Contents

Kazalo

Modernism Revisited

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Editorial

Since the 1970s and 1980s when the concept of postmodernism was advanced and hotly debated, the concept of "modernism" was not simply superseded, but also itself became a major object of criticism, questioning, negation, and reinscription. Throughout the 20th century and until the present, "modernism" has regularly simply superseded, has regularly accreted and shed meanings, fields of reference, and conceptual grounds. It has been variously characterized as the opposite of realism or a further radicalization of realist representation; as an outgrowth of or rupture with previous movements such as aestheticism and naturalism; as a synonym for or the antipode of various strands of the avant-garde; and as the visible proof of relevance of the notion of modernity, which by different thinkers has been said to have come to an end, been globally dispersed, or continued in further development and differentiation. It has been divided among Latin American, Anglo-American, German and French designations, and was proclaimed to be the last cultural dominant arising from Europe or the capitalist "West," to be then broadened into "global modernisms." By recent theorists, it has been temporally distinguished from contemporary art (by Terry Smith), dissolved within a historically more encompassing "aesthetic regime of art" (by Jacques Rancière), and displaced within the concept of "off-modernism" (Svetlana Boym).

Due to its varied and contradictory history and to its uncertain present status and content we have invited new reflection on the notion of modernism as a historicizing, periodizing, and/or geographical-historical framework. We wanted to attract boldly speculative, polemical essays that will set out new directions and spur further discussion and debate.

These were some possible questions for contributors to consider in formulating topics:

- Is modernism solely a past phenomenon or does it remain a contemporary one, and if so, how?

- How does the contemporary moment compel revisiting and reinterpretation of the modernist past, previous conceptions of modernism, the modernist canon or archive?
- Should alternative concepts such as those developed by Rancière, Smith, Boym (or other relevant thinkers) displace and / or replace the concept of modernism?
- Should we speak of global and alternative modernisms and how are these related to expanding notions of modernity and modernization?
- How do the various strains of "Eastern modernism"—related to Soviet, socialist bloc, and non-aligned social contexts—inflect the concepts of "modernism," "Western modernism," and / or "global modernism"?
- How do differentiated, multiple temporalities—i.e. social-political time, technological time, material rhythms, gendered temporalities, memory structures, etc.—affect formulations of the concept of modernism (or alternatives to it)?
- How have conceptions of modernism (or alternatives to modernism) responded to marginal and / or emerging identities?

The issue of *Filozofski vestnik* that is in front of you offers some answers to the questions formulated above. At the same time it also raises new questions and reveals new facets of this dynamic artistic, cultural and political phenomenon, thereby witnessing that in spite of frequent postmodern and also contemporary denigrations and proclamations of modernism as being obsolete and irrelevant, by its inner dynamism it continues to retain its importance and applicability to the past if not also to the present art. This is possible because past art forms, ideas, and works are being continuously interpreted and re-interpreted, and thereby reintegrated and then temporarily retained within what we call "art"—whether art as an institution or art as its opposite and negation. In both instances past art—the art of modernism—is being recuperated and exists now on the same synchronic level as recent and contemporary art. Due to this re-emergence/rejuvenation of modernist art and its inclusion into our present it suffices to view this art as continuously relevant. Its being incessantly questioned is another feature of its inner and continuous dynamism and vitality. Such characteristics and circumstances prove that in some (or many) of its past and current meanings and significations it remains a concept that we expect to see and work with in the future. Modernism thus continues to be a pivotal cultural and artistic foundation of our past and present. It represents the pinnacle of art in the his-

tory of the EuroAmerican culture and, as recent research and exhibitions show and prove, has exterted and continues to exert an extraordinary amount of influence also in other parts of the globe. This volume is thus yet another occasion to consider this point, causing modernism to be in the need of being revisited many more times.

Sascha Bru*

The Genealogy-Complex
History Beyond the Avant-Garde Myth of Originality[1]

As there are many possible historical contexts within which to frame modernism, there are also various histories of modernism. From the 1980s through the turn of the millennium, scholars tended to rub modernist texts and artworks up against their most immediate contexts—understood in institutional, ideological, social, or cultural terms. More recently, new approaches have called this procedure into question: digital humanities appear to bookend all of modernist history by questioning the traditional modes of presenting textual and artistic sources;[2] cognitive readings substitute the human brain for context;[3] while ecological and other approaches regard the history of modernist art and literature as a blip on the screen of planetary history, or "deep time", radically expanding the reach of a term like context.[4] These recent approaches have led to what could be called an "excess" of context that has thoroughly complicated our historical understanding of modernism and its classic avant-gardes (futurism, expressionism, Dadaism, surrealism, among others). Yet this excess has also created a situation in which the wood is often no longer seen for the trees, because it has tended to draw attention away from a basic concern that unites all historical analyses: the issue of writing history or historiography, of the narrative design and discursive presentation of *res gestae*. Different conceptualizations of the term "context" may well yield a variety of historical outlooks, but at least as

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[1]   I would like to thank Harri Veivo and his colleagues for their comments on a version of this paper presented in winter 2013 at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris 3. This work has further benefitted from critical input by members of the University of Leuven research team, MDRN (www.mdrn.be).

[2]   See, among others, collaborative digital humanities initiatives such as the Modernist Journals Project (http://library.brown.edu/cds/mjp/), Editing Modernism in Canada (http://editingmodernism.ca/), and the Blue Mountain Project (http://library.princeton.edu/projects/bluemountain/).

[3]   Consider Peter Stockwell's analysis of avant-garde poetry or Jesse Matz's reading of modernist prose: Peter Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics*, London: Routledge, 2002, 112-17; Jesse Matz, "The Art of Time, Theory to Practice," *Narrative,* 19:3 (October 2011), 273-94.

[4]   See, for instance, Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

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essential to attain that variety is the aesthetic manner in which those outlooks are fleshed out. Adding to the urgency of a reflection on the aesthetic dimension of historiography is the fact that recent approaches frequently present themselves with an air of positivism. This is obvious in tendencies claiming to adapt insights from Darwinism and the supposedly exact science of evolutionary biology for the analysis of modernist art and literature.[5] Yet the spirit of positivism is at times equally manifest in research exploits informed by digital humanities. The vast amount of modernist sources to have been disclosed of late with so-called tag clouds and other instruments of statistical use, for example, may well create the impression of a possible return to objective, empirical research, but the problems of inscribing such sources in historiography have arguably not disappeared with such projects.[6] History, today still, needs to be written, or at least, represented, for as we shall see the history of modernism could also be conceived of in visual rather than verbal terms.

Hayden White realized all of this well and was perhaps also one of the first to suggest that the views on history and historiography to circulate within modernism and the avant-gardes holds hitherto neglected potential. Two years before Roland Barthes published his now canonical essay "L'effet de réel," White reproached fellow historians for their literary backwardness, challenging them to stop representing the past as if they were nineteenth-century realist novelists and to start looking toward twentieth-century modernism and the classic avant-gardes for new modes of representation:

> When historians try to relate their "findings" about the "facts" in what they call an "artistic" manner, they uniformly eschew the techniques of literary representation which Joyce, Yeats, and Ibsen have contributed to modern culture. There have been no significant attempts at surrealistic, expressionistic, or existentialist

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[5] "New Darwinist" Steven Pinker even goes as far as to look askance at modernism's project for social change through aesthetics, arguing that "high priority" is to be given instead to "economics, evolutionary biology and probability and statistics," thereby altogether denying the complex historical links between evolutionary theory and modernism. See: Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, New York: Penguin, 2002, 235-36.

[6] For a more elaborate critique of data presentation that is also of interest to the concerns raised in this article, see Johanna Drucker, "Humanities Approaches to Graphical Display," DHQ: *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 5:1 (2011), http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/5/1/000091/000091.html (Accessed 28/04/2014).

historiography in this century (except by novelists and poets themselves) for all the vaunted "artistry" of the historians of modern times.[7]

Half a century later White's suggestion remains a powerful one, and I shall return to it in more detail in conclusion. At this point it suffices to state that I find myself in partial agreement with White. The at times local and small-scale views on history and historiography, especially those to circulate within the classic avant-gardes, are indeed worth scrutinizing to explore alternative ways of producing the history of modernism as well as to arrive at a better understanding of modernism as such. Among other things, a closer look at how the classic avant-gardes devised their own history helps us to cast a new light on their allegedly ahistorical stance and claims to originality, criticized perhaps most vehemently and richly by Rosalind Krauss in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (1981).

The Myth of Originality

It is a truism to argue that the modernist avant-gardes in a variety of ways claimed to create a new art from a *tabula rasa* and presented themselves as well as their work as absolutely original and thus ahistorical. F. T. Marinetti's "Fondation et Manifeste du futurisme" (1909) needs but be recalled. Relegating the whole of history to the past and averring to start afresh from scratch, Marinetti's words paved the way for many isms to come. Originality here meant "more than just [...] revolt against tradition", Rosalind Krauss observed, because the avant-gardes to follow in the wake of futurism conceived originality in terms of "a literal origin, a beginning from ground zero, a birth."[8] Krauss expressed profound skepticism towards this vanguard discourse of rupture and inspired by (post) structuralist theory put forth two basic arguments against it.

First, she refuted the avant-gardes' parables of absolute self-creation by exposing how many artists stating to produce absolutely authentic works in actuality engaged in improvisational play within a very rigid sign system, almost to the point of copying one another. By reading plastic works in which schematized grid patterns time and again emerge, for example, Krauss illustrated how most

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[7]   Hayden White, "The Burden of History," *History and Theory,* 5:2 (1966), 111-34, here 127.

[8]   Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986, 157. Subsequent references to Krauss' book occur in parenthesis in the main body of the text.

avant-gardists mistakenly confused the idea of starting afresh with *self*-creation. Thus, Kasimir Malevich, Piet Mondrian as well as Pablo Picasso and Kurt Schwitters all stressed the autonomy of their abstracting self-creation, whereas in practice they were repeating each other *in difference*. Indeed, Krauss further asserted that the materiality of the system, "grid" or Saussurean *langue* of linguistic and pictorial signs, subject as it is to an endless process of signification, of necessity always forestalls pinning down the meaning or tenor of such seemingly exchangeable works. Both this proliferation of meanings and the acts of systemic repetition, according to Krauss, were covered up by the avant-gardes' discourse of originality. Like a myth, this discourse was employed to obscure a deeper-lying structure or "grid" of repetition in discourse and practice. As such, Krauss noted, the avant-garde "myth of originality" also played in the hands of the art market and its institutions. For this myth went well beyond the "restricted circle of professional art-making": "this discourse *serves much wider interests*—and is thus fueled by more diverse institutions [...]. The theme of originality [...] is the shared discursive practice of the museum, the historian, and the maker of art" (162, my emphasis). Thus Krauss also exposed the historical-institutional context in which the myth of originality functioned. Perhaps more than the avant-gardes themselves, art historians and the art market stand to gain from dubbing the originality myth: for the traditional historian it opens up the possibility of presenting the avant-gardes as a succession of ever new isms; for the market it creates the possibility of financial surplus.

Remarkably, however, Krauss went to some length not to call her own critique of the avant-garde *historical*, mounting a second argument against historical readings of the avant-gardes. Krauss called her own method *etiology* and put it in stark opposition to the methods of traditional history:

> History, as we normally use it, implies the connection of events through time, a sense of inevitable change as we move from one event to the next, and the cumulative effect of change which itself is qualitative, so that we tend to view history as *developmental*. Etiology is not developmental. It is rather an investigation into the conditions for one specific change—the acquisition of disease—to take place. In that sense etiology is more like looking into the background of a chemical experiment, asking when and how a given group of elements came together to effect a new compound or to precipitate something out of a liquid. [...W]e are specifically enjoined from thinking in terms of "development," and instead we speak of repetition. (22)

In the introduction to her book she highlighted the liberating force of this operation: "we have discovered that one of the most modernist things about it [the grid] is its capacity to serve as a paradigm or model for the antidevelopmental, the antinarrative, the antihistorical" (*ibid.*).

By labelling her own approach antihistorical, Krauss at once proved consequential and contradictory. She was consequential in that her analysis stuck within the parameters of her (post)structuralist frame of reference. Just like Barthes in "La Mort de l'auteur" (1968) questioned the hermeneutical tradition that reduced the meaning of a text to the original creator, the author's intention, Krauss cunningly exposed how the allegedly self-created works of the avant-garde were the product not of "individual" agency but of larger discursive structures. And like Michel Foucault in *L'archéologie du savoir* (1969) could only describe, yet never fully explain, certain changes coming about in history, Krauss' etiology claimed to evoke the discursive structure of "originality" without further exposing what agency, intentions or motivations kept that structure or "grid" in place.

Yet Krauss' antihistorical stance was also contradictory. For in practice she proved not as consistent as Barthes in "Histoire et littérature: à propos de Racine" (1960), for example, when he averred that literature (and, by extension, all art) simply resisted history as such, given language's irrepressible process of semiosis, but also that an institutional or functionalist history of art and literature were nonetheless always possible: "l'histoire littéraire n'est possible que si elle se fait sociologique, si elle s'intéresse aux activités et aux institutions, non aux individus."[9] Krauss as well contextualized and historicized in this sense, unearthing the power relations that kept the "myth of originality" in place. For was the avant-garde artist's discourse of originality not also developed to serve the much wider interests of the art market and its institutions? Setting out to criticize the alleged *a*historical nature and Romantic presumptions of the modernist avant-garde, then, perhaps she, too, in the end proved too much of a modernist when she upped the ante and asserted to be entirely *anti*historical. Naturally, much could be argued for her critique of traditional art history, which by presenting the avant-gardes in a succession of ever new isms failed to come to grips with recurrent structural patterns within the avant-gardes as a whole. Yet

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[9]   Roland Barthes, "Histoire et littérature: à propos de Racine," *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations,* 15:3 (1960), 524-37, here 530.

as her own practice illustrated, to be against this convention in historiography is not the same as being antihistorical. Quite the opposite: Krauss' analysis of the "grid" *did* cast a new light on the historical phenomenon of the avant-gardes.

Krauss' approach, rather than being antihistorical, presented an alternative way of writing history, one that was perhaps more in tune with the avant-gardes and as such also willing to consider strategies of *visual* historical representation such as the grid or roster: inventive pre-digital strategies for the "visualization" of historical "data" analogous to the readymade visualizations that contemporary computer users have at their disposal, such as the cascading list, the network diagram, the spreadsheet, and the word-cloud.[10] However, in this operation Krauss failed to take note of the fact that the avant-gardes, too, presented themselves as anything but ahistorical, because they as well experimented with the design of alternative, at times antidevelopmental, historiographical modes of representation. This is not to deny that they frequently foregrounded their originality or the absoluteness of their new departures. Rather, Krauss' reading of the avant-garde's "myth of originality" is itself in part a myth. For her reading in turn covered up how the modernist avant-gardes were perhaps the first in modern art and writing to actually *historicize*, however paradoxically, their own novelty and originality.

The Genealogy-Complex

The critique of the avant-garde "myth of originality" is as old as the classic avant-gardes themselves. The many negative reactions to the publication of Marinetti's "Fondation et Manifeste du futurisme" in *Le Figaro* need but be recalled to illustrate that from the classic avant-gardes' very inception skepticism towards their assertion to create *ex nihilo* was a commonplace. Two decades before Marinetti's manifesto appeared in *Le Figaro*, Jean Moréas in the same daily published his manifesto, "Le Symbolisme" (1886). Moréas, in less inflated terms than Marinetti, pointed out that symbolism was a new phenomenon, but he added that there was "une exacte filiation de la nouvelle école"[11]—the absolute novelty of symbolism, then, came with a pedigree. However counterintui-

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[10] For more on such strategies of visualisation, consult Johanna Drucker's *Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014.

[11] Jean Moréas, "Un Manifeste littéraire. Le Symbolisme," *Le Figaro*. Supplément littéraire (18 September 1886), 150-51; here 150.

tive it may be to claim that original creations *ex nihilo* have a genealogy, Moréas' strategy of historicizing the new was also to become one of the basic tenets of the early twentieth-century avant-gardes. Drawing on much older models of genealogy, often represented by way of a tree-diagram, the avant-gardes, both the movements and its individual artists, set out to rewrite art and literary history so as to reconstruct the anamnesis of their own work in the now.

Of note in what could be termed the "genealogy-complex" of the avant-gardes are four aspects. First and foremost this complex thoroughly complicates the received ahistorical nature of the avant-gardes and their assertions of originality as criticized by Krauss. Krauss was correct to isolate that many avant-gardists claimed to produce work on a *tabula rasa*, and thus averred to rupture in time and history, but the avant-gardes as a rule stressed not only the discontinuity they presented but also the continuity in which they figured. Admittedly, many of the genealogical models they came up with to this aim were developmental in the sense Krauss isolated, that is, teleological. The stationary F. T. Marinetti designed for the futurist movement around 1925 is a good illustration of this. Presenting his "futurismo" as the roots and trunk of a genealogical tree, it depicted all subsequent avant-garde movements to have emerged up and until surrealism as offspring or branches of the founding futurist family.[12] Another case in point is the synoptic table representing recent advances in French painting, which Umberto Boccioni devised for his *Pittura scultura futuriste. (Dinamismo plastico)* (1914).[13] As is not uncommon in genealogical research that reconstructs the so-called family tree, Boccioni here put the tree on its head and placed what he saw as the founding fathers of modern French painting on top. These formed a double offspring, one stressing colour and one accentuating form. The futurists, Boccioni's table exemplified, were the synthesis of these previous tendencies, which followed in the familiar succession of late impressionists, fauvists, and divisionists.

This tactic of representing the new ism as the synthesis of all previous ones was to be repeated by all subsequent avant-garde movements. In Hugo Ball's writings, for example, Dada in Zurich, too, was portrayed as the point in which expressionism, futurism and several other isms came to coincide to make a new

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12   F. T. Marinetti, "Futurismo" (n.d., ca. 1925), in the Filippo Tommaso Marinetti Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, GEN MSS 130.
13   Umberto Boccioni, *Pittura scultura futuriste. (Dinamismo plastico)*, Milano: Edizioni Futuriste di "Poesia", 1914, 100-1.
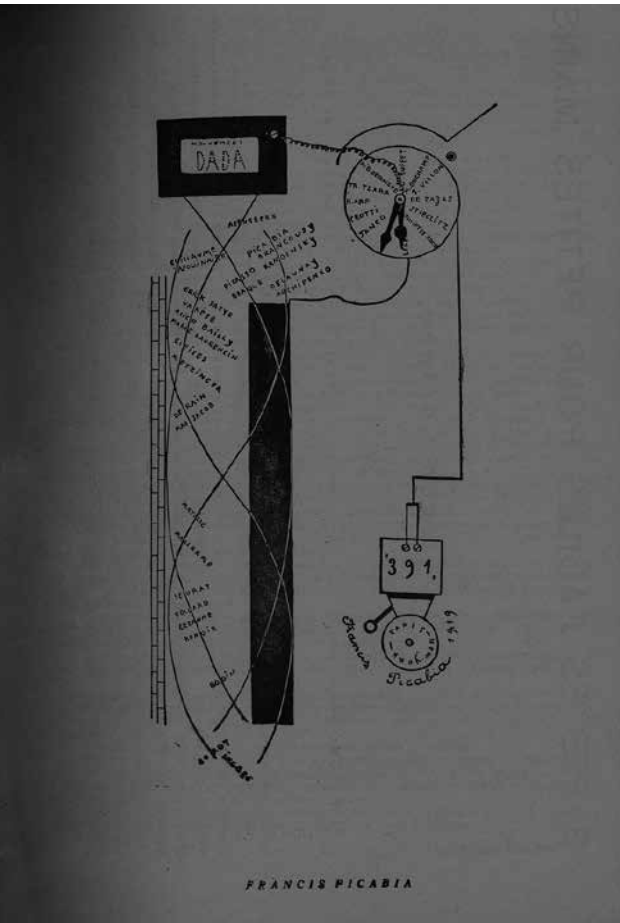
Figure 1: Francis Picabia, *Mouvement Dada*, ink drawing taken from *Dada*, n°4/5 (Zurich, 15 May 1919 *aka* "Anthologie Dada," International Version), 2. With permission of the International Dada Archive, University of Iowa Libraries. Copyright © Estate of Francis Picabia/SABAM.

advance.[14] And this same operation was repeated by Dada elsewhere, though preceding avant-garde movements were at times also substituted by the names of individual artists and writers. Francis Picabia's ink-drawing *Mouvement Dada* (1919, see **Figure 1**), for instance, represented Dadaism in Paris and New York. Picabia's drawing depicted the Dada group as a clock fuelled by a battery of artists from previous generations. The mechanical contraption Picabia thus evoked still in part suggested a causal relation: without the battery, no operating clock. Yet the very mutation of the genealogical model Picabia performed

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[14]   See Hubert van den Berg, *Avantgarde und Anarchismus. Dada in Zurich und Berlin*, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1999.

here—turning the synoptic, tree-like model of Boccioni into a clock—indicates how the avant-gardes also went against traditional developmental historiography, setting and resetting the time of aesthetic change and production. For in the differential model of Picabia's drawing it is no longer clear as to what or who came first, that is, the names in the battery on the left or those in the clock on the top right. Both existed simultaneously in a structural now, the one requiring the other to gain meaning. Thus, Krauss was right to isolate that many avant-gardists claimed to produce work from scratch, but they also thoroughly reflected on the history of this practice, developing a clearly *presentist* regime of historicity.

This presentism is, secondly, of note in itself, because as I have argued elsewhere it also helps us to do away with the common notion, canonised by Renato Poggioli in his *The Theory of the Avant-Gardes* (1968), that the avant-gardes were all somehow futurist, that is, that they favoured the future over the present in their historical outlooks.[15] If Boccioni, Picabia, and others whom we shall presently consider illustrate anything, it is that they all seized upon history in order to elucidate the(ir) present, the moment and context of creation, the now. Anticipating El Lissitzky's *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* (1919-20), *Sintesi futurista della Guerra* (20 September 1914), a poster-manifesto signed by Marinetti, Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo and Piatta, manifests this well. Historical and cultural geography come together here, on the one hand in a horizontal spearhead showing, very much counterintuitively, how the present of futurism came *before* the past on the arrow of time, and, on the other hand, in vertical lists driving a wedge between futurist and non-futurist nations; Germany, Austria and Turkey apparently belonging almost entirely to the past. Cyclical models of history, in which a core of tendencies and impulses rhythmically reoccur, were tried as well from a presentist perspective. László Moholy-Nagy's *Stilrhythmik nach Dr. Georg Wieszner* (1930, **Figure 2**) is a telling example. A collage meant to figure as the decorated title-page in a historical study by Wieszner, it visualizes Wieszner's conviction that the major shifts in architectural history were caused by an ever-recurring succession of movements towards change from below on the one hand (the upward mobility or "Bekenntniss" of the masses, the triangle on the top left), and towards the dictating of change from above ("Befehl") on the other hand (the triangle on the top right). This "voyage en zig-zag," as Astrid

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15   For details on this regime, see Sascha Bru, "Avant-Garde Nows: Presentist Reconfigurations of Public Time," *Modernist Cultures*, 8:2 (2013), 272-87.
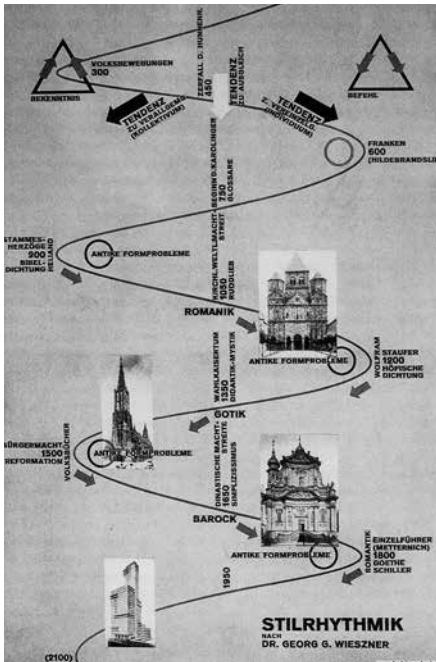
Figure 2: László Moholy-Nagy, *Stilrhythmik nach Dr. Georg Wieszner*; photomontage as frontispiece in Georg Gustav Wieszner, *Pulsschlag deutscher Stilgeschichte. I. Teil: Von den Anfängen bis ins 16. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Dr. Fritz Wedekind & Co., 1930). Copyright © Estate of László Moholy-Nagy/SABAM.

Schmidt-Burkhardt cleverly calls Moholy-Nagy's collage,[16] not only bracketed the historical cycles to come (see the "(2100)" at the bottom left). It also historicized the situation *anno* 1930, a year in which Moholy-Nagy could look back on almost three decades of experimentalism in the arts and—perhaps against the clear return to the moment of "Befehl" in German cultural history—hopefully descried the moment of "Bekenntniss" in the far future.

Historicizing both their originality and the now, thus, the avant-gardes not only proved consistently presentist but, thirdly, also exploited their intertextual or intersemiotic relations to the past. In fact, the avant-gardes made these relations as well as the signifying potential of their linguistic and plastic material productive in ways that often come eerily close to Krauss' etiological approach. A famous example is the cover of Lissitzky's and Hans Arp's edited volume *Die Kunstismen. Les ismes de l'art. The Isms of Art* (1925).[17] Whereas traditionally ge-

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16   Astrid Schmidt-Burkhardt, *Stammbäume der Kunst. Zur Genealogie der Avantgarde*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2005, 278.

17   *Die Kunstismen. Les ismes de l'art. The Isms of Art*, eds. El Lissitzky and Hans Arp, Erlenbach-Zürich: Eugen Rentsch, 1925, cover.

Figure 3: Cover of *391*, n° 8 (Zurich, 1918) with Francis Picabia's ink drawing *Construction moléculaire*. With permission of the International Dada Archive, University of Iowa Libraries. Copyright © Estate of Francis Picabia/SABAM.
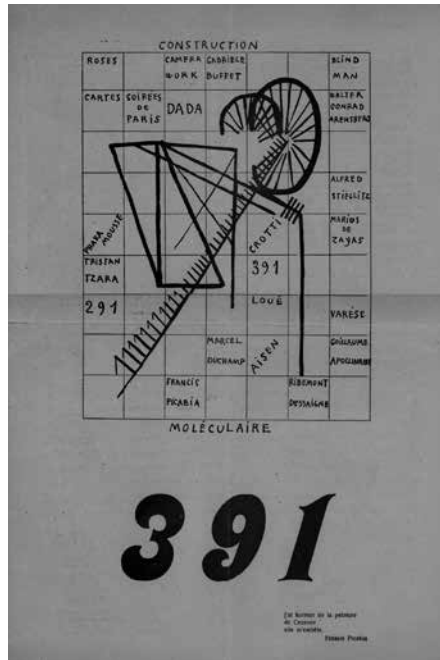
nealogical tree-models in art history construct a developmental pattern from artists' or writers' discursive claims of affiliation or from formal as well as thematic similarities between works, the cover here constructed a pattern that drew on an arrangement of language's materiality. Spanning a period of ten years, this book took stock of the avant-gardes by building a conceptual or linguistic tree around the etymon or stem ISM, which took up the function of the trunk here. The cover fleshes out a genealogy that is as much driven by this formal-linguistic constraint as by actual historical developments. All words or isms on the cover as it were branch out as boughs or limbs of a much larger trunk, the capitals ISM. Around and tied to this vertical etymon ISM, all branches are on a par, all equal, all horizontal.

Picabia's *Construction moléculaire* (1919, **Figure 3**), too, shows that Krauss' proposed etiological model of historiography was already tried by the avant-gardes. Striking first of all is the grid or roster, so central to Krauss' analysis. (Picabia is notably absent from Krauss' *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*.) Within the constraint of this roster, consisting of 9 times 7 squares, Picabia at once paid homage to immediate predecessors, especially

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Figure 4: Louis Scutenaire, "Pêle-mêle" [Le Panthéon surréaliste]. Collage with frame. Photographed by Alice Piemme. With the kind authorization of the Archives et Musée de la Littérature of Brussels. This collage was later also reproduced in Documents 34, *Intervention surréaliste*, July 1934, 50.

through the mention of older, pre-Dada magazines such as Alfred Stieglitz' *Camera Work* (1903-17) and *291* (1915-16) and Guillaume Apollinaire's *Les Soirées de Paris* (1912-1914). Picabia's design at the same time presented a sort of snapshot of the Dada movement, the position and distance between its protagonists' names also hinting at the internal relations within the group. As in *Mouvement Dada*, a machinelike contraption at the centre suggested to operate only when all components in the grid, past and present, are represented in the now, giving way to a temporal anomaly or anachronism.

The grid-like family portrait was of course by no means an invention of Picabia. This technique stemmed from the older, nineteenth-century *pêle-mêle* which

was developed to as it were pictorialize relations of kinship. A pêle-mêle, writes Anne Reverseau, is "a frame with cut-outs for photographs. This craft of collecting and presenting several 'random' pictures together, focusing on people and portraits, had been widely used for more than a century. [... It was a] popular way of representing families by an amalgamation of various pictures."[18] It is tempting to regard this pêle-mêle model as the basic grid structuring much of surrealist auto-historiography. We find it in Man Ray's stringently geometrical montage of photographs, *L'Échiquier surréaliste* (1934)—taken up in the *Petite Anthologie poétique du surréalisme*—which presented a group portrait of the surrealist "family" in the early 1930s. Yet we also encounter it, for example, in Louis Scutenaire's more messy collage, "Pêle-mêle" [Le Panthéon surréaliste] (1934, **Figure 4**), as well as in André Breton's "H.N." (1937) reproduced in *De l'humour noir* (1937). The latter two examples expand the family portrait of respectively Belgian and French surrealism in historical terms by way of a genealogical moment. Belgian surrealist Scutenaire included Marx and Freud, Rimbaud and Lautréamont; there are drawings of Lewis Carroll and Alfred Jarry, among others, and besides the Belgians René Magritte, André Souris, Paul Nougé and E.L.T. Mesens we also find Breton and Louis Aragon as representatives of French surrealism. Yet quaint other figures as well stand out in Scutenaire's pêle-mêle. There is the occultist Cornelius Agrippa, there are unconventional literary figures like Lassailly and Forneret, and romanticists like Achim von Armin. Scutenaire appears to have suggested with this collage that this was his family. In an unchronological fashion familiar also from surrealist anthologies, he presented a snapshot of his family *across the ages* but in the now. In similar examples using language instead of images we can see how Scutenaire's, Picabia's and Ray's clear grid patterns could quickly fade into the background, yielding even more rhizomatic historical portrayals, as in Breton's and Desnos' "Erutarettil" (1923),[19] or Max Ernst's "Favorite Poets and Painters from the Past" (1942).[20] Commenting on such practices in a manifesto entitled "La Justice immanente,"[21] Scutenaire went as far as to assert that the pêle-mêle had the potential to liberate the whole

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18   Anne Reverseau, "The Surrealist 'Pêle-Mêle': Picturing Literary History," in MDRN, *Modern Times, Literary Change*, Leuven: Peeters, 2013, 81-99, here 88.

19   André Breton and Robert Desnos, "Erutarettil," *Littérature*, 11-12 (1923), 24-25.

20   Published in *View*, 1 (1942), 14-15.

21   Louis Scutenaire, "La justice immanente," in *Documents 34*, special issue *Intervention surréaliste,* July 1934, 51.

of mankind: everyone could construct his own pêle-mêle, and by consequence, everyone was able to create his own history and pedigree.

This in part Nietzschean way of regarding the past not as dead weight but as a collection of materials for aesthetic play in and for the present, fourthly, differed from the way in which official art history devised genealogies. There was nothing new as such of course in designing genealogies. Traditional art history had been doing so for a long time and is doing so to date. Yet the impulse here is a different one. Unlike the avant-gardes, whose many histories pay tribute to pluralism, accentuate possibility and give way to a rhizomatic complex, art history aims to construct the one history in a comprehensive causal narrative or schema. Perhaps the most famous of these is the diagram Alfred H. Barr devised for the 1936 MOMA exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*. Much ink has spilled over this diagram, so I can limit myself here to highlighting just a few issues. For starters, Barr's *abstract* form was clearly indebted to the models developed by the avant-gardes in preceding decades. Yet equally important is that, instead of creating new possibilities in the present, his diagram reduced the present to a choice between two "states," that of non-geometrical abstract art, and that of geometrical art. If Barr's diagram further let Orphism die a quiet death along the way, if it left out dozens of avant-gardisms and further failed to articulate cross-fertilizations between many avant-garde movements that were included, this was only to make his model cohere. Barr too presented a genealogical structure, and his model was as presentist as those of the avant-gardes. While his structure did not dialectically evoke much possibility or potential, it is a memorable instance (among many) that illustrates how the historiography of art and writing indeed has already learnt, and perhaps still can learn, from the presentist experimentation of the avant-gardes.

By Way of Conclusion

I began with Hayden White who in the 1960s advised historians to stop representing the past as if they were nineteenth-century realist novelists and to start looking toward twentieth-century modernism and the classic avant-gardes for new modes of representation. Today still, White's suggestion remains a powerful one. Admittedly, his advocacy of avant-gardism strikes as somewhat dated, as many developments in metahistorical reflection of recent decades have of course caught up with various tenets of avant-garde writing. Nonetheless, the

often intriguing and radical possibilities offered by avant-garde poetics have far from been exhausted. A truly surrealist history of, say, the French Revolution, has not been written, for example. How could it? What indeed would such a history amount to? If historians were to take their cue from surrealist writing and draw, for instance, on the poetic of the image put forth by André Breton in his founding *Manifeste du Surréalisme* (1924), the results might be discomfortingly unhistorical, even to Krauss. As Breton explained in his *Manifeste* a surrealist image arises from the spontaneous articulation of several dispersed and unrelated everyday phenomena. A notorious example Breton himself gave derived from the Comte de Lautréamont's now canonised fifth song of *Les Chants de Maldoror*: "comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie." A sewing machine, a dissecting table and an umbrella have very little in common, indeed, but when put together—albeit in syntactically correct clause—on a table for surgical dissection a rather different and marvelous image sparks from their encounter. By trial and error a historian too could spin a narrative that connects entirely unrelated phenomena, distant from one another in time and space, or not. Whether that historian would be willing to deliver his *historia rerum gestarum* over entirely to arbitrary play with *res gestae*, as Breton would have it, is less clear, however.[22] Alternatively, historians could turn to surrealist visual art and draw on the technique of *frottage* developed by Max Ernst—also commonly encountered in archeological field research. Ernst would take a sheet of paper, a pencil (or any other writing materials) and arbitrarily start calquing objects' surfaces, later often cutting up the resultant tracing paper to insert snippets of it into larger collage artworks. Very few practices might so forcefully function as the index of the historian's actual bodily engagement with concrete remnants of the past. But which historian has been willing to *subconsciously* offer such an entirely *visual* narrative of past objects, following the example of Ernst himself in *Histoire naturelle* (1926)?[23] Given the examples of *écriture automatique* and *frottage*, it is perhaps not surprising that White never delivered a surrealist or avant-garde history of anything. Yet the genealogy-complex as I have called it here, a distinctly avant-garde form of

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[22]   Admittedly, Walter Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*, certain texts of Mass Observation, Humphrey Jennings' *Pandamonium*, and perhaps the documentary historical fiction of Alexander Kluge as well deliver a mode of *surrealistic* historical discourse at least potentially exemplifying what White was imagining.

[23]   Max Ernst, *Histoire naturelle*, Paris: Galerie Jeanne Bucher, 1926, portfolio with thirty-four collotypes after frottages made in 1925, introduced by Hans Arp.

historiography, might well prove worth pursuing more actively in history, and art and literary history in particular. If Krauss' grid has helped us to recognize more comprehensive structures across the classic avant-gardes, the genealogy-complex of the avant-gardes in turn presents a model for connecting such grids through time in Foucauldian-genealogical terms. Above all, the examples of avant-garde history I have given here are to remind us, as historians of modernism and its avant-gardes, that history will always be history, facing a number of constant challenges, first among which the choice of the most appropriate narrative or aesthetic form.

Éva Forgács*

Modernism's Lost Future

> "The past is normally depicted by a series of metaphors whose material is the present."
> Roman Jakobson[1]

"What has become of the social, ethical, and religious activism of the early years of the November Group?"[2] asked art critic Ernő Kállai[3] in a 1929 article marking the tenth anniversary of the group's founding in Berlin. He particularly missed the November Group as "a major collective undertaking" that was meant to model a future collective work. His question is a resounding confirmation of an earlier statement, that "the age of ferment, of 'isms' is over [...]. We are witnessing a time of professional consolidation and absorption in objective, expert work."[4] At the time of writing this Kállai was employed at the Dessau Bauhaus as editor of the school's journal, and had plenty of experience of the vanishing of modernism's idealist spirit, and the onset of a colder, business-like, matter-of-fact approach to the creative work.

Today modernism is history that generates, in many, criticism as well as nostalgia. It was taken for granted for many long decades that studies in modernism and the avant-gardes dominated the cultural history of the post-World War II

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[1]   Roman Jakobson, "Dada," *Vestnik Teatr* (Theatrical herald), 1921, 82; trans. Stephen Rudy, in Roman Jakobson, *My Futurist Years*, New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1992, 63.

[2]   Ernő Kállai, "Zehn Jahre Novembergruppe," *Der Kunstnarr*, April 1929, n. p. trans. David Britt, in *Between Worlds. A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes 1910-1930* [hereafter: BW], eds. Timothy O. Benson, Éva Forgács, Cambridge, Mass., Los Angeles: The MIT Press and LACMA, 2002, 718.

[3]   Ernő Kállai (1890-1954) was a Hungarian art critic who lived and worked in Germany from 1920 to 1935. He contributed such journals as *Das Kunstblatt*, *Die Weltbühne, Sozialistische Monatshefte, Jahrbuch der jungen Kunst, bauhaus*, that he edited from 1928 to 1930, and others. He collaborated with Hungarian artist, poet and editor Lajos Kassák, and contributed, among other Hungarian venues, his journals *Ma* (Today) and *Munka* (Work).

[4]   Ernő Kállai, "Ideológiák alkonya" (The twilight of Ideologies), 365, April 19-20, 1925, trans. John Bátki, BW, 615.

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period. It was a matter of course: focusing on modernism was as much a moral as a professional choice of historians. After the ashes left behind by the War it was their duty to pick up the pieces of the broken culture of modernity that had been lost to Nazism, Stalinism, and the War itself. Historians and theorists who worked to re-establish modernism's continuity and relevance, and researched it in details, disregarded the vast mass of anti-modern output for a long time. This darker side of the moon has been brought to attention and gotten scrutinized in the recent decades.

Reclaiming modernism after 1945, however, also entailed the mending of its former failure in the second half of the 1920s, a process that had started as early as the breakout of the Great War. On the one hand, the actual experience of trench warfare derailed the futurists' fascination with the shiny technological future they had anticipated, but, on the other hand, the lesson of World War I fuelled further utopian/modernist ideas of internationalism, inspired by the shocking lessons of jingoistic warfare and the 1917 Russian Revolution. The mirage of a new internationalism pervaded the concepts and the work of the post-World War I modernists and the avant-gardes. The second half of the 1920s, however, was the time of sobering up after their limitless ambitions and illusions. "Modernism" and the "avant-gardes" are not synonymous terms, of course. For the purposes of this paper "modernism" will be used as the umbrella term of modern art and the culture of modernity, while the "avant-gardes" as the activist, militant vanguard movements within modernism, that pursued clear-cut agendas usually articulated in manifestoes. While the avant-gardes were all modernists, if on the radical side, not all modernists were avant-gardes. The avant-gardes operated within the modernist cultural space as representatives of some of modernism's quintessential concepts, for example their claim to the future.

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Modernists and their fighting units, the avant-gardes, had exiled themselves into the future since Count Saint-Simon first outlined a future state that will employ the avant-garde artists as the state's official communicators with the populace. Throughout the hundred years stretching from the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries, modernism and the avant-gardes were consistently future-bound. Modernism was *power-art*, both when reflecting the actual power of the modernizing bourgeoisie and when opposing it in the name of a yet to be established new social order and new culture that the modernists would create through the avant-garde movements. The modernist artist claimed to have a mandate, either from

the dominant social groups or from their energetic progressive opposition. Modernism's universal claim to the future was expressed not only in the term "futurism". Conquering the future on a cosmic scale was expressed in the title *Victory Over the Sun*, Aleksei Kruchenkih, Mikhail Matyushin, Kazimir Malevich and Velimir Khlebnikov's 1913 futurist opera as well as in Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero's 1915 manifesto *The Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe*, to cite only two of the most obvious and grand examples of the cosmic conquest that modernists felt imminent. The anticipation of lingering epochal changes in the Russian society and then the historic fact of the Russian revolution, fast-paced progress in sciences and new technologies as well as, among other things, the success of early aviation fuelled the sensation that mankind's wildest dreams were being redeemed, and the future was within reach. Malevich declared that he had already relocated into the future, leaving behind "the blue lampshade of color limitations," and calling: "after me, comrade aviators!"[5]

More meticulous and pragmatic designs and concepts also abounded in the first two and a half decades of the twentieth century. The participants of De Stijl, the Bauhaus, and Russian constructivism, the circles of the journals *L'Esprit Nouveau* and *ABC Beiträge zum Bauen* worked on buildings and objects that people could actually use in the near future. Housing projects, interior design, new typography and modern fashion design from Tatlin and Varvara Stepanova to Balla[6] and Sonia Delaunay were equally propositions for an anticipated change in the way of life, now in the frame of a socially and technologically advanced, soon-to-be realized new world.

Modernism's vision and anticipation of the future both artistically and discursively, was confronted by past-bound regenerative trends that had a massive presence since the end of the nineteenth century and saw themselves not less revolutionary than the modernists. The myth of the fascist "new man" touting violence and fundamentalism, as theorized by Georges Sorel (1847-1922) and his successors[7] was

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5   Malevich, "Suprematism," April 1919, in *Malevich on Suprematism, Six Essays: 1915 to 1926*, ed. Patricia Railing, Iowa City: The University of Iowa, 1999, 46.

6   See Giacomo Balla, "Futurist Men's Clothing: A Manifesto," 1914, in *Futurism. An Anthology*, eds. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, Laura Wittman, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009, 194-195.

7   Mark Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism. The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France, 1909-1939*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007, 2.

the counterpart of El Lissitzky's utopian *New Man* in his 1923 portfolio version of *Victory Over the Sun.* The implication of modernist artists and even some of the representatives of the avant-gardes in the nascent fascist myth-making that projected a "fascist revolution" in the period between 1909 and 1939[8] has been the object of more detailed research since the 1990s, resulting in a more layered and complicated concept of modernism than the previously held image, which focused exclusively on the presence of the progressive features of modernity and the avant-gardes. Considering the anti-democracy, anti-capitalism, extreme nationalism and conservatism of these movements, it appears that the 1920s *rappel à l'ordre* should not have come as a surprise. But it did: in contemporary criticism as well as in later historiography. Benjamin D. Buchloh gives a detailed discussion of what he calls regression to figurative painting in a 1981 essay,[9] not hesitating to call the post-1915 developments the first "collapse of the modernist idiom" that he saw as a cautionary tale at the time of writing, and which is just as relevant today:

> The question for us now is to what extent the rediscovery and recapitulation of these modes of figurative representation [...] reflect and dismantle the ideological impact of growing authoritarianism; or to what extent they simply indulge and reap the benefits of this increasingly apparent political practice; or, worse yet, to what extent they cynically generate a cultural climate of authoritarianism to familiarize us with the political realities to come.[10]

This insight raises several questions: What exactly was getting lost when the former futurists and cubists resorted to figurative expression? Did they become, in Clement Greenberg's terms, producers of kitsch by giving up the avant-garde's demanding and critical position? Did they convert to the market? Did they regress to an easily understandable, populist visual language, as Buchloh suggests? Were they complicit in bringing on authoritarian neo-classicism?

These questions imply that modernism was the opposite of kitsch, the market, populism, and authoritarian neo-classicism. However, it was not only the neo-

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8   For detailed discussion see *op. cit.*

9   Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression," *October*, no. 16 (Spring 1981), 39-68; reprinted in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation,* ed. Brian Wallis, New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984, 107-134.

10   *Ibid.*, 108.

classicist style of Mussolini's Novecento, the Nazis, and Socialist Realism that filled with the spirit of a new order the forms of age-old classicism: the "rhetoric of power"[11] haunted the future-bound modernists' formal language as well, if not in the neo-classical style, but geometric abstraction. Seeking collective spirit in artistic expression to overcome the national and individual particularities in the wake of World War I, modernist aspirations turned away from expressionism and looked for its antithesis in art[12]. The new art of the future, the modernists were convinced, had to leave behind subjectivism, and be equally valid and understandable for all, displaying images of a common future. The most clearly overarching formal elements were the purely geometric ones, although very different philosophies generated them from theosophy to communism to suprematist metaphysics. Surveying the new art of the first post-World War I years Kállai discerned the anti-expressionist, anti-subjectivist tendencies that he attributed to the spirit of a future collectivism and labeled *objectivism* in spring 1921. He described the most progressive art as *constructions* (even if he could have hardly heard the term from Moscow, as it was just emerging there), that

> have created new space for the style of the twentieth century, which has lost metaphysics and illusions, but is unstoppable and progressive in technology and its civilization. [...] We don't need to go as far as art. What a great classicism: clear, transparent order, subtlety, beauty of form and movement we see in the system of modern machines! How much earthly, human dignity is in the proud verticality of the factories, the cruising of steamships, the flight of airplanes, the arches of the bridges![13]

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[11]   For the implications of early twentieth century geometric abstraction that the minimalists of the 1970s considered their model, see Anna C. Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine,* Vol. 64, No. 5 (January 1990), 44-63.

[12]   Modernism's flirtation with classicism goes back to even earlier times the discussion of which would go beyond the scope of the present paper. The Hungarian modernist tendencies of the first decade of the twentieth century that blended cubism and expressionism, were welcomed by Georg Lukács as "the art of the old times" in his programmatic 1910 article, "Az Utak Elváltak," *Nyugat* III/3 (February 1910): 190-193; English translation: "The Ways Have Parted," English translation by George Cushing, in BW 125-129 in *The Lukács Reader*, ed. Arpad Kadarkay, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, 167-173. For more on the subject, see Éva Forgács, "The Safe Haven of a New Classicism. The Quest for a New Aesthetics in Hungary 1904-1912," *Studies in East European Thought*, No. 60, 2008.

[13]   Ernő Kállai, "Új művészet" (New art), Part II, *Ma*, Vienna, Aug. 1, 1921, 115. My translation.

The unapologetic use of the term "classicism" for what he describes as cutting edge modernity and the fusion of art and life in objects that attest to the technical and aesthetic ingenuity of the modern man, indicates that in spite of the sharply contrasting concepts there was a rhetorical and formal overlap between the languages of the modernists and the regenerative traditionalists. Kállai naively used the word "classicist" to express his admiration for a regained order over what, at that point, appeared to him, and many modernists, as chaotic and deliberate subjectivism and bourgeois individualism. Leaning toward technological constructions and machine aesthetics, that became the staple of progressive abstract art for the next years, was also a reaction to the chaos of the war and the widely spread modernist desire to build the new, international world on rational and socially egalitarian foundations. That is, new art of a new *order*. Deleting the past is emphatically underlined in many programmatic works from *Victory Over the Sun* to a number of manifestos. The vision of a collectivist future found expression in the simple geometric forms and pure colours of the modernist aesthetic. However, Nazi Germany, Stalin's Russia and Mussolini's Italy were equally anti-individualist, and also ushered in a certain degree of modernization: the former two in technologies, the latter also in style. Relatively permissive in visual expression and architecture, Fascist Italy complicates our concepts of modernism. As Emily Frances Braun points out, it "overturns longstanding presumptions that the modes of abstraction, non-objective art, or expressionism were the sole purview of liberal or left wing exponents. In Fascist Italy, modernism, as well as tradition, were employed to the ends of anti-democratic politics."[14] Such overlap occurred in leftwing and right-wing populist phraseology, too. For example the Bauhaus's second director Hannes Meyer, a left-wing, self-described "scientific Marxist" programmatically used terms like "Volksseele," "Volksinteresse," "Volksgemeinschaft"—also key terms in Nazi talk.[15]

By the mid-1920s Neue Sachlichkeit ruled, along with a "shift to allegorical mode"[16] and a turn of the futurist and cubist painting to what Buchloh calls "au-

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[14]   Emily Frances Braun, "The Modernity of Tradition: The Fine Arts in Fascist Italy 1919-1929," in *Reinterpreting the Past. Traditionalist Artistic Trends in Central and Eastern Europe of the 1920s and 1930s*, ed. Irena Kossowska, Warsaw: Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 2010, 46.

[15]   Hannes Meyer, "bauhaus und gesellschaft," *bauhaus zeitschrift* 1929/1, 20.

[16]   Buchloh, 112.

thoritarian neo-classicism." Modernist product design was highly successful on the market and became fashionable, but was stripped of the utopian social visions of the early 1920s. El Lissitzky returned to Moscow in 1925; Walter Gropius and László Moholy-Nagy left the Bauhaus early in 1928; Theo van Doesburg died in 1931; Hitler came to power in 1933; and Socialist Realism was declared mandatory in the Soviet Union in 1934. Thus, years before World War II the modern imagination and the confident faith of the modernists in shaping and owning the future was suppressed and disappeared from sight. The power that the modernist and the avant-garde artist had thought to possess evaporated. As Buchloh points out,

> The Harlequins, Pierrots, Bajazzos and Pulcinelles invading the work of Picasso, Beckmann, Severini, Derain and others in the early twenties (and, in the mid-thirties, even the work of the former constructivist/productivist Rodchenko in Russia) can be identified as ciphers of an enforced regression. They serve as emblems for the melancholic infantilism of the avant-garde artist who has come to realize his historical failure. The clown functions as a social archetype of the artist as an essentially powerless, docile, entertaining figure [...].[17]

If regression in the 1920s materialized, among other things, in the figure of the clown, it still found in the clown a long time cultural symbol condensing a rich poetic, dramatic and literary tradition, quite unlike today's plush bunnies and Barbie dolls. The clown was still the emblem of the modernist artist who created art as an alternative to the world of power even when he was left powerless.

An early confession of the lost future appeared in a 1923 Soviet short story, in which the director of a salt mine explains to a painter what the murals of the new theatre, which was formerly the mine's church, have to represent. The pictures will show the changed life of man, with physical labour done by machines, natural catastrophes controlled by the power of the liberated human intellect, man overcoming the powers of the cosmos as well as human emotions that had divided humankind. But he soon receives a letter from a friend that brings him back to the present:

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[17] Buchloh, 118.

I will not hesitate [...] I will shoot myself in the head. [...] We have shot, crushed, and destroyed everything that even vaguely resembled the past. We have leaped ahead a thousand years, a millennium separated us from those we killed. [...] In brief, I struggled against time and space. I wanted to make the future present. This had seemed possible in those panic-stricken, confused years when time seemed to vanish, but now that the panic has subdued, life again proceeds in time and space. And even if space can be conquered, time cannot. Life is, once again, ruled by the same old things: love, money, and glory.[18]

Such early reckoning with the futility and irreality of the expectations attached to the future was rare in the mostly optimistic early 1920s. Four decades later, in the wake of World War II hope in a better world had to prevail, the more so, because the horrors of that war had to be forgotten. The human losses of World War II and the Nazi Holocaust were beyond comprehension and expression. All efforts had to be directed at the future. Thus the return of modernism to the mainstream of Western art and historiography after 1945 more than ever before, was inevitable, and modernity's position in the centre of the culture, now invested with a retroactive anti-war and anti-fascism stance, was confirmed for several decades. Modernism, once again highly politicized, was also a reference point for the anti-capitalist movements of the 1950s and 1960s, including various groups of the New Left. The period from 1956, when many Western communists found the Soviet Union's crushing the Hungarian uprising inacceptable and abandoned their respective communist parties generating the New Left, was the run-up to the intoxicating 1960s that culminated in 1968. This decade brought the rediscovery of the Russian avant-garde and, along with it, the rediscovery of the modernism and the avant-gardes of the 1920s both East and West.[19] The utopian and internationalist contents of modernism put the artist, once again, in the role of a potential leader who can serve as a guide into the future—suffice it to point at the figure of Joseph Beuys and the role he assumed as a leader and

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[18] Mikhail Slonimsky, "The Emery Machine," 1923, in *Kegyetlen szerelem* (Cruel love, an anthology), Budapest: Európa Kiadó, 1963, translated from János Elbert's Hungarian to English by the author and John Bátki. Russian original: Mikhail Leonidovich Slonimskiĭ, *Mashina Èmeri*, Moscow: Ateneĭ, 1924.

[19] For a detailed discussion of the integration of the Soviet-Russian avant-garde into the master narrative of Western art, see Éva Forgács, "How the New Left Invented East-European Art," in *Blindheit und Hellsichtigkeit. Künstlerkritik an Politik und Gesellschaft der Gegenwart*, ed. Cornelia Klinger, Wiener Reihe. Themen der Philosophie, Bd. 16, Berlin: Verlag Walter de Gruyter, 2014.

organizer with the wide support of followers and the media. The cult of modernism entailed inquiry into history, and more: the need to construct the relevant narrative of modernism. It entailed, furthermore, that knowledge of social and political history, philosophy, psychoanalysis, music and literature were, to a degree as high as possible, indispensable for understanding modernism.

This scale of competence supported the concept of the sustained relevance of modernism, its high standards and tenet of unfailing progress, projected into the future until modernism's crisis and demise starting in the late 1970s and around the early 1980s. Exactly at the time when Buchloh wrote his essay on the regressive anti-modern tendencies of the 1920s and 1930s that he appropriately tied to the present, the myth of modernism was fading out and was seen as the more and more irrelevant. Almost suddenly everything was questioned: who exactly is the artist, in whose name is he actually speaking, and what is he representing beside his own private self? At about this time modernism, and, along with it, the artist lost power and social mandate, for a number of reasons that need yet to be spelled out. One of these reasons was that the culture's focus shifted from the future to the present (and the past as well), so the ground fell out from below the modernist visions. A case in point is the ubiquity of the theme, and, indeed, the myth, of childhood in a lot of the visual art of the 1980s and 90s, when plush toys, dolls, toy cars and other childhood objects flooded the exhibition rooms. In contrast to modernism's vision of a shared future these objects and images tell private stories and personal memories of the past, or offer critical comments on the present in exceedingly private language. They display personal history instead of a common future, or tell narratives in allegorical language.

Although I would like to point out the ubiquity of toys in the 1980s and 1990s as indicative of a paradigm shift from the 'adult' modernist to the vulnerable *transmodernist* who discovered the child in his or her self, it would not be right to claim that toys and the theme of childhood first appeared in the art world and literature during this period. The idea and cult of childhood first appeared as instant critique of the Enlightenment. Even before Kant argued for mankind's newly acquired maturity that "the public use of one's reason"[20] warrants for, the anti-rationalist concept of the child as genius, free of the corruption perpe-

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[20]   Immanuel Kant: "What Is Enlightenment?" in Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals,* Indianapolis, New York, Kansas City: The Bobbs Merrill Company, Inc., 1959, 87.

trated by the culture, was introduced by Rousseau and was further cultivated by Goethe. Generations of reform pedagogues based their methods on saving the "innate genius" of children. Romanticism saw childhood as the entirety of the possibilities any human being has ahead in life. Freud and Proust, the expressionists, and the surrealists were all intent on fathoming childhood. The child was discovered inside the adult as the bottom of his ego, his primitive, authentic, primordial core of uncorrupted sensitivity.

In the 1980s, however, self-pity and narcissism were in the air: one had only to recognize their visual expressions[21]. René Ricard depicted his favourite Francesco Clemente painting in his 1981 essay "The Radiant Child."[22] He singled out a Clemente picture of a frog in a green pond as the "preservation of a lost moment from childhood, perfectly seen and remembered in a flash", and claimed that it was exactly this flashed childhood moment that "sets this picture apart as art."[23] But he was most of all moved by Keith Haring's picture *The Radiant Child*. "We are the radiant child and have spent our lives defending that little baby, constructing an adult around it to protect it from the unlisted signals of forces we have no control over. We are that little baby, the radiant child [...]."[24] Ricard is claiming back the Winnicotian "true self," lost amidst the maturing process and the worldly operations of "false self" adults. Also importantly, in contrast to the modernist attitude of being in charge and control, he points to "forces we have no control over," admitting the powerlessness of the artist.

By the end of the 1980s this narcissistic melodrama gave way to a more sophisticated and more educated critique that I would call *transmodern*, in order to express a complexity and an attitude that do not come across from the term *postmodern*. Transmodern combined sociological, psychological, anthropological and even educational awareness but dismissed their significance as a kind of tangential, secondary feature, while exuding alarming vulnerability, thus making it clear that being armed with knowledge and psycho-analytical

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[21]   Naturally, there is never a clear-cut divide when it comes to motifs. Childhood and the childlike appeared as themes much earlier in the work of Hans Bellmer and Joseph Cornell, as well as, for example, the work of Christian Boltanski in the 1960s. These occurrences were, however, isolated.

[22]   René Ricard, "The Radiant Child," *Artforum*, December 1981, 38.

[23]   Ricard, 38.

[24]   *Ibid.*, 45.

literacy were of little help for the artist in asserting his social position or secur-ing a stronghold in life. Everything that made the modernist artist powerful no longer worked for the transmodernist of the 1980s and 1990s. This came across, for example, the 1990 group exhibition *The Pathetic Aesthetic*,[25] "a blunt aes-thetic of failure, embarrassment and thumping degradation," as Los Angeles art critic Christopher Knight described it, coining the term *Patheticism* for it.[26] "Pathetic art is adamantly anti-idealistic," Knight concludes, "Rather than en-visioning utopias [...]. Patheticism simply makes do with what is. And 'what is' is frequently a mess. It embraces all those quietly horrific feelings one has gone to great if unwitting lengths to repress from memory."[27]

Transmodern—a more inclusive term than Patheticism, by analogy of the Italian term of the same years, *transavanguardia*— was tired of modernism's ambitions, achievements, and its claim for moral high-grounds, and expressed it through choosing private topics, marginal subject matters, or pathetic junk objects as if refraining from mainstream art. At the same time however, along with the pathet-ic, it displayed a lot of erudition, sophistication, and critique, but conspicuously on the sidelines, eschewing making a point or coming up with a big idea. Trans-modern is cool: it differs from postmodern inasmuch as it points to easily super-seding and dismissing, rather than just chronologically following modernism.

Transmodern art was often so sophisticated that at times it appeared as mod-ernism in disguise. Mike Kelley's or Annette Messager's soft toys, for example, reflected deep knowledge of the culture, eliciting sexuality, aggression, soli-tude, and yearning, confronting the actual reality of children, or the sustained childlike sensitivity of the artist, to the adults' rigid, stubbornly upheld image of an idealized world of flawless perfection, order and cleanliness. But where the modernist artist would have opposed establishment culture and politics

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[25] The show as organized by writer Ralph Rugoff in the Rosamund Felsen Gallery in summer 1990. The participants included Mike Kelley, Raymond Pettibon, John Miller, Georg Her-ald, and others. I am grateful to Kim Dingle for bringing it, as well as Christopher Knight's review, to my attention.

[26] Christopher Knight, "The Pathetic Aesthetic: Making Do With What Is," *Los Angeles Times*, August 14, 1990.

[27] *Ibid*. Julie Kristeva's 1980 book *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, in English: *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, should be mentioned in this context, even if a detailed discussion of it would go beyond the scope of this essay.

by activism, the transmodernist positions himself or herself as a detached observer, if not victim. Kelley, for example, was perplexed by the aggression of the adult world against children that manifested, among other things, in gift-giving. He saw home-made plush toys, supposedly the tokens of love, also as impositions of a will on children, a gesture that reflected society's attitude to the individual. Kelley's transmodern sensitivity perceived the continued power struggle in the culture and he sided with the powerless. "If you give this thing to Junior," he said, "he owes you something. It might not be money, but he owes you something. The most terrible thing is that he doesn't know what he owes you because there's no price on the thing."[28] The question is answered by Brian Sutton-Smith, who observed that toy objects have had a tendency to replace games in children's lives, and that the toys are designed for solitary occupation to isolate children from the earliest age on.[29] "Although the 'gift' is meant to bond the child to the parents, the child's reciprocal obligation is to become capable of solitary behaviour. Solitariness is the child's gift to the parents."[30] We have come a long way from modernism's collectivist ideals.

The transmodern is anti-authoritarian and does not have the ambition to step up as authority. A case in point is a body of work by Kim Dingle, the *Priss Room* installations (1994). Dingle also plays on the sharp contrast between the cultural facade and the raw, original, precultural reality presented as that of children: here two-year-old girls smear feces on the wall and throw violently ripped plush toys around. Donning frilly white dresses and black shoes as flawlessly cute little girls, the Prisses—prim, cissy and belligerent—clench their tiny fists, raring to fight. They explode with the energy of aggression and violence. Handmade and dressed by Dingle (and fashioned as caricatured self-portraits), they look like miniature beasts of prey, ready for action at any minute. If they have a demonic quality about them, it stems, as in Kelley's works, from the demons of our culture. The Prisses' piercing eyes express little illusion about life being a ruthless fight—a physical fight, that is—and they are clearly chomping at the bit, taking pleasure in the prospective. And no wonder: pull up their Sunday best dresses, and you will find bellies covered with tattoos that are in fact min-

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[28] Mike Kelley interviewed by John Miller in Los Angeles on March 21, 1991. In *Mike Kelley*, Los Angeles: Art Press, 1992, 18.

[29] Brian Sutton-Smith, *Toys As Culture*, New York: Gardener Press, 1986, especially the chapters "The Toy as Solitariness," and "The Use of Toys for Isolation."

[30] *Ibid.*, 53.

(left): Kim Dingle, *Priss*, 1994. Mixed media.
Courtesy of the artist.
(right): Kim Dingle: *Priss Room*, 1994. Installa-
tion, mixed media. Courtesy of the artist.

iature oil paintings depicting scenes from great American myths: wild battles
with the native Americans, all horses, whips and guns. The transmodern mes-
sage is: down with the big ideas! Nobody can claim moral high grounds in a
culture of unending violence.

Nayland Blake's *El Dorado*, another 1994 installation[31] is an Orwellian vision
featuring yellow toy rabbits (apparently cloned) as parts of a model-size com-
munity. One rabbit is gleefully smearing some brown substance on the wall,
another is drawing. One group has constituted an execution squad and is pre-
paring to shoot one of their fellow rabbits; another group is simply playing. One
rabbit, chased by yet another group, is trying to hide; another lies dead in a
refrigerator. There seems to be no moral or other scale to differentiate between
individual actions. Killing is like "playing at execution", being dead is like
"playing dead"; drawing may be interrupted for shooting. Since the toy world so
resembles the real one, there is no clear-cut borderline between feigning an ac-

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[31]   It was on show in Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica, in 1994.

tion and performing it. The cute little bunny-rabbits, as spotless as Kelley's toys were when first given to a child, act out their little masters' or their own unconscious ideas and desires in a violent free-for-all. If this is a vision of the future, it fundamentally differs from modernism's concept of an ever-improving, ever more advanced future world.

The novelty of the use of toys in the art of the 1980s and 90s, as opposed to the way surrealists used them in the 1930s was that they changed the route of communication between artist and viewer. Although each artist used them in a different way and for different purposes, toys are more objects than representations. They were not handmade by the artist, nor were they displayed as *objets trouvés*. As mass-produced or serially handcrafted objects they were familiar from everyone's childhood, so it was justified to use them as the lowest common cultural denominator of at least one generation. They lack the intellectual sophistication of the surrealists who addressed the unconscious through symbols so the viewer could intellectually respond to the challenge by deciphering them. The artists of the 90s did not address the viewer's mind. They used the viscerality of toys directly to electrify the viewer's unconscious, this art's real target. The intellectual step between the image and its frame of reference was eliminated as another sign of dismissing modernism. While Duchamp's ready-mades were carefully chosen objects, so neutral they did not invite any kind of identification and stayed halfway between viewer and exhibitor, the toy, by contrast to the bicycle wheel, is an object that absorbs both the artist and the viewer. Not only does it address the childhood ego, but, by its physical presence, powerfully reinvigorates it, so that it ceases to be, like other artworks, the object of contemplation. Instead, it is recognized as part of the viewer's self. Childhood was discovered in the art of transmodernity as the last common myth and cultural bond that activates everyone's private memories. Toys invited both artist and viewer, who shared an otherwise not admitted anxiety, to regress into pre-verbal childhood.

The 1980s and 90s didn't need the art world, though, to put children, with or without toys, on display: their images were ubiquitous. Ads in the print media and TV commercials quickly grasped the cult of children and childhood, the yearning for security, and the emotionalism involved. The media still incessantly flash images of infants, toddlers, and children to sell insurance, safe cars, retirement plans, to mention only a few typical items. Images of security

László Fehér, *Harbour*, 1988, oil on canvas.
Courtesy of the artist.

and images of happy childhood have grown inseparable, while the exploitation of the sexuality, consumer potential, and emotional reverberations related to children, have also become ubiquitous. Childhood, as PR experts have realized, has come to be seen as the ultimate safe haven from anxiety. The multifaceted use of children or the childlike in a multi-layered visual vernacular is reflected on in many more artists' works such as Sally Mann, Charles Ray, Nicole Eisenman, Tamara Fites, Tony Oursler, and others.

Childhood and the personal past were also prominent subject matter in Eastern Europe in the same decades in art as well as literature. Hungarian painter László Fehér, for example, consistently used the motif of childhood memories in his reductive compositions. Shadows and transparent figures open the picture space up to an inner reality while the style-frame is photorealist. Because of the local context the topic of childhood, as writer Péter Nádas explained, gave an opportunity to generate "subjective time that everyone creates for himself; [thus] thematising childhood was a hidden response to schematism and the ensuing more sophisticated forms of manipulation."[32] Re-visiting childhood

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[32]   Péter Nádas, "A gyerekkor: rejtett válasz a sematizmusra" (Childhood: a hidden response to schematism), interview with András Görömbei, *Alföld*, 1977, No. 7, my translation.
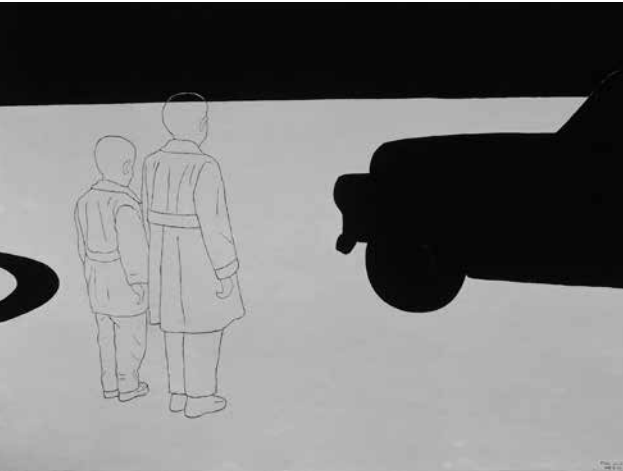
László Fehér, *Black Car*, 1989, oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

helped create personal freedom in the space of the artwork. Even if the topic of childhood was an invention against censorship and oppression, it was past-bound, and served as refuge from the present, unlike modernism's brave anticipation of the future.

Not giving up childhood is a soft resistance of the "essentially powerless" artist, in Buchloh's words, in the world of hard-edge corporate architecture. "Powerless" seems to have had a different meaning in the modernist past. Franz Kafka, who felt entirely powerless in his relationship to his father, summed up his weakness in his *Letter to his Father* and turned his very weakness into a powerful weapon in the battle against him. This struggle was not only Oedipal. It was tantamount to rejecting the world of the adults, which he saw epitomized, just as the young Oskar in Günther Grass's *The Tin Drum*, by business and the establishment. While he passionately expressed a sense of not belonging, he created the alternative space of the artist for himself, because, in the scale of modernist values the successful artist (who he already was) ranked higher than the successful businessman. Art was universal whereas money was merely materially functional. Having the power of artistic imagery and articulation was superior to worldly power.

It is inconceivable today that a son, armed only with artistic talent, could defeat corporate power whether it materializes in the figure of his father or otherwise. Art is weak unless it functions on the level of a corporate agency. The

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term "modernism" entails the powerful artist with faith in the future that he will bring to mankind, but this faith and power are now history.[33] Presently "modernism" as a concept appears to be teetering on the borderline between a restricted aesthetic-ideological category of the past, and a purely descriptive chronological rubric in historiography.

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[33] Just one example from the ocean of such references is Dieter Hacker's recent exhibition in Berlin' Diehl Gallery, accompanied by a text that puts modernism in perspective, titled "The Right Angle as a Socio-Political Art Concept." (On view March 22-April 25, 2014.)

Jožef Muhovič*

Modernism as the Mobilization and Critical Period of Secular Metaphysics. The Case of Fine/Plastic Art

Whenever we are dealing with the "modern," it is always interesting to know whether that which makes reference to its own contemporaneity and pleads for cohabitation with us is a transcending of the old with new means, or whether its novelty lies merely in preparing the terrain for the old to be suitably concluded. Such knowledge, however, cannot be obtained without analyzing concrete events and studying their consequences. And since the term "modernism" appeared as a theoretical reaction to the modernist "state of affairs" in the same way as sight appeared as an evolutionary reaction to the existence of sunlight and not vice versa, I shall attempt to explore the nature of the modernist "way of being" and evaluate it to a certain extent in the phenomenal field of fine/plastic art. In doing so I shall focus on the period between the mid-nineteenth century, when bourgeois art with its routine realist approaches drifted into a strange state of unresponsiveness to the world around it; on the 1960s, when the modernist model of aesthetic idealism found itself in a deep crisis; and on the 1970s and 1980s, when, owing to its inability to continue advancing in the same idealist direction, it became necessary to test the very "seismic stability" of modernist suppositions by demystifying the aesthetic and the sublime. As far as fine/plastic art is concerned, this was the time of a double shift of paradigms, one of which served to mobilize secular metaphysics, and the other of which aimed to verify its foundations in conditions of a globalizing culture. The first case involves the transition of the paradigm of fine art into the paradigm of "pure" plastic art, and the second focuses on the transition from the paradigm of "pure plastic art" to the paradigm of visual art, whose asset is "secondary semantization" of visual objects, events and contexts. For a precise discussion, a more than century-long time interval seems exaggerated, yet its selection was necessary because the paradigmatic shifts that I would like to coherently thematize are not visible in thinner temporal slices. Indeed, the consequences of such a decision undoubtedly call for obligatory conciseness in the verbalization of conceptual and articulatory transformations.

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1. Modernism as the mobilization of metaphysical background

In medias res
In the second half of the nineteenth century, bourgeois art of the realist genre practically came to a standstill on the formative standards of naturalist iconography and mimetics. Yet this extensive situation no longer befitted social happenings, whose speed was then being set by the first industrial revolution, by primary accumulation of capital and by fierce market competitiveness, nor by the creative potentials of artists who, confronted with the emerging photography, attempted to surpass the attained mimetic-documentary standards and thereby pave the way for painting.

The flexibility and instability of modern society acquired the initial external expression in Impressionism. Impressionists abandoned their dark studios adorned with artificially arranged motifs and headed out into the *plein air*, into the air and light, where, through direct experience, they encountered a fast-moving and disarranged life. Their paintings were composed in a sketchy way, because they wanted to capture the fleeting moment of life. This gave them freshness. Their painting procedure involved the optical mixing of colors (divisionism), which at the time was simultaneously being discovered by science.[1] This brought color to Impressionist works, as well as "scientific validity." Referring to science was also a sign of modern times. In doing so Impressionists strove to emphasize that their paintings were "more truthful" than those of Naturalist painters, since the Impressionist "truth" was supported by science, then considered the only solid and supreme authority.

This Impressionist "scientific truth" *ipso facto* made two methodological moves that were of key importance for the further development of fine/plastic art in the twentieth century: (a) On the basis of scientific findings about the optical mixing of colors and the simultaneous contrast, Impressionism broke down the appearance of truth into its optical components, into dot formations of pure colors.[2] This pointed to a modernist interest in the "background" of the

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[1] *Cf.* Michel-Eugène Chevreul, *Du contraste simultané des couleurs et de l'assortiment des objets colorés*, Paris: Pitois-Levrault, 1839, 1-16, 145-275 and 623-655 (quoted from: http://goo.gl/nhvykL; accessed in April 2014).

[2] This principle can be observed today with a magnifying glass in color rasters used in photo print reproduction.

world, which later developed into a modernist axiom. (b) The second move involved redirecting attention from the imitative aspects of depiction to the free production or synthetization of the visual, which subsequently also developed into a modernist axiom and opened the path to non-figurative or abstract art. This transition was explicitly contextualized by the painter Fernand Léger in his essay, "The Origins of Painting and Its Representational Value," in which he wrote:

> The impressionists were the first to reject the *absolute value of the subject and to consider its value to be merely relative*. That is the tie that links and explains the entire modern evolution. The impressionists are the great originators of the present movement; they are its primitives in the sense that, wishing to free themselves from the imitative aspect, they considered painting for its color only, neglecting all form and all line almost entirely. [...] The imitation of the subject that their work still involves is thus, even then, no more than a pretext for variety, a theme and nothing more. For the impressionists a green apple on a red rug is no longer the relationship between two objects, but the relationship between two tones, a green and a red. When this truth became formulated in living works, the present movement was inevitable. I particularly stress this epoch of French painting, for I think it is at this precise moment that the two great pictorial concepts, visual realism and realism of conception, meet—the first completing its ascent, which includes all traditional painting down to the impressionists, and the second, realism of conception, beginning with them.[3]

The distinction between "visual realism" and "realism of conception," as well as the artistic preference for the latter, were adopted and applied in their own way by post-Impressionist movements such as Fauvism, Expressionism, Cubism and Constructivism, all of which believed that the appearance of a thing is not the only reality, but that behind this appearance there exists an "invisible reality" which artists need to follow to a greater degree than the reality of appearance. Or, in the words of Wassily Kandinsky: Art has abandoned the skin of nature, but not its laws, its cosmic laws.[4] These laws were the laws of the plastic means of expression, that is, the laws of the visual perception and ontic analysis

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[3]   Fernand Léger, "Les origines de la peinture et sa valeur representative" (1913), in Fernand Léger, *Functions of Painting,* London: Thames and Hudson, 1973, 3-4.

[4]   Wassily Kandinsky, *Essays über Kunst und Künstler*, Bern: Benteli Verlag, 1963, 203.
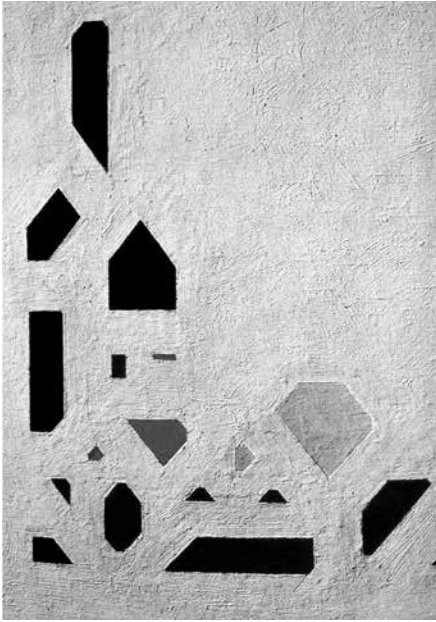
Figure 1: Bart van der Leck, *Still life with a wine bottle*, 1922; Otterlo: Kröller-Müller Museum.

of space, which the painters of the first decade of the twentieth century passionately explored in order to find legitimation and solidity at least in the foundations of their art (see **Figure 1**), if such solidity and trust could not be offered to them by the unstable economic and strained political situation in Europe of that time, which was rapidly sliding into the First World War.

"Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible."[5]
Klee's famous statement quoted above concisely summarizes the Impressionist discovery that art is not formed according to nature, it does not only reproduce its appearance (although it can), but also creates from its own elements (light-dark, color, point, line) and follows its own principles, in a manner analogous to nature. The realization that the artist may abandon the "united states of appearance" and independently create the appearance of the not-yet-visible opened new and promising paths of creative freedom to the artists of that time. They enthusiastically began to explore the new world that was simultaneously opening outwards, into the background of the world (into the objective), and inwards

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[5]   "Kunst gibt nicht das Sichtbare wieder, sondern macht sichtbar," Paul Klee, "Schöpferische Konfession" (1920), in *Paul Klee Kunst-Lehre. Aufsätze, Vorträge, Rezensionen und Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formenlehre*, ed. Günther Regel, Leipzig: Reclam, 1987, 60.

(into one's own subjectivity), while the *brave new world* of social life was becoming increasingly darkened in the shadow of the anticipated economic crisis. The artist, now pushed to the edge of society by the bourgeoisie and capital, was becoming a recluse, a meditator, and above all a seeker of experiential and life harmony which the current world of techno-politics was unable to provide. The abstract art appearing between 1909 and 1919 was an attempt by artists to capture, in a constructive way, a balance between the subjective and the objective that did not exist in the social conditions of that time. The assembly line, which degraded man to the level of an extension of a machine, was a production necessity, yet it implicitly caused great imbalance in man's creative identity and capacity. It needed to be compensated for, and artists spontaneously reacted to this imbalance. By articulating an abstract painting from pure plastic constructive elements in which forms began to live their own life in an orderly and logical composition, the artist created a symbolic image of what human life is supposed to be—that is, the image of man as the *creator of meaning*.

From plastic art to pure plastic art

Many artists of abstraction, particularly geometric abstraction, stepped onto this constructive and synthetic path; in these endeavors, the most in-depth and regulative course was taken by the movements of Suprematism and Neoplasticism and the artists associated with them, such as Kazimir Malevich, El Lissitzky and Piet Mondrian. These artists strove—either through "intuitive sensibility" (Suprematism) or through a kind of rationalized plastic Neoplatonism (Neoplasticism)—toward objective and universal beauty, and for this very reason attempted to break away from the spheres of singularity, particularity, randomness and subjective judgment. The artist of Suprematism and De Stijl subordinated himself entirely to the high idealism of pure, prototypical shapes and to the search for purified, objective and universal beauty (**Figure 2**). Or, as Piet Mondrian defined this endeavor in his essay "Plastic and Pure Plastic Art" (1937):

> Precisely by its existence, non-figurative art shows that "art" *continues always on its true road.* It shows that "art" is *not the expression of the appearance of reality such as we see it, nor of the life which we live,* but that *it is the expression of true reality and true life* [...] *indefinable, but realizable through the plastic.* Thus, we must carefully distinguish between two kinds of reality; one which has an individual and one which has a universal appearance. In art, the former is the expression of space determined by particular things or forms, the latter establishes expansion
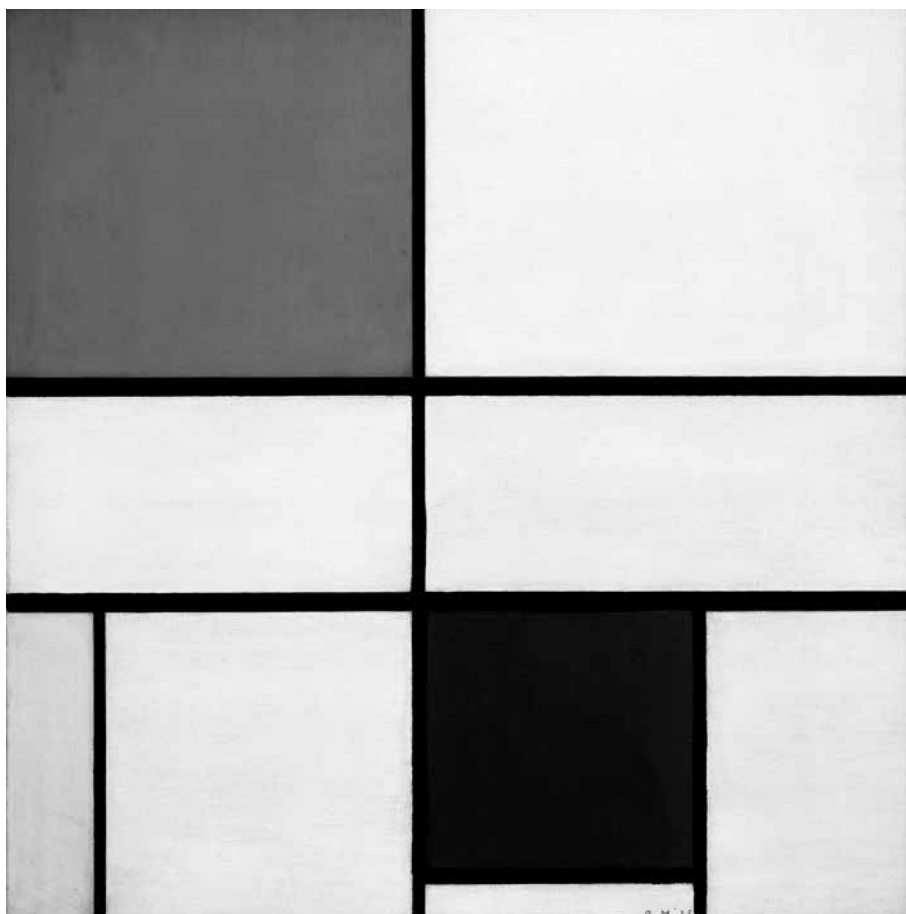
Figure 2: Piet Mondrian, *Composition C (no. III), with Red, Yellow and Blue*, 1935, Oil on canvas, 56,2 x 55,1 cm; private collection (on loan to Tate Gallery London, 2012).

and limitation—the creative factors of space—through neutral forms, free lines and pure colors. While universal reality arises from determinate relations, particular reality shows only veiled relations. The latter must obviously be confused in just that respect in which universal reality is bound to be clear.[6]

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[6]   Piet Mondrian, *Plastic and Pure Plastic Art* (1937), in *The New Art—The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*, eds. H. Holtzmann and M. S. James, London: Thames and Hudson, 1986, 297.

Pure plastic art thus functions as an agent of "enlightenment," with the help of which permanent spiritual light falls through fleeting appearances into "eternal structures." Its goal is to transcend the world of appearance; to turn away from the intrusive, confusing and turbulent surface of things; to perceive with a spiritualized eye their "essence," their "pure" formative values, structures and relations; and to reproduce them in a spirit and sense accessible form. And all of this was the work of artists who still believed in the values of classical European humanism and who were merely attempting to infuse non-figurative art with "Renaissance aesthetics" and all its faith in the lawfulness of the world and in science, in the immanent logic of artistic means of expression, in man's creative and metaphysical potentials. The abstraction appearing in 1910 represented the disintegration of interest in the material world, but not its ontic background. The artists of abstraction attempted to return art to its former splendor and life potency. But the subsequent development of economic relations that culminated in the economic crisis of 1929 brutally crushed their expectations.

From Europe to the USA, or: from the aesthetic background of the world to the sublime background of the subject

A thorn of doubt had thus been planted in the flesh of Western culture regarding the possibility of its renewal on old, Antiquity-Renaissance foundations. Yet at that time its pressure was not strong enough to deter artistic explorations in the direction of mobilizing the metaphysical background of reality. Constructivist and Purist endeavors survived the economic crisis, the rise of Nazism, and the atrocities of the Second World War. But due to the pre-war (and also partly postwar) migrations of European artists to the USA and because of the specific circumstances existing in Europe after the Second World War (destruction, division by the Iron Curtain), these endeavors grew stronger branches in their new, American homeland.[7] This occurred in movements such as American geometric abstraction, abstract expressionism, color field painting, hard edge painting, etc. Modernism as an endeavor to transform the explicit into the implicit, and to pull the background into the foreground, modified the driving force in its American version. If Constructivism was—generally speaking—driven by endeavors, impregnated with mysticism and theosophy, to uncover the metaphysical background

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[7] Willem de Kooning emigrated in 1926; Hans Hofmann in 1932; Josef Albers, Walter Gropius, László Moholy-Nagy and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in 1933; Piet Mondrian in 1940; and others.

of the world and express itself with the pure forms and cosmic laws derived from it, then post-Second World War American abstract painting was characterized by post-metaphysical endeavors for the plastic uncovering of the background of human striving for the superlative, which is generally designated with the term "sublime." In his essay "The Sublime Is Now" (1948), Barnett Newman revealed that in the procedures of this endeavor, the sublime was secularized:

> Instead of making cathedrals out of Christ, man, or "life," we are making it out of ourselves, out of our own feelings.[8]

The sublime as it appears in the works of the most prominent representatives of American post-war abstract art is metaphysical, transcendent—not by its (objectivist) attitude towards the world, but in its (subjectivist) attitude towards man as an agent of (self-)transcending desires, experiences and feelings. It generally has two modalities: that of minimalism, where the elementariness, primacy and "openness" of the result, i.e. its "here and now," is esteemed as an intellectual virtue;[9] and that of abstract expression, which attempts to be man's intimate partner in his striving for intensified sublime experiences and a personally motivated "empathy" (*Einfühlung*) with things, the spirit of the times, and artworks.[10] A typical example of the first modality is the work of Barnett Newman (*cf. Vir Heroicus Sublimis* from 1950-51; *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue?* from 1966, etc.), while a typical example of the second modality is the work of Mark Rothko (especially that from after 1948).[11]

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[8] Barnett Newman, "The Sublime Is Now" (1948), in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics,* eds. H. B. Chipp, P. Selz, and J. C. Taylor, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 553.

[9] Jean-François Lyotard wrote, with respect to Newman's painting *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, the following: "A canvas by Newman draws a contrast between stories and its plastic nudity. Everything is there—dimensions, colours, lines—but there are no allusions. So much so that it is a problem for the commentator. What can one say that is not given? [...] The best gloss consists of the question: what can one say? Or of the exclamation—'Ah'. Of surprise: 'Look at that.' So many expressions of a feeling which does have a name in the modern aesthetic tradition (and in the work of Newman): the sublime. It is a feeling of 'there' (Voilà)," Lyotard, "Newman: The Instant," in *The Lyotard Reader and Guide*, eds. Keith Crome and James Williams, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, 331.

[10] *Cf.* Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, München: Piper, 1907.

[11] "A picture lives by companionship, expanding and quickening in the eyes of the sensitive observer. It dies by the same token. It is therefore a risky and unfeeling act to send it out into the world. How often it must be permanently impaired by the eyes of the vulgar and

The question is, however, how long can such linear plastic self-transcending in the direction of minimalism and abstract expression last. It seemed that after 1950, by constantly appealing to the viewer's "sensitiveness" and "subtleness" (*cf.* fn 11), the secularly sublime was demanding, with each passing day, increasingly greater experiential, intellectual and volitional concessions.

2. Crisis of aesthetic idealism and the turn to secondary semantization[12]

In the 1960s, modernist art came to an obvious crisis that was reflected in an aversion to the constitutive modernist idea that, behind the appearance of things, there exists a self-dependent metaphysical world of "pure" formative values, structures and relations, i.e. a subtle, post-metaphysical "other world" of sublime experiences, and that leading to all of this was an abstract morphology transcending the appearance of the world with its purist geometry and *all-over* expression. Although a reaction to the not-too-convincing metaphysics of "purity" had already emerged in early modernism with Duchamp and the Dadaists, it disappeared in an "unripe time."[13] This demystifying gesture had been aroused from self-absorption in the late 1950s by Neo-Dadaism, which developed from the anti-idealist spirit of the New Left, and in particular from the auto-reflexive epicenter of American abstract painting, which, in exploring the formative foundations of painting, began to touch its extreme (physical, factual, material) boundaries.[14]

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the cruelty of the impotent who would extend the affliction universally."—Rothko, quoted in Barbara Hess, *Abstract Expressionism*, New York: Taschen, 2005, 42.

[12]   For more detail, *cf.* Jožef Muhovič, "Über das Geistige in der Kunst heute oder: An den Wurzeln der Diskurs (ohn)mächte," in: Gorazd Kocijančič, Vid Snoj, Jožef Muhovič, *Über das Geistige in de Kunst—zum zweiten Mal*, LIT-Verlag, Münster—Wien—Berlin 2010, 51-102.

[13]   Primarily because history has proven that the Duchampian *ready-mades* and the Dadaistic dismantlings of meaning do not hold ground as the *movens* of de-aestheticization, but spontaneously fall into a perpetuation of their own alternative—aestheticization. *Cf.* Duchamp's statement: "I threw the bottle dryer and urinal into their face as a challenge, and now they're admiring them as something aesthetically beautiful."—Duchamp, quoted in Hans Richter, *Dada—Kunst und Antikunst*, Köln: DuMont, 1964, 212.

[14]   Its protagonists were the American Neo-Dadaists (Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg; earlier John Cage in music) and the French "new Realists" (Arman, Yves Klein, Daniel Spoerri).

Figure 3: Robert Ryman, *Untitled*, 1964, vinyl polymer paint on aluminum, 18 x 18 x 7/8 in. (45,7 x 45,7 x 2,2 cm); private collection.

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Collapse of Aesthetic Difference

When we say that a painting "presents" or "makes visible" something or other, this means that it actively shows the appearance—or disappearance—of the visibility (*Sichtbarkeit*) of something. In brief, such painting makes visibility a process that unwinds before the eyes and spirit of viewers.

What the material existence of the painting (*signifier*) shows and what the painting itself means (*signified*) *differ*. And precisely this inseparably linked discrepancy of signified and signifier is the simplest definition of such a painting. This "idealist"

transcendence of the signifier by the signified became increasingly more suspicious in the anti-representational paintings of the 1960s (Robert Morris, Barnett Newman, Ad Reinhardt). The image, appearance and reference were denounced as illusionism and delusion, while minimalist painting (e.g. Frank Stella, Robert Ryman) was freely moving the weights on the scales of aesthetic relationships toward the objective, factual, material side (**Figure 3**). In other words: in an autoreflexive and reductionist fever, everything led to the breaking of ties between the pictorial signified and the signifier, i.e. to the collapse of *aesthetic difference*.

The principal norms of painting are the limiting conditions that need to be fulfilled by a "surface covered with colors distributed in a certain order" in order for it to be perceived and interpreted as a painting.[15] Modernism discovered that it was not only possible but also necessary to explore the irreducible essence of paintings. By now, wrote Clement Greenberg in his essay "Modernist Painting" in 1962, it has been established, it would seem, that the irreducible essence of painting consists in two constitutive norms—flatness and the delimitation of flatness—and that the observance of merely these two norms is enough to create an object which can be experienced as a "picture." The question posed by art is no longer the question of what constitutes painting or art, but rather what constitutes irreducibly *good* art as such. Yet it was precisely at this point that things became complicated for Greenberg. A monochrome, flat surface seen as limited and different from the wall could, based on the minimal conditions of limitation and flatness, be declared a painting, or even art,[16] but the question was whether it could also be declared a "good" painting and therefore "true" art rather than just "good design."[17] The material surface that fulfills the formal conditions for

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[15] *Cf.* Maurice Denis's famous statement dating from 1890: "Se rappeler qu'un tableau, avant d'être un cheval de bataille, une femme nue ou une quelconque anecdote, est essentiellement *une surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées.*"—Maurice Denis, "Définition du Néo-traditionalisme" (1890), reprinted in Maurice Denis, *Le ciel et l'Arcadie*, Paris: Hermann, 1993, 5.

[16] "A monochromatic flatness that could be seen as limited in extension and different from a wall henceforth automatically declared itself to be a picture, to be art"; Clement Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture" (1967), in *Minimal Art. A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, 181.

[17] In the same essay Greenberg suggests that the "aesthetic surprise" a viewer experiences on looking at "true" works of art is long lasting and important, while the novelty item provokes no more than a momentary surprise that is "superfluous." For Greenberg a "true" work of art is a handmade expression of the artist's feelings and thoughts. Minimalist art

a painting does not necessarily also produce aesthetic meaning. Greenberg often drew attention to the fact that a pictorial non-figurative surface, to which he gave absolute priority before the figurative pictorial surface, was something entirely different from the material surface of the painter's support, although the difference between the two was difficult to describe. Greenberg attempted to describe it as follows:

> The flatness towards which modernist painting orients itself can never be an absolute flatness. The heightened sensitivity of the picture plane may no longer permit sculptural illusion, or trompe-l'oeil, but it does and must permit optical illusion. [...] The first mark made on a canvas destroys its literal and utter flatness, and the result of the marks made on it by an artist like Mondrian is still a kind of illusion that suggests a kind of third dimension. Only now it is a strictly pictorial, strictly optical third dimension. The Old Masters created an illusion of space in depth that one could imagine oneself walking into, but the analogous illusion created by the modernist painter can only be seen into; can be traveled through, literally or figuratively, only with the eye.[18]

In brief: for a flat surface to be "true" art, its status must—according to Greenberg—reveal the delicate presence of "aesthetic difference" between the signified and the signifier. Even more: it must designate their unfamiliarity and non-identity, which is a precondition for creating an aesthetic field, an aesthetic relationship, and thereby "artistry."

It is not difficult to imagine that the self-reflexive and reductive impetus of late modernist painters could not, in its rush to the foundations of painting, permanently stop at this delicate, hair-thin barrier, but would sooner or later have to cross it. And, in the form of radical minimalism, they bid farewell to the transcending "idealism of the spirit" in favor of the "anti-idealism of bare objectivity." The shift of attention from meaning to its material infrastructure, from artefact to fact, from the significance of aesthetic difference to the significance of non-difference between the signifier and the signified, was a small step for the

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with its deliberate production of artworks devoid of feeling, such as Donald Judd's factory produced objects, was in fact closer to furniture than to art, and should be viewed as nothing more than "Good Design"; *ibid*., 185-186.

[18] Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *Esthetics Contemporary*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz, Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1978, 202.

form-generating process, but a giant step for its artistic consequences. If painted pictures no longer belong to a different world than their materials, their process of creation, their environment, context, institutional framework, etc., then all aspects that spatially, temporally, contextually and institutionally surround a pictorial work of art can equally and freely enter art.

That is what has actually happened. Paintings that became mere objects, artifacts that shrunk into facts, and signifieds that sublimated into the bareness of the signifier not only turned away from the painting medium that had been continuously protected and preserved by the aesthetic idealism of abstract art,[19] but also turned towards a radically different way of communicating meanings. Because they do not symbolize anything, they are no longer symbols; since they do not depict or represent anything, they are no longer iconic signs; therefore, as facts which represent themselves in good and bad, they are entitled only to the status of traces, self-exhibitors, *indexes*.

Objects or phenomena perceived as indexes do not "communicate" or transmit messages in a usual way. They are not messengers of an authorially fixed thought, idea or language [...] but can, with their semantic openness, be inscribed into an indefinite set of interpretative contexts. Simply because they can allure or entice a subject to think about them and thus with their self-thematization or self-incontextualization make the subject arrive at their meaning on his own. For just as it is possible to secondarily aestheticize optional things if these are assessed, in line with the criteria of—more or less reflected—taste, to be aesthetic and are accordingly treated as such,[20] so too it is possible to secondarily *semanticize* optional things (objects, phenomena, contexts) if these are placed within the coordinates of the subjective interpretative and meaning-forming will. In the latter case, we perceive such objects as clues. The objects denote nothing (except themselves, of course), but they may nevertheless attach to themselves connotations that are dependent on their form, their spatial and cultural context, on their use in both contexts, and above all on the will and capabilities of the subject semantically exploiting these objects. By definition, connotative exertion always surpasses the indexical clue or denotation, usually

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[19]   Abstract paintings are, in a technical-technological sense, entirely analogous to Renaissance paintings (canvas stretched onto subframe, priming, etc.).

[20]   Compare the aestheticized use of antiquities in modern apartments or the interest in making purchases at the flea market.

Figure 4: Tracey Emin, *My Bed*, 1998, installation; exhibited at the Tate Gallery in 1999 as one of the shortlisted works for the Turner Prize.

in the poetical or rhetorical direction. In brief: within the scope of a doubtful analogy, indexically used objects can always be interpreted in different ways in art. And since reflection and analytical work in this respect is no longer based on a specific aesthetic manner of perception that differs essentially from the functional one, but rather on functional identification, the two of them change profoundly. Late modernism is no longer familiar with aesthetic perception and experiencing in the narrow sense of the word, but has, on the basis of modern technical and functional perceptions, developed new methods of perception, reflection and analysis; particularly those of functional, cognitive, contextual and social-critical provenance (**Figure 4**).[21]

As long as an artwork was the result of an author's aesthetic perception, the intention and production that he used to realize the form of his intentional "meaning" in the material medium, the most suitable manner of inquiring into artworks was hermeneutics—i.e., the reconstruction of the original meaning. In a period that does not operate with forms, but rather with indexically-applied objects that do not have "authorially fixed meaning," hermeneutics is off-track. Namely, objects that have no immanently fixed meaning, even though they have been assembled and set up by artists, have no "lost" or "darkened" original meaning (especially not the only one) that needs to be reconstructed. Here, the

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[21]   Johannes Meinhardt, "Das Verschwinden der ästhetischen Einstellung," in *Kunst und Form. Was heisst „Form" in einer postmodernen Kunst*, ed. Jožef Muhovič, *Phainomena*, Ljubljana, XVII (66-67/2008; special issue), 82-85.

re-construction of denotative meaning must replace the authoritative de-construction of connotative reference, i.e., "eisegesis."[22]

If we do not question their opacity, the indexically appearing objects are revealed to us as implications or as chains of implications about which we may draw conclusions on the basis of their choice, application, use, and even their own invention. Late modernism does not put references in brackets, nor does it suspend them, but is instead intensely engaged in problematizing the methods of creating references, which it does in a predominantly allegorical manner.[23]An allegorical thinker no longer believes in the intentional meaning of what is being offered for him to view, but realizes that the manner in which he poses questions will determine which insights he will gain in connection with certain objects and their constellations. He is also aware of the limitation, questionability and arbitrariness of these questions and the dogmaticalness of his replies. An allegorist, says Walter Benjamin, uses objects or things to a certain extent as indexes which do not speak for themselves, but do direct him to situations in reality, especially social reality. What he will do with these instructions depends on him alone. Most important of all: an allegorist asks the world, not intentionally fixed statements. The world is what encourages him to reflect; the objects are merely catalysts for his questioning.[24] In short: the allegorical impulse that marked late modernism is intensely re-directing our experience of art from aesthetic to functional perception and from hermeneutic to rhetorical, textual, *discursive* intercourse with things.[25]

If the model of aesthetic idealism in plastic art thus presupposed and favored authorially semanticized forms with explicit post-metaphysical features, i.e. forms which distanced themselves to the greatest possible degree from the *delusive* "physics" of objectivity and functional perception, then the model of late

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[22]   To emphasize the difference between the "re-construction" of meaning, which is characteristic of exegesis and hermeneutics, and its de-construction, which is characteristic of the interpretation of indexically used objects, I have introduced the inverse expression "eisegesis" (Gr. *eisegesis*), which is normally described in dictionaries as the "subjective, dogmatic explanation of sources."

[23]   *Cf.* Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism," in *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation,* ed. Brian Wallis, New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art New York & D. R. Godine Publisher Inc., 1984, 235.

[24]   *Cf.* Walter Benjamin, "Das Passagen-Werk," *Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. V/1, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982, 466.

[25]   *Ibid*., 223.

modernist indexical semantization turned precisely to what the idealist model wished to abandon, that is, to the singularity of the factual and to the functionality of perception. It did so, paradoxically, for the same reason: because of the *delusiveness* of plastically embodied aesthetic idealism. It could therefore be said that we are dealing here with the banishment of a too much mystified aesthetically-idealist Beelzebub by a demystifying Satan of secondary semantization. The moving force of this semantization, however, is no longer to function in the medium of a plastic art that is spontaneously calling for forming and trans-forming, for existential participation and creative *eros*; instead, it is to jump out of this medium into the medium of discourse, which is a synonym for distance and intellectual meta-position.

If the artefacts of old, "aesthetic art" (with all of their idealizations) were often not only "full of everything conceivable," but also full of themselves (aesthetic autonomism), the (arte)FACTS (objects, events, contexts) of contemporary, "de-aestheticized art" are intentionally "empty" and thus "open" semantic potentials, and as such they are directly seeking an interpretative (*eisegetic*: see fn 22) impulse for discourse; practically any kind of discourse may be offered to—or imposed upon—them as the "most important surrogate of what is most important." Over and over again, since the fluidity and—ultimately—transitoriness of discourses cannot prevent the discourses of other interpreters from appearing on the scene of semantic openness. And with the same entitlement.

3. Epi-logic:

Modernist heartbeat in the rear-view mirror of art
To determine whether any conclusions can be drawn from the renewed observance of modernist strategies in the realm of fine/plastic art presented above with respect to the nature, scope and topicality or non-topicality of the term "modernism," I shall attempt, in abbreviated form, to summarize the empirical "depths" and "reefs" of the modernist *model of aesthetic idealism* on the one side and the *model of secondary semantization* on the other side.

Added value and the autonomist trap of the aesthetic idealism model
In my opinion, the strong side of the metaphysical orientation of modernist art is in its artefactness, in the "drama of formativeness," that is, in the intention to transcend the given, to aim for human self-transcendence, and to create real

forms that do not exist in nature but can be produced on the basis of a knowledge of natural laws (*cf.* footnote 5). Although this intention cannot be realized with the same potency in all spiritual-historical circumstances, it is nevertheless not possible to imagine human culture entirely without it. It is based on the endeavors to pull the background into the foreground and to show a complicated life the path to spiritual orderliness and cleanliness. In modernism, this metaphysical regime interested in background and cleanliness is bound to the superlative in all its phases. In this regime, to create what is relevant always means to express what is in man's conceptions most fundamental, supreme, the best, the most lasting, the most complete.

Yet in this optimized human endeavor also lies the greatest danger of the secularized idealist model. Namely, the more a plastic artist looks upwards or downwards to the "essential," the "fundamental" and the "pure," and on that basis attempts to produce "from himself"(*cf.* footnote 8) still unseen and non-existing forms, the deeper he is entering the autonomous realm in which he must determine not only the boundaries, but also the "laws" for his own articulation.[26] This is an exceptional task, within which many creators and even periods "lose their nerves" and end up in the blind alley of self-will, which sooner or later begins to send them bills of credibility in the form of the most perfidious self-deception, i.e. in the form of the conviction that whatever is satisfied with itself, the world and the times is also the most suitable.[27] Consequences of this are frequently fictions or pathetic phantoms of "superpersonal wisdom" which have an effect only as long as the viewer's conscious will is prepared to credit them in the form of a suitable quantum of mystification. When the credit is spent and the articulation demystified, the time comes for sobering strategies and the return to more realistic possibilities and values.

Added value and blind spots of the secondary semantization model
Moving away from metaphysical phantoms and fictions understandably leads to their de-mystification, de-idealization, and de-universalization. All of this in line with Nietzsche's and Popper's criticism of teleological reason, which

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[26]   *Auto-nomos*, he who makes his own laws.

[27]   Adapted from Peter Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoismus: Zur Kritik der politischen Kinetik,* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989, 240: *"In diesem Sinn ist politischer Moralismus* [...] die tückischste Form von politischer Blindheit, *weil er das, was meint, mit sich selbst zufrieden sein können, zugleich auch für weltgerecht halten will."*

showed that all recognition is of a local nature and that no human observer can reach the stage where he actually transcends his own position. From this perspective the purpose of contemporary visual art (objects, installations, new media, activism, etc.) based on secondary semantization is not in absorbing oneself in visual objects, events and contexts, and transcending them in order to please this or that super-personal "wisdom"; its purpose is not to ignore such objects, events and contexts on a personal level, even though they may be "low" and ephemeral, but to find them (*ready-mades*), to put them into focus, to semantically seize them, and to socially exploit them.

The positive side of the turn to factuality, to the de-idealization of human metaphysical appetites, and to the pragmatization of artistic objects, processes and institutions is that contact with the daily routine is preserved, the disarranged world is integrated into the horizons of artistic interest, and idealized life goes back to being profane. The good side of this discursive meta-position, which is a "formatted place" for activating human interpretative, associative and connotative potentials, is the permanent semantic actualization of all aspects of the world, particularly those that reflect the ways in which social discursive powers and dominants manifest themselves through visuality and images.

Yet hanging over these two "positivities" is also a Damoclean sword of "two little wrong gestures" with significant consequences. This preservation of the contact with the directness of the world can easily slip into the blurring of boundaries between art and life, and if "art is life" and "life is art," then we will very soon have neither the authentic form of the first nor the authentic form of the second. It may just as easily happen that the constant semantization and actualization of objects, facts and contexts, which are never verified in extra-discursive, plastic form, are deformed into a permanent entropic acquiescence with the automatic, fleeting and fatally unchangeable "current of the world."

Discursive semantizations dispose with endless versions of being acquainted with things and informing about them, but due to the meta-positioned distance our human consciousness will remain immune to actual situations and their consequences. Without the contact with presence, without its resistance, correctiveness, suffering and pleasure, the nature of creative ideas and even creative intelligences may essentially change. At the end we thus face the question: What exactly do we gain if we turn away from the questionable exaggeration

referred to in the metaphysical model of aesthetic idealism as *escape into the permanent* and turn instead toward the equally questionable, though oppositely signed exaggeration which the indexed semantization model refers to as *escape into the fleeting*?

Coda

Looking back on all that has been said in this essay on the more than century-long events that have shaped Western fine/plastic art, it is my opinion that it could be condensed not only into the classic, Apollonian-Dionysian binome, but also into the classic organic metaphor of vitality—the metaphor of the modernist "cardiac cycle." Its expansive, systolic phase is aesthetic idealism, which strove to penetrate as deeply as possible into the visual and into the mystical-mysterious world behind it, while its correlative diastolic phase—currently still in progress—is *aesthetic anti-idealism*, which is linked to the factual and its secondary semantization. The first phase was directed from the everyday world into the epicenter of "spiritualized" plastic art, while the second was directed from exclusive and sometimes absolutist plastic spirituality towards life "in the first person singular." On the one side, the cardiology of modernism reached an elevated metaphysics of purity and the sublime, which sees and grabs facts from their foundations, appearances from their essence, and structure from their functions; on the other side, after the break with the fictions of the metaphysical "apparition," it called the creator and viewer back into the grounded, supple and confusing real world. In this respect it is clear that these two phenomena are not merely two links of historical succession, but rather that they, viewed in the long term, form a verifiable, complementary and functional whole.

Because this is how I see things, it is perhaps understandable that in my essay I do not speak of "postmodernism" as something that is in progress because something else (modernism) has passed.

Krzysztof Ziarek*

The Avant-Garde and the End of Art

Modernism remains a complex and complicated term, contested not only with regard to its historical meaning or period boundaries but also with regard to its (continuing) relevance for aesthetics and, more broadly, for the contemporary understanding of art(s). This conceptual dilemma is in part due to modernism's implication within and sometimes uneasy relation to the historically and cognitively more capacious notion of modernity. Is modernism the culmination of modernity, its crowning moment, or perhaps its tipping point toward the purported postmodernity/postmodernism, or is the challenge, even revolution, instigated by modernism's artistic inventiveness—its avant-garde momentum—still extant and current beyond the apparent succession of modernism by postmodernism? In the opening sentence of *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno diagnoses modernism as radically calling into question the very existence and pertinence of art: "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, neither in it nor in its relation to the whole [*zum Ganzen*], not even its right to exist."[1] And even more poignantly a few sentences later: "It is uncertain whether art is still possible; whether, with its complete emancipation, it did not cut off and lose its own preconditions."[2] For Adorno, the uncertainty afflicting the very possibility of art's existence stems from what he sees as the fiasco of the avant-gardes: "The sea of the formerly inconceivable, on which around 1910 revolutionary art movements set out, did not bestow the promised happiness of adventure. Instead, the process that was unleashed consumed the categories in the name of that for which it was undertaken."[3] In short, the avant-gardes were "too radical," as they eroded the very categories, chief among them the aesthetic notions of subjectivity, aesthetic experience, and judgment, that Adorno wants to redefine and yet preserve, in order to maintain art's critical relation to social antagonisms and suffering. Rejecting the "non-aesthetic" radicalism of Dadaists or of

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[1]   Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. R. Hullot-Kentor, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 1, modified.

[2]   *Ibid.*, 1, modified.

[3]   *Ibid.*

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John Cage, Adorno looks instead to modernists like Kafka, Schönberg, or Beckett, in whose work he identifies a crucial, and socially significant, reconfiguration of the aesthetic conception of art, in which the subject no longer dominates its object and where form, through sedimenting dissonances and discords, exposes and denounces antagonisms inherent in modern society. In response to the suffering brought by modernity and epitomized in the figure of Auschwitz, art has to turn against its own affirmative essence, that is, against its creation of another world detached from and opposed to the empirical world. Through form, art transforms aesthetic categories while turning against "the status quo and what merely exists."[4] As the title of Adorno's study indicates, one of art's preconditions eroded by "revolutionary artistic movements" is precisely aesthetics; aesthetics as providing the framework for understanding the production, experience, and significance of artworks.

Though approaching the role of art in modernity through a different lens, Jacques Rancière can be seen to be, broadly speaking, in agreement with Adorno's diagnosis of a new artistic paradigm in modernity, as he advances the idea of a crucial shift in the underlying structures of experience that he calls the aesthetic regime of art and identifies as significantly altering the distribution of the sensible in modernity. "In the aesthetic regime, artistic phenomena are identified by their adherence to a specific regime of the sensible, which is extricated from its ordinary connections and is inhabited by a heterogeneous power, the power of a form of thought that has become foreign to itself. [...]"[5] Next to Adorno's approach to aesthetics undertaken largely in the context of negative dialectics, Rancière's articulation of the aesthetic regime of arts emphasizes the positive and political character of the changes made possible by the new distribution of sensibility prompted by it. Numerous differences between Adorno and Rancière aside, what their approaches have in common is the way in which they sideline the challenge posed to aesthetics by avant-garde invention. My supposition here is that this is the case because what the avant-garde puts into question and tries to leave behind is precisely the aesthetic approach to art, one of the preconditions for art's existence in modernity articulated at the start of *Aesthetic Theory*.

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4   *Ibid*., 2.

5   Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesth*etics, trans. G. Rockhill, London and New York: Continuum, 2004, 22-23.

Yet the avant-garde impulse[6] in modernism pushes even further, interrogating the very idea of art, that is, the understanding of (art)works as art to begin with. Although Adorno does not articulate the issue in these terms, his question about whether art is still possible at all after modernism gestures at the conditions in modernity that would continue to make art possible, or render it impossible, as art. In simple terms, why are there (art)works at all and why are these works constituted and conceived of as *art*; or, to put it differently, can there be (art) works that do not conform to (any) idea of "art"? And what would this non-art be without being simply commodity, object, or tool?

The question brought into the open by the avant-garde momentum in modernism is therefore twofold. First, is aesthetics a necessary and unavoidable precondition for art in modernity, as both Adorno and Rancière suggest in different ways? Second, and more paradoxically, is art itself, whether seen through the prism of the idea of art or as the plural of arts, another precondition for what perhaps we can no longer simply call (art)works without, however, merging them seamlessly with life, experience, action, or technology? Both Adorno's disquiet about Dadaism and Cagean (non)aesthetics and Rancière's re-inscription of the avant-garde into the aesthetic paradigm register the first side of this question and offer as a response different recalibrations of the aesthetic. At the same time, Adorno wants to counter what he sees as the erosion by the avant-garde of two crucial categories: humanity and freedom, and offers his transformed aesthetic theory to discover the contemporary preconditions for art's continued existence. By contrast, Rancière finds in the redistribution of the sensible in art's aesthetic regime a liberating and democratizing force, affirming art's new role in modern life and society. Though differently, both Adorno and Rancière identify in broadly conceived modernist art and literature a critical transformative moment. Yet this transformation is said to happen explicitly as inaugurating the aesthetic regime of arts (Rancière) or a historically new aesthetic of form (Adorno), which means that, notwithstanding the changes it brings about, this transformation remains within the aesthetic horizon for the understanding of art.

On that point, it is Heidegger who offers a more radical approach, advocating not only the overcoming of aesthetics but even the possibility of freeing "art-

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[6]   See my discussion of the avant-garde momentum in *The Force of Art*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

works" from the concept of art itself.[7] While this may strike those unfamiliar with the full extent of Heidegger's numerous remarks on art, aesthetics, and their entrenchment in the metaphysical thought as unexpected or surprising, Heidegger, without any consistent engagement with the avant-garde, except for his remarks on Klee and attested admiration for Celan's radical and inventive poetic language, nonetheless confronts in his reflections on art, poetry, and language, precisely the twofold question raised by the avant-garde with regard to art and its prevalent aesthetic conceptualization. Though Heidegger's texts on poetry and art engage predominantly with Romantic or modernist works, from Hölderlin to Rilke, George, and Trakl, his approach to language and especially his own practice of guiding his thinking through radical openings and transformations of German words and phrases correspond much more closely to his stated need for freeing artworks from being ensconced in the aesthetic paradigm.

In "The Origin of the Work of Art" and even more expressly in *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, Heidegger declares the need to free our understanding and experience of the artwork from the aesthetic paradigm. "The question of the origin of the work of art is not intent on an eternally valid determination of the essence of the work of art, a determination that could also serve as a guideline for the historiological survey and explanation of the history of art. Instead, the question stands in the most intrinsic connection to the task of overcoming aesthetics, i.e., overcoming a particular conception of beings—as objects of representation. The overcoming of aesthetics again results necessarily from the historical confrontation with metaphysics as such."[8] For Heidegger, to account for the possibility of a transformative opening that presents itself with regard to art in modernity, it will not be enough to diagnose a paradigm shift in art, as in Rancière, or postulate a new aesthetics, as in Adorno, if such

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[7] Though on the surface, it seems that Adorno and Heidegger propose very different, aesthetic and non-aesthetic respectively, approaches to artworks, the relation not just between the two thinkers but also between their views on art is much more complex and admits of many proximities, which I cannot address here. For a more developed discussion of the intersections between Adorno's and Heidegger's approaches to art, see my discussion in *The Force of Art*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, 9-17 and 29-36, and "Beyond Critique?," in *Adorno and Heidegger: Philosophical Encounters*, eds. Ian Macdonald and Krzysztof Ziarek, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.

[8] Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. R. Rojcewicz and D. Vallega-Neu, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012, 396.

approaches do not break with the domination of the notion of beings and entities in the orientation of Western thought to the detriment of being and its event. Metaphysics, in Heidegger's characterization, describes a technicist, productivist and manipulative in essence self-disclosure of reality as disposable resource, which orients experience, knowledge, and action in terms of availability and disposability of beings for processing, control, or use. Aesthetics for Heidegger is inescapably embedded in the division of being into subject/object, matter/form, and the sensible/intelligible, which makes the aesthetic conceptualization of art part and parcel of the Western metaphysical tradition. In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger proposes not to approach artworks as objects or beings, as artistically formed material, for instance, but instead through the prism of the event that takes place in art as its enactive and transformative work. This experience becomes oriented first and foremost by the changing vectors of one's emplacement within the world opened up from the artwork's event, vectors that can transform perception, knowledge, action, and judgment. As such, this experience—the working of the artwork—is not beholden or reducible to aesthetic-metaphysical categories (subject/object, matter/form) that are themselves indebted to the notion of constant and discrete yet related beings. Instead, it follows the morphing contours and interlinked pathways of the event, its futural momentum and possibilities it opens to decision. The encounter with the working of the artwork is initially neither a matter of *aisthesis*, and thus the sensible, nor of the intelligible: meaning, interpretation, critique. Rather, these all follow from the originary transformative impact of the event and need to be seen as coming from the event and understood from its inceptive, as Heidegger calls it, openness. It is not that artworks are not in some ways aesthetic objects, whose meaning is necessarily open to criticism, in interpretation and judgment, nor that they do not, as Rancière argues, introduce significant changes into the sensible and its distribution, but that these characteristics of the artworks, of their effects and the process of their reception, have come to shape our "aesthetic" relation to art to the detriment of the possibility of tracing in art a more originary event, whose force, when allowed by us to open, redisposes the very experience and sense of being. Beyond perception of and relation to beings, the artwork's event actuates the relatedness of the world as if anew each moment. It is the inceptual (*anfänglich*) force of the event's opening that can be encountered in the artwork and experienced in its resonance that transforms relations among beings, nonhuman and human.

From the perspective of Heidegger's critique of metaphysics, aesthetics operates essentially with regard to beings, thus neglecting and forgetting being and its finite, each time one-time event. What is more, the aesthetic understanding of art functions expressly with regard to human beings, framing the human-oriented experience of artworks in terms of sensibility, meaning, interpretation, on the one hand, or museum, market, and commodity, on the other. It is precisely this centralization and dominant role of the human being that needs to be called into question for the possibility of overcoming aesthetics. Intertwined with overcoming aesthetics is, for Heidegger, the paradoxical need to dislodge "art" and its works from the purchase that the very notion of art has on them. In posthumously published works, which contain Heidegger's most inventive and far-reaching proposals for art, he suggests on a couple of occasions the possibility that with the end of metaphysics, art could also come to an end. In his *Metaphysik und Nihilismus*, there is a section entitled "With metaphysics art ends as well,"[9] while on the subsequent page one can find a remark that links thinking to "the art-free poetizing" (die kunst-*lose* Dichtung).[10] The suffix "-los" indicates in this context clearly not an "artless," that is, clumsy and failed, poetry but rather a different sense of poetizing that breaches the envelope of art. This remark is reinforced by a couple of lines in *Über den Anfang* that, in the mode of supposition, suggest "Perhaps the last essence of poetry" and "perhaps the overcoming of all 'art,'"[11] once again linking the notion of poetizing (*Dichtung*) with the possibility of seeing (art)works otherwise than art. In the later essay entitled "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger draws attention to the fact that ancient Greeks did not have a notion of art and did not experience or regard art in aesthetic terms. The term "art" is Latin and was introduced by the Romans, who thus invent the notion of art and the possibility of its subsequent aesthetic incarnations. The Greeks saw what later was distinguished as and separated into art as belonging instead to a broader sense of *techne*, which to Heidegger denotes an originary mode of knowing the world in its intrinsic openness, which allows one to create, make, or produce. In his numerous essays and remarks on *Dichtung*, Heidegger makes clear that at issue in this formulation is not poetry as a literary genre or as verse writing, but a dis-

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[9]   Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysik und Nihilismus*, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 69, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1999, 108.

[10] *Ibid.*, 109.

[11] Martin Heidegger, *Über den Anfang*, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 70, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2005, 167.

tinctive, non-aesthetic, and perhaps even non-art-like, that is, no longer fitting under the rubric of art, setting into the work of the event in its singular, one-time play of un/concealment. Such non-aesthetic works, free or released from art (*kunst-los*), and, therefore, perhaps no longer even to be labeled art-works, are *dichterisch*, poetic or poieitic. Analyzed though the prism of art's autonomy or separation from the social domain, the avant-garde's challenge to this separation is seen as leading to art's disappearance into the social fabric of occurrences and the eventual loss of artwork's distinctiveness, power, and influence.

Though undeveloped, Heidegger's remarks about the possibility of art-free "poetizing" (*Dichtung*) suggest that what can perhaps be called avant-garde "event-works," although no longer "art" strictly or aesthetically speaking, do not simply melt seamlessly into the political, the social, or the commercial. For Heidegger, seen poetically, (art)works are neither simply autonomous from nor dependent on and conditioned by the socio-empirical world but instead inaugurate transformatively and redispose, through the inceptiveness characteristic of the event, their world and the vectors for the diffusion of their force. In this perspective, the avant-garde works are not concerned with the autonomy or heteronomy of art, or simply with social statement or political action, but instead with enacting the inceptive force of art buried under ages of aesthetic conceptualization and unrecognizable among artistic formulas, styles, or fashions. The end of art, signaled in their respective ways by the avant-garde and Heidegger, does not mean the disappearance of artworks but instead the fore-grounding of the event-works characteristic of the avant-garde art and writing.

Even though Heidegger does not speak directly to modernist aesthetics or avant-garde works, and seems to misjudge abstraction in art by seeing in it an unin-terrogated extension of technics, it is not an accident that Lyotard, borrowing Heidegger's term *das Ereignis*, underscores the link between the event and the avant-garde, especially evident for him in the avant-garde challenge to the idea of grasping thought, that is, to conceptual, determinative thinking. Writing in *The Inhuman* about Barrnett Newman's painting in the perspective of the question of the event, articulated by Lyotard as the question "Is it happening?," he remarks: "Letting go of all grasping intelligence and of its power, disarming it, recognizing that this occurrence of painting was not necessary and is scarcely foreseeable, a privation in the face of *Is it happening?* guarding the occurrence 'before' any defense, any illustration, and any commentary, guarding before be-

ing on one's guard, before 'looking' [*regarder*] under the aegis of *now*, this is the rigour of the avant-garde. In the determination of literary art this requirement with respect to *Is it happening?* found one of its most rigorous realizations in Gertrude Stein's *How to Write*."[12] What Lyotard identifies as the rigor of the avant-garde is the poietic rigor that Heidegger sees as more nimble and exacting in its idiomatic way than the grasping, conceptual power of logic and rationality. Such poietic rigor is required for thinking capable of responding to and guarding, as Lyotard puts it, the event. From the conjunction between Heidegger and Lyotard, two important points arise with regard to understanding the import of the avant-garde momentum in the wider context of modernism: first, its poietic, non-conceptual rigor, irreducible to aesthetic categories; second, the non-human (Heidegger) or inhuman (Lyotard) resonance of the event. The rigor that Lyotard identifies in Stein's *How to Write*, a text expressly on the avant-garde transformation of literary writing, recalls the poietic strength of the thinking of the event, which Heidegger signals in the subtitle of *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)* with regard to philosophical writing. This rigor pertains to the non-human event, thus reorienting the avant-garde work beyond the human and the human-centered understanding of language and experience. In different ways, both Heidegger and Lyotard link the rigor they are after to the non-human: Heidegger shows how the determination of the human comes from the non-human Da-sein, which, as the morphing site of relation to being, needs to be taken on as a task by human beings; Lyotard distinguishes between two kinds of the inhuman: one as the dehumanizing inherent in the over-rationalized systems of modernity, the other as the cosmic or worldly inhuman complexity—and its event—in which human beings arise over and over again. The link between the rigor of poetic thinking and the in-human skein of the event constitutes the distinctiveness of the avant-garde works amidst the modernist aesthetic.

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This distinction can be also brought out by juxtaposing Adorno's and Lyotard's comments on the avant-garde. When Adorno expresses his worry about the preconditions for the existence of art in and after modernism, he identifies humanity and freedom as chief among these preconditions, and more specifically the link that makes humanity the bearer of freedom. In Lyotard, the letting go of grasping intelligence in the name of the event implies a different, non-human

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[12]   Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, trans. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991, 93.

sense of freedom, in which human beings participate but which they do not simply bear or own. This non-human or dishumanized scope of freedom is elaborated more expressly and extensively in Heidegger's writings, and is fore-grounded especially in texts dealing with the event and Da-sein. It is at least in part because of this uncoupling of freedom and humanity that Adorno criticizes the avant-garde in the name of a modernist aesthetic that, offering a revised no-tion of subjectivity, reimagines (the absence of) freedom. This is why the issue of in/human freedom can be one way to think about the tear, if not bifurcation, between modernism and the avant-garde.

The dishumanization of freedom, its recalibration with regard to the event and its complex happening, pivots on language and the possibility of its poietic rigor. In this perspective, the avant-garde can be seen as a debate with, perhaps even a polemic against, modernism that takes place within modernism itself. By "with-in" I mean that this polemic does not simply leave the ground of modernism and its aesthetic behind but instead dis-places the artwork with regard to the event and the inhuman. In modernity, the artwork is already part of what perhaps could be called the technological inhuman and its dehumanizing effects. The radicalization inherent in the avant-garde breaches this humanizing-dehuman-izing dialectic in order to foreground how this dialectic is already enveloped by the dishumanizing momentum of the event-work. To trace in this perspective the branching off of the avant-garde within modernism, I examine briefly the question of poietic rigor in Gertrude Stein and Wallace Stevens. Though Stevens is a much more "traditional" and "modernist" poet, at least when compared to the "avant-garde" Stein, the rethinking of poetic language and experience he undertakes in his poems struggles precisely to point language beyond human "feeling" and "meaning," as "Of Mere Being"[13] puts it. A modernist aesthete preoccupied with the question of the imagination and the poetic shaping of the world, on the one hand, Stevens, as early as "The Snow Man," makes poetry re-sponsive to the inhuman event, in this case, the eventuation of the wintry land-scape. It is this kind of event that breaks the aesthetic framework of poetry and art and gestures toward the need to reconceive (art)works as no longer "merely" art. Stein's still challenging "masterpieces" are, I would argue, perhaps the most radical re-writing of literature beyond the idea of art. They not only disclose the

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[13]   Wallace Stevens, *The Palm at the End of the Mind: Selected Poems and Play*, ed. Holly Ste-vens, New York: Random House, 1967, 398.

avant-garde momentum of modernism but also give it a force whose resonance cannot be delimited by the logic of literary periodization.

The poietic rigor emblematic of the avant-garde is present in Stevens most often discursively or thematically. At the same time, it is not simply a topic of reflection, but, in parallel with the nearly omnipresent preoccupation with the imagination, translates into his practice of writing. Stevens' poems frequently read either as an extended image, a narrative description, or a theoretical deliberation, a kind of discourse, set in verse. This practice makes possible a running commentary on poetry and poetic imagination that is meshed together with described situations or images. Beyond the idiom of self-reflexivity, this way of writing serves to point out precisely the moments when the conventional aesthetic language of poetry is pushed to its limits, finding itself, as it were, "at the end of the mind."[14] It is in this liminal zone that the poetic rigor at stake in my analysis can possibly come into play. In "The Snow Man," the human mind must turn into "the mind of winter," shedding and silencing the human concerns and desires, in order to allow the poetic listening to emerge through the aesthetic modes of signification. The poet becomes a listener and poetic writing turns into the practice of listening that envelops perceptions and thoughts so that one does not think "Of any misery in the sound of the wind," leaves, and the land.[15] "Misery" is both named and unnamed in the same word: named in the language that is already humanizing the landscape, it is simultaneously exposed precisely in its distortive humanizing overlay and thus emptied out, opening onto the triple sense of "nothing" mentioned in the last stanza. The listener, no longer simply human, becomes nothing itself that beholds everything that is there to see, including the nothingness pervading the scene. The complex process of un/naming "nothing" listens not only to the landscape but also to the language in which it takes place. When the poem refers to "nothing that is not there," suggesting the listener's openness to everything that is to be listened and attended to, "nothing" has to appear in its all-inclusiveness without any articles, and when in the next phrase Stevens names "the nothing that is," the definite article as though confirms that paradoxical existence of "the nothing" as something that can be "definitely" named. The poem triangulates the naming among the listener as nothing, nothing that is not there, namely everything, and the nothing that is

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14   *Ibid.*, 398.

15   *Ibid.*, 54.

there. In this way, Stevens fleshes out the nothing named in the last instance as pulsing through "nothing that is not there," that is, through everything, including the poet/listener. Like "misery" earlier in the poem, "nothing" both names "everything" and unnames it into nothingness characteristic of temporal occurrence. One can recall as well in this context "the giant of nothingness" from "A Primitive Like an Orb,"[16] "A vermilioned nothingness" from "Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit,"[17] or even more poignantly the air in "A Clear Day and No Memories" that is emptied of everything and knows only nothingness.[18] Poietic rigor means here attentiveness to how and what language, in the gesture of naming, opens up and lets be, and does so specifically in the manner that unveils, without misery or pathos, the nothing that holds together existence. It is instantiated through a complex negotiation of naming and unnaming, which in "The Snow Man" becomes extended into the three instances of "nothing," as if Stevens were slowing down the process and taking us through the interrelated steps of the poietic rigor, having language listen to the elusive turning of "nothing," still resonant even in the proliferating names and images.

This nothing transpires as the self-emptying of names with its double, simultaneously humanizing and dishumanizing, gesture. In "The Snow Man," the winter landscape becomes the landscape of the mind and, more important, of language that unfolds in its poietic rigor of listening. Its event consists in a specific and difficult naming that unnames itself precisely for the sake of what might be called the inhuman. This self-annulling naming brings language into the liminal state, which Stevens calls the end of the imagination or the end of the mind. In this liminality, language opens beyond the human meaning and feeling onto the "plain sense of things."[19] Stating that it is both necessary and required, Stevens is well aware that this end or absence of imagination has itself to be imagined, that is, it remains a matter of language. At issue, though, is writing that, fully aware of the human capacity to imagine and color reality, has language name at the very end of the imagination, that is, in a way that lets the inhuman and the nothing envelop and place the human. This complicated and radical gesture is strikingly marked in the last line from "Of Ideal Time and Choice," where it

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16   *Ibid*., 320.
17   *Ibid*., 265.
18   *Ibid*., 397.
19   *Ibid*., 382.

is "The inhuman making choice of a human self."[20] The choice here concerns how "to be without a description of to be," to cite a line from "The Latest Freed Man."[21] This choice involves, even requires, human participation, specifically trying to bring language to the end of the mind, yet it is made or decided by the inhuman. Being without a description of to be indicates not a mute, thoughtless attitude, but a difficult attentive participation, whose openness to the future is signaled twice by the use of the infinitive "to be." What is more, the infinitive resonates and intertwines both the active sense associated with deciding how to be and the infinite implied in the "giant of nothingness." The same use of the infinitive, again linked to the question of naming, occurs in "Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction," when Stevens writes, "The sun / Must bear no name, gold flourisher, but be / In the difficulty of what it is to be."[22] To be without a description of to be becomes possible, as "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" again insists by saying "It is possible, possible, possible. It must / Be possible,"[23] at the end of the mind. There, beyond the last thought, poetry not only discloses freedom as more than human but returns freedom to the play of the inhuman.

Tracing how the poeitic rigor disclosed by Stevens at the end of the imagination restores the human to its inhuman play shows that the avant-garde momentum can be in play even in a more conventional, non-avant-garde modernist writing, whose discourse is still invested in aesthetics and in the post-Romantic deliberation on the imagination and its relation to reality. Stevens' work illustrates the deliberation and deliberateness that marks the span of modernist aesthetic, reaching back at least as far as Romanticism while also being laced with the avant-garde inventiveness.

If Stevens both illustrates and deliberates on the poietic rigor, Stein's writings are a multifaceted attempt to have language follow the contours of the event. This is evident especially on the level of the sentence, which for Stein becomes event-like, less a grammatical structure than an enactment. This is why "A sentence is not a picture"[24] oriented by meaning that is to be experienced or interpreted. Instead, a sentence in Stein strives primarily to be attuned to the chang-

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20   *Ibid*., 301.
21   *Ibid*., 166.
22   *Ibid*., 208.
23   *Ibid*., 230.
24   Gertrude Stein, *How to Write*, Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 2000, 172.

ing mode and force of "intense existence." For Stein, it is not just that sentences have "wishes as an event" but, more decisively, only language events merit the name of sentences: "This is a sentence if it is an event."[25] Such events are guided not by grammatical, let alone aesthetic, propriety, but by a play of transfers and transitions. They are enactments of the between spanning the relatedness intrinsic to the morphing event: "What is a sentence. A sentence is a beginning with when they are at home with a transaction transition transfer and between."[26]

Toward that end, Stein's writing declines habitual or traditional scaffolding of literary texts, whether prose or poetry, so that it eschews narrative, plot, description, characters, images, and conventional grammatical structures securing signification and meaning. When repetition or alliteration appear, these devices contribute to the overall sense of the movement of Stein's texts, with the impression that it is language that moves, acts, and instantiates. The idiomatic character of this writing has to do with directing, coaxing, or pleasuring the reader with the task of transforming our very relation to language. Stein's disappointment with the noun is reminiscent of the quandary of Stevens' "Man on the Dump" of poetic images: "I hope now no one can have any illusion about a noun or about the adjective that goes with the noun."[27] Signifying things with a view to grasping them, nouns and names block the "intense existence" of things, as Stein calls it. In *How to Write*, she even writes "A noun is always a sacrifice."[28] It is clear that her writing generalizes the designation "noun" to refer to any being or entity that can be brought to stand in a name: "A noun is the name of anything. [...] A noun is a name of everything."[29] Or, "A word is a noun."[30] That is why in *How to Write*, she repeatedly indicates the need not to introduce nouns into her sentences: "A noun should never be introduced into a sentence," or "A noun is the name of anything and therefor it should not be without doubt therefor it should not be in a sentence unless easily easily in in have have lean to so that leaving out without doubt a noun out without doubt they were left to have it looked for with implication."[31]

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[25]   *Ibid*., 154.
[26]   *Ibid*., 160.
[27]   *Ibid*., 125.
[28]   *Ibid*., 138.
[29]   *Ibid*.
[30]   *Ibid*., 195.
[31]   *Ibid*., 157.

Since these declarations are made obviously with the use of nouns, nouns referring to or describing the function of nouns, it becomes clear that the notion of the language sign has become fluid or tender, as the title *Tender Buttons* implies. The noun, and by extension any name or word, come to refer not to lexical categories but instead to items in the vocabulary of conceptual thought which *How to Write* sets out to undo for the sake of a new poietic rigor. Stein's question, "Was there not a way of naming things that would not invent names, but mean names without naming them"[32] indicates, therefore, the attempt to release poetic language from the dominion of grasping intelligence and to instantiate a non-grasping poietic rigor, which Lyotard finds to be characteristic of the avant-garde. Toward that end, grammar and vocabulary, which expressly preoccupy Stein in *How to Write*, become also transformed in a parallel way. Stein's characteristic sentences dispense almost entirely with punctuation, in order to open themselves to syntactical ambiguity, hesitant or undecidable subordination, or even entertain grammatical mistakes and run-on sentences. Parts of speech lose their discriminating features, as verbs, nouns, and adjectives fluctuate between multiple possibilities, as though refusing to close sentences and instead holding them open to the play of possibilities. Similarly, grammatical phrases also lose their determination and often shift categories between the nominal, the verbal, or the adverbial. Articles, prepositions, and even conjunctions frequently gain the resonance conventionally delimited to nouns or verbs. Clauses become spliced, creating possibilities for new, non- or more than grammatical, that is, grammatically correct, syntactical structures. The fluidity and excess characteristic of such Steinian sentences register the poietic momentum of the event, which does not cease to open to the future.

This brief characterization of how Stein writes and encourages writing illustrates the avant-garde's radical push not only to overcome aesthetics but, more daringly, to prompt the end of art. If as Heidegger remarks, art ends with metaphysics, than the ending of the noun and the name as we know, them which is clearly at issue in Stein's writings, means also breaking with the metaphysical grasp of being through the prism of beings or entities, with their corresponding names and definitions, or "nouns," to echo Stein. It is in this sense that Stein and by extension the avant-garde impulse in modernism creates works that do not fit

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[32] *Ibid.*, 139.

easily under the conceptual umbrella of "art," and that could perhaps be more fittingly described through the prism of the poeitic (*dichterisch*) as event-works.

In the metaphysical perspective, modernism can be seen to extend art's lease on life, both as a concept and as an aesthetic paradigm and practice, while the avant-garde, positioned both within and against modernism, spells the end of art for the sake of an art-free, poietic event-work. Against the backdrop of this rift, one could say that Stein's avant-garde writing is intensely engaged in its practice with the poietic, staging and enacting it almost at every turn of the phrase, while the modernist Stevens uses aesthetic paradigms and reflection to trigger the liminal state at the end of the imagination or the mind. Modernism and the avant-garde inhabit the same historical moment yet part ways with regard to aesthetics. As the avant-garde elaborates its poietic rigor in order to work in tune with the non-human reach of the event, it moves beyond the metaphysical determination of art and aesthetics. In the avant-garde, what is 'proper' to humankind comes to be "inhabited by the inhuman," to paraphrase Lyotard,[33] and is "celebrated" as such. This fissure means also that the momentum of the avant-garde extends beyond the historical boundaries of, for many already closed, chapter of modernism. Its force continues to challenge and displace the anthropic binds of art and aesthetics.

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[33] Lyotard, 2.

Tyrus Miller*

The Historical Project of "Modernism": Manfredo Tafuri's Metahistory of the Avant-Garde

for Hayden White

This essay focuses on the writings of the architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri, the central figure of a group of historians and theorists at the University of Venice's School of Architecture, including the philosopher and future mayor of Venice Massimo Cacciari, the philosopher Franco Rella, and the architectural historian Francesco Dal Co. It considers how his works dealing with the avant-garde, especially *Architecture and Utopia* and *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, develop a historical-critical method to identify and explicate the gap between the evolution of ideologies of the avant-garde and their translation into a repertoire of techniques that have divergent histories and social meanings than those posited by avant-garde ideologies. In doing so, I argue, Tafuri is not just offering an "ideology-critique" of modernism, revealing how the avant-garde failed to fulfill its postulated social and aesthetic goals. He is also arguing metahistorically, that via a cunning dialectic of the avant-garde, twentieth-century capitalist modernity weaves an ideological fabric of modernism and interleaves it into the effective structure of reality, through the practices of architecture and urbanism. Thus, for Tafuri, "modernism" becomes a relevant term of periodization, not because of the historical veracity of any orthodox art historical narrative of the succession or progressive evolution of modernist forms, but insofar as "modernism" designates the symptomatic tension between the progressive history of avant-garde forms and the heterogeneous technical history that represents how the avant-garde's formal programs were actualized. Although Tafuri's specific objects of critique—ranging from urban utopias, social democratic urban planning, technocratic modernist architectures, modernist design, and semiotics— are no longer as strongly in the center of current discourse as they were at the time of his writing in the 1960s-1980s, his metahistorical methodology retains its actuality. It remains pertinent, I argue, to diagnose the specific forms of "modernism" that contemporary society still articulates and to specify possibilities of contemporary historical critique.

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Between the early 1960s and his untimely death in 1994, Tafuri deployed a restlessly evolving, complex framework for historical study of the disciplines of architecture and urbanism, and the related theories and ideologies of architects and urban planners, focusing with special intensity on the theories and practices that emerged within the 20th-century with the architectural avant-gardes and the international modern movement. Even among his writings that have appeared in English translation, there are four major books that focus directly on twentieth-century modernist concerns: *Theories and History of Architecture* (originally published in Italian in 1968), *Architecture and Utopia* (originally published in 1973), *Modern* Architecture (with Francesco Dal Co, originally published 1976), and *The Sphere and the Labyrinth* (originally published in 1980).[1] For readers of Italian, there is a much wider range of articles and books by Tafuri and his followers, including the influential Marxist theory and research journal he edited in the late 1960s, *Contropiano*, which included key essays by Marxist theorists such as Antonio Negri (on John Maynard Keynes), Massimo Cacciari (on the origins of negative thought), as well as by Tafuri (on the critique of architectural ideology) and Tafuri and his circle's numerous essays and colloquia in Venice on topics including Red Vienna, Soviet architecture, Michel Foucault, and the European artistic and architectural avant-gardes.[2] Tafuri should, thus, be an important general point of reference for scholars of modernism, even outside of the disciplines of architecture and architectural history. Yet of its most influential thinkers, only Fredric Jameson has made extended

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[1] Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture*, New York: Harper and Row, 1980; Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. Barbara Luigia La Penta, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1976; Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, *Modern Architecture*, trans. Robert Erich Wolf, New York: Rizzoli, 1986; Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s*, trans. Pellegrino d'Acierno and Robert Connolly, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1987.

[2] See, for example, Antonio Negri, "La teoria capitalistica nel '29: John M. Keynes," *Contropiano* 1:1 (1968), 3-40; Massimo Cacciari, "Sulla genesi del pensiero negativo," *Contropiano* 2:1 (1969), 131-200; Manfredo Tafuri, "Per una critica dell'ideologia architettonica," *Contropiano* 2:1 (1969), 31-80; *Vienna Rossa: La politica residentiale nella Vienna socialista, 1919-1933*, ed. Manfredo Tafuri, Milan: Electa, 1980; Manfredo Tafuri et al, *Socialismo, città, architettura: URSS 1917-1937*, Rome: Officina, 1971; Massimo Cacciari, *Metropolis*, Rome: Officina, 1973; Massimo Cacciari et al, *Il Dispositivo Foucault*, Venice: Cluve Libreria Editrice, 1977; Giancarlo Buonfino, Massimo Cacciari, and Francesco Dal Co, *Avanguardia Dada Weimar*, Venice: Arsenale Cooperativa Editrice, 1978.

reference to Tafuri's work, above all, in his important essay "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology."[3]

Architecture has its own peculiarities as a discipline that defines its specific place in a broad historiography and critical theory of modernism. As a particular and perhaps idiosyncratic instance of modernism's development and persistent afterlife, it may offer a relevant perspective from which to gauge broader similarities with and differences from conceptions of modernism oriented towards artistic media such as visual arts, performance, or literature. Although this essay concentrates on Tafuri's views on, especially, 20th-century history of architecture and urbanism and the corollary concepts of architectural modernism and avant-garde, it is not, however, solely because of his contributions as historian of modern architecture that I have made Tafuri the focal point of this essay. Three other considerations have shaped my choice of topic.

First, Tafuri set architectural modernism and avant-gardism within an exceedingly broad interdisciplinary prospect that sought to relate the discipline-specific formal and technical problems and ideologies to a theory of *modernity* that encompassed both the theory of capitalist development in Marx and the theory of institutional and cultural rationalization in Max Weber, as well as the broad trajectory of sociological and philosophical thinking about modernity's transformative effects on individual and collective experience, ranging from Ludwig Feuerbach and Friedrich Nietzsche to Sigmund Freud, Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and Michel Foucault. Additionally, Tafuri was strongly attentive to how architectural problems of form and formal "language" found a wider context in the various 20th-century formalisms that evolved in structuralist and semiological theories in linguistics, anthropology, psychoa-

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3   Fredric Jameson, "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology," in *Architecture Criticism Ideology,* ed. Joan Ockman, Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1985, 51-87. For recent work on Tafuri, mostly from within the field of architectural history, see: Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1999; Andrew Leach, *Manfredo Tafuri: Choosing History*, Ghent: A&S Books, 2007; Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2008; Gail Day, *Dialectical Passions: Negation in Postwar Art Theory*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010; Marco Biraghi, *Project of Crisis: Manfredo Tafuri and Contemporary Architecture,* Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2013.

nalysis, literary and art-historical study, and other cultural disciplines.[4] I would thus argue that beyond his specific contributions to architectural history, Tafuri should be seen an exemplary methodological resource for today's "new modernist studies," which has emphasized a comparative, trans-disciplinary and trans-national contextualization of modernist works that might earlier have been looked at primarily within single-media, national, and relatively more restricted social- and intellectual-historical frameworks.

Second, Tafuri's extraordinary contextual range as a scholar also extended temporally back to the late Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, and Enlightenment contexts. He discerned anticipations of 20th-century modernist phenomena already within the long wave of modernity that dated back, in his view, to Quattrocentro Italy, with Brunelleschi's and Alberti's confrontation of the historical residues of the medieval city and a new interventive architecture montaged out of quoted fragments of a rediscovered classical idiom. Even more poignantly, Tafuri devotes the first two chapters of *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, his most wide-ranging study of 20th-century modernism and avant-garde, to the 18th-century Roman artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi: an essay on Piranesi's montage of fragments in the *Carceri*, the *Campo Marzio*, and the *Cammini* where Tafuri claims Piranesi constructs a "utopia of dissolved form" and hence become a founder of "what would emerge as the ethic of the dialectical becoming of avant-garde art," its self-renewal by continuous self-destruction[5]; and, successively, an essay on Sergei Eisenstein's analysis, in very late lectures from 1946-47, of Piranesi's *Carceri* as a model of the "ecstasy" of exploded form that reveals the dialectical tensions within apparently stable spaces, which both Piranesi's precinematic montage and Eisenstein's cinematic montage help to disclose.[6] Although I will not discuss at length this dimension of deep historicity in Tafuri's work, it offers an important reminder that the relative "presentism" of modernist studies that limits our appreciation of the *longue durée* of artistic modernism's complex responses to a European modernity evolving over several centu-

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4   See, for instance, the chapters "Instruments of Criticism," in *Theories and History of Architecture* 171-225; "Architecture and Its Double: Semiology and Formalism," in *Architecture and Utopia* 150-169; and Part Three of *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, entitled, after Hermann Hesse's novel in which a spiritual elite plays an enigmatic, intransitive game with abstract elements, "The Glass Bead Game," 267-304.

5   Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth,* 54.

6   Sergei Eisenstein, "Piranesi or the Flux of Form," in *Nonindifferent Nature*, trans. Herbert Marshall, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 123-154.

ries before reaching an inflection point in the late 19th-century. Tafuri drew upon a wide range of historical examples to estrange and defamiliarize the modern present and to unsettle modernism's self-conferred privileged status, bought at the cost of its own dehistoricization.

Lastly, Tafuri was extraordinarily self-conscious about historical method, and restlessly adapted his historiography to new objects, new contexts of writing, and new intellectual influences over the three decades of his mature work. Hence Tafuri is not only an exemplary practitioner in the writing of the history of architectural modernisms and avant-gardes and of their broader context in the artistic and political vanguards of the twentieth century; he is also an extraordinary source of metahistorical reflection on the problems and possibility of historicizing modernism. A key motivation for this metahistorical reflection is, Tafuri suggests, the very complexity and convention-breaking nature of modernism, which has made close attention to empirical detail a precondition of adequate conceptualization and criticism. Although he is critical of the empiricism of the architectural criticism coming out of the modern movement, he unequivocally affirms his preference for its nimble attention to new facts over the rigidity of static theoretic frameworks. In his introduction to the 1976 edition of *Theories and History of Architecture*, Tafuri writes:

> The criticism of modern architecture has been obliged to proceed, almost until today, along rails laid on unprejudiced empiricism: perhaps this was the only viable route as, too often, the art of our century has jumped the fence of ideological conventions, of speculative foundations, of the very same aesthetics available to the critic. So much so that the only authentic criticism of modern art came, especially between 1920 and 1940, from those with enough courage not to derive their analytical methods from existing philosophical systems but from direct and empirical contact with the thoroughly new questions of the avant-gardes.[7]

Tafuri means in architecture critics such as Nikolaus Pevsner, Siegfried Giedion, Karel Teige, Alfred Behne, and Giulio Carlo Argan, and in the broader ambit of modernism figures such as Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, Sergei Eisenstein, Viktor Skhlovsky, and Carl Einstein. His constant, intense metahistorical reflection on the nature of modernist architectural histories, the divergences between

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[7]   Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture*, 5.

architecture's ideological functions and its material forms, and the multivalent forces that converge and diverge around these may inspire similar reflections in other areas of new modernist studies as well.

In the remainder of my essay, I will survey three interrelated, but varying frameworks in which Tafuri addresses the problem of writing critical history of modernism. The first, related most closely to *Architecture and Utopia*, I call the "utopia-as-ideology" problematic. In this approach, Tafuri adopts a critical stance towards modern architecture in relation to the broader capitalist development of twentieth-century urban space and production, which in his analysis renders 20th-century architecture's social pretensions increasingly unreal, distant from capitalism's effective actuality, hence, in a pejorative sense, "utopian." The second I call Tafuri's "concrete / abstract labor" problematic that he most closely explored in the two-volume historical study *Modern Architecture.* Tafuri frames this problematic as a matter of a loss of identity of the concrete activity of the architectural discipline along with a set of attempts to renew architecture by remaking, as he puts it, "the organizational structure of the intellectual labor involved in dealing with the construction of the human environment."[8] Lastly, I will discuss Tafuri's further considerations of modernism in *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, under the sign of what he called "the historical project," which includes and modulates the first two with further new complications. The historical project takes up the dissonant architectural ideologies, techniques, and the organizational forms of abstract labor, discerning and accentuating the gaps that exist between them in field of historical phenomena and artifacts. Only in this way, Tafuri argues, may historical writing "project" the fragmentation and crises of the plurilinguistic real beyond the limits of disciplinary ideologies into the domain of valid critical knowledge.

I first, however, want to remark the intersection point between these three otherwise different critical optics: their common focus on modernism as a paradoxical and problematic historical object, an object of historical research and criticism that is constituted and defined by *anti-historical* impulses, according to Tafuri. As he wrote in 1976, noting a troubling resonance between the legacy of the artistic avant-garde early in the century and the theoretical horizon of his own time:

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8   Tafuri and Dal Co, *Modern Architecture*, 7.

> To discover that this ideal area is all based on anti-historical knowledge and activity might frighten or disconcert. But we shall be far less disconcerting if we try to go further, to dig deeper into the phenomena and not be led by inadequate ideological pulls.

> Has modern art not presented itself, from the very beginning, in the European avant-garde movements, as a true challenge to history? Has it not tried to destroy not only history, but even itself as an historical object?[9]

In his early essay, "Modern Architecture and the Eclipse of History," Tafuri offers a variety of specifications of what he means by this anti-historicity. First, noting Walter Gropius's refusal to institute a history course as part of the Bauhaus's curriculum, Tafuri sees a modeling of designed space or object on technology, which reduces its duration to a rapidly consumed present, which in turn undermines its capacity as a vehicle of historicity. "If architecture must model itself on technological reality," Tafuri writes—

> so intimately as to become an *epistemological metaphor,* if it reduces to pure perception the structures of visual communication, if it tends to become pure object, and, even, pure industrial object, it is clear that one cannot even begin to question its historicity.[10]

Tafuri discerns in the most extreme instances of the modern movement in architecture an operation not solely of turning away from history, but furthermore of an active subduing and cancellation of historical traces, by overwriting them in the technified code of the present. The past represents a threat to be contained and overcome, because its alterity challenges the abstract value that disposes as a coordinated order the power of technology, administrative control, and capitalist production. "The *extinction of the past* by a present raised to the status of new value," he writes—

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> is merciless. Artistic production is not, then, *consumed* by the inevitable adjustment of the public to the forms, but it is born with the precise purpose of being rapidly consumed: the condition necessary to reach this objective is the contem-

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9   Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture,* 7.
10   *Ibid.,* 41.
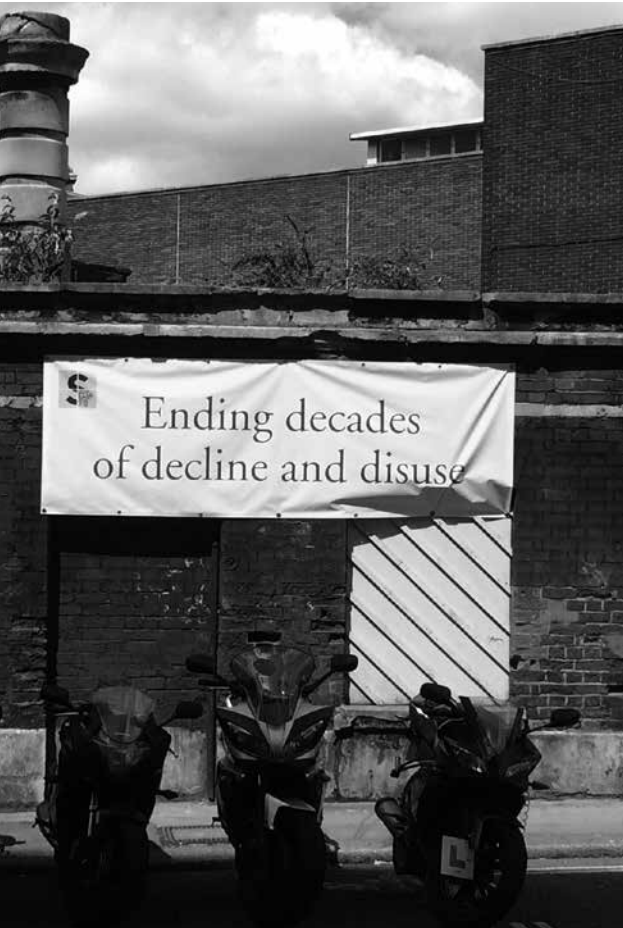
Figure 1: Smithfield Market area, London, June 2014. Photograph by the author.

porary consumption of the entire past, whose presence carries the memory of an extinct way of producing *values*, a disturbing and dangerous memory because of the illusion of the possible return to a sacral conception of artistic activity. This is the reason why all avant-garde movements see in history a *danger* for modern art.[11]

This danger of history has a specific valence for modern architects: the problem posed by the pre-existence of the historical city, especially regarding the preservation or transformation of the historic centers (**Figure 1**).

