

Saint-Petersburg State University

**“Museology in XXI century: problems of
studying and teaching”**

Saint-Petersburg, 14-16 May 2008

Curators: exhibition *auteurs* or museum employees?

**A case study: The exhibition
Metamorphoses of the Modern. The Greek Experience,
National Gallery- Alexandros Soutzos Museum,
Athens, 1992.**

Eleonora VRATSKIDOU

Paris, February 2008

Introduction¹

The museum curators' professional identity is marked by an intrinsic duality: as scholars they act within a framework of academic culture and ethics, that privileges a research vocation for the advancement of the state of knowledge in their respective fields; as museum employees and public servants, they act within the framework of the museum's policies and guidelines.

The museum itself, as an actor of the *art world*, participates in a cooperation network co-animated by artists, art dealers, collectors, critiques and scholars². Each of these groups tends to influence the museum's orientations, according to their own interests and expectations. How do the museum's involvement in the art world, as well as the curator's own interactions in this network affect the curatorial work?

N.Heinich and M. Pollak offer an interesting sociological analysis of the curator's profession. They speak of an "inherent risk of error deeply inscribed in this profession, devoted as it is to highly unstable and strongly held artistic values"³. This risk of error resides mainly in the process of selection of artworks for acquisition and exhibition: cases of fraudulent copies, works of inflated value, neglect of works of proven value. Through his/her choices, the curator may create, inflate or even diminish artistic values - especially in the case of contemporary art curatorship. In opposition to the Parson's model of professional, whose competence rests upon objectifiable scientific knowledge, the curator's competence is measured by the relevance of his/her choices with respect to the - often changing - hierarchies of works and artists as established in the history of art⁴. Furthermore, the curator, as a museum representative - especially in the case of public institutions -, is bound to avoid conflicts of interests in the art world and resist the pressures exercised by art dealers or patrons that could undermine the museum's integrity⁵. This complex framework of the curator's profession tends to privilege a phenomenon of "erasure of the person in the post"⁶.

Nonetheless, Heinich and Pollak argue that a recent crisis in the profession has thrown into question the established order, including the erasure of the curator as person⁷. On the basis of an analysis of the French case, they argue that exhibition creation has permitted "the emergence of an authorial position", that is the emergence "of an original manner, validated from within and without, of conducting curatorship"⁸. The accession of the curator to the position of *auteur* is marked by an "individualisation of the product where a signature becomes much more apparent"

¹ The collection of the empirical material as well as a first version of this paper were realised in collaboration with Panayotis Protosaltis, to whom I am most grateful.

² Becker H.S., *Art Worlds*, Berkeley, University of California press, 1982.

³ Heinich N., Pollak M., "From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur", in: Greenberg R., Ferguson B.W., Nairne S. (eds.), *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London / New York, Routledge, 1996, p. 234.

⁴ Heinich N., Pollak M., 1996, p. 233.

⁵ For an analysis on the question, see Alloway L., "The great curatorial dim-out", in: Greenberg R., Ferguson B.W., Nairne S. (eds.), *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London / New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 221-230. See also Alexander, V. D., "Pictures at an Exhibition: Conflicting Pressures in Museums and the Display of Art", *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 101, n. 4. (Jan., 1996), pp. 797-839.

⁶ Heinich N., Pollak M., 1996, p. 234.

⁷ This crisis was brought about by numerous factors, such as the increase in the number of posts, "the widening of recruitment criteria and the opening up of the entry routes into the profession", "the multiplication and diversification of institutions concerned", and "the increasing specialisation of tasks allocated to the various categories of curators". See Heinich N., Pollak M., 1996, p. 232.

⁸ Heinich N., Pollak M., 1996, p. 235.

and by “a redefinition of competence in terms of singularization (originality) rather than the implementation of collectively recognized rules”⁹.

In the present paper, we shall consider these claims with special reference to Greece. Until the 1990's, the profession of art museum curator was in Greece almost exclusively represented by the staff of the National Gallery-Alexandros Soutzos Museum, a public institution founded in Athens in 1900¹⁰. With a collection spanning Greek and foreign as well as past and contemporary art, the National Gallery was by far the most important art museum in the country prior to the creation of two museums of contemporary art, one in Athens and the other in Thessaloniki, (established as late as 1997)¹¹.

