She is dressed in a silver and brown hounds tooth check double-breasted suit with a skirt just below the knee in length, an off-white silk button-down blouse, white stockings and black pumps. Her brown hair is gathered into a small bun held in place with a black bow:

Good afternoon, uh . . . Everyone? Good afternoon. My name is Jane Castleton, and I’d like to welcome all of you to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. I’ll be your guide today as we explore the museum, uh, its history, and its collection.

Our tour today is a collection tour – it’s called Museum Highlights – and we’ll be focusing on some of rooms in the Museum today, uh, the Museum’s famed Period Rooms; Dining Rooms, Coat Rooms, etcetera, Rest Rooms, uh – can everyone hear me? If you can’t hear me, don’t feel shy, just tell me to speak up.

That's right. As I was saying, we'll also be talking about the visitor reception areas, and various service and support spaces, as well as this building, uh, this building, in which they are housed. And the Museum itself, the Museum itself, the "itself" itself being so compelling.¹

Of course, we'll only be able to visit a small portion of the Museum on our tour today; its over 200 galleries contain hundreds of thousands of art objects spanning the globe and centuries. But, just to give you a general idea, uh, to help you orient yourself, this may be your first visit, your very first visit to the museum today – welcome again.

This is the West Entrance Hall. Uh. Opposite, of course, is the East Entrance, where we'll be going shortly. This is really the center of the Museum which – as you can see on these maps here – consists of a long central building with wings extending back at each end. It's four stories high including a basement.

This West Entrance Hall provides access to the ground floor of the South Wing which houses some of the Museum's public facilities that we'll be visiting uh, later on today . . .

Jane walks to the information desk in the center of the West Entrance Hall.

It also houses the Museum's brand new combination information desk, admissions desk – I hope that all of you have paid your admission fee – and, uh, membership desk. If you're a Museum Member, of course, you don't have to pay an admissions fee.

Membership, you know, "plays a vitally important role in the life of the Museum. Many Members indicate that they joined the Museum because they perceive it to be an institution of the highest quality, one of the world's great repositories of civilization. They see it as a place apart from the mundane demands of reality where an individual can fortify his or her linkage with the creative forces of the world, old and new."²

And, uh, if you're a Museum Member, you'll also be able to use the Members Only Lounge located on the balcony directly above my head and to the right as you see . . .

I myself did not pay an admission fee. Uh. I'm not a Museum Member, nor am I a Museum employee. I'm a visiting lecturer, a guest of the Division of Education. Uh, I am also, like the Board of Trustees and the Museum Guides, a volunteer.³ It is thus my privilege, my privilege, as a guest, as a volunteer – and, shall I say, as an artist – to be able to express myself here today simply as a unique individual, an individual with unique qualities.

And I sincerely hope that I express my best qualities – as do we all, if I may say so. That's why we're here.⁴

Let's move on to the East Entrance shall we. Follow me if you will. To the elevator . . .

Jane leads the group to the elevators.

Uh, here we are. We're going to the second floor.

When the group reassembles on the second floor in the Great Stair Hall, Jane continues.

Is everyone here? All right, let's continue.

This is the Great Stair Hall, and, as you can see, we're on the second floor, just inside the East Entrance. As I said earlier, this is really the center of the Museum, and it provides access to the Museum's collections. To my right is the South Wing where the American art is generally kept to itself on the first floor, with the South Asian, Near and Far Eastern, and Medieval art on the second floor. To my left is the North Wing where you'll find European and Twentieth-century Art on the first floor and, on the second floor, more European art and the Period Rooms that we'll be talking about later today.

Uh. The Philadelphia Museum of Art is one of the oldest art museums in the United States. It was originally the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art and it was established in 1877, 1877. Uh, that was in Memorial Hall, not this building.⁵ This building opened to the public in 1928. It wasn't originally supposed to be the new home of the Pennsylvania Museum. It was first envisioned about 1907 as, uh, just as a, as "a great building [to be the] terminal feature of the [Benjamin Franklin] Parkway. The purpose of the building was secondary."⁶

But an art museum is not just a building, not just a collection of objects. An art museum – particularly a municipal art museum like our own – is a public institution with a mission, with a mandate. And the Philadelphia Museum of Art, uh, like all public institutions, was the product of a public policy.

What was that policy?

