

RENEW MARXIST ART HISTORY

EDITED BY
WARREN CARTER
BARNABY HARAN
FREDERIC J. SCHWARTZ

ART/BOOKS



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Cover image: Karl Marx photographed in London in 1875 by John Mayall. Courtesy of the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

Page 2: Carol Duncan, *Under Wraps (Bust of Lenin)*, 2011, pencil on paper, 25.4 × 21.6 cm.

CONTENTS

Title Page

PREFACE

Warren Carter, Barnaby Haran and Frederic J. Schwartz

INTRODUCTION

Warren Carter, 'Towards a History of the Marxist History of Art'

MARXIST THEORY IN PRACTICE

John Roberts, 'Art History's Furies'

Stephen F. Eisenman, 'The Political Logic of Radical Art History in California 1974–85: A Memoir'

Warren Carter, 'The Dialectical Legacies of Radical Art History: Meyer Schapiro and German Aesthetic Debates in the 1930s and 1940s'

Stewart Martin, 'Approaching Marx's Aesthetic: Or, What is Sensuous Practice?'

Matthew Beaumont, 'A Communion of Just Men Made Perfect: Walter Pater, Romantic Anti-Capitalism and the Paris Commune'

Norbert Schneider, 'What Remains of Adorno's Critique of Culture?'

Frederic J. Schwartz, 'Aby Warburg and the Spirit of Capitalism'

LANDSCAPE, CLASS AND IDEOLOGY

Alan Wallach, ‘A Note on Aestheticizing Tendencies in American Landscape Painting 1840–80’

Brian Foss, ‘Meaning, Change and Ambiguity in Canadian Landscape Imagery: Homer Watson and *The Pioneer Mill*’

Charles Ford, “One spectator is a better witness than ten listeners”: Roger North, Making the Past Public’

Steve Edwards, ‘An “Ever-Recurring Controversy”: John Thompson, William James Stillman and the Bootblacks’

Tom Gretton, ‘*Calaveras* and Commodity Fetishism: The Unhallowed Supernatural in the Work of José Guadalupe Posada’

Angela Miller, ‘Reading Ahab: Rockwell Kent, Herman Melville and C. L. R. James’

Caroline Arscott, ‘William Morris, Ornament and the Coordinates of the Body’

MARXISM AND THE SHAPING OF MODERNISM

Barnaby Haran, ‘Red *Hashar*: Louis Lozowick’s Lithographs of Soviet Tajikstan’

Martin I. Gaughan, ‘Lu Märten and the Question of a Marxist Aesthetic in 1920s Germany’

Rachel Sanders, ‘Experiment and Propaganda: Art in the Monthly *New Masses*’

Jody Patterson, ‘Stuart Davis and Left Modernism on the New York Waterfront in the 1930s’

Fred Orton, ‘Action, Revolution and Painting: Resumed’

James A. van Dyke, ‘Erasure and Jewishness in Otto Dix’s *Portrait of the Lawyer Hugo Simons*’

Paul B. Jaskot, 'The Nazi Party's Strategic Use of the Bauhaus: Marxist Art History and the Political Conditions of Artistic Production'

MARXISM IN A NEW WORLD ORDER

Alex Potts, 'Realism and Materialism in Postwar European Art'

Frances Stracey, 'The Situation of Women'

Peter Smith, 'Photography, Language and the Pictorial Turn'

Chin-tao Wu, 'Scars on the Landscape: Doris Salcedo Between Two Worlds'

Gail Day, 'Realism, Totality and the Militant *Citoyen*': or, What Does Lukács Have to Do with Contemporary Art?

Kerstin Stakemeier, 'Deartification This Side of Art: Ideology Critique, Autonomy and Reproduction'

Notes on the contributors

Index

Copyright

This book is the result of a project that had two goals. It was conceived as a Festschrift in honour of Andrew Hemingway, to mark the occasion of his retirement from the Department of History of Art at University College London. But the project quickly exceeded that initial objective, and for two reasons. First, a Festschrift implies the end of an academic career, something patently not the case with Andrew, who continues to teach, publish and supervise doctoral students. And second, his field of activity has always gone beyond the confines of a single academic institution, even one to which he contributed so much and whose direction he helped to determine over two decades. He was, for example, at the centre of the University of London's Labour History Seminar for many years, and was the principal figure behind the Seminar for Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture (now renamed the Seminar for Marxism in Culture) that came out of it. He was also crucial to the development and continued profile of the *Oxford Art Journal* for many years. And he has been a tireless organizer of conferences – the international MAVAN (Marxism and the Visual Arts Now) set the agenda for many for a decade – symposia and volumes of collected texts. As supervisor, external reader and editor, he has encouraged and challenged scores of scholars, whose work has gained in richness, depth and rigour as a result. In a discipline once handicapped by insularity, he has been a key link between academics in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Germany and France.