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[11]   *Ibid.*, 46.

Figure 2: Le Corbusier, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, June 2013. Photograph by the author.

Thus, Tafuri writes, "Both Le Corbusier and Wright—leaving aside, for the moment, the obvious differences that separate their global conceptions of the modern city—take a phenomenon for granted: the historical centres, if used as 'pieces' of the contemporary city, *are dangerous to life.*"[12] Along with their tangible alterity in time, the danger lies in their undoubted structural density and coherence, which nevertheless is opposed to the principles by which the modern structure is organized (**Figure 2**).

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[12] *Ibid.*, 48.

Hence, they haunt the anti-historicity of the modern with its own shadow of becoming and passing-away, the contingency of its supposedly timeless and rationally founded structure: "The entire historical texture is a structure, quite apart from its stratifications. Or, rather, it is a structure that somehow is defined, *negatively*, by contraposition to another structure: the, even though only hypothesized, structure of the modern city."[13] In the end, the modern architect is caught between two irreconcilable relations to the historical city, which drive an unsteady oscillation in modernist architectural ideology between the past as a neutralized model and the past as a burden to be overcome by the technological present of production. As Tafuri expresses these alternatives:

> A. In a certain light [historical textures] are considered models, in the sense of figural values that, although unrecoverable as such today, can show the contemporary urbanist the need to translate into a coherent linguistic system the confused, though vital, indications offered by the ephemeral worlds of the non-representational and consumable objects of technological reality: Le Corbusier's continuous references to the ancient urban spaces in his self-publicity, are clearly to the point.

> B. As, however, the poetic of the changeable—directly related to the incessant and rapid mobility of the new structure of the capitalist production cycle—is at the base of the hypothesis of new urban structures, it is the value of permanence, immutability, a-temporality of the ancient towns that are seen as dangerous challenges to modern urban planning and as a dangerous opponent. (This *danger* has a concrete meaning, beyond its merely ideal one; both Wright and Le Corbusier refer to the invisible chaos resulting from the forced injection of modern mobility into the old textures.)[14]

Anyone who has experienced the traffic snarls in, say, Naples's historic center knows just what Tafuri means. When we consider how much the mobility of automobile circulation was a part of Le Corbusier's modernist ideology, we see the catastrophic implications of Naples historic hive of dark alleyways and dense market-streets.

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[13] *Ibid*., 49.

[14] *Ibid*.

I return now to the first of these problematics, the reading of modern architecture as an ideologically functioning "utopia." What does this mean for Tafuri? There are three basic assumptions embedded in this framework, none of which is simply axiomatic; each rather entails strong theoretical claims. First is that the gradual emergence of the concept of the "city" in modernity—and Tafuri means from the Renaissance on, but especially with the Enlightenment city as a space that may be conceived as a planned totality—undermines traditional notions of architectural form as a closed, static entity, and put its value into crisis. Architectural form is dissolved into a function of a larger, more encompassing framework of city planning and construction. The notion of the modern city as a site of technological production, distribution, and consumption intensifies this crisis, by making architecture just "a mere link in the production chain" and an element in what Tafuri calls "the merciless commercialization of the human environment."[15]

Second is that the techniques of modern visual communication—Tafuri means, following Walter Benjamin, photography, cinema, advertising, and so on—imply that ideology can no longer be considered only a matter of "false consciousness" or "distorted ideas" discursively represented, but also refers to a systematically distorted structure of experience that can be non-discursively embodied in a pluridimensional environment of signs, spaces, objects, structures, and bodies. Here Tafuri offers his own contribution to innovations in the Marxist notion of ideology that include György Lukács's concept of reification, Walter Benjamin's investigations of cities as collective dream-structures, the notion in Theodor Adorno that culture industry translates commodity-structure into cognitive and affective schemata that preform contemporary experience, Guy Debord's idea of the society of the spectacle in which social relations have been transformed into images, and Louis Althusser's formulation of ideology as the normal unthematized background of lived relations to the social order, the "imaginary relation of individuals to their real conditions of existence." For Tafuri, notably, the concept of "the city" itself becomes one of the most important sites of modern ideological articulation and mass mediatization through the emerging technical media of visual communication (Tafuri was one of the early European readers of Walter Benjamin's work). The city is the pivotal notion around which modern architecture and urbanism pitched its ideological positions; it is

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[15] Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 42-43.

Figure 3: The Journal *Vesch Objet Gegenstand* 3 (1922). Photograph by the author.

one of the key "imaginary" relationships through which individuals experience their relation to the complex conditions of managed capitalism; but also, dialectically, these ideologies of the city take on, in complicated ways, effective reality in the built environments and lived experience of city spaces. Modern architects and planners, equipped with a fertile set of city-ideologies and new experiences of modernity, sought to translate these, with greater or lesser degrees of success, into built city-spaces of lived experience. In turn, the structures and fissures they thus introduced into city-space, the stratified results of their successful and failed or partially-realized interventions into the historical fabric of cities, became the materialized embodiment of their discontinuous and contradictory city-ideologies.

Lastly, Tafuri argues that the various connotations that were layered into the ideological discourses of the "city"—architectural, urbanistic, but also the artistic and literary discourses of the avant-garde from Baudelaire and Rimbaud through Döblin and Dos Passos—were ways of taking up as "raw material" the disorder of capitalist production and distribution and ideologically transmuting them into innovative forms that both registered and redeemed the chaos of the modern city. In this context, for the short-lived period of upsurge of the classical avant-garde, "form" could take on a utopian valence in which the anarchic

crisis of values in the social world were transfigured into new, self-posited and self-referential linguistic or language-like relational systems of value, not functional yet in the actually-existing world but speculatively anticipating the norms of a "new age," a "new world," or a "new man." Moreover, this utopia of form evolves over time as well, from the organic dreams of expressionism or the informal montage of dada and surrealism—which in Tafuri's formulation individualize and protest or symbolically compensate unsatisfied human needs[16]—towards the rationalist "ideologies of the plan" that one finds in 1920s radical avant-gardes including the Bauhaus, Russian Constructivism, De Stijl, and "Nouveau Ésprit" (**Figure 3**).

In the last turn of the dialectic, Tafuri writes, "This phase in turn is put in crisis and supplanted when, after the crisis of 1929, with the elaboration of the anti-cyclical theories and the international reorganization of capital, and after the launching in Russia of the First Five-Year Plan, architecture's ideological function seems to be rendered superfluous, or limited to rear-guard tasks of marginal importance."[17] Drawing upon his background in the journal *Contropiano*, especially Antonio Negri's important essay on the role of Keynes in the adaptation of capital during the global depression of the thirties,[18] Tafuri argues that in the face of a still-unplanned capitalism, avant-garde ideologies could project artistic form as *anticipatory* of a rational, planned social order. Consider, for instance, El Lissitzky's constructivist visual fairy tale *Of 2 Squares*, in which the collision of two geometrical forms allegorically provides the genesis of a new global constructivist order. But once the attempt to control the social totality through planning became a factual, present aspect of societies from Keynesian "New Deals" to fascist autarchies to Soviet planned communism, the anticipatory, utopian, critical energies went out of these programs. At best they continued to provide ideological sustenance and design aesthetics for the state and economy in their actually existing organization, as for example with the comparatively feeble futurism and the neo-classicism *Romanità* of Italy in the 1930s under Mussolini

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[16]   Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 48.

[17]   *Ibid*., 48-49.

[18]   Antonio Negri, "La teoria capitalistica nel '29: John M. Keynes," *Contropiano* 1:1 (1968), 3-40. A translation of a revised version of this essay appears as "Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State," in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, 22-50.

Figure 4: Palazzo della civiltà del lavoro, EUR Rome. Photograph by the author.

(**Figure 4**). At worst, such utopian projects simply became irrelevant and were consigned to the trashbin or archive.

Tafuri's *Architecture and Utopia* dated back, in its basic problematic, to the militancy of the late 1960s and Tafuri's collaboration with the young militant intellectuals around *Contropiano*, such as Cacciari, Negri, and Mario Tronti, and indeed, as Tafuri explicitly notes, it is a "reworking and sizeable enlargement" of the essay "Per una critica dell'ideologia architettonica" published in 1969 in *Contropiano*.[19] By 1976, with his publication of *Modern Architecture* with Francesco Dal Co, Tafuri had partially reconsidered the intransigently negative tone of *Architecture and Utopia*'s critique of modernist architecture and art, and added new theoretical nuances to his historical methodology. In this two-volume work, spanning from the mid-19th-century to then-current neo-avant-garde and early postmodernism, he puts the emphasis on the new dialectic of concrete and abstract labor that modern architecture projected and, to an extent Tafuri previously did not acknowledge, helped to actualize. What had earlier appeared as a binary confrontation of modern architecture's naïve utopia of form against the hard destiny of capitalist production, bureaucratic administration, technology, and planning, now takes shape as a differentiation and renovation of intellec-

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[19]   *Ibid.*, vii.

tual labor in confrontation with the new social space of the managed society. Tafuri writes:

> What is involved is a restricting of intellectual labor as the communicative preg-
> nancy of the "objects"—the buildings built—tends to fade away while new im-
> portance is assumed by the organization of the sphere of production and by the
> control and administration of the urban complex. That no guarantee of political
> action as such is implicit in such new organizational tasks will be evident in the
> pages that follow. Yet there can be no doubt that inherent in them are unprec-
> edented relationships between intellectual labor and socio-economic develop-
> ment, even if the terrain in which such relationships are born is rife with nostalgic
> regressions and utopias we could happily do without.[20]

Tafuri introduces here a kind of "cunning of architectural reason," regarding which it no longer suffices to point out that various architectural ideologies proved to be deluded in their utopian pretensions and expectations. Here Tafuri admits that despite these illusions, and under the protection of their ideologi-cally veil, architecture carried out socially consequential invention and change. As if addressing his former position, Tafuri argues that these utopian errors were not deviations from "real history"; they were constitutive and, dialecti-cally, even effective impulses for this history, which is unthinkable apart from the genealogical stratification of utopian anticipations and false-starts:

> Yet these regressions and utopias must also be seen as part of history, in confron-
> tation with the cities of the enemy that they leave intact and with the prospects
> for the future to which they are willfully blind. The time is past when there might
> have been some point in crying scandal at ideological mystification: what matters
> now is to try to understand the historical reasons responsible for it.[21]

Lastly, he goes on to note that he and Dal Co avoid, outside of quotation and similar references, generalizing terms like "the modern movement," since these tend to cover over the multiple, interwoven, but irreducible histories of which the genealogy of modern architecture is composed.

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[20]   Tafuri and Dal Co, *Modern Architecture*, 7.
[21]   *Ibid*.

One of the key differences in the approach taken in Tafuri's later work, programmatically set out by "The Historical Project" introduction to *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, is a detailed confrontation with the historical studies of Michel Foucault, who in the late 1970s came to Venice for colloquia including Tafuri, Cacciari, Rella, and others of the Tafuri circle. His engagement with Foucault reinforced Tafuri's anti-utopian historical stoicism in the face of contradiction, multiplicity, and unresolvable antagonisms—a stance that had already been nurtured by his circle's engaged reading of Nietzsche and Max Weber,[22] and that found a kindred spirit in Foucault's singular combination of radicalism and disenchantment. In "The Historical Project," Tafuri offers a sort of implicit self-criticism, for his overly exclusive focus on architectural ideologies, which in turn led to an overly unitary account of the modern development he had set out to critique. "Architecture itself," he writes—

> inasmuch as it is an institution, is anything but a unitary ideological block: as with other linguistic systems, its ideologies act in a highly nonlinear fashion. So much so that it is legitimate to suspect that the very criticism of architectural ideology—as it has been conducted up to now—has only reckoned with the most obvious and immediate aspects of that ideology: the refusals, repressions, and introspections, which run through the body of architectural writing.[23]

Simply shifting from a focus on texts to contexts, however, is not sufficient to open up the historical object and critically shatter its apparent but deceptive coherence and continuity with "precursors" and "successors." Here, the influence of Foucault's "archeology" on Tafuri's historiographic idiom becomes apparent:

> The context binds together artistic languages, physical realities, behaviors, urban and territorial dimensions, politico-economic dynamics. But it is constantly broken up by subterranean ideologies that nevertheless act on an intersubjective level; it is broken up by the interaction of diverse techniques of domination, each of which possesses its own untranslatable language.[24]

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[22] Especially influential were the analyses of Massimo Cacciari, "Sulla genesi del pensiero negativo," *Contropiano* 2:1 (1969), 131-200; and "Aforisma, tragedia, lirica," *Nuova Corrente* 68-69 (1975-76), 464-92.

[23] Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, 5.

[24] *Ibid.*, 5.

The task of the historian is not to reduce these languages and the borders between them to a common denominator, whether formal or contextual, but rather to highlight their "collisions," sharpening the borders and boundaries between them and the inclusions and exclusions these define. Tafuri writes:

> The construction of a physical space is certainly the site of a "battle" [...] That such a battle is not totalizing, that it leaves borders, remains, residues, is also an indisputable fact. And thus a vast field of investigation is opened up—an investigation of the limits of languages, of the boundaries of techniques, of the thresholds "that provide density." The threshold, boundary, the limit all "define": it is in the nature of such definition that the object so circumscribed becomes evanescent. The possibility of constructing the history of a formal language comes about only by destroying, step by step, the linearity of that history and its autonomy: there will remain only traces, fluctuating signs, unhealed rifts.[25]

The historian's primary object, then, becomes the gaps and interstices between fragmentary and partial idioms of a pluralistic sort, from linguistic, discursive, and theoretical to typological, technical, material, and territorial:

> Historical space does not establish improbable links between diverse languages, between techniques that are distant from each other. Rather, it explores what such distance expresses: it probes what appears to be a *void*, trying to make the absence that seems to dwell in that void speak.

> It is, then, an operation that descends into the interstices of techniques and languages. While operating within these interstices, the historian certainly does not intend to suture them; rather he intends to make emerge what is encountered on the borders of language. Historical work thus calls into question the problem of the "limit": it confronts the division of labor in general; it tends to go outside of its own boundaries; *it projects the crisis of techniques already given.*[26]

One of the specific manifestations that Tafuri uses as a diagnostic for approaching this interstitial space—relevant, perhaps, to a historical methodology for modernisms other than architectural as well—will be the divergences between

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[25] *Ibid.*, 8.
[26] *Ibid.*, 13.

the historical series of modernist semantic, ideological, and theoretical *themes* and the succession of *forms* actualized in the work. This very divergence of ideological thematics and form takes on symptomatic value as an entry into a broader set of factors structuring the historical field and impinging upon the individual work. "It is," Tafuri writes, "the very gap that exists between avant-garde ideology and the translation into *techniques* of that ideology. It is a gap that historiography is incapable of filling, but one that it must instead accentuate and turn into the material of concrete and widespread knowledge."[27]

In the end, Tafuri's "historical project" defines itself as an iterative and intentionally pursued "project of crisis."[28] The project of crisis, as an outcome of Tafuri's mode and method of historical analysis, strikes deep at the bases of any monumental, autonomous historical evolution of modernist forms, which Tafuri sees as the characteristic ideological representation of modernism by its acolytes. It is, for instance, such a historical ideology that is enshrined by pseudo-historicizing notions such as "the Modern Movement" or "international style" in architecture. Despite his criticisms of the artistic avant-garde, Tafuri's sympathies and even inspiration for the project of crisis lie with the radically disintegrative energies that flashed up briefly with the avant-garde of negation and crisis, such as Dadaism: "And to comprehend fully the dialectic—suspended between the extremes of the tragic and the banal—that shapes the tradition of the twentieth-century avant-garde, is it not more useful to go back to the hallucinatory buffooneries of the Cabaret Voltaire than to reexamine those works in which the tragic and the banal are reconciled with reality?"[29] Translated into historical method, Tafuri suggests, the project of crisis seeks to dissolve the ideological glue that held together disparate elements in an apparent synthesis:

> The interweaving of intellectual models, modes of production, and modes of consumption ought to lead to the "explosion" of the synthesis contained in the work. Wherever this synthesis is presented as a completed whole, it is necessary to introduce a disintegration, a fragmentation, a "dissemination" of its constitutive units. It will then be necessary to submit these disintegrated components to

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[27] *Ibid.*, 21.

[28] "Project of crisis" is Tafuri's own term for his project: see *op. cit.*, 13. For further elaboration of this notion in Tafuri's work, see Marco Biraghi, *Project of Crisis: Manfredo Tafuri and Contemporary Architecture*, trans. Alta Price, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2013.

[29] Tafuri, *op. cit.*, 13-14.

a separate analysis. What reactions, symbolic horizons, avant-garde hypotheses, linguistic structures, methods of reorganizing production, technological inventions will all be seen thus stripped of the ambiguity ingrained in the synthesis displayed by the work.[30]

Having set free the fragments, and fragments of fragments, of these no-longer valid historical syntheses, the historian now has them at his disposal for critical "remontage."[31]

Tafuri explicitly refers to certain moments and figures of the avant-garde in articulating this point, which might be summarized thus: the historical project, as a project of crisis, shatters and estranges the apparently autonomous order of "languages" emerging out of twentieth-century capitalism's technologically permeated, state-steered, and metropolitan social order. Tafuri evokes the names of Zurich Dada, Viktor Shklovsky, Bertolt Brecht, and Max Bense, among others, as his inspirations and points of theoretical reference. It is thus as if, even for one of the most astringent critics of the ideological pretensions of twentieth-century modernist and avant-garde movements, fragments of the avant-garde remain an ambiguous resource of hope in the critique of modern culture and social life. However reluctantly and skeptically, Tafuri the stoical historian of crisis never ceased to seek in the avant-garde's practices and spaces the thrust of a contemporary critical "knight's move," disclosing the radically new.

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[30] *Ibid.*, 14.
[31] *Ibid.*, 15.

Miško Šuvaković*

Theories of Modernism. Politics of Time and Space

The Modern, Modernism, and Repetition: New / The Newest

The modern and modernism are artistic, cultural, and social formations that refer to changes in art, culture, and society in historical and geographical terms. The modern and modernism are viewed as formations that *should* uncover a new "state of affairs" within contemporaneity. On the other hand, viewed ontologically, the modern and modernism are also about redefining the potentially new into a *sustainable new* or the "tradition of the new" as a permanent search for and realisation of a "different world" as "the horizon of possibility" for the newer than new. This search for and realisation of a "different world" or "new state of affairs" as the horizon of feasible possibilities for the newer than new may be identified with the concept of permanent modernisation.

The modern and modernity are interpreted as situations of a *new sensibility* of time within contemporaneity. The paradigms of the modern or modernity were established as contexts of Western society, culture, and art between the eighteen and the mid-twentieth centuries.[1] The feeling of modernity signifies the possibility of identifying the current moment: the here and now as opposed to the overcoming of the past and an expected future. The modern begins in the history of the West at the moment of an artistic and aesthetic that is, cultural and political break with the past as a safe tradition. The modern is characterised by opposing the present or contemporary time of the past—it rejects all narratives of memory, tradition, and history. For instance, Peter Osborne views the modern and modernity as expressions of a specific politics of time:

> "Modernity", we have seen, plays a peculiar dual role as a category of historical periodization: it designates the contemporaneity of an epoch to the time of

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[1]   Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Incomplete Project," in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, London: Pluto Press, 1985, 9.

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its classification; yet it registers this contemporaneity in terms of a qualitatively new, self-transcending temporality which has the simultaneous effect of distancing the present from even that most recent past with which it is thus identified.[2]

In the European context, the politics of time signifies procedures whereby social, cultural, and artistic phenomena are selected with regard to contemporaneity, which means regarding differences between the past, the contemporary as the new or newer, and the future.

Modernism is a developed and "accelerated" modern. Modernism emerges when the contemporary interval of being here and now is posited as a practice that is superior to all aspects of social life and when the desire for the new is posited as a source of permanent social "breaks" leading either to emancipation or to cultural *fashion*. Whereas the relatively static modern was characterised by the bourgeois national industrial capitalism of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, modernism is characterised by moving from capitalism as an "industrial system of production" toward an internationalised global market system. In other words, the modern is defined by a recognised modernisation of production within national cultures, whereas modernism is determined by a global modernisation of mass consumption. Permanent modernist emancipation refers to processes of social, cultural, and artistic progress that direct human life toward ever-increasing freedom. Permanent fashion refer to consumerist craving for the new and newer than new that over time starts repeating itself, directing itself toward the production, exchange, and consumption of the newest. Modernism is thus a selective political practice that enables a choice that inevitably leads toward the new and newer than new.

At this point, the stable model of the bourgeois proprietary modern, based on aesthetic identification by way of a culturally protected privacy and realised autonomous art, is replaced by a permanent emergence of ever-newer artistic products with aesthetic or anti-aesthetic properties. Artistic products suggest novelty and consumerist enjoyment in the new, as opposed to the traditional model of identifying within one's own class and its patriarchal structures. Terry Eagleton has emphasised the class model of the modern aesthetic:

2   Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-garde*, London: Verso, 1995, 13–14.

> My argument, broadly speaking, is that the category of the aesthetic assumes the importance it does in modern Europe because in speaking of art it speaks of these other matters too, which are at the heart of the middle class's struggle for political hegemony.[3]

Eagleton's discussion of "the ideology of the aesthetic" and then T. J. Clark's critical identification of, say, the role of Impressionist painting in the construction of modern bourgeois life point to a transition from a static to a dynamised modernity, i.e. liberal modernism:

> As the context of bourgeois sociability shifted from community, family and church to commercialized or privately improvised forms—the streets, the cafés and resorts—the resulting consciousness of individual freedom involved more and more an estrangement from older ties; and those imaginative members of the middle class who accepted the norms of freedom, but lacked the economic means to attain them, were spiritually torn by a sense of helpless isolation in an anonymous indifferent mass. By 1880 the enjoying individual becomes rare in Impressionist art; only the private spectacle of nature is left.[4]

The modern is viewed as the determining context of a realised, urbanised, liberal, and bourgeois contemporaneity. In *The Arcades Project*, for instance, Benjamin wrote about the analogy between capitalism and nature: "Capitalism was a natural phenomenon with which a new dream-filled sleep came over Europe, and, through it, a reactivation of mythic forces."[5]

In his *Philosophy of New Music,* Adorno critically characterises the realised modern as the "dialectics of loneliness."[6] He thereby identified bourgeois contemporaneity as an effect of alienation in the industrial and emerging market world. Fredric Jameson likewise emphasizes the capitalist character of the liberal modern, regarding modernist abstract art, positing a correspondence between the

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[3]   Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990, 3.

[4]   T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris and Art of Manet and his Followers*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1985, 3–4.

[5]   Walter Benjamin, "K (Dream City and Dream House, Dreams of the Future, Anthropological Nihilism, Jung)," in *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002, 163.

[6]   Theodor W. Adorno, "Dialectic of Loneliness," in *Philosophy of New Music*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, 37–40.

abstraction of money and that of *painting and sculpture*: "Modernist abstraction, I believe, is less a function of capital accumulation as such than rather of money itself in a situation of capital accumulation."[7]

The Ontological Core of Modernism

There is more than one periodisation of modernism. For instance, according to Raymond Williams, modernism is periodised as art after 1950:

> "Modernism" as a title for a whole cultural movement and moment has then been retrospective as a general term since the 1950s, thereby stranding the dominant version of "modern" or even "absolute modern" between, say, 1890 and 1940. [...] Determining the process which fixed the moment of modernism is a matter, as so often, of identifying the machinery of selective tradition.[8]

Regarding Williams's notion of modernism, I will use the term "high modernism," dating it in the Western world in the post-WWII period. Unlike Williams, I will use modernism to label various phenomena in society, culture, and art that began around 1900, when there was an accelerated shift of cultural and artistic fashions: Post-Impressionism, various expressionisms, Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism, Cubo-Futurism, Suprematism, Neo-plasticism, Constructivism, Surrealism, Art Deco, *Retour à l'ordre*, New Objectivity, etc. We may understand Williams's modernism, that is, in my modification, "high modernism," as the highest or final stage of international modernisation as a social, cultural, and artistic project.

Historically, modernism, as the phenomenon of acceleration in the sequence of various paradigms of emancipation and types of fashions, signified technological, social, cultural, and artistic changes during the twentieth century. In such a periodization, modernism signified three characteristic phenomenological moments: (1) the break with the past, (2) the establishment of the contemporary, and (3) the anticipation of the future. Every fresh seizure of contemporaneity was signified with the demand that the feeling of confronting the new be re-

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[7] Fredric Jameson, "Culture and Finance Capital," in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998*, London and New York: Verso, 2009, 136–161.

[8] Raymond Williams, "When Was Modernism?," in *Politics of Modernism*, London: Verso, 2007, 32.

peated regarding the new that had become the old and regarding the future that would become potentially possible only with the next turn from the new that would grow obsolete into the new that has yet to come and be the newest. This obsessive repeatability of attaining the newer than new would become the onto-logical core of modernism.

Thus emerges the formula of permanent repetition: "Times have changed" and again, "Times have changed," and again. [...] The consequence is that things no longer stand in the stable traditional or usual way. It seems as though some-thing from the past has become superfluous or impossible,[9] and something new from the present has emerged in a way that was erstwhile unthinkable. To its contemporaries, the new therefore always seemed unjustified, opaque, and in-comprehensible, although, at the same time, fatally attractive as well. That is probably why Theodor W. Adorno at the beginning of his *Aesthetic Theory* felt compelled to call for a redefining of the self-evidence of contemporary art: "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist."[10]

With the accelerated shifts of modernist paradigms, art increasingly differed from the real or the ideologically projected ideal tradition of great Western art (Antiquity, Renaissance, Baroque). It became necessary to perform a new inter-pretation of art and culture simultaneously and in parallel with the emergence of new art within a changed culture. That was probably why Arthur C. Danto made his claim that interpretation was constitutive of modernist art: "My view, philo-sophically, is that interpretations constitute works of art, so that you do not, as it were, have the artwork on one side and the interpretation on the other."[11]

This claim enables the understanding of the modernist notion of "artworld," which Danto opposed to the tradition of understanding the *pure* and *universal* work of art within the modern and an imaginary Western tradition that linked the modern with the timelessness of the classical, i.e. that of Antiquity: "To see

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[9]   *Cf.* the logic of thinking about a changed state of things in Jacques Rancière, "In What Time Do We Live?," in *The State of Things*, London: Office for Contemporary Art, Norway and Koening Books, 2012, 12.

[10]   Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, London: Continuum, 2002, 1.

[11]   Arthur C. Danto, "The Appreciation and Interpretation of Works of Art," in *The Philosophi-cal Disenfranchisement of Art*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, 23.

something as art requires something the eye cannot decry—an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld."[12]

Therefore, the art of modernism must be viewed in its variability as a complex web, intertwining the sensory and the discursive, and relating to cultural and social contexts.

The modern and modernism traversed the path from an anticipated potentiality, which would be the regime of alternative and avant-garde practice, to a realised potentiality as an attained new with all the consequences that accompany the establishment of artistic, cultural, and social hegemony in relation to other historical and geographical formations. Between anticipating a potentiality and realising it as something new, there comes the demand for something newer than what was already achieved, which leads toward transcending the realised modernity in order to reach an even more characteristic modernity. Modernism was more modern than the modern, and post-WWII modernism was more modern than interwar modernism.

Liberal *Différance*: Modernist Painting

The historical debates about modernism were developed on the basis of a canonical definition of the international—and this signifies hegemonic—Western modernism as a grand and totalising post-WWII *style*. This is the "Western story" of universal modernism and its realised autonomy, i.e., its emancipatory potentiality. Here we will mention Clement Greenberg's concept of modernist painting and Charles Harrison's critique of that concept.

Clement Greenberg interpreted the concept of "modernist painting," as it was established after WWII, ranging from abstract expressionism to post-painterly abstraction, as an expression of a historically directed evolution of the immanent means and effects of painting. Greenberg's aesthetics of painting is a neo-Kantian aesthetics of liberal artistic creativity with a precise experiential distinction between aesthetic judgement and aesthetic enjoyment in relation to

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[12]   Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld," in *Philosophy Looks at the Arts: Contemporary Readings in Aesthetics*, ed. Joseph Margolis, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986, 162.

intuitive insight.[13] This evolution led from illusionistic realist painting via Impressionism, Expressionism, and Cubism, to "pure abstraction," free of direct references to literary narratives or sculptural three-dimensionality. Greenberg's evolutionism posited modernism not as a break with the past, but as a gradual self-reflexive perfection and development of the autonomy of the artistic medium in discovering the immanent nature of painting. The medium of painting thus became the essential topic of a creative treatment of surface:

> Modernist painting asks that a literary theme be translated into strictly optical, two-dimensional terms before becoming the subject of pictorial art – which means its being translated in such a way that it entirely loses its literary character. [...]
> It should also be understood that the self-criticism of modernist art has never been carried on in any but a spontaneous and subliminal way. It has been altogether a question of practice, immanent to practice and never a topic of theory. [...][14]

Greenberg advocated aesthetic formalism based on the modern tradition. Modernist painting might therefore be interpreted as an evolution within the "tradition of modernity". He understood this notion of evolution, predicated on a modernisation of painting, not in the Marxist sense of "social practice," but in terms of liberal, i.e., individual mastering of creative skills in art as a free and specialised pursuit of human "self-expression" and "self-positing." Greenberg's interpretative discourse recognised the painterly productions of Claude Monet, Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, and the like as exceptional achievements of the modernist evolution whereby the pictorial plane witnessed pictorial inscriptions of the hand or the body of the artist. Those inscriptions could not be related verbally; they are exclusively a painterly trace and as such geared toward an optical effect that one may only indirectly and insecurely verbally present as metaphor in judging a work as such.

In Charles Harrison's view, Clement Greenberg was the critic who set up terms for periodizing and defining modernism in the sense of identifying the essential

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[13]   Clement Greenberg, "Intuition and the Esthetic Experience," in *Homemade Esthetics: Observations of Art and Taste*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 4–9.

[14]   Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" (1965), in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison, London: Harper & Row, 1986, 8–9.

properties of a painterly work of art.[15] Harrison viewed Greenberg's method of defining modernism as an essentialist objectivism opposed to the theoretical relativism of the avant-gardes and popular culture. For Greenberg, painting was always a matter of *objective taste*, rather than a demonstration of a theoretical position in a work of art. Or in Harrison's words: "For example, asked for evidence that esthetic judgments are indeed involuntary and objective, rather than being governed by specific theories or individual preferences, Greenberg pointed to a "'consensus (of taste) *over time*' which has settled on the defining high point of an artistic tradition."[16]

Greenberg's theory is characterised by his claims that the creative transcends the critical, that artistic practice is governed by intuitions as direct expressions of emotions, and by a direct, all-encompassing experience of the work of art. Therefore, artistic creativity invariably precedes theory, i.e. art theory is merely a secondary addition to the organic wholeness and fullness of artistic expression. Greenberg wrote: "Art is a matter strictly of experience, not of principles."[17]

Harrison opposed Greenberg's neo-Kantianism, which excluded any kind of intellectual engagement with artistic creativity and advanced an intuitive establishment of a unitary and universal model of modernism. In Harrison's view, in contrast to Greenberg's "one-dimensional definition of modernism," the history of modernism after the Second World War has been determined by two mutually opposed concepts of understanding the character of artistic labour.

The first is Greenberg's concept of high modernism, based on the link between intuition and taste, which brings the values of the autonomy of abstract painting into a position of aesthetic dogma in Abstract Expressionism and in post-painterly abstraction:

> The productions of the modern artist, it is assumed, are determined by some special insight into the nature of reality—be it the reality of the natural or of the social or of the psychological world. The work of art is an assertion of the human in the

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[15]   Charles Harrison, "Introduction: The Judgment of Art," in Greenberg, *Homemade Esthetics*, xiii.

[16]   *Ibid.*, xvii.

[17]   Clement Greenberg, "Abstract, Representational and So Forth" (1954), in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1961, 133.

context of the real. Although the values of humanity are seen as "relatively constant," art of "quality" is a form of stimulus to spiritual change.[18]

The other voice, and this is Harrison's innovation, is critical of high modernism, where intuitions, spontaneity, expression, and aesthetics are independent of the semantic and political conditions of contemporary society, culture, and art:

> In the second version of the story, the first is taken as given. It is quoted in a spirit of scepticism, not as a true story, but as one typical of a certain culture and rooted in certain interests. The second voice seeks to explain what the first has said, and how it has come to be saying it.[19]

Harrison's thesis is that the first voice intended to show that artistic production always and by necessity intuitively preceded theory (the painting of Jackson Pollock and Kenneth Noland). By contrast, the other voice disregards this separation of the creative from the critical and shows that that distinction in artistic positions is not an effect of the nature of art or creative individualism, but a consequence of the organisation of artistic culture in society. This other voice (Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Donald Judd, Robert Morris) is determined by a critical approach that insists on a link between the conceptual and the sensual in the context of social differences and antagonisms.

Modernism and the Neo-avant-garde: Dialectical *Différance*

If one transferred Harrison's "second voice" from its Anglo-American context to a European, Asian, or South-American context, the critical potential of artistic acting against the autonomous aestheticism of high modernism could be identified with the term "neo-avant-garde". The concept of neo-avant-garde signifies a "second avant-garde" about which rather divergent interpretations exist.

For instance, the early avant-garde of the early twentieth century is viewed as original pioneering artistic acting with a pronounced transgressive and innovatory potential. The post-war avant-gardes are identified as institutionalised avant-gardes, i.e. second-hand avant-gardes, remakes of the first (the "histor-

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[18]   Charles Harrison, "A Kind of Context: Modernism in Two Voices," in *Essays on Art & Language,* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991, 5.

[19]   *Ibid.*

ical") avant-garde in the context of high modernism. For instance, in his ret-rospective defence of his thesis of the neo-avant-garde as an institutionalised avant-garde, Peter Bürger made the following suggestion:

> The argument of *Theory of the Avant-garde* runs as follows: the neo-avant-gardes adopted the means by which the avant-gardists hoped to bring about the sub-lation of art. As these means had, in the interim, been accepted by the institu-tion, that is to say, were deployed as internal aesthetic procedures, they could no longer legitimately be linked to a claim to transcend the sphere of art. "The neo-avant-garde institutionalizes the avant-garde as art and thus negates genuinely avant-gardiste intentions".[20]

Against Bürger's conception, one could argue that after WWII the avant-garde realised and concretised those technological utopias and projects of the early avant-gardes that could not be realised before. For instance, solutions in art, de-sign, and architecture that the Soviet avant-garde, Bauhaus, and De Stijl offered on a utopian level became part of the international style and mass market only in American high modernism.

Likewise, one might also argue that the neo-avant-garde was a specific set of movements and individual effects between 1950 and 1968 that critically pro-voked the unitary essentialism and universalism of high modernism. Therefore, the neo-avant-garde regime denotes a critique, subversion, or deconstruction of the realised possibilities of high modernism, or, more accurately, the artistic, social, and cultural hegemonies of the realised modern and modernisms.

The neo-avant-garde may be understood in two ways: (1) as a transgression that disrupts the newly established order of the latest hegemonic high modernism and (2) as a strategy and tactic of established modernism itself that, out of fear that otherwise it might turn into a frozen or petrified "new tradition", produces its own self-critique to destabilise, destroy, or overcome the attained state of affairs. We might compare thi dynamic as it is established between the avant-garde, mod-ernism, and the neo-avant-garde with Thomas S. Kuhn's theory of scientific revo-

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[20]   Peter Bürger, "Avant-garde and Neo-avant-garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of Theory of the Avant-garde," *New Literary History* 41 (2010), 707. The interpolated quotation is from Peter Bürger, "The Avant-gardiste Work of Art," *Theory of the Avant-garde*, Minne-apolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, 58.

lutions. The theory of paradigm shifts in science was applied to art by Charles Harrison in his interpretations of the activities of the Art & Language group.[21]

In other words, my position is that the avant-garde was an artistic or aesthetic vanguard or anticipation of modernism, whereas the neo-avant-garde was a critical and excessive practice within the dominant high modernist culture. One might say that in the context of liberal Western high modernism, predicated as it was by an aesthetic and poetic fetishization of the autonomy of the disciplines and the media of art, the neo-avant-gardes performed a trans-disciplinary critique or transgression by pointing to the potentialities of "the open work of art and acting in art," that is, to a political critique of the modernist professionalisation and institutionalisation of the production, exchange, and consumption of art (Lettrism, experimental art, happening, Neo-dada, Fluxus, New Tendencies). One might also say that the historical avant-gardes (Futurism, Dada, revolutionary constructivisms) generated alternative micro-social formations (groups, movements) that opposed the system of modern art at the time, which was still insufficiently institutionalised. On the other hand, the neo-avant-gardes became active against high modernism's formally and pragmatically established system of institutions. Whereas the historical avant-gardes, with their various techniques (collage, montage, assemblage, readymade, avant-garde periodicals as collage-montage visual texts), anticipated the aesthetic nature of emerging consumer, popular, and mass culture, the neo-avant-gardes acted in historical conditions where the paradigms of elite high art mModernism were explicitly opposed to those of consumer, mass, and popular culture. The aesthetic dialectic[22] of high taste (the autonomous values of art) and popular taste (the functions and effects of mass consumption) were thus confronted with a third party—the critical-subversive and emancipatory potential of the neo-avant-garde, which was nomadically traversing both systems—the high and the popular—of Modernist art, relativising their boundaries, deemed to be unconditional and impregnable at the time.

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[21] Charles Harrison, "Introduction," in *Art & Language: Text zum Phänomen Kunst und Sprache*, Cologne: Verlag M. DuMont Schauberg, 1972, 14.

[22] *Cf.* the exhibition concept in *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture*, eds. Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1990 and Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996.

Modernism and the Neo-avant-garde: Argan's Project Theory

The relationship of Modernism and the neo-avant-garde may also be noted in Italian art historian Giulio Carlo Argan's theory of "the modern project." As a leftist intellectual writing in the European context, he recognised the emancipatory social potential of an innovative artistic practice that had traded its imaginary creative autonomy for the context of real social antagonisms. Unlike American conceptions of high modernism (Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg, Michael Fried), in Western Europe high modernism had no dominant canonical current; instead, the differences between various artistic modernisms were established in terms of political differences and their implementations in the then contemporary artworlds.

For Argan, it was important to critically re-examine the conditions of the relationship between art and society. In his view, the basic *dispositif* of modernism was established around the concept of the project of a critical and exploratory art within a neo-capitalist system that enslaved and alienated the individual. The dialectic of the individual (liberal) and the collective (social) is essential in his thinking. The modern project denotes plans, visions, projections, and anticipations of an emancipatory transformation of society and art. The modern project is associated with critical approaches to the notions of social, technical, and artistic progress in the name of social liberation. The project of art is characterised by participation in the social event. Therefore the artistic project is opposed to social passivity:

> Just as it once discovered in the object the immobile structure of the objective world, today art is discovering in the project the mobile structure of existence. The project, which art must furnish with a methodological model, finally constitutes a manoeuvring defence of social, historical life in its perennial conflict with eventuality and chance.[23]

By positing art as a project, Argan takes art itself into a complex and multifaceted fight for actualising human life in the modern world. Therefore, artistic projecting is the opposite from as well as an alternative to technological project-

[23]   Đulio Karlo Argan (Giulio Carlo Argan), "Projekt i sudbina" (Project and Destiny, 1964), in: *Studije o modernoj umetnosti* (Studies in Modern Art), Belgrade: Nolit, 1982, 79. Italian original: C. G. Argan, "Progetto e destino," in *Progetto e destino*, Milan: Il saggiatore, 1965, 9-74.

ing *qua* programming, i.e. controlling alienated living in liberal neo-capitalism. In Arganian thinking, a liberal aesthetic and artistic liberation from the non-optical in the work is insufficient; art should instead be viewed as a domain of sociality and, therefore of the social struggle for human liberation and genuine emancipation. The target of his discourse is the technocratic and market alienation of neo-capitalist neoliberalism.

Argan developed his theoretical position by linking critical Western Marxism with an existentialist Sartrean examination of forms of life and the modernist trust in the potentiality of art as a *dispositif* of emancipation. In Argan's view, the survival of art in tomorrow's world hinges on the project, making the art of today conditioned by the art, culture, and society of tomorrow. In this respect, he is quite close to the neo-avant-garde way of thinking. Opposed to "market fashions", Argan offers the conception of a political change in art as an important factor in social emancipation. Rather than privileging the immanence of artistic form, Argan advocates anti-form (Informalism: Lucio Fontana, Alberto Burri) and art beyond the borders of artistic disciplines (post-Informalist art: Piero Manzoni, Enrico Castellani), to point to the place of the work or act of art

in a web of antagonistic social relations. According to Argan, art that acquires *an exploratory character*[24] initiates the passage from the work into performing practices and productions that provoke or even change forms of modern life amid alienated consumption.

Modernism and the Neo-avant-garde: Multiple Modernities

Beyond the Western context, the term "neo-avant-garde" signifies complex processes of artistic subversion and a critique of locally dominant modernisms, i.e. alter-modernisms. These are manifestations of modernisation "beyond the cultural-geographic sphere" of Western Europe and the United States. Alter-modernisms may denote various geographical modernities and modernisms that occurred in the specific contexts of colonial or real-socialist societies, away from direct or profound impacts of Western liberal modernism's hegemonies.

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[24] Đulio Karlo Argan [Giulio Carlo Argan], "Umetnost kao istraživanje" [Art as Exploration, 1965], in *Studije o modernoj umetnosti,* 153–160. Italian original: G. C. Argan, "Arte come ricerca," in *Arte in Europa: scritti di storia dell'arte in onore di Edoardo Arslan*, Milano, 1966, 3-8.

Alter-modernisms differ from Western international modernism. In local environments, certain alter-modernisms become hegemonic centres of artistic influences, while others become their peripheral followers. In relation to the notions of "global modernity" as a multiplicity of alter-modernisms, Western modernity and modernism are viewed only as one possible instance of modernisation. That is why one speaks of "multiple modernisations" or "multiple modernisms": "This is seen to be indicated by the move away from an idea of the singularity of modernity, based on more traditional, non-linear, historical understandings, to discussions about the multiplicity of *modernities*."[25]

Destabilising "unitary" or "holistic" modernism led from asking "How to periodise unitary and universal modernism?" to asking how and why modernism took place and under what social, cultural, and artistic conditions. Furthermore, the concept of theoretical reflection on multiple modernities and multiple modernisms stems from three theoretical models that question unitary and universal Western modernism:

1. postcolonial studies, which project notions of modernity and modernisms in the Third World whilst "avoiding Euro-centrism"[26]—the colonial societies of Asia, Africa, South America, and the Pacific islands;
2. socialist and post-socialist studies, that address modernity and modernisms in the real-socialist societies of Europe and beyond, highlighting asymmetries with Western modernism—the so-called Second World societies;
3. the humanities and social studies, above all art-history studies,[27] led by concepts from the Spatial Turn.

The concept of horizontal or geographical distinctions in modernism is notable in authors working outside of the European context (China, the Arab world, South-American cultures), as well as in some European theorists of art. For instance, British art theorist Paul Wood's discussion of conceptual art may be read in terms of a horizontal distinction between Western and other modernisms:

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25 Gurminder K. Bhambra, "Introduction: Postcolonialism, Sociology, and the Politics of Knowledge Production," in *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*, New York: Palgrave, 2009, 5.

26 Gurminder K. Bhambra, "From Modernization to Multiple Modernities: Eurocentrism *redux*," in *Ibid.*, 56.

27 Piotr Piotrowski, "On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History," *Umèni / Art: Journal of the Institute for Art History,* Prague, 56 (2008): 378–83.

> [...] "conceptualism" takes on a double identity. "Analytical" conceptual art gets downgraded as the art of white male rationalists, mired in the very modernism they sought to critique. The expanded history, on the other hand, begins to excavate a huge array of artists, men and women alike, deemed to have been working in a "conceptualist" manner from the 1950s onwards, on a range of emancipatory themes ranging from imperialism to personal identity in far-flung places from Latin America to Japan, from Aboriginal Australia to Russia.[28]

This shows that in alter-modernisms, different neo-avant-gardes are established, too. For instance, neo-avant-gardes working in alter-modernist contexts are characterised by critiques of racial, gender, and class identities, as well as Western economic or cultural imperialism (Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, Antonio Dias, M. F. Husain, Wang Jin).

Socialist Modernism and Neo-avant-gardes: Permanent Transitions

The notions of the Western capitalist, i.e. liberal concept of modernisation, developed from modernity to modernism, were confronted by those of revolutionary communist modernisation in the countries of real socialism (i.e., the Second World). The primary communist modernisation was based on a revolutionary and anti-liberal ideology of modernisation. Above all, it concerned the urbanisation and industrialisation of the underdeveloped Russian Empire in the form of the Soviet Union.

One Leninist slogan ran as follows: "Industrialisation + Electrification = Communism." The slogan may be explained by reference to Lenin's programmatic speech about the overcoming of Russia's industrial backwardness:

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> Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country. Otherwise the country will remain a small-peasant country, and we must clearly realize that. [...] Only when the country has been electrified, and industry, agriculture and transport have been placed on the technical basis of modern large-scale industry, only then shall we be fully victorious.[29]

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28 Paul Wood, "Approaching Conceptual Art," in *Conceptual Art*, London: Tate Publishing, 2002, 9.

29 "Vladimir Lenin, "Report on the Work of the Council of the People's Commissars. December 22, 1920," http://soviethistory.macalester.edu/index.php?page=subject&SubjectID=19

In the Soviet context, modernisation determined industrial and economic development, associated with realising the ideal of the "class struggle." But in terms of aesthetics and art, modernisation ranged from radical avant-garde projects (Cubo-futurism, Suprematism, Constructivism) in the early days of the revolution to the canonisation of socialist realism as a stable expression of modern revolutionary and didactic creativity. The ideal of modern art in terms of modern realism was established as the canonised ideal. For instance, Leon Trotsky defined revolutionary realist art in the following way:

> When one speaks of revolutionary art, two kinds of artistic phenomena are meant: the works whose themes reflect the Revolution, and the works which are not connected with the Revolution in theme, but are thoroughly imbued with it, and are colored by the new consciousness arising out of the Revolution.[30]

Trotsky's understanding of the revolution was in terms of "the permanent revolution."[31] One might understand it as a radical and permanent modernisation, passing through constant transitions toward the universal and geographically global communist society of the future. Moving from an avant-garde to a revolutionary and then to a socialist-realist modernisation of art meant creating a specific modern expression serving the party and the state.

Then, in the 1950s and 1960s, the movement from socialist realism to socialist modernism marked the constitution of a hegemonic artistic pattern in Eastern Europe. Socialist modernism pointed to the potentiality of a liberal-oriented creation of abstract—*qua* Western—artistic forms and, at the same time, to a symbolic or topical interpretation of such forms, articulated by the party. The liberalisation of socialist realism in favour of socialist modernism enabled the establishment of Eastern European socialist modernism as a bureaucratised and institutionalised art in state socialism.

21electric&Year=1921, accessed: 3 April 2014.

[30] Leon Trotsky, "Revolutionary and Socialist Art" (1924), in *Literature and Revolution*, London: Haymarket Books 2000, 123.

[31] Leon Trotsky, "What Did the Theory of the Permanent Revolution Look Like in Practice?," in *The Permanent Revolution, and Results and Prospects*, Seattle: Red Letter Press, 2010, 231–52.

The emergence of the neo-avant-garde in Eastern Europe was a critique of the link between socialist realism as a revolutionary art and the phenomenon of socialist modernism[32] as the art of a bureaucratised post-revolutionary state. Eastern European neo-avant-garde practices[33] were motivated by seeking to establish an "alternative artistic space" or alternative artworlds. Alternative spaces were outside of the bureaucratically led institutions of socialist realism and modernism. Alternative spaces were "dark zones" within tightly controlled societies with one-dimensional state programmes of supporting and surveying culture and art.

Alternative artistic space might also be termed "the second public sphere."[34] In Eastern Europe, in the domain of culture, neo-avant-garde artistic practices took place outside the official state public sphere, in spaces where privacy was territorialised as public space (from the studio to the commune). Eastern European neo-avant-garde artists created alternative institutions, such as exhibitions and theatre plays, in private apartments or studios, founded communes on the principles of self-organising and direct democracy, published so-called *samizdat* periodicals and books in small print runs. Also, Eastern European neo-avant-gardes occupied socially indeterminate spaces that were meant for youth culture, student cultural institutions, as well as amateur cultural institutions (for instance, photo and film clubs), which in socialist societies had state support as a matter of policy.

Eastern European neo-avant-garde artists built their productions by moving nomadically through various art disciplines (literature, theatre, music, film, fine arts). They produced open and multimedia works of art (happenings, performances, installations, artists' books) that represented generational, gender, and cosmopolitan identities geared toward stepping out of closed societies. In the collectivist cultural order of real and self-managed socialism in Eastern

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[32]   Ješa Denegri, "Inside or Outside *Socialist Modernism*? Radical Views on the Yugoslav Art Scene, 1950–1970," in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991*, eds. Dubravka Đurić and Miško Šuvaković, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003, 170–208.

[33]   Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, London: Reaktion Books, 2009.

[34]   The term was introduced by performing arts theorists Adam Czirak and Katalin Cseh in the conference "Performing Arts in the Second Public Sphere" held at the Freie Universität Berlin, on 9–11 May 2014.

Europe and in contrast to the pronounced individualism of their Western colleagues, Eastern-European neo-avant-garde artists worked with *dialectical differences halfway* between liberal individualism and self-organised collectivism. Noteworthy examples of Eastern-European neo-avant-garde practices certainly include the theatre experiments of Polish director Tadeusz Kantor and multimedia artist Józef Rabakowski, those of Czech visual poets and performers (Milan Knižák, Jiři Valoch, Jiři Kovanda), the Slovenian OHO group, the Croatian group Gorgona, Hungarian experimental artists Miklós Erdélyi and Támas Szentjóby, Serbian composer Vladan Radovanović, and Yugoslav author Bora Ćosić.

Conclusion: Difference / Dialectics

My intent in this article was to point to the hybrid complexity of modern and modernist phenomena in relation to the criteria of the *politics of time* (dialectic historicisation) and *politics of space* (geographic difference). In relation to every contemporaneity that has occurred or is occurring at different times and in different places, the modern and modernism required different conceptualisations of "modernisation" and different conceptualisations of a critical response to the transition of modernisation practices from the margins of society to its hegemonic centre, both internationally and locally.

Ian McLean*

Modernism without Borders

This disorientation of a world civilization is hardly new to us today. In 1962 Ricoeur argued that to survive in it each culture must be grounded in its own indigenous tradition; otherwise this "civilization" would be domination pure and simple. Similarly, in our own time Jürgen Habermas has argued that the modern West, to restore its identity, must critically appropriate its tradition—the very project of Enlightenment that led to this 'universal civilization' in the first place. Allegories of hope, these two readings seem early and late symptoms of our own postmodern present, a moment when the West, its limit apparently broached by an all but global capital has begun to recycle its own historical episodes as styles together with its appropriated images of exotica (of domesticated otherness) in a culture of nostalgia and pastiche—in a culture of implosion, "the internal violence of a saturated whole."[1]
Hal Foster, 1985

The imperialist era is over but its culture of modernism again holds our interest. The new postcolonial arrangements of power have left us wondering about a possible non-Western history of modernism and what it might mean. In this revisionism, how do we distinguish one modernism from the other? In the main, this is a question of epistemology. While the old imperialist modernism might not yet be an entirely foreign country—it too had much to say about capitalism and globalism—the space and tempo of the world has changed radically in the heterogenous order of postcolonialism. Globalism and capitalism now ap-

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[1]   Hal Foster, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art," *October,* 34/Autumn (1985), 45-70 at 69.

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pear differently. "The distinct colours of the imperialist map of the world have merged and blended", said Hardt and Negri, and today, we must learn to decipher the "rainbow glow" of postcolonial globalism.[2] This is why, in the 1960s, mapmakers redrew the world, giving it a completely new look.

However, the postcolonial remapping of the artworld is taking longer. In 1997 Okwui Enwezor hoped that those contemporary artists who are "mobile and itinerant", unattached to national identity or other bordered projects, "could serve as primers for mapping new incarnations of the world".[3] Since then new artworld mappings have begun to appear under the name of "the contemporary".[4] Terry Smith, its first substantial cartographer, insists that its epistemological frame should not be reformulated in terms of modernism: "Classic conceptions of modernity and modernism", he warns, "cannot be stretched and patched to carry this degree of spinout."[5] Instead of the clear differential of the Western metropolitan mainstream and its peripheral eddies that structured modernism, he argues (like many others) for a wholly new post-Western epistemology capable of delineating the heterogeneous borderlessness of the contemporary.

This new epistemology is re-ordering the world to such an extent that even the past now appears differently. For example, we see more clearly the modernisms of those who had been othered by the discourse of Western modernism. On the other side, those with the most investment in Western modernism—the major museums of modern art—are seizing the opportunity to recast its racist Western-centric discourse of cruel otherings into a happy inclusive multi-cultural carnival that opens to the postcolonial future.[6] This seductive redeeming revisionism conceals more than it reveals. A good example is the radical rehang at the Pompidou Centre's Musée National d'Art Moderne's (MNAM), an ambitious project called *Modernités Plurielles 1905-1970*, which opened in 2013. In the company of

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2   Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000 at xiii.

3   Okwui Enwezor, "Introduction," *Trade Routes: History and Geography: 2nd Johannesburg Biennale 1997*, Johannsberg and Den Haag: Greater Johannsberg Metropolitan Council and Prince Claus Fund, 1997a, 7-12 at 12, 7.

4   Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.

5   Terry Smith, "Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity," *Critical Inquiry,* 32/4, Summer (2006), 681-707 at 706.

6   For example, see Catherine Greiner, "An Upside Down World?," in *Multiple Modernities 1905-1970*, ed. Catherine Greiner, Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2013, 14-31 at 15-18.

familiar and unfamiliar Western modernist works, it shows how a good range of non-Western artists engaged with the modernity of imperialism, as if, surprise, a new world of modernism had suddenly been discovered (more than 1000 works from 41 countries). Yet this rehang has not changed one defining aspect of the old modernism: indigenous art only appears in the guise of the primitive and never as modernism. Even in this new redeeming revision of global modernism, indigenous art is condemned to only (dis)appear as the primitive other. Can modernism appear without primitivism?

Primitivism and the End of Modernism

Primitivism has in some form been a trope in many if not all cultures well before it was made into a science in the late nineteenth century. So it should be no surprise that while the anthropological inventors of this science had discredited it by the mid-twentieth century—thus leaving modernism without a credible leg to stand on—primitivism remained a potent artworld trope. For example, in their postmodernist critique of William Rubin's *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* exhibition, Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss and Thomas McEvilley seemed like a cheer squad for the old surrealist days, when, as a figure of negation, primitivism provided a mythic justification, as well as much needed torque, for an already waning modernism.[7] According to them, Rubin's failure was the insipidness of his primitivism: his whitewashing of the primitive with the aesthetic gloss of modernism had denuded it of its subversive potential.

Foster, however, did intuit a connection between the simultaneous crises in primitivism and modernism evident in Rubin's exhibition. Despite being about beginnings—Rubin displayed classic examples of Western modernism against their supposed indigenous sources—the exhibition had Foster musing about endings. Feeling caught between "the ruins of (mostly) dead cultures", both "tribal" and "modern", he couldn't help thinking that "against its own intentions, the show signaled a potentially postmodern, post-tribal present", to the point, that "this present seemed all but posthistorical."[8] If such complex thoughts left Foster adrift between the twilight of a once powerful but flawed

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[7] Foster, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art"; Rosalind Krauss, "Preying on 'Primitivism'," *Art & Text*, 17 (1985), 58-62; Thomas Mcevilley, "Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief," *Art Forum*, November (1984), 54-60.

[8] Foster, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art," at 55.

civilization and a vague premonition of a dawning postmodern world in which the critical negations of the other might yet save us, he also sensed a dawning globalism in which the "politics of otherness" by which the West knows itself "had reached its limit". Perhaps, he suggested, modernism—which he (like nearly everyone then) equated with the Western avant-garde—had done itself in, devoured by the agenda of its own offspring, "global capital".[9]

A more likely culprit emerged around this time when postcolonial critics focused on the agency of those that Western modernism had othered, and their hybrid relations in the contact zones of global empires. This postcolonal critique established the ground for the new epistemology of "the contemporary" that came fully into view in the new millennium. Hardt and Negri grasped its epistemological significance in their description of it as a "passage from the dialectic opposition [of modernity] to the management of hybridities [of global modernity]".[10] This is the blueprint for *Modernités Plurielles*, which aims to recalibrate modernism in Hardt and Negri's image of "*decentred* and *deterritorializing* [...] hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges",[11] even if it means ignoring their historical analysis. Its curator, Catherine Greiner, dubbed modernism an "art without borders", a time when "art became globalized to a truly extraordinary degree".[12] Why do modernism and contemporary art now appear in this borderless way? Is it because the most striking feature of the twilight of modernism is the withering of its otherings—that "there is no longer an outside"?[13] Or, in the penumbra of this disappearance, are we unable to see that invisibility which now organizes thought?

Hardt and Negri's influential diagnosis was published shortly before 911. Shortly after 911, in 2003, Arif Dirlik saw a very different landscape, though one that equally challenged "modernity's ways of knowing".[14] His claim that "global modernity unifies and divides the globe in new ways"[15] might echo Hardt and Ne-

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9   *Ibid.*, at 69. Hal Foster, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art," *October,* 34/Autumn (1985), 45-70 at 69.

10   Hardt, *Empire* at 203.

11   *Ibid.*, at xii.

12   Greiner, "An Upside -Down World?," at 26-27.

13   Hardt, *Empire* at xii.

14   *Ibid.*, at 189.

15   Arif Dirlik, "Global Modernity? Modernity in an Age of Global Capitalism," *European Journal of Social Theory,* 6/3 (2003), 275-92 at 278.

gri's qualification that what "seems to be" the undifferentiated "smooth world" of globalism is really "a world defined by new and complex regimes of differentiation and homogenization",[16] but Dirlik's emphasis is very different. He saw a new raft of recalcitrant otherings that defiantly insist on, rather than disguise, their differences:

> [...] not the dissolution of cultural essentialism but the hardening of cultural boundaries that accompanied the revival of cultural fundamentalisms around the globe [...] rather than disappear, they have been proliferating, as new claims to ethnic and cultural identity produce demands for new sovereignties.[17]

The artworld also has become a place of proliferating differences, but instead of cleaving the world into alterities, they appear, like Hardt and Negri's smooth globalism, as multiple currents and differences for crossing—a state of being that Greiner's revisionist account of modernism backdates to the age of imperialism. Yet, like an uncanny reminder of some forgotten transgression, an unreconstructed primitivism interrupts the display (as well as the catalogue essays) of *Modernités Plurielles*, as if the revision of modernism from the perspective of the contemporary need not touch indigenous art. Even here, as the former differences between the West and the Rest are loosened, indigenous art remains outside, its contemporaneity unseen.

Modernity and Modernism

The real politics of modernity took shape as European states became world powers, enabling them to literally go out into the world and mix it up in unprecedented ways. However, it was metaphysics that made modernity a figure of the universal and Europe its home. Enwezor aptly calls this metaphysics Westernism—Stuart Hall had earlier dubbed it "the West and the Rest"—though we still generally know it as modernism.[18]

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[16]   *Ibid.*, 277.

[17]   Hardt, *Empire* at xiii.

[18]   Stuart Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power," in *The Formations of Modernity: Understanding Modern Societies an Introduction Book 1 (Introduction to Sociology)*, eds. Stuart Hall, and Bram Gieben, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, 276-89. Okwui Enwezor defined "Westernism" as the West's "insistence on the total adoption and observation of its norms and concepts" as "the only viable idea of social, political, and cultural legitimacy from which all modern subjectivities are seen to emerge." Okwui Enwezor, 'The Black Box,'

Like all ideas, modernity appears in terms of its otherings. The modern is made (visible) through imagining the unmodern: *modernism maps the imaginary borders of the modern and unmodern*. In the process of providing a rich field of otherings through which Western modernity appeared, Western imperialism established a dense network of relations across the planet in which the most incommensurable differences that had accumulated over the ages were, by the momentum of transculturation, forced into translation. In 1848, in the first glimmer of Western modernism as a distinctive sensibility of this new age of industrialization and world empires, Marx and Engels (in the Communist Manifesto) had a compelling vision of its consequences: a decentred interconnected smooth globalism of strangers and diasporas in which the ground of all existing socialities and patterns of thinking are "swept away". They even envisaged a post-ethnic world and "world literature". Modernity's (i.e. capitalism's) "cosmopolitan character to production and consumption", they wrote, draws "all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization". For Marx and Engels, such is the power of modernity that even the indigenous, the most barbarian, are drawn into it.

Like Marx and Engels, Charles Baudelaire—who at this time was also giving shape to this new sensibility, which he called *modernité*—was particularly interested in the potential de-borderings of the sharp differences of gender, race and class that organized knowledge in the nineteenth century. They were the ground that he turned in order to spinout his irony, thus establishing that modernism would be a border poetics. Where is the indigenous in his ironic formulations? And what are its movements in the age of imperialism?

Border Poetics at the Dawn of Modernism

Because it is a border poetics, modernism is at its sharpest in the ironic mode, twisting the inside out and the outside in. Exemplary in this regard is Negritude, the African surrealist movement that emerged in Paris during the 1930s, when Westernism was mainstream. As if recognizing that Westernism's otherings were its Achilles Heel, these black colonial poets inverted modernity's slur of "Negro" into the rallying cry of "Negritude," thereby plucking modernism from its Western tongue and making it their own: a black post-Western modernism. It

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Documenta 11 Platform 5: Exhibition Catalogue, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002, 42-55 at 46.

inspired a generation of African modernists in the wake of postcolonial national independence.[19] An example is the incoming Director of the National Theatre in postcolonial Kampala in 1967, the Ugandan poet Okot p'Bitek. Replacing the British Council's grand piano with an indigenous drum post, he reportedly exclaimed: "Our national instrument is not the piano—tinkle, tinkle, tinkle—but the drum—boom, boom, boom!"[20] This ironic twisting of a colonizing primitivism into anti-colonial indigenism effectively opened to the African indigene, or more accurately, the new Ugandan citizen, what colonial modernity had previously prohibited: the spectre of an African modernism.

If the lens of modernity is better focused through the inverted mirror of its otherings then the most knowing modernists are its imaginary unmoderns, those made modern negatively. Arguably (and Franz Fanon argued this most powerfully) they most deeply feel, in their very bodies, modernity's epistemological cuts—though even some who were made modern positively, like Baudelaire, had ears for its dialectic beat. Raised in the lap of bourgeois privilege, his agitated soul preferred the other side. In his treatise on the journalistic sketcher Constantin Guys, *The Painter of Modern Life* (1860)—modernism's first manifesto—the taste of his declared hero of *modernité* is compared to that of "savages", children and women. However, the cartographers of Westernism quietly substitute Guys with his follower, Manet (as did the curators of *Modernités Plurielles*[21]), as if correcting a misreading that Baudelaire had made in his surveys of the borderlands. They also tend to overlook Baudelaire's enthusiasm for the 1855 *Exposition Universelle*, as if it was merely some fanciful monster that his fervid imagination had sketched in the margin of his surveys.

The 1855 *Exposition* was the first attempt to exhibit world art and industry in Paris. Regularly thrown up in Europe's capitals between 1850 and 1950, these world expositions proved readymade haunts for the aspiring *flâneur* and connoisseurs of *modernité*. If now they have a bad name as spectacles of imperial-

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[19] See Elizabeth Harney, *In Senghor's Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-Garde in Senegal, 1960-1995*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

[20] Cited in Sidney Littlefied Kasfir, *Contemporary African Art*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1999, at 166.

[21] See Michel Gauthier, "A Brief History of Modernism," in *Multiple Modernities 1905-1970*, ed. Catherine Greiner, Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2013, 32-34 at 32.

"Civilisation"

This picture represents a few natives who have been employed at shearing time on some station and taken out their wages in "plenty good fellow clothes" and made themselves "along a white fellow well" The Australian natives are very fond of copying white men's manners in dress when they can manage to do so.
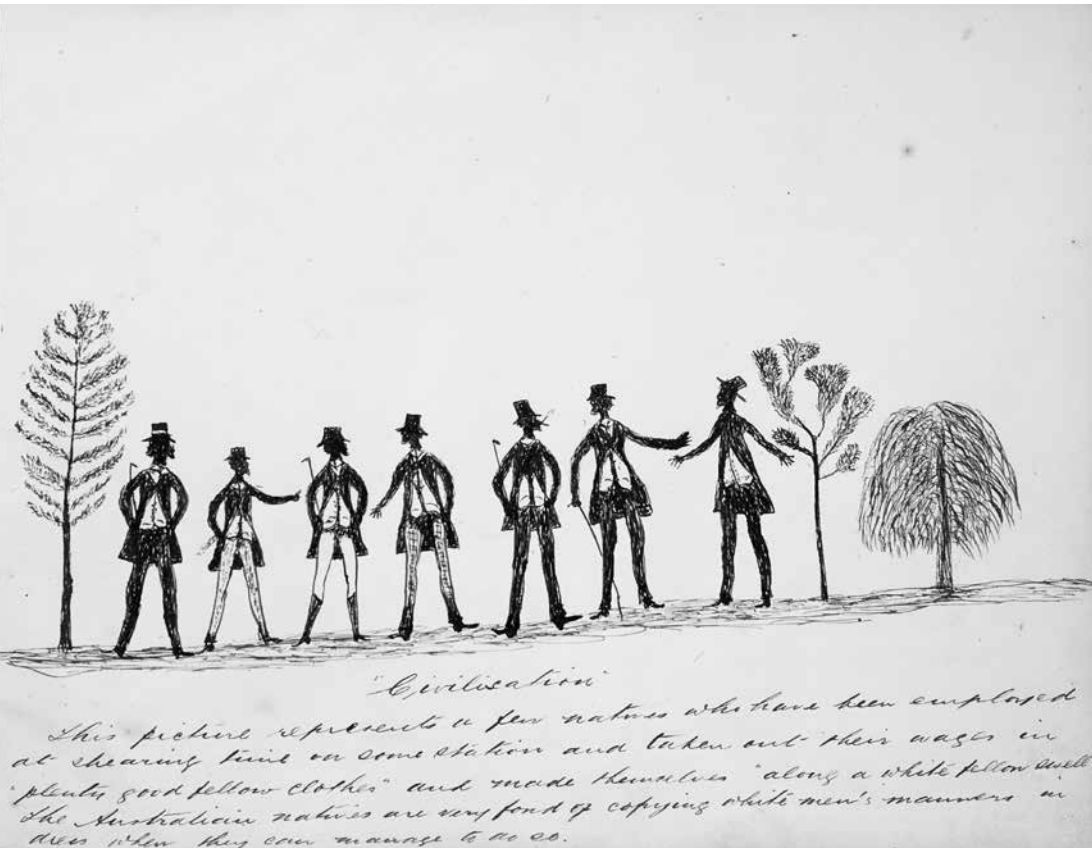
Tommy McRae, *Civilisation* (1986.0052.0001)
Published with the permission of
The National Museum of Australia.

ism, Baudelaire saw in them "the divine grace of cosmopolitanism".[22] While the emphasis of these expositions was the innovations of modern industry, Baudelaire, who despaired of this "americanization" of taste (as he dubbed it), was in 1855 most enchanted by the Chinese pavilion. He either did not see or felt no need to comment on the displays of indigenous art, which were in the halls of industry amongst the exhibits of various colonies. Perhaps his distaste of Americanization kept him away from this part of the Exposition.

[22]   Charles Baudelaire, "The Exposition Universelle 1855," in *Art in Paris 1845-1862: Salons and Other Exhibitions Reviewed by Charles Baudelaire*, ed. Jonathan Mayne, London: Phaidon, 1965, 121-43 at 122.

Baudelaire might have pronounced the taste of unmodern savages and other afi-
cionados of fashion a sophisticated *modernité*—this is the ironic way of modern-
ism's primitivism—but he is silent on the taste of those reformed or modernized
"savages" who, like his "black Venus" and mistress Jeanne Duval, had crossed
to his side. Take the example of Tommy McRae's pen and ink drawing titled
Civilization, made sometime in the latter decades of the nineteenth-century on
the Australian frontier. Baudelaire suggested that the most cosmopolitan critics
lived in these "faraway countries" that the exposition had folded into Paris.[23]
If he were such a critic on the Australian frontier, would he have recognized in
Civilization the *modernité* that he ascribed to Guys?[24]

Civilization depicts seven dandies, dapper and dressed to the nines—a favourite
Baudelairean subject—though these dandies are all black. McRae was born into
a hunter gather economy near the present-day Australian city of Albury, at about
the same time that Manet was born into a very advantaged household in Paris.
Such is the throw of the dice. The frontier, that unforgiving hard cutting edge of
modernity, decimated McRae's people at the same that young Baudelaire was
finding his way around that softer contact zone of bohemian Paris. With his in-
heritance swept away—though for different reasons than Baudelaire's—McRae
was pushed into the modern pastoral industry that provided raw material for
England's wool mills. His drawing of the good times after shearing, cashed up
and ready for the perks of civilization, has an ironic note typical of modernism
as it puts into play the signs of modernity and its otherings. McRae may have ex-
perienced the hard edge of modernity, but he depicted its softer fraying borders
of transculturation.

While McRae's art has always attracted interest, it has been as curios and not
as examples of modernism. Such hybrid art forms from the frontiers of moder-
nity did not enter the frame of modernism until *Magiciens de la terre*, the ex-
hibition curated in 1989 by Jean-Hubert Martin, then Director of MNAM. At the

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[23]   Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne,
London: Phaidon, 1995 at 32-33.

[24]   I recently addressed this question in a much fuller way: Ian Mclean, "The Mysterious Cor-
respondence between Charles Baudelaire and Tommy McRae: Reimagining Modernism in
Austalia as a Contact Zone," *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Art,* 13 (2013), 91-103.
Ian Mclean, "The Mysterious Corresspondence between Charles Baudelaire and Tommy
McRae: Reimagining Modernism in Austalia as a Contact Zone," *Australia and New Zea-
land Journal of Art,* 13 (2013), 91-103.

time, *Magiciens'* display of multiple modernisms from across the world seemed inconclusive. Poorly attended, scathing reviews and victim of rumour and innuendo, Martin lost his job. Now the most discussed exhibition of the late twentieth century, it is remembered for its foretaste of the borderless globalism that MNAM now seeks to make, in *Modernités Plurielles*, the normative condition of modernism.

In 1989 *Magiciens* "was perceived by many […] as […] indistinguishable from the universal expositions of the last century". However its critics were not thinking of its Baudelairean pedigree—which could be traced rather directly through Martin's enthusiasm for surrealism—but that it was "an act of 'colonialism'".[25] Is this why indigenous art generally remains taboo in the contemporary unless retailored in the dress of the diaspora? Despite it getting a berth in *Magiciens* as well as in Smith's mapping of the contemporary, it remains the last unmodern. It is not just its invisibility (its disappearance as the primitive other) in *Modernités Plurielles*. You will not find it in other influential museums making concerted efforts to globalize their content, such as Tate Modern or the Guggenheim and MoMA, as if its presence is taboo, blasphemy.[26] Where then is indigenous art located in the smooth veneer of postcolonial globalism?

Modernism without Borders: Enwezor's Global Modernism

Enwezor announced his prime objective in the opening sentences of his editorial for the first issue of the journal for African contemporary art, *Nka* (which he founded in 1994): to neutralize "the specious assertion by many in Western art establishments, that there is really, no such thing as modern art from Africa."[27] To achieve this he developed a postcolonial theory of modernity that outflanked primitivism and at the same time secured the place of African art in the contemporary artworld so that it is not just a fixture of the African scene but also a *poetics*, by which he means a universal expression that inherits the historical promise of modernity. His task, and indeed his great achievement as a curator,

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25 *Ibid.*

26 There is the rare exception that proves the rule, such as two paintings by Emile Kame Kngwarrey being included in MoMA's exhibition *On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century*, in 2011.

27 Okwui Enwezor, "Redrawing the Boundaries: Towards a New African Art Discourse," *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art*, 1 (1994), 3-7 at 3-4.

has been to thwart what he called: "the current [artworld] skepticism toward a globalized reception of contemporary artistic practices from far-flung places with little historical proximity to the ideas transmitted from within the legacy of the Western historical avant-garde."[28]

In seeking to inscribe African art into the Western canon, Enwezor necessarily brings into question the conventional Westernism of modernism, including accounts of its origins and ends. Thus, as well as setting the future agenda of contemporary art Enwezor also recalibrates its past, as if there can be no new future without a new past. In this respect the scope of his thinking makes him one of the most visionary curators working today. However, much like Rasheed Araeen who in many ways precedes him, he at the same time leaves untouched some of modernism's assumptions.[29]

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[28] Okwui Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition," in *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, eds. Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee, Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, 207-34 at 222.