In our view, the passage from a situation of personal erasure in the post to the adoption of an authorial position first took place in Greece with the exhibition, *Metamorphoses of the Modern: The Greek Experience*, organised in the National Gallery in 1992 by the museum's curator Anna Kafetsi. The exhibition, which aimed to present the Greek modernist phenomenon in plastic arts as well as architecture through the 20th century, gave rise to intense controversy - an entirely new phenomenon in Greek museum circles - and, in doing so, raised the question of the role and responsibilities of the curator. Although the exhibition courted controversy in its own right by including contemporary artists, its reception also illustrates some typical hazards of the curator's profession and exemplifies the difficulties presented by the emergence of an innovative position, that of *auteur*.

We will first examine the degree to which the creation of this exhibition permits us to speak of an emergent authorial position in the context of the Gallery's established curatorial practice. In the second part, we will analyse the reception of the exhibition in the Greek art world in order to identify the reactions of the most significant actors towards this phenomenon and consider the main issues which arose in the course of the controversy. Our aim is to consider the amount of autonomy and freedom of choice accorded to the curator in a public museum.

⁹ Heinich N., Pollak M., 1996, p. 238.

¹⁰ The main transformation of the profession during the 20th century concerns the curators' profile and competence: the first curators of the National Gallery, responsible merely for the care and conservation of the museum's collections, were painters themselves. In the after war period, however, curators are scholars, issued from the academic field of art history; the documentation and study of art works is added to their functions and temporary exhibitions are gradually institutionalized. One should remark, concerning the Greek case, that the activity of the curator is still in process of professionalisation; many indicators for the profession's institution as defined by the sociology of professions are still not met, such as the formalization and uniformity of criteria of competence and recruitment. The Greek museological field is largely depended on the international one, mainly in terms of education. Museum studies, as postgraduate program, were introduced in Greek universities as late as the end of the 1990's. As far as associational structures are concerned, the first Association of Greek Museologists was created in 2005. For the sociology of professions, see Wilensky H., “The Professionalisation of Everyone?”, *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 70, n. 2 (Sep., 1964), pp. 137-158. For the Greek case, see Skaltsa M., “Οι μουσειολόγοι στα αζήτητα”, *To Vima*, 12.01.1997.

¹¹ For an overview of the Gallery's history, see Lambraki-Plaka M. (ed.), *National Gallery, 100 Years. Four Centuries of Greek Painting from the Collections of the National Gallery and the Euripidis Koutlidis Foundation*, Athens, National Gallery - Alexandros Soutzos Museum, 1999, p. 19-33.

The Research Vocation and the *Metamorphoses of the Modern. The Greek Experience*

The exceptional character of the 1992 exhibition compared to the Gallery's previous curatorial practice may be remarked at several points. First, one should note that, unlike the monographic exhibitions that predominated in the period 1972-1991, *Metamorphoses of the Modern* was predicated on a principle of thematic organization. The rare thematic exhibitions that had been organised in the past were, for the most part, imported by foreign institutions and had already been prepared and documented; *Metamorphoses of the Modern* was the first large-scale Greek production of its kind¹².

Above all, *Metamorphoses of the Modern* stands out for its research orientation and strong scientific determination to advance a particular theory, with the curator privileging one possible definition of the modern¹³, which then functioned as the criterion for selecting the works to be exhibited. She identified nine distinct aspects of Greek modernism, nine "metamorphoses" around which the exhibition was to be structured.

The exhibition included 365 works from 99 artists and was the result of fully two-years of primary source research in libraries, galleries, private collections and artists' studios. Furthermore, the curator edited a voluminous bilingual (Greek-English) catalogue in which she developed the theoretical foundations of the exhibition and invited leading art historians to contribute to the discussion. The catalogue is still a main reference on the subject of Greek modernism.

For the first time in the Gallery's history, a curator undertook a large research project; her work became recognizable, defying, thus, the omnipresence of the director's name in the Gallery's representation. The curator's adoption of an authorial position, in other words, her work's *originality*, resides in the exhibition's research vocation¹⁴.