Well, writing about *The New Museum and Its Service to Philadelphia* in 1922, the Museum wrote that, uh, they wrote: "We have come to understand that to rob . . . people of the things of the spirit and to supply them with higher wages as a substitute is not good economics, good patriotism, or good policy."⁷

Like the other municipal institutions of the day – uh, the Zoological Garden and the Aquarium also of course in Fairmount Park; the new free library on the Parkway; the new municipal stadium; Camp Happy, "for undernourished children"; Brown's Farm, for "dependent and abandoned children"; the new House of Correction; the new Hospital for Mental Diseases at Byberry; the new General Hospital at Blockly; the Hospital for Contagious Diseases at Blockly; the Hospital for the Feeble-Minded at Blockly; the Home for the Indigent at Blockly;⁸ the Commercial Museum next to Blockly, where homeless men were sometimes housed "dedicated to economic education" – now the Philadelphia Civic Center; the poorhouses of Germantown, Roxborough, and Lower Dublin . . .⁹

Called living tombs and social cemeteries, vile catchalls for all those in need, squalid warehouses for the failures and cast-offs of society,¹⁰ no one would enter the poorhouse voluntarily. The receipt of public assistance was made into a ritual of public degradation so abhorrent that even the meanest work for the meanest wages was preferable.¹¹

*Jane walks to a window and leans against the grand piano standing in front it.*¹²

The Municipal Art Gallery "that really serves its purpose gives an opportunity for enjoying the highest privileges of wealth and leisure to all those people

who have cultivated tastes but not the means of gratifying them.” And for those who have not yet cultivated taste, the Museum will provide “a training in taste.”¹³ But, above all, the Municipal Art Gallery should be “generous enough to fitly symbolize the function of art as the expression of all that is noblest in either the achievements or the aspirations of humanity . . . ‘where there is no vision the people perish . . .’”¹⁴

Jane throws open the curtains covering the window and reveals a perfect vista of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway.

And just look at this view! Magnificent!

“If we do not possess art in a city, or beautiful spots in the city, we cannot expect to attract visitors to our home town.”¹⁵

Jane gestures toward group.

“Because young people in particular are drawn to the area, Philadelphia attracts a huge labor pool of college-educated and trained technical people. And, due to its old manufacturing traditions, skilled laborers are also plentiful.”¹⁶

Jane leaves the window and walks through and past the group. She gestures generally as she walks.

“The climate is healthy. Quality space is available and affordable . . . The systems for success are in place and working well. But even more important, Philadelphia is livable.”

“You can choose from 5 professional sports teams, a world-class symphony, 100 Museums, the largest municipal park system in the country, and a restaurant renaissance the whole world is talking about.”¹⁷

Plus: “8 million square feet of new commercial office space . . . High-tech, Healthcare, Medical Publishing and Printing, General Business Services, Financial Services, Heavy Manufacturing [and] Fashion . . .”¹⁸

I’d like to move on now to the galleries where we’ll be talking about some of the Museum’s period rooms, uh, as I mentioned earlier, the Museum’s famed period rooms. If you’ll just follow me please.

Jane leads the group through the European Art galleries to one of the Museum’s period rooms.

And here we are.

This is the Grand Salon from the Chateau de Draveil. It’s French, uh, eighteenth century . . .

Few eras in history were more preoccupied with “living in style” than eighteenth-century France . . .

Notice “the chaste style, characteristic of the later years of Louis XVI’s reign . . . revealed here in the simplicity of the broad surfaces, in the slender proportions of their frames, and in the classical ornaments . . . carved with the most extreme crispness and brilliance . . . of great beauty and refinement . . . unusual interest . . . of the utmost delicacy . . .”¹⁹

Next, I’d like to talk about another period room. It’s just across the gallery. If you’ll follow me please . . .

Jane walks across the gallery to another period room, entered through a short, narrow corridor that also contains the door to the Men's Room.

Uh, this is a Paneled Room from England, dating from 1625. It contains seventeenth-century Dutch paintings, and was installed in the Museum in 1952, uh . . .

And in here, this is the Men's Room.

“What a difference there may be on opposite sides of a thin partition-wall! On this side of the wall is a family inclined to dirt and disorder because of its unperfect social education . . . Cleanliness of persons or rooms is wholly forgotten. The floors become littered with filth, for no one feels the desire or obligation to have it otherwise. The rights of property are disregarded or are only respected through fear and personal force.

“On the other side of the wall only a few inches away, the floor, neatly carpeted, is spotless. The center-table holds a . . . lamp, [and] a vase with fresh grasses . . . There are pictures on the walls, of . . . landscapes [and] the family . . .

“One may find a bureau turned into a shrine.

“It stands to reason that slovenly and destructive occupants are not accorded the same attention that is given to . . . those who are clean and careful and prompt in their payments.”²⁰

Jane leaves the Paneled Room.

“The public, who buy clothes and table china and wall paper and inexpensive jewelry, must be forced to raise their standards of taste by seeing the masterpieces of other civilizations and other centuries.”²¹

Here for example . . .

Jane gestures around the gallery.