[29] Araeen's determined attack on the Eurocentrism of Western modernist discourse was never anti-modernist. Instead he proposed a revisionist modernism that in many ways foreshadowed current notions of multiple modernisms, in which modernism is recognized as a global rather than purely Western phenomenon. Ahead of his time, Araeen's call for Third World and black European and diaspora modernists to be given equal recognition with Western modernism is now becoming policy in mainstream Western museums of contemporary art. However, his enthusiasm for non-Western art that engages in the discourse of Western modernism has difficulty accommodating non-Western art that is indifferent to this engagement. Like many critics of *Magicians of the Earth*—an exhibition in which he had work—he criticized its focus on contemporary non-Western art that played to this cultural difference. "Why," he asked, "is there such an obsession with so-called primitive societies?' And why, he also asked, is Western "folk" or "traditional" art ignored, "as if Western culture alone has passed from one historical period to another"? (Rasheed Araeen, "Our Bauhaus Others' Mudhouse," reprinted in Lucy Steeds et al, *Making art global (part 2): 'Magiciens de la Terre' 1989*, London: Afterall Books, 2013, at 239, 245.) While Araeen fully understands that no culture is outside modernity, his framing of these questions in this way tends to endorse the binary thinking of Western modernity. This is also evident in Araeen's skepticism of non-Western art that didn't engage with Western modernism. He argued it was a new form of primitivism designed to sideline non-Western modernism, and a "celebration of cultural difference" that "masks the exploitation and oppression of a people". (Rasheed Araeen, "Come What May: Beyond the Emperor's New Clothes," in *Complex Entanglements: Art, Globalisation and Cultural Difference,* ed. Nikos Papastergiadis, London: Rivers Oram Press, 2003, 135-55, at 136. If this criticism rings true in the promotion of this art, it misses a nuanced understanding of how modernity and modernism appear in the most oppressed Indigenous communities of the world.

A child of postcolonial Africa, Enwezor belongs to that first generation of Africans who crossed the threshold from indigenes beholden to customary law, to citizens subject to the abstract civil law of modern sovereignty as constituted in the nation state. Today only about 5% of the African population is officially counted as indigenous. In this respect Enwezor's acclaimed exhibition, *The Short Century* (2001), which traced the escape of African art from an ethnic indigenous category to a post-ethnic art engaged in global modernity, is autobiographical. He embodies in his very person and thinking, the new postcolonial African order in which words like indigenous, native and tribe are unspeakable relics of colonialism best destroyed in case they contaminate the future.

In his catalogue essay for *The Short Century*, Mahmood Mamdani argues that postcolonial African "nationalism was a struggle to be recognized as a transethnic category,"[30] and would succeed only if it challenged "the idea that we must define political identity, political rights, and political justice first and foremost in relation to indigeneity."[31] In a similar spirit, Enwezor's instinct is that the demonstration of African art's modernism requires it to be unindigenous. If for Enwezor postcolonial African art has a grand narrative, it is one of diaspora not indigenousness. Indigenous art is off Enwezor's radar. It is not that the art of the San or so-called "Bushmen" do not appear in his and Chika Okeke-Agulu's recent survey of African contemporary art[32]—which in its scope is typical of books on African contemporary art—but that Enwezor avoids engaging with Indigenous contemporary art from Australia, New Zealand and North America that for over thirty years has been making claims on the contemporary artworld in the name of postcolonialism. The reason for their invisibility is not just due to his African experience, but is also found in his ambivalent allegiance to the idea of modernity.

132 Like Smith, Enwezor grasps that globalism "marks a radical new condition for the reception of art" (and not just for African art).[33] However, unlike Smith, Enwezor is not in a hurry to ditch the idea of modernism in toto. In this he is closer

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[30] Mahmood Mamdani, "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism," in *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994*, ed. Okwui Enwezor, Munich: Prestel, 2001, 21-27 at 22-23.

[31] *Ibid.*, at 27.

[32] Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art since 1980*, Bologna: Damiani, 2009. Okwui Enwezor, And Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art since 1980*, Bologna: Damiani, 2009.

[33] Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art since 1980*, at 6.

to Nicolas Bourriaud's project to "create a form of modernism for the twenty-first century".[34] This is not at odds with Enwezor's vehement rejection of Westernism and the politics of the nation state.

For Enwezor the project of modernity will remain incomplete until it has moved beyond its otherings—an idea that resonates with the aesthetic premises of Greenberg and Adorno, and also with Jürgen Habermas's notion of the incomplete project of modernity.[35] On these grounds Enwezor takes particular issue with the primitivism that underwrote twentieth-century Western modernism, in which indigenous art, previously invisible in Western art, had gained visibility as a returning figure of the repressed. Thus he does not warm to the postmodernist suggestion, made by Foster (and also Krauss and McEvilley) in the wake of Rubin's *"Primitivism"* exhibition, that "the otherness of the primitive might be thought disruptively," so that it can open "the very field of difference in which the subject emerges—to challenge Western pretenses of sovereignty, supremacy, and self-creation".[36] To give him his due, Foster did not have in mind the resuscitation of "a lost or dead other," which he believed tended to occur in postmodern theory—he named Baudrillard, Deleuze and Derrida—but instead proposed a turn towards "vital others within and without—to affirm their resistance to the white, patriarchal order of Western culture," such as [echoing Baudelaire] "feminists [...] 'minorities,' [...] 'tribal' peoples".[37]

Enwezor is surely right to be suspicious of this burden to perform negation thrust upon the other, whether dead or alive. He prefers to purge the very figure of the other, and especially the indigenous other that had long plagued African art and indeed African humanity. "There are," said Enwezor, "no ancient riverbeds to excavate in order to find continuing traditions [...] there is no need to revivify expired authenticities, nor to mourn the death of autochthonous traditions."[38] Thus he is (as is Foster) particularly dismissive of identity-based discourses as a way to navigate the postcolonial condition of globalism. "Wrong-headed and

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34 Nicolas Bourriaud, "Altermodern," *Altermodern: Tate Triennial*, London: Tate Publishing, 2009, 11-23 at 12.

35 Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity—an Incomplete Project," in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, London: Pluto Press, 1985, 3-15.

36 Foster, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art," at 62, 70. See also Krauss, "Preying on 'Primitivism'".

37 Foster, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art," at 70, 69.

38 Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art since 1980*, at 13.

regressive,"[39] they are "incapable of transcending" the reductive specificity of their cultural and political essentialisms and "aspiring to universal culture." He instead champions the postcolonial art of "decolonization," which "more than just a forlorn daydream" or the longing for some lost identity, has "attached to it, something recognizable in the ideals of modernity: the notion of progress."[40]

This is about as close as Enwezor gets to directly rejecting the figure of the indigene, for generally he ignores it, even if it means accepting that blindness of art history which forecloses indigenous art entirely, as if its place is out of sight in the ethnographic museum. In this respect Indigenous art is not so much an oversight but the absent other that Enwezor must expel in order to make his case for African contemporary art. He excludes indigenousness as a theoretical object, as if the very concept stands in the way of thinking the global. Whether he has completely succeeded in foreclosing it is a moot point, because in the bruises of repression that occasionally discolor his discourse we sometimes glimpse its shadow—as in his scathing criticism, in 1997, of contemporary art that reinvests in "the so-called endangered Bushman."[41] Any sign of nativism seems to strike a raw nerve in Enwezor. Perhaps this echo of the familiar Enlightenment antinomy between indigenous and modern lifeworlds is one reason why the Western artworld has been extraordinarily receptive to his exhibitions, as if he has created the semblance of a post-race criticism without dislodging the deeper metaphysical borders that secure Western hegemony.

Enwezor's theory of the contemporary is now familiar enough: whatever the contemporary artworld's neo-primitive machinations, the real world underwent dramatic transformations in the second half of the twentieth century. In colonial times distant places were elsewhere; now they have collapsed into one networked world in which the "empire's former 'other' [is] visible and present at all times." From this postcolonial space of "terrible nearness" the former colonized "lay claim to the modernized, metropolitan world of empire."[42] This "global modernity," said Enwezor (citing Édouard Glissant), is "essentially a phenomenon

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[39] Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation," at 226.

[40] *Ibid.*, at 225.

[41] Okwui Enwezor, "Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation," *Third Text,* 40/Autumn (1997), 21-40 at 28.

[42] Enwezor, "The Black Box," at 44-45.

of the creolization of culture."[43] "Transnational, transurban, transdiasporic, transcultural practices," he declared, "are transforming the ways in which we understand the world."[44] The artists who inherit this global modernity belong to the "displaced" multitude, as they are best placed to imagine a new cosmopolitan "sovereignty, which in its deterritorialized forms, is no longer defined by the conservative borders of the old nation state scheme" but composed as "a collage of reality from the fragments of collapsing space."[45]

As one of the displaced multitude, Enwezor is also a bricoleur, his theory collaged from fragments of various influential theorists of modernity and the contemporary. In the above quote we glimpse Hardt and Negri's account of transnational globalization referred to earlier. However, Enwezor is more sanguine than Hardt and Negri. He leans towards Habermas's central idea of modernity as an unfinished project—unfinished because reason is yet to realize its freedom in the form of "rational communicative action." In a furious attack on Tate Modern's inaugural hang (in 2000) that included colonial representations of Africa but no African voice, Enwezor suggested that the curators read Habermas: "the entire installation was ahistorical, with no semblance of the critical method of what Habermas calls 'the philosophical discourse of modernity [...] in fact it was marked by a savage act of epistemological and hermeneutic violence."[46]

Rational communicative action, said Habermas, is the active engagement of critical thinking: an "inter-subjective" self-critical reflexivity that empowers "the interpretative accomplishments of the participants themselves,"[47] as opposed to the passive reiteration of social norms in tradition-bound societies. Closer in spirit to what Enwezor actually envisages are the sort of inter-subjective processes that define Bourriaud's relational aesthetics. They underwrite Enwezor's postcolonial conception of contemporary art and curation. His most influential achievement, *Documenta 11*, was not just about de-Westernizing this "astonish-

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[43]   Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation," at 209.

[44]   Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo and Others, "Introduction," in *Créolité and Creolisation: Documenta 11_Platform3*, eds. Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo and others, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2003, 13-16 at 16.

[45]   Enwezor, "The Black Box," at 45.

[46]   Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation," at 222.

[47]   Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalisation of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, 2 vols., 1; Boston: Beacon Press, 1984 at 70.

ingly Western institution"[48] but also aimed to "deterritorialize" the experience of art and "redistribute its accumulated cultural capital" through relational practices.[49] Claire Bishop noted that it was the first Documenta to promote the "collectivist, activist and documentary practices" championed by Bourriaud—which take their cue from post-conceptual practices that flowered in the twilight years of modernism just prior to the advent of postmodernism.[50]

Enwezor's attachment to the ideals of modernity is most clearly spelt out in his contribution to Bourriaud's Tate Triennial *Altermodern* (2009), where he locates African contemporary art in a category he calls "Aftermodernity," in contrast to the "Supermodernity" of canonical Westernism. In Hegelian fashion, he argues that African contemporary art is not a postmodernist "rejection of modernity and modernism" but, on the contrary, the result of modernity's "teleological unfolding."[51] In this way Enwezor establishes a bloodline between African and European modernity in which Africa, as the site of *Aftermodernity*, is the ultimate recipient of *Supermodernity's* inheritance after its postcolonial fragmentation—an argument he had made earlier in *The Short Century*.

Enwezor's Hegelian logic means that modernity cannot be disavowed, it can only be worked through. Like Habermas, Enwezor retains a utopian or idealized notion of modernity's potential despite being acutely aware of its failings. The Western system, he complains, continues to maintain its boundaries, between, for example, "tribal and modern," "theocratic [...] and democratic."[52] This boundary maintenance, he says, explains the "double bind" of an avant-garde artworld, which "in its attempt to negotiate both its radicality and normativity"—the perennial ambivalent double-bind of the dialectic—has proved "surprisingly conservative and formal."[53] It might also explain Enwezor's own double bind. His postcolonial theory surprisingly exhibits its own "boundary-

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48   Okwui Enwezor, "Okwui Enwezor—Interview by Pat Binder & Gerhard Haupt" (1997). http://universes-in-universe.de/car/africus/e_enwez.htm (Accessed April 30, 2014.)

49   Okwui Enwezor, "Interview with Okwui Enwezor, Part 1," *BaseNow* (2009). http://www.basenow.net/2009/03/27/interview-with-okwui-enwezor-part-1/ (Accessed May 1, 2014.)

50   Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London: Verso, 2012 at 194.

51   Okwui Enwezor, "Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence," *Altermodern: Tate Triennial*, London: Tate Britain, 2009, 27-40 at 40.

52   Enwezor, "The Black Box," at 47.

53   *Ibid.*, at 46.

maintaining systems" as if he has absorbed more of Habermas than he bargained for. Habermas meticulously constructs a theory of modernity in terms of a dialectic in which "archaic societies [...] present an antithesis to the modern understanding of the world."[54] No wonder indigenous art only had a token presence in Enwezor's postcolonial *Documenta* despite its significant role in postcolonial discourse.[55]

Enwezor's dismissal of indigenousness as a viable modern lifeworld buys into the very trope of primitivism that he disdains, his distinction between diasporic and identity-based discourses reiterating the classical distinction between modernism and primitivism that Habermas recycles. Habermas's sociological evidence for the primitive lifeworld of indigenous societies is sourced from classical anthropological literature that, in tautological fashion, constructs indigenousness in the negative image of modernity as a rational ideal.[56] Such anthropology is cooked and has no place in contemporary accounts of indigenous society. The fieldwork of contemporary anthropologists such as Fred Myers, Howard Morphy and Eric Michaels, the anthropological histories of James Clifford and Nicholas Thomas and the cultural analysis of Marcia Langton, Nikos Papastergiadis and Stephen Muecke—to name just a few—has revealed Indigenous cultures to be dynamic, cosmopolitan, diasporic and transcultural. Their engagements display, as Enwezor claimed of creole and diasporic texts, "the ability to invert and convert the logic of the hegemonic sphere into the symbolic capital of cultural difference."[57] Moreover, in settler colonies most indigenous people suffered massive and often violent dispersals, though usually within rather than without the nation state (thus not meeting the standard definition of diaspora). This led Clifford to conclude that "the older forms of tribal cosmopolitanism [...] are sup-

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54   Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, at 44.

55   There are only two indigenous exhibits in *Documenta 11*, a suite of polaroid chromogenic prints by the Melbourne based Kuku and Erub/Mer artist Destiny Deacon and a collaborative video with fellow Melbourne artist Virginia Fraser, and videos by Ogloolik Isuma Productions, co-founded in 1990 by the American-born Canadian film director Norman Cohn and the Inuit Director Zacharias Kunuk. Both bodies of work had the documentary feel of relational art.

56   For a much closer analysis of Habermas's "neo-primitivism," see Victor Li, *The Neo-Primitivist Turn: Critical Reflections on Alterity, Culture and Modernity*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006 at 153-217.

57   Enwezor, Basualdo et al, "Introduction," at 15.

plemented by more properly diasporic forms."[58] At issue for Enwezor, it would seem, is not the transcultural and diasporic forms of indigenous art (to which he seems blind), but the memories that its very name evokes.

Conclusion

How do these two bookend moments—these early and late symptoms of modernism—one at its dawn and the other at its twilight, help us map the course of this imaginary figure we call "modernism"? If we place Baudelaire at the dawn, he saw himself inhabiting the twilight, contemplating those "great extinct civilizations" in which "a new aristocracy" emerges amongst men "rich in native energy", and focused "on the divine gifts which work and money are unable to bestow". These "dandies", as he called them "all spring from the same womb; they all partake of the same characteristic quality of opposition and revolt ... of combating and destroying triviality." Baudelaire was talking of his fellow bohemians, but he also had in mind their indigenous cousins, "the type of dandy discovered by our traveller in North America": "those tribes which we call 'savage'". In them, and in those other continents of alterity that the Enlightenment and its bourgeois offspring sought to free from the chains of ignorance—such as women and children—he saw not just the fate of Western civilization but also that spirit he dubbed *modernité*.

In the spirit of Baudelaire, avant-garde modernism held dear indigenous art and all that was being swept to oblivion in the currents of modernity. They held it above the tide in the company of their own art, but as repressed objects, fetishes of a lost paradise returned to haunt modernity. In this way they bound indigenous art, in a deep metaphysical sense, to modernism. This left these modernist connoisseurs of the repressed blind to the undertows and eddies where its ideal savages, those quintessential dandies, were busily making their own modernity, warming to its promised sovereignty.

This insight is the starting point of Enwezor's thinking as he seeks to appropriate the project of modernity for Africa, peering from the side-eddies into the mainstream, hungry for its bounty at the very moment that its promise is dis-

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58   James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997 at 254.

appearing before his eyes. Looking at modernity through the lens of its other-ings—in this case African art—he made his major discovery: that African art's redemption required looking beyond Africa, beyond its indigenism, and towards a post-Western (and thus post-indigenist) theory of art—a new epistemological frame that could accommodate both the legacy of Western and African modernisms. But in leaping over indigenism he left it unchanged as a metaphysical construct, thus effectively leaving in place what he wished to move beyond. From here, on the outside, it threatens to pull his reimagining of post-Western modernism back into the mythic frame of Westernism. It is a lesson that critics of indigenous art, including Enwezor, would do well to learn if indigenous art is to be prized from its confines in that promised land of the other—as if a relic we dare not touch for fear of sacrilege—and takes its place in the everyday rough and tumble of not just the contemporary but also, retrospectively, modernism. Otherwise it seems destined to remain in that special place that the metaphysics of modernity constructed for its abode, the *terra incognita* of the unmodern, as if even the contemporary, in all its seamless exteriority, can only appear through what it disappears.

Peng Feng*

Modernism in China: Too Early and Too Late[1]

In his essay "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," Fredric Jameson charts a sequence of movements in Western culture from realism through modernism into postmodernism. He argues that this sequence parallels capitalism's successive development from market capitalism, through monopoly capitalism and imperialism, into multinational or consumer capitalism.[2] Jameson ultimately endorses this progress in Western culture, politics and economy. Could we also find such a sequence in China? Is this sequence really "progress" or is it simply a linear course of events? When we look back on the processes in Chinese culture over the past century, the kind of sequence described above is nowhere to be found. Or, if it can be found, it has already been rewritten, altered, or distorted. In fact, we will discover that, while modernism exists throughout the transformations of twentieth-century Chinese culture, it never arrives on time. Borrowing Lyotard's phrasing, we could say that it always comes either too late or too soon. Modernism, instead of the postmodern in China, "would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*)."[3] Modernism seems to be a specter haunting China. In this essay, I wish to narrate some historical moments of modernism in China and try to grasp this modernist phantom. This phantom is to be found in the arts (though not exclusively). In particular, this essay will focus on visual art.

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1   Thanks to Aleš Erjavec for comments and suggestions, and to Brandon Underwood for polishing the English.

2   Jameson admits, "At any rate, it will also have been clear that my own cultural periodization of the stages of realism, modernism, and postmodernism is both inspired and confirmed by Mandel's tripartite scheme." *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*: Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991, 36.

3   Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, 81.

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1. The Entry of Modernism into China

Modernism as a style or ideology in the arts arrived in China in the 1920s. It emerges simultaneously, or even prior to, realism. This contravenes Jameson's schema. Realism overtakes modernism in the subsequent course of events, and thereby both proves and disproves Jameson's theory.

Lin Fengmian (1900-1991), the founder of Chinese modernist painting, went in 1919 to France to study painting. In the same year, the painter Xu Beihong (1895-1953) made the same journey. In 1920s Parisian modern art was on the rise, while realism had not yet stepped down from the stage of history. For these young men from China, realism was equally new as modern art and modernism. However, the two Chinese newcomers took different artistic paths. Xu studied realist painting, while Lin preferred modernist ones. Lin Fengmian returned to China in 1925 and established an art school in Beijing. By 1928 he had been appointed President of the National Academy of Art in Hangzhou.

Well-known modernist painters such as Wu Guangzhong (1919-2010), Zhu Dequn (1920-2014), and Zhao Wuji (1921-2013) trained at Lin's academy. Modernism in visual arts was the main style and artistic orientation from the mid-1920s to the middle of 1930s. In fact, before Lin brought modernism to China, there were already preludes. For example, Liu Haisu (1896-1994) had visited Japan in 1919, subsequently introducing modernist painters such as Paul Cézanne into China. According to Sullivan's record, from 1920s to 1930s there were several centers of modern art in China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Guangzhou, Wuhan, Wuxi, Quanzhou, Chengdu, and so on.[4] "In 1920 Cheng Jin, a traditional painter who had learned about Western art in Tokyo, gave a series of lectures at the academy of fine art on impressionism, postimpressionism, cubism, fauvism, and futurism."[5]

Xu Beihong returned to China in 1927. His realistic style attracted wide attention. Actually Christian missionaries, such as Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), had brought realist representational painting to China two centuries before, but it was not widely accepted for a number of reasons. One was that the paintings

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[4] Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996, 42-51.

[5] *Ibid.*, 42.

created by Western missionaries were stored, and thus isolated, in the court, unavailable to the public. Their recognition, appreciation and influence were limited. The Chinese public was not yet sufficiently familiar with Western culture nor was it ready to accept realistic painting. The other reason was that European style of realist painting wasn't suitable for the Chinese *literati*'s taste. Let us illustrate this position by a comment on Western painting by Zou Yigui (1686-1772):

> Westerners are skilled in geometry. They make precise measurements of light and shade, foreground and background [...] The images in the pictures are measured with a set square so that they are reduced in size according to distance. People almost want to walk into the houses and walls they have painted. [...] Though meticulously executed, their works are those of craftsmen and cannot be considered as paintings.[6]

Geometric laws whereby objects appear to diminish in size as they recede from the viewers did not cause much excitement among Chinese painters as had been the case in Renaissance Italy. Chinese viewers were not amazed when they saw paintings with this unique capacity for creating illusion as had happened in Florence two centuries before. As to Masaccio's wall-painting *The Holy Trinity, the Virgin, St John and Donors*, Ernst Gombrich made the following remark:

> We can imagine how amazed the Florentines must have been when this wall-painting was unveiled and seemed to have made a hole in the wall through which they could look into a new burial chapel in Brunelleschi's modern style. But perhaps they were even more amazed at the simplicity and grandeur of the figures which were framed by this new architecture.[7]

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Prejudice against foreign culture, arrogance and the sense of superiority of domestic culture prevented the prevalence of realist painting in China. But after the Opium War in 1840, China suffered further aggression from colonial powers, and its cultural arrogance and sense of superiority quickly diminished. The

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[6]   Zou Yigui, *Small Mountain Painting Copybook (Xiaoshan Huapu)*, in *The Collected Aesthetics Materials in All Previous Dynasties (Lidai Meixue Wenku)*, ed. Ye Lang, Vol. 15, Beijing: Gaodeng Jiaoyu Press, 2002, 340.

[7]   E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, fifteenth edition, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990, 172-73.

country eventually opened its doors to accept foreign culture. When this happened, realist paintings caused excitement and amazement both among artists and public, as did the illusionary paintings in Renaissance Italy. For example, when Wu Fading showed his *Heroes of Qinglongqiao*, a large oil painting depicting an incident from revolutionary historical events in 1922, "its size and dramatic realism caused something of a stir."[8]

In China, Xu Beihong's realist paintings are more celebrated than Lin Fengmian's modernist works, not only because the former can produce magic-like illusions, but also because they can be easily understood by the general public that regards them with the naïve eyes of a child. Realist paintings that cannot satisfy connoisseur's taste can amuse the naïve child. As Su Dongpo (1037-1101) pointed out in his poem: "To discuss paintings in terms of verisimilitude is to show the child's understanding. To indite poem just limited in this poem is to show that the poet is not a real poet."[9] Child and the general public do not have good taste in the arts. They appreciate painting in terms of its subject, poem in terms of its literal meaning. The real artist is good at metaphorical meaning and the real connoisseur pursues meaning beyond images and words.[10]

So on the one hand, this capacity to understand realist paintings could not serve the *literati*'s refined taste. On the other, it could function politically, including the power to encourage the Chinese people to join the Anti-Japan War and later the War of Liberation. In 1937, with the breakout of the Lugouqiao Incident, China first entered the eight-year Anti-Japan War and then a three-year War of Liberation. Chinese modernist painters could not create masterpieces focused on the wars and major historical events such as Picasso's *Guernica* and therefore faded out from the public view. Realist paintings such as Xu Beihong's *Tianheng and Five Hundred Gentlemen* (oil on canvas, 197x349cm, 1930), *Foolish Old Man Moved Mountain* (ink on paper, 143x424cm) and Jiang Zhaohe's (1904-1986) *The Refugees* (ink on paper, 200 x2700cm, 1943) encouraged Chinese soldiers and the masses to enthusiastically join the forces of resistance against Japan. This political relevance of realist paintings greatly added to their reputation. This

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10   The sentences in Chinese are: 论画以形似，见与儿童临。赋诗必此诗，定知非诗人。The sentences are translated word by word. Maybe the second sentence can be translated as "To write poem just in terms of literal meaning is to show that the poet is not a real poet."

reminds us of Walter Benjamin's explanation of distraction and concentration as two ways of relating to art. Benjamin argued:

> Distraction and concentration form polar opposites which may be stated as follows: A man who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it. He enters into this work of art the way legend tells of the Chinese painter when he viewed his finished painting. In contrast, the distracted mass absorbs the works of art.[11]

In Benjamin's text, the contrast between distraction and concentration does not mean the contrast between modernist painting and realist painting but rather the contrast between painting and film or architecture. However, in terms of realist paintings that were taken as propaganda tools during the wars in China, they played the same role as photography and film in Benjamin's text. Art's function was now reversed. Benjamin argued, "Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics."[12] Realist painting can serve political purposes even if it is not a reproduced work of art. In addition to reproduction, realist paintings share some properties with photography. Both are representations of reality and easily understood by the masses.[13] This explains why Castiglione's painting could not be accepted in eighteenth century China but Xu's could be in the twentieth. In short, Castiglione's realist paintings were not accepted by *literati* because of aesthetic appreciation, while Xu's realist paintings were accepted by the masses for political purposes. By the same token, this explains why Xu's realistic painting outdid Lin's modernist painting during the wars. Facing long and brutal wars, Lin's modernism, which was devoted to aestheticism, paled into insignificance.

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[11]   Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968, 239.

[12]   *Ibid.*, 224.

[13]   Realism has different meanings. In its specific sense, realism was an artistic movement that began in the middle of the nineteenth century in France. In general, realism is defined as the attempt to represent subject matter truthfully. (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realism_(arts)). Jameson uses realism in a specific sense. Here I extend realism to include its general sense. In China, realism is normally used in its general sense. Only in academic realm of art history are the differences between romanticism and realism emphasized. Erasing the differences between its specific sense and its general sense would not hinder the comparison of Chinese art with Jameson's sequence, since realism in its specific sense and general sense can be seen as premodern artistic style. What we need are the differences between realism and modernism, instead of the differences between different realisms.

Modernism was obviously born at a wrong time in China. According to Jameson's cultural periodization, in the 1920s China did not possess the social conditions necessary for modernism to flourish. The feudal Chinese empire was overthrown in 1911 and capitalism remained weak in the first half of the twentieth century. Monopoly capitalism, which is the social requirement for modernism, had yet to emerge. The first time modernism came to China too early.

The premature birth of modernism in China could be attributed to the influence of modernism from the West and to affinity between traditional Chinese aesthetics and modern Western aesthetics. All members of the first generation of Chinese modernism were educated either in Europe or Japan. They imported Modernism from the West, because it had not grown naturally in China. Modernism could have been accepted at the same time as realism, or even earlier, due to the affinity between traditional Chinese aesthetics and modern Western aesthetics. The former developed independently of its Western counterpart for centuries. The disinterested attitude towards the aesthetic object, the idea of art for art's sake, aesthetic experience as pleasure caused by free play—features that constitute the core of modern Western aesthetics—can be found in Chinese philosophy from more than two millennia ago.[14] It seems very natural for Chinese *literati* to accept and adapt modern aesthetics and modernism. This explains why modernism came to China earlier than realism. However, the wars and the process of modernization unique to China ended the modernist honeymoon with traditional Chinese aesthetics. The direction of modernization in art and aesthetics was heteronomous instead of being autonomous, which was the direction taken by modern Western aesthetics.

Both traditional Chinese aesthetics and modern Western aesthetics were criticized and completely abandoned especially after the revolution in 1949. Art for the people, instead of art for art's sake, became the core of Chinese Marxist aesthetics. In 1936 Benjamin warned: "This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art."[15] This Communist response could be found ten years later in China.

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[14] For details, see Peng Feng, *The Modern Chinese Aesthetics*: Nanjing: Jiangsu Renmin Press, 2014.

[15] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 242.

2. Marxism

Between 1949 and 1976, art in China was dominated by socialist realism. Modernism was totally suppressed. About the art of this period, Sullivan made the following observation:

> The years during which Mao Zedong exerted total control over cultural life in China were, for creative men and women, at first a period of commitment and hope, then of uncertainty as the reins were alternately tightened and loosened, and finally of growing despair and frustration, culminating in the nightmare of the Cultural Revolution. Artists were required to "serve the people." The dialectical struggle between tradition and revolution, Chinese and Western art, continued, with Western modernism replaced by Soviet socialist realism. The theoretical debate was carried on over the artists' heads by Party ideologues, who enforced Mao's directives to "make the past serve the present" and "make foreign things serve China." Within strict ideological limits, many new answers to that challenge were found. If for the professional artist Party control was often stifling, and at times severe punishment was meted out to deviants, the encouragement given to workers and peasants to take up the brush would enormously broaden the human base from which creative art could spring.[16]

Mao's authority ended after he died in 1976. On July 14, 1979, an underground art group named The No Name, realized its first exhibition in Huafangzai Museum in Beijing. Most of the exhibited works were modernist paintings. The No Name Group was founded in early 1960s and brought together a dozen amateur painters. They believed in the modernist credo "art for art's sake." Not all members of the group received their education abroad. Their modernist aesthetics thus did not originate in Europe as was the case with the first generation of Chinese modernists. On the contrary, they developed their modernism on the basis of traditional Chinese aesthetics. When Liu Haisu, one of the founders of the first generation of Chinese modernism, visited the 1979 exhibition he gave it an extremely high appraisal. The amateur artists were very excited. It seemed to them as if they passed the tests and received a diploma from art academies in Europe.[17]

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16   Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*, 128.
17   For details, see Gao Minglu, *The No Name: A History of A Self-Exiled Avant-Garde*, Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2007.

Modernism that obviously differs from socialist realism is taken by art historians as the beginning of contemporary art in China. Art for art's sake had its political implications when it was advocated by modernists in late 1970s. Modernism became a tool against socialist realism and, furthermore, against the whole socialist ideology. Modernism discarded pure aestheticism and autonomy and returned to heteronomy, but in a diametrical relation to socialist realism. For the dominant ideology, the latter were sycophants, and the former, dissidents. Dissident or critical modernism was later proclaimed to be contemporary art.

Yuan Yunsheng's mural *Water-Sprinkling Festival: A Paean of Life* in the building of the Beijing Capital International Airport is a good example of the frequently present mix of modernist and contemporary art. Three painted nude women in the painting caused an uproar in Beijing and also elsewhere in the country. Thousands of citizens visited the new airport just to take a look at the painted nude women. The painting's style is not socialist realism but modernism. But the painter's intention is not only artistic but also political: Yuan not only wanted to defend modernism but also to test the degree of openness of the authorities and the general tolerance of society. Surprisingly, Deng Xiaoping praised this work, while the public could not accept it. Finally the commissioner Li Ruihuan decided to build a wall in front of the nude women so that the public could not see this part of the work. Forced by public opinion the artist went into exile in the United States. Yuan Yunsheng's mural *Water-Sprinkling Festival* is not only modernist but also contemporary due to its political intentions and implications, even if its style is typical modernism.[18]

Exhibitions of another major group, the Stars, can be viewed in the same way. Its members were painters and sculptors who were fascinated by modernism. However, they had no occasion to show their works openly during the dominance of socialist realism. Finally, they decided to exhibit their works in the courtyard of China National Museum of Fine Art during the 5th National Fine Art Exhibition in September 1979. The illegal exhibition was closed immediately after its opening and the exhibiting artists immediately started to demonstrate. This unexpected exhibition became a serious social and political event. The authorities were finally forced to make concessions. The exhibition was permitted

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[18]   Zheng Qi, "Intending to Test the Reformation with Naked Women: An Interview with Yuan Yuansheng," *The Beijing News*, September 11, 2013.

to take place in Shishahai Museum in November of the same year and again in China National Museum of Fine Art in August 1980.

Yuan Yunsheng's *Water-Sprinkling Festival* and most of the other works of the Stars exhibitions are modernist paintings and sculptures. Opposing socialist realism with the aid of modernism was a common strategy for Chinese artists in 1980s. According to socialist realism, art should come from the people and should reveal their everyday life. The best way for art to achieve such an aim is to imitate and transfigure people's life. In a word, art should be a tool for educating the people and to strengthen socialist ideology, and so art cannot be independent, pure, or autonomous.

In 1980s, Chinese avant-garde artists launched a movement whose agenda was to purify artistic language. This Purification Movement aimed at saving art from utilitarian uses and at substituting a heteronomous art for an autonomous one. By this time in the West postmodern art had surpassed modernism and autonomous art, or "art for art's sake," was considered an outdated idea. Nevertheless, in China, where in the 1980s art was dominated by socialist realism, an idea of avant-garde art based on "art for art's sake" still carried subversive connotations.

Xu Bing created his *Book from the Sky* between 1987 and 1991. He is a representative of the Purification Movement. *Book from the Sky* is different from, and goes beyond, the abstract painting that was practiced by many members of the Purification Movement. *Book from the Sky* is totally meaningless. It is not a painting, not even an abstract one. It is actually a book, an unreadable book that consists of thousands of characters created by Xu Bing. The artist spent four years to create a meaningless thing with the intention to defend the idea that art is meaningless and to fight against socialist realist art.

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The Purification Movement cannot be interpreted only as a modernist movement, i.e. a movement of "art for art's sake" or formalism, since it has obvious political implications. Xu Bing admits that there are political elements in his works, even if his original intention was not political. As he replies to Glenn Harper: "As an artist, I don't usually think about political factors when I create a work; I am focused on more concrete issues—the methodology I plan to use, which techniques will work best, etc. But at the same time I believe that since Chinese society is such a politically charged environment, and since I grew up

in that environment, it is unavoidable that political elements will emerge in my work."[19] In short, by attacking socialist realism, the Purification Movement aimed at subverting the whole socialist ideology. But the political implication of *Book from the Sky* is so hidden or obscure that few among the public can interpret it. Instead, most viewers see in it cultural implications. The book, even unreadable, is easily seen as a symbol of Chinese nature.

In the 1990s Chinese artists and critics finally comprehended the differences between modernism and contemporary art. Political Pop and Cynical Realism could directly express their political demands without the shelter of modernism. Modernism was criticized by the new interpreters of art as conservative and outdated. Modernism again failed to take on artistic significance in China, but this time it had come too late. China caught up the postmodern trend very quickly. "It's Modern but is it contemporary?" is the question Hal Foster put to the new MoMA in 2004.[20] Chinese artists faced the same question when they devoted themselves to modernism but suddenly found themselves in the shift from modernism to contemporary art.

The observation that modernism came to China in 1920s contradits Jameson's sequence of cultural movements from realism through modernism into postmodernism, while its early death in 1930s and rebirth in 1980s confirms Jameson's theory. Modernism should emerge after the maturity of realism. However, realism reached its over-mature or moribund stage in Chinese socialist realism. In 1980s it was too late to resuscitate it. But the story of modernism in China does not end here. We are witnessing its new life in the new millennium.

3. Chinese Contemporary Art

In Chinese art circles postmodernism was not broadly recognized, because it was quickly absorbed by modernism and contemporary art.

What is Chinese contemporary art? This was the theme of the First China Contemporary Art Forum co-organized by James Elkins and myself in Beijing in 2009. No

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[19] Glenn Harper, "Exterior Form-Interior Substance: A Conversation with Xu Bing," *Sculpture* 22.1 (2003), 51.

[20] Hal Foster, "It's Modern but is it contemporary?" *London Review of Books*, Vol. 26, No. 24 (December 2004), 23-25.

tangible conclusions came from the three days of presentations and discussions, except a 1000-page bilingual proceedings published two years later. Although Chinese contemporary art appears to be difficult to define, this does not signify that the notion is useless or meaningless. We can differentiate Chinese contemporary art theoretically and practically not only from Chinese traditional and modern art, but also from contemporary art in North America, Europe and across the globe. Historically, art after the late 1970s could be called contemporary art. Theoretically, art related to contemporary society, especially art expressing dissent and criticism of the dominant ideology, is commonly called contemporary.

Of course, this is only one meaning of the ambiguous notion of contemporary art. There are others.[21] One influential definition was authored by Arthur Danto and Hans Belting, who claimed that contemporary art is post-historical art. The word "post-historical" literally means after or devoid of history. Danto wrote, "Today there is no longer any pale of history. Everything is permitted."[22] Hans Belting noted that "Contemporary art indeed manifests an awareness of a history of art but no longer carries it forward."[23] Danto and Belting are influential authors in North America and Western Europe. If they are right, it means that contemporary art in North America and Western Europe does not possess a "history" (understood teleologically and prescriptively, as progress, world view, necessity, or period-style. Since for many, North America and Western Europe represent the international and the postmodern traditions, we can perhaps say that international contemporary art or postmodernist art is an art without history.

International contemporary art does not possess history not only because in this history there is no progress, but also due to its vague and undefined beginning. A clear break between modern and contemporary art is difficult to establish. As Danto wrote:

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> It is characteristic of contemporaneity—but not of modernity—that it should have
> begun insidiously, without slogan or logo, without anyone being greatly aware

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21   For different interpretations of contemporary art, see Hal Foster, "Contemporary Extracts," http://www.e-flux.com/journal/contemporary-extracts/

22   Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 12.

23   Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art*, trans. Christopher S. Wood, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, 3.

that it had happened [...]. Contemporary art [...] has no brief against the art of the past, no sense that the past is something from which liberation must be won, no sense even that it is at all different as art from modern art generally.[24]

In China and Eastern Europe, i.e. in the postsocialist countries, the situation is different.[25] The beginning of contemporary art in postsocialist countries is clear. There is much public discussion about it, and almost everyone in art circles and even in society as a whole is aware of its beginning. In contemporary art there are revolutions or reforms. The enemy of contemporary art in these countries is obvious and indubitable, i.e. socialism and socialist realism. In short, contemporary art in postsocialist countries is different from contemporary art in postmodernist countries.

Contemporary art in Eastern Europe has its beginnings, but not the progress that is essential for history. The radical political and artistic revolutions in Eastern Europe very quickly changed the society. Contemporary art soon became the hegemonic art form and was quickly absorbed into the international contemporary art community and soon reached its post-historical stage.

The situation in China is different not only from postmodernist countries but also from postsocialist ones. Instead of radical revolution, China carried out gradual reformation. Here contemporary art has not yet won the fight with socialist realism. Contemporary art in China is still undergoing "progress" and has not yet reached the post-historical stage. Danto preferred to call contemporary art post-historical art. The post-historical means a period without narrative direction. Danto wrote:

> We could capitalize the word "contemporary art" to cover whatever the disjunction of postmodernisms was intend to cover, but there again we would be left with the sense that we have no identifiable style, that there is nothing that does not fit. But that in fact *is* the mark of the visual arts since the end of modernism, that as a period it is defined by the lack of a stylistic unity, or at least the kind of stylistic unity which can be elevated into a criterion and used as a basis for developing a

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24   Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, 5.
25   For contemporary art in post-socialist countries, see Aleš Erjavec (ed.), *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003.

> recognitional capacity, and there is in consequence no possibility of a narrative direction. That is why I prefer to call it post-historical art. Anything ever done could be done today and be an example of post-historical art.[26]

But Chinese contemporary art still has its narrational direction and has not yet reached its post-historical stage or end. In the past forty years, there were movements and successive stages. Based on these movements or stages, a history of Chinese contemporary art is still possible. Actually several books on the history of Chinese contemporary art were published recently.[27] From critical realism and critical modernism in 1980s, through political pop and cynical realism in the 1990s, to pop surrealism and new ink art in 2000s, the story of Chinese contemporary art is being told.

The master narrative of history can differ according to different perspectives. Such history could be divided into three stages. After aping Western art in the 1980s and serving Western art markets in 1990s, Chinese contemporary art finally reached its self-consciousness of identity in the new millennium. The identity consists of its Chinese features, contemporaneity and artistic-ness. In the past decades Chinese contemporary art borrowed much from the rich tradition of Chinese culture. But since 2008, demand for art with Chinese characteristics started to become a prominent phenomenon in art circles. Numerous avant-garde artists, such as Feng Mengbo in Beijing and Qiu Zhijie in Hangzhou, abandoned new media experiments and turned back to traditional ink painting. This does not mean that they turned into old masters of ink painting. Instead, the pursuit of contemporaneity transformed old ink painting into new ink art. Akin to modernists in early twentieth century, such as T. S. Eliot, the newness of their art could be somehow traditional. Rather than challenging the boundary of art, Chinese contemporary artists are defending the status of art or artistic-ity. Most of contemporary artists in China had academic education. They do not believe slogans, such as "Everyone is an artist" declared by Joseph Beuys, or "Everything in permitted [to be art]," announced by Arthur Danto.

Demanding Chinese characteristics, pursuing contemporaneity and defending artistic-ness has thus resulted in yet another art movement in China, namely,

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[26]   Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, 12.

[27]   Lu Hong, *Chinese Contemporary Art 1978-2008*, Changsha: Hunan Meishu Press, 2013; Lv Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, Beijing: Peking University Press, 2006.

the New Ink Art Movement. Their works were exhibited in dozens of exhibitions, such as *Undoing Shuimo: Invitational Exhibition of International Contemporary Ink Art* at Shanghai Duolun Modern Art Museum in October 2012 and Beijing MoCA in January 2013, *Re-Ink: Invitational Exhibition of Contemporary Ink and Wash Painting 2000-2012* at Hubei Fine Art Museum in December 2012 and Today Art Museum in April 2014, *Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in December 2013, and so on. Indubitably the wave of new ink art is becoming increasingly stronger.

This fresh movement of new ink art is different from the movement of experimental ink art which began in 1980s and ended in 1990s. Ironically, the latter is even newer than the former. Experimental ink art was so fascinated by the pursuit of novelty that it hardly maintained its Chinese character or its artisticity and reached its end quickly. The difference between experimental ink art in the 1990s and new ink art in the 2010s is somewhat similar to the difference between graffiti and street art.

Even if the two are in many ways the same, contemporary street art is clearly more subtle and aesthetic than graffiti. Street art aims at "aesthetic integration" instead of occupation. "Viewing street art is about more than the aesthetic appreciation a new art form."[28] New ink art participates in this return of the aesthetic and can been regarded as a return from the contemporary or postmodern to the modern. Modernism seems to emerge in China for its third time after the end of contemporary art.

4. Conclusion

Let us return to the beginning. The emergence of realism, modernism and postmodernism or contemporary art in China does not fall into the sequence charted by Fredric Jameson. Actually Jameson's three cultural dominants exist in China synchronically instead of diachronically and make up a unique panorama of art. Comparatively speaking, the situation of modernism in China is very complicated. It could exist earlier than realism and later than postmodernism or

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28　Justin Armstrong, "The Contested Gallery: Street Art, Ethnography and the Search for Urban Understandings," AmeriQuests, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2005), http://ejournals.library.vanderbilt.edu/index.php/ameriquests/article/view/46/37

contemporary art. The modernist phantom has and continues to haunt Chinese art in unpredictable ways.

Since modernism was welcome by traditional Chinese aesthetics, it could have come to China at the same time as or even earlier than the realism of 1920s. But Chinese society at that time was not yet ready to accept modernism. Both modernism and traditional Chinese aesthetics were soon surpassed by socialist realism. Realism and politicized art were praised as proletarian art and aesthetics, while modernism and Chinese *literati* tradition were criticized as bourgeois or aristocratic. According to Marxist historical materialism, the former is newer and thus more advanced than the latter. This is why I say that modernism came to China too early its first time.

After the Great Cultural Revolution, modernism came to China for the second time. Chinese society was ready to accept modernism, and it almost won the fight against socialist realism. However, the international shift from modernism to contemporary art stopped the growth of modernism. Modernism came to China too late its second time.

Contemporary art is suffering from conceptual insufficiency, Western cultural centralization, and the unresolved idea of progress. In order to save art from reaching its end, Chinese artists mix the traditional and the contemporary, the West and the Chinese, and create new styles and movements of art, such as the New Ink Art Movement. New ink art is not radical, but eclectic and somehow reminiscent of modernism. Could this Chinese version of modernism infect the Western art world? Could ink art paint a white box black? For visitors crowded in the Ink Art exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the answer is patently yes.

Aleš Erjavec*

Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge

1.

Between 1905 and 1930 in Europe the radical artistic trends—the avant-garde movements—also represented "the spearhead of modernity." The most radical and politicized among them were Italian futurism and Russian constructivism. Others, such as Dada (as a radical but primarily non-politicized movement), the early surrealism, and the less radical expressionism, cubism, Bauhaus, and De Stijl, although they didn't limit their "revolutions" to style and technique, they nonetheless didn't depart from the realm of art and didn't cross the line between art and "life." What therefore distinguished the radical ("politicized," "extreme," "social," "aesthetic") avant-garde movements from the rest of the avant-gardes was that the former programmatically demanded "that art move from representing to transforming the world."[1] What this meant can be illustrated by comparing cubism and Italian futurism. In their time both were considered "revolutionary," but in different ways. Let us take the case of Italian futurism:

> Life was to be changed through art, and art to become a form of life. The Futurist project of innovation encompassed all aspects of human existence, and was conceived as a total and permanent revolution. What was [in 1915 in a manifesto by the same name] called "Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe" was aimed at a transformation of mankind in all its physiological and psychological aspects, of the social and political conditions in the modern metropolis.[2]

To sense the difference between futurism and cubism and thereby between pronouncedly politically radical and artistically radical avant-garde let us consider the following description of cubism offered by the previous cubist painter, the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera. Cubism, claimed Rivera, was

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[1] Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, translated by Charles Rougle, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, 14.

[2] Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1996, 47.

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a revolutionary movement, questioning everything that has previously been said and done in art. It held nothing sacred. As the new world would soon blow itself apart, never to be the same again, so Cubism broke down forms as they had been seen for centuries, and was creating out of the fragments new forms, new objects, new patterns, and—ultimately—new worlds.[3]

Cubism too, argued Rivera, strove to realize the "creation of new worlds," but we of course also sense that these "worlds" were those of the mind and not of the material historical and social reality: they were limited to art and didn't extend beyond it, into "life." Italian futurism—to continue this parallel reading of two very different strands of avant-garde art from a century ago—in contradistinction to cubism fused art and life. To see how this futurist perspective differed from that of cubism, let me quote from an article by the futurist Giovanni Papini which was published in the journal *Lacerba* on December 1, 1913. The reader should note that although Papini mentions art, the stress in his article is on "life" to which "art" is obviously either subordinated or which constitutes only its segment:

> I am a Futurist because Futurism signifies a total appropriation of the modern civilization with all its enormous wonders, its fantastic possibilities and its horrible beauties. [...] I am a Futurist because I am tired of Byzantine tapestries, false intellectual profundity, [...] of harmonious rhymes, pleasant music, pretty canvases, photographic painting, decorative, classical, antique and ambiguous painting. [...] I am a Futurist because Futurism signifies love for risk-taking, for danger, for what didn't attract us for what we have not tried, for the summit that we didn't expect and for the abyss that we have not measured. [...] I am a Futurist because Futurism signifies a desire for a greater civilization, for a more personal art, for a richer sensibility and for a more heroic thinking. I am a Futurist for Futurism signifies Italy as it was in the past, more worthy of its Future and its Future place in the world, more modern, more developed, more avant-garde than other nations. The liveliest fire burns today among the Futurists and I like and I am boasting that I am and remain among them.[4]

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[3] Quoted in David Craven, *Art and Revolution in Latin America 1910 – 1990,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002, 11.

[4] Quoted in Giovanni Lista, *Le Futurisme. Manifestes, Documents, Proclamations*, Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 1973, 91-92.

A similar statement can be found in Tatlin: "What happened from the social aspect in 1917 was realized in our work as pictorial artists in 1914 when 'materials, volume and construction' were accepted as our foundations."[5] If in Italy the change implemented by futurism produced among futurists such as Papini a novel sensibility, a new "distribution of the sensible" (Jacques Rancière) then for Tatlin too, radical art such as constructivism had already became a *fait accompli*, to be followed by the social upheaval, i.e. the October Revolution.

What characterizes Italian futurism and Russian constructivism and distinguishes them from cubism is that they form complete worldviews and strive to affect extra-artistic life of the national or class community, while cubism remains limited to the domain of art in the sense that it is characterized by autonomy and the ensuing institution of art. To understand what that means, it suffices to remember the lesson of Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades. Duchamp's intention when introducing in 1915 the ready-mades was to subvert the institution of art—to show, by bringing a urinal or a bottle-rack into an exhibition, that it is the context that makes a work into an artwork and not the other way around—an ambition in which he totally failed, for these objects, instead of serving as prime examples of non-art were swiftly assimilated into the realm of art. Or in the words of Duchamp: "I threw the bottle-rack and the urinal into the faces of [the public] as a challenge and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty."[6]

One would think that the two poles of avant-garde art—namely Italian futurism and Russian constructivism on the one hand and cubism or expressionism on the other—would cover the variety of artistic options developed by the early (also called "classical" or "historical") avant-gardes from a century ago, but this was not the case, for even more radical varieties of politicized or radical avant-garde movements that questioned the legitimacy of further existence and creation of art were soon developed. Aleksei Gan thus in 1922 claimed:

> Our Constructivism has declared uncompromising war on art, because the means and properties of art are not powerful enough to systematize the feelings of the

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[5] Vladimir Tatlin, quoted in John E. Bowlt, *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde. Theory and Criticism*, London: Thames and Hudson 1988, 206.

[6] Quoted in Edward Lucie-Smith, *Movements in art since 1945*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1989, 11.

revolutionary milieu. It is cemented by the real success of the [October] Revolution and its feelings are expressed by intellectual and material production.[7]

In other words, constructivism wanted—independently of the events in New York triggered there at about the same time by Duchamp's ready-mades—to eliminate art as a bourgeois invention, believing that a new society, that of revolutionary communism, required new expressive means, among which there was no place for art, for it was considered to be an obsolete part of an obsolete bourgeois society and therefore of an obsolete period in human history. To replace such past art, the constructivists went into two directions: one was productivism—the designing of useful everyday objects such as stoves and warm clothes—while the other continued the tradition of machine aesthetics (associated with anarchism) elaborated already in the nineteenth century when a whole philosophy of industrial aestheticism developed—a tendency realized also in the Arts and Crafts movement (1860-1910) and later continued in Bauhaus.

> In much Western scholarship, at least, Constructivism has become an integral part of the historiography of the October Revolution and tends to be appreciated almost exclusively as an immediate result of the new political order and to be granted an inordinate primacy in the development of early Soviet culture. All the more surprising, then, is the fact that Constructivism produced very little of permanence. It was a movement of built-in obsolescence, of ready-to-wear and throw-away, of designs often intended for multiple and mass consumption, of theories, statements, and projects which left behind a precious, but very scant, legacy of material objects. In other words, in remembering the icons of the Constructivist process, and Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* (**Figure 1**) is an obvious specimen, we realize that Constructivism is now celebrated more for what it did not create than for what it did.[8]

In the opinion of Aleksei Gan, constructivism was both a Soviet and a Western invention, but the two varieties were not the same. The distinction between them

> hinges precisely on the concept of art. Gan argued that, for the West, Constructivism was merely the name given to the new artistic trend. "They [the West] simply

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7   Aleksei Gan, *Konstruktivizm*, Tver 1922; quoted in Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, 338.

8   John Bowlt, "5 x 5 = 25," unpublished manuscript.

Figure 1: Tatlin, *Monument to the Third International*, 1919-20.
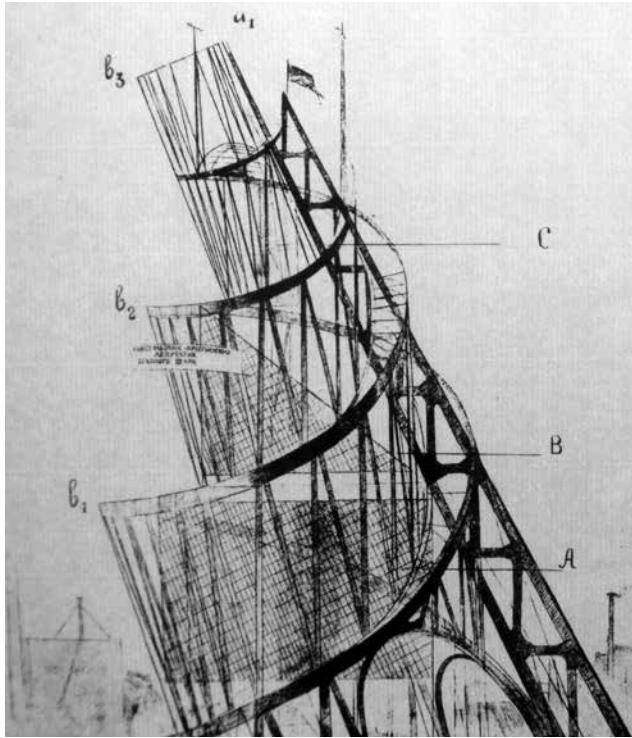
call the new art Constructivism," he asserted. He particularly singled out [two of his fellow Constructivists] Ehrenburg and Lissitzky for blame. "The basic mistake," he stressed, "of comrade Ehrenburg and comrade Lissitzky consists in the fact that they cannot tear themselves from art." Gan stressed that the Russian Constructivists had dispensed with art and that it was the Revolution which ensured that this would happen.[9]

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In a society thoroughly permeated with political ideology, such as that of Russia of the twenties, art shared the destiny of this society. What distinguished the western notion of art from that of the former socialist countries was the latter's social and political context in which there was no art market. "Art becomes politically effective only when it is made beyond or outside the art market—in the context of direct political propaganda. Such art was made in the former Socialist countries."[10]

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[9]   Lodder, *op. cit.*, 237.
[10]   Boris Groys, *Art Power*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008, 7.

Let us take two examples of art that could be called "propaganda" or political, but which could equally well be described as creating and erecting a new artistic paradigm which was inextricably linked to political purpose. The first is the mentioned *Monument to the Third International* commissioned in early 1919 by the Department of Fine Arts and to be erected in the center of Moscow. "During 1919 and 1920 [Tatlin] worked on it and built models in metal and wood with three assistants in his studio in Moscow. One of these was exhibited at the Exhibition of the VIIIth Congress of the Soviets held in December 1920. 'A union of purely artistic forms (painting, sculpture and architecture) for a utilitarian purpose' was how Tatlin described it."[11] The monument, resembling a leaning Eiffel Tower, was to be three times as high as the Empire State Building, with its glass body moving at different speeds: the cylinder once a year, the cone once a month and the cube on the top once a day with a continuous flood of political and propaganda activity going on inside it and emanating from it. "Unfortunately the project never got further than the models which Tatlin and his assistants built in wood and wire. These models came to be a symbol of the Utopian world which these artists had hoped to build. In many ways it is typical of their hopes: so ambitious, so romantic and so utterly impractical."[12]

Another such work was El Lissitzky's poster *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* (1919). It is this poster that will be the focus of this essay.

> The poster as a whole, besides being a work of political propaganda, [...] also exhibits an overt aesthetic function. Its simple graphisms convey an excess of signification. Pure ideological statement and pure aesthetic object never meet in a single space. [...] In the case of the poster [...] the aesthetic effect engendered by pure geometric forms augments the ideological effect of the written statement, and vice versa. The image and the narrative exist in two distinct spaces. They merely intersect, producing in our perception not a unified effect, but a doubled or parallel impression—a binary effect.[13]

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[11] Camilla Grey, *The Russian Experiment in Art: 1863 – 1922*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1971, 225.

[12] *Ibid.*, 226.

[13] Aleš Erjavec, "Introduction," in *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition. Politicized Art under Late Socialism*, ed. Aleš Erjavec, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, 44.

In Soviet Union such works flourished until the late twenties when the agit-prop "factography" replaced the avant-gardist "Faktura."[14] Already from the early twenties on, especially Lissitzky and Rodchenko discarded their previous artistic avant-garde modernist endeavors to turn to political education and state propaganda, with Rodchenko becoming the editor of the magazine *USSR in Construction*. It is from within this context that Benjamin Buchloh poses a question resembling that of Boris Groys:

> Why did the Soviet avant-garde, after having evolved a modernist practice to its most radical stages in the postsynthetic cubist work of the suprematists, constructivists and Laboratory Period artists, apparently abandon the paradigm of modernism upon which its practices have been based? What paradigmatic changes occurred at that time, and which paradigm formation replaced the previous one?[15]

In the West the answer to this question remained obscured by grouping much (or all) such later Soviet avant-garde work under the rubric of political propaganda.

> The problem with this criticism, is that criteria of judgment that were originally developed within the framework of modernism are now applied to a practice of representation that had deliberately and systematically disassociated itself from that framework in order to lay the foundations of an art production that would correspond to the need of a newly industrialized collective society.[16]

The intent of these Russian avant-garde artists was to effect—or to take an active part in—a "'double revolution' by redefining revolutionary art practice so that it became revolutionary social practice as well."[17] As Victor Margolin claimed, "The ambition of the artistic-social avant-garde [...] was to close the gap between discursive acts, which were confined to postulation and speculation, and pragmatic ones, which involved participation in building a new society."[18] It was for this rea-

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[14] See Benjamin Buchloh, "From *Faktura* to Factography," *October* 30 (Autumn 1984), and Yve-Alain Bois, El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility," *Art in America* (April 1988): 161-181.

[15] Buchloh, "From *Faktura* to Factography," 85.

[16] *Ibid*., 108.

[17] Victor Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy Nagy. 1917-1946*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, 3.

[18] *Ibid*.

Figure 2: Nikolai Kolli, "Project for a monument commemorating the victory over General Krasnov," 1918.

son that Lissitzky could write in his diary shortly before he died, in 1941, that in "1926 my most important work as an artist began: the design of exhibitions."[19]

From the early twenties on many Russian avant-garde artists decided to take an active part in the building of the Soviet state. They considered such an endeavor to be a personal as well as an artistic continuation of their previous futurist, Suprematist or other avant-gardist artistic work: for them classical painting and traditional art forms have attained their final developmental form before 1917 and had nothing more to offer to the new society or to the new art. This view coincided with Walter Benjamin's fascination with the Soviet revolutionary cinema and its technique of montage; cinema not only demolished aura, but offered a collective experience, with montage—a technique related to the earlier avant-garde practice of collage—offering an Adornian "resistance" when compared with the products of Hollywood film industry.

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[19]   Buchloh, *op. cit.*, 102.

2.

In his book on public monuments Sergiusz Michalski discusses an unrealized "Project for a monument commemorating the victory over General Krasnov" from 1918, which was proposed by the constructivist architect Nikolai Kolli (1894-1996). (**Figure 2**) This "was," claims Michalski, "the first fully abstract political public monument in the world. This piece consists of a black pedestal from which rises a white stone, splintered at the top by a red wedge. A peculiar word play was intended here, since it had been by means of the red (*krasnij*) wedge that the 'bands of Krasnov' had been defeated."[20]

> Kolli's project—continues Michalski—was deftly plagiarized by El Lissitzky in his famous poster *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* (1920), (**Figure 3**) which showed a white circle (for the White Guards) being pierced by a red wedge, thus broadening Kolli's play on words. But the sequence of transformations and ripostes did not end here. In the fall of 1920, the famous avant-garde artist Malevich and his students erected a plywood monument to the October Revolution in Vitebsk which depicted a circular form splintered by a wedge.[21]

Red wedge also represented the Bolshevik army emblem.

In 1921 Walter Gropius developed what resembled an expressionist monument that was to honor victims of the working-class in a putsch in Weimar. It immediately brought to mind Lissitzky's work. Later Kandinsky used the same motif and the image of the "wedge" to criticize Bolshevik symbolisms. These variations of the basic theme—white circle and the red wedge, supplemented with a few words to the same effect—witness that there must have existed some profound reasons why the whole composition met with such a widespread and positive response.

It was Camilla Gray with her book *The Russian Experiment in Art: 1863-1922* that in 1962 introduced Russian avant-garde to the Western public, including the work of El (for "Lazar") Lissitzky. In her view Lissitzky's 1919-20 poster was linked to his abstract material bodies, the "prouns" the first of which was also

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[20]   Sergiusz Michalski, *Public Monuments. Art in Political Bondage 1870-1997*, London: Reaktion Books, 1998, 112.

[21]   *Ibid.*, 113.

Figure 3: El Lissitzky, *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* (Street Poster), 1919-20.

made in 1919. "A poster of his of 1919," muses Gray, "reading 'Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge', is an amusing illustration of those 'leftish artists' contribution to Bolshevik propaganda. "[22]

How did Lissitzky himself view the poster? Most certainly within the framework of his desire to partake in the avant-garde's attempt to redefine revolutionary art practice and to transgress the limits of art, moving into the territory of industrialism and constructivism. Benjamin Buchloh used this peculiarity of Lissitzky's "art" to point out the dividing line between Western modernism and Eastern avant-garde such as constructivism, a gap that even today continues to remain wide and unbreachable, in spite of existing for almost a century. Hal Foster asks himself whether already then "Barr understood that Constructivist practices

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[22]   Grey, *The Russian Experiment in Art*, 1971, 254.

spoke to a historical rupture in the mode of production, not to the historicist logic of the institution of art. In any case,—continues Foster—MoMAist logic soon demanded the displacement of a heterogeneous, collectivist Constructivism by a Western Cubistic-constructive tradition."[23]

Lissitzky's 1919-20 poster remained half way between Suprematism and constructivism and even if it was an abstract work it nonetheless also contained explicit and implicit figurative representations as well as written text. In the opinion of Christina Kaier, Lissitzky's 1919-20 poster contains also explicit sexual imagery: "The floating geometric forms of Lissitzky's Suprematist composition represent not only the penetration of the White Guard front by the Red Army, but the fantasy of the complete penetration of traditional Russian social life by the invigorating sharpness of Bolshevik ideology."[24]

It was to this motif that Lissitzky turned in 1929 when creating the stage design for the play *I Want a Child* by Sergei Tret'iakov. Here is the resume of the play:

> In *I Want a Child*, an unmarried party member named Milda, whose extensive public organizing work to benefit the collective leaves no time for marriage or children, suddenly realizes that she wants to have a child. As an agronomist well-versed in eugenics as well as Leninism, Milda decides that the prospective father must be of 100 percent healthy proletarian stock. Rationalist and antiromantic, she searches out an appropriate specimen. [...] She offers him a contract stating that after conception she will make no claims for his support of her or the child, nor will she ask him to play the roles of husband or father in any way. [...] Their son is raised communally in collective Soviet children's institutions. [...] In the play's conclusion, set four years later in 1930, [the father] catches a glimpse of his son when the child wins first prize in a "Healthy Baby" contest—displayed as an object of collective consumption, rather than of traditional, individual parental pride.[25]

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[23]   Hal Foster, "Some Uses and Abuses of Russian Constructivism," in: *Art Into Life. Russian Constructivism 1914-1932*, Seattle: The Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, 1990, 246.

[24]   Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions. The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005, 260.

[25]   Kiaer, *op. cit.*, 245.
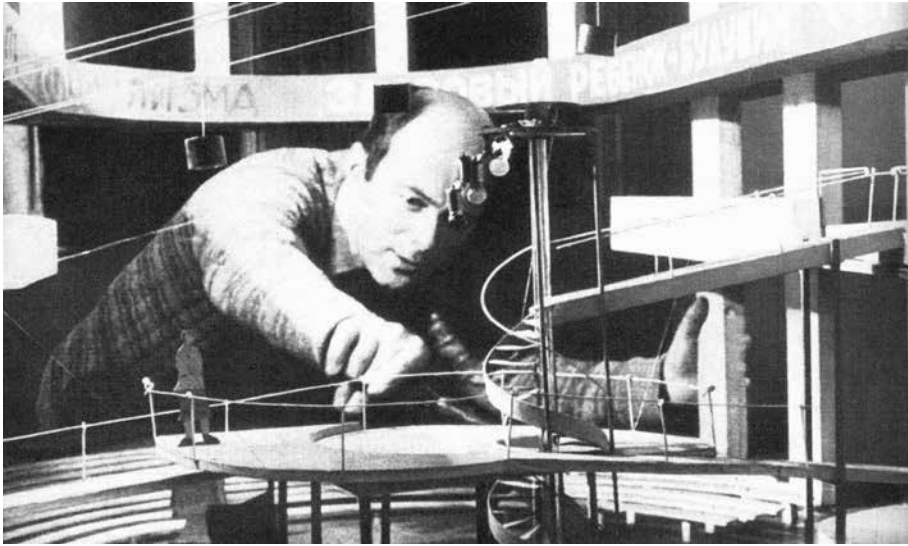
Figure 4: El Lissitzky, Set for the play *I want a Child*, 1929.

For the stage design of the play *I want a Child* (**Figure 4**) Lissitzky employed elements from his poster of ten years before, recycling the composition and its main elements—only now they functioned in a very different setting. On a 1929 photograph we thus see "Lissitzky leaning into the model of his stage set to adjust the fragile railing around a glass circle."[26] Tret'iakov's play is suspended between a tragic existential human situation personified by the circumstantial father on the one hand and Milda's eternally one-dimensional world of satisfaction and contentment.

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The continuous strength and persuasiveness of Lissitzky's work lie in the combination of the image and the text, that is, the narrative. Such creative gesture of synthesizing the pictorial and the discursive elements which are simultaneously kept apart by an unbridgeable void, can be viewed both in Lissitzky's poster from 1919-20 and in his 1929 stage design. There is something enigmatic in the white circle, the red wedge and the narrative that accompanies them, something that prevents us to regard the work from a single vantage point—the ideological, for

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[26] *Ibid.*, 263-64.

example. The work offers what I have designated as the "binary effect,"[27] comparing the nature of its impact to Fichte's dialectics, a dialectics that consists of thesis and anti-thesis without these two elements ever meeting in a common or shared space. From this viewpoint Lissitzky's work seems to represent an instance of socialist modernism. It creates or builds upon an abstraction but one that at the same time possesses an excess of signification and one that carries an evident heteronomous content which is paradoxically revealed precisely through the use of abstract forms.

In his "Study of Ideologies and Philosophy of Language" from 1929 V. N. Voloshinov makes an important observation as regards the notion of ideology. In his view, "All manifestations of ideological creativity—all other nonverbal signs—are bathed by, suspended in, and cannot be entirely segregated or divorced from the element of speech."[28] This statement, evoking in a single gesture a paraphrase of Marx and Althusser, is dependent also on Lenin's essay "What is to be Done?" from 1902, in which Lenin makes the distinction between the bourgeois and proletarian ideology. The prime location of ideology is the word. Or in Voloshinov's own words, "The word is the ideological phenomenon par excellence."[29] It is this same notion of ideology that is so very present in Lissitzky's poster: political ideology does not hinder the artistic potential of the poster it instead enhances its aesthetic effect, for it is expressed through a combination of colors which, although possessing a secondary signification they nonetheless also evoke asbstract meaning and create an aesthetic effect.

In the spring of 1968 Jean-François Lyotard held a seminar at Nanterre devoted to political posters. He was particularly interested in the work under discussion in this talk, namely in Lissitzky's "Street Poster"—as the poster discussed in this essay is also known. In my earlier book *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition*, too, I commented on Lyotard's interpretation of Lissitzky:

> The poster as a whole, besides being a work of political propaganda, also exhibits an overt aesthetic function. Its simple graphisms convey an excess of significa-

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[27] See Erjavec, "Introduction," *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition*, 44-46.
[28] V. N. Voloshinov, "The Study of Ideologies and Philosophy of Language," in *Tekstura. Russian Essays on Visual Culture*, eds. Alla Efimova and Lev Manovich, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993, 8.
[29] *Ibid*., 6.

tion. Pure ideological statement and pure aesthetic object never meet in a single space, for this would destroy the perception and reception of each of them. The effect produced by the poster resembles visual paradoxes where, by changing our inner perceptual vantage form, we see the same object in a different way, or as a different object. In the case of the poster (and in many other works by the same artist or by Malevich) the aesthetic effect engendered by pure geometric forms augments the ideological effect of the written statement, and vice versa. The image and the narrative exist in two distinct spaces. They merely intersect, producing in our perception not a unified effect, but a doubled or parallel impression—a binary effect.[30]

If this is true, then we can claim that in the poster the image exists in one "reality" (or its dimension) and the discourse or narrative in another—in spite of both actually existing in a single visual space of the poster. It may thus be true, as Lyotard argued in his *Discours, figure*,[31] that a letter is a figure and a discourse at the same time, but perhaps even more could be said: that the discourse supplements and intensifies the effect of the image. This may be especially true when dealing with an image that is basically abstract. Already Camilla Gray noticed that after the introduction of "prouns," "Lissitzky's interest in lettering was soon combined with these new abstract compositions."[32] Lissitzky was obviously aware that a picture that contains an abstract pictorial and a concrete discursive component achieves its maximum aesthetic effect when the two elements exist in a tension which is in his poster furthermore strengthened by the dynamic positioning of the red wedge. Perhaps we could even claim that Rodchenko's, Moholy-Nagy's and Lissitzky's later constructivist photographs (such as those presented in the twenties and thirties in the journal *USSR in Construction*), just as in the case of Lissitzky's work under consideration, built on the same principle of dynamism of geometrical forms which instantly evoked the aesthetic effect. It was probably this abstract aesthetic property of constructivism that attracted the attention of the post-war Western artists.

The discursive ingredients of the image—the text—thus offers an explicit statement but one that avoids the simple ideological effect of ordinary political posters. Works such as these open up a territory between pure propaganda (be it ideo-

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[30]   Erjavec, *op. cit.*, 44.

[31]   Jean-François Lyotard, *Discours, figure*, Paris: Klincksieck, 1971.

[32]   Gray, *op. cit.*, 254.

logical or commercial, as created in the twenties by Mayakovsky and Rodchenko) and autonomous western art. If then indeed, Barr wanted to promote and retain the global place for western art, he really had, as he put it during his winter 1927-28 visit to Soviet Union, to "find some painters [in the USSR] if possible."[33]

3.

In this way Barr partook in a dispute that has still not been resolved, although it is one of the exemplary instances of simultaneous autonomization and heteronomization of art. According to western artistic standards, is art (or an artwork) such as Lissitzky's 1919-20 poster, "ideological" or "autonomous" art? I would argue that it is an instance of both: On one level it represents a pure propaganda gesture, even in its first appearance, i.e., in Kolli's initial sculptural project. On the other hand it has today drifted into the institution of art and has lost its ideological potential, retaining only the aesthetic one. What used to be regarded in 1920 as a work of political propaganda which simultaneously possessed an aesthetic function and existed in a space opposite that of the artistic autonomy and the institution of art, was after decades of historical assimilation transformed into a yet another instance of institutional art, thereby being assimilated, becoming essentially abstract and "beautiful"—becoming an object of a gaze similar to that despairingly evoked by Duchamp in relation to his ready-mades. Its textual component retains today only its visual aestheticized effect, this one being enhanced by the Cyrillic script. In this way the poster has undergone the processes that avant-garde art of the twentieth century underwent soon after its artistic and political successes and impacts. After World War II Lissitzky's poster turned from a specific avant-garde work of political propaganda into an assimilated modernist work more akin to western constructivism than to its original signification. Its context was gone so its ideological meaning was gone too.

The wedge and the circle started to reappear in Soviet Union and some other socialist countries again in the seventies, eighties and nineties of the previous century in works that were usually postmodern, namely ironic, referential and double-coded. In all instances these more recent versions of the circle and the wedge built upon what by now became the archetypal image associated with the October revolution. In the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989

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[33] Quoted in Foster, *op. cit.*, 246.
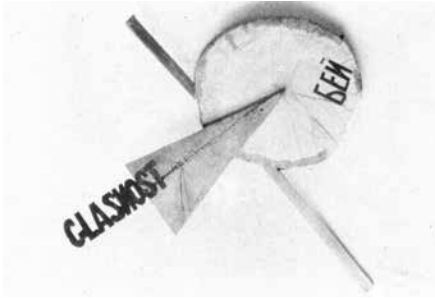
Figure 5: Leonid Sokov, *Plakat L. Lisickoga*, 1987.
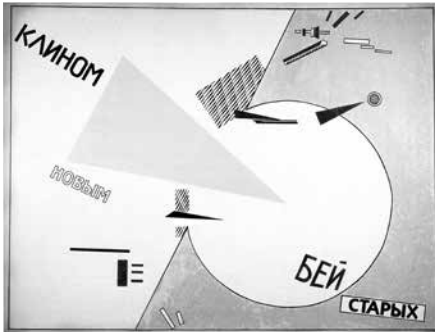
Figure 6: Afrika (Sergei Bugaev), *Anti-Lissitzky Series (Green)*, 1990.
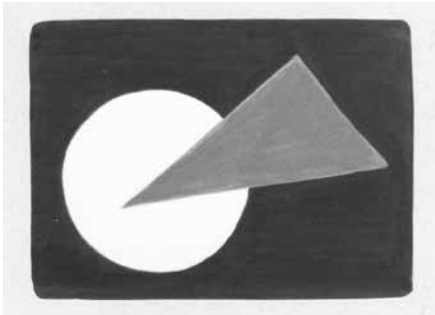
Figure 7: Huang Rui, logo for the "Stars" group, 1979.

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Russian and Eastern European artists have thus sometimes evoked Lissitzky's abstract geometric design from his 1919-20 poster with the frequent postmodernist practice of quoting well-known historical works. What probably attracted them in Lissitzky's poster was its binary nature: the dualism of the aesthetic and the ideological,[34] the latter of them with the unfolding of time becoming increasingly aestheticized too. Nevertheless, the poster continued to contain a political potential, even if it now contained only sarcastic or ironic signification—as

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[34] Another Russian artist from the eighties who uses the "binary approach" is Erik Bulatov.

in the work by Leonid Sokov titled *Lissitzky's Poster* (1987), where Gorbachov's "Glasnost" replaced the red wedge (**Figure 5**) or in the works by Afrika (Sergei Bugaev) where the same motif was used, starting with Afrika's "Anti-Lissitzky Series." (**Figure 6**) Works from the series bore titles such as *Blue Wedge Beats Pink*, or *Don't Beat Anybody with Anything* (1990).

Such examples are not to be found only in Russia or in Eastern Europe. In 1979 Huang Rui, a leading member of the Chinese "Stars" painterly movement, designed a logo of the "Stars" group. (**Figure 7**) Nothing exceptional, you will say—except that it was (apart from the blue background) a copy of El Lissitzky's poster from more than half a century before, namely of the poster *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*.[35]

Let me conclude by raising a few obvious questions: First: How did an artist such as Huang Rui who was basically a "modernist" in the seventies stumble upon Lissitzky's constructivist image, and found it congenial? Second: Why did Huang Rui think that a work that stood for the opposite of the autonomous art that he and his group were professing would suitably express and represent the nature or essence of the artistic orientation of the "Stars" group? It would seem that both questions would have to be posed to Huang Rui. Nonetheless, perhaps we can venture and attempt to answer them by ourselves. I think it is important that in the "Stars" logo the political statement is gone. What remains is the abstract geometric image that incessantly reveals, expresses and confirms the aesthetic potential of geometric forms—just like in Lissitzky's "prouns." It is this gesture of removing the political and ideological statement that turns the poster into an empty shell of aesthetic form and allows the militant statement of the poster to be finally transformed into the aestheticized artwork that Huang Rui could employ to express the spirit of the "Stars" group. Put differently, the avant-gardist and ideological signification of the street poster has with the removal of the ideological statement been transformed into a formalist work of art thereby confirming Voloshinov's statement about the ideological nature of discourse. Perhaps the incessant driftings of works such as Lissitzky's that lose their heteronomous nature and acquire (or retain) only their autonomous one, is what not only differentiates the original Lissitzky's work from that of Huang

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[35]   Cf. Huang Rui, *The Stars' Time. 1977 – 1984*, Beijing: Thinking Hands + Guanyi Contemporary Art Archive, 2007, unpaginated.