¹² For the history of the Gallery and its curatorial practices up to 1992, see Vratskidou E., Protopsaltis P., "Hellenic Cultural Institutions in Search of Identity: the Case of the National Gallery – Alexandros Soutzos Museum", communication in the 3rd Hellenic Observatory PhD Symposium on Contemporary Greece, *Structures, Context and Challenges*, London School of Economics, London, 14-15 June 2007 <http://158.143.192.210/collections/hellenicObservatory/pdf/3rd_Symposium/PAPERS/PROTOPSALTIS%20VRATSKIDOU.pdf>, p. 14-17.

¹³ "the emancipation and autonomy of the plastic language from the constraint of external reality", Kafetsi A. (ed.), *Metamorphoses of the Modern. The Greek experience*, Athens, National Gallery-Alexandros Soutzos Museum, 1992, p.18.

¹⁴ Putting the emphasis on an academic-research ideal is not *original* in itself; it is part of the curator's profession. It becomes however *original* in the Greek context of curatorial practice, where this aspect was rather neglected.

The Reception of the Exhibition

No other event in the history of the National Gallery has provoked such intense controversy or such extreme reactions¹⁵. Most members of the Greek art world were not ready to accept the curator's adoption of an authorial position¹⁶. It was ultimately on the inclusion or exclusion of artists in the exhibition's outline that the controversy turned. Almost every participant in the discussion drew up his own list of artists who were absent or under-represented as well as of artists who should not have been included or were unjustly over-represented on the basis of various criteria; including historical significance and artistic recognition.

As Bruce Ferguson argues, exhibitions are "complex representations of institutional, social and, paradoxically, often personal values, simultaneously"¹⁷. The controversy in question reveals precisely the difficulty of this paradoxical confluence between the curator's personal evaluations - theoretically grounded, though they may be - and collective values. It is indeed one of the occupation's hazards¹⁸.

Two remarks should be made here concerning the type of critiques leveled at the exhibition. On the one hand, the discussion shifted the problem from works to artists, most of whom were still living and therefore directly concerned. However, the exhibition was explicitly not artist but rather work-oriented¹⁹. As the curator explained, "*there were the artists' works and not the artists that were selected*"²⁰. That is, the works featured in the exhibition were chosen for the degree to which they responded to its guiding principle. This shift from an artist-centered exhibition orientation to a work-centered one, which broke with the established curatorial tradition of the Gallery, indicates the curator's desire to adopt an authorial stance and constitutes an innovation transcending the Greek art world's horizon of expectations.

¹⁵ The analysis of the exhibition's reception is based on the review of daily press and art journal articles for the period of the exhibition's run (14 May-13 September 1992).

¹⁶ Few voices praised the curator's initiative or stressed the importance of the exhibition for a "*suffering institution which seeks for decades to find its identity with no success*" (Psychopedis G., in: "Πόλεμος ...μοντέρνος", *Ta Nea*, 26.6.1992.) Alexandros Xydis, an eminent art critic, speaks of a "*regenerated Gallery, where the problems of Greek art could be discussed with sobriety and decency*", and congratulates the Board of directors of the Gallery for deciding, with this exhibition, "*to take the institution out of the colorless and indifferent twilight in which it was sunk since its creation; it had ended up as a super-showroom for individual exhibitions and for some group-exhibitions, mostly foreign, which occasionally occupied the premises of the institution.*" (Xydis A., "Ελληνική Τέχνη. Πορεία και μεταμορφώσεις στον 20^ο αιώνα- IV", *Anti*, n. 500, 7.8.1992, p. 51, 54.) Equally, the artist Giannis Psychopedis welcomes the fact that "*curators take the responsibilities for their choices, expose themselves as scholars*" and at last "*exit the civil servant's slumber*". (Psychopedis G., in: "Πόλεμος ...μοντέρνος", *Ta Nea*, 26.6.1992.) Finally, Athina Schina, an art historian and critic, insists on the fact that the exhibition proposes one possible interpretative approach of Greek modernity and, as such, a quite coherent one, opening thus a dialogue and offering an excellent opportunity in order to re-examine the question of modernity in art. (Schina A., "Προς μια αναθεώρηση του μοντερνισμού (Α)", *Anti*, n. 495, 29.5.1992.)