“Imposing architectural installations provide noble settings within the Museum's . . . galleries.”²²

Jane walks north into the next gallery. Then, addressing “The Birth of Venus” by Nicolas Poussin:

“Resplendently . . . amazingly flawless . . . sumptuous . . . This figure is among the finest and most beautiful creations . . . An image of exceptional rhythm and fluidity . . .”²³

Jane walks across the room to address “Saint Luke” by Simon Vouet.

“This is the most spectacular . . . prized for their clear bold patterns and relatively few yet strong and harmonious . . . of the more than one thousand works collected by celebrated Philadelphia Lawyer . . . monumental, sculptural . . . in an austere setting . . .”

Jane walks north into a gallery containing “The Four Seasons” attributed to Augustin Pajou. As she walks:

[“Steady, thrifty, forehanded and domestic in their habits . . . independent and self-helpful . . . quietly self-assured.”²⁴]

Addressing “The Sacrifice of the Arrows of Love on the Altar of Friendship” by Jean Pierre Antoine Tassaert:

“One of the most jarring and emotionally effective interpretations . . . The writhing, enchained, muscular . . . majestic, frenzied . . . vast and vigorous . . . perfectly complimented Europe’s opulent palaces and churches . . .”

[Let’s move on to the next gallery shall we . . .]

Jane walks north into the next gallery. Gesturing generally:

“One of the most complex and graceful compositions of the seventeenth century . . .”

Addressing “Cabinet” attributed to Adam Weisweiler:

“This charming group of dancing maidens . . . graceful, life-size, mythological . . . a creation of almost visionary splendor. The sweeping and surging . . . exaggerated, lunging . . . at once so splendidly theatrical and so obviously individualized . . .”

Jane walks back into the gallery containing “The Four Seasons.” She addresses the group:

[“Though she was from ‘out of town’ her background was similar to theirs, and she fit in to the routine of afternoons ‘at home,’ the Tuesday box at the Academy of Music, the opening night of the Oil Painting Show . . .”²⁵]

Speaking generally:

“ . . . where the best qualities of taste were sustained until late in the century . . .”

Addressing a guard’s stool in the corner of the gallery:

“In scale and complexity . . . the most ambitious undertaking . . . in the great European tradition . . . abundance and grace . . . free from time and change . . .”

Addressing “The Four Seasons: Autumn as Bacchus”:

And here . . .

“American, mother, three brothers distinctly subnormal, herself mentally deficient, violent, undisciplined and lacking in every qualification of motherhood, shiftless, irresponsible . . .”

“Her second husband is one of the most degraded, of a low and vicious family . . . extremely backward and incorrigible . . . father being of less than average intelligence . . . generally . . . regarded by all who have dealt with her as weak . . . and a dangerous character on account of her immoral propensities . . . grossly low condition . . . unable to learn . . . of no service in the home, and constantly . . . given to self abuse . . . almost entirely nude . . . stretched out on floor with a dirty, blackened pan . . .”²⁶

Addressing the group:

I want to be graceful.

Rituals of family and love and orderliness . . .

Jane walks back to gallery with “The Birth of Venus.” Speaking generally:

“Gentle, private . . . charm and originality . . . Total restraint . . . utilitarian . . . rectilinear . . .”²⁷

Addressing “The Birth of Venus”:

“Lower class culture: there is a substantial segment of present-day American society whose way of life, values, and characteristic patterns of behavior are

the product of a distinctive cultural system which may be termed 'lower class.'"²⁸

Jane walks back into the gallery between the Grand Salon and the Paneled Room. Speaking generally as she walks across the gallery:

"Plain grace . . . harmony and perfection . . . impressive . . . severely formal, yet tender . . . vigorous . . . humble . . . joyful . . ."²⁹

"Shiftless, lazy, unambitious . . . ; chronic poor . . .

Addressing "Rape of the Sabines" by Luca Giordano:

"Unable to 'make a go of it' because of character deficiencies or lack of skill . . . ; [If you'll just follow me . . .] 'the new poor'; 'multi-problem families'; 'the culture of poverty'; 'disreputable poor,' 'paupers,' 'cannot cope,' 'make noise,' cause trouble and generally 'create problems' . . . 'lower-lowers' "³⁰

Addressing an exit sign above door at the far end of the gallery:

"Firm in painting, delicate in color and texture, this picture is a brilliant example of a brilliant form."³¹

"Or over here . . ."

Jane exits the gallery leaving most of the group some distance behind her. She continues into the Medieval art galleries, walking back toward the Great Stair Hall. Speaking generally:

"Unstable and superficial interpersonal relationships . . . low levels of participation . . . little interest in, or knowledge of, larger society . . . sense of helplessness and low sense of personal efficiency . . . Low 'need achievement' and low levels of aspirations for the self."