Rui's logo, but also separates Western modernism from its Eastern variety. Sokov's or Afrika's ironic exploitation of the symbolic capital acquired since 1920 by Lissitzky's Street Poster appears insignificant when compared with the impact made by the original or by Huang Rui's logo. They no longer "make ideology visible" (Althusser) and they are not ideology itself; instead they exist on razor's cutting edge separating ideology and politics from the beautiful and truth. "If man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom."[36]

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[36] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, eds. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967, 9.

Patrick D. Flores*

Speculations on the "International" Via the Philippine

The word "international" may have been drained of its semantic valence, or co-opted in many ways by institutional forces in the course of time. But it proves to be an intriguingly productive term, one that invites erasure at the same time that it retains a desire for it. First, it posits an inherent relationality, a certain between-ness as opposed to, for instance, across-ness, as intimated by the rubric of the "transnational." Second, it references one of the exemplary conditions of modernity that is the nation along with its apparatus, the nation-state, which the term "global" forecloses, or at least drastically diminishes. It is the nation, the time of its past and the geography of its boundaries, that oftentimes overdetermines the afterlife of the post-colony and secures for it the discourse of culture and identity and the aesthetic of representation. As Clifford Geertz once asked: What is a country if it is not a nation? What is a state if it is not a sovereign?

The international is complicit in this process of preemption by the nation-state, except that it also hints at an "inclination outward," and so phases in the presences of others in different places at the same time in a climate of "comparative contemporaries." What this outside is, this beyond-ness, that surpasses the nation deserves to be conceptualized. What locale eludes the nation? And what locality can resist being merely consigned to a region or a province configured as an international because it can no longer be confined to the national and yet cannot posture as the global? This excess and this limit need to be demonstrated, to be pointed to with interest: *that* outside in relation to *this* inside; *here* and not *over there; now* and not *not-yet*. This is not so much to diversify positions and to relativize temporalities as to craft intersubjectivity. Therefore, the "inter" creates a necessary nexus, an aspiration to belong across the back and forth, so to speak. Such complications brought in by the international cast the term as a critical interlocution of totalizing cartographies like the global; or the radically particular consequences signified by the translocal.

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This essay conceives of the international largely in the context of an archipelagic, tropical Philippine, a term that is a diminution, a miniaturization of Felipe, Prince of Asturias who later became King of Spain, colonizer of the islands for almost four centuries beginning in 1521 when Ferdinand Magellan, a circumnavigator of the globe, was killed on the shores of a place called Mactan after planting the Catholic cross and the Spanish flag. As a figurine, the Philippine is emblematic of the archipelagic moment, the rendering of the world in pieces, in picturesque, precious pieces, surely. These pieces are also, however, catastrophic. According to those who diagnose the epidemiology of disasters, since 1900, the Philippines was the country on the planet that had needed the most "international" succor to be able to respond to natural calamities.[1] In 2013, the typhoon Haiyan struck, the strongest ever-recorded to have hit ground in world history, with the strongest wind ever gauged, stirring up storm surges that engulfed land and lives of around 7000 in what is obviously a very inclement country. The international media harped on the "resilience" of Filipinos, a recurring characterization of a people that would prompt the novelist Ninotcka Rosca to take exception: that resilience is not the apt term to describe this tenacity or this insistence. Rosca thinks of survival in these parts, or better to say, of the Philippine prevailing, as metamorphic, rather than resilient: "We break, when the world is just too much, and in the process of breaking, are transformed into something difficult to understand. Or we take full measure of misfortune, wrestle with it and emerge transformed into something equally terrifying [...]. This is in sync with our indigenous worldview [...] an understanding of reality, including ourselves, as metamorphic (or, capable of transformation)."[2]

It is in this context that this essay pursues the problematic of the modern, one that turns intimately and cataclysmically, and transformatively. Within the archipelagic and the tropical Philippine, it moreover implicates the history of successive colonialisms, current insurgencies, and intense migrations, a formidable assemblage of historical burdens that mediates the importuning of

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[1]   Greg Bankoff, "Storms of History: Water, Hazard and Society in the Philippines 1565-1930," in *A World of Water: Rain, River and Seas in Southeast Asian Histories*, ed. Peter Boomgaard, Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2007, 153.

[2]   Ninotchka Rosca, "Commentary: Calling Filipinos Resilient is an Insult," *Yahoo Philippines News*, accessed November 18, 2013, https://ph.news.yahoo.com/commentary--calling-filipinos-resilient-is-an-insult-011053161.html.

the outside and the sentimentality of the inside. The term international stakes out the ground on which the antinomy seemingly wedded into exclusion and equality stands. But it could be made to yield instead what may be provisionally set up as equivalence, eccentricity, and entitlement. These are terms that hope to ease the post-colonial anxiety of being late or being belated, of catching up and never having to arrive, of being hybrid or a function of sheer mimicry and not being able to take on an integrity of cosmological, existential form. To be equivalent is to translate with travail and also to fluently converse with a vernacular. To be eccentric is to distract the government of presence and to circulate without prediction. To be entitled is to not fear the outside because it is an immanent critique of whatever it is that is deemed inside, or because the outside has been always-already accorded hospitality and friendship—given care—by way of affective labor.

The first sortie of this theoretical effort is into the colonial. Why must we begin with the colonial? The colonial is called out at the first instance because it draws our attention to the processes of making worlds and of making modernities. In the history of Philippine culture, five indices of modernity as a mode of self-consciousness and a heightened, if not sophisticated, sense of the other or the outside may include the following: the signature the artist affixes to lay claim to a work as an agent of that work; the academy that codifies protocols of pedagogy and canon formation; the portrait that assures the representation of human likeness; the historical painting that marks the turning of time in space and the figuration of agent and event in synchrony; and the world exposition that exhibits artifacts and live people to describe a culture within a universe plotted out by empire. These instantiations index the circulation of self, a particular aspect or talent of self, across sites and across the tenure of the post-colony. Is this post-colony necessarily the nation, reducing the country to it and expanding it into a locality of similar constitutions that became a region and finally an international? These impulses carving out the colony and the post-colony constellate the nation, render their dimensions and orientations (inside, outside, far, near) relational, and therefore predispose them to incline or lean towards the international.

I. *Path to the international by way of the colonial Philippine*

First thesis: *The colony is an allegorical sympathy with another country*.

In Francisco Baltazar's metrical romance *Florante at Laura* (Florante and Laura, 1838; 1875), the hero Florante speaks of a distraught homeland, in the guise of Albania, that wallows in abjection:

> Within and beyond my abject country
> treachery reigns,
> while merit and goodness are prostrate,
> entombed alive in suffering and grief.[3]

The first scene sets the allegorical tableau and elicits sympathy with a captured exiled subject; and the citation of Albania indexes an imagination of an outside, a breakdown of the world elsewhere. Florante, Duke of Albania, is tied to a tree, speaking of the woes of his fallen world; his father has been deposed as king, and the son of the usurper has coveted Florante's beloved Laura. Two lions are about to attack Florante in this dark forest when Aladin, Prince of Persia, comes to save him. This medievalist imagination conjures an allegory. The artifice of the latter is deployed here in its unique capacity as a rhetorical strategy to grasp a quickchange reality; having said that, it also tends to skirt itself, thus the allegorical problem rests on its own provisionality, "seeming to be other than what it is. It exhibits something of the perpetually fluctuating, uncertain status of the world it depicts."[4]

Second thesis: *The transcendence of the colonial is the comparison with empire.*

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In 1886, the National Hero Jose Rizal published his novel *Noli Me Tangere* in Berlin. It is a miniature universe of the Philippine colonial world, unfolding with the return of Juan Crisostomo Ibarra from Spain and finding, like Florante per-

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[3] The translation is a variant of the translation found in *Himalay: Kalipunan ng mga Pagaaral Kay Balagtas,* eds. Patricia Melendrez-Cruz, Apolonio B. Chua, Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1988.

[4] Jon Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987, 13.

haps of the earlier narrative, a debased homeland. Ibarra strays into the novel somewhat enchanted, or better still, bedeviled. The passage runs thus:

> The sight of the botanical garden drove away his gay reminiscences: the devil of comparisons placed him before the botanical gardens of Europe, in the countries where much effort and much gold are needed to make a leaf bloom or a bud open; and even more, to those of the colonies, rich and well-tended, and all open to the public. Ibarra removed his gaze, looked right, and there saw old Manila, still surrounded by its walls and moats, like an anemic young woman in a dress from her grandmother's best times.[5]

The historian Benedict Anderson intuits "el demonio de las comparaciones" as the "specter of comparisons" while the Tagalog writer Patricio Mariano nuances it as "tukso ng pagkahawig-hawig," or the "temptation of affinities" or "phantasm of semblances." Either way, the phrase describes the condition or experience of mediating discrepant worlds coming together in an instance of a ricocheting vision (or "malikmata") that is at once belated and present and in a gap or interval that is at once memory and mimicry. In this situation, the local world exceeds itself and slips into the colonial world that is incommensurate and the imperial world to which it pretends. That said, such pretension, or such pretending, permits the local world to cohabit with the outside and to insinuate the latter within itself. Thus, the colonial country at some point integrates with the world through mastery and *mestizaje*.[6]

In rethinking, therefore, the international, we might want to reassess the notion of comparison, of comparability, and of comparativity. Must the international be predicated on comparison? And how must this comparison be pondered and how can the Philippine, for instance, refuse being merely compared to an imperial standard and hopefully finally assume the condition of comparativity: that is, it ceases to be a locality to be linked up in the chain of other localities to complete the international and becomes a co-producer of the international all together? It may well be anticipated theoretically that if the dialectic failed to sustain the mastery and mestizaje opposition, there could be a third moment

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[5] Jose Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere*, trans. M.S. Lacson-Locsin, Manila: Bookmark, 1996, 67.
[6] For greater elaboration, see Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Towards a Geography of Art*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

to which the nineteenth-century metrical romance of Baltazar and the novel of Rizal have already alluded.

Third thesis: *The colony is country robustly conceived*.

Finally, the post-colony that can be nation does not have to be mapped out geographically and politically and emplaced across the grids of nation, region, internation, trans-nation. It could be grasped as atmosphere. The Philippine lexicon yields the word "*banwa*." It offers up a myriad of meanings: "mountain," "countryside," "terrain," "climate," "homeland," "forest," "hinterland," "every island from sea to sea."[7] It is practically the ecology, the atmosphere, or if more deeply elucidated, a local moral word that equally conceives of well-being, or *ginhawa*, breath itself in one of the vernacular languages: the air and the clearing.

A concomitant word that may inflect *banwa* is *naturaleza*, which is a Hispanic derivation. It roughly means the condition of a person's body, or better to say, an embodiment of its life force, its level of vitality; in the old Spanish lexicon, it is essence and attribute, in other words, "nature" in the sense that it is "quality" and therefore not opposed to "culture." In fact, the nature and culture duality is surmounted by the concept; it makes of the body a vessel of distinction and hence of discrimination; and of nature as human, a biological and political form that enlivens and enfeebles. It is perceived to inhere in the person so that whatever is perceived as coming from the outside, or the foreign, is scrupulously mediated by it. This *naturaleza* may be discerned as part of a person's destiny, an inheritance, conditioned by lineage and the state of the body that is always vulnerable as it is self-renewing, finite as it is persistent. It may also, however, be regarded as a medium in the active process of the body's response to the various ways by which it is acted upon by ill wind or virus or curse.

Naturaleza may be akin to the word favored by Spinoza, by way of Étienne Balibar, which is *ingenium*. It is, in his vernacular, a complexion or a temperament, "a memory whose form has been determined by the individual's experience of

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[7]   See Alonso de Metrida's *Bocabulario de la lengua Bisaya-Hiligueyna y Haria de las islas de Panay y Sugbu, y para las demas islas*, 1841, first published 1637, in Manila as cited in Marian Pastor Roces, "Pictures at an Exhibition: Re-presenting the Sugar Industry at the Negros Museum, Philippines," in *House of Glass: Culture, Modernity, and the State in Southeast Asia*, ed. Yao Souchou, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2001.

life and by his various encounters, and which, as a result of the unique way in which it has been constituted, is inscribed both in the mind (or soul) and in the disposition of the body."[8] Pierre Bourdieu's habitus and hexis come to mind as well. Resonant, too, is what the anthropologist Aihwa Ong imagines as "sheer life in the tropics," or how the fundamental need of human survival is organized in this part of the world between the endemic, or the vernacular, and the epidemic, or the viral: "The region is characterized by an outmigration of threatening pathogens. This 'latitudinal biodiversity' makes Southeast Asia a tropical region of uncanny surplus wealth and diseases."[9]

With *banwa* and *naturaleza* in place and in flux, the colony is not so easily localized and reconstitutes the outside at various levels of debility and cogency. This sensibility of thinking about the local may well be "archipelagic." Simone Pinet has written a luminous book on insular fictions from chivalric romance to the novel, imagining the archipelago as a corpus of elements like the island and the forest, which the banwa encompasses. The island is delineated as marginal but prone to legend, a "space open to imagination, where dreams and hauntings take place in their floating contours."[10] The forest, on the other hand, bears aspects of the *locus amoenus*, "a concept of geological configuration" that finds affinity with "deserts, islands, and mountain ranges, rendering the link between the literary motif and the geographical obvious."[11]

The essay invests in the colonial because it is the colonial moment that produces an elusive modernity. It is one that incites a revolution and conceives the nation and yet at the same time exposes the limit of that revolution and nation because it supplements the colonial civilizing process: Why must a post-colony merely end up as a nation when it could be a more encompassing country, an inclusive archipelago? That said, this elusive modernity finds a way to belong to a domain beyond the typifications of nation, carving out its distinction by inhabiting the space of the international. This is the reason the discussion here extends to a locus outside the nation, which encroaches on the "region" that is Southeast

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8   Étienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics,* trans. P. Snowdon, London: Verso, 1998, 29.
9   Aihwa Ong, "Scales of Exception: Experiments with Knowledge and Sheer Life in Tropical Southeast Asia," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography,* 29 (2008), 7.
10   Simone Pinet, *Archipelagoes: Insular Fictions from Chivalric Romance to the Novel,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, 37.
11   *Ibid*.

Asia. By positing a relationship between the national and the non-national, the international is foregrounded as a more hospitable modernity that was built up as layers of defense to constantly calibrate the hegemony of the national, which cannot be the only future of the post-colony if it truly abides by the promise of a radically reworked modernity. The international is incrementally bred by a *naturaleza* that bears traces of the passage of a corpus, a body of work, an oeuvre of persons and things that may be deemed "modern" but only to the degree that it is post-colonial, refusing the colonial overdeterminations of the national and strongly placed to be at home with others, open to affinities, and keen on solidarities. The modernity of the international is a form of risk of repressing the distinctions of nation and nurturing a *naturaleza* borne in relationalities and intersubjectivities.

The international reflexively opens up the modern and exceeds its progressivist instinct, and as such articulates a calibrated form of modernism, the kind that is thrilled by the "new" and is simultaneously anxious about the "originary." The "neo-ethnic" may be paradigmatic of its aesthetic, that is, it is resolutely fluent in the idiom of a supposedly authentic vernacular, which in itself is an invented tradition of the modern, and yet aspires to the idiosyncrasy of an acquired language to which it feels indebted and entitled. The modernism of the national is purposive, rigorous, almost singleminded, and assiduous in its fulfillment of identity, the integrity of its form. The modernism of the international, on the other hand, is distracted or distracting, sensitive to the afflictions and complicities of others, suspicious of containments and dualisms that reduce modernism into the representation of a coherent, exceptional volition. Thus, the succeeding discussion foregrounds instances in which these "distractions" are made intelligible in the guise of the "world," of "people," and of a myriad "self."

II. *The International in Polemical Texts*

At this point, the text shifts from the Philippine to another context, another level of the inter-nation. This is Southeast Asia, a geopolitical construction of colonialism, imperialism, and the Cold War that is oftentimes characterized as a region. Again, we ask if a region is anything but a locality of countries, which can only in the end be nations. Here, the international is fleshed out in three polemical texts. These texts are selected to evoke both the register of language and the discursive urgency of what is spoken to. The polemical is a salient aesthetic

that needs to be harnessed for its ability to insert fantasy into the description of the political. These texts had emerged from Southeast Asia or had shaped the relationship of Southeast Asia with the international.

1. Final Communiqué of Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia (1955).

The Asian-African Conference in Bandung was organized by Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia, and Pakistan, attended by 29 countries including Afghanistan, China, Ethiopia, Liberia, Libya, Sudan, South Vietnam, Yemen, among others. It brought together figures like Nasser of Egypt, Chou En-Lai of China, Sihanouk of Cambodia, and Nehru of India. It was a seminal moment for what would later be called Non-Aligned Movement in Belgrade in 1961 after a series of incipient initiations in India after the war.

    a.   The Asian-African Conference took note of the fact that the existence of colonialism in many parts of Asia and Africa, in whatever form it may be, not only prevents cultural cooperation, but also suppresses the national cultures of the people.

        Some colonial powers have denied their dependent peoples basic rights in the sphere of education and culture, which hampers the development of their personality and also prevents cultural intercourse with other Asian and African peoples.

        This is particularly true in the case of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, where the basic right of the people to study their own language and culture has been suppressed.

    b.   The Asian-African Conference deplored the policies and practices of racial segregation and discrimination which form the basis of government and human relations in large regions of Africa and in other parts of the world. Such conduct is not only a gross violation of human rights, but also a denial of the fundamental value of civilization and the dignity of man.

    c.   The Asian-African conference discussed the problems of dependent peoples and colonialism and the evils arising from subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation. The Conference agreed:

        First, in declaring that colonialism in all its manifestations is an evil which should be speedily brought to an end;

Second, in affirming that the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental rights.

Sukarno, the President of Indonesia said in his speech that: "This is the first intercontinental conference of colored peoples in the history of mankind."[12] He talked of the Lifeline of Imperialism that "runs from the Straits of Gibraltar, through the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea and the Sea of Japan. For most of that enormous distance, the territories on both sides of this lifeline were colonies, the peoples were unfree, their futures mortgaged to an alien system."[13]

The Conference proved to be a critical initiative that sought to provide an alternative to the superpowers United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In this particular citation, the bipolarity that a hegemonic international in the Cold War assumes is reorganized by way of a non-alignment that insists on an unrelenting critique of the colonial or coloniality as a fundamental basis of inhumanity. It is argued that the Bandung affair, which had precursors beginning in 1900 across different parts of the world, "constituted a foundational moment of the early postcolonial era."[14] As a herald of a possible "geopolitical communitas" that was committed to the project of decolonization and emancipation, it also, however, "contained the existential predicaments of newfound sovereignty and the internal and external political claims and responsibilities that would soon challenge it."[15] That the event took place in Indonesia is significant in light of the kind of modernity that had formed in the country. We might want to study, for instance, how the workshop model or the *sanggar* in the thirties, site of apprenticeship and peer-to-peer ideological discussion, would be rearticulated in the production of biennales, artist-initiated spaces, and archives, platforms that have been sustained in Indonesia more than anywhere else in Southeast Asia. The non-aligned formulation of a third moment may lead some scholars to spin the idea of a "non-aligned" modernism or cyber-

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[12]   George McTurnan Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956, 39.

[13]   *Ibid.*, 41-42.

[14]   "Introduction," in *Making Worlds After Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*, ed. C. J. Lee, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010, 3.

[15]   *Ibid.*

netic socialism that merits further theoretical pursuit.[16] Finally, in the sphere of Southeast Asia within the ambit of the Pacific and the Third World, gatherings like the First Southeast Asian Art Conference and Competition in Manila in 1957 and The Asian Art Show in Fukuoka in 1979-1980, as well as the Sydney Biennale in 1979[17] and the Havana Biennial in 1989[18] are key moments in the long durée of the international and the lasting latitude of the Third World.

2. "Between Two Worlds," Imelda Marcos, First Lady and Governor of Metropolitan Manila, 1976 International Monetary Fund-World Bank Joint Annual Meeting, 1976, Manila.

   a. The Philippines is an archipelago of 7,100 islands slung between two mighty seas—the Pacific Ocean and the China Sea; two vast continents, America and Asia; two competing ideologies, capitalism and communism; indeed between two worlds.

   For a long time we have been torn between the culture of the Orient, into which we were born, and that of the Occident, which held us in captivity for centuries. We were once the farthest outpost of Islam; we are now in the outer reaches of Christianity in Asia. Geography and history have conspired to place us at the crossroads of the world, constantly buffeted by the conflicting cross-currents of different religions, cultures, ideologies, political and economic systems.

   You have come to our country at a most exciting time, though at a somewhat awkward stage, when we are negotiating the challenging transition from a traditional order to a progressive humanist society.

   This new complex of buildings, erected on land reclaimed from the sea, stands in dramatic contrast to the slum areas which blight our city. The contrast of shrine and shanty symbolizes the shining future against our impoverished past.

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16 See Armin Medosch, "Non-Aligned Modernism—the International Network and Art Movement New Tendencies (First Phase, 1961-1965)," paper presented at the conference Postwar Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic 1945-1965, Munich 2014.

17 See Anthony Gardner, Charles Green, "The Third Biennale of Sydney: 'White Elephant or Red Herring?'," *Humanities Research*, 19 (2/2013).

18 See Rachel Weiss *et al.*, *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989*, London: Afterall Books, 2011.

b. Further, we have freed ourselves from the excesses of transplanted cultures. We have gone to our past and our roots, a rich indigenous culture that continues to flourish among our more than 85 national cultural tribes. Fortunately, a few years ago, we discovered the Tasadays—a tribe of Stone Age Filipinos hidden for centuries in the rain forests of Mindanao. In this we see our origins: the purity, the gentleness and the beauty of our land and people at the beginning of time.

c. Last month, we assembled in Manila, an international conference of scientists to discuss how science and technology should be harnessed to cope with the problems of human survival. With the Philippine experiences as a frame of reference, no aspect of modern life escaped its scrutiny. From human habitat to sea-farming; from the population explosion to solar energy; from storm control to oceanography; from telemedicine to remote sensing.

In Imelda Marcos's speech, we see the intersection of three discourses that supported the vision of an international belonging: development, identity, and democracy. Imelda, the First Lady of Ferdinand Marcos who took office in 1965 and declared Martial Law in 1972, unreels a montage of transformation, of the past and the future colliding, or better to say, constellating in the present. While the Bandung meeting implied a realignment and a potential non-alignment, Imelda gestured towards some kind of synchrony with the world and at the same time asserted the distinction of the Philippines as it sought this synchrony, a recalibration of its hybridity within the international.

This engagement with the international may also reference an engagement with the avant-garde. This disposition to assimilate and appropriate western fine-art expression does not only produce mestizaje or hybridity but in many ways mastery, with the Philippine artist feeling entitled to the "western" and making such an entitlement an intimate part of its talent and temper. Such a process played out exceedingly well in the field of the arts that Imelda Marcos liberally advocated as evidenced in, among other endeavors, the building of a cultural center of brutalist internationalist design on reclaimed land; the curation of international art and local experimental art, including *musique concrète* broadcast through public radio; the commissioning of symphonies and chamber works; the establishment of the National Music Competitions for Young Artists; and the promotion of world-class virtuosi who could sing and play piano like natives of empire and compete with those born into the culture of the forms needing the

expression, from the polyphony of Palestrina to Chopin to Tchaikovsky. This schema complicates the notion of national identity and the process of indigenization or decolonization and unsettles the theory of mimicry as one of critique. Perhaps, the language of critique has to give way to a language of intimacy, of obligational reciprocity, of importuning rather than negating. In this light, the term "neo-ethnic," as suggested earlier, might be worth looking into as we analyze how this thing called the western, regarded as outside of the ethnic, is renewed from within because the ethnic is entitled to transform.

Another aspect of the avant-garde implicated in the life of the Cultural Center is the resistance itself to the institution, or to the centralization of culture under the auspices of the state. This comes by way of the performance of David Cortez Medalla at the opening of the Cultural Center in 1969. Medalla, who later moved to England and became well-known for his kinetic sculptures and took part in Harald Szeemann's exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* in 1969 and in Documenta V in 1972, unfurled banners in the foyer of the building and staged an impromptu performance. He confronted security personnel; he talked to himself in his seat, annotating the gala presentation; and delivered a speech in front of the magnificent fountain outside after the ceremony. Medalla was disturbed by the "nerve-wracking fragmentation"[19] generated by the state policies of the Marcos government, and his intervention at the Cultural Center was a way of recovering some kind of nexus between him and others.

As Imelda Marcos was undertaking this cultural program, Ferdinand Marcos was trying to shift the Philippine foreign policy to some kind of non-alignment. For example, he opened embassies in Eastern Europe and initiated formal relations with China in 1975 and Soviet Russia in 1976. Right after the Vietnam War, the Philippines forged official ties with Vietnam in 1976.[20] In 1975, Marcos shaped a foreign policy prioritizing "ASEAN relations; relations with Socialist states, especially the Soviet Union and China; closer identification with the Third World; continuing beneficial relations with Japan; supporting Arab countries in their struggle for a just and enduring peace in the Middle East; and finding a new basis, 'compatible with the emerging realities in Asia, for a continuing

[19]   Guy Brett, *Exploding Galaxies: The Art of David Medalla,* London: Kala Press, 1995, 83.
[20]   Ricardo Jose, "The Philippines During the Cold War: Searching for Security Guarantees and Appropriate Foreign Policies, 1946-1986," in *Cold War Southeast Asia,* ed. M. H. Murfett, Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2012, 78.

healthy relationship with the U.S.'" According to a historian: "Marcos moved towards non-alignment, even with the U.S. bases still on Philippine soil."[21] In other words, Imelda's partly naïve, partly clever rhetoric sketches out the Cold War polarities of capitalism and socialism, colonial critique and international integration, as it deftly transacts the geopolitical enterprise.

Finally, there is a difference that could be gleaned in the way Imelda would envisage the world and the place of the Philippines in it from the way the architects of Bandung would. In 1948, Indonesian Prime Minister Hatta read a speech titled "Rowing Between Two Coral Reefs" and intoned the need to "become an object in the arena of international politics, but rather that we must continue to be a subject with the right to determine our [...] position [...] of a fully Independent Indonesia."[22] His trope of two seemingly impenetrable coral reefs and his binarism of object and subject protract a Cold War imaginary, while Imelda's "cross-currents" portend a more archipelagic world sphere.

3. "The Yan'an Forum in Literature and Art," Mao Zedong, 1942.

    a. The first problem is: literature and art for whom?

       This problem was solved long ago by Marxists, especially by Lenin. As far back as 1905 Lenin pointed out emphatically that our literature and art should "serve [...] the millions and tens of millions of working people."

    b. Who, then, are the masses of the people? The broadest sections of the people, constituting more than 90 per cent of our total popular, are the workers, peasants, soldiers and urban petty bourgeoisie. Therefore, our literature and art are first for the workers, the class that leads the revolution. Secondly, they are for the peasants, the most numerous and most steadfast or our allies in the revolution. Thirdly, they are for the armed workers and peasants [...] and the other armed units of the people, which are the main forces of the revolutionary war. Fourthly, they are for the laboring masses of the urban petty bourgeoisie and for the petty

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[21] *Ibid.*, 79-80.

[22] Samuel E. Crowl, "Indonesia's Diplomatic Revolution: Lining Up for Non-Alignment, 1945-1955," *Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia, 1945-1955*, Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009, 249-50.

bourgeois intellectuals, both of whom are also our allies in the revolution and capable of long-term co-operation with us.

The texts of the forum resonated with struggles in Southeast Asia against colonialisms and signaled the urgency of address premised on the people. Surely, here the international is translated as a collective struggle, informed by the ethical and the political. The international is, moreover, imbued with the socialist, the socialist international and reminds us of actually existing revolutions in the world even after 1989.

The production of manifestos in Southeast Asia in the seventies must be noted. Four such manifestos were crafted, and two of them referenced Mao's Ya'nan Forum lectures. These were the manifestos of Kaisahan in 1976 and The Artists' Front of Thailand in 1975.[23] These texts represented a kind of artistic practice that critically negotiated the demands of national identity, western art history, political action, and local values. It is possible that their strong affirmation of Mao's commitments profoundly imbricated them with socialist movements and their armed revolutions as in the Philippines, or modulated the persuasion of Buddhist values in everyday life as in Thailand.

The manifesto from Bangkok begins with the existence of historical inequity:

> For thousands of years, "small groups of big people" have taken power over politics and economics of a country or an area, have used their "power" to frighten or hurt and take advantage of "big groups of little people" The "small groups of big people" waged wars against each other, but have deceived the "big groups of little people" into fighting to the death for their parties. The "small groups of big people" have formed constitutions without an agreement of the "big groups of little people."[24]

And the manifesto from Manila proposes a program:

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[23]   For excerpts of these manifestos and a more in-depth discussion of this subject, see Patrick Flores, "First Person Plural: The Manifestos of the 1970s in Southeast Asia," in *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture,* eds. Hans Belting *et al.*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012, 224-271.

[24]   *Ibid*.

> We realize that our search will be meaningless if it does not become a collective experience, an experience that is understood and shared by the broadest number of people. In its beginnings, art was not the isolated act that it is now; it was as necessary, as integral, a part of the people's lives as the knowledge of when to plant.

> For us, therefore, the question "for whom is art?" is a crucial and significant one. And our experiences lead us to the answer that art is for the masses. It must not exist simply for the pleasures of the few who can afford it. It must not degenerate into the pastime of a few cultists [...].

> We shall therefore develop an art that no only depicts the life of the Filipino people but also seeks to uplift their condition. We shall develop an art that enables them to see the essence, the patterns behind the scattered phenomena and experience of our times.[25]

It is also important to recognize the idea that socialism may have actually fostered the international, partly because of the internalized subjectivity of workers as workers of the world, and of the primordial character of the revolution. It is maintained, too, that Moscow had been a cosmopolis. Boris Groys is of the mind that Russians thought themselves "international." When the Soviet Union was dissolved, Russians became Russians.[26] In Documenta V, the Filipino artist David Medalla proposed a work under the banner of the Artists Liberation Front and the slogan "Socialist Art Through Revolution" and exhorted all the "progressive artists all over the world" to intertwine their practice with the "practice of the revolution" and with the "peoples of the world...the great masses who are fighting for liberation." He thought that his "participatory propulsions" would be realized at higher levels through the wisdom of the masses, quoting Mao who believed that "the masses have boundless creative power."[27]

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[25] *Ibid*.; and Patrick Flores, "Social Realism: The Turns of a Term in the Philippines," *Afterall*, 34 (Autumn/Winter/2013).

[26] Boris Groys, "The Thaw: Soviet and Eastern European Art before and after the Death of Stalin," paper presented at the conference Postwar Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic 1945-1965, Munich 2014.

[27] David Medalla, Statement for Documenta V Catalogue, Kassel 1972, 197.

The idea of the international may be productively reflected upon by revisiting the concept of the colonial and the post-colonial afterlife and the post-colonial promise. From this reconsideration, we may be able to more sharply facet the angle of the national and its inclinations outward across a gamut of terms: the international, the translocal, the neo-ethnic and the polyethnic, the global, the transnational, the worldly, the cosmopolitan, the polytropic. The process of walking through the colonial and the post-war as this essay has tried to accomplish is instructive to the degree that it infuses people and things, texts and events, with agency in parts of the world that have been portrayed as peripheries but figure here as provinces instead, in the sense that they are bodies of discipline and knowledge "firmly rooted in essence" though may be "errant in form."[28]

The trope of the international lends to a deconstructive procedure and yet also splices a circuit away from the dialectic of the national and a multitude of its repressions, on the one hand, and of the unity of an economic and political "order," on the other. It is perhaps the polysemy of the prefix inter that suffers the condition so that it could adumbrate a space that is not an alternative. It is a melancholy and exhilarating space, instilling the sadness and frisson of belonging. And it is a reciprocal constituency of equivalent, entitled, and eccentric others. Such a constituency of "animate" others should, moreover, open up into lush diversities of species and histories as we inevitably revisit the exotic and the tropical, or to risk a theoretical category, the Philippine.

In terms of historicizing the inter-nation, we might want to look back on the post-war era through the eighties within particular art worlds to understand the various ways by which relationships between nations were shaped in light of the forces that had sought to gain ascendancy, from post-independence nation-states to a sequence of wars from the Pacific War, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War; the visionaries who cognitively mapped culture and the people as a totality like Mao and Imelda; and of course, collectives and the world makers within them from Bandung and beyond, this *banwa* from forest to island.

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[28] José Lezama Lima. "Baroque Curiosity," in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest,* eds. L. P. Zamora, M. Kaup, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, 213.

Kimmo Sarje*

The Rational Modernism of Sigurd Frosterus. A Nordic Interpretation

The ways that modernism, which today represents to many people the models of modern society, was developed and conceptualized in the Nordic countries, remains a relatively little known chapter in the history of modernism. Neither are the names of the major Nordic theorists familiar. The "Modernism Revisited" issue of *Filozofski vestnik*, which invites "new reflection on the notion of modernism as a historicizing, periodizing, and/or geographical-historical framework," could be an appropriate context in which to introduce Sigurd Frosterus (1876–1956), one of the leading Scandinavian theorists of the modernism of the first half of the 20th century. His impact in Finland was crucial and as he wrote in Swedish he was influential throughout the Nordic countries. Alvar Aalto thought that he was one of the few to have intellectualized architectural discourse in Finland, and important aspects of Frosterus's reflections on technology and Western civilization continued later also in the cultural criticism of Georg Henrik von Wright. Frosterus had two different concepts of modernism. In his early texts from the beginning of the 20th century he admired technology and technical rationality which he believed ruled nature. During the First World War he gradually abandoned his narrow idea of the modern and became a pluralist and a critic of technology. Also his architectural style changed from rational art nouveau towards values of craftsmanship, historicism and classicism.

My article is biographical and points to Frosterus's personal links with influential European architects, writers and critics such as Henry van de Velde, Eliel Saarinen, Roger Fry and Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche. Frosterus's essays and critiques can be interestingly compared with the texts of many of his contemporaries, including H. G. Wells, Adolf Loos, Oswald Spengler, Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin. Frosterus's architecture and writing proves how organically 20th-century modernism in Finland was rooted in Scandinavian, Continental and Anglo-American discourses. Bauhaus Universitätsverlag in Weimar will publish a collection of Frosterus's writings in 2015.

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A photograph of Sigurd Frosterus in Weimar in 1903. Museum of Finnish Architecture.

The architect, critic, essayist and art collector Sigurd Frosterus was a significant influential figure in Finnish and Scandinavian modernism during the first five decades of the 20th century.[1] He designed multi-storey apartment buildings, villas, manor houses, commercial buildings and power plants. In Helsinki alone, his office designed dozens of buildings, the best-known being the Stockmann department store, his main work. One of the leading architects of his generation in Finland, Frosterus was also a prolific critic and philosophical essayist, who published some ten books on the problems of painting, literature, architecture, philosophy and modern life.[2]

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[1] An early version of this essay formed a part of my PhD thesis. Kimmo Sarje, *Sigurd Frosteruksen modernin käsite. Maailmankatsomus ja arkkitehtuuri*, Dimensio 3, Valtion taidemuseon tieteellinen sarja, Helsinki: Valtion taidemuseo, 2000.

[2] Books by Sigurd Frosterus: *Arkitektur en stridskrift våra motståndare tillägnad af Gustaf Strengell och Sigurd Frosterus*, Helsingfors: Euterpes Förlag, 1904; *H. G. Wells*, Helsingfors: Fölagsaktiebolaget Helios, 1906; *Olikartade skönhetsvärden*, Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag & Helsingfors: Holger Schildts Förlag, 1915; *Moderna vapen*, Borgå: Holger Schildts Förlag, 1915; *Regnbågfärgernas segertåg*, Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag & Helsingfors: Holger Schildts Förlag, 1917; *Solljus och slagskugga*, Helsingfors: Söderström & C:o För-

Weimar, where Frosterus studied and worked in the office of the architect Henry van de Velde from 1903 to 1904, was a special city in his development as a young architect and intellectual. Frosterus's friends and acquaintances included van de Velde and his family, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, Count Harry Kessler, the painters Ludwig von Hofmann and Max Libermann, theatre director Gordon Craig, the actress Louise Dumont and the ceramist Erica von Scheel, all of whom he mentions in his correspondence.[3]

In the early 20th century, Weimar played an important role in reforming cultural life in Germany. Frosterus's contacts with Weimar were also important impulses for Finnish modernism, the significance of which may not yet have been evaluated in all respects.[4] His collaboration with van de Velde was fruitful. During his stay in Weimar, Frosterus formulated the starting points of his rationalist aesthetic—his so-called Steel and Reason style—in practical and theoretical terms.

Frosterus sent radical entries in a machine-aesthetic spirit from Weimar to the architectural competitions for the railway stations of Helsinki and Viipuri (present-day Vyborg) in 1904, but with no success. The design for the railway station in Helsinki was defined in terms of reinforced concrete, glass and applying the shapes of railway locomotives in a rational *art nouveau* spirit. Eliel Saarinen and his colleagues won both competitions and were given the commissions for the projects.

In a defence of his artistic and theoretical views, Frosterus and his colleague Gustaf Strengell published also in 1904 a manifesto of rationalist modernism entitled *Arkitektur, en stridskrift* (Architecture. A Challenge) which helped break down the dominant status of national romanticism in Finnish architecture and

lagsaktiebolag, 1917; *Färgproblemet i måleriet*, Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag & Helsingfors: Holger Schildts Förlag, 1920 (Dissertation); *Jorden krymper, jorden växer*, Helsingfors: Holger Schildts Förlag, 1930; *AB Stockmann OY*, Helsingfors, 1931; *AB Stockmann OY*, Helsingfors, 1939 (auf Deutsch & in English); *Stålålderns janusansikte*, Stockholm: Holger Schildts Förlag, 1935. (Original version Helsingfors: Söderström & C:o Förlagsaktiebolag, 1935); *Nordiskt i dur och moll*, Helsingfors: Söderström & C:o Förlagsaktiebolag, 1946.

3   Kimmo Sarje, "Ein neuer Stiel für ein neues Weimar. Mitteleuropäische Impulse im frühen finnischen Modernismus," trans. Tiina Solda, *Jahrbuch für finnisch-deutsche Literaturbeziehungen*, Nr. 30, 1998.

4   Kimmo Sarje, "Sigurd Frosterus in der Kulturgeschichte Finnlands," trans. Tiina Solda, *Jahrbuch für finnisch-deutsche Literaturbeziehungen*, Nr. 300, 1998.
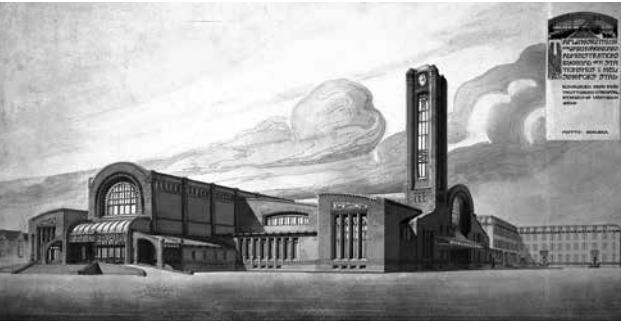
Sigurd Frosterus's entry in the Helsinki railway station competition, 1904. Museum of Finnish Architecture.

design.[5] These critics underlined the structural starting points of architecture and called for a scientific, international and honest attitude. They supported contemporary technology and new materials such as steel and concrete as the basis for construct. The Steel and Reason style (in Swedish en järn- och hjärnstil) was their slogan for replacing national, archaeological and mythological ideals.[6]

Eliel Saarinen also took the critique and Frosterus's competition entry seriously. The result of this was that when completed in 1919, the Helsinki Railway Station by Saarinen finally resembled Frosterus's entry more than Saarinen's prize-winning national-romantic design.

In Finnish art history, early 20th-century Weimar thus represented rationalism and a new interpretation of the art nouveau style that was more abstract than before. In an article "Henry van de Velde. Tänkaren och teoretikern" (Henry van de Velde as a thinker and theorist) from 1905, Frosterus presented van de Velde's conception of art and his role in developing and spreading the *arts and crafts* movement. Also in his work as a designer and architect, Frosterus applied and developed the ideas and motifs that he had adopted from van de Velde. His art nouveau-style entries for the railway station competitions in the spirit of van de Velde, however, were original works. The influence of van de Velde may be even too obvious in Frosterus's designs for interiors and desks, but in the design of armchairs the structural approach of this young architect can be seen.

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[5]   Kimmo Sarje: "Gustaf Strengell and Nordic Modernism," *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, no. 35, 2008.
[6]   Kimmo Sarje, "Sigurd Frosterus: From Progressive to Critic of Technology," trans. Timothy Binham and Kimmo Sarje, *Thesis*, Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Heft ½, 1997.

Two armchairs and a table designed by
Sigurd Frosterus ca. 1908 in his studio.
Museum of Finnish Architecture.

The architect Gustaf Nyström, Frosterus's teacher in architecture in Finland, had studied in Vienna in 1878-1879 and admired the work of Otto Wagner. Perhaps this is why Frosterus's first theoretical article, from 1901, was on Wagner's conceptions of architecture. He supported the constructional and analytical attitude of Wagner, and the latter's conception of metropolitan architecture. It appears that Wagner was almost as important as van de Velde in shaping Frosterus's notions of architecture. On the other hand, Frosterus and van de Velde had a personal and long-term interactive relationship.

While Frosterus's decision to train in van de Velde's office was partly based on fortuitousness, I would claim that a decisive motive was his own professional ambition, the desire to develop as an architect in the most challenging setting possible. This was also in keeping with the programmatic aims of the *Euterpe* group of young Swedish-speaking intellectuals in Helsinki, of which Frosterus was a key member. The aim was to develop the culture of one's own country in the spirit of Western internationalism.

The Belgian-English painter and ceramist Alfred William Finch moved to Finland in 1897 and achieved a prominent position in the Finnish art world. Van de Velde and Finch were fellow painters and old friends in Belgium. They were also members of the artist group known as *Les XX (Vingt)*. Finch served as an intermediary and confidentially recommended Frosterus as an assistant to van de Velde.

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Van de Velde and Frosterus

When he began work at van de Velde's office in Weimar, Frosterus was a 27-year-old architect who also had a Master of Arts degree and was already known as sharp critic. He had studied art history, literature and philosophy at the University of Helsinki under the renowned professors of these respective disciplines: J. J. Tikkanen, Carl Gustaf Estlander and Edvard Westermarck. The university was followed by two years of studying architecture at the Polytechnic Institute of Finland in Helsinki, where he was taught by the architect Gustaf Nyström, who had established his career with public buildings in the Neo-Renaissance style and was a member of the Academy of Arts of St. Petersburg. He was also taught by the national-romantic architect Usko Nyström. Frosterus had travelled extensively in Europe and published his impressionistic and analytical letters from his visits to Siena and London. He spoke several languages, being more fluent in English than German or French.

Frosterus was no longer a lump of clay to be shaped and moulded when he began his collaboration with van de Velde. Despite his great and sincere admiration for his master, Frosterus's letters from Weimar soon began to include critical remarks. In a letter to his mother (18.11.1903), he noted, "Van de Velde is incredibly skilled in ornamentation and 'interior decoration', but he is clearly no architect". There was also an obvious difference of temperament between the mentor and his pupil, who was analytical rather than the spontaneous, intuitive artist that van de Velde was.

In the early 1900s, Frosterus was a proponent of strict, scientifically argued rationalism, for which rapidly developing machine technology was pointing the way. In a travel essay entitled "London-Rhapsodi" (London Rhapsody) from 1903 he was intoxicated by the fast tempo of the metropolis. Railway stations, railway yards, locomotives and the London underground were modern works of art for him. This masculine emphasis on the importance of technology and science also contained a rejection of the feminine and decorative. To Frosterus, they were something decadent that threatened to paralyse creativity. In this respect, he shared the attitudes of H. G. Wells, an author whom he followed throughout his life and of whose works he published his first book in 1906.

Frosterus's uncompromising rationalism also made him critical towards excessively painterly, archaeological and mythological national romanticism and unduly decorative Secession architecture and design. Therefore, Eliel Saarinen of Finland and Joseph Maria Olbrich of Austria, even with their considerable merits, were also cautionary examples, for the same reason he was also wary of van de Velde's decorative mannerisms. Nonetheless, Frosterus adopted many influences from all these leading contemporary architects.

Villa Nissen, designed by Frosterus and Strengell and built at Meilahti in Helsinki in 1904, owes its roof design and external appearance to villa architecture by Olbrich—although the rendered façades do not have ornaments as in the villas by the Austrian architect. Frosterus's published essay from the same year on Olbrich's architecture was of a critical tone: "Joseph M. Olbrich is not one of those who will steer architecture in a new direction and open broad perspectives. He is a leading name among those who have attacked old values in a lighter and more random fashion but not too harshly."[7]

Van de Velde had great confidence in Frosterus's skills and discernment and their cooperation was based on mutual respect and friendship. It was only Frosterus's entry in the Viipuri Railway Station competition that led to an argument that both parties sincerely regretted. Defending his entry in a letter to his mother on 1 August 1904 Frosterus wrote: "I proceed from constructional requirements [...] while v.d.V. wants, from the very beginning, to juggle abstract lines and surfaces, for which so-called assured gaze and taste can give a permanent justification." Regardless of the criticism, Frosterus admired and respected van de Velde and was grateful for the opportunity to work with him. On New Year's Eve 1903, Frosterus described his feelings as follows:

> I can speak with him about everything, and for the time being he is the only person, who has really been able to help me, not just as a paragon, but also with his words. He has a wonderful enchantment about him when he looks within you with his large, dark black greenish-brown eyes, and speaks with his resonant assured and self-confident voice of his own, hard and good experiences; his unswerving enthusiasm, his strong will to be victorious has something melting

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7   Sigurd Frosterus, "Josef M. Olbrich. En arkitektonisk orientering," *Euterpe* 34, 1904, 402.

and inspiring to it that will not die and be extinguished once it is beyond his enchanted circle.

While working Weimar, Frosterus assisted van de Velde in the design of at least seven projects.[8] Furthermore, as noted above, he prepared his entries for the Helsinki and Viipuri railway station, while a villa jointly designed by him and Strengell was being built in Helsinki. Frosterus was in the midst of an intense and productive period.

Van de Velde's satisfaction with Frosterus's work and their mutual feeling of trust are evinced by the fact that van de Velde proposed the founding of a joint architectural practice under both names. As partners collaborating in work, they complemented each other in many ways. Van de Velde was a European celebrity and one of the leading architects and ideologists of the *art nouveau* style; he was a painter by training and self-taught as an architect. Frosterus was still a talented novice in the field but with the benefit of a professional degree.

"An almost dizzying perspective for the future" was Frosterus's opinion of the offer in a letter sent to his mother on 4 January 1904. After serious reflection, however, he declined the offer, maintaining that it would be easier for him to start his career in Helsinki where he already had a joint office with Strengell. In addition, van de Velde's authority and sovereign role made him feel cautious. He also suspected that Mrs. Maria van de Velde would not accept the shared professional distinction.

Van de Velde was naturally disappointed by Frosterus's negative decision, but in retrospect, he felt it was a wise choice. As a result he did not embroil his colleague in the difficulties that he would soon encounter in Weimar.[9]

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[8] Leon Ploegaerts & Pierre Puttemans, *L'œuvre archtecturale de Henry van de Velde*, Atelier Vokaer—Bruxelles, Les Presses de l'Université Laval—Québec, 1987, 285, 287–288, 294, 297–298. The projects were Haus Herbert Esche in Chemnitz (1902–1903), Haus in Chicago (Fassade) (1904), Entwurf für einen Neubau des Grossherzoglichen Museums für Kunst und Gewerbe in Weimar (1903–1904), Entwurf für das Dumont-Theater in Weimar (Fassade) (1903–04), Immeuble le 'Secession' in Berlin (1903–1904), Kunstschule in Weimar (1904–1911) and Der Grossherzogliche Sächsische Kunstgewerbschule in Weimar (1905–1906).

[9] Henry van de Velde, *Geschichte meines Lebens*, ed. H. Curjel, Munich: R. Piper & Co Verlag, 1962, 260.

Frosterus's decision to operate on his own did not lead to any falling out. Even much later, in his article "Arkitektonisk antinomi" (Architectural antinomy) from 1914, Frosterus defended his friend's copyright in the Théâtre des Champs Elysées project, in which architect August Perret and his engineer brother Gustave Perret had taken the initiative. Frosterus wrote: "Eternal antagonisms between sketch and realization, genius and routine and theory and practice have once again let forth their cruel play [...] and above all this is the spirit of van de Velde, although his name is not mentioned." [10]

In 1909, correspondence between Frosterus and van de Velde was interrupted for decades, and was not resumed until after the Second World War. The architects had a last meeting in 1953 at van de Velde's home in Oberäger in Switzerland.

Nietzsche and Wagner

The philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche was markedly reflected in Frosterus's intellectual setting in Helsinki in the late 19th and early 20th century. Nietzsche's works were translated into Swedish and Finnish at an early stage and they were discussed. The author Georg Brandes of Denmark, who interpreted Nietzsche's philosophy, often visited Helsinki, where he had a large circle of friends and acquaintances. Brandes's aristocratic radicalism emphasizing the culturally reforming power of talented men found support among intellectuals.

Nietzsche was worshipped as an intellectual example in the Euterpe circle and there were pilgrimages to Sils-Maria in the Engaden region in the Swiss Alps where Nietzsche's chalet was located. Frosterus also visited Sils-Maria and enjoyed the fresh outdoors. "Not a trace of southern vegetation, everything is cold, severe and serious. It is grand and moving rather than painterly and 'beautiful', i.e. just what I wanted to see," wrote Frosterus in a letter from Sils-Maria on 7 August 1900.

Frosterus was also drawn to the Alps by Giovanni Segantini, the great painter of Engaden, whom Frosterus regarded to be an important reformer of painting and a herald of the new century, like Nietzsche. In an essay on this painter from 1903, Frosterus wrote:

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[10] Sigurd Frosterus, "Arkitektonisk antinomi," *Nya Argus* 14, 1914, 121.

> And so on the stage are almost simultaneously both of them, who with their iron grip pressed the Alpine air within the boundaries of culture and from their solitary heights forced fresher, cool winds into the dust and stuffiness of the valleys; Segantini and the poet of Zarathustra. That two so excellent individuals [...] in almost the same place [...] independently of each other achieved their development is wonderful proof of the dismembering feeling of liberation that a person of the plains feels when standing up at the snow line, trembling with happiness and a thirst for action, facing nature alone in all its law-bound, free grandeur.[11]

While studying and working in Henry van de Velde's office in Weimar, Frosterus met Nietzsche's sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, a leading personage in the city. He received personal invitations from the philosopher's sister—"Zarathustra's Sancho Panza" as she was called by Theodor Adorno[12]—to visit or dine at her home. In his letters, Frosterus described these meetings and considered Förster-Nietzsche's activities and personality. While critical, Frosterus also felt sympathy for her.

Van de Velde received many commissions and plans related to Nietzsche, from graphic design for books to a memorial. One of his achievements was the interior design of the Nietzsche Archive, which Frosterus presented passionately and analytically in the magazine *Euterpe* in 1904. According to him, van de Velde was one of the greatest interior architects of all time. In a letter to his mother on 6 November 1903, he described the gifted and energetic van de Velde as "a prototype of the superman".

Nietzsche was one of Frosterus's intellectual guiding figures. "Nietzsche is great, as an example, a personality, a symbol," wrote Frosterus in an essay in 1905 with as much conviction as Adorno wrote four decades later: "Nietzsche, one of the most advanced enlighteners of all [...]."[13] At the Nietzsche Archive, the Finn had the opportunity to study the correspondence of Nietzsche and his friend, the philologist Erwin Rohde. Frosterus sought to respond to the problems ethics

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[11] Sigurd Frosterus, "Giovanni Segantini," *Euterpe* 8, 1903, 105.

[12] Theodor W. Adorno, "Wagner, Nietzsche and Hitler," (original 1947), *Gesammelte Schriften* Band 19, Musikalische Schriften VI, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984, 408.

[13] *Ibid.*, 410.

aroused by Nietzsche; he was preoccupied by the human character, rhetoric and psychology of this misanthrope.[14]

Richard Wagner was well-known as a composer in late 19th-century Finland, and Frosterus, who loved music, had no doubt heard Wagner's music already in Helsinki. During his stay in Weimar he had many opportunities to deepen his views of the composer.

Frosterus had reservations about Wagner, whose art he regarded as magnificent, but the culmination of a long course of development rather than anything new as such. Analysing a performance of *Tannhäuser* in a letter to his mother on 21 December 1903 he wrote: "He is still completely on the old basis with Germanic mythology, Schopenhauer and Christianity as his supports." In a review from 1947, Adorno criticized Wagner in the same spirit for "his bombastic Germanic *Weltanschauung*."[15] Frosterus found authoritarianism to be the composer's problem, in addition to underestimating his audience. Writing to his father Theodor Frosterus on 28 November 1904, he summarized the thoughts aroused by a performance of *Lohengrin*: "He speaks 'von oben herab'. He preaches. He gives orders and wants to be obeyed. He does not permit any discussion, not interjections; he loves to hear only his own voice resound over the heads of the masses... But Wagner is nonetheless a unique genius, whose work is not diminished by justified counter-arguments."

Back to Finland

After returning to Helsinki, Frosterus continued his collaboration with Strengell. A steam power plant for the town of Kokkola in 1905 was the largest project of their joint office. The office, however, closed in 1906, but in the same year the architects established an agency for design products. Frosterus continued on his own, designing interiors and villas and as a critic and editor of the journal *Arkitekten* (The Architect) from 1908 to 1911. He married Emmy von Kraemer, the daughter of Admiral Oscar von Kraemer who had served three Tsars – in 1907.

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14 Sigurd Frosterus, "Friedrich Nietzsches brefväxling med Erwin Rohde," *Euterpe* 39–40, 1905.

15 Adorno, *op. cit.*, 411.

Sigurd Frosterus's first apartment building, at no. 7 Töölönkatu street in Helsinki, was built in 1910. Museum of Finnish Architecture.

Several apartment buildings designed by Frosterus were built in Helsinki in the early 1910s. His first building of this type, at no. 7 Töölönkatu Street, was built in 1910. The rendered façade of this building is decorated with greenish ceramic tiles and carefully considered details carved in natural stone; the verticality of the design is emphasized by the pillar structures at the street corner of the house, roofed balconies and window bays. The building drew more upon the starting points of Otto Wagner of Vienna than the work of van de Velde.

A culmination of Frosterus's architectural designs from before the First World War was the Taos residential and commercial building constructed in 1912 at the corner of Bulevardi and Yrjönkatu streets in Helsinki. This building displays connections with the architecture of van de Velde, for example in the arch motif of the façade hewn from natural stone. The building is a total work of art of plasticity with a large number of finished details. The dynamic design of the courtyard side is also impressive.

Sigurd Frosterus's book *Moderna vapen*
(Modern weapons) 1915.
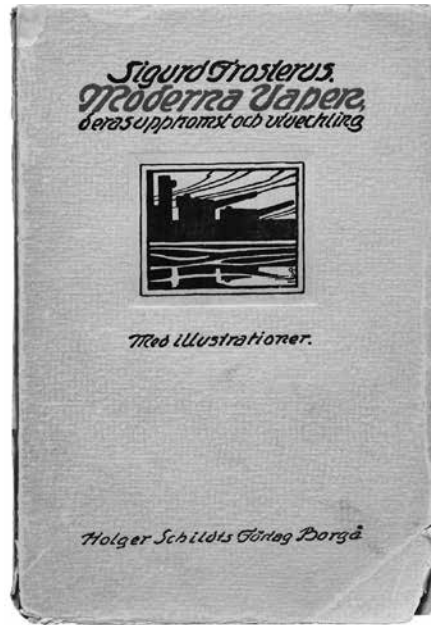
In his project, Frosterus followed modern principles quite consistently, but he had only limited opportunities to work with reinforced concrete, the use of which he propagated. He regarded ornamentation and the façade decorations of 19th-century revived styles in the same terms as Adolf Loos in the latter's essay "Die potemkische Stadt" (The Potemkin Town) from 1898. "We cannot, however, sufficiently underline that the *emphasis is not on ornament,*" wrote Frosterus in 1904.[16]

In his review of palatial commercial buildings by his Finnish colleagues Armas Lindgren and Lars Sonck in 1911, Frosterus, however, no longer called for the correspondence of the façade and the interior as required by the modernist norm, but instead accepted the display value of a monumental façade as a commercial necessity. Only seven years previously, in 1904, he had severely condemned the carnivalistic façade of the Pohjola Insurance building by the Gesellius, Lindgren, Saarinen office as archaeological and anachronistic.[17]

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[16]   Sigurd Frosterus, Gustaf Strengell, *Arkitektur en stridskrift våra motståndare tillägnad af Gustaf Strengell och Sigurd Frosterus*, Helsingfors: Euterpes Förlag, 1904, 44.

[17]   Kimmo Sarje, "Facades and Functions. Sigurd Frosterus as a Critic of Architecture," *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, nos. 40–41, 2010–2011.

"Det moderna slagskeppet" (The Modern Battleship), an aestheticizing analysis of the dreadnought published by Frosterus in 1907, two years before Marinetti's futurist manifesto was the culmination of his machine aesthetics in terms of a cynical notion of a functional machine of war as a modern work of art. His interest in issues of machine aesthetics, from military technology to painting, was, however, permanent. His book *Moderna vapen* (Modern Weapons) presenting new military technology from both technical and aesthetic perspectives appeared in 1915, and in his book *Regnbågsfärgernas segertåg* (The Triumph of the Colours of the Rainbow) on new painting in 1917 he admired the way in which Italian Futurist painters depicted movement.

Frosterus's aesthetic appreciation, however, was changing in a more pluralistic direction. Strict rationalism was no longer enough for him. In 1915 at the latest, through his enthusiastic presentation of Westminster Cathedral in London, designed by John Francis Bentley and built in 1895–1902, he spoke in favour art-historical curiosity and creative traditionalism instead of a narrow view of modernism. Frosterus was impressed and convinced by the cathedral's Byzantine points of departure, drawing upon Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, its dimensions and craftsmanship. He regarded the cathedral to be the "greatest victory that church architecture can display since the High Renaissance."[18]

In his article "Järnet och teglet" (Iron and Brick) from 1917 Frosterus rejected bare steel structures[19] and the machine ideal as a starting point for immobile buildings for aesthetic and technical reasons, the latter included fire safety. According to him, the force of gravitation on a firm foundation called for simple rectangular forms instead of s-curves—especially in the Nordic countries where the effects of ice and snow had to be minimized in structures and façades. The Finnish architect felt that van de Velde's mistake had been to apply the forms of moving constructions, such as trains and steamships, in static structures.

The essay "Järnet och teglet" was a well-argued reassessment of Frosterus's and Strengell's early polemic manifesto on architecture ("Arkitektur, en stridskrift"), now to the benefit of traditionalism. Also in Frosterus's own architecture, brick-

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[18]   Sigurd Frosterus, "Den katolska katedralen i Westminster," *Arkitekten* II, 1915, 13.

[19]   Frosterus already severely criticized the bare steel structures of the Amsterdam Stock Exchange designed by a Hendrik Berlage in a letter to Henry van de Velde dated 17.2.1904. This issue does not seem to involve a changing of opinion but rather a public statement of it.

work and craftsmanship gained importance, with Swedish national-romanticists, such as Ragnar Östberg, and the British architect Edwin Lutyens as his examples. Red brick was a material close to Frosterus, who applied it in various works, from apartment buildings to power plants.

Soon after the Finnish Civil War in 1918, Frosterus and Ole Gripenberg (1892–1979) founded a joint architectural office. The practice was highly prolific, designing apartment and commercial buildings, power plants, factories, bridges, manor houses and auxiliary facilities for rural conditions. Vanaja Manor is an opulent rural residence of red brick designed by Frosterus in the spirit of Lutyens and Östberg in the early 1920s. Bridge projects were an opportunity for him to experiment with simplified functional reinforced concrete structures.

Wertheim and Stockmann

In 1905, Frosterus published "Berlin-Rhapsodie" (Berlin Rhapsody), a travel essay of far-reaching vision in which he analyses his impressions of the Wertheim department store designed by Alfred Messel. The building stood in the centre of Berlin, but was destroyed in the Second World War. With its thirst for the new and worship of the metropolis, Frosterus's essay is almost the diametrical opposite of Walter Benjamin's nostalgic recollections of his childhood in Berlin, which the latter published in the 1930s. Benjamin writes of loggias in backyards, the mazes of the city and its mysterious life, while Frosterus focuses on the innovations of department store design. "Berlin Rhapsody" finds more of a parallel in the manner of analysing a modern metropolis followed by Benjamin in his essay "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century" from 1939.

On the outside, Wertheim was quite a conservative Neo-Gothic building, but its interior revealed the new design of space permitted by reinforced concrete technology. Frosterus was particularly fascinated by the atrium as a central element organizing the building. He also pointed to the flexible and efficient flow of customers within the building. The department store had two visages; in daytime its windows reflected sunlight and in the evening it was a lantern lighting the surrounding urban space.

Wertheim was a source of important impulses when Frosterus participated in 1916 in the architectural competition for the Stockmann department store in

Sigurd Frosterus's major architectural project was the Stockmann department store in Helsinki built in 1916–1930. Photo: N. Wasastjerna. Museum of Finnish Architecture.

The atrium of the Stockmann department store. Photo: Roos. Museum of Finnish Architecture.

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Helsinki. The atrium of the building and its surrounding balconies were the central starting point of the design, along with transparency and distinct routes of access. Frosterus drew upon his experiences of the Wertheim department store in these principles. Wertheim and Frosterus's entry also had external similarities, such as vertical structures of the façade, a steep-pitched roof and skylights.

Frosterus's entry was given second place, but was chosen to be realized instead of the winning design by Valter & Ivar Thomé. On this occasion, Eliel Saarinen, who had won the competitions for both the Helsinki and Viipuri railway stations, was given third place.

Sigurd Frosterus's dream was to erect a skyscraper at the south corner of the Stockmann department store in Helsinki. Museum of Finnish Architecture.

The Stockmann department store was completed in 1930, although designs for its south end still remained to be realized. During the years of construction of this project, Frosterus's architecture and world-view, however, continued to undergo profound changes as this admirer of technology grew to become its critic. The final architectural result was thus a symbiosis of rationalism, classicism and Swedish national romanticism.[20]

Frosterus dreamed of a skyscraper at the south end of the Stockmann building. To expedite these plans he published in 1922 a pamphlet entitled *Skyskrapan hägrar* (A Dream of a Skyscraper) which also appeared as an article in the journal *Arkkitehti/Arkitekten*. With reference to the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena he argued that the department store in its valley setting needed a tower. He also felt that a skyscraper was suited to the city centre and silhouette of Helsinki. The tower was never built, but an option for it remained in the plans of the department store and the architect until the 1950s.

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[20]   Kimmo Sarje, "The Stockmann department store as an emblem of the modern metropolis," trans. Michael Garner, *Arkkitehti* 5–6, 1995.

Eliel Saarinen was inspired at the same time by ideas for skyscrapers. In 1922, he participated successfully in the competition for the Chicago Tribune Tower with an entry which he had prepared in Finland. His conception of a modern skyscraper received second prize and it was praised in American reviews of the competition. No less a figure than Louis Sullivan regarded Saarinen's tower design of staggered tapering form to be revolutionary. Saarinen's project, however, was never built, but it had a great effect on American skyscraper architecture.

A couple of years later, in 1924, Frosterus applied the skyscraper theme in his design for an administrative centre for Helsinki. This project displays echoes of Saarinen's staggered tapering skyscraper shape. Frosterus's designs for skyscrapers also remained on paper. [21]

Frosterus's collection of essays *Jorden krymper, jorden växer* (A Shrinking and Growing World) appeared in 1930, the same year when the major part of the Stockmann department store was completed. The ethical criticism voiced in the title essay of the collection took aim at machine culture, class struggle, imperialism and policies of war, while also drawing upon impulses from Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (The Decline of the West). Frosterus considered the crisis of Occidental culture in the following terms: "Like a child who has suddenly received an incomprehensible mechanical toy, mankind in its curiosity fiddles with its sharp tools. Machines are outgrowing their users. A uniform, impersonal world economy is taking grip of ever larger parts of the globe."[22]

Frosterus continued his assessment of modern Western culture in the essay "Nuets facit" (The Results of the Present) in his main philosophical work *Stålålderns janusansikte* (The Janus Face of the Steel Era). He also returned—from new perspectives—to many of the philosophical and moral issues of his earlier writings "Arkitektur. En stridskrift", Järnet och teglet" and Jorden krymper, jorden växer". Frosterus also considered the concepts of socialism and Darwinism and compared Marx, Lenin and the British socialists, such as H. G. Wells and Bernard

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[21]   Elina Standertskjöld, *The Dream of the New World. American Influence on Finnish Architecture from the Turn of the 20th Century to the Second World War*, Helsinki: Museum of Finnish Architecture, 2010, 6–7 & 31–33.

[22]   Sigurd Frosterus, "Jorden krymper, jorden växer," in Sigurd Frosterus, *Jorden krymper, jorden växer*, Helsingfors: Holger Schildts Förlag, 1930, 22.

Shaw. According to him, *Capital* by Marx and Darwin's *Origin of Species* had fundamentally changed Western thinking in religious, social and political issues.

According to Frosterus, *Capital* was a "suggestive" work though drawing upon an old philosophical tradition, and he could not believe in class struggle as a patent solution to the problems of society. As a Nietzschean, he underlined the importance of the individual for progress in society and culture, but he regarded social Darwinism—*the survival of the fittest*—as an ideology to be a distasteful defence of might. Frosterus also condemned anti-Semitism and nationalism and was particularly averse to National Socialism. [23]

Frosterus regarded Lenin's personal contribution to have been decisive for the Russian Revolution and he was critically curious about the new Soviet state. He appreciated Shaw, in turn, as a sharp critic of society. H. G. Wells's British socialism calling for responsibility and initiative from the upper and lower classes alike was closest to Frosterus's own views. Henri Bergson's vitalism – *l'élan vital* – fascinated Frosterus as the metaphysical basis of a modern world-view. "The revolutionary aspect of considering the human condition is that we have suddenly seen the species itself to be live and happy, while the individuals of the same generation, who by their numbers and as bearers of various traits ensure forced adaptation to the future, descend to become the tools of the spark of life from one generation to another."[24]

"Nuets facit" was Frosterus's statement of contemporary diagnosis in which he sought his place among the prevailing intellectual and ideological currents. He addressed some philosophical issues only by way of reference and others in an

[23] As an avant-gardist, modernist or even as a traditionalist, Frosterus was not drawn to totalitarianism. He cannot be regarded in terms of "reactionary modernism" as defined by Jeffrey Herf in *Reactionary modernism. Technology, culture, and politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, whereby the industrial revolution is associated with national traditions and nationalism. In her article "Avantgarde *und* Faschismus," Lia Lindner presents a wide-ranging discussion of avant-garde and modernist connections with totalitarianism with regard to art theory: Lindner, "Avantgarde und Faschismus. Anmerkungen zum Für und Wider einer fragwürdigen Gleichsetzung in der westeuropäischen kunstwissenschaftlichen Literatur zu Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts,"*Acta Historiae Artium* XLVIII (2007): 203-62.

[24] Sigurd Frosterus, "Nuets facit," in Sigurd Frosterus, *Stålålderns janusansikte*, Stockholm: Holger Schildts Förlag, 1935 (original version Helsingfors: Söderström & Co, 1935), 161–62.

argued manner. Frosterus was concerned about the future of the human race on Earth under the pressures of egotism, class struggle, propaganda and imperialism. According to this philosopher, the "mechanically controllable splitting of the nucleus of the atom," to which he already referred in his book *Moderna vapen* in 1915 and of which Wells also wrote at an early stage, offered mankind fantastical opportunities for both good and evil. Frosterus's political utopia was a world state that could arbitrate the conflicts for the benefit of the future of mankind. He understood at the time of writing his essay, in the mid-1930s, that a world state, "a goal so necessary as an orientation still remains far from the path of achieving it." [25] The United Nations founded after the Second World War was a more solid step than the League of Nations in the direction desired by Frosterus.

The Liberation of Painting

Of the liberal arts, painting was of particular importance for Frosterus. As a young architect, he painted water colours, especially on his travels in Italy and at his Villa Fridhem near Helsinki. Frosterus was one of the leading critics and theorists of art in Finland and Scandinavia before and after the First World War. He was fascinated by the problem of colour both experientially and theoretically. Frosterus's considerable art collection, mainly containing works of French Post-Impressionism from Paul Signac to Louis Valtat and Finnish early 20th-century painting from A. W. Finch to Magnus Enckell is deposited in the Amos Anderson Art Museum in Helsinki.

Frosterus's programmatic writings of the early 1900s show that he had a wide knowledge of contemporary aims in the visual arts, from naturalism to symbolism. In the article "James McNeill Whistler. In memoriam" from 1903 Frosterus admitted that he regarded Whistler to be one of the leading painters of the age and was particularly moved by Whistler's portrait of his mother: "The wonderful picture of Mrs Whistler appeals straight to the heart – it is the most beautiful painting that I have ever seen."[26] Whistler was also one of Frosterus's ideals as an art critic and polemicist. The critic found the artist's tendency to develop abstraction towards pure visuality and to argue in writing for his conception of art to be fascinating.

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[25] *Ibid.*, 149.
[26] Sigurd Frosterus, "James McNeill Whistler. In memoriam," *Euterpe* 27, 1903, 344.

In the article "Framtidskonst" (Art of the Future) published in 1905, Frosterus believed that the evolution of art was based on continuity instead of upheaval. "The modern is thus not the opposite of the old or the traditional, but instead an imprecise expression of certain properties that gradually, developed through the exact sciences and their practical applications achieve more permanents forms day by day," he proposed.[27] Frosterus maintained that modernity itself was "a worn-out, jaded term, a common pasture grazed bare by the whole world."[28] It was thus necessary to define its meaning in its specific contexts of use.

According to Frosterus, the art of the future would not be the expression of arbitrary fantasy, but the product, as it were, of mature imagination conscious of the laws of existence. A locomotive or a railway station could be art, and also furniture design could achieve the status of an independent art: "*pure line, intelligent ornament, an intact new world*—when the eye evolves in time to understand the law-like regularities of the play of line as sensitively as it has understood colours for a long while, and as sensitively as the ear hears the wrong note or incorrect playing in an orchestra."[29]

According to Frosterus's vision the art of the future would be pluralistic, since he found a uniform modern style to be restrictive. As an elitist, he believed that the development of art would be carried out by a small circle of people devoted to it, while also welcoming the middle class and proletariat of the visual arts— the various forms of printmaking. Frosterus believed that art would gradually evolve towards restrained appropriateness: "The art of the future will be passive, ascetic and restrained—leaving freedom for those who enjoy it."[30]

Frosterus's focus as a critic and theorist gradually began to shift towards the evolution of painting and problems of colour theory. He published his theoretical essays in *Regnbågsfärgernas segertåg* (The Triumph of the Colours of the Rainbow) in 1917. *Solljus och Slagskugga* (Sunlight and Umbra) a collection of reviews by Frosterus, also appeared in 1917. *Regnbågsfärgernas segertåg* was influential in the region of the Scandinavian languages and it was based on Frosterus's talks and writings from 1908–1916. An essay in the book on the

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[27] Sigurd Frosterus, "Framtidskonst," *Euterpe* 43–46, 1905, 441.

[28] *Ibid.*, 441.

[29] *Ibid.*, 444.

[30] *Ibid.*

Young-Helmholtz colour hypothesis and its reflections in painting focused on visual perception in the light of modern science, physics and the psychology of perception. The first version of this text already appeared in 1909. The other four essays in the book were on the orientations, autonomy and self-reflective nature of modern painting. Frosterus aimed at demonstrating the evolutionary logic of pure painting with his analytical discussion.

In 1920, Frosterus deepened his studies of colour theory in his doctoral dissertation *Färgproblemet i måleriet* (The Problem of Colour in Painting), in which he discusses the development of pigments and notions of colour from Ancient Egypt to the Middle Ages. Together, this dissertation and *Regnbågsfärgernas segertåg* form an attempt at a universal theory of colour from the Ancient Egyptians to Post-Impressionism.

The essays "Självändamålsprincipen" (The Principle of the End-in-Itself) and "Linjen" (The Line) of *Regnbågsfärgernas segertåg* focus on the tendencies of liberation in painting. Frosterus was convinced that art evolved towards ever-greater specialization. This process, however, was not straightforward but was realized either consciously or through trial and error. It coincided with the opposite aim of creating new artistic synthesis. According to Frosterus, the logic of differentiation was based on both positive and negative attempts at solutions:

> [...] positive: animated by the desire to expand explicitly painterly means of expression and to seek forms unattainable with the technical resources of fellow arts. [...] negative: avoiding themes or ideas that literature, music or sculpture can express just as well or better. [31]

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Frosterus noted that "the most recent painting sought effects that are grasped in a purely visual manner" and that its aim was to create "a painterly world of form distinct from the purely plastic one that has predominated thus far"[32] Expression with colour and immediate reception provided the starting point: "[...] a movement towards purely painterly painting, towards greater depth of painting in the areas where visual perception colours and mediates the emotional impres-

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[31]   Sigurd Frosterus, "Självändamålsprincipen och måleriets ställning till övriga konstarten," in Sigurd Frosterus, *Regnbågsfärgernas segertåg*, Stockholm: Albert Bonnier & Borgå: Holger Schildt, 1917, 153.

[32]   *Ibid.*, 153–54.

sions that we receive."[33] While the new "purely abstract aesthetic values" of new painting brought it closer to music, Frosterus did not consider as very successful attempts to paint with tones or to make music with colours. Nonetheless, he dreamed of a completely new genre of art; "an independent, mobile art of colour and light with a time dimension like that of music."[34]

"Purely painterly painting", however, was not just the art of the pure palette. That would have been dogmatic to Frosterus. "As in music where only fraction of things can be expressed in C Major or A Minor, also in painting; the expressive possibilities of pure colours are limited," wrote Frosterus. A further essential aspect was the two-dimensional starting point of "purely painterly painting"— "the property of the painting canvas as a plane."[35]

The principle of Kant's conception of beauty i.e. "Zweckmässigkeit [...] ohne Vorstellung eines Zweckes" (purposiveness without the notion of purpose), is analogous to the idea of painting as an end in itself. [36] The essays "Självän-damålsprincipen" and "Linjen" can be compared to the contemporary British critic Roger Fry's study "An Essay in Aesthetics"—from 1909 and partly to Clive Bell's book *Art* from 1914 . Both Fry and Bell drew upon Kant in their writing. They were known to Frosterus and may have influenced his views. Frosterus also had the opportunity to meet Fry, possibly on a visit to London in 1914. The British critic and artist had given Frosterus his painting *Guildford* (1912), which is included in Frosterus's art collection.