¹⁷ Ferguson B., "Exhibition rhetorics. Material speech and utter sense", in: Greenberg R., Ferguson B.W., Nairne S. (eds.), *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London / New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 180.

¹⁸ See, Heinich N., Pollak M., 1996, p. 233.

¹⁹ Kafetsi A., 1992, p. 19. See also Belezinis A., "Μια έκθεση και ποιούς εκθέτει (2)", *Anti*, n. 498, 10.7.1992, p. 56.

²⁰ Kafetsi A., in: Kardoulaki A., "Οι μεταμορφώσεις του μοντέρνου-Η ελληνική εμπειρία", *Ta Nea tis Technis*, n. 8, May 1992.

On the other hand, most of the critics seem to have disregarded the not primarily or exhaustively historical character of the exhibition. For instance, in a press article we read that the exhibition was organized “*with the scientific ambition to present all the important stages of the Greek plastic language of the 20th century. An historical exhibition which, according to its numerous adversaries, did not in the least fulfill its historical mission*”.²¹ Anticipating such criticism, the curator cautioned in the catalogue itself that “*although it [the exhibition] follows the course of a specific artistic phenomenon through time, has no wish whatever to pass itself off as an historical panorama of 20th century art*” and explained that “*works which would certainly have a place - often a central place - in the history of 20th century art but which would not make a material contribution to this first (and economical) identification of the nature of the modern should not be included*.”²² Her aim “*was not to organize a retrospective Pan-Hellenic exhibition*”²³.

Thus, the scientific character of the exhibition was questioned without its ever being seriously considered on its own terms.²⁴ The theoretically grounded choices of the curator were criticized as personal predilections. She was accused variously of partiality, lack of objectivity²⁵ and historical falsification²⁶. For many critics, this could be accounted for by reference to favoritism or the intervention of back-stage networks of power, namely the School of Fine Arts, the State Committees and the galleries²⁷.

²¹ Mpati O., “Μεταμορφώσεις του Μοντέρνου και ελληνικές αμαρτίες”, *Mesimvrini*, 12.6.1992. (emphasis added).

²² Kafetsi A., 1992, p. 20.

²³ Kafetsi A., in: Kardoulaki A., “Οι μεταμορφώσεις του μοντέρνου - Η ελληνική εμπειρία”, *Ta Nea tis Technis*, n. 8, May 1992.

²⁴ The debate on the theoretical guideline of the exhibition itself was rather limited; it was mainly focused on the problem of the definition of modernism: to the rather formalistic definition adopted by the curator, the critics opposed an historical one. Kambouridis Ch., “Στολισμένος Λαβύρινθος”, *Ta Nea*, 1.6.1992 ; Maragkou M., “Αποθήκη μοντέρνου”, *Eleftherotypia*, 8.6.1992 ; Stefanidis M., “Παραμορφώσεις του μοντέρνου. Εφευρεση της ιστορίας”, *Avgi tis Kyriakis*, 14.6.1992 ; Stefanidis M., “Μοντερνισμός και γάλα βλάχας”, *Sima*, n. 9, sept. -oct. 1992, p. 14-15 ; Xydis A., “Ελληνική Τέχνη. Πορεία και μεταμορφώσεις στον 20ο αιώνα”, *Anti*, n. 497, 26.6.1992, p. 51 ; *Anti*, n. 498, 10.7.1992, pp. 54-55 ; *Anti*, n. 499, 24.7.1992, pp. 58-59 ; *Anti*, n. 500, 7.8.1992, pp. 54-55 ; Loizidi N., “Με αφορμή την πολυσηζητημένη έκθεση της Πινακοθήκης. Ο μοντερνισμός αλλού και εδώ”, *To Vima*, 23.8.1992.

²⁵ To quote a critic, “*the criteria of selection are subjective, depending, in the case of living artists, on social interrelations*”. “Μεταμορφώσεις του Μοντέρνου - Η ελληνική εμπειρία ή πώς γραφεται η ιστορία. Προχειρότης, σκοπιμότητες ή άγνοια;”, *Sima*, n. 8, May – June 1992, p. 6.