Turning to address the group:

[*"The love of beauty is one of the finer things that makes life worth living."*³²]

Again speaking generally:

"Jobs at the lowest level of skills . . . unskilled . . . and menial jobs . . ."

Gesturing toward various parts of the gallery:

"in hotels, laundries, kitchens, furnace rooms, nonunionized factories and hospitals . . ."³³

"Scattered brick houses . . . dreary warehouses . . . blank walls and junk yards . . . drab, enclosing . . . sometimes blue . . ."³⁴

Jane walks through the doors to the Great Stair Hall. She stops and turns to address group:

Really! I mean . . . Here for example . . .

Jane moves in the direction of the stairs as she speaks, gesturing generally at benches, the stone railing, tapestries, etcetera.

"You take your ordinary, barnyard room, so to speak, the familiar room that you have lived in, that you never thought of as a work of art, and somehow, insensibly, you pull it about, you put a chair in a different place, you arrange the mantelpiece, get rid of half the impedimenta of the mantelpiece – you know how most people load up the mantelpieces – you simply strip it and you put one or two things there and you put them in the right place . . . an artist will do that . . . Well, that's what a museum does, I think, for all of us."³⁵

I'd like to continue on now to the first floor . . .

Jane descends the Great Stair with the group. At the second landing she begins speaking, gesturing in various directions around the Great Stair Hall as she walks. When she reaches the bottom of the stair she walks around it to the left.

As I mentioned earlier, it “consists of a center building, with wings at each end extending back . . . It is four stories high, including the basement . . .

“The inmates are lodged in rooms of about 22 feet by 45 feet (of which there are 42) from 20 to 24 persons in each room, and are classed according to their general character and habits, separating the more deserving from the abandoned and worthless, and thus removing the most obnoxious feature consequent to such establishments. The Americans are generally by themselves; so are the Irish; and the Blacks also have their separate apartments.

“[It] also contains a penitentiary, a hospital for the sick and insane, several large buildings for workshops, schoolrooms, lodging rooms for children, and the various outhouses of a large and well regulated establishment . . .”³⁶

She stops in front of Diego Rivera's "Liberation of the Peon," which is hung outside the door to the coat room underneath the stair.

And isn't this a handsome drinking fountain!

Jane walks into the Coat Room, gesturing toward the drinking fountain at the far end. Addressing the drinking fountain:

Hmm “. . . a work of astonishing economy and monumentality,” “. . . it boldly contrasts with the severe and highly stylized productions of this form . . .” [Uh, notice, uh . . .] “The massiveness . . . the vast [uh] . . . most ambitious and resolved. . . !”³⁷

Graceful, mythological, life-size . . .

I want to be graceful.

Jane leaves the coat room, gesturing for the group to follow her.

You know – come along. You know “each individual, no matter how untutored, [can find] a thousand objects (or better still, just one . . .) so obviously perfect and so directly in the line of [her] own half-understood striving for perfection that . . .”³⁸

Here for example . . .

Jane walks to a David Smith sculpture. Standing next to it, she holds her arm outstretched.

Notice how the light catches the fabric, the tiny hounds tooth checks of the suit, and silvers the fabric a little more brightly, as it falls about the arms, the legs, uh, just below the knee, and creases slightly at the waist, double-breasted . . .

But look at the face. The skin is broken. She turns her head away slightly . . .

Jane begins walking to the stairs leading to the West Entrance Hall, still speaking.

While her dress and bearing may suggest an upper-class, uh, lady, the discriminating, uh, the discriminating, viewer, will notice that her hands are scarred and poorly manicured, and her teeth have not been straightened.

I'd like to move on to the West Entrance now . . .

Halfway down stairs to the West Entrance Hall, Jane turns to address the group.

“The museum’s task could be described as the continuous, conscientious and resolute distinction of quality from mediocrity.”³⁹

“Hunger is the best sauce, and everything that is eatable is relished by people with a healthy appetite. [But] . . . a satisfaction of this sort shows no choice directed by taste. It is only when the want is appeased that we can distinguish which of many men has or has not taste.”⁴⁰

In the West Entrance Hall:

“Still, it takes very little to produce a perfect plate of fruit and cheese.” Here for example . . .

Addressing one of the “Dancing Nymphs” by Claude Michel (known as Clodion):

“ . . . hunks of sharp white Vermont cheddar served in rough hewn blocks, and a single perfect apple are elegant in their simplicity and preferable . . .”