Fry stressed the emotional origins of artistic experience. Artistic emotions were end in themselves and they could be considered conceptually by analysing the formal properties of an artwork, such as rhythm, mass, space, light, shadow and colour. According to Bell, Fry's "An Essay in Aesthetics" was "the most help-ful contribution to science since the days of Kant."[37] Bell continued to develop his colleagues' notions of emotionalism and formalism in his theory of *Signifi-*

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[33] *Ibid.*, 156.

[34] *Ibid.*, 179.

[35] *Ibid.*, 176.

[36] Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, ed. G. Lehmann, Stuttgart: Philip Reclam Jun., 1966 (original version 1790), § 17, 120.

[37] Clive Bell, *Art*, New York: Capricorn Books, 1958 (original version 1914), 8.

cant Form. This is a factor common to all works of art that we recognize with the aid of aesthetic emotion.

Frosterus's role as an art critic in Finland—and perhaps also in the other Nordic countries—and as a theorist and protagonist of French painting, and Post-Impressionism in particular – matched the roles of Fry and Bell in Great Britain. Compared with Fry, Frosterus was more analytical in writing, while Bell was more innovative and acute as a philosopher of art. In his essay "Linjen" Frosterus refers critically to the theories of Fry and Bell, noting that Bell's *Significant Form* was a fashionable slogan rather than an insight as such. Frosterus maintained that the German aestheticist Konrad Fiedler had already detailed the starting points of artistic perception in his concept of *reine Sichtbarkeit* presented in his article "Über die Beurteilung von Werken der bildenden Künste" from 1876.

> But one of the first who with manly forthrightness and clear thinking formulated art as something high above the concept of beauty was Fiedler, a friend of Marées and Hildebrand, when he declared that only in artistic perception do we lay claim to the external world as a visual impression (*Sichtbarkeit*) and that this visibility as such does not exist at all without artistic form."[38]

This reference to Fiedler, a Neo-Kantian art theorist, indicates Frosterus's versatility. Skilled in languages, he followed Continental European, British and Nordic discourse and had a privileged position for drawing conclusions. In his text about Whistler, he expressed regret that contemporary nationalism had led "French, English and German critics in their narrow-minded self-sufficiency" to assess the development of art solely from perspectives of their respective countries.[39] Fry's critical remark that "after the usual twenty years of delay, provincial England had become aware of the impressionist movement in France" was along the same lines.[40]

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[38] Sigurd Frosterus, "Den dragna linjen och de skilda perspektiven," in Sigurd Frosterus: *Regnbågsfärgernas segertåg*, Stockholm: Albert Bonnier & Helsingfors: Holger Schildt, 1917, 229.

[39] Sigurd Frosterus, "James McNeill Whistler. In Memoriam," *Euterpe*, 27, 1903, 341.

[40] Roger Fry, "Retrospect" (original version 1920), in Roger Fry, *Vision and Design*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1923, 287.

Chronologically and in their attitudes, Fiedler's writings paralleled Whistler's elitism and aestheticism, which in turn provided Fry's and Bell's immediate art-philosophical background. Fiedler, however, was a theorist arguing in the German manner and Whistler was a polemicist. According to the German, art was neither the imitation of nature nor the presentation of ideas. He also wrote that "spiritual art activity leads to no results, for it itself is the result."[41] Painting had its own independent visual world, in which formal quality was decisive. He regarded art to be ultimately a "code" accessible to few people and therefore he did not consider art education to be necessary.

Frosterus's commendable argument for the autonomy of painting in the essay "Självändamålsprincipen" can be compared not only to the texts of Fry and Bell but also to the much later essay "Modernist Painting" by Clement Greenberg from 1960. The Finnish and American critics shared a similar scientific ethic and the belief in genre-specificness of the arts. "That visual art should confine itself exclusively to what is given in visual experience, and make no reference to anything given in any other order of experience, is a notion whose only justification lies in scientific consistency," Greenberg writes.[42]

Compared with Frosterus, Greenberg had the benefit of over four decades of later experience in the development of modern painting, but he does not introduce much that is new to the theory of painting as an autonomous medium. His merits are more along the lines of a good formulation of theory. Arthur C. Danto considers Greenberg's great achievement to be his clear exposition of the self-critical principle of modernism, the fact that like other genres of art painting unswervingly seeks to "discover its own philosophical essence". In this regard, Danto appears to overrate Greenberg's merits as a theorist of modernism at the expense of European writers.[43]

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[41] Konrad Fiedler, "Über die Beurteilung von Werken der bildende Künste," in Konrad Fiedler, *Schriften über Kunst* I, ed. H. Konnerth, Munich, 1913, 56.

[42] Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," (original version 1960), in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Volume 4, Modernism with a Vengeance 1957–1969, ed. J. O'Brian, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995, 91.

[43] Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1997, 68. See also 67–70.

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Ernest Ženko*

Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* as a Modernist Example of Media Determinism

Introduction

The film medium developed during a time of the rapid expansion of modernism, which took over almost all of art. Nevertheless, mainstream narrative cinema joined this movement only after a considerable delay. During the 1920s certain movements in cinema appropriated the main ideas of modernism, but it was only after the Second World War, in fact during the 1960s, that modernism in cinema came to full bloom.

Due to its reflexive nature, the role of its auteur, and its open-endedness, Ingmar Bergman's film *Persona* (1966) is considered one of the finest examples of modernism in cinema. *Persona* is, nevertheless, also an exceptional example of media and technological determinism. In this film, Bergman accomplishes a reversal of a crucial modernist problem related to technology: he does not show how to animate an apparatus, but rather how media technology have infiltrated the prevailing frame of mind so deeply that the psyche can at best be grasped through the film medium itself.

We should, for clarity, distinguish between a "vulgar" understanding of media determinism as a reductionist, causal relation between the appearance of technological media and their impact on society, culture, art, and subjectivity, on the one hand, and its "soft" (or dialectical) version, on the other. In the latter, there is more space for various, sometimes even mutually opposed processes that obscure the main orientation, which nevertheless remains present in both crucial mantras of the so-called "media turn"—Marshall McLuhan's "medium is the message"[1] and Friedrich Kittler's "media determine our

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[1] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994, 7.

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situation."[2] In both assertions, priority has been given to the materiality of a medium over its content.

In this paper, we will claim that such a view, related today to the above-mentioned authors of the media turn, has actually been one of the key characteristics of modernist art. As pointed out by Mallarmé ("poetry was made not of ideas but of words"), Cartier-Bresson ("the photo was made not of stories but of lines") and other modernist authors, it was the materiality of the medium that constituted the conditions of possibility for the creation, and consequently the interpretation, of a work of art.[3] *Persona* is not an exception to this rule, but is instead one of the best examples of media determinism ever created in the film medium.

Persona, or, *Cinematography*

There can been no doubt that *Persona* is an enigmatic film that defies a definite interpretation, and today, from the distance of half a century, this is perhaps even more so. After showing it to an audience of undergraduate students, I came across a judgment that evidently demonstrated how distant this film already is from the expectations of contemporary 20-year-olds. In their opinion, *Persona* is not film at all, because it tells us no coherent and comprehensible story and, consequently, makes no sense as a whole. They were thus quite bewildered when they realized (after searching internet resources for the film and using their smartphones during the screening, which is equally symptomatic) that what they had just seen was "one of this century's great works of art."[4]

Film critics and scholars never shared the opinion that *Persona* makes no sense; nevertheless, from the very beginning they did find it enigmatic and difficult to pin down. In the words of Bergman's biographer Peter Cowie, "Everything one says about *Persona* may be contradicted; the opposite will also be true."[5] This assertion reminds one of an old joke about abstract paintings:

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[2] Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, xxxix.

[3] Not only modernist artists themselves, but also the scholars who interpreted their works became aware of this process, among them most notably Walter Benjamin.

[4] Hubert Cohen, *Ingmar Bergman: The Art of Confession*, New York: Twayne, 1993, 227. Susan Sontag even claimed that *Persona* was the best film ever.

[5] Peter Cowie, *Ingmar Bergman: A Critical Biography*, New York: Scribner's, 1982, 231.

"I think this one is hanging upside down."

"How can you tell?"

Consequently, there have been few serious attempts among critics to develop solid interpretations supported with firm arguments: "Although generally praising the film, they tend to shy away from definitive interpretation, preferring instead to describe its sensory effects and to hazard some speculations as to their possible meaning."[6]

One of the reasons why Bergman's masterpiece manages to preserve the status of an enigma, evading any final determination, undoubtedly lies in something that Bertolt Brecht called the alienation effect, which is associated with the film's reflexive or self-referential structure. Christopher Orr even claims that "*Persona* remains the most avant-garde of Bergman's films in the sense that its self-reflexive devices disrupt the spectator's involvement in the events of the narrative and call attention to the film's status as material object. In this respect, *Persona* can be placed within the context of what was in 1967 an emerging subgenre of the art cinema: the Brechtian film."[7]

Persona, therefore, calls the audience's attention to the fact that it is watching a film, or, in other words, it "encourages the audience to suspend its willing suspension of disbelief, to back out of believing the story and take a critical look at it."[8] The alienation effect is enabled, but also complicated, by film's reflexivity. *Persona* is modernist in a radical Kantian-Enlightenment sense, probably most precisely articulated by Clement Greenberg: "The essence of modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence."[9] The same critical procedure should be valid for any me-

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[6]   Lloyd Michaels, "Bergman and the Necessary Illusion," in *Ingmar Bergman's* Persona, ed. Lloyd Michaels, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 5.

[7]   Christopher Orr, "Scenes from the Class Struggle in Sweden: *Persona* as Brechtian Melodrama," in Michaels, 88. *Cf.* Dana Polan, "A Brechtian Cinema? Towards a Politics of Self-Reflexive Film," in *Movies and Methods. Volume 2*, ed. Bill Nichols, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985.

[8]   Bruce Kawin, *How Movies Work*, New York: Macmillan, 1987, 76.

[9]   Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism Vol. 4*, ed. John O'Brian, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, 85.

dium, not only modernist painting, and, since *Persona* "is a film in search of its own laws," as Bruce Kawin puts it, it is therefore *per definitionem* modernist.[10]

There are not many coincidences in Bergman's films, and the choice of a title would certainly not be one of them. As we know, the original Latin meaning of "persona" relates to a theatrical mask, and only in the later Roman period did the term change to indicate a character in a theatrical performance. From this early usage, the word entered contemporary culture and obtained the meaning of a character played by an actor, as well as that of an individual's social role. The latter developed within psychology under the influence of Carl G. Jung, who defined persona as "a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and on the other to conceal the true nature of the individual."[11]

Many interpretations of *Persona* draw heavily from the assumption that *nomen est omen*, and they follow the motif of masks throughout the film, relating its meaning above all to the abovementioned Jungian understanding of persona. Bergman's *Persona* thus becomes a mask that points to itself and questions the relation between the individual and the social, between being and role-playing.

All interpretations of this sort, which focus mainly on and track the development of the narrative involving the main protagonists, assume that the film's title is, in words of Roland Barthes, the anchor directing us towards a meaning already selected in advance (in this case by the film director).[12] The crucial question that the interpreters have to answer therefore relates to the interpretation of a mask and its meaning, especially in relation to the culmination of the film in a composite close-up of both protagonists comprising a single mask. Some authors conclude at this point that *Persona* is a narrative about one single soul, wearing a mask, divided into true self and role-playing.

There are at least two arguments that speak against such interpretations. The first one comes from Bergman himself, who has been always "extremely specific

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[10]   Kawin, 76.

[11]   Carl G. Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, London: Baillière, Tindall & Cox, 1953, 190.

[12]   *Cf.* Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image—Music—Text*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

in disavowing this reading of the film."[13] When presenting the basic idea of this film to Svensk Filmindustri (SF), the leading Swedish film company, he gave a very simple description of the project: "It's about one person who talks and one who doesn't, and they [...] get all mingled up in one another."[14] The second argument follows the well-known, but sometimes neglected, fact that the title *Persona* was not Bergman's initial choice at all. He wanted to give his film the title *Cinematography* and lobbied for it at SF. However, the producers did not accept it and demanded a more appealing name. This makes the title *Persona* an unwanted child, in a sense. It is also known that Bergman insisted that the sprocket holes at the edge of the frame be retained in the early publicity stills for the new film—another clue that points out the primacy of the (cinematic) medium over the narrative (i.e. the mask).

It is interesting to observe that Bergman's modernist strategy, distinctive above all in *Persona*, has not been perceived necessarily as a positive characteristic or a specific quality, but rather quite the opposite. It also seems that given a critical distance from Modernism, this becomes even more the case, as recent film criticism clearly shows. In 2007, film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum published a devastating critique of Bergman under the title "Scenes from the Overrated Career." In his article Rosenbaum claims that the main deficiency of Bergman's work lies in the fact that his "movies aren't so much filmic expressions as expressions on film."[15]

Only a few days later, a renowned late film critic Roger Ebert published his commentary under a telling title: "Defending Ingmar Bergman." Ebert himself interpreted Rosenbaum's statement this way: "He means form itself is [for Bergman] more important [...] than narrative, emotional content and performance." Then he added, "Not everyone would agree."[16] Which means, in other words, that not everyone would agree that for Bergman form (i.e. the medium) is more important than content (i.e. the message), but would, on the other hand, agree that such a preference would seriously reduce the quality of his work.

Rosenbaum's claim is too general to cover the whole career of a filmmaker who directed (TV production included) almost 60 feature films and went through

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13   Wheeler W. Dixon, "*Persona* and the 1960s Art Cinema," in Michaels, 54.
14   Stig Björkman *et al.*, *Bergman on Bergman*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973, 198.
15   Jonathan Rosenbaum, *New York Times*, August 4, 2007.
16   www.rogerebert.com/interviews/defending-ingmar-bergman (Accessed May 10, 2014).

changes and modifications of his style and approach. *Persona* stands in this sense as a breaking point, signaling his departure from his earlier work as a director: "*Persona* was new cinematic territory for Bergman, shorn almost entirely of the theatrical constraints that marked his earlier directorial efforts. [...] Then, too, in *Persona* Bergman finally breaks free of the proscenium arch tradition that informed his earlier work to create a film in which rips in the image, out-of-focus shots, repeated sequences, and elaborate optical effects constantly remind us that we are watching a film, a construct, a world that Bergman has invented solely for cinematic consumption."[17] Both Rosenbaum and Ebert therefore seem to miss the point, at least regarding *Persona*. Not only does Bergman put the primacy of the medium over its message here, but he also shows that one cannot grasp the specific quality of this film properly without considering this very choice. Nevertheless, to understand, how this works, we have now turn to the film itself, to the beginning. Curiously enough, the importance and simultaneously the elusiveness of the beginning poses a question here that reminds us of Hegel's famous meditation in the opening pages of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

A Story of Two Levels

In the beginning there was light, and in the end there was darkness again; something had been created, lived for a short time, and then disappeared again. This could easily be considered the basic premise of *Persona* if one takes into account the importance that art and religion had for Bergman during his entire life and the dialectical relation between God and the artist (as creator) throughout Western history. After a moment of complete darkness, the first image in *Persona* appears, which is that of a projection arc lamp fired up at that very moment. It is not a moment of divine light, a coming into existence, but simply the turning on an electric lamp that creates light and enables it to pass through the film medium onto the screen. In a completed symmetry, and after 84 minutes, in the last image the same arc lamp is switched off, leaving us in darkness.[18]

The world created in *Persona* by Bergman, his extraordinary cinematographer Sven Nykvist, the actors Bibi Andersson and Liv Ullmann, and many others (since any film is ultimately a team endeavor) exists only for the duration of the

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17   Dixon, 44-45.
18   The length of the film varies from 79 to 85 minutes, depending on the version.

A composite close-up of Alma and Elisabeth comprising a single mask.

film's projection. Filmmakers had been using fade-outs or the darkening of the screen in order to separate parts of the film for a long time before *Persona*, and Bergman uses this darkness in the same sense. There is no before and no after, and there is no relation to some outside reality, independent of film's projection that we watch during those 84 minutes.

Persona has a double-leveled (or two-layered) structure: one telling a narrative of two women protagonists, Alma and Elisabeth, a nurse and a patient merging into one another; the other showing seemingly unrelated shots from the history of film, the making of *Persona*, the firing the projection lamp, and so on. One might ask what is true and what is illusion, or, what is real and what is mere representation. However, since *Persona* does not seem to exemplify Platonist metaphysics, but rather its reversal, the answers to such questions are less straightforward and more difficult to obtain (supposing that they are meaningful at all).

Let us for the purpose of this analysis name the first part of the film's structure the "narrative level (or realm)" and the second one the "material level (or realm)."[19] About one fourth of the entire film length is dedicated to the material level, which appears three times: in the beginning, in the middle, and in the end, thus establishing a kind of a formal framework. Many interpretations of *Persona* start with the narrative level, while some of them even skip the material level altogether, or at least characterize it as resisting reasonable interpretation

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[19] The two levels seem to be somehow connected to Bergman's originally intended title (*Cinematography*, related to the material level) and the official title (*Persona*, related to the narrative one).

because it is mystifying, intentionally impenetrable, or utterly incomprehensible. Nevertheless, one should start not with the narrative, but instead with its material conditions.

Bergman started to shoot *Persona* at the Svensk Filmindustri Studios in Stockholm, on July 19, 1966. Everything went wrong there, or as he recalled, "one day after another went by, and all the time we got only bad results, bloody awful results. And Bibi was angry, and Liv was nervous, and I was paralyzed."[20] Film and actors obviously resisted the studio milieu. Everything shot there turned out to be a failure, and Bergman decided to move to a real, but also domestic location—to his own summer house on the island of Fårö. There was no need to build sets, since the walls were already there, and consequently *Persona* became a minimalist film. Scenes from the hospital, where the narrative begins, were shot in a local museum, and these spaces are almost empty—in Elisabeth's room, there is only a hospital bed, a TV set, and a radio.

Together with film, photography, literature, and theatre, *Persona* therefore covers the whole range of contemporary media and points out their role within a modern world, paying homage to Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), which in principle is a silent film in which meaningful speech only comes out from the technological media. This idea, in a slightly modified form, also finds its place within *Persona*.

One of the two main characters is Elisabet Vogler, a well-known theater actress, who declines to speak.[21] During a performance of *Electra*, she suddenly stopped speaking, remained without words, and since then has remained silent. Elisabeth has been taken to a hospital, but if one expects to find a simple straightforward connection between the Greek play, in which C. G. Jung found the inspiration to label a feminine Oedipus complex the "Electra complex," and the diagnosis given to her by the psychiatrist, then one would clearly be wrong. As her doctor put it at the beginning of film, it is the "hopeless dream to be" which defines her illness, if she is ill at all, and Bergman himself went in this same di-

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[20] Björkman *et al.,* 198.

[21] The name Vogler and its connection to the absence of speech had already appeared in Bergman's film *The Magician* from 1958 (the original Swedish title of the film is "Ansiktet," which means *the face*). In this film, Albert Vogler is a travelling performer who pretends to be mute in order to achieve stronger illusionistic effect.

rection, claiming that Elisabeth's silence is "completely unneurotic," and above all, "a strong person's form of protest."[22]

 Persona grew from the director's own crisis and illness: from the loss of faith in his creative power and from a prolonged illness that left him incapacitated and hospitalized during several months in 1965.[23] He often referred to it as the film that "saved his life," both literally and in the metaphorical sense of his life as an artist.[24] There is thus an immediate relation between Bergman and Elisabeth: she refuses to speak because she realizes that the mask she is wearing in the theatre is only a symptom of a life in which masks are only changed, but never truly removed. Masks are deceiving, and she is guilty of deceit, but so is Bergman, according to his own words at least: "When I show a film I am guilty of deceit. I use an apparatus which is constructed to take advantage of a certain human weakness, an apparatus with which I can sway my audience in a highly emotional manner. [...] I perform conjuring tricks with [an] apparatus so expensive and so wonderful that any entertainer in history would have given anything to have it."[25] There is therefore no way out: Elisabeth's silence is, as her doctor observes, no more than another role she has taken, another mask she has put on; likewise, *Persona* itself is just another film that uses the same "wonderful apparatus" to perform the same "conjuring tricks."

Persona, then, is a film that transcends subjectivity and aspires to universality, but only to show that it is the apparatus itself that forms a material frame out of which a subject or a soul may develop.[26] This soul enters *Persona* in the form of Alma, the young nurse put in charge of Elisabeth Vogler.[27] According to some commentators, Alma is the main protagonist of *Persona*, with Elisabeth being merely her inner dark side, which begins to surface when she breaks into madness.

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[22] Björkman *et al.*, 211.

[23] *Cf.* Michaels, 13.

[24] Ingmar Bergman, *Images*, New York: Arcade, 1994, 64.

[25] Ingmar Bergman, *Four Screenplays of Ingmar Bergman*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960, 15.

[26] *Cf.* Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus and Other Essays*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, 20.

[27] The meaning of nurse's name Alma in some languages, such as Spanish and Portuguese, is *soul*, which is hardly a coincidence, if we take into the consideration the importance Bergman gives names during his career.

Another interpretation, which gets closer to Bergman's own commentaries on *Persona* but retains the importance of Alma's character, would take into account the aforementioned condition of the hopeless dream of being. It is the condition shared by both life and film, and in putting this relation into the structure of his film, Bergman delved into another characteristic of modernism—a paradox, actually, that none of the avant-garde art movements could escape. The more art struggles to become one with life, the more it realizes that this dream is impossible to achieve. There is no life without a mask, and there is no film without deceit.

There is yet another connection between Elisabeth and Bergman. He reveals it in an entry written in his notebook during the making of *Persona*: "I am unable to grasp the large catastrophes. They leave my heart untouched. At most I can read about such atrocities with a kind of greed—a pornography of horror. But I shall never rid myself of those images. Images that turn my art into a bag of tricks, into something indifferent, meaningless."[28] This quotation, together with the former, is telling, since it shows an understanding of the film medium that *Persona* renders at its best: to shoot a film is not so much to make an idea visible, to interpret a story, or to translate someone's life into a film narration, as is to take images in order to perform tricks. Some of those images in *Persona* came from the time when Bergman himself was in a hospital: the morgue, for example, which he saw from his bedside window (which appears at the material level), or the image of two women wearing big hats and comparing hands (which appears at the narrative level).

However, there are other images included in the film that are also important, that transcend Bergman's perceptions or visions, and that relate to media and history, perhaps even politics. Elisabeth not only refuses to speak, but also declines any emotional relation to others, including her nurse Alma. Nevertheless, this does not prove that she has no feelings altogether, since she does have strong emotional responses, albeit only to media representations. In a shot taken in her hospital room, there is an image she is watching on a television: an iconic image from Vietnam showing the self-immolation of the Buddhist bonze that makes her cry; the next time there is a photograph of a well-known holocaust image—the Warsaw ghetto child.[29] Other instances that make her emotionally

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[28]   Bergman, *Images*, 59.

[29]   It has been pointed out several times that Bergman, as opposed to Godard, rarely included contemporary political references in his films, and his apolitical stance became one of

react are also related to media representations: a radio play makes her laugh, and the photograph of her own son irritates her so much that she tears it apart.

On the narrative level, *Persona* begins straightforwardly and extremely efficiently: Alma steps into the doctor's office, and within the first minute we know the names of the characters and their relation. From her conversation with the doctor and Elisabeth, we grasp that she is 25 years old, engaged, professionally still lacking full confidence (she is not convinced that she will be able to cope with a patient with such mental strength), but also convinced that her life is predestined to be a happy one: "I'll marry Karl-Henrik and have a couple of children, [...] I have a job that I like and enjoy."

During the sequence, the camera follows the protagonists as it has its own consciousness, breaks the tradition of shot/reverse-shot, and goes extremely close to the actresses in its voyeuristic stalking, showing every detail. Close-up shots are a trademark of Bergman's, though in *Persona* we can also read their extreme variations as an illustration of one of the main characteristics that separates the film medium from the theatre in early film theory (the other one main distinctive characteristic is montage).

The psychiatrist believes that remaining in the hospital will not be of any help and therefore advises Elisabeth to move with Alma to her own beach summerhouse (in fact, Bergman's cottage). As soon as Alma accepts her role as nurse, she starts to invade Elisabeth's intimacy; already in the hospital, she opens and starts to read a letter for Elisabeth. However, later in the beach house, she also sacrifices her own intimacy and reveals one of her deepest secrets—the story of a past sexual misadventure. She once participated with another girl in an erotic coupling with two very young boys on a beach. When she had sex with her fiancé that very evening, she experienced the most pleasurable lovemaking during their engagement. She also became pregnant and decided to have an abortion. It is an intensely sensual experience that Bergman turns into a sequence of ten shots lasting about seven minutes. Even though he thus creates, as Lloyd Mi-

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his characteristics. In *Masculine / Feminine*, known for the phrase, "Children of Marx and Coca-Cola," and released the same year as *Persona* (1966), Godard makes strong connections between his film and the contemporary political situation—the Vietnam War, the proletariat, colonialism, and American popular culture in France and so on. Bergman's statement is not that straightforward and bold, but it is still there nonetheless.

chaels has pointed out, "one of the most intensely erotic moments in the history of the cinema," these moments remain in their essence iconoclastic.[30] There are no flashbacks or cutaways, and there is no nudity: Alma is sitting in her chair talking, and Elisabeth is lying in her bed listening.

Alma gradually becomes convinced that they are somehow emotionally connected and that they even look alike. Their relation, however, is not symmetrical. Elisabeth cannot keep Alma's secrets to herself, and even though she is not speaking, she still writes letters. In a letter to the doctor, she writes about Alma as if she were the object of enquiry and reveals the erotic story on the beach, but she unfortunately forgets to seal the envelope. When Alma reads it, she realizes that there is an unsurpassable gap between them. Her positive feelings for Elisabeth turn to anger, and she purposely leave pieces of broken glass on the floor so that Elisabeth cuts her leg, and later on she even threatens her with a pot of boiling water (forcing Elisabeth to say at least one sentence, "No, don't do it!" in an act of self-preservation).

We realize that Alma is on the verge of a breakdown; here *Persona* probably reaches the crucial point on the level of narrative. However, at the moment we see Alma's soul breaking apart, Bergman reaches for something unusual—he brings back the material level and shows that this very soul is only a construction, a product of the film. The celluloid itself cracks and burns, the narrative dissolves, and seemingly unrelated images reappear. We are confronted with the materiality of film once more and realize that what we have been watching is nothing more and nothing less than a movie. After a while, another logic (or logos), that of the narrative, takes over again, and we are again following the troubled relation between Alma and Elisabeth. Nevertheless, things become very uncertain now, and we are at pains to separate dreams or hallucinations from apparent reality. Several shots in a row are dominated by a veil, which obviously symbolizes a dream, a hallucination, or at least a problematic relation to reality. In the course of events, Elisabeth's husband visits the beach house, but then something unusual happens: Alma acts as if she were Elisabeth, and the husband is not aware that he is making love to Alma and not his wife. Interpretations of this scene differ, claiming that we are dealing with Elisabeth's dream, with Alma's hallucination, with a situation in which both women are

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[30]   Michaels, 4-5.

two sides of a single person, and so on, but there is no final solution to this riddle to say the least.

Bergman employs another film device in *Persona*, one that poses a similar question, namely the so-called double monologue. In the sequence in question both women, dressed in black, sit across a table confronting each other, and again Elisabeth is silent, while Alma becomes her voice and explains in detail the decisive moments that have led to her silence. She describes Elizabeth's mothering impulses, her pregnancy, her giving birth, and above all, the fact that she conceived her child out of a feeling of being incomplete, because her friends indicated that she lacks motherliness. As a result, she started to hate her child even before it was born, and after birth, she wished it dead, even though the boy loved her. In *Persona* we see this same scene twice or, more exactly, we hear it twice and see two different versions of the same scene—the first time the camera focuses on Elisabeth, and the second time on Alma. Before the scene reaches its climax for the second time, the camera gradually constructs a composite image, which is half Alma, half Elisabeth. This close-up shot reveals the main theme of *Persona*: the two that cannot be made one. There are two persons, two levels, two kinds of logic, and they remain forever separated. Bergman works hard here to convince us that when there is the danger that two will become one, or in other words, when we do not mind the gap, things go wrong, and the film tears. He makes us see this actually, pointing to the material level itself. Many discussions of *Persona* skip the material level and start with the narrative, but as Susan Sontag once wrote, "Any account which leaves out or dismisses as incidental how *Persona* begins and ends hasn't been talking about the film that Bergman made."[31]

The Material Level and the Materiality of Medium

Persona begins (this time literally) with the first of the three sequences that represent the material level. An initial darkness lasting several seconds is replaced by nearly 60 black and white shots with a total duration of a little less than six-and-half minutes. Two white geometric spots on the black background are transformed into a bright light from the projector arc, and various shots follow showing a film leader running through the projector and gradually reveal the film and the projector itself. The experience is not only visual, but also auditory.

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[31]   Susan Sontag, "Bergman's *Persona*," in Michaels, 75.

Persona begins with a sequence of shots that seem unrelated to film's narration, nevertheless they turn out to be crucial in order to grasp its meaning.

The appearance of the projector is accompanied by high-pitch abstract sounds that resemble a siren before turning into mechanical, but realistic sounds of the projector itself. This is the tool or apparatus that is going to enable viewers to see the world created by the film director. This is, to use Kant's words, the condition of possibility for any film experience.

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What follows is a countdown, starting with the very short shot of the word "START" turned upside down, and then we see for a split second, turned up-side-down as well, the numbers eleven, ten, nine, eight, and seven; between them, as punctuation, are shots of a black screen with thin white disconnected lines forming the letter Z. The countdown continues, but instead of number six, which would logically follow, the image of an erect penis emerges, rendering a kind of filmic Freudian slip—the meaning of Swedish word sex is namely both six and sex. However, this is more than just Bergman's inside joke; it is the way to show the importance that Freud, psychoanalysis, and above all dreams have

had for the film medium from the very beginning. As it is, the reversed image of numbers is more than a coincidence, since it shows the upside-down image reproduced in *camera obscura*. The numbers that come after the image of the penis, i.e. five, four, and three, become more and more abstract and finally almost unrecognizable. The number two is replaced (again) with the image of a projector, thus showing the redoubling that it produces. The countdown sequence ends with the image of an illuminated film frame (number one) that transforms into a simple animated cartoon.

The role of the sequence with the cartoon is obviously to show the transition of a static image into a moving picture. In the beginning, we focus on the single film frame, then the film starts to move, and this movement gives life to an animated character (a girl that washes her face, standing in a pond). After a few seconds, the image freezes, then starts to move again, and in the next shot, we see again the source of this life—the projector and the film. A close-up of hands follow, supposedly pointing out the relation between the machine and human hands as his basic tool. The screen becomes completely white after this shot, and what follows is a sequence of shots in which a skeleton pops out of a steamer trunk in a bedroom. This time, Bergman quotes himself, namely, his own feature film from 1949, entitled *The Devil's Wanton*.

In the next sequence, images of unrelated figures emerge—from a spider and an eye (making a reference to another film, this time *Un chien andalou* [1929]), to animal entrails and most disturbingly a close-up of a human hand with a spike driven through it (clearly addressing the religious symbolism). All of these images alternate with reflections of pure light accompanied by abstract sounds. The next two shots, of a surface of a canvas and then of a Winter forest, return us to a calmer atmosphere, and another two deal with the different forms that film can reproduce—one spiked, the other amorphous or round; the natural, the architectural, or the human.

The next sequence, which will not be meticulously analyzed, because it would far exceed our intentions here, concerns the question of life and death. The close-up of an old woman's face, a shot of a boy lying on a bench covered with a white sheet, and close-ups of various parts of human bodies, presumably taken in a morgue, do not leave a lot of space for interpretation. They all lie there dead. They do not move, and the impression is that we are watching photographic

stills, photographs as fragments, devoid of life, which, in turn, seemingly draw our attention to the relation between photography and death. Only the sound of water dripping somewhere in the distance gives us a feeling of time.

Nevertheless, the next close-up shows the eyes of a woman open, and a strange-looking boy slowly awakens, begins to move, puts on glasses, and starts to read a book that appears out of nowhere. Since this level is not random, but subjected to a peculiar logic, despite what most readings of *Persona* contend, the author and the title of the book offer another clue to interpretation. The book that the boy reads is Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* (written 1838-1840). In this novel we find an idea that seems so close to the basic concept of *Persona* that it would be hard to consider the appearance of that book in this film as a pure coincidence: "There are two personalities within me: one lives—in the full sense of the word—the other reflects and judges him; the first, it may be, in an hour's time, will take farewell of you and the world for ever, and the second—the second?"[32]

The role of the boy is performed by Jörgen Lindström, who, however, is not credited in the film. This decision could be supported on the basis that he is not a part of the narrative level, does not contribute to the narrative, and consequently could not be considered an actor performing as a character. Therefore, his identity remains a mystery, and even though some critics claim that he is Elisabeth's son while others insist that he is the film's public, neither side has a solid argument. Even more so if one sees in a boy reading *A Hero of Our Time* Bergman himself, or an instance of his psyche adopting an idea for *Persona*, or to be more precise, for its narrative level.

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In the next shot, a boy is disturbed by the presence of something that we do not see, but some commentators state that it is the camera, even though there is again no clear evidence to support such claim.[33] He tries to reach it with his hand, and then in the reverse shot, which is one of the most fascinating shots in *Persona*, we finally see what attracted his attention and what he is trying reach—it is a huge unfocused close-up photograph of a woman's face appearing behind the screen. The boy's hand extends to trace (maybe caress, or even to

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32   Mikhail Lermontov, *A Hero of Our Time*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1916, 301.
33   *Cf.* Michaels, 1.

A memorable film shot from *Persona* showing Bergman's attempt to bridge the gap between the material and the narrative level.

shape) the figure, which gradually becomes another woman's face. For a first-time viewer, there is no clue about who these two women might be, and with the transition from one to another, the somehow logical solution that this is simply the boy's mother is entirely shaken. Moreover, the soundtrack becomes high-pitched and intrusive, leading to a conclusion or transition.

In the next shot, the titles appear, beginning with "PERSONA," "EN FILM AV IN-GMAR BERGMAN," and separated by a series of very short shots, some of which are taken from other parts of *Persona*, alternated with close-up shots of the boy. At the end of the sequence, accompanied by intense sound effects, we leave the material level and enter the narrative level—the story about Alma (Bibi Andersson) and Elisabeth (Liv Ulmann) begins.

Conclusion

In his now classic work on Postmodernism, Fredric Jameson describes the transition from Realism to Modernism, and finally to Postmodernism, by way of the concept of the sign: "Once upon a time at the dawn of capitalism and middle-class society, there emerged something called the sign, which seemed to entertain unproblematical relations with its referent."[34] These "unproblematical" relations with the referent are the essential characteristics of Realism, including

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[34]   Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1991, 95.

Film Realism, and most of the films ever produced, Bergman's own works before *Persona* included.

In Jameson's Marxist-structuralist interpretation of the aforementioned transition, reification is the force that lurks behind it all. Since reification manifests itself through the logic of "ruthless separation and disjunction, of specialization and rationalization," thus showing that in its essence it is the logic of capital itself, the moment of Realism cannot endure, but must eventually give way to another historical moment.[35] Therefore, "by a dialectical reversal [realism] then itself in turn becomes the object of the corrosive force of reification, which enters the realm of language to disjoin the sign from the referent. Such a disjunction does not completely abolish the referent, or the objective world, or reality, which still continue to entertain a feeble existence on the horizon like a shrunken star or red dwarf. But its great distance from the sign now allows the latter to enter a moment of autonomy, of a relatively free-floating Utopian existence, as over against its former objects. This autonomy of culture, this semi-autonomy of language, is the moment of modernism, and of a realm of the aesthetic which redoubles the world without being altogether of it, thereby winning a certain negative or critical power, but also a certain otherworldly futility."[36]

In this view, then, *Persona* is an outcome and a perfect example of the process described above, a process of reification leading to autonomy and Utopia, a process of redoubling, but also one of separation and disjunction. The formal structure of this film, which is one of its most striking and enigmatic issues, is clearly related to the topic of redoubling. The redoubling in *Persona*, however, takes more than one form prescribed by Jameson. Moreover, it is not only the realm of film, which redoubles the world (if at all) without being of it, but it is also a film that in a peculiar way actually redoubles the realm of film itself. Then, on the other level, it tries to put it back together, and we see this in the remarkable close-up shot of the composite face, half Alma and half Elisabeth.

Jameson's interpretation therefore adds another level to our interpretation and shows that even the material level is redoubled: on the one hand, there is the materiality of society, organized in the form of a capitalism that separates and

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[35] *Ibid.*, 96.

[36] *Ibid.*

disjoints, and which is driven by the force of reification. On the other hand, there is the materiality of the technological medium, which functions as a mediator between a material basis of society and the consciousness of the subjects living in any given society. It is subjectivity that follows materiality, and not vice versa; this is not only Marx's idea in his critique of ideology, but also Bergman's key point in *Persona*.

There is, however, something more to this. The development of society, and consequently of technological media, does not end with Modernity. Art does not end with Modernism, and the process of reification and fragmentation continues, according to Jameson, until we are left with free-floating signifiers. *Persona* is able to show us these unrelated fragments on the material level—images, shots, and sequences that are shown in an order that seems arbitrary, incoherent. Why, then, does it not fall apart altogether, or simply remain fragmentary, made of free-floating images and sounds? What enables its narrative to appear at all? Why is *Persona* not postmodernist?

This is probably the most important question that Bergman posits in *Persona*. It is modernist exactly because there exists a force that is able to put together all of these seemingly unrelated fragments and form a narrative out of them. This narrative is an island of temporary, inconclusive, and extremely fragile order in an ocean of chaos, and the force needed here is the creativity of a modernist author. A modernist author, as presented in *Persona*, plays the role of Lermontov's Pechórin—he or she is "a hero of our time," who has the capacity to reveal the truth of that time and above all puts on the mask of Kant's *a priori* cognitive unity, without which any possible perception becomes impossible. *Persona* is modernist, because its director takes upon himself the role of the transcendental ego that synthesizes and unifies fragments in order to make a work of (modernist) art.

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Rainer Winter*

The Politics of Aesthetics in the Work of Michelangelo Antonioni:
An Analysis Following Jacques Rancière

1. The Work of Antonioni in the Context of Aesthetic Discussions

The work of Michelangelo Antonioni is considered as trailblazing and paradigmatic expression of modernism in cinema. Even today it has an impact on film style and holds a key place in the history of film art.[1] This reputation was established by *L'avventura* with its powerful and commanding visuality which when first shown in Cannes in 1960 was seen as scandalous. In this visuality, space, body and the surfaces of the world were portrayed in an innovative and complex way. The film critic, Michael Althen wrote in his obituary of the director that we "have to thank him for everything which we consider modern."[2].His films, which are consistently self-reflective and aesthetically complex, break and dissolve the naturalness of "classical cinema"[3] by frustrating the practiced expectations of narrative films and by making the film itself the subject alongside the protagonists.[4] Classical film does not refer to itself as a narrative medium, instead it would rather present a believable world through its narration. The characters' actions are therefore marked by causality, comprehensibility and transparency. They are always motivated. Characters act in order to affect change. In contrast, the tendency to "transform the actions into optical and sound descriptions" as determined by Gilles Deleuze has appeared in Anton-

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[1]   Cf. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *L'avventura*, London: BFI, 1997; Irmbert Schenk, "Antonionis radikaler ästhetischer Aufbruch. Zwischen Moderne und Postmoderne," in *Das goldene Zeitalter des italienischen Films. Die 1960er Jahre*, eds. Thomas Koebner and Irmbert Schenk, Munich: Fink: text und kritik, 2008, 67-89; Jörn Glassenapp, "Ein Modernist bis zum Schluss," in *Michelangelo Antonioni—Wege in die filmische Moderne*, ed. Jörn Glassenapp, Munich: Fink, 2012, 7-12.

[2]   Michael Althen, "Die zärtliche Gleichgultigkeit der Welt," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (1 August 2007), 31.

[3]   David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

[4]   Oliver Fahle, *Bilder der Zweiten Moderne,* Weimar: Bauhaus Verlag, 2005.

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ioni's films since *Crónaca di un amore* (1950).[5] Deleuze also states that Antonioni's work starting with *L'eclisse* (1962) is characterized by a "treatment of limit-situations which pushes them to the point of dehumanized landscapes, of emptied spaces that might be seen as having absorbed characters and actions, retaining only a geophysical description, an abstract inventory of them."[6] He continues that Antonioni is a "critical objectivist" who seeks abstraction in his films.[7] According to Deleuze, he strives with cool and passionless distance to record vigilantly, precisely and insightfully the world which seems to have neither meaning nor purpose in his pictures. To that end, Antonioni creates open, decentred, elliptical narrative structures which remove the drama from the plot. Often the description of circumstances and states stands in place of actions. Characters often become low action observers. The action-image which follows the stimulus response pattern and is typical of "classical cinema" is suspended. The protagonists' observations do not lead to actions but rather they themselves become the object of reflection. Actions are no longer clearly causally motivated, they appear deliberately accidental. The subject of the film is the visual. "The fundamental concern is not the narrative development of meaning, but rather the focus is the visual production of meaning."[8] Images exploit spaces by producing and exploiting surfaces. Therefore, above all it is the images and their flow in his films which remain impressively memorable.

The representation of a narrative-created world is no longer the focus but rather the phenomenological investigation of optical and visual spaces of modernity which are not created causally by actions nor lead to actions. The context of the narrated story moves into the background. People who would like to achieve something through their actions are only of passing interest to Antonioni. For him, landscapes, situations, objects, roads or buildings become important, sometimes more significant than people. For Kiefer (2008: 36) this displacement is an expression of the central difficulty in Antonioni's creation: "[...] the experi-

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[5] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.,* 6.

[8] Cornelia Bohn, "Volatilität des Geldes, der Bilder und der Gefühle. Michelangelos Antonionis Eclisse," in *Was ist ein Bild? Antworten in Bildern*, ed. Sebastian Egenhofer, Inge Hinterwaldner and Christian Spies, Munich: Fink, 321-23.

ence of decentralization, of the placelessness of people and also the attempt to redefine, to resituate in an opaque, contingent and fragmentary reality."[9]

The viewer tries to understand what he can see. Because in the films the narration loses its structuring power, the viewer is forced to turn his attention to the possibilities of the images.[10] While in "classical cinema", an image reveals a window which remains invisible to a narrated world, here images emerge which link reality, dream, imagination and memory with each other. The fluctuation between real and virtual leads to "crystal images."[11]

Closely linked to this is the fact that interpretations of his films are ambivalent, ambiguous and vague and in the end undecidable. His pictorial world is characterized by ambiguity which presents the visible "surfaces of the world,"[12] its meaning however remains unclear and ambiguous. Thus there can be no exhaustive and definitive interpretations. The films embody "open artworks" in the sense of Umberto Eco.[13] In this way, the process of interpretation itself becomes a problem and also becomes the subject of the films. Roland Barthes describes this characteristic of Antonioni's films as "the fluctuation of meaning."[14] Meaning is not set or imposed but rather is subtly held in limbo. Thus, meaning cannot be appropriated by the powerful who would like to set, define and appropriate it. Antonioni's political modernism is shown in this battle against this "fanaticism of meaning". While "classical cinema" constantly produces relatively definitive and coherent meanings, the cinema of Antonioni rejects this constraint which harks back to the fascist tendency of language which forces us "to speak" as Barthes has shown in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France.[15]

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[9]   Bernd Kiefer, "Michelangelo Antonioni (1912-2007)," in *Filmregisseure*, ed. Thomas Koebner, Stuttgart: Reclam, 2008, 36-43.
[10] Schenk, 71.
[11] Deleuze, 95ff.
[12] Seymour Chatman, *Antonioni or, the Surface of the World*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1985; Bernhard Kock, *Michelangelo Antonionis Bilderwelt*, Munich: Fink, 1994.
[13] Umberto Eco, *Das offene Kunstwerk,* Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp, 1973.
[14] Roland Barthes, "Weisheit des Künstlers," in *Michelangelo Antonioni, Rehe Film 31*, Munich: Hanser, 1984, 65-70.
[15] Roland Barthes, *Leçon/Lektion*, Antrittsvorlesung am Collège de France, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1980.

In what follows I would like to discuss and enlarge upon these interpretations of his work in the context of the political character of his aesthetics. Into this discussion I intend to include social criticism that is linked for example with the blunt presentation of the decadent, inconsequential and blasé members of the Italian bourgeoisie in the 1960s. The political in his films, my thesis suggests, is found in the aesthetic experience which becomes possible by means of his films. As Jacques Rancière has shown, aesthetic experience is closely linked to a democratic experience. Both problematize the theory that the dominant framework of meaning and the meanings of a social and cultural order are set in stone and could not be otherwise. They create an appreciation for contingency and possible changes. Furthermore, Rancière assumes the equality of all things which must only be brought about by collective action. Art and politics would like to remove hierarchies and problematize as well as change the existing identities. In this way, a new breakdown of the sensible should be achieved.

For Siegfried Kracauer the central characteristic of film is to present the physical reality and by these means, to make it visible. He records and reveals things of the world in their materiality, surfaces and details.[16] This expressive function is a central feature of cinema according to Rancière.[17] The determining power of narrative and ideology is subverted and overdetermined as a world of objects and people is presented whose meaning must first be determined by the viewer. Without a doubt, Antonioni's films express this characteristic. Furthermore, they embody beauty in the sense of the aesthetic regime of art, which does not appear in the representation or mimesis. Thus, they can neither be consumed easily nor exhaustingly defined conceptually. As Jacques Rancière (2008) shows, with reference to Deleuze, beauty is "resistant" and art is itself political. It is therefore not merely a commentary on or an extension of politics but rather "art is politics."[18] In the aesthetic experience, which is not limited to the experience of art, common ground can be found which can (perhaps) lead to a new community. Therefore the "resistance" of art contains the "promise of a new people."[19]

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[16]   Siegfried Kracauer, *Theorie des Films. Die Errettung der äußeren Wirklichkeit*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1985, 71ff.

[17]   Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables*, ed. Emiliano Battista, Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2006.

[18]   Jacques Rancière, *Ist Kunst widerständig?* Berlin: Merve, 2008, 13.

[19]   *Ibid*., 22.

From this background, I will define the resistance of Antonioni's art in the context of cinema more closely. To consolidate this further, I will turn then to the work of the Chinese film director Wong Kar-wei in whose work the aesthetics of the surface also plays an important role. I will show how he connects with Antonioni and updates this visual aesthetics for the present day. In the conclusion the results in the context of the conception of the "emancipated spectator"[20] will be discussed.

2. The Resistance of the Art of Antonioni

Antonioni's films were very often interpreted in the context of the existentialist "structure of feeling."[21] They portray fears, alienation, loneliness and the isolation of modern humanity, as well as the "existentialist experience,"[22] and the challenge to find a meaning to life in a meaningless world which no longer has frameworks of interpretation which impart coherence. In this way, *Il Grido* (1957) is an accusation of the coldness of the modern world. The proletarian Aldo, who is the main character is said to find no foothold in the world, nowhere does he feel at home. His journey ends in death and it remains unclear whether it was an accident or a suicide. The mortal end of his roaming reveals the absurdity of modern existence.[23] In this way, Antonioni's films express the negativity of modernity.[24] Critics also talk of an "Antonioni ennui,"[25] a condition of lethargy, disorientation and emptiness which would characterize, for example, the protagonists in *L'avventura* (1960).

Antonioni himself states in a now famous interview that Eros is sick,[26] and that, in a world in which traditional codes of morality no longer have any value, people are driven and obsessed with their sexuality because they are disoriented

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[20]   Jacques Rancière, *Der emanzipierte Zuschauer,* Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2009.

[21]   Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 188ff.

[22]   Martin Schaub, "Sisyphus," in *Michelangelo Antonioni: Rehe Film 31*, 18ff.

[23]   Schenk, 84.

[24]   Kiefer, 36.

[25]   Seymour Chatman and Paul Duncan, *Michelangelo Antonioni—Sämtliche Filme*, Cologne: Taschen, 2004, 62.

[26]   Michelangelo Antonioni, "A talk with Michelangelo Antonioni on his work in *Film Culture*" (1962), in *Michelangelo Antonioni Interviews*, ed. Bert Cardullo, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008, 32ff.

and unhappy.[27] Thus, for example, Sandro in *L'avventura* has abandoned his artistic ambition as an architect in order to take on a more financially rewarding job as an assessor. Because of this he is frustrated and, according to criticism, this leads to a more obsessive and impulsive sexuality. Regarding this, Antonioni thinks that "The tragedy in *L'avventura* stems directly from an erotic impulse of this type—unhappy, miserable, futile."[28] Sandro is bored, unsatisfied, but incapable of changing anything because he cannot successfully develop and follow ethical rules in his behaviour. "Thus moral man who has no fear of the scientific unknown is today afraid of the moral unknown."[29] According to criticism, Il *deserto rosso* (1963/64) shows alienation in capitalistically and technologically changed surroundings. Criticism suggests that a strong contrast between the characters' feelings and their surroundings is produced.[30] Consequently, the life of the bourgeoisie in prosperous post-war Italy takes place in an "emotional and moral vacuum."[31] (Kiefer 2008: 38) In his obituary, Richard Phillips writes in the *World Socialist Website* that Antonioni has through the course of his creation, lost his ability "to find images for the inner emotional complexity of modern life and to express a certain protest". He even speaks about "an artistic decline." According to Phillips, Antonioni has fallen in line with the "political and social status quo."[32] All later interpretations of his work show how his aesthetic is disregarded or misunderstood, when the primary focus is on the contents and themes of his films. In this way, *Blow up* (1966) or *Identificazione di una donna* (1982) have no obvious political message that would point to social change. It cannot be denied however that Antonioni has also created images in these films which present "Being in the World" shaped by modern life with its complexity and its difficulties. He is a master of precise and attentive observation. In this way, his films can be read and understood as a commentary reflecting on problems. At other times they can be understood as allegorical representations which portray and critically diagnose the developments of their time.[33] In this

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[27] Chatman and Duncan, 63.

[28] Antonioni, 33.

[29]   *Ibid.*

[30] Chatman and Duncan, 95.

[31] Kiefer, 38.

[32] Richard Phillips, "Michelangelo Antonioni – Kein makelloses Vermächtnis," World Socialist Website, 11.8.2007, http://www.wsws.org/de/articles/2007/08/antoa11.html, accessed 8.7.2013.

[33] Douglas Kellner, *Cinema Wars. Hollywood Film in the Bush-Cheney Era*, Oxford: Wiley/Blackwell, 2010.

sense, they articulate the condition and controversies of their age without, however, coming to final interpretation. An interpretation of the films in their social complexity can therefore give an insight into the existential problems and into the related *condition humaine*.

However, the resistance of the art which is articulated in Antonioni's work and which is not linked to the age in which it arose cannot be appreciated like this. Therefore, the critic of the *World Socialist Website*, for example, who complains of the alleged political inconsequentiality of Antonioni's films since *Blow up* (1966) misses the inherent political character of its aesthetics in which the content has become the form. This cannot therefore be defined by an analysis of content but only when his cinematic opus is viewed in the context of the aesthetic regime of art which in Rancière's work replaces the periodising concepts of modernity and post-modernity.

Jacques Rancière distinguishes in the Western tradition between three different forms of defining what art is.[34] In each regime, art is defined as the relationship within an epoch between human expression and the world. Each regime is defined not only by constitutive rules but also by inconsistencies which can arise from them. For Rancière, the crucial issue concerns the visibility of aesthetic practices, the place they occupy and the breakdown of the sensible which they produce.[35] Amongst these, he recognizes a system of sensible evidence which produces common threads but which also rules out certain elements. He differentiates between the ethical, the representative and the aesthetic regimes of images. While the first two both embody the classical, the latter stands for the modern.

The ethical regime of images is concerned on the one hand with the consequences of artistic practices and artefacts for individuals and society. On the other hand, it is defined by problems that Plato described in his reflections on art. How can artistic artefacts fairly represent ideas or ideal models? In contrast, the representative regime of art concerns mimesis and artistic artefacts are not defined by the law of conformity. "It is not artistic technique but rather a visible regime of the arts."[36] The representative regime is organized hierarchi-

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[34] Jacques Rancière, *Die Aufteilung des Sinnlichen. Die Politik der Kunst und ihre Paradoxien*, Berlin: b-books, 2006, 38ff.

[35] *Ibid.*, 27.

[36] *Ibid.*, 38.

cally. "This hierarchy defines the representative primacy of the action over the characters just as that of the narrative over the description."[37] Even the chosen form of representation (genre and language) must conform to the position of the presented theme in the social hierarchy. Therefore, for example, tragedies deal with nobility and comedies with the ordinary people.[38]

The aesthetic regime, which arose 200 years ago, dissolves the link between subject and its portrayal. The emergence of "literature" at the beginning of the nineteenth century led to an ascendance of language and expression.[39] The power of language consists in its ability to address and to explain what is distant (in space or time) or what is not openly available such as the inner motives of characters. Art is thus freed of any specific rule or hierarchy of the subjects.[40] There exists an equality among the represented subjects: "The aesthetic condition is a pure suspension of the moment, in which form as such is perceived. It is the moment in which a special humanity is formed."[41] In the novel, Balzac, and more so Flaubert, destroyed hierarchical representation, and hence, for example, the primacy of narration over description.[42] A work of art becomes an object of sensual experience, a part of the world which is changed by art's existence. The aesthetic system, which arose in the context of political revolutions, is shaped by the principal of equality. It attacks hierarchical structures in the field of art and therefore produces artistic modernity. As in the political world however, the hierarchies don't disappear. Even in the aesthetic regime, despite the new possibilities, representative logic still plays a role. Cinema is a good example of this. Classical, representative narrative logics continue to dominate in many film productions, such as in "classical cinema." For Rancière, the cinema is the art form which can poignantly express the conflict between these two poetics because it continually combines them.

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Since its beginnings avant-garde in the world of cinema has striven for a realization of aesthetic principles. In the impressionist tradition of French film

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[37] *Ibid*., 39.

[38] *Ibid*., 52.

[39] Jacques Rancière, *Die stumme Sprache. Essay über die Widersprüche der Literatur,* Zürich: Diaphanes, 2010.

[40] Rancière, *Die Aufteilung des Sinnlichen*, 37.

[41] *Ibid*., 40ff.

[42] *Ibid*., 41.

criticism, Louis Delluc formed the idea of *photogénie* in the 1920s. By this, he understood the poetic aspect of things and people which only the language of the film can capture and convey. "From this game of light and shadow, from the movement and the rhythm, from the stylizing of objects the images in the film's power of suggestion should grow—from blatant visual signs we thus sense the flow of images in their rhythm as a particular type of 'music'. However, it is not the rhythmic layout of the materials alone which is deemed temporarily to be the main aim but rather the hints of what cannot be said, the evocation of moods, thoughts and feelings on the other side of what can be narrated."[43]

For Rancière's argument *Bonjour Cinéma* (1921) by Jean Epstein, part of the Delluc's circle of directors and critics, possesses particular significance. This is of course the purist view: "Cinema is truth. The story is a lie."[44] Epstein saw a close link between modern literature and cinema because they both turned away from theatre. According to him, cinema does not narrate, rather it points towards something. "I wish for films in which nothing or almost nothing happens [...], in which a modest detail indicates the tone of a hidden drama."[45] Epstein developed the vision that cinema is a script of light or movement which does not depict but rather captures the "vibrations of sensual matter."[46] He felt that when it turned away from telling of stories, which are characteristic of the representative regime, cinema became art. In this, plots are organized causally and follow the rules of probability. A mimetic rationality is at the basis of fiction. According to Epstein, however, cinema should capture the texture of the world and chart things "as they come into being, in a state of waves and vibrations, before they can be qualified as intelligible objects, people, or events due to their descriptive and narrative properties."[47] In his vision, cinema becomes the apotheosis of the aesthetic regime of art. Rancière refers, however, to the fact that cinema has developed primarily in another direction and continually restores the representative order which literature and painting have left behind.

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43 Ulrich Gregor and Enno Patalas, *Geschichte des Films*, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1962, 80.
44 Epstein, quoted by Jacques Rancière in *Spielräume des Kinos,* Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2012, 22.
45 Epstein, quoted by Gregor and Patalas, 82.
46 *Ibid.*
47 Rancière, *Film Fables*, 2.

From this background, Rancière criticizes above all the "consensual cinema", whose fictions legitimize reality by reproducing it. Instead of this, he makes the case for a "dissensual cinema" in which reality becomes a stranger to itself and consensus is revealed as fiction. Thus it becomes clear to him that there are other possibilities for experience. In this way, he sees that aesthetic fiction can be freed from rational imitation. "Fiction as a contrived world is not accountable to reality but rather uses it to define a sphere of common references and experiences."[48] Fiction should not validate reality; rather, in the process of mimesis reality should become different from itself and a common ground should be created. Its contingency should become visible.

The political significance of Antonioni's aesthetics can now be defined more closely. The open narrative structure, the autonomization of the camera, the playing with *temps mort*, the visual development of spaces or the gradual emptying of the image field are characteristics of his style and undermine the representative regime which was even more important in his early films because these followed more closely the rules of genres and their causal logic. It is doubtless that Antonioni's work is indebted to the aesthetic regime. He often compares his work with that of a poet. We must also assume that he was familiar with the work of Delluc and Epstein because he admired French film greatly and similarities can be found between Antonioni's self-statements and the writings of the French impressionists.[49] Thus, for example, he speaks of *photogénie* of the wind. It is invisible but can be imagined by the viewer through the objects which it affects. Kock describes in detail: "These sequences, where the wind which is strictly speaking invisible, suddenly becomes visible and audible, are then in many of Antonioni's films part of the most visually powerful and contemplative moments in his works: the wind which secretly animates the parkland in "Blow Up", the cedars and cacti in the closing sequence of *Zabriskie Point*, that sway gracefully back and forth, the wind in the closing sequence of *L'avventura*, which makes the leaves ruffle, the leaves of the avenue in *L'eclisse* which come to life because of a gust of wind or the flag staffs which, because of the wind moving their ropes, give rise to a secretive far off music."[50]

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[48] Jacques Rancière, *Und das Kino geht weiter. Schriften zum Film*, eds. Sulgi Lie and Julian Radlmaier, Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2012, 21.

[49] Kock, 323ff.

[50] *Ibid.*, 325.

The withdrawal of narration and the carefully shaping of images challenge the viewer to decipher the complexity of the images, the details of the appearances, in order to discover what is happening, what moves the protagonists and motivates their actions. As in the novels of Gustave Flaubert or Virginia Woolf, the viewer must learn to interpret differently the facial expressions or movements in order to be able to develop an understanding of the motivations of the characters and events.

Antonioni's visual technique associates people, buildings or objects with each other and even uses objects to refer to other objects. This, according to my thesis, is due to the principle of equality. Even the important and the unimportant are brought together in a single image. Associations between images are produced which allow similarities to be discovered. His aesthetic focuses on the superficial structure of images which become more important than dialogue or action. Thus the existing hierarchies are deconstructed and an equality in the image and between images is produced. Antonioni also dismantles existing hierarchies between art forms. He is both writer and painter which is why his films are closely shaped by literature and painting. In *Blow Up* (1996) photography, painting, fashion, architecture, jazz and pop music are used equally to suggest meaning.

Starting points for Antonioni's film work are "visual epiphanies", revealing impressions of the world around him.[51] These cannot be revealed or summarized in words. If they become visual motives, in Antonioni, they preserve an individual meaning towards action. They become important elements of his image aesthetics. After the image detail of a setup is determined, Antonioni meticulously and comprehensively adapts the image surface. Thus there are visual motives like windows, bars, waters or fog which appear again and again and whose multivariant process is an important basis for Antonioni's style.[52]

A further stylistic characteristic is the emptying of spaces. Protagonists disappear bit by bit or suddenly and unexpectedly. Sometimes the camera itself moves away. Characters seem left in the vastness of the space. Antonioni uses different possibilities in order to produce emptiness and strangeness. As in de Chirico, in Antonioni too images are found which are immobile and timeless. Their stillness makes

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[51] Chatman, 99.
[52] Kock, Chapter 5.

them enigmatic and secretive. Even the "temps-mort" images which are a cinematic component of Antonioni's pictorial language can convey a sense of emptiness and isolation. If the characters at the end of a scene are no longer present in their setting, the movement comes to a standstill. There is a loss of drama. At the beginning and ending of many scenes, we also only see elements of a landscape.

Besides, the set, which is designed so carefully, comments on events. As Seymour Chatman has emphatically shown in *Antonioni or the Surface of the World*, the set conveys meaning in metonymic ways not defined by the characters. The surface structure of images does not stipulate meanings, however. Director and audience have equal right to comment on and to interpret these images. "Antonioni's films create meaning, even if they often change this meaning again or at least take it back, they also carry however the characteristics of open artwork [...] they review values and certainties and invite the viewer to share with the author different configurations and interpretations of the images as a wide field of possibilities."[53] Furthermore the setting of a film is often marked by paintings and other *objets trouvés* that Antonioni has brought together.[54] They comment upon the action as well as indicate a real world. The viewer can or should speculate on their significance which in the end remains unclear. If a (temporary) interpretation is not successful, they remain aesthetic objects which divert from the action and lead to false associations. Not only individual images can lead to associations in Antonioni, he also intensively uses the montage technique of image association. Image associations can facilitate our understanding of the characters; they can however also develop their own meanings. In *L'eclisse*, for example, we see a mushroom-shaped water tower which reminds us of a cloud after a nuclear explosion. It corresponds to a headline "Nuclear War" in a newspaper which is shown in the film. However, these (latent) interpretations remain on a preconscious level as a rule and they can only be submitted to a deeper analysis upon repeated viewing. Otherwise, they (might) generate feelings of disconcertment and unease. Even with this technique, Antonioni aims at thwarting definitive allocation of meaning and to encourage free association.

The architecture which is depicted also comments upon the action, for example in *La notte* (1961) and in *L'eclisse* (1962). In these, we have the feeling—as in

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[53]   Kock, 247.
[54]   Chatman, 99ff.

de Chirico's paintings—that architecture is the real protagonist. Like the landscapes in Antonioni's films, architecture creates a visual framework in which characters move as on a chessboard. Even this is used to comment upon their inner life. We should also mention in this context the visual autonomy of the camera, which reaches its climax in *The Passenger* (1975). Often the camera wanders away objectively, giving us the impression that the narrator of fiction is distracted.[55] This leads to spatial disorientation of the viewer, in particular, in the desert scenes. Cinematography is constantly aimed at undermining the view, that Locke's "point of view" is central.[56]

The characteristics in Antonioni's film art which I have mentioned here reveal that his films are indebted to the aesthetic regime of art, as described by Rancière, and also to Epstein's purist vision. By different stylistic means, he infiltrates the representative regime, leaves it standing in the background and robs it of its structuring power. Through the ambiguity of his images, he questions consensual fiction which is marked both by the representative regime as well as by reality. Antonioni has created a dissensual cinema in which can be found the aesthetic truth of cinema, the ambiguity of dumb and ephemeral things, the texture of the world as it is. Thus visual surroundings are emancipated in their signs. His cinema carries out the transition from the representative fiction of the plot to the aesthetic fiction of the signs. Wong Kar-wai has followed him in this.

3. The Aesthetic Surfaces in the Work of Wong Kar-wai

In an interview with Peter Brunette,[57] Wong Kar-wai refers to the fact that Antonioni had an important influence on him. He made it clear that the central protagonist in a film is not the actor but rather the background as Antonioni portrays it in *L'eclisse*. In addition Brunette adds: "But it is the formal, the idea that abstract lines, and forms, and shapes, and colours can give emotional meaning and expression as much as narrative lines, dialogues, characters."[58] In this way meanings are conveyed via the worlds of the protagonist which remain abstract and vague and therefore cannot ever be precisely defined. Thus, for example, in

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[55]   Chatman, 196ff.

[56]   *Ibid*., 199.

[57]   Kar-wai Wong, "Interview with Peter Brunette," in Brunette, *Wong Kar-wai*, Urbana and Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 2005, 119.

[58]   *Ibid*.

Chungking Express (1994) Faye is repeatedly reflected in a metal wall until finally the whole screen is filled with it. In this way her inner state is suggested. She seems to be confused and uncertain. In his films, Wong often uses visually expressive techniques in order to describe inner experiences. As with Antonioni, the viewer is left to decide how he precisely interprets the scene. Even in *Il grido*, for example, the landscape of Po valley conveys suggestively insights into the inner life of Aldo.

In Wong's cinema, narrative structure also loses its central power and remains fragmentary. He assembles loosely linked plots and locations. Thus in *Chungking Express* not much dramatic happens. The film has an open ending and many problems remain unsolved. The characters are lonely, isolated as in the director's previous films. They believe they have missed their one chance to fall in love because of fate. Wong tells two stories which have similar plots and characters and which refer to one another. Thus a juxtaposition of different interpretations arises which have however an equal right to exist. The stories do not seem to happen back to back but at the same time. The narrative changes into actions which are scattered in space and time. Because of this, it is difficult to reliably get your bearings in the film world and this leads to the focus on visual sensations, sensual impressions and the perspectives of experiences. Even in his later films Wong remains true to an elliptical fragmentary form of storytelling.

In Wong's films, even more than in Antonioni's, characters appear lonely, incapable of forming relationships and isolated. Objects like cans of pineapple in *Chungking Express* help them to deal with feelings of loneliness, desolation and loss. They try to overcome their condition, to establish a stable, common relationship. This seems impossible for any length of time in the dynamic metropolis of Hong Kong. Even the construction of space in Wong's films reflects the isolation of the characters. For Wong, the point is not to use Hong Kong architecture as a framework for his films. Rather he defamiliarises the things we encounter in order to express the characters' subjective perception and their feelings. He does not show the Hong Kong skyline or important tourist sites. Instead, from the start, the viewer is confronted with a Hong Kong which causes alienation and fragmentation. Inevitably, it is difficult to find the way in this heterogeneity of places and visual impressions. Even by sterilising space, Wong tries to give hints to the inner mental life of his characters.

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Wong Kar-wai also adopts the Antonioni concept of the vacated space. In *Days of Being Wild* (1991) the frustrated and embittered Yuddy leaves his stepmother. The camera lingers briefly on the empty space, in which he has just lingered. Therefore, the melancholic feeling of an experience of loss is conveyed. Furthermore, the final sequence of the films is in a dialogue with the end of *L'eclisse* (1962). The camera shows at the end the places where the lonely Su Li-Zhen and the policeman Tide tenderly converged, before they separated from one another. Now the places are abandoned, emptied of their presence. The viewer remembers however. The vacated space arbitrates between presence and absence.[59] It is no longer closed in on itself but rather marked by fluidity, openness and transitoriness. Seen as a whole, Wong creates with his construction of space the impression of places where identity becomes fleeting, fragmentary and problematic.

Following Frederic Jameson,[60] we could understand this as a (postmodern) identity crisis. The distance and the displacement between people which is shown in *Chungking Express* remind us of his diagnosis of individual and cultural schizophrenia. The people in late capitalist world are separated from one another, they are narcissistic, unconnected, focussed on their subjectivity and often have more than one identity. Furthermore, the central characters in the film are often disguised. No one seems to know who they really are and how they should behave. They change languages and even identities. This state of confusion is expressed by the frequent deployment of reflected images in mirrors and windows.

The characteristics which are presented here as examples show that there are intertextual relationships between Wong's films and the work of Antonioni. Both turn away from the representative regime of art and look for the aesthetic truth of cinema in its visuals and allegories. They design sensual landscapes of the surface of the world which have broken the straight line between cause and effect and are defined by aesthetic affect according to Rancière.[61] Wong has continued the cinema of Antonioni. The interpersonal conditions seem to have

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[59] Wolf Lindner, "Impressionen von einem unsteten Ort. Zur Raumkonstruktion bei Wong Kar-wai," in *Wong Kar-wai. Film-Konzepte 12,* ed. Roman Maurer, Munich: Text und Kritik, 2008, 71.

[60] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London and New York: Verso, 1991, 16ff.

[61] Rancière, *Ist Kunst widerständig?*, 57.

worsened. Communication fails, relationships seem impossible. Eros is also sick in the world of Wong.

4. Conclusion

I have tried to show that the political character of Antonioni's (and also Wong's) work cannot be extrapolated through an analysis which is focused on content. Consistently and without compromise, Antonioni liberates the image. He is no longer dependent on plot, instead he strives for *photogénie* and seeks to poetise images. The impression of an image should capture the moment. The finding of the moment and its capture on film define his artistic creation. In the visual strength and complexity of the image develops the "Eigensinn" (self will) of the aesthetics which opens spaces for opportunities because it unveils the ruling consensus as a fiction.

Antonioni addresses an "emancipated spectator"[62] who takes up the role of an active interpreter. His images encourage association. Elsewhere, I have spoken of a "productive spectator."[63] In the interaction with media texts this spectator productively and creatively creates interpretations in the context of his own educational and life history. Rancière sees in this very ability for association and also for dissociation the emancipation of the spectator. "Every spectator is already an actor in his story."[64] Therefore he must produce an individual interpretation of the work of Antonioni in order to turn films into his own story. This work is a "demonstration of equality"[65] Narrators and translators produce an emancipated community which shares the experience of the aesthetic. The timelessness of Antonioni's work shows that this is still possible today in interaction with his films.

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Translated by Andrew Terrington

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[62] Jacques Rancière, *Der emanzipierte Zuschauer,* Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2009, 33.

[63] Rainer Winter, *Der produktive Zuschauer. Medienaneignung als kultureller und ästhetischer Prozess,* Cologne: Herbert von Halem Verlag, 2010 (second enlarged edition).

[64] Rancière, *Der emanzipierte Zuschauer, 28.*

[65] *Ibid.*, 30.

Ernst van Alphen*

On the Possibility and Impossibility of Modernist Cinema: Peter Forgács *Own Death*

Whereas modernism is a productive notion in literary studies and art history for the understanding of twentieth-century cultural practices, in cinema studies it is hardly viable. Cinema and modernism are an unlikely couple, for, as Peter Verstraten has argued, film scholars are adamant to contradict a history of film that would parallel the histories of older, established art forms.[1] One tries to create a unique position for cinema by keeping cinema outside the scope of modernism.

The unique position of cinema is not only caused by a different history, but also by its medium specificity. And since American art critic Clement Greenberg published his essay "Towards a Newer Laocoön" (1940) medium specificity has become an important issue in the understanding of modernism.[2] Greenberg considers modernism as a self-reflexive, formal focus of a medium on its own specificity. In the course of history, especially in the nineteenth-century the different art media have become hybrid in their imitation of other media. It is the "task" of twentieth-century modernism to purify media of everything that is not specific to the medium. The visual arts in general should prevent being perverted by words. And the medium of painting should get rid of the illusion of three-dimensionality, because in pursuing that illusion it rivals with the three-dimensional medium of sculpture. For Greenberg, music offers a valuable model for the other media, because as an art of immediate sensation and pure form it is less seduced by the pursuit of qualities belonging to other media than most of the other art media. Music is antithetical to literature, which focuses on subject matter.

The Greenbergian notion of modernism implies a major problem for the new medium of cinema. Whereas other art media are supposed to have specific qual-

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[1]   Peter Verstraten, "A Modernist "Attempt at Cinema": The "Impurity" of *Pierrot le Fou*," in *Modernism Today*, eds. J. Baetens, S, Houppermans, O. Boele, P. Liebregts, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013, 220.

[2]   Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer *Laocoön*," *Partisan Review* 7 (July-August 1940): 296–310.

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ities and characteristics, however polluted in the course of history by the qualities and characteristics of other media, it is not clear at all how the medium specificity of Cinema can be imagined or defined. Cinema combines moving images, usually figurative, but in some practices abstract, with music and with words, spoken or written. It makes little sense to set the task for cinema as medium to purify itself of one of these aspects by arguing that the respective aspect is ultimately imported from another medium. If cinema has no qualities of its own, it makes no sense in the case of cinema to follow the project of Greenberg's notion of modernism of purifying media from what is not specific to them. Cinema, then, cannot be considered an art medium. Verstraten's answer to the dilemma impelled by Greenbergian modernism is elegant and convincing: "Cinematic expression is not to be reduced to a pure essence, since its nature is hybrid."[3] The specificity of cinema resides in its synthetic nature, that is, in its impurity. A modernist cinema, then, is a cinema that not refrains from its impurity, but celebrates it and demonstrates it emphatically.

A rare example of a study of modernism in cinema that seems to follow this possibility of modernist cinema is András Bálint Kovács' *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema 1950–1980*.[4] He considers modernism as such as an aesthetic self-criticism of the traditions in the respective arts. Modernist painters affirmed and negated their affinities with precursors like Rembrandt, Velazquez, and Courbet. Modernist writers could do that with writers like Balzac, Flaubert, Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dickens. But for filmmakers working in the 1920s it was not that easy. According to Jean-Luc Godard, for filmmakers working in the 1920s like Marcel Carné, Louis Delluc and René Clair, in the cinema "there was no critical or historical tradition yet".[5] Kovács claims that because of the absence of an artistic tradition *within* cinema "early modernism was *cinema's reflection on artistic and cultural traditions outside the cinema*."[6] Following the conception of cinematic modernism, in the decades of the 1920s and 1930s cinema can be considered as modernist insofar as it adopts inspiration from other art forms. A good example of such an early Modernist film, mentioned by Kovács, is Robert

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3   Verstraten in *Modernism Today*, 227.

4   András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950–1980*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

5   Godard quoted in *Ibid.*, 16.

6   *Ibid.*, 17. Emphasis in original.

Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920). This film drew influences from German Expressionist painting.

Inspired by Kovács notion of cinematic modernism and rewriting Greenberg's modernism, Verstraten argues that Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le Fou*, taking the medium specific impurity of cinema as a guideline, "is a supreme example of modernist film because of its many ramifications in various art forms and media."[7]

> Film is truly Godard's medium, because the medium lends itself to such surprising crossovers: in addition to image, film includes the option to all kinds of written texts, spoken words, sound, music, dance. This hybridization was strictly necessary as the basis for a new language whose function was to stretch conventional representations: as soon as cinema is exclusively defined in terms of visuality and reduced to pure image, it will risk fading. Film is truly film when it cultivates its hybridism. The film language propagated by Godard is based upon the idea that cinema is essentially a multilayered medium.[8]

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The fact that Godard's film uses crossovers with comic strips, advertisements, diary notes, book covers and reproductions of paintings by Matisse, Picasso, and Renoir is, then, not an adulteration of pure filmic language; it shows the modernist ambition to exploit cinema's hybridity fully.

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[7] Verstraten 2013, 234.
[8] *Ibid*., 233.

Modernism in Literature

In what follows I will explore another modernist attempt in cinema, this time adopting a device that is usually seen as specific for the literary text, in the sense that only in textual form the device is really possible and effective. I will examine *Own Death*, made in 2007 by Hungarian artist and filmmaker Péter Forgács, based upon the 2002 novella of the same name by Hungarian author Péter Nádas. The Modernist device that is consistently used in Nadas' novella device is the one of consistent character-bound focalization. The story told is from beginning to end presented through the eyes and experience of one focalizing subject: a middle aged man in Budapest, who does not feel well and who seems to get a heart attack. I will call the device "radical perspectivism", and it concerns a radical, that is, systematic, consistent adaptation of one point of view, or better one focalizing position.