²⁶ Christos Karras, an excluded artist charged the exhibition with “*deliberate and brutal falsification of the country's artistic history*” in a letter addressed to a major newspaper and spoke of the “*obvious reversion of values in the exhibition and the concealment of important contributions to the prevalence of the 'modern' in Greece and to its development*”. (Karras Ch., “Μοντέρνο και Πινακοθήκη”, *Kathimerini*, 30.5.1992.) An artists' protest committee claimed that the “*exhibition presents the personal appreciations and predilections of incompetent art historians and is characterized by [...] partiality, lack of a sense of responsibility towards History*”. (“Να κλείσει η έκθεση της Πινακοθήκης”, *Mesimvrini*, 25.6.1992 ; Roumpoula D., “Μοντέρνα πάθη”, *Ethnos*, 26.6.1992.) The sculptor Thodoros said “*no to the deformations of the 'Modern', which, without respect towards the works, puts forward its 'good intentions' for the promotion of some of his own and a post-dated settlement of relatives and friends in the 'apartments of Modern', at the moment where the market of sponsorship opens up and the Museum of Modern Art is forthcoming*” (Thodoros, “Εγώ λέω όχι στις παραμορφώσεις”, *Ta Nea*, 29.5.1992.)

²⁷ Thodoros, “Εγώ λέω όχι στις παραμορφώσεις”, *Ta Nea*, 29.5.1992 ; Kazazi S., “Ένα εικαστικό γεγονός της Αθήνας που προκαλεί βαθιά απογοήτευση. Αγνοείται το έργο του Χρήστου Λεφάκη και του Νίκου Σαχίνη. Πολλές απορίες και ερωτήματα. Ιστορική και αισθητική

The Repercussions of the Curator's Choices in the Art World

An important issue in the controversy was to what extent the curator's choices are implicated in the construction of artistic and economic values. A critic directly addressed this problem: "*It is however an exhibition that by itself establishes values and surplus-values in the sensitive art market*"²⁸. Naturally, "any show that a curator puts on will have some commercial repercussion, inasmuch as museum exhibitions are status-conferring"²⁹, but in this case critics spoke of excessive effects³⁰.

This issue mainly preoccupied artists and art dealers, two art world actors who had specific expectations vis-à-vis the Gallery. The reactions of some artists - mainly the excluded ones - were the most extreme, a sign that they considered themselves more immediately concerned than others. Some resorted to protest letters and commentaries in the daily press, while others formed an artists' committee that demanded that the Ministry of Culture close down the exhibition and take disciplinary measures against the Gallery's administration! The committee further proposed replacing it with a Pan-Hellenic exhibition that would extend a participation invitation to every member of the Greek Chamber of Fine Arts³¹. Excluded artists saw their identification with the category "modern Greek art" annulled in the National Gallery itself, which functioned as the most important legitimating institution in the Greek art world. Their discontent reveals that many artists expected the museum to function as a reputation-conferring institution. In fact, this expectation had been greatly encouraged by a previous director (during the period 1973-1989)³². Since the Gallery failed to fulfill the artists' expectations, they turned to another institution, the Greek Chamber of Fine Arts, which might guarantee equality of representation.

During the exhibition, an open roundtable discussion on *Modern Art and the Involvement of the Galleries* was organized by the museum. Many Athenian gallerists participated in this discussion, which was coordinated by the director of the Gallery. The discussion soon moved off topic to consider the controversial exhibition, leading

παραπληροφόρηση", *Makedonia*, 22.6.1992; Stefanidis M., "Παραμορφώσεις του μοντέρνου. Εφεύρεση της ιστορίας", *Avgi tis Kyriakis*, 14.6.1992.

²⁸ Mpati O., "Μεταμορφώσεις του Μοντέρνου και ελληνικές αμαρτίες", *Mesimvrini*, 12.6.1992.

²⁹ Alloway L., 1996, p. 226.