Doing justice to such a wide range of activity and influence would have resulted in a publication three times this size. The book as it is, however, represents the attempt of the editors to gather a representative group of Hemingway's colleagues, students and interlocutors in the service of the second goal: to provide a snapshot of the state of an art history that can be considered properly Marxist.

The volume is divided into four sections. Three of these correspond to areas of Hemingway's own scholarly commitments, and one does not. The first section, 'Marxist Theory in Practice', addresses theoretical issues of materialist art history and explores case studies in the development of the tradition itself. Establishing an intellectual context for the rest of the book, John Roberts maps out the development of Hemingway's own scholarship by situating it within the moment in the 1970s when a generation of academics, radicalized by the utopian moment of 1968, withdrew from the subject altogether, embracing instead the newly emergent domains of popular or visual cultures. Roberts charts what was at stake in Hemingway's decision to stay within art history, reading his research through his initial attachment to a form of humanist realism and then the shift to a post-Adornian position in which the work of art is read as a form of symptomatic critique, all within a Lukácsian framework emphasizing the continuing importance of the concept of totality. Stephen Eisenman provides a personal account of another trajectory of the period: his formation as a radical art historian in California from the early 1970s through to the mid-1980s, from the moment when a Marxist art history was being forged with both Otto Karl Werckmeister and T. J. Clark at UCLA through to its

recuperation and eventual eclipse in the 1980s. Looking at the development of this tradition through the prism of internal debates within the subject, its relationship to other radical traditions within the Californian academic system (including the presence of key members of the Frankfurt School) and the broader economic shifts impacting upon the university sector, Eisenman charts how the initial political optimism of the earlier work became transmuted into a form of political fatalism in which revolutionary defeat was preordained and avant-garde strategies were understood as compromised.

Warren Carter assesses the political rationale that underpinned Meyer Schapiro's aesthetic theories during a period of emerging crises on the Left, in particular the schisms caused in the 1930s by the repressions of the Soviet Union. He situates Schapiro's ideas in a dialogue with German Marxist debates on aesthetics, and traces the influence of Bertolt Brecht's 'epic theatre' and Georg Lukács's rival notion of 'epic realism' in Schapiro's thinking on public art, most notably the work of Diego Rivera, and later in Abstract Expressionism's gestural appeal against alienation. In the following text, Stewart Martin considers the basis of Marx's concept of the aesthetic in the sensuous materialism of Ludwig Feuerbach, and argues that Marx's break with the latter in his 'Theses on Feuerbach' necessarily involved jettisoning any conception of the aesthetic. Martin shows that thinking through the consequences of this rupture allows a radical clarification of Marx's new conception of practice, as this emerges from his critique of sensuousness materialism (and idealism); and furthermore that this new vantage point

suggests a new basis for an appreciation of Marx's relation to aesthetics, indeed a new orientation to the critique of aesthetics within the capitalist mode of production. Putting aside Walter Pater's reputation as the leading 'art-for-its-own sake' aesthete of the late nineteenth century, Matthew Beaumont addresses the seldom-explored sociality of Pater's writings as a rebellious form of romantic anti-capitalism. Beaumont recasts details such as Pater's homosexuality and his apparent antagonism towards modernity as contributory elements of a 'social dreaming' based on utopian, liberatory impulses that equated with sensory aesthetic experiences, and indicates a modern, even prophetic, sensibility inherent in '*Diaphaneité*', his putative manifesto. In the next contribution, Norbert Schneider, a key figure in the development of a left art history in the Federal Republic of Germany, provides an erudite reconsideration of Adorno's influential critique of culture, exploring its sources, strategies and lacunae. Schneider shows something else too: that, as in the case of Werckmeister, art history emerging from the German New Left was not a passive recipient of critical theory but instead a unique and productive site from which to engage with this body of thought. Finally, Frederic J. Schwartz starts in non-Marxist territory - a brief encounter between art historian Aby Warburg and sociologist Max Weber - to explore how Warburg's work represented an ambivalent and uncomfortable engagement with turn-of-the-century debates about the nature and origins of capitalism. Paradoxically, Warburg's tentative and evasive treatment of the issue, Schwartz argues, proved influential for later critical

theorists, from Ernst Bloch to Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer.