Turning to address the second of the “Dancing Nymphs”:

“ . . . to such daunting combinations as chicken medallions with avocado.”⁴¹

Jane walks away from “The Dancing Nymphs.” She walks past the coat room and into a corridor with rest rooms, telephones, the Art Sales and Rental Gallery, and some contemporary art. She speaks while walking, turning occasionally to address the group.

“I heard at a Sunday Brunch not long ago . . . Everybody, it seems, now has horror stories:

“A man with a magnificent house on Delancy Place says he can’t keep flowers outside, because every morning he finds the pots overturned and his sidewalks covered with filth and litter.

“Another man tells of seeing a street bum [who seem to have taken every available nook, cranny and stairwell] sprawled in front of Nan Duskin on Walnut Street, in our prime retail location. Nobody could move this bum, not even the police.

“A woman who has always been a patron of the Art Museum can’t believe what a shambles the landscaping there has become . . .

“ . . . there is no longer any place to escape [no civilized oasis]”⁴²

Jane stops at the end of the corridor and turns to address the group.

This corridor houses some of the Museum’s public facilities: the coat room, rest rooms, telephones, uh . . . it doesn’t really have a name, but uh . . .

Down the hall here . . .

Jane walks down an adjoining corridor toward the Drawing and Print Galleries opposite the Museum Shop.

Down the hall here we have the Muriel and Philip Berman Drawing and Print Galleries. They were named as part of the Museum’s Donor Recognition Program. The Museum you know provides prospective donors with a veritable cornucopia of Named Space Opportunities.

Here for example . . .

Jane walks across the corridor to address the Museum Shop.

. . . for \$750,000 you could name the Museum Shop.

You know, I’d like to name a space, why, if I had \$750,000 I would name this Shop um . . . Andrea. Andrea is such a nice name.

Jane walks a few feet further down the corridor and stops again to address the group.

This is our Museum Shop, Andrea, named in 1989 by Mrs. John P. Castleton, a onetime Museum guide and eternal art appreciator. Jane, as she was called, always liked to say that “patronage creates a personal sense of ownership in a beautiful home of the arts and unites the most enlightened spirits of the community in a high devotion to the public good.”⁴³

“Did you know her? To know her was to love her. She was special . . . with her long stride and tailored profile, a [blond] of medium height dressed in understated refinement, incredibly ‘finished.’ She often carried a briefcase . . . apologizing . . . Her voice surprised, deep and husky and resonant with emotion, drawing out and lingering over the vowels . . . a serious student, humble, hungry, analytic . . . She read . . . and would look and invite us to look . . . there was time to see more clearly.”⁴⁴

Jane is silent for a moment and then continues speaking as she walks past the Museum Shop and on through the series of harshly lit and empty corridors that lead to the Museum’s cafeteria.

“The Museum wants and needs an informed, enthusiastic audience whose . . . knowledge of the collections and programing continue to grow.”⁴⁵

The Museum says: here you will find “satisfaction,” you will find “contentment,” you will find “pleasure,” here you will find “the finer things that make life worth living,” here you will be liberated “from the struggle imposed by material needs,” here you will find your “ideal beauty,” you will find “inspiration,” here you will find “a place apart,” you will find “standards,” here you will find “civilization . . .”⁴⁶

Jane stops just outside the cafeteria.

Oh, I’ve known happiness; intense happiness, exquisite happiness, here in the museum, beside these tiles, or across the room from those or, or over here, between these two.

It’s nice to feel alive.

I’d like to live like an art object. Wouldn’t it be nice to live like an art object.

“A sophisticated composition of austere dignity, vitality, and immediate quality; a strict formality softened by an exquisitely luminous atmosphere . . .”⁴⁷

How could anyone ask for more.

Graceful, mythological, life size . . .

Jane enters the cafeteria.

“This room represents the heyday of colonial art in Philadelphia on the eve of the Revolution, and must be regarded as one of the very finest of all American rooms.”⁴⁸

Jane moves through the room as she speaks, gesturing at tables, chairs, trash bins, cafeteria patrons, etcetera.

Notice “the architectural decoration . . . [It] combines the classical vocabulary of broken pediments and fluted pilasters familiar in English house design, with the flamboyant, asymmetrical plaster ornamentations derived from the French Rococo style. The beautiful upholstered sofa, Chippendale style chairs, and

marble-top table show the variety of form for which Philadelphia furniture makers were justly famous.”⁴⁹

And . . . “This room was much frequented by Washington while Commander-in-Chief and President.”⁵⁰

Jane leaves the cafeteria and walks back the way she came.

“Stately men and women – above all things stately – measured, ordered, with a certain quiet elegance about them . . . sober color, dignified composition, the arrangement . . . that is simple, fine, and sympathetic to us all [certain habits of good drawing . . . things which I like to call the ‘good manners of painting’] . . . a little more measure, a little more calm, a little more serenity . . . dignity and a certain technical rectitude . . . taste, the sense of measure and decorum . . .

