

Statement on the cancellation of Philip Guston's Show at 4 museums

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Our identities have something to do with what we think. As we became Homo sapiens a couple hundred thousand years ago, we developed an ability to think about what other people WOULD think when they're no longer present. It is thought that this was because of an increase in community size for humans.¹ This has to do with IMAGINING what somebody else thinks. Already, thinking "i think -- x" is really something! Then, sometimes we can think of what others think, like Uncle so-and-so, or being influenced to think "I think i SHOULD think this" because my wise uncle thought that, OR the same thing if you have certain religious beliefs— thinking about things you should be thinking, or that God sees all your thoughts. When people confuse what they think for what they think they should think, they might get confused, or might even think what they think they should think is what they think. Humans have a capacity for embedding things inside other things, expressed through language: I think [what I think I should think] . Negating this is a good goal: [DON'T [think [what other people think you should think]].

Another way of thinking about identity is IDENTIFYING with a group, and SHARING their thoughts. Shared values can be a good thing. Self-censorship to appease a group is a decision one can make. If one decides not to dissent by not opening one's mouth, how can one know whether a [future] backlash is real (to be counted on), or simply imagined? When you self-censor, it's a conjured dictator inside your own mind-- how sad is that? No real dictator censored anybody, no real dictator controlled anybody— just one imagined, created, and imposed on ourselves by ourselves, a police inside the mind.

In the case of a Philip Guston show postponed by four museums, BLM as a phenomenon has caused the museums to self-censor. What did those people in those institutions think before BLM? Has something changed? If they actually had an identity, they could stand on their own thoughts. If they ever actually had a view on justice or the art on view, they could carry it forward and be confident. Now, when they cancel the show, it looks like no identity and no confidence— and like they have something on their conscience. It looks like they're not thinking, they don't have perspective, they're just thinking what they think other people think (which is completely imagined).

¹ See the book THINKING BIG: How the Evolution of Social Life Shaped the Human Mind. Written by Clive Gamble, John Gowlett, and Robin Dunbar