According to present dominant visions in literary studies, high modernist fiction is characterized by formal innovation and above all, the radical subjectivization of literature. Modernism is said to be focused on the problem of mastering a chaotic modernity by means of formal techniques. The most characteristic formal techniques are ironic detachment, highly mediated and multi-perspectival narration, self-referentiality, stylistic ostentation, use of large-scale symbolic forms, and the dramatization of states of consciousness, including the author's own.[9] Nadas novella seems to be an excellent example of this notion of modernism. It represents the state of consciousness of a man, followed during one single day, who seems to get a heart attack and will die. The device used for representing his state of consciousness is perspectival narration, more specific: consistent character-bound focalization through one single character.[10]

Character-bound focalization is a narrative device notably used in realist literature. It is not Flaubert's narrator who explains to us what is going on inside the protagonist of *Madame Bovary*. Instead, we as readers are allowed direct access to her reflections, fantasies, doubts and feelings. Character-bound focalization helps to avoid explanations and comments from a narrator. It seemingly gives

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[9]   Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars*, Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1999, 17.

[10] For a detailed elaboration of the concept of focalization, see Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1985, 2009.

us direct access to the sense perceptions of a character. As readers, we both feel for and sympathize with Emma Bovary.

However, character-bound focalization is not prevalent in realist literature. It alternates with introductions by a narrator, there is plenty of dialogue, and several characters take turns in focalizing. In modernist literature, the use of character-bound focalization is radicalized. Long scenes, entire chapters or even entire books are being narrated consistently from the point of view of a single character. I shall call this narrative technique aiming at consistent focalization of one single character 'radical perspectivism.' Virginia Woolf's modernist novel *The Waves* (1931) is one of the most prominent examples of it. Each of the work's six characters observes himself and the others using the narrow perspective of character-bound focalization. The six resulting observations together do not constitute one univocal story. What is striking is the discrepancy between the characters' perceptions as well as between characters' perceptions of themselves and the ideas others have of them.

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Flemish Louis Paul Boon's novella *Menuet* (1955) displays a similar radical perspectivism. In this work, an event is recounted in three chapters, every chapter giving a different version of events depending on the character who is focalizing. Again, these three different accounts on the same event do not combine to make for a unified and coherent story. On the contrary, it seems as if these three characters with their individual perspectives are involved in completely different events.

The narrative concept of focalization is based on a visual metaphor: focus. This does not imply that focalization is always visual, or even sensory. It applies to any

form of subjective interpretation or perception of an object, situation or event. Yet the visual metaphor rightly indicates that focalization always involves a relationship: that between subject and object. Focalization implies that something is observed, experienced, or interpreted by a character in a particular way. It is therefore paradoxical that modernist examples of radical perspectivism seem to point to the direct opposite. Characters whose focalizations constitute the entire narrative seem to be prisoners of their own perspectives. It disables any relationship with their environment, cuts them off from other objects. It is the radical quality of this narrow perspective which causes a kind of existential isolation, barring characters from engaging with the very surroundings that are the object of their perspective. It is this radical and consistent perspectivism, so frequently occurring in modernism, which shows the two-facedness of focalization. It is not only relational but also isolating—experienced as some form of imprisonment.

Radical Perspectivism in Film

The way in which focalization isolates is shown very clearly in a few rare cases of films that employ radical perspectivism. Most films include a few point-of-view shots, shots that are presented as if coinciding with the perspective or position of a character. Films that aim for radical perspectivism however, are much rarer. Examples of this technique might be abundant in literary modernism, but in cinema narrowing down to the focalization of one character only is still considered an experiment. One example of such an experiment is the 1947 thriller *The Lady in the Lake*. The face of the protagonist, played by Robert Montgomery, can only be seen when he looks into the mirror. The entire film consists of his focalizations. Another, similar example (also a 1947 thriller) is *Dark Passage*, directed by Delmer Daves. Humphrey Bogart plays Vincent Parry, an innocent man who is accused of committing murder. He escapes from prison and has a plastic surgeon construct a new face for him. His new face should guarantee a new identity, freeing him and enabling him to start over again. The moment the bandages are removed is the first moment the spectator actually sees Bogart's face. Up to that point only his perspective was shown without actually showing him.

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What makes *Dark Passage* so interesting is the fact that the imprisonment of the main character is shown using radical perspectivism. When he was still "imprisoned" by the identity what was considered criminal, the spectator only had access to his focalization. Now that he has a different face and identity, Bogart

also becomes the object of focalization. He is no longer the person accused of a crime that would put him in jail, and so no longer the prisoner of his own gaze. His new-found freedom is represented through a range of points of view and focalizations of which he is the object. The film suggests that he is truly free the very moment he is seen by others.

A recent example of radical perspectivism in cinema Péter Forgács's *Own Death*, based on Péter Nadás's 2002 novella. Both text and film capture the diegesis entirely from the point of view of the male protagonist. He narrates us his thoughts, feelings and contemplations on the day he has a heart attack. The story is set on a sunny day in Budapest. Despite persistent chest pains, the main character leaves his apartment to visit a restaurant. When he has a heart attack in the street, he is brought to a hospital. It seems likely that he will die in there. However, he survives, after having had a near-death experience. Again, both film and text use his focalization only to convey his experience.

As conventional as such a technique would be in literature, in cinema it is surprising and unexpected. Translating character-bound focalization from a literary text to cinema is a highly unconventional move. As a visual medium, film does not convey inner thoughts and feelings as effortlessly as literature. It conveys the effect or illusion of representing the inner self—or, more formally speaking, of character-bound focalization—rather than objectively conveying that representation itself. It is possible to create the illusion that the lens of the camera and the eye of the character coincide. This is the case in *Dark Passage* and *The Lady in the Lake*. In *Own Death* however, the camera often does not coincide completely with the gaze of the character. The spectator is offered close-

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ups of a part of his head, glasses, neck, or shoulders; effectively looking over his shoulder. In film studies, this type of shot is called a 'dirty close-up' as the elements indicating the subject position are polluting the clean close-up shot. *Own Death* also contains various shots that suggest character-bound focalization although the camera lens does not coincide with the character's point of view. A certain passage from the film itself may explain why this is the case. The protagonist says:

> Mantegna depicted Christ's nude body in a foreshortened perspective viewed from his huge, bare soles. It was from this extreme, almost grotesquely foreshortened perspective that I looked out on my own body as it lay on the gigantic squares of the tiled floor. (2006, 231)[11]

The extreme and limited perspective on Christ's body created by Mantegna is described as a grotesque close-up of his own body. The protagonist emphatically characterizes this limited perspective, and thereby character-bound focalization, as grotesque in the sense of strange or excessive. The grotesque effect is caused by the extreme points of view. As the film effectively is a series of close-ups from a limited perspective, the spectator almost automatically assumes every close-up to be a point-of-view shot from the protagonist, even when formally or visually speaking that is not really the case. Even when a close-up shows the protagonist's eye or head it seems to be a shot produced through character-bound focalization. In *Own Death*, this type of focalization cannot only be

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[11]   The film's voice-over follows the English translation of Nádas's work almost word for word. Therefore I refer to the page numbers of this translation when citing the film.

identified through specific sightlines but especially through the aforementioned grotesque effect.[12]

The film's dirty close-ups emphatically signify the main character's isolation before, during, and after the heart attack. Through the nature of this event, the character's imprisonment inside his own gaze receives immediate meaning. The fact that he is dying literally and figuratively cuts him off from his environment. The following passage shows he is well aware of this happening:

> You don't understand what is happening, you have never experienced anything like this, yet you know exactly that this is what they call the sweat of death. An ice-cold surface covers your inner heat. You see that nothing has changed around you and so you can still comprehend that the difference between your own perception and that of others is greater than you would normally expect. A sensational experience that concerns me and no one else.[13]

Apart from getting separated more and more from other human beings, the main character's own inner sense of being is also increasingly cut off from his gaze. In *Dark Passage* and *The Lady in the Lake* subject and object of focalization coincided when looking in the mirror. In *Own Death* this does not happen: when the protagonist looks at himself in the mirror of the restaurant's bathroom, we hear the following voice-over:

> I was holding out, but I wanted to see what this was. However, the most I could see in the mirror was that somebody was looking at himself. The surprising thing in all this was not my failure to identify myself with these characters looking at each other, but their waxy, gray complexion. [. . .] The sight I perceived didn't justify the sensation, and vice versa: the bodily sensation didn't justify the sight [. . .]. It wasn't I, yet theoretically I couldn't have seen anything other than my mirror image.[14]

He realizes he is slowly being cut off from both his environment and his own gaze.

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[12] Narrative technique can never be fully adapted for use in another medium. For more on narrative techniques and procedures in cinema, see Peter Verstraten, *Handboek filmnarratologie*, Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2006.

[13] Nadás, 55.

[14] *Ibid.*, 67.

This passage also clearly shows how Forgács's film and Nádas's novella are artworks on the fine line between modernism and postmodernism. The radical perspectivism created by consistent character-bound focalization singles these works out as modernist masterpieces. In that case the narrow perspective illustrates a set of epistemological issues. These concerns of knowledge prompt questions such as: how is it possible for a subject to connect to and understand his surroundings? But since *Own Death* focuses on a (near-)death experience, ontological issues are also at stake here. This means that in addition to questions on knowing the world, questions on being are also relevant; questions like: What kind of experience is dying? The examples of radical perspectivism mentioned earlier still may have passed for typically modernist works of literature or cinema. *Own Death*, by contrast, shows that if modernist strategies are applied radically and consistently, epistemological issues are abandoned in favor of ontological ones.[15]

Ontological concerns come into play due to the protagonist's increasing separation from his environment. The world as he knows it starts to take on a different shape. Upon leaving the restaurant, he concludes: "My relations with everyone are more or less severed."[16] He continues telling us how this has come about:

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[15] See Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction*, New York and London: Routledge, 1987, for a reading of modernism in terms of foregrounding epistemological issues, and of postmodernism in terms of foregrounding ontological issues.

[16] Nádás., 117.

> Involuntary sense perception affects the mind only as long as one is capable of relating one's own experience to that of others and stores this experience in a processed form. In any case, people passed me by. [17]

His explanation for being severed from himself as well as from others may also explain why radical perspectivism is confined to modernism only in literature, and is barely used at all in cinema. The ability to relate one's own experiences to that of others is something that expands and increases consciousness. When a narrative strategy disables this option, a character becomes isolated (*The Waves*), imprisoned (*Dark Passage*), or dies (*Own Death*).

From the moment the main character of *Own Death* is hospitalized, he starts to lose access to his bodily and sensory perceptions. His self-awareness is what remains: "The mind deprived of its bodily sensations perceives the mechanism of thinking as its last object."[18] His introspective abilities seem to increase: "I caught myself perceiving and thinking, but no longer acknowledging things within the limited conditions of bodily structures."[19] These abilities are kept intact throughout the experience, even when he approaches the moment of death:

> Totality does indeed realize itself in you. It carried me. Not away from my consciousness, as in fainting, but into it. What seized me was an enormous force that operates simultaneously within and without, and therefore it is pointless for consciousness to make such a distinction. We were beyond everything personal and passionate.[20]

His ability to think and to be introspective ostensibly starts to fail when he is actually at death's door. Paradoxically, this moment is described in great detail, while it seems to cancel the possibility of doing so. He describes this moment as follows:

> It is a single, short, flipping or tipping move. To tip over from somewhere and thereby end up somewhere else. In German there is a good descriptive verb, umkippen. In French, too, there is a verb for this, basculer.[21]

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[17] *Ibid.*, 119.
[18] *Ibid.*, 129.
[19] *Ibid.*, 135.
[20] *Ibid.*, 201.
[21] *Ibid.*, 209.

This short move cancels the very thing that remained during the process of dying: his faculty of thought.

> This means that, with his death, that which never really belonged to him falls away. And this thing is probably nothing else than language-bound conceptual thinking. It is through this that he was tied into the community of others. First to get rid of the constant bodily sensations, and then of that highly esteemed thinking.[22]

His being barred from the society of others is represented here through the transition from first- to third-person narration. This too is a "single, short, flipping or tipping move." The events leading up to this moment have all been narrated in the first person. From here on, however, tentative transitions to third-person narration occur several times. The third person does not implicate (the presence of) a second person like the first person does. Here, the presence of others is no longer automatically implied by the type of narration used. Form and content contradict each other in this quotation; it is a profound reflection on the loss of the capability to reflect. This suggests that this quotation does not so much capture a death experience as a near-death experience, as his ability to reflect has remained throughout.

The connection to his surroundings is restored shortly after this particular moment. This does not only prompt the return of the first person, but also the appearance of the second person. The first person appears to observe himself from the point of view of the second person: "You look back with gentle irony. There

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[22]   *Ibid.*, 209.

is no hurry, since you will decipher it as you move away from your life, at this pace and on these levels."[23] The second person creates the possibility for the first person to come into existence. Character-bound focalization is no longer a form of isolation or imprisonment, or a sign of impending death. Instead, it enables relationality to come into play.

This quotation already indicates that this involves not only relationships between first and second person, but also between past and present. At a later moment in the film, the protagonist says: "Retrospection unites many different perspectives of consciousness."[24] His retrospective abilities also return to him after his near-death experience. The film represents these abilities by inserting bits of old footage, probably of old home movies. For example, at the beginning of the film we see shots of a naked man jumping around. Later on, this is followed by footage of a dancing woman. Both cases seem to capture memories of moments of intense sensuality and bodily awareness, features that—as I indicated already—threatened to disappear while he was dying. His resurrection and regain of retrospective capabilities are confirmed by added old footage shots which again carry connotations of intense bodily awareness.

The idea of bodily experience is also created by the affective nature of the images. This does not so much hold for what these images depict (such as the naked, jumping man), but for the cinematic techniques employed by Forgács. He manipulates and exaggerates the characteristics of moving images in a manner similar to the way he has done so in his other films (that, in contrast to *Own Death*, consist exclusively of home-movie footage).[25] In an interview Forgács explains the fundamental difference between looking at photographs and moving images:

> If we made right now a black-and-white photograph of ourselves, we could observe the event as already-past time: history. [. . .] But, while we have the moving images of the past, we always have the fluxes of life [. . .] which proves forever that

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23   *Ibid.*, 233.

24   *Ibid.*, 235.

25   For my analysis of Forgács's films created with home-movie footage, see Ernst Van Alphen, "Towards a New Historiography: The Aesthetics of Temporality," in *Cinema's Alchemist: The Films of Péter Forgács*, eds. Bill Nichols and Michael Renov, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, 59–74.
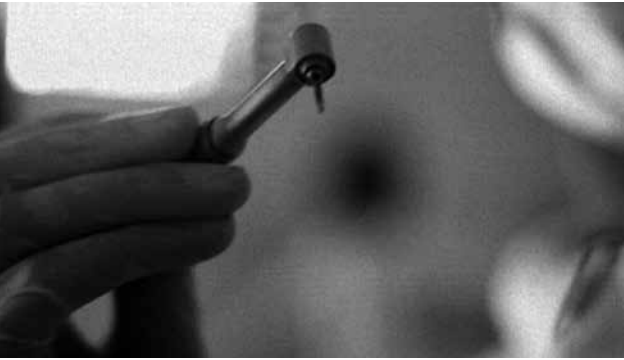
we're alive. So my viewers—and you—know that they [. . .] are physically dead, but they are still moving. They are reanimated again and again by the film.[26]

Forgács manipulates narrative time in order to reanimate the characters from home movies, using slow motions or freeze frames. He creates a rhythm that enhances the vivacity and dynamics of scenes. Our ideas of time and movement are upset by the fact that story time is out of sync with narrative time. This causes the liveliness of the moving images to overwhelm us.

In *Own Death*, Forgács's manipulation of narrative time is even more radical due to its specificity. Instead of bringing dead characters back to life, this film shows the minutest details of the process of dying. Large parts of the film consist of series of stills, like Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962). Just when the film has created the idea for the spectator that the entire film employs this technique, moving images come in. While the voice-over is intellectual and introspective, the rhythm of moving and still images creates an intense sense of bodily awareness. In this paradoxical situation the display of still images in a film moves us: it makes us realize that moving images represent life, life that is under threat in this film.

In connection to Michel Foucault's work, Mieke Bal writes on the representation of death: "Death is a challenge to representation to the extent that it is a moment that nobody can describe, an event that nobody can escape, a process

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26   Sven Spieker, "At the Center of Mitteleuropa: A Conversation with Péter Forgács." *Artmargins*, May 20, 2002. http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/5-interviews/354-at-the-center-of-mitteleuropa-a-conversation-with-peter-forgacs (accessed December 1, 2010).

that nobody can narrate."[27] And while it is indeed possible to narrate another person's death, it is impossible to speak the words "I am dead." In *Own Death*, Forgács makes the impossible possible by using radical perspectivism and by his manipulation of filmic time. He uses the typically modernist technique of character-bound focalization in a typically postmodern way, as he tries to explore a 'world' or ontology that would normally be inaccessible. Significant in this respect is the elliptic, English-language title of both Nádas's novella and Forgács's film. It could be read as "my own death," but also as "to own death," thereby implying that narrating one's own death in the present tense means that one has a hold on it, controls it.[28] Forgács's film shows spectators the process of dying from the inside. But the final breath is never drawn, and so the film's closure is not brought by death, but by a profound, continuing contemplation of life, death, consciousness and bodily awareness.

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[27] Mieke Bal, *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 375.

[28] In the Hungarian title, *Saját halál*, the double sense is slightly less direct, but also discernable: "saját" connotes that which is referred to a specific individual, but also that which belongs to it as its "own," as its "property" or "properties."

Terry Smith*

Rethinking Modernism and Modernity Now

If we understand modernism to be the most definitive set of responses within the arts to modernity—itself understood as the confluence of social, economic and political forces that definitively shaped the experience of modern life—then, to revisit artistic modernism now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, requires a leap over at least three complex, equivocal yet ultimately powerful acts of historical, even ontological, opening then closure. These operations were performed on modernism by the anti-modernist art movements of the 1970s, by postmodernism in the arts and theory during the 1980s, and, since the 1990s, by the prioritization of contemporaneous difference in most aspects of contemporary life and thought. There is, however, at least one major distinction between these operations: to become truly contemporary—to establish genuine, coeval diversity as the basic condition of being on a world scale—would preclude closure, permanently.

Attributing accurate dates to the occurrence of each of these operations in particular fields of practice—the configuration of global power, say, or the history of thought, or artmaking—is as contentious as was periodizing the many aspects of modernism and modernity themselves. This is so because each of these responses, convergent aspects, openings and closures occurred unevenly in time and space, at different times on the world clock, and in different, not always connected, places. As well, they took distinctive forms in each situation, and therefore, everything about their comparability is controversial. But occur they did, and are doing so now. How might we be accountable to these changes as historical phenomena, how might we track their impact on contemporary life and thought, and discern their relevance to possible futures?

Faced with these challenges, some would deny that modernism and modernity require revisiting: why do so, they insist, when the art that counts remains committed to modernist imperatives (you can forget the rest, as History will do), and the world at large continues, in however surprising ways, to modernize itself

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(every significant change is a modernization)? Versions of this view can be found across the ideological spectrum of artworld institutions, from certain museums vested in modernism as an almost entirely aesthetic enterprise to certain critics and historians on the left for whom modernist artists offered the most trenchant critiques of capitalism, the form of geopolitical management that, they believe, still rules the world.[1] To me, for reasons that will become clear, such views are not only redundant; they also entail a kind of willful naivety at one end of the spectrum, and melancholic bitterness at the other. Both end up short-changing the possibilities that they actually value. Instead, let me tackle some of the challenges outlined above, as much as can be done in one essay, by tracing three steps in my own pathway through them. I begin by revisiting an occasion, over twenty years ago, when it became necessary to make some useful distinctions between the key terms, "modern," "modernity," and "modernism," while also profiling their necessary interdependence. At that time, the blurring of these terms in artworld discourse was so constant that it created a kind of conceptual haze, a mix of self-induced ideological mystification and appeals to be rescued by the next artistic advent. I will then return to the anti-modernism within the late modernism of the 1970s, before setting out in conclusion my thoughts on the implications of a revised understanding of the conjunctive modernities—and the polycentric modernisms that they generated—as the social and art historical precursors to the proximate differencing that marks our contemporane-

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1   On MoMA's efforts to absorb contemporary art into its modernist aegis, see Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, chapter 1. At the other end of the spectrum, see Paul Wood, *Modern Art and the Wider World*, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014. Wood's volume highlights the danger of exaggerating the longevity and the actual power of "the West," profiles moments when art from "the wider world" was crucial to not only formal but also critical innovations in European art, and condemns what he sees as the tendency of most theorists of contemporary art, in thrall to ideologies of neoliberal globalization, to forget the radical politics of the early twentieth-century avant-gardes and thus reduce modernism to its mid-century formalist mode. Interesting and provocative on art up to the mid-twentieth century, his study declines into anxious contestation thereafter. With little awareness of the agency of those who brought about their own decolonization as the imperial empires imploded during the wars of the twentieth century, he fails the grasp the purport of the multiple modernities project. Unwilling to rethink the radical politics of the early twentieth century in the light of present circumstances, he values only that contemporary art which he can read in those terms. This perspective leads him, in his concluding chapter, to travesty the views of some curators and commentators on contemporary art, including mine.

ity (our contemporary world being) and the internal diversity that characterizes what we call contemporary art.

Modernism and Modernity Defined

Published in 1996, the *Dictionary of Art* was conceived by its publishers as the visual arts parallel to their *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, the foundational reference in that field since George Grove's first edition of 1879. In 34 volumes, the *Dictionary of Art* aimed to be an exhaustive encyclopedia, with entries by recognized experts on every known artist, architect, artistic technique, art center, and art concept (41,000 articles by 6,700 contributors from 120 countries). Fifteen years in the making, it was edited initially by Hugh Brigstocke, previously curator at the National Gallery Scotland, and then by art historian Jane Shoaf Turner. Both are specialists in the arts of the European Renaissance. The project combined a strong sense of the relative importance of artists, mediums, places, and ideas within a hierarchical, European-based, historical structure—reflected most sharply in the length of entries assigned to them—and a recognition that visual art of note and interest had been made throughout the world and across time. If Michelangelo was celebrated in a 30-page essay, over 40 percent of the entries were devoted to non-Western subjects. There was, however, no entry on "Contemporary Art." The term appears a dozen or so times in the Index where it refers readers to short entries and passing references to contemporary art societies and to names of journals. This remains the case for the latest online editions, where "contemporary art" comes up most prominently as a subsection of the entry on "Aboriginal Australia." There was, and is, no entry on "Modern Art," but there were, and still are, entries on "Modernism" and "Modernity," which I authored.[2]

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[2]   On the first edition, see Michael Kimmelman, "Michelangelo Meets Buffalo Meat," *New York Times*, April 24, 1997, at http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/24/reviews/970824.24kimmelt.html. London-based publisher Macmillan produced the 1996 edition; Oxford University Press published a revised edition in 2003. It is now available online as *Grove Art Online*, at http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/book/oao_gao. Online users are referred to three entries in the *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*: critic Thomas McEvilley on "Postmodern Transformations of Art," artist-critic Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe on "Aesthetics of Contemporary Art," and artist Mary Kelly on "Images and Desire," each interesting in its own way but in no way constituting an adequate treatment of the subject. Perhaps the revision currently being undertaken will do so.

These articles were written at a time when postmodernist practices prevailed in most artworlds around the world, and postmodernity—especially as it was being critically described by Fredric Jameson and David Harvey—had replaced modernity as the most acute descriptor of our larger condition.[3] Thirty years later, contemporary art has rendered postmodernist practices ingrained and historical, and postmodernity as the overall world picture is being replaced by ideas concerning the contemporaneity of differences within that picture.[4] Asked to write the entry on modernism, I insisted that it be accompanied by an entry on modernity. The editors objected that such a subject was more suited to a dictionary of sociology, history, or politics. I argued that no dictionary of such scope and seriousness of purpose should subscribe to the aestheticization that had attended thinking about art since the advent of Romanticism. Modernist claims to autonomy were a topic to be dealt with *in* the entry, not conceded in advance. To me, postmodernist delight that all forms of accountability to history were now superseded was, in part, a current form of that same claim. I had recently published *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America*, a study of the formation of what I called a "visual imagery of modernity" during the first half of the twentieth century in the United States.[5] Against the idea of a "Machine Age" aesthetic, I showed that this imagery grew within the complex changes to existing visual cultures engendered by the shifts from mass production to mass consumption within capitalist modes of production during that period. In passing, I argued that many of the dynamic transformations then being attributed to

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[3] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (July-August, 1984): 59-92, in his *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Social Change*, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 1992.

[4] Pamela M. Lee, *Forgetting the Artworld*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012, argues that we have given up on critical understandings of postmodernity too lightly. This is true of general artworld discourse; it is not true of critical theories of contemporaneity such as those discussed in the last sections of this article.

[5] Terry Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America*, Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1993. The use of the term "America" for a study that confined itself to the United States was not appropriate. This book was based on my dissertation, originally conceived as a comparative study of how artistic modernisms related to relevant economic, cultural, and political formations in a dozen countries in different parts of the world. Having pursued this question in Australia, and noting that its development in France, Germany, and elsewhere in Europe was already the subject of strong scholarship, I was advised to begin with the U.S., as this question was, surprisingly, not being asked by scholars there.

the supposedly new post-Fordist, posthistorical age were, in fact, anticipated or invented during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Even though I was determined that *The Communist Manifesto* would appear somewhere in the *Dictionary*, I had come to feel that "modernity," rather than "capitalism," was the best name for the conditions within which modern art, as every other aspect of modern society, had been created.[6] Modernity encompassed non-capitalist social formations, such as those in the Soviet sphere, which were then imploding but had prevailed for decades; social formations in "advanced" societies, as in indigenous communities for example, that pre-existed capitalism, and were, at their core, not-modern, yet had to deal with the modernizing societies in which they found themselves; and forms of social organization in Asia and Africa that were modernizing in ways that shared some but not all of the key characteristics of Western capitalism. All of these formations, not only those definitive in EuroAmerica, were the base—the actual material, physic, social, cultural, and political conditions—that shaped the superstructural—ideational, rhetorical, discursive—domains within which modernism came to prevail as a leading tendency. In turn, ideas, images, and structures of feeling such as modernism influenced the basic relations between people in society, how they used their tools, how they saw their surroundings, including each other.[7] From this perspective, modernism was modernity's best artistic idea. And, at times, modernism was also unmatched in showing what was worst about modernity.[8]

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[6]   In the event, William H. Shaw and Charles Saumarez Smith did author an entry on "Marxism."

[7]   I should have included Raymond Williams in the bibliography, as his essay "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural theory" has been pivotal to my thinking since its publication. See *New Left Review*, I/82 (September 1973): 3-16; also in his *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980): 30-49. His "When Was Modernism?" is equally pertinent to this discussion, see *New Left Review*, I/75 (May-June, 1989), from which this is a key sentence: "'Modernism', as a title for a whole cultural movement and moment, has been retrospective as a general term since the 1950s, thereby stranding the dominant version of 'modern' or even 'absolute modern' between, say, 1890 and 1940." This is accurate as to the state of affairs in Europe and the United States, but hopelessly blinkered as a world-wide description—indeed, it excludes vast sections of the world from modernization and from the possibility of modernist art just at the time when these sections began to become modern in ways I will discuss.

[8]   As T. J. Clark demonstrated in *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

Here are the two articles, one after the other. "Modernism" was preceded by entries on the art history of Modena, the Italian city, and on *Moderne Kunstkring* (Modern Art Circle), a group of Dutch artists active in Paris in the first decade of the twentieth century, who staged influential exhibitions of French art in Amsterdam. An article on the "Modern Movement" in architecture follows my articles, then one on Paula Modersohn-Becker. Online, of course, they are not preceded or followed by anything, except what you did before and what you will do next. (The words in capitals refer to entries elsewhere in the *Dictionary*; internal references are to the titles appearing in the bibliographies to each.[9]). While, for alphabetical reasons, "modernism" appeared before "modernity," I reverse the order here, as I will deal with these subjects in that order in the comments that follow.

> **Modernity**. Term applied to the cultural condition in which the seemingly absolute necessity of innovation becomes a primary fact of life, work and thought. Modernity appeared first in Europe in the 16th century and became dominant in the mid-19th century, with enormous consequences for colonized non-European countries and for residual cultural formations in Europe. It has been described as the first truly "world" culture, universalizing in its ambitions and impact. Modernity is more than merely the state of being modern or the opposition between old and new. This article discusses the nature of modernity and its relation to art.

> 1. THE NATURE OF MODERNITY. The ecology of pre-modern societies was largely agricultural, based on using renewable resources in restorable conditions, but modern societies in pursuit of greater productivity, profits and the spread of "well-being" are built around machine processing of unrenewable resources. Constant technological progress is required to keep ahead of accelerating consumption, as is the flexibility to switch from exhausted resources to new ones. Incessant change becomes central to cultural experience. The agenda for change is, however, concentrated in the hands of relatively few, is partial in scope and largely arbitrary in its effects. Thus its forms are felt as ambiguous and conflicted. Modernity is the accumulating impact of these forces of modernization on individuals, societies and environments.

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9   *Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner, London: Macmillan, 1996, vol. 21, "Modernism," 775-77, "Modernity," 777-79.

New ideas and modes of expression have occurred in many societies throughout human history, even in civilizations that changed slowly as did that of ancient Egypt. Also frequent is the sense of being modern—that is, being up to date, "of today," or less strongly, part of the present or recent past. Modernity, however, is much more active, engaged and widespread than these occasional and circumstantial occurrences. It is what happens to both everyday and exceptional experience when large sections of a society are undergoing modernization. It is an unfolding of active processes, of changes in all spheres, away from accepted traditions, customary conventions and current practices towards imaginary, often utopian, futures. It is experienced as a constant encounter with the new as a set of challenges and thus demands a reorientation of our sense of self around the presumption that change is the inevitable result of the functioning of forces outside of ourselves, is largely unpredictable and yet may be influenced, to some degree, by individual belief and action. Modernity provokes a preoccupation in us with its definition, occurrence and significance. Modernity is living in, and with, perpetual flux.

In *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote:

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all newly formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face, with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind. (*Selected Works*, p. 38.)

These changes had been resisted from the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. The poet Oliver Goldsmith, in his essay *Visit to Elysium* of 1773, was rudely confronted by Luddite reality: 'I should certainly have fallen beneath the hands of this company of men, who gloried in the title of Modernicides' (*Miscellaneous Works*, London, 1837, I.213).

While many of these factors were nascent in the RENAISSANCE (leading some to label it the Early Modern period), it was during the 19th century in Europe that modernizing forces came to dominate material life: the capitalist system of economic exchange became nearly global; industrialists used new technologies and

rationalized management to introduce mass production; faster means of transportation and communication spread everywhere; millions of people migrated between nations and into cities; governmental and corporate surveillance became increasingly pervasive and was strongly resisted by organized and revolutionary political movements; everyday life was secularized, traditional values were cast as mere nostalgia, and popular culture was shaped into spectacles infused with desires for commodities. Overt ideological struggle is thus characteristic of modernity (*see also* IDEOLOGY). At stake is the direction of modernity itself. Typically, attempts are made by some to recruit modernity's victims as willing subjects and by others to encourage radical resistance. Both sides, however, share an assumption about the inevitability of a modernized future, while rejecting continuity from the past and viewing its persisting forms as anachronistic survivals. They aim to reduce actual global diversity of outlook by insisting on the necessity of unifying, integrative conceptual frameworks, by promoting abstract organizational forms over individual choice. They oppose the inherited hierarchies and also the autonomous differentiality of tradition-based communities – especially those beyond the major European cities—with claims that rationality, materialism and pragmatism are essentially universal. In general, the rhetoric of disruption disguises modernity's fundamental sleight-of-hand: its eventual absorption of tradition, otherness and its own novelty into its expansionary self.

The ideology of modernity is evident in its narratives of universal liberation, a number of which compete and combine. They all presume European leadership and include the revolutionary overthrow of aristocratic, theocratic order to establish the democratic nation state, the promise of progressively increasing wealth for all offered by the political economy of capitalism, and the hope for the realization of rationality in the minds and actions of men held out by Enlightenment philosophy, above all by Kant and Hegel. MARXISM, a widely influential ideology during the period of modernity's hegemony, was a critique of these narratives accompanied by its own grand narrative of the revolutionary destruction of the bourgeois state, the establishment of a socialist state and, eventually, the communism of pure liberation. A less systematic critique of modernity was offered by such philosophers as FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE and MARTIN HEIDEGGER and by such political philosophies as anarchism.

2. MODERNITY AND THE ARTS. These ideologies and materialities have profoundly shaped art and literature. They surfaced first in the QUARREL OF THE ANCIENTS

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AND THE MODERNS in 17ᵗʰ century France and England in particular. During the following 150 years, the applied empiricism of the *Encyclopédie* project (1751-72) of Denis Diderot and the ROMANTICISM of many writers and artists mapped out, respectively, a science and an aesthetic increasingly independent of classical precedent. By 1848 THÉOPHILE GAUTIER could assert: "It goes without saying that we accept civilization as it is, with its railways, steamboats, English scientific research, central heating, factory chimneys and all its technical equipment, which have been considered impervious to the picturesque" (*Souvenir*, p. 203). Others were less sanguine—thus the cry from CHARLES BAUDELAIRE in "Le Cygne": "Old Paris is gone (the form of the city...changes much faster, alas! than the mortal heart)" (Baudelaire, p. 209). Such grief for a past visibly disappearing, shot through with anxiety about whether it is possible to keep up with the necessity of novelty, recoil from the present while being embroiled in a searching for the future within it—this dialectical ambivalence is a typically modern mix.

Seeing the Paris of the Second Empire as a key site of modernity, WALTER BENJAMIN traced its definitive figures: the city itself obliterating the countryside except as memory and place of leisure; the volatile crowd against whom individuality was now measured (especially that of the *flâneur*, a new model for the artist); the dislocations of the experience of time and space; the dominance of the world by its "phantasmagorias," its fanciful, fantastic, engrossing yet misleading projections of itself through advertising and political ideologies. In the years after 1900 mass-produced visual imagery proliferated throughout city spaces and in the burgeoning variety of communicative media. International, national, regional and local cultures defined themselves increasingly in terms of identificatory visual images, as did political parties, urban subcultures and even small, occasional, groupings of people. Advertising, entertainment, propaganda and fashion were the primary vehicles for an imagery of modernity that celebrated the MASS PRODUCTION process and then its products. Modern design symbolized the age of mass consumption. Images of factories and workers, cities and crowds, products and consumers appeared regularly in the incessant circulation of signs of the new. Modernist art claimed a definitive closeness to the essential spirit of modernity (*see* MODERNISM). In its avant-garde forms, it also insisted on the necessity of art's autonomy, its pure experimentality. It is also arguable, however, that the various realist tendencies in art since the late 18ᵗʰ century, further inspired by the examples of Gustave Courbet in the mid-19ᵗʰ century, express the experience of

modernity even more directly, if more critically, often picturing its forces at work on individuals seen as part of a social fabric.

Since the late 1960s modernity has been radically reinterpreted. The forces of modernization have been blamed for creating alienating, repressive societies that are increasingly divided between rich and poor, for accelerating the inequities between nations and for wide-scale environmental destruction. Nation states based on such universal systems as socialism, communism, and many forms of capitalism are rapidly losing the consent of their citizens, which in turn is leading to greater repression or the creation of hybrid forms of power-sharing. Theorists of post-modernity argue that the master narratives that have sustained the consent of modernizing societies—ideals of progress, democracy, humanism, modernity itself—have become illegitimate and that the dream of universal rationality that inspired the Enlightenment has ended. Post-modernists call for a new era of anything-goes, open-ended possibility. Yet in practice, old beliefs, especially theocratic ones, are revived, often fanatically, and new cynicisms flourish beside naïve hopes for particular, local changes. This has led, in the late 20th century, to a revisionary reading of the period of modernity as not necessarily closed but rather as a many-sided phenomenon, marked by the ruins of its earlier phases, but still profoundly formative of the present. This situation seems destined to generate textures of experience even more complex than those encompassed by such generic terms as modernity and post-modernity, however expansively they may be defined.

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The close, indeed necessary, connection between the two concepts is underscored in the opening sentences of the entry that follows. Despite my efforts to write an essay that would match its subject, and operate like an "open work," I was aware that what I said in summary form at the beginning would most likely function as a *de facto* definition of the term "Modernism" for most readers everywhere. I was, therefore, determined that these sentences would not stand alone, and that readers would be required to turn to the entry on "Modernity," with each shadowing the other as they were being read.

Modernism. Term applied to the invention and the effective pursuit of artistic strategies that seek not just close but essential connections to the powerful forces of social MODERNITY. The responses of modernists to modernity range from triumphal celebration to agonized condemnation and differ in mode from direct picturing of the impacts of modernization to extreme renovations of purely artistic assumptions and practice. Such strategies – pursued by artists working individually or, often, in groups, as well as by critics, historians and theorists – occur in all of the arts, although in disjunctive forms and across varying historical trajectories. They have been strongest in painting, design and the MODERN MOVEMENT in architecture, highly significant in literature and in music, but quite muted in the crafts. They have echoes in aspects of commercial and popular culture. Despite being intermittent in their occurrence and unsystematic in nature, these

strategies have been most effective in Europe and its colonies from the mid-19th century and in the USA from the early 20th, moving from the margins to the center of visual cultures, from reactive radicality to institutionalized normality.

Some early usages of the term "modernism" occur in the context of the recurrent battle between the new and the old. In 1737, Jonathan Swift complained to Alexander Pope about "the corruption of English by those Scribblers, who send us over their trash in Prose and Verse, with abominable curtailings and quaint modernisms" (*Published Works*, 1757, ix: 218b). Yet such disputes were usually local ones, occurring within broader frameworks of cultural continuity, except at periods of epochal change. During the 19th century in Europe, however, modernizing forces became hegemonic, and by the mid-20th century modernity had become the norm in many parts of the world, its effects being felt everywhere.

Within this fast-changing context, certain moments in the history of the visual arts stand out as definitively modernist. The play of modernizing forces in Paris in the 1850s and 1860s was manifest in Courbet's critical realism, Manet's induction of the aesthetics of popular spectacle into high art, and the poetics and art criticism of CHARLES BAUDELAIRE. "By *modernité*," Baudelaire wrote in 1863, "I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable." These artists and writers recognized that to make significant, potentially timeless art, it was necessary to begin from the transitory, ever-changing present. This reversed the historical teachings of the academies. Towards the end of the 19th century the term "modernist" was adopted to identify ART NOUVEAU tendencies in many European countries. A related usage appeared in the claims of SECESSION artists in Germany and elsewhere.

In the years after 1900 Paris was the centre of an explosion of artistic innovations, by Fauvist and Cubist artists, which inspired radical experimentation by Futurists in Italy, Suprematists and Constructivists in Russia, Dadaists in Germany and many others. Subsequent tendencies, such as Surrealism, explored the social and psychological impacts of modernization even more deeply. In general, these artists passed from drastic transformations of tradition to fundamental interrogations of art itself. Such extreme reflexivity, emphasizing negative criticism of the conventional and pursued by these artists usually working in groups, constitutes the avant-garde within modernism.

At the same time developments in modern art were fashioned into influential historical narratives in such exhibitions as *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* (London, 1910), opened by the critic ROGER FRY, and new markets for modernist art were created by the ARMORY SHOW (New York, 1913) and others. Those involved in these developments usually identified each movement or grouping by its name and referred to "the new art" or, increasingly after 1920, "modern art" as the generic term for what was emerging as a broad tendency. Meanwhile, product designers made the term "modernist" fashionable for their ART DECO elegances, but defenders of tradition during the first half of the 20th century saw "modernistic" art as indicative of political excess, diseased social values and the insanity of those who made it.

As a name for the mainstream tendency in 20th-century abstract art "modernism" came into widespread usage only in the 1960s. It was applied to the Abstract Expressionists and to contemporary hard-edge painting, colour field painting and abstract sculpture, most influentially by the American critic CLEMENT GREENBERG. Its lineage was traced back to Manet as the initiator of a sequence of formal innovations, particularly those that lessened illusionism in painting and mimeticism in sculpture. Reflecting the economic and cultural ascendancy of the USA and the enormous power of the New York art market, this viewpoint became orthodox internationally. It was, however, subject to subversion by Pop and Minimalist artists and to devastating criticism by conceptual, political and feminist artists and commentators. By the early 1970s it was displaced as a paradigm for most artists, although it persists in many museums, galleries and educational systems.

What were the practices of modernist artists? A typical strategy was to provoke the shock of the new, to reveal the present as replete with blindingly self-evident value and, at the same instant, to consign the recent past to anachronism. Another was to imagine the future as within reach, and still another was to reclaim the distant and even ancient past as a generalized precedent, a repository of essential values that transcended the style-bound historicisms of the 19th century. Typical modes were these: picturing the environments, artefacts, styles and attitudes of everyday life in the modern world; inventing forms, compositional formats and systems of visual signage that parallel those of the forces of modernization; insisting on art's autonomy—its obligation to secure a space for unbridled creativity, for pure possibility; promoting abstraction as an inevitable historical unfolding; highlighting the separateness of the arts or mixing them in startling ways;

constantly disturbing fixed relationships between artists and works of art and between works and viewers. The basic impulse of modernism within modernity is the drive to create previously unimagined objects and new ways of seeing them.

In the late 20th century, however, the limitations of modernism, its wasteful exclusions, became increasingly evident. Aspects of the culture of non-European peoples were often incorporated into modernist experimentality as estranging devices and signals of "primitive" otherness. This occurred throughout the vanguard movements in Europe around 1900, but from a post-colonial perspective it can be seen as a legacy of imperialism. While the agenda for world art seemed to be set by mainstream École de Paris art movements, and then, after World War II, by developments in American art, artistic practice in the cultural and economic colonies is not necessarily a matter of dependent provincialism. Local artists adopt, adapt and often transform the elements that circulate throughout a system of exchange, which is itself becoming increasingly international. Regional, local, even national, modernisms have occurred all over the world since the 1920s, each with their own distinctive concerns and values. Feminist art historians draw attention to the exclusion of significant work by women artists from the canon of modernist masterpieces, to the social restrictions that prevented these artists from entering into the spaces so vital to modern life, and to the persistence in early modernism of women seen as aesthetic objects (*see* WOMEN AND ART HISTORY). Similarly, modernist art constantly pirated popular and commercial visual cultures, while still insisting on an essential critical distance from the everyday life of modernity. No longer a source of strength, this contradictory pattern of incorporation and exclusion has contributed to modernism's decline.

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While modernism no longer inspires artists, its heroic history and its accumulation of masterworks have become standard fare within educated taste as it consumes the visual arts with ever-increasing enthusiasm. Modern Masters, fine designers, great geniuses, modest decorators: a diverse and conflict-free aesthetic has spread outwards from the centers of artistic innovation to become an international modernist culture among the upper and middle classes in most countries with a European heritage.

Post-modern artists and theorists (*see* POST-MODERNISM) tend to reject modernism as a historical narrative binding on current practice, while at the same time rehearsing some of its strategies and quoting instances of early modernist art as

allusions within their circulating of imagery from, potentially, anywhere and any time. Post-modernism is, however, obsessed with modernity; and the issue of whether human societies have moved into a post-modern phase remains open. Another modernist moment in art cannot, therefore, be ruled out.

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Modernity as a Historical Fiction

The broad outlines of these accounts, I believe, retain their adequacy. As do, I think, most of the specific characterizations within them.[10] Yet some striking differences of emphasis would be required if one were writing such entries today. Three stand out. The burgeoning of art and ideas about art from previously colonized or less "advanced" countries and regions of the world since the 1950s—itself inspired by decolonizing and "deWesternizing" forces operative at every lev-

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[10] So, it seems, do the editors, as I have not been asked to revise them. To my amusement, they remain in widespread use—at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, for example, where they are on the website and in interface usage in the museum as default explanations of that museum's core concept.

el, that have thrown nationalities and the global connections between them into a condition of permanent transition—led, by the 1990s, to what I have named an "iconogeographic turning" within the world's art, an essential element of its becoming contemporary with itself.[11] Second, this becoming contemporary of art is, I argue, a worldwide phenomenon that occurs differently in each place because it grows not only from local "modernisms" (whatever they may be), but, more precisely, from the specifics of the negotiations between traditionalisms, indigeneities, and modernizations in that place, those that occurred not only in art circles but at every level of personal and collective life. Recently, these negotiations take place in unprecedented awareness of the proximity of various other contemporaries everywhere, and in the context of the decline from dominance of Western narratives of art's historical development. Thirdly, work by artists active in Europe and North America during the modern period—work rendered "minor" by concentration on the achievements of the high modernist artists—has come into view for research and evaluation as itself a richly complex *provincial* art.[12] Indeed, far from being a monolithic enterprise, European art has always been the product of internal warring between cultural values—between Rome and the barbarians, Northerners and the Mediterreneans, the Germanic and Latin races—a long-running battle that resurfaced with a vengeance in the mid-twentieth century.[13]

Let me comment on the advantages but also the challenges facing those of us who would revisit modernism in the light of these changes, the first especially. The second I have explored in some detail in my recent books on contemporary art and contemporaneity, so will make only summary remarks at the end of this essay. The third aspect—the retrospective downgrading but also enrichment of

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[11]   On decolonization and De Westernization, see Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. See also Terry Smith, "World Picturing in Contemporary Art: Iconogeographic Turning," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, 6/2 (2005) and 7/1 (2006): 24-46. Vilashini Cooppan's *Worlds Within: National Narratives and Global Connections in Postcolonial Writing*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, exemplifies a parallel project in literary studies.

[12]   This is an effect within art history and criticism of what Dipesh Chakrabarty explored in relation to historical thinking in his *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

[13]   For its impact on art historical thinking, see Eric Michaud, "Barbarian Invasions and the Racialization of Art History," *October* 139 (Winter 2012): 57-96.

understandings of EuroAmerican modernism—I will deal with in more depth at another time.

The West versus the Rest debate has sharpened somewhat since my entries in the *Dictionary of Art* where, oblivious to earlier modernizations in China, and in certain Muslim and Mongol empires, I describe modernity as appearing in 15th-century Europe and then spreading throughout the world. Anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot alerts us to the dangers inherent in universalizing our general terms:

> Modernity is a murky term that belongs to a family of words we may label "North Atlantic universals." I mean by that words that project the North Atlantic experience on a universal scale that they themselves have helped to create. North Atlantic universals are particulars that have gained a degree of universality, chunks of human history that have become historical standards. Words such as development, progress, democracy, and nation-state are exemplary members of that family that contracts or expands according to contexts and interlocutors. Belonging to that class does not depend on a fixed meaning. It is a matter of struggle and context about and around these universals and the world they claim to describe.[14]

He goes on to show that these seemingly descriptive terms also carry "visions of the world," preferred ones, offered seductively, as if they were natural, and simply rational. "It makes sense to be modern. It is good to be modern. How could anyone not want to be modern?"[15] The same critique applies to the use of terms such as "the West," which is, as he says, "always a fiction, an exercise in global legitimation":

> That exercise sometimes takes the form of an explicit project in the hands of intellectual, economic, or political leaders. Yet most humans who see themselves as Westerners, aspire to become so, or criticize that aspiration experience the West in the form of a projection: the projection of the North Atlantic as the sole legitimate site for the universal, the default category, the unmarked—so to speak—of

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[14] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 35.

[15] *Ibid.*

all human possibilities... As in all default categories, the West as the universal unmarked operates only in opposition to the population that it marks.[16]

Along with its coercive, religious, and economic powers, deployment of the conceptual cluster around "modern" has been among the West's most potent weapons in exercising this ideational hegemony. Trouillot continues: "in its most common deployments as a North Atlantic universal, modernity disguises and misconstrues the many Others that it creates. A critical assessment of modernity must start with the revelation of its hidden faces."[17]

Within this framework, other seemingly neutral terms do their world-defining work, always from a Western viewpoint. For example, as philosopher Archille Mbembe reminds us: "Africa as an idea, a concept, has historically served, and continues to serve, as a polemical argument for the West's desire to assert its difference from the rest of the world."[18] Anthropologist James Ferguson adds that a term such as "Africa" is "a category that (like all categories) is historically and socially constructed (indeed, in some sense arbitrary), but also a category that is 'real,' that is imposed with force, that has a mandatory quality; a category within which, and according to which, people must live."[19] He does not mean that such categories should be accepted, rather, that their actuality within world being cannot be overlooked, if effective resistance to them is to be mounted. Understanding their constructed nature is the first step on this path. The same holds for concepts such as "the East," as Edward Said famously demonstrated with regard to "the Orient," and for "America," "Asia," "East/Central Europe," "the Middle East," and "Latin America"—in each case, albeit distinctively, the European location of the primary observer is inscribed in the very word itself. Any revisiting of modernism, any mapping of multiple modernities in the arts or any other sphere, must account for the operations of this double-dealing structure, must track the activities of its agents on both sides of the divide that it constantly recreates, and probe its weaknesses for spaces in which to exercise autonomy.

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16   *Ibid.*, 1-2.

17   *Ibid.*, 36.

18   Archille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, 2.

19   James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007, 5.

Modernisms Reimagined

In their statement of aims, the organizers of the 2013 conference *Reimagining Modernism, Mapping The Contemporary: Critical Perspectives on Transnationality in Art*, held at Cambridge University, UK, mark the most recent phases in art historical approaches to this task:

> The conference takes as its point of departure the consolidation of a new historiography of artistic modernism written at a global level and characterized by a weakening or even outright rejection of the demarcations that traditionally served to separate Western artistic practice from 'the rest'. Influential recent studies and exhibitions have argued for the categories of cosmopolitan, rather than national, modernisms; global rather than Anglo-American conceptualism; a diasporic rather than continental Afro-modernism. These developments go beyond a tokenistic inclusion of artistic practices from formerly economically peripheral and semi-peripheral nations into the mainstream canon; they do not simply expand the group of nations understood to be 'core' to the development of modernism in line with changing geopolitical realities and the waning of Western hegemony. Rather, they challenge the imagined community of the nation or region as the basic unit of artistic territorialisation, focusing instead on diverse, networked artistic communities that are understood to cohere at a transnational and/or transregional level, often with particular global cities as their enabling nodes.[20]

The organizers have in mind as models Kobena Mercer's *Annotating Art's Histories: Cross-Cultural Perspectives in the Visual Arts* project, the *Global Conceptualism* exhibition held at the Queens Museum, New York, in 1999, and books such as Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu's *Contemporary African Art since 1980*.[21] These are models for me, too, and are significant signposts in what amounts to a major revisionary undertaking by art historians, curators, certain

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[20] *Reimagining Modernism, Mapping The Contemporary: Critical Perspectives on Transnationality in Art*, CRASSH conference, Churchill College, Cambridge University, September 22-3, 2013, organized by Luke Szkrebowski and Devika Singh. I am grateful to the organizers for inviting me to speak. Passages in what follows are drawn from my paper.

[21] See: *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, ed. Kobena Mercer, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press for the International Institute for the Visual Arts, 2005; *Discrepant Abstraction*, ed. Kobena Mercer, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press for the International Institute for the Visual Arts, 2006; *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers*, ed. Kobena Mercer, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press for the International Institute for the Visual Arts, 2008; *Global Conceptualism*, ed. Jane Farver,

artists, museums and art research institutions throughout the world. Yet, while I share the values that inspire this effort, I am concerned about the damage being done to it as an accurate, realistic and generative art historical program if we continue to refer each and every element of this complex tapestry of artistic achievement to the question of whether, or not, or how and to what degree, it was *modernist*.

As an example of the complexities haunting even the most conscientious approach to these matters, let me cite the opening two paragraphs of the review by Holland Cotter "Modernism Blooming in Iran," from the *New York Times*, September 5, 2013:

> Most accounts of modern art say, basically, one thing: the West creates while the world waits, like a grateful beggar, for a nourishing handout. This is false history. Modernism has always been a global adventure happening for different reasons, in different ways, on different schedules, everywhere.

> That America and Europe are still barely awake to this reality makes an exhibition like 'Iran Modern,' which opens on Friday at the Asia Society, invaluable educationally. That the show is also terrifically good-looking, threaded through with human drama and composed of work that is both cosmopolitan and, over all, like no other art, doesn't hurt.

After describing a number of works with his usual perspicacity, he concludes:

> That there is drama—many kinds—in modern Iranian art has now been demonstrated beyond doubt: the historical drama of a pre-20th-century past that remains to be explored, of a mid-20th-century present that is still barely understood, and of a future that is being radically altered by politics.

> You can also pick up here on the tired drama of Western modernism's insistence on erasing or diminishing anything that it can't claim to have created. And, finally, as a positive, there's the drama of encountering a new modernism. It's one

New York" Queens Museum of Art, 1999; Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art since 1980*, Bologna: Damiani Editore, 2009.

    of many across the globe, and it is one that stands complex and generous—as part
    of a global picture, but also on its own.[22]

Simply by being concerned with such questions, Cotter stands out among art
critics based in New York. Not only does he make a point of reviewing shows of
art from elsewhere; he actually travels to report on key exhibitions, new muse-
ums, and biennials. His evident commitment to an ethical approach to these is-
sues is also exceptional. He takes seriously his obligation to bring his readership
along to a gradually deepening understanding of the complexities attending the
making of art in art-producing centers outside of the city. His colleagues prefer
to stay on the beat: writing about whatever the galleries in Chelsea, midtown
and, in recent years, the Lower East Side decide to show—which is overwhelm-
ingly, to the point of egregious exclusion, art produced in the United States and
Europe. Were it not for the few region-focused museums, such as the Asia Socie-
ty, and the small number of venues sponsored by national governments, regular
gallery-goers would be forgiven for thinking that, when it comes to modern and
contemporary art, the rest of the world was, with a few spectacular exceptions
(mainly Chinese in recent years), an art-free zone.

Cotter is merely summarizing, in a way he believes will be most attractive and
palatable to his regular readers, the narrative of multiple modernities that has
recently become a paradigm within much art historical, curatorial, and critical
thinking concerned with the art of the twentieth century (with some bleeding
backward in time and forward to the present). He is right about his readership.
Yet there is something askew with this picture if we are to take it as a usable art
historical framework, if our goal is to get at the realities in play when artists seek
the social and psychic space within their own location to make art, and espe-
cially to make art that tells the truth to power. Indeed, with due respect to the
constraints within which he is writing, we might characterize Cotter's words as
exemplifying *nice modernism*. There is little hint of the depth and degree of con-
flict that fundamentally shaped modern art in the West—including the intensi-
fied form properly characterized as modernist—as it did but differently, modern
art everywhere else. Yes, he acknowledges the racist blinkers in the West and
elsewhere that so condescendingly reduce the art of the alien others to lesser

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22   Holland Cotter, "Modernism Blooming in Iran," from the *New York Times*, September 5,
    2013, C21 and 25.

crafts and fascinating fetishes. And yes, he acknowledges that artists every-where push against constraints within their "complex" cultures. But he makes the typical mistake of attributing to the "mid-20th-century present" much of the degree and kind of agency that artists working in these cultures wish to have today, an agency described as "generous"—presumably so in command of itself that it can be generous towards others. However much this "gives voice to the others," and genuinely acknowledges the coevality that should be the right of all, it is unrealistic as a picture of the actual working conditions of artists, then as now, in many parts of the world, notably, much of the Middle East, Africa, and northern Asia (especially China).

Descriptions like this come close to presuming that modern artists in Western and non-Western societies had the same kind and degree of agency, both within their "complex" cultures, and in relationship to other, dominant cultures. "Agency" tends to mean the model aspired to in Europe since the sixteenth century, that of the individual with a free will who contracts with others to form a society organized above all to preserve and encourage the flourishing of that will. By the nineteenth century, in certain European centers, artists became widely seen as those who most embodied this spirit of personal freedom. But these are, as we noted above, models developed in just a few of the world's cities. A naïve presumption of this model would attribute at least the possibility of total free agency to every artist everywhere at every time. A slightly more subtle position would hope that, if they were not free initially, they could escape local and global binds by acts of will, by making choices. Again, this looks like wishful back-projection. Or, the fallback position: these artists were freer than they appeared to be to previous chroniclers of their efforts. Perhaps so, but this perspective probably reflects the fact that the historian has more information now, and more willingness to recognize agency when she or he sees it. Over-all, however, this perspective leaves curators and art historians with the job of playing "*catch-up modernism*," their task confined to showing how these artists were really modernists, albeit in their own specific and located way. The goal becomes to write each artist into a universal narrative of the shared evolution of modernism, the outline of which has been set by developments in EuroAmerica. This is to fall for a fiction, to perpetuate the master-slave relationship, and, strategically, to play a losing game.

Rebarbative Modernists

I am arguing that if the histories of nineteenth and twentieth century art everywhere on the planet are revised in terms that presume that every artist always aspired to modernize, and either succeeded, or tried but failed, or refused to do so (and was therefore reactionary), then recursion, rather than revision, will actually occur. During this period, ideas concerning modernity, modernization, and modernism were historical constructions, Western fictions that, in all spheres of life and work, were part of the ideological machinery of imperialism and colonization. This was the case in the metropolitan centers, and in the colonies themselves. The enabling as well as the disabling elements of this complex economy must be carefully teased out. When it came to the visual arts, moreover, the modernizing hegemony carried within it a crucial paradox: the modernism of the artists of the 1860s—the Parisian painters, primarily, whose work is widely credited as being definitive of the initial phases of the movement, and a model throughout its subsequent development—was, at its heart, an *internal critique* of modernity itself. In one way or another, the artists and theorists (Charles Baudelaire, most notably), and virtually all subsequent art historical chroniclers and interpreters of the movement, concur in taking this aspect to be definitive of the decisive change in the history of art that they effected. Philosopher Robert B. Pippin has recently offered a concise summary of this situation and its implications:

> What commentators are noticing is that Manet's paintings seem to declare that the norms of pictorial intelligibility and credibility established by conventional techniques had begun to fail and that what was required now was an approach that engaged and in some sense worked through not just the modern threats to pictorial intelligibility and the credibility of paintings but perhaps new, more general threats to the shareable intelligibility of human deeds altogether and even to shareable claims for the legitimacy of human practices as such.[23]

Like my linking of the artistic modernism to social modernity in the entries cited above, and reflecting the "left Hegelianism" of the major commentators on European modernist art (notably T.J. Clark and Michael Fried, but this broad framework also underscores the feminist interpretations of Linda Nochlin and

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[23]   Robert B. Pippin, *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014, 64.

Griselda Pollock), Pippin is identifying how a profound change in the history of art at the level of both content and form is, in material fact, a constitutive element within a broader shifting of societal communicative modes, themselves reflecting deeper political and economic changes, which have precipitated a crisis in values—indeed, he claims, in the possibility of ethical behavior as such for all humans. None of the connections here are smooth or automatic. They are, rather, conflicted, confused, and rebarbative.

This paradox, which emerges at the heart of European modernism when we see it as an deontological enterprise rather than, as is usually done, a succession of radical renovations of art styles, obliges us to pose some more awkward, but necessary, questions. Accounts of what was most at stake in artistic modernism, such as these, set a high bar for those who would categorize as modernist artworks made in contexts outside the modernizing centers in Europe and, after the 1940s, in the United States. Nevertheless, this can and should be done, otherwise the highest valuations and, indeed, the very possibility of being modern, let alone modernist, remains confined to the West, and, strictly speaking, to a few centers, at just some times and places within it.

As we do so, we need to remain alert to the fact that this kind of account, for all of its accuracy as to the artists it takes as the primary agents, also resonates with the Westernist instinct towards universalism against which Trouillot warns. An important question is this: when we go ahead to note the locally specific artistic and ethical breakthroughs that enable us to identify modernist innovation and reflexivity in the work of certain non-Western artists, what do we make of their aspirations, frequently expressed, toward a wider ethical relevance, if not universality? The implicit assumption within the modernity fiction is that modernization outside the West occurred in ways broadly similar to its evolution in Europe. But if the innovations and the reflexivity are distinct, then we must expect that the larger claims will also be different in kind.

Thirdly, and more generally, focus on modernism served (and still serves) to obscure the persistence, in art-producing sites throughout the world, including in Western centers, of cultural continuity (labeled "traditionalism" by the moderns), as well as appropriations from adjacent cultures or from colonizing ones, counter-modern tendencies, and indigenous art production. Art made during modern times was always more complex, and was made for different reasons,

than those prioritized by the high achieving but relatively narrow concentrations that we rightly label "modernist." The entire array of these interacting forces needs to be taken into account, and their relativities plotted, if we are to develop an art historical approach that, while acknowledging the historical impact of the Western model, supersedes it.

Rethinking Modern Art's Histories

To thoroughly ground this enterprise in the critiques that first made its necessity apparent, we need to step backwards in time, one further step, to the anti-modernism of the 1970s—specifically, the revolt against the dominance of formalist modernism that had, by the 1960s, entrenched itself in criticism, curatorship, art historical writing and much art practice in the metropolitan centers, above all New York. While much of the revolt was inspired by artists seeking to work with unfettered directness in any and all mediums, this very impulse was driven by recognition of the necessity to make art that would respond, without impediment, to the demands of the times. Merging "Art" into "Life" was the simplest of slogans for a situation as complex and as transformative was that of the 1860s. Moreover, such changes were happening not only in the EuroAmerican centers, but also in many places throughout the world, and would continue to do so, I argue, right through to the present, and beyond. This fact changed the dynamic of the master-comprador-slave relationships that operated between metropolitan and peripheral art centers within the world's cultural empires.

Since the sixteenth century at least, the freedom of certain Europeans had depended upon the unfreedom of others in their own societies, then, as the empires of many European states expanded, freedom at home depended increasingly on the oppression and exploitation of others elsewhere in the world. Not only were past times in one's locality designated "pre-modern" (and those at great temporal distance, "pre-historical"), but also contemporaneous cultures, those subject to colonization, were designated as "not-modern," distanced not only in terms of real yet linked space but also by being placed into an earlier stage of the story of human evolution. Like its Chinese predecessor and its Ottoman parallel, European modernity originates in this ontological violence, towards itself and its necessary others. As the modern world system developed, this structural inequity operated between central and peripheral artworlds everywhere in increasingly elaborate and nuanced forms. It also shaped the disposition of

cultural power within even the most seemingly privileged art centers, New York not excepted. In 1974, I characterized the world situation for late modern artists, wherever they were located and however often they traveled, as taking the form of a provincializing double bind:

> Provincialism appears primarily as an attitude of subservience to a hierarchy of externally imposed cultural values. It is not simply the product of a colonialist history; nor it is merely a function of geographic location. Most New York artists, critics, collectors, dealers, and gallery-goers are provincialist in their outlook, attitudes, and positions within the system. Members of artworlds outside of New York—on every continent, including North America—are likewise provincial, although in different ways. The projection of the New York artworld as the metropolitan center for art by every other artworld is symptomatic of the provincialism of each of them.

I was convinced, however, that seeing this structure for what it was, treating it not as an intractable problem but a potentially manageable problematic, was the first step towards breaking free from it. The second paragraph read:

> Most of us treat this projection as if it were a construction of reality—and it is, in the sense that it is almost universally shared. However, those who are able to live adequately within the framework of the respect for the essential differentness of diverse yet related cultures recognize that this projection does not have the force of 'natural law.' It is, rather, a viewpoint that, while effectively governing majority behavior, is as culturally relative as any other. That is, it is one among many ways of defining the (different) situations we are in.[24]

Written from inside my membership of the Art & Language group, this polemic is symptomatic of the anti-modernist sentiment emergent within late modern, critical art practices during the 1970s. It parallels the feminist accounts that were also directed against the then prevailing view of modernism as an avant-garde formalism, at its core indifferent to the lifeworld concerns of artists or anyone else.[25]

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[24] Terry Smith, "The Provincialism Problem," *Artforum* XII/ 1 (September 1974): 54. See also Samir Amin, *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976.

[25] In his 1965 "Modernist Painting," Clement Greenberg outlined the most influential, and reductive, formulation. See *Art & Literature* 4 (Spring 1965): 193-201; also in Clement Green-

Without either falling for the Westernist fiction, or naively believing that because we can see it as such it will evaporate, how might we acknowledge the realities of this framework as it evolved during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries while also accurately portraying how artists and other artworld actors worked within it and against it? Those of us who would chronicle the art produced at given places during the past two or three hundred years are faced, first and foremost, with the task of profiling the effects of this "system," marking its disabling and enabling elements, its strengths and weaknesses, its hold and the holes within it.

For artists working in colonial settings, there has been only one positive effect, albeit not a simple one. External models, including those initiated at the imperial center, can provide references for artmaking with broader horizons, for techniques and perspectives that extend the confines of local artworlds, breach the limits of local cultures, and defy censorship by local political powers. Unlike citizenship, art is not about conformity, or consensus; no matter how closed the situation, it always strives to exceed its points of origination, be they material, personal, or social. Such dynamics should be valued, not only because art requires it, but also because they energize locality, test it, extend its range, and its negotiating capabilities. Denying external worlds in the name of protecting locality is self-defeating parochialism. Nevertheless, in the name of the post-West world to come, we should acknowledge that priority in identifying exactly how and when to act within this network of relations should rest with local agents.

There is little doubt that the disabling effects of the provincializing system have been much more prevalent than enabling ones. According to my definition in the *Dictionary of Art*, the most modern artists were those closest to the core energies of modernity itself, to the sources of that energy, the most modern societies, and the art centers within them. Also, according to the second part of the definition above, and the summary by Pippin, the truly, indeed only, modern*ist* artists are those who effected profound and influential transformations in the nature of

berg, *The Collected Essays and Fiction: Modernism With A Vengeance, 1957-1969*, ed. John O'Brian, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. Key feminist texts include Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," *Art News* (January 1971): 20-39 and 67-71, in her *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1988, 147-158; and Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*, London: Routledge, 1988.

Art itself during modern times. Thus the one-way traffic in judgments of artistic achievement: "[Sidney] Nolan is admired as a great *Australian* artist, while [Jackson] Pollock is taken to be a great artist—his Americanness accepted as a secondary aspect of his achievement qua artist."[26] In his 1955 essay "'American-Type' Painting," Clement Greenberg treated the New York setting in which the artists he was discussing worked as incidental to their artistic achievement. His key statement about Pollock was this: "I do not think it exaggerated to say that Pollock's 1946-50 manner really took up Analytical Cubism from the point that Picasso and Braque left it when, in their collages of 1912 and 1913, they drew back from the utter abstractness to which Analytical Cubism seemed headed."[27] It has taken until recent years for art historians to see Pollock and other American artists of similar stature as profoundly shaped by, and shapers of, a local, indeed provincial, culture that fought its way to its sense of self, as distinct from acting out a triumphalist narrative of New York replacing Paris as the center of world art.[28]

Within this world system, the actual exclusion of artists, critics, and others from ongoing participation in the most innovative circles of a metropolitan center led to the perception (on the part of artists themselves, their peers, and external evaluators) that art made outside these centers was derivative, delayed, undeveloped, etc. On the face of it, given how small such circles necessarily are, how chancy their activities, and the internal battles they face, open access and equal opportunity are impossible expectations. But hierarchical valuing systems are by nature centripetal. For the outsider, value is located inside, and the possibility of change—originality being the highest value for moderns—can only come from elsewhere, from the other side of a closed door, or from a distant power. In historical retrospect, how does one discern the art that effectively countered this pernicious effect? During the modern period, one route was hyper-conformity: doing better what they do at the center, and, preferably, doing it better there, with appropriate recognition. The most common pathway was compromise. A

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26 Smith, "The Provincialism Problem," 55.

27 Clement Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting," in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1961, 218.

28 Compare Irving Sandler's *Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism*, New York: Harper & Row, 1977, to his localist accounts of the scene in and around Greenwich village, such as *A Sweeper-Up After Artists: A Memoir*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2003, and Anne Middleton Wagner's critically provincializing reading of post-War art in the United States, *A House Divided: American Art since 1955*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

bolder option was to create a reimagined art, leading to better ideas about what art might be, and, hopefully, provoking from critics and commentators better accounts of such changes. Given the inequities of opportunity, and the internalization of dependence, this was rare, but it did happen. For example, in the neo-concretist movement that flourished in Brazil in the late 1950s and early 1960s, in the work of Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, and others, and in the better ideas in, for example, Ferreira Gullar's "Theory of the Non-Object" (1959).[29]

Is exceptionality what we are looking for? Yes, of course, but within which frameworks? Something more is needed if we are to truly acknowledge the patterns that form, the repetitions that occur, the structures that are created, only to become subject to constant revision as circumstances change. So, we should be open to the singularities, occurrences, coincidences—in a word, the contemporaneities— that can cluster to become convergences, or shared outlooks, whenever and wherever they appear. Despite the risk of retreating to anything-goes particularism, is this not better than broadening the definition, and thus lowering the bar, such that every artist who was at all modern anywhere becomes part of the same story of the onward march of art, and can then, by vague, well-intentioned blurring, be crowned a modernist too? The wishful thinking here turns on blurring the two, opposing kinds of meaning that adding the suffix "ist" to a noun can evoke. In this case, within European art since the 1860s, "modernist" names the extreme, *more-modern-than-modern* questioning in certain (usually avant-garde) artworks of modernity's ways of seeing itself, whereas, outside this setting, "modernist" identifies art that *looks like* European modern and modernist art, or, somewhat better, *behaves like* this art, albeit in ways calibrated to its own setting.

I strongly suggest that, if we are to accurately grasp the relative nature of the multiple modernities generated within the different art-producing centers around the world during the past two centuries, the focus be on "modern art at x, y, or z place and time," not modern*ist* art. To measure every artist against an abstract but, in fact, Parisian and then New York notion of what counts as modernism is the real exclusion. Particularly if modernism is a version of that which took its definitive form only in the 1950s and 1960s, in the criticism of Clement

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29 Ferreira Gullar, "Theory of the Non-Object" (1959), in Mercer, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, 170-3, translated and introduced by Michael Asbury, whose essay "Neoconcretism and Minimalism: Cosmopolitanism at a Local level and a Canonical Provincialism," in *Ibid.*, 174-189, adds valuable nuances to this discussion.

Greenberg, Michael Fried, and others before spreading virally through the late modern artworld in EuroAmerica and its cultural colonies. Very few artists, even in these metropolitan centers, made genuinely modernist art by this criterion. At the opposite extreme, design historians and curators of historical collections are increasingly taking a more open approach, one that sees modernism as the simply the design style apparent in the fine and decorative arts between the two world wars and up to the 1960s.[30] This is to treat "modernism" as if it were above all a style, or a look, that configured at certain major art centers, and then, like a perfume, diluted as it dissipated itself elsewhere, until it finally became historical, subject only to retrospective revivals within the framework of later styles. Such capacious approaches are the obverse of formalist narrowness, yet are little more than all-inclusive generalizations that prioritize appearances while remaining, at their core, modeled on a form of Eurocentric diffusionism. In contrast, formalist approaches have proven themselves oblivious to the very idea that art from cultures outside of Europe and the United States might be of any interest at all.

A different way of opening the aperture to take in expanded notions of what kinds of art might have been modern (as distinct from modernist) is to focus on the options available to artists in particular times and places. Soviet Socialist Realism was *the* modern art in Russia and its satellites for most of the twentieth century.[31] From the late nineteenth century, the naturalism of the French and German academies and salons, and the realisms that questioned it, became the dominant modern, European styles for public artmaking in many Asian countries, Japan notably, and China, where they remain a staple of art school instruction, alongside ink painting.[32]

Examples such as these expand the principle basic to the theory of alternative or multiple modernities—that, as Gaonkar puts it, "modernity always unfolds within a specific culture or civilizational context."[33] They indicate that each

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[30]   For example, see *Modernism: Designing a New World, 1914-1939*, ed. Christopher Wilk, London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2006.

[31]   In his *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, Boris Groys attributes to the Soviet state itself the modernist avant-garde dream of total social transformation.

[32]   See John Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, Sydney and Honolulu: Craftsman House, 1998.

[33]   Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "On Alternative Modernities," *Alternative Modernities*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001, 14.

distinctive manifestation is also, in principle and frequent practice, connected through cross-cultural linkages to other modernities. These are long-term historical processes. To Sanjay Subrahmanyan, speaking of early modernizations in South Asia from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, "modernity is a global and *conjunctural* phenomenon, not a virus that spreads from one place to another. It is located in a series of historical processes that brought relatively isolated societies into contact."[34] These connections between modernities occurred with ever increasing intensity during the modern period, until such conjunctures have become the highly volatile norm in our contemporary times. Thinking about the work of modern artists in Latin America during the twentieth century, curator Mari-Carmen Ramirez speaks of their vital relationships to both European centers and those elsewhere in the region as "intersecting modernisms."[35] Susan Stanford Friedman, in a brilliant 2006 survey of postcolonial thinking about cultural modernities, and about literary modernism as what she calls "the expressive dimension of modernity," is led to conclude that

> Polycentric modernities produce polycentric modernisms, ones that are simultaneously distinctive and yet produced through indigenizations of traveling modernities that take place within frequently extreme differences of power. This dynamic is particularly true for the modernisms developing out of colonialism and its demise throughout the century. Theorizing modernism in this way fundamentally alters the conventional end points of twentieth century modernism...It requires the recognition that the 'periods' of modernism are multiple and that modernism is alive and thriving whenever the historical convergence of radical rupture takes place.[36]

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[34] Sanjay Subrahmanyan, "Hearing Voices; Vignettes of Early Modernity in South Asia, 1400-1750," *Daedalus* 127/3 (1998): 99-100.

[35] Mari-Carmen Ramirez, "The Necessity of Concreteness: An Abstract Art That is Not an Abstraction," address to the conference *Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic 1945-1965*, Haus der Kunst, Munich, May 21-25, 2014.

[36] Susan Stanford Friedman, "Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies," *Modernism/modernity* 13/3 (September 2006): 435 and 439. Friedman's essay boldly attempts for modern literature what I am aiming to do for the modern visual arts in this text. Although our theoretical approaches are consonant on most points, I am obliged to register the relatively smaller scale of visual arts production during the modern period (its exponential growth is relatively recent) and its greater reliance on enabling and disseminative frameworks—artworlds, if you will, in post-1960s parlance. In the modern visual arts, this leads, mostly, to a more hierarchical

Echoing, and adding to, Fredric Jameson's famous exhortation "Always historicize!" Friedman urges us to "Always spatialize!" Hear, hear!

Movement across cultural space, of course, goes in many directions. Reversing the usual flow, historians of multiple modernities are noticing something that has been obvious to artists for decades: that the initiating energy so vital to modernist avant-gardism came as much from artists who traveled from the colonies, or from otherwise dependent cultures, to the metropolitan centers as it did from artists native to them. In his *The Politics of Modernism*, speaking mainly of literature, Raymond Williams noted that it was in "a generation of 'provincial' immigrants to the great imperial capitals that avant-garde formations and their distanced, 'estranged' forms have their matrix," an idea developed for the visual arts in Bernard Smith's *Modernism's History*.[37] Ex-colonial artists can be found at every point of avant-garde rupture in Europe and the United States. Start with Pissarro, go on to Picasso, add Rivera, and the list grows and grows, and will be endless. Recognition that this is the case is slowly spreading through art historical accounts and exhibitions at significant venues.[38]

Transcultural Iconomorphism

On the level of compositional strategies, one thing that all of these artists have in common is a penchant for what my mentor, Antipodean art historian Bernard Smith identified as *iconomophism*. This is an ancient capacity of the visual arts, to be found wherever an image or object has a double identity as we see it, or is shown ready to change into another—by fusion, figure-ground reversal, ex-

and exclusionary institutional framework, and more convention-bound art practice, than the more individual act of writing.