“Well, frequent this museum of yours and get in contact with tradition. You drink in the tradition that exists [here] and that is . . . piled up [here], all the epochs, all the great ages. You will feel with me that these touchstones, these standards, after all, are not pedantic things [but] standards for a cultivated, governed, discriminating instinct.”⁵¹

Let’s not just talk about art. Because finally, the Museum’s purpose is not just to develop an appreciation of art, but to develop an appreciation of values . . .

“By appreciation of values we have in mind the ability to distinguish between the worthy and the unworthy, the true and the false, the beautiful and the ugly, between refinement and crudity, sincerity and cant, between the elevating and the degrading, the decent and indecent in dress and conduct, between values that are enduring and those that are temporary,”⁵² between . . .

Here . . . Over here, between . . .

Jane walks quickly back into the corridor with the telephones, coat room, rest rooms, Art Sales and Rental Gallery, etcetera. She moves around the corridor, gesturing to these things as she refers to them.

. . . here, the ability to distinguish between a coat room and a rest room, between a painting and a telephone, a guard and a guide; the ability to distinguish between yourself and a drinking fountain, between what is different and what is better and objects that are inside and those that are outside; the ability to distinguish between your rights and your wants, between what is good for you and what is good for society.

Well. That’s the end of our tour for today.

Thank you for joining me and have a nice day.

Notes

- 1 “Museums Highlights: A Gallery Talk” was developed as part of the Contemporary Viewpoints Artist Lecture Series, which was organized by the Tyler School of Art of Temple University, and funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. The performance owed its existence to Hester Stinnett, the director of Contemporary Viewpoints, who invited me to Philadelphia, and to Danielle Rice, the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s

Curator of Education, who supported the performance from within the Museum. I would also like to thank Donald Moss for his comments on various drafts of this script; Allan McCollum, for first calling the activities of docents to my attention; and Douglas Crimp, at whose request the script was first prepared for publication in *October* magazine.

- 2 Robert Montgomery Scott and Ann d'Harnoncourt, "From the President and the Director." *Philadelphia Museum of Art Magazine* (Spring 1988).
- 3 This is partly true. For the first performance, I received an honorarium from Contemporary Viewpoints. The following four performances were "voluntary." Providing the services of a guide in the galleries and at the information desk, a volunteer docent is not just someone who gives tours for a small percentage of the museum's visitors; she is the Museum's representative. Unlike the members of the museum's nonprofessional maintenance, security, and gift shop staff that visitors come in contact with, the docent is a figure of identification for a primarily white, middle-class audience. And unlike the museum's professional staff, the docent is the representative of the museum's voluntary sector. The Philadelphia Museum of Art, like many municipal or civic museums in the United States, is a hybrid of public and private nonprofit, volunteer and professional. The city owns the building and provides municipal employees for its security and maintenance; volunteer trustees own everything in the building and govern a private nonprofit corporation which engages other volunteers and hires a professional staff. While docents are usually trained by the professional staff, I would say that they aspire less to professional competence than to what Pierre Bourdieu calls the "precocious," "status-induced familiarity" with legitimate culture that marks those to whom the objects within the museum belong(ed); an "Imperceptible learning" that can only be "acquired with time and applied by those who can take their time" (Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 71–2).
- 4 While Jane is a fictional docent, I would like to consider her less as an individual "character" with autonomous traits than as a site of speech constructed within various relations constitutive of the museum. As such, Jane is determined above all by the status of the docent as a non-expert volunteer. As a volunteer, she expresses the possession of a quantity of the leisure and the economic and cultural capital that defines a museum's patron class. It is only a small quantity – indicating rather than bridging the class gap that compels her to volunteer her services in the absence of capital; to give, perhaps, her body in the absence of art objects. Yet it is enough to position her in identification with the museum's board of trustees, and to make her the museum's exemplary viewer.
- 5 The Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art was a product of the Centennial Exposition held in Philadelphia in 1876. In 1893 the School of Industrial Art moved to a "property formerly belonging to the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb." The Pennsylvania Museum maintained a large study collection of decorative arts. By 1910 it began to be derided as a "mixed up collection of industrial exhibits and curiosities, as well as art, in...the cluttered gloom of Memorial Hall" (Nathaniel Burt, *Perennial Philadelphians* (Boston: Little Brown, 1963), p. 344). "Occupied by specimens of Industrial Art," Memorial Hall was considered