³⁰ Another critic takes a specific example from the exhibition: the presentation of a relatively unknown artist, noting that the value of his works is now expected to increase. The critic concludes: "*thus they managed the post-mortem 'metamorphosis' of an amateur painter to an 'historical figure', whose works would become most wanted. [...] It is unclear, to what extent the Gallery is conscious of this dimension that derives from their actions*". "Μεταμορφώσεις του Μοντέρνου - Η ελληνική εμπειρία ή πώς γράφεται η ιστορία. Προχειρότης, σκοπιμότητες ή άγνοια;", *Sima*, n. 8, May – June 1992, p. 13.

³¹ "Να κλείσει η έκθεση της Πινακοθήκης", *Mesimvrini*, 25.6.1992; Roumpoula D., "Μοντέρνα πάθη", *Ethnos*, 26.6.1992.

³² In fact, under the directorship of the influential Dimitris Papastamos, the Gallery hosted a great number of monographic contemporary artists' exhibitions and seemed to have been transformed into a State institution for the support of Greek artists. "Unfortunately, this transformation was to the detriment of its historical character and its research mission. The artists perceived an exhibition of their work at the Gallery as the recognition of the achievements of a lifetime. The practice of the Gallery created legitimate expectations on their part, for being presented there. It is indeed a moment when the Gallery's orientations and the artists' interests were strongly interwoven". Vratskidou E., Protopsaltis P., 2007, p. 16-17.

to a tense confrontation between gallerists, the director and the curator³³. Many of the gallerists complained about not having been asked to collaborate with the curator in the organization of the exhibition³⁴. Although it would be extremely reductive to attribute the reactions of the gallerists to their commercial interests, their position as merchants could not be completely ignored. The curator's authorial attitude prevented them from exercising their influence in the creation of an important contemporary art show, for which museums are traditionally dependent on dealers.

"Personal Choices" of the Curator in a State Museum

The criticism of the "personal choices" of the curator that dominated the debate raises the question of the status and liberty of curators as scholars working for a state institution. What actually troubled most critics was the fact that the "subjective" choices of the curator were presented as the official position of a national institution: *"personal choices are legitimate in a neutral place, but not in a State institution"*³⁵. In a letter of protest, the painter Christos Karras argued that *"the National Gallery represents the Greek State, which has the duty to record history with the greatest possible objectivity [...] If we were in a country that respected itself, the exhibition would have been immediately closed down and a committee of the broadest possible composition would inquire into the question in dept and would put it down with objectivity, transparency, thoroughness and courage."*³⁶.

Extreme though it may be, Karras' position partly captures how the public perceives the involvement of a State institution in the writing of art history. What kind of historical writing and subsequent curatorial practice did the critics expect? Apparently, a consensual and non-conflicting one. For her part, the curator, A. Kafetsi, responded to these critics with two editorials in a daily paper, proposing an interesting critical approach to objectivity in history. In her view, the kind of objectivity demanded by the critics was reduced to: *"1. the suppression of the process of selection (everybody in!) and its substitution by a simple registration based on confirmed criteria, 2. the non assignment of exhibitions to curators without restrictions (teach and do not question!) and 3. the empirical, easy to understand and didactic, but not necessarily educational way of museological display (everything on the plate!)"*³⁷.

"Civil War in the Gallery"³⁸

Finally, the controversy gave rise to an internal crisis in the Gallery as to who precisely should be held responsible for the exhibition's positions. Although most of

³³ Bakogiannopoulou S., "Εμφύλιος στην Πινακοθήκη", *To Vima*, 31.5.1992; "Οι γκαλερίστες εμίλησαν...", *Sima*, n. 8, May – June 1992, p. 15; "Ένταση στην Πινακοθήκη", *Kerdos*, 28.5.1992.

³⁴ "Οι γκαλερίστες εμίλησαν...", *Sima*, n. 8, May – June 1992, p. 15.

³⁵ Maragkou M., "Αποθήκη μοντέρνου", *Eleftherotypia*, 8.6.1992.

³⁶ Carras Ch., "Μοντέρνο και Πινακοθήκη", *Kathimerini*, 30.5.1992. See also, Maragkou M., "Αποθήκη μοντέρνου" *Eleftherotypia*, 8.6.1992; Mpati O., "Μεταμορφώσεις του Μοντέρνου και ελληνικές αμαρτίες", *Mesimvrini*, 12.6.1992.