[37] Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism*, London: Verso, 1989, and Bernard Smith, *Modernism's History: A Study in Twentieth Century Art and Ideas*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

[38] David Carrier sketched a broad framework for this approach in his *A World Art History and Its Objects*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008. The 2008 CIHA conference was devoted to it, see Jaynie Anderson, *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence, Proceedings of the 32nd International Congress in the History of Art*, Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2009. Anthologies include *Cultural Contact and the Making of European Art since the Age of Exploration*, ed. Mary D. Sheriff, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010, and *World Art and the Legacies of Colonial Violence*, ed. Daniel J. Rycroft, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013. The online journal *Atl@s Bulletin* is devoted to detailed studies of "transnationality" in art.

truded adjacency, or our switch of viewing position. Iconomorphism is funda-
mental to the religious arts, in which the icon is the passage toward the spiritual
being, and the viewer could become one with it, if belief were intense enough
and the being was so disposed. In 1962, Smith had something more modest in
mind: a compositional device to enable the simultaneous use of images that
are normally shown separately, a hybridization that changed the look and the
meanings of both, at once, and with considerable shock effect. His examples
were Sidney Nolan's Ned Kelly series, Francis Bacon's screaming popes, Larry
Rivers' historical tableaux, and Arthur Boyd's half-caste bride series.[39] Smith
surmised that this innovation on the part of these post-war figurative painters
was, perhaps, a more or less unconscious resistance to the rise of abstraction,
then being promoted as the universal passageway to a free art by United States
agencies. But we should not forget that, for these artists as well as the Abstract
Expressionists (long before their official promotion as American heroes), icono-
morphy was made vivid for them early in their careers, by Picasso in particular
and Surrealism in general.

The long history of exchanges of valued objects between cultures is replete with
imagery that hybridizes elements from the traditions of each party to the trade.
From this perspective, modern art in general, and modernism in particular, in
Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is largely the story of a
cultural *narrowing*, winnowing, usually under the banner of developing a na-
tional culture, and then, as we have seen, critically interrogating it, or in the
name of art's necessary autonomy, usually sought in terms of abstraction or
formal reflexivity. There are, of course, exceptions, such as Gauguin's journeys
to the islands of the Pacific. And there is the necessary, spectral double of this
withdrawal: modernist primitivism. Meanwhile, however, most artists outside
of Europe, and in its provinces, or at its peripheries, had become artists in con-
texts where traditional craft practices remained vital, and had inherited from
their modernizing predecessors strategies appropriate to their dependent dis-
tance from the centers. I have argued elsewhere that, in settler colonies such
as the United States, Australia, Canada, South Africa, Argentina and Brazil,

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[39] Bernard Smith, "Image and Meaning in Recent Painting," *The Listener* 68/1738 (19 July,
1962): 93-6. Iconomorphism in painting and sculpture during this period find obvious par-
allels in the use of doubled voices and plot structures in novels such as Chinua Achebe's
Things Fall Apart (1958) and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1967), the latter
movingly analyzed by Friedman in her essay cited above.

modern artists continually refined processes of *adopting*, *adapting*, and, in rare cases, *transforming* the artistic elements (imagery, subject matter, techniques, and styles) and modes of artist behavior that had achieved currency in the centers. Some rested content with adopting a dominant or new style, and exploring its implications as best they could. Others adapted its elements to existing local motifs and styles, to fit local needs and interests, creating icons for their national cultures, including in some cases critical, interrogatory ones. A few fused both to come up with transformations of relevance to artists everywhere.[40]

Perhaps a term such as *transcultural iconomophism* might best name the artistic strategies in play in these situations, especially when volatile adaptation and intense transformation has taken place, and above all, when the imagery being fused, and the ethical imperatives being tackled, originate in two or more settings or cultures, all of which are sites of experience for the artist involved, who effectuates a transpositioning of aesthetic and ethical values in his or her work. We might see the intersections here as artistic realizations of conjunctive difference, a convergence that maintains distinctiveness within the new unity it has effected. This is the sense of "relation" theorized by Caribbean philosopher Edouard Glissant in his *Poetics of Relation*.[41]

These strategies are not confined to the artists of the settler colonies such as those mentioned above. They are operative, albeit later in time, in the modern art of colonies that were sparsely settled by colonizers, and had large indigenous populations, notably those in Africa, the Middle East, and East and South East Asia. (As a modernizing imperial autocracy, Japan sets a distinct agenda for North Asia throughout this period.) This lateness is not a "belatedness" according to a modernist clock set in Paris, London, Moscow, or New York, rather, it is a recognition that these strategies were taken up by exceptional artists from these places, usually those few able to travel to the centers. They became truly viable for a critical mass of artists in such countries only later in the century, after World

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40 Terry Smith, *Transformations in Australian Art: vol. 2, Modernism and Aboriginality*, Sydney: Craftsman House, 2002, introduction, chapters 1 and 2. The concept of *antropófagia*, developed by Oswald de Andrade in Brazil in 1928 to describe the "cannibalistic" absorption of European cultural influences by Latin American artists, is a brilliant metaphor for the most intense version of this process.

41 Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* [1990], Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

War II, as part of the broader process of anti-colonial struggle, independence and decolonization.[42] Indeed, artists from these regions are now the key drivers of the main current within contemporary art, as I will show in the next two sections. In our post-Hegelian world, the slaves have become, if not the masters, at least masterly in their command of the art required by our contemporaneity.

Acknowledging Art Historical Multiplicity

My main argument has been that those of us who would chronicle the history of the art produced in both colonizing and colonized countries since the sixteenth century must ground our accounts in a picture of the historical unfolding of the relationships between indigenous, traditional (inherited, continuing), and modernizing practices, seeing each of them, and the shifting relationships between them, not as variant expressions of autochthonous ethnic essences, but as social constructions by individuals working cooperatively or in contestation in order to do the variety of things that art does: picture, celebrate, confirm, question, expose fragilities, or imagine things otherwise. Part of what shapes the art in each place will be assumptions about what it is to be an artist in that community, thematics important to one's predecessors, the interests of one's teachers, and the expectations of immediate audiences. Recent writing about the key concerns of artists working in certain parts of Africa, for example, have evoked themes such as "violence," "the animal," and "time," while "black" and "post-black" are terms with some currency among African-American artists working in the United States.[43] No one is suggesting that these themes are definitive of such practices, or that every African artist does, or should, deal with them to be authentically "African" or an African-American. They are, rather, recurrent concerns that have become distinctive to art's role within that place, and thus become matters of not only social but also art historical fact.

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[42] Pioneering close studies of these changes include Ifitkhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South East Asia*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010; Ming Tiempo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010; and Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.

[43] Achille Mbembe, "Flow: What Does Africa Name?" in *Flow*, ed. Christine Y. Kim, New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2008; Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, chapter 10, "Our Others: The Beauty of the Animal."

Cultural models distributed by the colonizer will seek to set artistic agendas, but open perspectives enable us to see that such impacts were often matched by re-deployment of those models in acts of counter-appropriation.[44] Examples from an artist's region, from proximate localities, colonized or not, may have been as formative, if not more so, than those emanating from the major centers. Comparative regional art histories are, therefore, urgently needed.[45] On the other hand, regional identification, when it is externally-imposed—as, say, a presumption that art from Asian, African, China, or Central Europe should deal with issues of identity relevant to the region's relationship to the West—can distort the nature of the work of artists whose practice is in fact based in one country or in a city or a locality, or is, in their view, entirely personal.[46]

What we need from historians and critics are better narratives of the development of art during modern times in every art-producing center or region, and of the shifts from modern to contemporary art, when they occurred, and as they are doing so now. I made a start on this while devising the structure of *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, a survey of the ways in which the kinds of art produced in each region of the world became contemporary during the later years of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first. As I noted in the introduction:

> Organizing the book in this way is the result of some hard choices about how modern and contemporary art relate to recent geopolitical history, the volatility of which has led to incessant conflict between peoples with different world-pictures and distinct senses of their place in the world. Much of this conflict is traceable to a failure to understand the intricate connections between the local and the global in a planetary sense—that is, an inability to think regionally in

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[44] As theorized by Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, and Partha Mitter, "Reflections of Modern Art and National Identity in Colonial India: An Interview," in Mercer, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, 24-49.

[45] To date, few have been attempted, but interest in such projects is growing. Curators and artists have led this effort, beginning with the region emphasis of the Bienal de la Habana since 1986, and continuing through such projects as East Art Map. Art historians include John Clark, *Asian Modernities: Chinese and Thai Art Compared, 1980 to 1999*, Sydney: Power Publications, 2010; and Anthony Gardner, *Mapping South: Journeys in South-South Cultural Relations*, Melbourne: The South Project, 2013.

[46] John Clark, "Asian Modern and Contemporary Art," *Oxford Art Online*.

the context of a vision of the needs of the planet and all who live upon it. No one pretends that this is easy to do.[47]

I drew on the work of human geographers Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, especially their book *The Myth of Continents*.[48] They suggested that if one pays attention to historical processes rather than imagined civilizational traits, to assemblages of ideas, practices, and social institutions (that is, cultures) while acknowledging but not privileging political dominance and subordination, and to the interaction between peoples in each region as much as their internal relationships, a useful picture of regionality in the world can be drawn.

These considerations were helpful in arriving at the structure of my book, one that largely treats art as it is produced at localities within regions, and—following the impact of the forces of globalization, decolonization, and those within contemporaneity—between and across these regions. The first section explores how contemporary issues were pivotal to the critical practices of late modern artists in EuroAmerica. I traded off the risk of prioritizing "the West" against a frank acknowledgement of the predominance of Western centers during that period, which I take to be historical fact. The main body of the book, however, traces the evolution of indigenous, traditional, appropriative, and modernizing tendencies in the art of the major world regions, especially as these intertwined during the twentieth century, and above all as they provided platforms (or not, in some cases) for the emergence, or appearance, of a contemporary art in each region. Geopolitical realities in each region usually meant that one or two countries played a leading role in culture, although of course that changed over time. Within countries, certain cities or areas were prominent, and operated as centers for internal regions. Exchanges usually occurred between artists and arts organizations based in these cities: regional ones often, but more so during the modern period between these cities and those of the relevant Western colonizing power. Decolonization, earlier and more so than globalization, has been vital to the possibility of contemporary art as a world wide phenomenon, although of course neoliberal globalization has also pervaded artworlds everywhere, as it has most spheres of life.

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[47] Terry Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, London: Laurence King; Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2011, Introduction.

[48] Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

In tracing the evolution of these artistic changes, I noted important differences between the kinds of art made possible within the conditions created by different colonizing purposes and procedures, some of which continue to resonant today. Settler colonies such as those established on the North American and Australasian continents—that is, colonies where European modes of life were established and indigenous peoples were quickly reduced in numbers—differed from those, such as Brazil and Argentina, which became independent nations during the period of modern nation-state creation in Europe. Despite their geographic location at some, often considerable, distance from their imperial center, these nations were substantively part of "the West" during the modern period, and remain so. Yet the provincialism dynamic operated strongly for them, highlighting their thirst for coevality, for recognition on all sides of their contemporaneous particularity as well as their ability to contribute to the growth of shared cultures and, since the Bandung Conference of 1954, to solutions to worldwide problems.

Substantial differences are to be noted within Africa, between the Francophone and Anglophone colonies, and between countries within each block. The mobile borders of Europe have been, in recent years, as volatile as the nations constituting its core, with the idea of contemporary art (not least via the Soros Centers) playing interesting roles during the implosion of the Soviet sphere and the expansion of the European Union. The complexity of development in the different parts of Asia defies brief description, but it can be traced with care. In some regions, such as the Middle East and much of North Africa, modern art was rare, and mostly confined to male practitioners, but contemporary art has enabled women artists from the region to become the most internationally prominent.

The Western, provincializing fiction has had the effect of excluding the possibility that Indigenous art might, in certain circumstances, be a modern art practice. Typically, it is often regarded as tribal, pre-modern, or timeless. The process at the core of colonization, everywhere in the world, is that the colonizers regard the colonized, particularly if they are Indigenous peoples, as survivors from an earlier era, as anachronisms, as non-contemporaneous contemporaries. Time itself will inevitably erase them: why not, then, speed it up a little, subject them to temporal cleansing? Against this, the struggle of Indigenous peoples is to outlive modernity by becoming contemporary, while at the same time maintaining traditional values that are regarded as indispensable, values important to peoples for whom the world is not only secular but also spiritual. To do this success-

fully under conditions of extreme precarity, it is not enough to simply demand the right to do so, or to work out how to live a divided life. It becomes necessary to try to change the terms of the equation, to persuade the more powerful to try to reimagine their world as a world in which people who live differently are also genuine contemporaries—people who *belong* to the same time as you. This has been the mute appeal of Indigenous art ever since it was consciously made in forms legible to others, and on formats that they could take away. In Australia, for example, this begins on Melville Island in 1870.[49]

Debates about this question have developed further in Australia than anywhere else, so let me introduce this topic by reference to them. Ian McLean has argued that, since white settlement in 1788, Australian Aboriginal artists have made continuous adjustments and accommodations to European/settler imposed modernity, and that their art is, therefore, a kind of "modernism."[50] Aboriginal adjustment certainly can be considered as one among what are currently understood as "multiple modernities," but doing so is subject to the cautions I have been issuing in this article. It was, in fact, rarely named "modern," perhaps because, as was the case with art from Africa, EuroAmericans could not conceive indigenous peoples as modern in any sense except to their detriment. Instead, in European art market sales, book titles, etc., the output from Africa, Oceania and Australia was designated as "traditional" or "contemporary." This has led McLean to also argue, provocatively, that Aboriginal art is, in this sense, the first contemporary art.[51] These are complex matters, requiring careful exploration, which has been undertaken for some decades by scholars in many parts of the world, but is only beginning to be seen in global contexts.

Ruth B. Phillips rightly insists that tracking the artistic trafficking between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures in this context has a particular importance, and a great relevance as to how we might understand the complex cross-cultural connections we have been mapping. Far from being a matter of formal

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[49]   See Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, London: Phaidon, 1998.

[50]   Ian McLean, "Aboriginal Modernism in Central Australia," in *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers*, 72-93.

[51]   See Ian McLean, *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art*, Sydney: Power Publications, 2011, introduction. Actually, the usage is prior in relation to Africa in the early 1960s—see Ulli Beier, *Contemporary Art in Africa*, New York and London: Praeger, 1968, and art market nomenclature from the same period for "primitive" art.

exchanges between utterly distinct, slow-changing, monolithic cultural blocs, this trafficking is much more a case of contingent, individual encounters that actually occur often enough for a pattern to be discerned. "In all of these encounters we find the same triangulated pattern, which brings into dynamic association the de-territorialized western artist, the colonized and dispossessed native artist, and the modernist ideology of artistic primitivism," the last usually represented by a European scholar of the primitive arts, displaced due to the rise of fascism in Germany or, later, dissatisfaction with post-war consumerism.[52] Her examples include the artist Margaret Preston and the scholar Leonard Adam in Australia during the 1930s, Oscar Jacobsen and Kiowa artists in Kansas during the same decade, George Swinton and Inuit artists in the Artic in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and Ulli Beier and Suzanne Wenger at Oshogbo, Nigeria, during the early years of independence. While inequity attends all such encounters, mutuality was their currency, and certain shared benefits emerged in each case, not least for the Indigenous artists. In many societies, these have grown—in some cases, such as in Australian Aboriginal art, they have become sustainable settings for the production of a contemporary Indigenous art.

Trying to decide whether Indigenous art is "traditional," "modern," or "contemporary" might sound like a haggling over words, or a petty debate about the correct art critical term to apply to the case. But our entire discussion has demonstrated that there is much more at stake. The breakthrough achievement of artists such as Emily Kame Kngwarreye and El Anatsui may amount to something more than innovations in the history of art. If we take seriously the deepest challenges of what I have called the current condition of contemporaneity, there are profound implications here not only for EuroAmerican-style modernity—including the versions being pursued in Asia and elsewhere at the moment—but also for the life-worlds that have precipitated the transnational transition. The latter includes Australian Aboriginal spirituality, Native American art, and Indigenous art throughout the world. The seismic shifts in the nature of human being on the planet—not just the after-effects of colonization, bad as they are—that we are experiencing today is undermining all singular, essentialist world-views, ways of life, and art practices.

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[52]   Ruth Phillips, "The Turn of the Primitive: Modernism, The Stranger, and the Indigenous Artist," in *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers*, 47.

Profound questions about the nature of human world being after the time of the West are raised by the persistence, indeed, growth of indigenous arts and cultures in world circumstances that seem to be less and less propitious. We are alerted to a deep challenge, one that has always existed but which, today, in contemporary circumstances, is on the surface of everyday experience, and is written large across the scenarios of our world picturing. We are face-to-face with the foundational fact of cultural incommensurability inside our shared humanity, and are, at the same time, exposed, without alibi, to the end of the possibility of universality for all models of individual differentiation within social formations. Actually, this leaves issues of "the West" and "the Rest" in the dust—quite literally, when it comes to global warming, in the coal dust, smog, and storm surges. Such a profound undermining of modern models of globality calls on us to imagine our being on this planet in new, complex, contemporary ways. Does the art that we admire today signal to us the tragic implosion of modern pasts, the dazzling array of contemporist presentism, or the breaking through to a necessary, planetary mutuality? I strongly suspect that it is doing all three of these things, at once, differently but contemporaneously.

The Contemporary Supersession of Modernism

The conference organizers at Cambridge elaborated their first proposition about reimagining modernism cited above into a second, as follows:

> As postmodernism has taken its place in history so we are obliged to rearticulate the notion of the "contemporary" once again. This conference explores the ways in which doing so requires us to revisit the putative supersession of modernism, examining what types of relations may be found between modernist and contemporary transnational artistic practices. Does the development of a transnational history of artistic modernism reflect the ascendancy of a genuinely postcolonial disciplinary moment, one that surrenders the idea of Western exceptionalism? Is there a risk that we are witnessing a reorientation of scholarly priorities in step with the type of selective "denationalization" pursued by global capital, one that preserves deep, if no longer uniform, structural inequities between the global North and South, West and East, while continuing to rely

on the power of particular nation states as its guarantor? In the name of what present, then, is the past to be reimagined?[53]

Yes, of course there is this risk, in everything that we do, in no matter what sphere of life, as global capital seeks to continue its dominance, not only of the economic management of our lives but of our imaginations. Against this, I have been arguing that if you continue to return every change in contemporary art to some kind of modernism, however elaborated, updated, decolonized, or contemporized, you will fall short of grasping the complexities of the present. Worse, you condemn contemporary art to suspended animation in what the RAQs Media Collective call "modernity's waiting room," an immobilized space, one that immobilizes all who enter it, a place of waiting for the next great art unifier, the next really big art story. Here, postmodernism meets post-Marxism in a shared melancholia. But the big story is that there is no big story: no new trains have come for decades. A real modernist would say that none of consequence have appeared since the 1960s.

The upshot is that, while these questions certainly move us along from the catch-up modernisms model, they risk bringing us only to a kind of altermodernism, an international modernism of the others.[54] Is that all there is to transnationality? Or, to dilute the mix still further, what is this art, or wider aesthetic, that challenges "the imagined community of the nation or region as the basic unit of artistic territorialisation, focusing instead on diverse, networked artistic communities that are understood to cohere at a transnational and/or transregional level, often with particular global cities as their enabling nodes"? This formulation, from the Cambridge conference organizers, shares language with the elite corps of any global corporation, but is intended to evoke the critical ideal of cross-cultural exchange underlying Mercer's "cosmopolitan modernisms." He asks: "Could 'the cosmopolitan' serve as a conceptual tool capable of cutting through the congested, and often confusing condition created by the competing vocabularies?"[55] Not, I suggest, if it remains tied to modernism as the most val-

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[53] Luke Szkrebowski and Devika Singh, *Reimagining Modernism, Mapping The Contemporary: Critical Perspectives on Transnationality in Art*, CRASSH conference, Churchill College, Cambridge University, September 22-3, 2013.

[54] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Altermodern: Tate Triennial 2009*, London: Tate Publishing, 2009.

[55] *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, 9.

ued art noun. Meskimmon and Papastergiadis explore a more open approach, one more closely related to contemporary concerns about world connectivity.[56]

A confusion of terms has indeed come to characterize the efforts of theorists wishing to identify the key aspects of contemporary art. "Global art" today can be understood as art that serves the dominant neoliberal international order, specifically the spectacular works generated by international competition between artists competing for market prominence.[57] A variant is "biennale art," which describes artworks distorted by the obligation to represent your country by creating a striking art souvenir. In contrast, some see "global art" more positively as the art of a decolonized "globality."[58] Pakistan-born British artist Rasheed Araeen has for decades argued for the recognition of the innovations of Afro-Asian artists in Western societies, and offered trenchant objections to generalizations such as "the new internationalism."[59]

In the face of impending planetary catastrophe, some artists and commentators are asking how art might contribute toward the development of the kind of connected imagination that could enable humans to survive extinction. The term "world art," like "world music," rightly receives the opprobrium of having been a North Atlantic universal of the worst kind. It certainly does have a history in modern European art discourse of identifying art from the rest of the world, outside of Europe. A deeper, longer history is its use among art historians and

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[56] Marsha Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination*, London: Routledge, 2010; and Nikos Papastergiadis, *Cosmopolitan Cultures*, London: Polity, 2012.

[57] Some commentators welcome this, for example, (*Global Art*, eds. Silvia von Benningsen, Irene Gludowacz, and Susanne van Hagen (Ostfildern: Hatje Kantz, 2009). Others, whose views I share, are intensely critical of it: Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; reissued as *Contemporary Art: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

[58] *The Global Contemporary: The Rise of New Art Worlds after 1989*, eds. Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg, Peter Weibel, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press for ZKM, Karlsruhe, 2013. This exhibition/publication was the culmination of their important Global Art and the Museum project, see http://www.globalartmuseum.de/site/home. See also Nancy Adajania, "Time to Restage the World: Theorising a New and Complicated Sense of Solidarity," in (ed.), *21st Century: Art in the First Decade*, ed. Miranda Wallace, Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery/ Gallery of Modern Art, 2010, 222-29.

[59] Rasheed Araeen, "New Internationalism, or the Multiculturalism of Global Bantustans," in *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. Jean Fisher, London: Kala Press, 1994.

museum curators as signifying *all* of art *of* the known world. More recently, it is gaining sense as designating "worldy art, that which is coming *from* a rapidly decolonizing and globalizing world. [60] Whether, and how, contemporary art may be *for* a world to come is, I have argued, its most burning question.

Faced with the daunting challenges of being accountable to this array of complexities, it is understandable (but not excusable) that some might seek refuge in the individual artist "solution." Mercer, for example, says of his *Alternative Art Histories* series, that

> Rather than seeking to fulfill an ideological programme for a totally "inclusive" global art history—whatever that might be—the creative ambition for the series is to bring together research and scholarship that foregrounds attention to individual artists and the institutional contexts in which their ideas and works were forged.[61]

Yes, we must focus on particular works by individual artists or groups, and on the specifics of the immediate contexts in which they were created, but not leave open the gap between that focus and something as vague and distant as "global art." What Mercer probably had in mind was perhaps something like "the art of the modern world," rather than "global art" as it is understood in contemporary circumstances, where the idea of "globalization" is operating as a North Atlantic universal. I have no doubt that we share the view that connecting the dots within and between individual artists, groups, localities, nations, and regions is what is required of art history now, not a retreat into particularism. One thing that has retreated, within the terminological babble just described, is modernism.

Contemporary Art, Incorporating Re and Neo-Modernisms

The core *art historical* idea in my recent writing is the claim that a worldwide shift from modern to contemporary art was prefigured in the major movements

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[60] See, for example, *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, eds. Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme, Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008. See also *World Art*, eds. George Lau, Daniel Rycroft, Veronica Sekules 1/1 (March 2011): "Editorial"; and *Humanities Research Journal*, Australian National University, Canberra, XIX/2 (2013), special issue on "The World and World-Making in Art," including the editors' "Introduction," 1-10, and my "Worlds Pictured in Contemporary Art: Planes and Connectivities," 11-26. Wood, *Modern Art and the Wider World,* also favors a form of world art studies.

[61] *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, 8.

in late modern art of the 1950s and 1960s in EuroAmerica, and became explicit in artworld discourse there during the 1970s and 1980s. Postmodernist practice was an important signal of this change, postmodern and poststructuralist theory its first analysis. A market phenomenon in the major centers during the 1990s, contemporary art was at the same time expanded, but also divided, by art emergent from the rest of the world. Since then, contemporary art everywhere has engaged more and more with spectacle culture—with image-saturated commerce, globalized lifestyle, and social media—and with anxieties caused by political volatility and climate change. These developments flow through the present, thus shaping art's imaginable futures—in the short term at least.[62]

Unlike the art styles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these changes from modern to contemporary art were not a monopolizing phenomenon that spread outwards from a predominant center, or set of centers. Rather, as I suggested above, and showed in *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, they occurred at different times and in distinctive ways in each cultural region and in each art-producing locality.[63] I have been arguing throughout this article that the histories specific to each place should be acknowledged, valued, and carefully tracked alongside recognition of their interaction with other local and regional tendencies, and with the waxing and waning of more powerful regional and

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[62]   Terry Smith, *Sodobna umetnost in sodobnost [Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity]*, ed. Aleš Erjavec, Ljubljana: SDLK, Slovensko društvo likovnih kritikov [Slovenian Society of Art Critics], 2013.

[63]   In her "By Whose Rules? Contemporary Art and the Geography of Art Historic Significance," *Artl@s Bulletin* 2/1 (2013): Article 8, Anna W. Brzyski offers an excellent discussion of how modern, and indeed modernist, modes of art historical thinking about what it is for art to be "con-temporary" (with time, up-to-date, modern) on the part of artists and art historians in Europe since the late nineteenth century have persisted into the frameworks within which some historians of contemporary art perceive certain forms of art made today as contemporary while dismissing the rest. She summarizes my "discussion of contemporary art as an art of contemporaneity, a concept which acknowledges the impact of geography on the perception of time, postulates, in effect, the existence of different art-time zones—different geographic temporalities or ways of being in time, which are configured by unique local conditions and histories—all of which, nevertheless, give rise to contemporary art that is recognizable as contemporary." This is accurate, up to the "nevertheless," a move I do not make, and would not, precisely for the reason she adduces: it would imply that "local art histories can be woven together into a narrative that terminates everywhere in contemporary art." Not so, as I show, in *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, to be the case everywhere, and as she correctly points to in her article with reference to the minority status of contemporary art within the art scene in China today.

international art-producing centers. Applied retrospectively, and with due regard for the cautions issued above that they were not only or most significantly modernist, but were, rather, multiple in character, this approach is, as we have noted, leading to greatly enriched histories of the art actually made throughout the world during the modern period. Complexity within modernity itself laid the groundwork for the diversity that we now see flowing through the present. But contemporary difference is different from that which prevailed during the modern period.

When seen on a world scale, or from a worldy perspective, present art practice is shaped not only by persistent modernisms—those from the Western centers, but also, and increasingly, by continuity from the multiple modernities that we have been reviewing. Even more so, both quantitatively and qualitatively, contemporary art is shaped by various transformatory indigeneities, by renovations of continuing traditional practices, by ongoing Modern art cultures (as distinct from modernist ones), by highly evolved forms of critical, postcolonial (that is, decolonizing) art, and by new forms of contemporary creativity. All of these, together, constitute "contemporary art." Their volatile interweaving is how art became fully contemporary, how the seismic shifting from modern to contemporary art occurred.

What, then, are the different kinds of art that coexist in contemporary conditions? As a core *art critical* idea, I have argued, in *Contemporary Art: World Currents* and other recent publications, that three strong currents may be discerned within the extraordinary quantity and seemingly limitless diversity of art made since around 1989. *Remodernist*, *retro-sensationalist*, and *spectacularist* tendencies fuse into one current, which continues to predominate in EuroAmerican and other modernizing art worlds and markets, with widespread effect both inside and outside those constituencies. Against these, a second current has emerged, especially from previously colonized cultures: art created according to nationalist, identarian, and critical priorities. It came into prominence on international circuits such as biennials and traveling temporary exhibitions: this is the art of *transnational transitionality*. For many of the artists, curators and commentators involved, it has evolved through at least three discernable phases: a reactive, anti-imperialist search for national and localist imagery; then a rejection of simplistic identarianism and corrupted nationalism in favor of a naïve internationalism; followed by a broader search for an integrated cosmopoli-

tanism, or worldliness, in the context of the permanent transition of all things and relations. The third current cannot be named as a style, a period, or a tendency. It proliferates below the radar of generalization. It results from the great increase in the number of artists worldwide and the opportunities offered by new informational and communicative technologies to millions of users. These changes have led to the viral spread of small-scale, interactive, do-it-yourself art (and art-like output) that is concerned less with high art style or confrontational politics and more with tentative explorations of temporality, place, affiliation, and affect—the ever-more-uncertain conditions of living within contemporaneity on a fragile planet.

Each of the three currents disseminates itself (not entirely, but predominantly) through appropriate—indeed, matching—institutional formats. Remodernism, retro-sensationalist and spectacularist art are usually found in major public or dedicated private museums, prominent commercial galleries, the auction rooms of the "great houses," and the celebrity collections, largely in or near the centers of economic power that drove modernity. Biennials, along with traveling exhibitions promoting the art of a country or region, have been an ideal venue for postcolonial critique. These have led to the emergence of a string of new, area-specific markets. The widespread art of contemporaneity appears rarely in such venues—although some of it doubtless will, as the institutions adapt for survival and certain artists make their accommodations—preferring alternative spaces, public temporary displays, the net, zines and other do-it-yourself-with-friends networks. There is, of course, no exclusive matching of tendency and disseminative format. Just as crossovers between what I am discerning here as currents are frequent at the level of art practice, connections between the formats abound, and artists have come to use them as gateways, more or less according to their potential and convenience.

While these currents are contemporaneous at present, how might we imagine them changing, in themselves, in relation to each other, in response to as yet unpredictable new currents and even less predictable changes to the complex flows of art in the world? A small flutter of excitement occurs every few years as a critic, a curator, or a group of artist somewhere announces that modernism's time has come again (as I predicted at the end of my entry in the *Dictionary of Art*, perhaps without sufficiently underscoring the ironic tone that I intended). Since modernism and modernity have dipped below the art historical and onto-

logical horizon, however, these moments occur as revivals, that usually replay one or two aspects of an earlier artist's strategy and, with more or less (usually less) intensity, mix these repeats with a contemporary strategy. Discerning a "Neo-Modern" or "neo-formalist" tendency in recent art shown in New York, Brooklyn-based art critic David Geers suggests that artists such as Mark Grotjann, Josh Smith, Gedi Sibony, for example, "might juxtapose a modernist look with a material process, counterbalancing aesthetic delectation with ascetic denial."[64] Such strategies have been staple in art schools throughout the West for decades, and now predominate in art fairs, not least because they make ideal, small, saleable packages. Geers correctly sees this as a tendency that "greets a pre-primed spectator, already indoctrinated into the codes and mythologies of the modern, who happily welcomes it as a return to old certainties—an echo of a lost golden age."[65]

Neomodernist moments are simply the most contemporary instances of the re-modernist self-renovation that continues to drive the first of the currents I have discerned. It prevails, still, in the major art market and museum centers of the world, but is historically residual and will eventually fade. The second current, that of transnational transition, took shape due to local necessities but was also, everywhere, a reaction to the dominance of EuroAmerican art. It has come to prominence relatively recently, and will, I believe, prevail as the major shaper of the world's art for some time. Looked at on the level of an ontological exchange, there is a dialectical antagonism in operation between these two currents, because both are products of modernity's inner historical logic, itself dialectical. But the third current is emergent and will increasingly set the terms of what will count in the future. We already know that these terms will be different in kind from those first formed during modern times. History is one such term: less and less is it understood as linear and unidirectional, a matter of periods that succeed each other. Even the residual, dominant, emergent layering on which I am relying is losing force as a form of explanation. It contests with a contemporary kind of historical consciousness, one that begins from the present and travels back and forth in time and across space, seeking to visit the present of particular places in the past or the future, hoping to participate in their contemporaneity—which, it is anticipated, will be different from that of today, not because it is an

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[64] David Geers, "Neo-Modern," *October* 139 (Winter 2012): 10.

[65] *Ibid.*, 14.

earlier moment in an unfolding narrative of human development, but because, like all contemporary moments, it is what it is.

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Abstracts | Povzetki

Sascha Bru
The Genealogy-Complex.
History Beyond the Avant-Garde Myth of Originality
Key words: European avant-gardes, presentism, art and literary history, modernism

This essay argues against Rosalind Krauss' assertion that the classic avant-gardes' self-acclaimed originality was an *ahistorical* myth. Constructing at times anachronistic genealogies tying past movements and individual artists to the present, the avant-gardes, perhaps paradoxically, were one of the first in modern art and literature to historicize their own originality. By way of a survey of a number of such genealogies stemming from futurism, Dadaism, surrealism and constructivism, this essay unearths the presentist nature of the avant-gardes and suggests that the many modes of representing history developed by the avant-gardes should be further scrutinized for their historiographical potential.

Sascha Bru
Genealoški kompleks.
Zgodovina onkraj avantgardnega mita o izvirnosti
Ključne besede: evropske avantgarde, prezentizem, zgodovina umetnosti in književnosti, modernizem

V eseju nasprotujemo trditvi Rosalind Krauss, češ da je bila samopoveličevana izvirnost klasičnih avantgard *ahistorični* mit. S tem ko so včasih tvorile anahronistične genealogije, ki so povezovale pretekla gibanja in individualne umetnike s sedanjostjo, so bile avangarde – morda paradoksno – med prvimi v moderni umetnosti in književnosti, ki so historizirale svojo lastno izvirnost. S preučevanjem številnih tovrstnih genealogij, ki izvirajo iz futurizma, dadaizma, nadrealizma in konstruktivizma, avtor tega eseja razkrije prezentistično naravo avantgard ter nakaže, da je potrebno še naprej raziskovati številne načine reprezentiranja zgodovine, ki so ga razvile avantgarde, da bi način, na katerega njegova dela izluščili njihov historiografski potencial.

Éva Forgács
Modernism's Lost Future
Key words: Modernism, Fascism, transmodern, childhood, "patheticism"

One of modernism's core claims was to own a technologically advanced, socially superior, equalitarian and internationalist future and play a definitive role in it. However, the future turned out to be contested territory and modernism, after setbacks in the wake of World War I, and in the late 1920s, was defeated by the emerging dictatorships in Europe. In the light of recent scholarship the relationship between modernist and anti-modernist art is seen as much more complicated than earlier. Following World War II, modernism was vigorously resuscitated. This revival peaked in the 1960s, a period of heightened social activism, while since the 1980s we see a shift. The artist has lost his mandate, ceased to be seen as a public figure competent in social issues, and has, to a great extent, exhibited his or her vulnerability as a private person. Even social comments are made from this marginal position. The ubiquity of the theme of childhood in the visual arts in the 1990 indicates the change in artistic attitude. Highly erudite, informed of the important intellectual currents of their time, many prominent artists find themselves powerless, detached from the public discourse. I call this blend of intellectual alertness and social inefficiency a *transmodern* phenomenon: lacking a strong social commitment and a claim to the future, it is beyond the illusions of modernism, but lacking the "anything goes" attitude as well, it differs from what is broadly understood as postmodern, too.

Éva Forgács
Izgubljena prihodnost modernizma
Ključne besede: modernizem, fašizem, transmoderen, otroštvo, »pateticizem«

Ena od osrednjih trditev modernizma je bila, da poseduje tehnološko napredno, družbeno razvitejšo, enakostno ter mednarodno prihodnost, v kateri sam igra točno določeno vlogo. Vendar pa se je za prihodnost izkazalo, da je ozemlje spopadov in predmet spodbijanja, medtem ko so modernizem po težavah neposredno po prvi svetovni vojni in po poznih dvajsetih letih premagale evropske diktature. V luči nedavnih raziskav se zdi razmerje med modernistično in antimodernistično umetnostjo veliko zapletenejše kot poprej. Po drugi svetovni vojni je bil modernizem živahno obujen. Ta vrnitev modernizma je dosegla svoj vrhunec v šestdesetih letih, v času povečanega socialnega aktivizma, medtem ko smo od osemdesetih let dalje priče preobratu. Umetnik je izgubil svoj mandat, nič več ne vidimo v njem lika, ki bi se spoznal na socialne teme in ki je v veliki meri razkrival svojo ranljivost kot zasebna oseba. Celo socialni komentarji so izrečeni iz obrobnega položaja. Povsod navzoča tema otroštva v vizualnih umetnostih v devetdesetih letih nakazuje spremembo v umetniškem odnosu. Zelo načitani, seznanjeni s pomembnimi intelektualnimi tokovi svojega časa, se številni znani umetniki znajdejo brez moči ter odmaknjeni od jav-

nega diskurza. To mešanico intelektualne čuječnosti ter socialne neučinkovitosti imenujem *transmoderen* pojav, ki mu primanjkuje močna socialno zavezanost ter sklicevanje na prihodnosti, ki obstaja onkraj iluzij modernizma, ki pa mu prav tako manjka "karkoli že" odnos, ter se ob tem razlikuje od tega, kar je na široko razumljeno kot postmoderno.

Jožef Muhovič

Modernism as the Mobilization and Critical Period of Secular Metaphysics. The Case of Fine/Plastic Art

Key words: modernism, crisis, secular metaphysics, model of aesthetic idealism, model of secondary semantization

Since the term "modernism" appeared as a theoretical reaction to the modernist "state of affairs" in the same way as sight appeared as an evolutionary reaction to the existence of sunlight and not vice versa, the author attempts to explore the nature of the modernist "way of being" and evaluate it to a certain extent in the phenomenal field of fine/plastic art. In doing so he focuses on the period between the mid-nineteenth century, when bourgeois art with its routine realist approaches drifted into the strange state of unresponsiveness to the world around it; on 1960s, when the modernist model of aesthetic idealism found itself in a deep crisis; and on the 1970s and 1980s, when, owing to its inability to continue advancing in the same idealist direction, it became necessary to test the very "seismic stability" of modernist suppositions by demystifying the aesthetic and the sublime. As far as fine/plastic art is concerned, this was the time of a double shift of paradigms, one of which served to mobilize secular metaphysics, and the other of which aimed to verify its foundations in conditions of a globalizing culture. The first case involves the transition of the paradigm of fine art to the paradigm of "pure" plastic art, and the second focuses on the transition from the paradigm of "pure plastic art" to the paradigm of visual art, whose asset is the "secondary semantization" of visual objects, events and contexts. For a precise discussion, a more than century-long time interval seems exaggerated, yet its selection was necessary because the paradigmatic shifts that the author would like to coherently thematize are not visible in thinner temporal slices.

Jožef Muhovič

Modernizem kot mobilizacija in krizni čas sekularne metafizike. Primer likovne umetnosti

Ključne besede: modernizem, kriza, sekularna metafizika, model estetskega idealizma, model sekundarne semantizacije.

Ker se je pojem »modernizem« pojavil kot teoretska reakcija na modernistična »stanja stvari«, enako kakor se je vid pojavil kot evolutivna reakcija na obstoj sončne svetlobe

in ne obratno, bo skušal avtor naravo modernističnega »načina biti« raziskovati in do
določene mere evalvirati v fenomenalnem polju likovne umetnosti. In to v času med sre-
dino 19. stoletja, ko je meščanska umetnost s svojimi rutiniranimi realističnimi prijemi
zašla v čudno luč neodzivnosti na svet okoli sebe, šestdesetimi leti preteklega stoletja, ko
je prišel v veliko krizo modernistični model estetskega idealizma, in sedemdesetimi ter
osemdesetimi leti istega stoletja, ko se je zaradi nemožnosti nenehnega napredovanja
v isti idealistični smeri pokazala potreba po tem, da se z demistifikacijo estetskega in
sublimnega testira sama »potresna trdnost« modernističnih predpostavk. Kar se likovne
umetnosti tiče, gre za čas dvojne menjave paradigem, od katerih je ena služila mobiliza-
ciji sekularne metafizike, druga pa verifikaciji njenih temeljev v pogojih globalizirajoče
se kulture. V prvem primeru gre za prehod paradigme likovne umetnosti v paradigmo
»čiste likovne umetnosti«, v drugem primeru pa za prehod od paradigme »čiste likovne
umetnosti« v paradigmo vizualne umetnosti, katere adut je »sekundarna semantizacija«
vizualnih objektov, dogodkov in kontekstov. Za precizno razpravo se zdi več kot stoletni
časovni interval pretiran, vendar ga je bil avtor prisiljen izbrati, saj so paradigmatske
spremembe, ki bi jih želel povezano tematizirati, v tanjših režnjih časa pač nevidne.

Krzysztof Ziarek
The Avant-Garde and the End of Art
Key words: avant-garde, poetry, art, aesthetics, the inhuman

Modernism remains a complex and complicated term, contested not only with regard to its
historical meaning or period boundaries but also with regard to its (continuing) relevance
for aesthetics and, more broadly, for the contemporary understanding of art(s). Is mod-
ernism the culmination of modernity, its crowning moment or perhaps its tipping point to-
ward the purported postmodernity/postmodernism, or is the radical challenge instigated
by modernism's artistic inventiveness—what I call its avant-garde momentum—still extant
and current beyond the apparent succession of modernism by postmodernism? This es-
say approaches these questions through a discussion of various approaches to artworks
in modernism and the avant-garde: Adorno, Rancierè, Heidegger, and Lyotard in order to
explore the extent to which aesthetics remains both the precondition and the optics for
modernism. At the same time, it assesses the implications of the avant-garde's challenge
to the very idea of art. The divergence in the discussions of the split between modernism
and avant-garde, as well as the contention between proposals for a new aesthetic and the
critique of the notion of art, pivot on the issue of freedom and the role of the human. In its
challenge to art, the avant-garde calls into question the centrality of the human and the
idea that freedom is a human possession. In doing so, it rethinks the notion of the artwork
with regard to the non-human (Heidegger) or inhuman (Lyotard). Against the backdrop of
this rift between modernism and the avant-garde, the essay discusses the works of Wal-

lace Stevens and Gertrude Stein. While Stein's avant-garde writing is intensely engaged in its practice with drafting a new poetic rigor of writing and experience, the modernist Stevens uses aesthetic paradigms and reflection to trigger the liminal state at the end of the imagination or the mind. This brief study of Stevens and Stein illustrates the fact that modernism and the avant-garde inhabit the same historical moment yet part ways with regard to aesthetics. As the avant-garde elaborates its new rigor in order to work in tune with the non-human reach of the event, it moves beyond the metaphysical determination of art and aesthetics. In the avant-garde, what is 'proper' to humankind comes to be "inhabited by the inhuman," to paraphrase Lyotard, and is "celebrated" as such. This fissure means also that the momentum of the avant-garde extends beyond the historical boundaries of, for many already closed, chapter of modernism.

Krzysztof Ziarek
Avantgarda in konec umetnosti
Ključne besede: avantgarda, poezija, umetnost, estetika, inhuman

Modernizem ostaja kompleksnen in kompliciran izraz, čigar pomen je spodbijan ne le glede na njegov zgodovinski pomen ali obdobnostne meje, pač pa tudi glede na njegovo (ohranjajočo se) tehtnost za estetiko in, širše, za sodobno razumevanje umetnosti. Je modernizem vrhunec modernosti, njen kronski trenutek ali pa morda njegova točka preobrata v smeri dozdevne postmodernosti / postmodernizma, ali pa radikalen izziv, ki ga je povzročila umetniška iznajdljivost modernizma – kar sam imenujem avantgardni pospešek modernizma – še vedno obstaja ter je sedanji onkraj navideznega nadomeščanja modernizma s postmodernizmom? Ta esej se približa tem vprašanjem z razpravo o različnih pristopih k umetninam v modernizmu in avantgardi: Adornovega, Rancièrovega, Heideggrovega in Lyotardovega, da bi raziskali obseg, v katerem ostaja estetika tako predpogoj kot kot optika za modernizem. Istočasno v eseju ocenimo implikacije izziva avantgarde glede same ideje umetnosti. Razhajanje v razpravah o cepitvi med modernizmom in avantgardo kot tudi spor med predlogi za novo estetiko in za kritiko pojma umetnosti, se vrtijo okrog vprašanja o svobodi in vlogi človeka. V svojem izzivu umetnosti avantgarda izraža dvom glede osrednjosti človeka ter zamisli, da je svoboda človeška last. S tem tudi postavi v premislek pojem umetnine glede na ne-človeško (Heidegger) ali inhumano (Lyotard). Na ozadju te cepitve med modernizmom in avantgardo esej obravnava dela Wallacea Stevensa in Gertrude Stein. Medtem ko je avantgardno pisanje Steinove v svoji praksi močno zaposleno z izdelavo nove pesniške strogosti pisanja in izkustva, modernistični Stevens uporablja estetsko paradigmo in razmislek, da bi sprožil liminalno stanje na koncu domišljije ali mišljenja. Ta kratka študija o Stevensu in Steinovi ponazarja dejstvo, da modernizem in avantgarda naseljujeta isti zgodovinski trenutek, vseeno pa se razideta glede na estetiko. Ob tem, ko avantgarda izdela svojo novo strogost, da bi tako delovala usklajeno z ne-človeškim dosegom dogodka, se premakne onkraj metafizične določitve

umetnosti in estetike. V avantgardi to, kar je "lastno" človeštvu, postane "naseljeno z ne-človeškim", če parafraziramo Lyotarda ter je "slavljeno" kot tako. Ta razpoka pomeni tudi, da se zagon avantgarde razteza onkraj zgodovinskih meja poglavja o modenrizmu, ki so za mnoge že zaprte.

This essay focuses on the writings of the architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri, who was at the center of a group of historians and theorists at the University of Venice's School of Architecture. It considers how his works dealing with the avant-garde, especially *Architecture and Utopia* and *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, develop a historical-critical method to identify and explicate the gap between the evolution of ideologies of the avant-garde and their translation into a repertoire of techniques that have divergent histories and social meanings than those posited by avant-garde ideologies. In doing so, Tafuri is not just offering an "ideology-critique" of modernism, revealing the way that the avant-garde failed to fulfill its postulated social and aesthetic goals; he is also arguing metahistorically, that via a dialectic of the avant-garde, twentieth-century capitalist modernity weaves an ideological fabric of modernism and interleaves it into the effective structure of reality, for instance through the practices of architecture and urbanism. Thus, "modernism" becomes a relevant term of periodization, not because of the historical veracity of any orthodox art historical narrative of the succession or progressive evolution of modernist forms, but insofar as "modernism" designates the symptomatic tension between the progressive history of avant-garde forms and the heterogeneous technical history that represents how the avant-garde's formal programs were actualized.

Ta esej se osredotoča na spise zgodovinarja arhitekture Manfreda Tafurija, ki je bil v središču skupine zgodovinarjev in teoretikov na Arhitekturni šoli Beneške univerze. V razmislek jemlje način na katerega so njegova dela, ki se ukvarjajo z avantgardo, še posebej *Arhitektura in utopija* ter *Obla in labirint*, razvijajo kritičnozgodovinsko metodo, da bi identificirali in razložili razkorak med evolucijo ideologij avantgarde in njihovega prevoda v repertoar tehnik, ki imajo različno usmerjene zgodovine in družbene pomene kot pa so one, ki so

jih vzpostavile avantgardne ideologije. Tafuri na ta način ne le ponudi "ideološko kritiko" modernizma, ter pri tem razkrije način na katerega je avantgardi spodletelo izpolniti svoje postulirane družbene in estetske cilje, pač pa tudi metahistorično trdi, da prek dialektike avantgarde kapitalistična modernist dvajsetega stoletja tke ideološko blago modernizma ter ga vloži v dejansko strukturo realnosti, na primer skozi prakse arhitekture in urbanizma. »Modernizem« tako postane ustrezen izraz periodizacije in to ne zaradi zgodovinske točnosti katerekoli ortodoksne umetnostnozgodovinske naracije, zaporedja ali napredujoče evolucije modernističnih oblik, pač pa ker »modernizem« poimenuje simptomatično napetost med napredujočo zgodovino avantgardnih oblik ter heterogeno zgodovino tehnike, ki predstavlja kako so bili aktualizirani formalni programi avantgarde.

Miško Šuvaković
Theories of Modernism. Politics of Time and Space
Key words: modern, modernism, modernist painting, neoavant-garde, project, multiple modernities

The author explores relations between different theories of modernism. He takes into consideration: (1) general concepts and theories of modernism; (2) theories of international modernism inherent to Western twentieth-century hegemonic modernism; (3) theories of the local (national and regional Western) modernism; (4) revisions of the concept of modernity in contemporary theories of globalization. These topics are considered, in a first step, via the philosophical distinction between a historical perspective (international modernism) and geographical perspective (global revision of modernism). The author then interprets aesthetic universalism and the concept of the autonomy of art characteristic of international modernism (Adorno, Greenberg, Argan). He points to the transformation of the hegemonic aesthetic universalism into national modernisms which are characteristic of local modernisms. He argues that the theories of global modernity carry out a critical discussion of Western modernism as the ideal model. This shows that universalist western modernism appears as one of many modernisms in relation to colonial/post-colonial societies and to socialist/post-socialist societies.

Miško Šuvaković
Teorije modernizma. Politika časa in prostora
Ključne besede: moderno, modernizem, modernistično slikarstvo, neoavantgarda, project, multiple modernosti

Avtor raziskuje odnose med različnimi teorijami modernizma. Prikaže (1) obče koncepte modernizma; (2) teorije mednarodnega modernizma, ki je lasten zahodnemu hegemonskemu modernizmu dvajsetega stoletja.; (3) teorije lokalnega (nacionalnega in regionalne-

ga zahodnega) modernizma; (4) revizije koncepta modernosti v sodobnih teorijah globalizacije. Te teme so v prvem koraku obravnavane s pomočjo filozofskega razlikovanja med zgodovinsko perspektivo (mednarodni modernizem) in zemljepisno perspektivo (globalna revizija modernizma). Avtor nato razloži estetski univerzalizem ter koncept avtonomije umetnosti, ki je značilna za mednarodni modernizem (Adorno, Greenberg, Argan). Izpostavi preoblikovanje hegemoničnega estetskega univerzalizma v nacionalne modernizme, ki so značilni za lokalne modernizme. Meni, da teorije globalne modernosti izvajajo kritično razpravo zahodnega modernizma kot idealnega modela. To kaže, da se univerzalistični zahodni modernizem pojavlja kot eden od mnogih modernizmov glede na kolonialne/postkolonialne družbe ter glede na socialistične/postsocialistične družbe.

Ian McLean
Modernism without Borders
Key words: Charles Baudelaire, Okwui Enwezor, indigenous art, postcolonialism, Primitivism

In recent times revisionist histories have sought to reposition modernism in the light of today's postcolonial globalism. In seeking to assess such revisionism, this essay addresses the metaphysics of modernism through the lens of its otherings—in particular its othering of indigenous art—in two bookend moments. The first is at the dawn of modernism, in the cosmopolitan criticism of the critic and poet Charles Baudelaire, whose theory of *modernité* is widely considered a prototype of classical Western modernism. The second is in the twilight of modernism, mainly in the influential postcolonial critique of Okwui Enwezor. Motivated by the quest to redeem African modernism, he embarked on an ambitious project of reconfiguring (re-mapping) the project of modernity in the light of postcolonial globalism, as if, like Bourriaud, he wants to "create a form of modernism for the twenty-first century."

Ian McLean
Modernizem brez meja
Ključne besede: Charles Baudelaire, Okwui Enwezor, domorodna umetnost, postkolonializem, primitivizem

V nedavni preteklosti so se revizionistične zgodovine trudile premestiti modernizem glede na današnji postkolonialni globalizem. Ob tem ko pričujoči esej poskuša oceniti tak revizionizem, se loteva metafizike modernizma skozi optiko svoji drugih – še posebej svojega drugega, ki je domorodska umetnost – v dveh zaključnih trenutkih. Prvi je ob rojstvu modernizma, v svetovljanski kritiki kritika in pesnika Charlesa Baudelaira, čigar teorija o *modernité* na splošno velja za prototip klasičnega zahodnega modernizma. Drugi

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zaključni trenutek je v prehodnem času modernizma, v glavnem v vplivni postkolonialni kritiki Okwuija Enwezorja. Slednji je zaradi želje po osvoboditvi afriškega modernizma pričel z ambicioznim projektom rekonfiguriranja (prekartiranja) projekta modernosti v luči postkolonialnega globalizma, kot da bi, tako kot Bourriaud, hotel »ustvariti obliko modernizma za 21. stoletje«.

Peng Feng
Modernism in China: Too Early and Too Late
Key words: China, Modernism, Realism, the Contemporary, Fredric Jameson

Modernism came to China from Europe for the first time in early twentieth century. It was too early not because of anachronism but because of a logical problem. According to Jameson, modernism should follow realism. But China did not have realism before modernism's entry. Modernism and realism entered into China almost at the same time. Modernism was defeated by realism not only due to its logical priority but also due to the revolutions in China. Modernism came to China again in 1980s. This time it was too late not because of a logical problem but because of anachronism. After initial enthusiasm for modernism, Chinese scholars recognized that they had a cause for embarrassment due to an anachronism—the rest of the world has been in the process of transformation of art into postmodernism and the contemporary. Modernism seems to remain ungraspable in China. We could say that there exists something like the condition of Beijing, i.e. to be always escaping determination and arriving both too early and too late.

Peng Feng
Modernizem na Kitajskem: Prezgodaj in prepozno
Ključne besede: Kitajska, modernizem, realizem, sodobno, Fredric Jameson

Modernizem je prvič prišel na Kitajsko iz Evrope zgodaj v 20. stoletju. To je bilo prezgodaj in to ne zaradi časovnega neskladja, pač pa zaradi logičnega problema. Po Fredricu Jamesonu bi modernizem moral slediti realizmu. Toda pred vstopom modernizma Kitajska ni imela realizma. Modernizem in realizem sta vstopila na Kitajsko skoraj hkrati. Realizem je premagal modernizem ne le zaradi svojega logičnega problema, pač pa zaradi anahronizma. Po začetnem navdušenju nad modernizmom so kitajski znanstveniki spoznali, da so imeli vzrok za sramoto zaradi anahronizma – preostali svet je bil v postopku preoblikovanja umetnosti v postmodernizem in sodobnost. Za modernizem se zdi, da je ostal nezapopadljiv na Kitajskem. Lahko bi rekli, da obstaja nekaj takega kot stanje Beijinga, to je, vedno uiti determinaciji ter prispeti tako prezgodaj kot prepozno.

Aleš Erjavec
Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge
Key words: El Lissitzky, constructivism, art, political propaganda, ideology

The author follows the historical path and transformations of one of the best known twentieth-century political posters, El Lissitzky's *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* The article surveys avant-garde art that moves from representing to changing the world and points out instances of such art in Italian futurism and Russian constructivism. Lissitzky's poster is then described, and some of its transformations and appropriations in the history of the past century are detailed, showing how the poster has acquired a historic position among images of the Soviet Union that brought about remakes and applications in the USSR/Russia of the seventies and eighties. At that time it was also transformed into the logo of the "modernist" Chinese "Stars" group, which raises the question of how a Bolshevik political image could have served as an emblem for a non-politicized group of Chinese painters after the end of the Great Cultural Revolution. In the article the poster's ideological and aesthetic connotations and denotations are also described.

Aleš Erjavec
Bij bele z rdečim klinom
Ključne besede: El Lisicki, konstruktivizem, umetnost, politična propaganda, ideologija

Avtor sledi zgodovinski poti in preoblikovanjem enega od najbolj znanih političnih plakatov dvajsetega stoletja, *Tolci bele z rdečim klinom!* Ela Lisickega. Članek prikaže avant-gardno umetnost, ki se giblje od reprezentacije sveta v njegovo spreminjanje ter izpostavi primere, ko je navedeni plakat pridobil zgodovinsko mesto med podobami Sovjetske zveze, ki so povzročile nastanek njegovih remejkov in aplikacij v SZ / Rusiji sedemdesetih in osemdesetih let. V tistem času je bil motiv plakata tudi preoblikovan v logotip »modernistične« kitajske skupine »Stars«, kar zastavlja vprašanje o poti po kateri je boljševistična politična podoba lahko pričela služiti kot emblem nepolitične skupine kitajskih slikarjev po koncu Velike kulture revoloucije. V članku so opisane tudi ideološke in estetske konotacije in denotacije plakata.

Patrick Flores
Speculations on the International Via the Philippine
Key words: International, Southeast Asia, Post-coloniality, Philippines, nation

This paper speaks to the condition of the modern by reflecting on its afterlife in the national and the international and its emergence within the colonial. Through examples cited from Philippine art history, the latter is set up as a fundamental moment of the

national and the extension beyond it with its perceived others elsewhere in the international system. The other gesture of the paper is to locate this moment of the international within a region delineated as Southeast Asia. Through four polemical texts that have informed the Southeast Asian modern, this effort finally contributes to the conversation on the modern as a transformative process from the nineteenth century through the Cold War under the productively fraught auspice of the international.

Patrick Flores
Ugibanja o mednarodnem prek Filipina
Ključne besede: mednarodno, Jugovzhodna Azija, postkolonialnost, Filipini, nacija

Članek obravnava pogoje modernega s tem, da reflektira svoje posmrtno življenje v nacionalnem in mednarodnem ter njegovo pojavitev znotraj kolonialnega. Prek primerov iz filipinske umetnostne zgodovine je slednja postavljena kot temeljni moment nacionalnega ter kot podaljšek onkraj nje, z njenimi dojetimi drugimi drugje v mednarodnem sistemu. Naslednja gesta članka je določiti ta trenutek mednarodnega znotraj regije, ki je določen kot >Jugovzhodna Azija. Skozi štiri polemična besedila, ki so bila ključna za oblikovanje modernega jugovzhodne Azije, ta napor končno prispeva k pogovoru o modernem kot transformativnem procesu od devetnajstega stoletja skozi hladno vojno pod produktivno naloženim pokroviteljstvom mednarodnega.

Kimmo Sarje
The Rational Modernism of Sigurd Frosterus. A Nordic Interpretation
Key words: Modernism, Rationalism, architecture, theory of painting,
Henry van de Velde, Finland, Scandinavia

Sigurd Frosterus (1876–1956) was one of leading modernists of the early 20th century in Finland and Scandinavia. He was an architect, critic and theorist who wrote about architecture, painting, literature and technology. Frosterus sought to capture the rationalist world-view of the new century, with H. G. Wells, Friedrich Nietzsche, James McNeil Whistler, Otto Wagner and Henry van de Velde giving impulses to his visions. Frosterus studied and worked with van de Velde in Weimar in 1903–1904, and they shared many challenging projects. In Weimar, Frosterus also designed his own innovative entries for the architectural competitions for the railway stations of Helsinki and Viipuri. The Belgian colleague asked Frosterus to establish an architectural office with both their names. Frosterus highly appreciated the offer, but decided to return to Finland, where – he believed – it would be easier to pursue an independent career. In Finland Frosterus with his different offices successfully designed villas, residential houses, business premises, farmhouses, factories, power stations and bridges, the Stockmann department store

(1916–1930) in the centre of Helsinki being his major work. Frosterus's style changed from rational art nouveau towards historicism and classicism during the years of the First World War. He criticized steel architecture with undulating forms in static constructions and preferred brick buildings and high-standard handicraft, taking Edvin Lutyens of Great Britain and Ragnar Östberg of Sweden as examples. Also Frosterus's world-view changed from severe rationalism towards pluralism; and the machine aestheticist now became a critic of technology in the spirit of Oswald Spengler. Frosterus published several books on art, literature and new technology, and he wrote his doctoral dissertation on the history of colour in with reference to the writings of Konrad Fiedler and Roger Fry.

Kimmo Sarje
Racionalni modernizem Sigurda Frosterusa. Nordijska razlaga
Ključne besede: modernizem, racionalizem, teorija slikarstva, Henry van de Velde, Finska, Skandinavija

Sigurd Frosterus (1876–1956) je bile eden vodilnih modernistov zgodnjega 20. stoletja na Finskem in v Skandinaviji.Bil je arhitekt, kritik in teoretik, ki je pisal o arhitekturi, slikarstvu, književnosti in tehniki. Frosterus je želel ujeti racionalistični svetovni nazor novega stoletja, ter ob H. G. Wellsu, Friedrichu Nietzscheju, Jamesu McNeail Whistlerju, Ottu Wagnerju in Henryju van de Velde razvijal svojo vizijo. Frosterus je študiral in delal z van de Veldejem v Weimarju v letih 1903–1904, kjer sta si delila veliko izzivajočih projektov. V Weimarju je Frosturus tudi narisal svoje novatorske prijave za arhitekturne razpise za železniške postaje od Helsinkov do Viipuri. Belgijski kolega je prosil Frosterusa, da ustanovi arhitekturni atelje z obema njunima imenoma. Frosterus je visoko cenil ponudbo, a se je odločil, da se vrne na Finsko kjer je bil prepričan, bo lažje slediti lastni karieri. Na Finskem je Frosterus s svojimi različnimi ateljeji uspešno risal načrte za vile, stanovanjske hiše, poslovne stavbe, kmetije, tovarne, elektrarne in mostove ter Stockmannovo trgovsko hišo (1916–1930) v središču Helsinkov, ki je njegovo glavno delo. Frosterusov slog se je spremenil od racionalnega art nouveau v smeri historicizma in klasicizma med leti prve svetovne vojne. Kritiziral je jekleno arhitekturo z valovitimi oblikami v statičnih konstrukcijah ter dajal prednost opečnim stavbam ter visoko kvalitetnemu rokodelstvu, pri čemer se je zgledoval po Edvini Lutyensa iz Velike Britanije ter Ragnarja Östberga iz Švedske kot zgleda. Tudi Frosterusov svetovni nazor se je spremenil iz ostrega racionalizma k pluralizmu, mašinistični estet pa je sedaj postal kritik tehnike v duhu Oswalda Spenglerja. Frosterus je objavil več knjig o umetnsoti, književnosti in novi tehniki ter je napisal svojo doktorsko disertacijo o zgodovini barve, pri čemer se je skliceval na spise Konrada Fiedlerja in Rogerja Fryja.

Ernest Ženko
Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* as a Modernist Example of Media Determinism
Key words: Ingmar Bergman, *Persona*, Modernism, film, media determinism

One of the key characteristics of modernist art is to be found in its implicit media determinism. As pointed out by Mallarmé ("poetry was made not of ideas but of words"), Cartier-Bresson ("the photo was made not of stories but of lines"), and others, it was the materiality of the medium that constituted the conditions of the possibility for the creation and consequently the interpretation of a work of art. Two consequences immediately follow from this assumption: modernism's ambivalent relation to technology and its reflexive nature, i.e. modernism's focus on its own signifiers, irrespective of the referent extrinsic to the medium that immediately opens up space of undecidability in interpretation. Even though the film medium was born during the time of the rapid development of modernism, which took over almost all forms of art, mainstream narrative cinema joined this movement only after a considerable delay. On the one hand, this was due to the fact that film was not considered an art form, but merely a sort of entertainment for the masses; on the other, film held a strong relationship to the same kind of realism that modernism was so desperately trying to surpass. During the 1920s certain movements in cinema appropriated main ideas of modernism, but it was only after the WWII that modernism in cinema came to full bloom. Due to its reflexive nature and open-endedness, Ingmar Bergman's film *Persona* (1966) is considered one of the finest examples of modernism in cinema. *Persona* is, nevertheless, also an exceptional example of technological determinism. In this film Bergman accomplishes a reversal of a crucial modernist problem related to technology: he does not show how to animate an apparatus, but rather how media technology have infiltrated the frame of mind so deeply that a psyche can at best be grasped through the medium itself.

Ernest Ženko
Bergmanova *Persona* kot modernistični primer medijskega determinizma
Ključne besede: Ingmar Bergman, *Persona*, modernizem, film, medijski determinizem

Implicitni medijski determinizem predstavlja eno izmed ključnih značilnosti modernistične umetnosti. Kot so poudarjali Mallarmé (»poezija se ne sestoji iz idej, temveč iz besed«), Cartier-Bresson (»fotografija ni narejena iz pripovedi, pač pa iz črt«) in drugi, je materialnost medija tista, ki konstituira pogoje možnosti ustvarjanja in posledično interpretiranja umetniškega dela. Tej predpostavki sledita ambivalentni odnos, ki ga ima modernizem do tehnologije in njegova refleksivna narava, se pravi, osredotočenost modernizma na svoje lastne označevalce, neodvisno od zunanjega referenta, kar pa neposredno vodi v neodločljivost v interpretaciji. Čeprav se je filmski medij pojavil v času

hitrega razvoja modernizma, ki je prevzel skoraj vse oblike umetnosti, se je pripovedni film pridružil temu gibanju z znatnim zamikom. Po eni strani se je to zgodilo, ker filma dolgo niso dojemali kot umetnost, temveč zgolj kot zabavo za množice, po drugi strani pa je film ohranjal tesno povezavo z realizmom, kar pa si je modernizem močno prizadeval preseči. Kljub temu, da so si v 20. letih XX. stol. nekatera filmska gibanja prilastila temeljne ideje modernizma, je slednji v filmu doživel razcvet šele po drugi svetovni vojni. *Persona*, film režiserja Ingmarja Bergmana iz leta 1966, predstavlja, glede na svojo refleksivno naravo in odprtost, enega izmed najboljših zgledov modernizma v filmu. Poleg tega je to tudi izjemen primer tehnološkega determinizma, v katerem Bergman izpelje obrat bistvenega modernističnega problema v navezavi na tehnologijo: ne pokaže, kako oživiti aparat, temveč kako tehnologija medija tako močno prežame okvir mišljenja, da lahko duševnost dojamemo šele na podlagi razumevanja samega medija.

Rainer Winter
The Politics of Aesthetics in the Work of Michelangelo Antonioni: An Analysis Following Jacques Rancière
Key words: Politics of aesthetics, Antonioni, Wong Kar-wai, dissensual cinema, regime of art

The work of Michelangelo Antonioni is considered as trailblazing and as a paradigmatic expression of modernism in cinema. Even today it has an impact on film style and holds a key place in the history of film art. In my contribution I discuss and enlarge upon these interpretations of his work in the context of the political character of his aesthetics. The political in his films, my thesis suggests, is found in the aesthetic experience which becomes possible by means of his films. As Jacques Rancière has shown, aesthetic experience is closely linked to a democratic experience. Both problematize the theory that the dominant framework of meaning and the meanings of a social and cultural order are set in stone and could not be otherwise. They create an appreciation for contingency and possible changes. Following this argumentation, the political significance of Antonioni's aesthetic can be defined more closely. The open narrative structure, the autonomization of the camera, the playing with *temps mort*, the visual development of spaces or the gradual emptying of the image field are characteristics of his style and undermine the representative regime. By different stylistic means, he infiltrates it, leaves it standing in the background and robs it of its structuring power. Antonioni has created a dissensual cinema in which can be found the aesthetic truth of cinema, the ambiguity of dumb and ephemeral things, the texture of the world as it is. His cinema makes real the transition from the representative fiction of the plot to the aesthetic fiction of the signs. Wong Kar-wai has followed him in this. Both design sensual landscapes of the surface of the world which have broken the straight line between cause and effect and are defined by aesthetic affect.

Rainer Winter
Politika estetike v delu Michelangela Antonionija: Analiza, ki sledi Jacquesu Rancièru

Ključne besede: politika estetike, Antonioni, Wong Kar-wai, nesoglasna kinematografija, režim umetnosti

Delo Michelangela Antonionija velja za pionirsko in za paradigmatičen izraz modernizma v kinematografiji. Še danes učinkuje na filmski slog ter zaseda ključno mesto v zgodovini filmske umetnosti. V svojem prispevku podrobno obravnavam razlage njegovega dela ter na njihovi osnovi razlagam njegovo delo v kontekstu političnega značaja njegove estetike. Po moji tezi se politično v njegovih delih nahaja v estetskem izkustvu, ki ga omogočijo filmska sredstva. Kot je pokazal Jacques Rancière, je estetsko izkustvo tesno povezano z demokratskim izkustvom. Oba problematizirata teorijo po kateri je prevladujoči okvir pomena in pomenov družbenega in kulturnega reda vklesan v kamen, ne da bi obstajala druga možnost. Oba tvorita vrednotenje naključnosti ter možnih sprememb. Sledeč tej argumentaciji lahko politični pomen Antonionijeve estetetike pobliže določimo. Odprta narativna struktura, avtonomizacija kamere, igranje *temps mort*, vizualni razvoj prostorov ali postopno praznjenje polja podobe so značilnosti tega sloga ter spodkopujejo reprezentativni režim. Vanj prodre z različnimi slogovnimi sredstvi, ga pusti stati v ozadju ter ga oropa za njegovo strukturirajoča moč Antonioni je ustvaril nesoglasni film, v katerem lahko najdemo estetsko resnico filma, dvoumnost neumnih in trenutnih stvari, teksturo sveta, kakršen je. Njegovi filmi naredi resničen prehod iz reprezentativne fikcije zapleta do estetske fikcije znakov. Wong Kar-wai mu je v tem sledil. Oba gradita čutne pokrajine površine sveta, ki so prelomile ravne črte med vzrokom in učinkom ter so določene z estetskim učinkom.

Ernst van Alphen
On the Possibility and Impossibility of Modernist Cinema: Péter Forgács' Own Death

Key words: Péter Forgács, Péter Nádas, Modernism medium specificity, focalisation

Whereas Modernism is a productive notion in literary studies and art history for the understanding of twentieth century cultural practices, in cinema studies it is hardly viable. The unique position of cinema is not only caused by a different history, but also by its medium specificity. But it is not clear at all how the medium specificity of Cinema can be imagined or defined. If it is the "task" of 20th century Modernism to purify media of everything that is not specific to the medium, it implies that cinema cannot be considered an art medium. To counter this notion of Modernism in terms of medium the idea will be defended that the specificity of cinema resides in its synthetic nature, that is, in its

impurity. Next, I explore a Modernist attempt in cinema, adopting a device that is usually seen as specific for the literary text, in the sense that only in textual form the device is really possible and effective. I will examine *Own Death*, made in 2007 by Hungarian artist and filmmaker Péter Forgács, based upon the 2002 novella of the same name by Hungarian author Péter Nádas. The Modernist device that is consistently used in Nadas' novella device is the one of consistent character-bound focalization. The story told is from beginning to end presented through the eyes and experience of one focalizing subject: a middle aged man in Budapest, who does not feel well and who seems to get a heart attack. I call the device "radical perspectivism," and it concerns a radical, that is, systematic, consistent adaptation of one point of view, or better, one focalizing position.

Ernst van Alphen
O možnosti in nemožnosti modernistične kinematografije: *Lastna smrt* Pétra Forgácsa

Ključne besede: Péter Forgács, Péter Nádas, medijska specifičnost modernizma, fokalizacija

Medtem ko je modernizem produktiven pojem v literaranih vedah in umetnostni zgodovini za razumevanje kulturnih praks dvajsetega stoletja, je v filmskih študijih komajda sposoben življenja. Posebnen položaj kinematografije ni povzročila le drugačna zgodovina, pač pa tudi posebnost njegovega medija. Vendar pa nikakor ni jasno kako sploh si lahko zamislimo ali definiramo specifični medij filma. Če je »naloga« modernizma 20. stoletja, da očisti medije vsega, kar ni specifično za medij, potem to nakazuje, da filma ne moremo imeti za medij. Da bi nasprotovali temu pojmu modernizma v izrazih medija, bomo zagovarjali zamisel, da se specifičnost filma nahaja v njegovi sintetični naravi, to je, v njegovi nečistosti. Nadalje raziskujem modernistični poskus v filmu ter se pri tem poslužujem pripomočka, ki ga običajno vidimo kot specifičnega za književno besedilo, v pomenu, da je pripomoček resnično zmožen in učinkovit le v tekstovni obliki. Modernistični pripomoček, ki je dosledno uporabljen v novelah Nadasa, je dosledna fokalizacija usmerjena na osebe. Povedana zgodba je od začetka do konca predstavljena skozi oči in izkustvo enega fokalizirajočega subjekta: moškega srednjih let v Budimpešti, ki se ne počuti dobro in za katerega se zdi, da bo imel srčni napad. »Pripomoček« imenujem »skrajni perspektivizem« ter zadeva skrajni, tj, sistematičen, dosleden privzem enega gledišča, ali bolje, enega fokalizirajočega položaja.

Terry Smith
Rethinking Modernism and Modernity Now
Key words: Modernism, modernity, iconomorphism, contemporary art, contemporaneity

Revisiting modernism today requires us to leap backwards in time over three displacements of its centrality to artistic practice and theory: late modern transformations, postmodernism, and the recent prominence of contemporary art. Rather than ignore these moments, the author explores the changing ideas about modernism at each moment, and the residual effects of these changes within contemporary thinking. Drawing on key texts, including some of his own, he links artistic modernism to the broader frameworks of social and geopolitical modernity. Given the Western values and power structures inherent in "the modern," he argues that the "multiple modernities" project should define all related terms from inside its own project, not by inference from EuroAmerica. A detailed, supportive yet critical theorization of this project is offered, and some new terms proposed. In conclusion, the essay examines the relationships between this project and the author's recent theorizations of contemporary art within the contemporaneity of difference which, he argues, defines our world condition today.

Terry Smith
Premisliti modernizem in modernost sedaj
Ključne besede: modernizem, modernist, ikonomorfizem, sodobna umetnost, sodobnost

Revizija in ponovni obisk modernizma danes od zahteva, da skočimo nazaj v času prek treh premestitev njegove osrednosti do umetniške prakse in teorije: poznomoderna preoblikovanja, postmodernizem ter nedavna pomembnost sodobne umetnosti. Raje kot da bi ignoriral te momente, avtor raziskuje spreminjajoče se ideje glede modernizma v vsakem trenutku ter učinek preostale učinke the sprememb v sodobnem mišljenju. Ob uporabi nekaterih ključnih besedil, vključno z nekaterimi njegovimi, avtor poveže umeteniški modernize s širšimi okviri socialne in geopolitične modernosti. Izhajajoč iz zahodnih vrednot in struktur moči, ki so lastne "modernemu", trdi, da bi moral projekt "multiplih modernosti" definirati od znotraj svoj lastni projekt, ne pa s sklepanjem na osnovi Evro-Amerike. Avtor nato ponudi podrobno in zanj sprejemljivo—čeprav tudi kritično—teoretizacijo tega projekta in predlaga nekatere nove izraze. Na koncu esej razišče razmerje med tem projektom ter avtorjevo nedavno teoretizacijo sodobne umetnosti znotraj sodobnosti razlike, ki, trdi avtor, definira naše svetovno stanje danes.

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1. Gilles-Gaston Granger, *Pour la connaissance philosophique*, Odile Jacob, Paris 1988, p. 123.
2. *Cf.* Charles Taylor, "Rationality", in: M. Hollis, S. Lukes (Eds.), *Rationality and Relativism*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1983, pp. 87–105.
3. Granger, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
5. Friedrich Rapp, "Observational Data and Scientific Progress", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, Oxford, 11 (2/1980), p. 153.

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