- unsuitable “for the exhibition of paintings and fine art” (*Report of the Commissioners of Fairmount Park for the Year 1912*, p. 9).
- 6 George and Mary Roberts, *Triumph on Fairmount* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1959), p. 24.
 - 7 Anonymous, *The New Museum and Its Service to Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art, 1922), p. 19. Art museums began to be established in large numbers in the United States in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. At that time there was a general movement, spearheaded by bankers and industrialists, to tighten public relief and reorganize public policy. The primary aim of this movement was to eliminate all direct outdoor or extra-institutional public relief which, Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward write, “was making it possible for some of the poor to evade the new industrial assault” by providing a choice between work under any conditions and starvation (Fox Piven and Cloward, *The New Class War* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), p. 64). Direct material relief would be limited to the poorhouse, where “discipline and education ‘should be inseparably associated with any system of relief’ ” (Michael B. Katz, quoting Josephine Shaw Lowell, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), p. 71).
 - 8 According to the *Report of the Committee on Municipal Charities of Philadelphia* (1913), Blockly was “a reproduction on a large scale of conditions often found in country almshouses,” an overcrowded and “unscientific massing of several types of dependents” (p. 11). In 1928, the year that the new Pennsylvania Museum on the Parkway opened to the public, Philadelphia’s Home for the Indigent was described in municipal reports as follows: “In this division of the bureau is the City’s poor of both sexes; some who have served their apprenticeship in crime and shady transactions, as lax in caring for their bodies as their morals, acquainted with the usages and customs of reformatories and prisons, graduates from the House of Correction and similar institutions, having ‘sold their birthright for a mess of pottage,’ and when unable to continue the customary mode of existence owing to age or infirmities, have drifted into the home and become a public charge . . .” (*The Fourth Annual Message of W. Freeland Kendrick, Mayor of Philadelphia, Containing the Reports of the Various Departments of the City of Philadelphia for the Year Ending December 31, 1927*, p. 244).
 - 9 This list was compiled from *The First Annual Message of Harry A. Mackey, Mayor of Philadelphia, Containing the Reports of the Various Departments of the City of Philadelphia for the Year Ending December 31, 1928*.
 - 10 Nineteenth-century descriptions of nineteenth-century poorhouses quoted in Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State* (New York: Free Press, 1984), p. 59.
 - 11 The establishment of public institutions, particularly poorhouses, as deterrents to their use and goads to work at menial jobs at below subsistence wages is an idea that was perhaps first codified in England in the 1834 Report from His Majesty’s Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws: “Into such a house no one will enter voluntarily; work, confinement, and discipline, will deter the indolent and vicious; and nothing but extreme necessity will induce any to accept . . . the sacrifice of their accustomed habits and gratifications.” (Quoted in Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor* (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 35.)

- 12 Where Mrs. Robert Montgomery Scott is wont to give impromptu recitals.
- 13 The Museum Fund, *A Living Museum: Philadelphia's Opportunity for Leadership in the Field of Art* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art, 1928), pp. 2, 17.
- 14 Fairmount Park Art Association, *Forty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Trustees* (1913), p. 18. I would like to consider the art museum, then, as one term in an organization of public institutions, and of publicity, into a system of incentives and disincentives, goads and deterrences. As coupled ideas, paired and opposing representations, this system might function similarly to what Foucault described in *Discipline and Punish* as the tactics of nineteenth-century penal reform: "Where exactly did the penalty apply its pressure, gain control of the individual? Representations: the representations of his interests, the representation of his advantages and disadvantages, pleasures and displeasures. . . . By what instruments did one act on the representations? Other representations, or rather couplings of ideas (crime–punishment, the imagined advantages of crime–disadvantages perceived in the punishments); these pairings could function only in the element of publicity: punitive scenes that established them or reinforced them in the eyes of all" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), pp. 127–8).
- 15 Joseph Widener, "Address." In *Fairmount Park Art Association, Fifty-Sixth Annual Report of the Board of Trustees* (1928), p. 44.
- 16 Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation, "How a Unique Combination of Location, Lifestyle and Low Costs Is Sparking a Regional Economic Boom in the Nation's Birthplace." *Business Week*, April 18, 1986, p. 27.
- 17 Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation, "Philadelphia Is a Decision You Can Live With." *Business Week*, April 18, 1986, p. 13.
- 18 Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation, "Unique Combination of Location, Lifestyle and Low Costs," p. 27.
- 19 Fiske Kimball, "Six Antique Rooms From the Continent." *The Pennsylvania Museum Bulletin* 24 (Oct. /Nov. 1928), p. 7. (Kimball was the Parkway Museum's founding director.)
- 20 Octavia Hill Association of Philadelphia, *Good Housing that Pays* (Philadelphia, 1917), p. 83.
- 21 Anonymous, *The New Museum and Its Service to Philadelphia*, p. 5.
- 22 The following descriptions (except those otherwise footnoted) were taken in the order that they appear from *Introduction to the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1985).
- 23 I would like to consider the following descriptions as representations not of paintings, but of the museum's ideal visitor – representations of her interests, representations of her advantages and disadvantages, pleasures and displeasures. They are representations less addressed to than constructing the museum's audience – constructing out of a heterogeneous field of different, conflicting interests, a homogeneous public. They would do so by taking hold of those interests, wants, needs, desires; taking hold of them and representing them, reforming them, directing them, and determining the space, the language, and the logic in which they can be articulated.