³⁷ Kafetsi A., "Αναχρονισμοί", *Ta Nea*, 23.7.1992.

³⁸ Bakogiannopoulou S., "Εμφύλιος στην Πινακοθήκη", *To Vima*, 31.5.1992.

the critics directly targeted the curator, it was actually the Gallery's responsibility as an institution that was at stake.

Interestingly, the exhibition coincided with a moment of administrative change: it was assigned to the curator Anna Kafetsi on her request during the two-year directorship of M. Michailidou but was inaugurated by acting director, M. Lambraki-Plaka, who had been appointed earlier the same year. Lambraki-Plaka clearly drew the line between her responsibilities and those of the curator, stressing that she did not in the least intervene in the preparation of the exhibition and in fact disagreed, as an art historian, with the omission of important Greek modernists and the absence of an historical dimension in the exhibition's approach³⁹. The President of the Artistic Committee of the Gallery P. Tetsis - professor in the Athens School of Fine Arts and himself one of those "excluded"- stated that, until the last moment, nobody in the Gallery knew (other than through an outline) *"how the exhibition was organized and what exactly it represented"*. In his opinion, such an important exhibition should have been assigned to a small group of scholars in order for the results to be more objective⁴⁰. Finally, a co-curator of the Gallery severely criticized the exhibition and even proposed the organization of a *"corrective exhibition-manifestation, fruit of collective work this time"*⁴¹.

Responding to the management's reaction, A.Kafetsi expressed her own view on the role of the director of the Gallery. She wondered whether there *"would ... ever be a case for a director of a museum or of another similar institution to interfere on the research part, confusing his administrative and scientific duties"*⁴².

The crisis brings out a structural problem in the institution's operation: at the time, there were no internal regulations by means of which the Gallery might clearly define the powers and authorities of the director and curators (this remains the case today). Furthermore, with no central research guidelines having been set by the institution, the curator is theoretically free to make his own choices. He risks, however, finding himself deprived of institutional protection. Part of the Gallery's management seems to share the conception of objectivity, incompatible with the one-man exhibition creation, advanced by most of the external critics. Thus, in the Greek case, this first occasion of what might be called "authorial curating" was validated neither within the institution nor by the surrounding art world.

³⁹ A.K., "Μεταμορφώσεις του Μοντέρνου στην Ελλάδα", *Eleftheros Typos*, 14.5.1992. Bakogiannopoulou S., "Εμφύλιος στην Πινακοθήκη", *To Vima*, 31.5.1992.

⁴⁰ Tetsis P., "Η έκθεση στην Εθνική Πινακοθήκη", *Kathimerini*, 2.6.1992; Tetsis P., "Για την έκθεση στην Εθνική Πινακοθήκη", *Kathimerini*, 21.6.1992.

⁴¹ Bakogiannopoulou S., "Εμφύλιος στην Πινακοθήκη", *To Vima*, 31.5.1992.

⁴² Kafetsi A., "Σκοταδισμός και κηδεμονία", *Ta Nea*, 2.6.1992.

CONCLUSION

The adventure of the exhibition *Metamorphoses of the Modern. The Greek experience* offers an interesting insight into the delicate position of - and margin of maneuver available to - curators in a public institution. The controversy elicited by the exhibition brought to light a dominant representation of the state institution as a neutralizing and consensus-building agent, access to it being regulated by a principle of equality rather than specific criteria of selection. Indeed, such a representation of the public museum imposes little initiative and a rather conformist posture on the curator, which may undermine his scholar identity. Thus, in the *Metamorphoses of the Modern*, the very act of selecting a particular definition of the modern and the resulting choice of representative works, both of which serve to sustain the authorial position of the curator, drew protest from actors of the Greek art world, namely artists and dealers, who thought their interests under threat. Acceding to an *auteur* position, the curator emerges as a new subject of power, a determinant actor in the art world. The response of discontented art world participants was to mount an assault on the curator's scientific authority. Furthermore, assuming the stance of *auteur* engendered internal problems in the curator's relationship with the museum management.

The question with which we would like to open the discussion is whether our example illustrates just a particularity of the Greek case or is rather representative of the tensions that marked the emergence of a new form of authorship in the art world, that of the curator.