- 24 Descriptions of Philadelphians from Burt, *Perennial Philadelphians*, p. 108, and John Lukacs, *Philadelphia: Patricians and Philistines 1900–1950* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1981), p. 72.
- 25 A description of Mrs. Eli Kirk Price. Price, according to George and Mary Roberts, was responsible for getting the new Fairmount Museum building on the city plan. See Roberts and Roberts, *Triumph on Fairmount*, p. 21.
- 26 Department of Public Health and Charities of Philadelphia, *The Degenerate Children of Feeble-Minded Women* (1910), pp. 2–8: “THE HISTORIES OF THESE FEEBLE-MINDED WOMEN AND THEIR FEEBLE-MINDED CHILDREN ARE PRACTICALLY THE SAME. THEIR UNFORTUNATE BIRTH, HELPLESSNESS, PAUPERISM AND RUIN IS PART OF A CONTINUOUS SERIES WHEREBY THE COMMUNITY IS CONSTANTLY SUPPLIED WITH THE ELEMENTS OF DEGENERACY” (p. 8).
- 27 *Introduction to the Philadelphia Museum of Art*.
- 28 Walter B. Miller, quoted in Chaim I. Waxman, *The Stigma of Poverty: A Critique of Poverty Theories and Policies* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1977), p. 26.
- 29 *Introduction to the Philadelphia Museum of Art*.
- 30 Z. D. Blum and P. H. Rosi, “Social Class Research and Images of the Poor: A Biographical Review.” In *On Understanding Poverty*, ed. Patrick Moynihan (New York: Basic Books, 1969), p. 350.
- 31 This sentence is the complete description of a painting in “The Display Collections: European and American Art.” *Pennsylvania Museum of Art Handbook* (1931), p. 65.
- 32 Museum Fund, *A Living Museum*, p. 27.
- 33 Blum and Rosi, “Social Class Research,” p. 351.
- 34 Description of approach to Philadelphia Twentieth Street Station on a train. From Roberts and Roberts, *Triumph on Fairmount*, p. 17.
- 35 Royal Cortissoz, “Life and the Museum.” In Fairmount Park Art Association, *Fifty-Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Trustees* (1929), p. 55.
- 36 Philadelphia Board of Guardians, “Report of the Committee Appointed by the Board of Guardians of the Poor of the City and Districts of Philadelphia to Visit the Cities of Baltimore, New York, Providence, Boston, and Salem (1827).” In *The Almshouse Experience: Collected Reports*, ed. David Rothman (New York: Arno Press, 1971), p. 8.
- 37 *Introduction to the Philadelphia Museum of Art*.
- 38 *The New Museum and Its Service to Philadelphia*, p. 20.
- 39 Alfred H. Barr, Jr., quoted from a plaque in the Museum of Modern Art.
- 40 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hasner Press, 1951), p. 44.
- 41 Fran R. Schumer, “Salad and Seurat: Sampling the Fare at the Museums.” *The New York Times*, April 22, 1987, p. C1.
- 42 D. Herbert Lipson, “Off the Cuff.” *Philadelphia Magazine*, Dec. 1988, p. 2.
- 43 Museum Fund, *A Living Museum*, p. 19.
- 44 *The Weekday Museum Guides’ Twenty-Fifth Anniversary 1960–1985*, p. 2.
- 45 “From the President and the Director.” *Philadelphia Museum of Art Magazine* (Spring 1988).
- 46 From “From the President and the Director,” *Philadelphia Museum of Art Magazine*; Museum Fund, *A Living Museum*; and anonymous, *The New Museum and Its Service to Philadelphia*.

- 47 Descriptions of art in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Guide* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983).
- 48 “The Display Collections: European and American Art.”
- 49 *Guide* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1977).
- 50 *Pennsylvania Museum of Art Handbook* (1931).
- 51 Cortisoz, “Life and the Museum,” p. 53.
- 52 Edwin C. Broome, “Report of the Superintendent of Schools.” In *One Hundred and Tenth Report of the Board of Public Education for the Year Ending December 31, 1928*, pp. 275–6.