The second section, 'Landscape, Class and Ideology', focuses on a set of concerns that was crucial to the development of a Marxist art history in the wake of the New Left, while at the same time reconsidering approaches to this material. Alan Wallach explores aestheticizing tendencies within Hudson River School painting from the 1850s and 1860s, developments that had been obscured with the invention of the art-historical category of 'Luminism' from the 1950s as a means both to market a particular type of landscape art and to define a home-grown pictorial model in the nineteenth century. Drawing upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu and examining the paintings of John F. Kensett, Wallach argues that these aestheticizing tendencies coincide with the needs of a particular patrician class seeking to distinguish itself through its aesthetic sensibility in an attempt to secure a cultural hegemony in line with its political and economic power in the post-Civil War period. Brian Foss shows how the landscapes of the Canadian painter Homer Watson from the turn of the twentieth century responded to the encroachment of industry and infrastructure on the wilderness, and were consonant with a nostalgic and selective discourse about nature that saw modernity as an imminent threat. Marketing himself as imbued with the 'pioneer spirit' to an urban audience, Watson was caught between preserving a natural paradise and serving a cultural elite that the very destructive processes of modernization had enabled. Charles Ford uses the consideration of the class dynamics of an earlier period – late-seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century

England – as a way to explore the emergence of the ‘bourgeois public sphere’ as described by Jürgen Habermas. But Ford comes to decidedly un-Habermasian conclusions, seeing the wide-ranging work of polymath Roger North as negotiating a place for private knowledge in the new publicity of published and circulating texts. Despite the usefulness of Habermas’s categories in describing the origins of what we identify as the Enlightenment, the contours of privacy, publicity and authorship are drawn here in a very different way.

The remaining texts in this section similarly stretch categories, chronologies and media. Looking at John Thompson’s *Street Life in London* from the 1870s, Steve Edwards considers the political economy of nineteenth-century British photography. He addresses themes of continued urgency about the document’s social agency (in a rebuttal to both the influence of Michael Fried’s attenuation of the medium’s social promise and the ironic archival style of some contemporary work), debates on the métier of photography and its aesthetic status, the nuances in the iconography of labour, and the operation of photography as a form of work. Tom Gertton moves through and beyond an iconographical analysis of the prints produced by the Mexican artist José Guadalupe Posada in Mexico City between 1888 and 1913. Focusing on what he terms the ‘specific commodity function’ of these sheets, he identifies precisely the urban audience for them, at the same time drawing upon and challenging the anthropological work of Michael Taussig on both devils and commodity fetishism. Concentrating on the artist Rockwell Kent’s 1930 illustrations for *Moby Dick*, Angela Miller

elaborates a triadic relationship around the epic nautical narrative between Herman Melville's original text, Kent's dramatic woodcuts and C. L. R. James's 1953 Marxist analysis of the book. She argues that the figure of Ahab becomes a shifting cipher of political personality cults as the era of dictators moves on to the Cold War, a site of tension that echoes the antagonisms of Kent's political thinking, an idiosyncratic version of socialism that combined unionist collectivism with the survivalist individualism of the wilderness adventurer. Caroline Arscott reconsiders a seemingly familiar topic – the designs of William Morris – in terms of the political potential of affect, desire and subjectivity. Framing her discussion by reference to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's discussion of biopolitics in *Empire*, she investigates the intimations of sensory experience in Morris's designs for printed textiles and their relation to both Morris's own aesthetics and contemporary physiological aesthetics.

Section three, 'Marxism and the Shaping of Modernism', considers the historical intersection of Marxism and the modernist projects of the early twentieth century, teasing out the complexities and specificities of these episodes. In the first chapter, Barnaby Haran discusses how Louis Lozowick's apparently unambiguously celebratory lithographs of Soviet Tajikistan invoked the conflicts that underlay 'red hashar', a sovietized version of Central Asian neighbourliness, whereby figures such as veiled and unveiled women and Tajik Red Army horsemen and tractor drivers were used as symbols of ongoing traumas in the imposition of communist modernity against Islamic, feudal traditionalism. Embroiled in international controversies about proletarian iconography, which

he largely challenged, Lozowick's pictures of Tajikistan were imbued with touristic, melancholy romanticism about the indigenous world that the Soviet modernizers were forcibly remaking. Martin Gaughan explores the complex work of Lu Märten, writings that amount to a sophisticated but largely forgotten attempt to develop a Marxist aesthetics in 1920s Germany. Gaughan unearths a debate that developed in the pages of *Die Linkskurve* and *Die Rote Fahne*, involving not only Märten but also Karl August Wittfogel and Gertrud Alexander, important figures who remain obscure. Rachel Sanders demonstrates that far from being a monolithic organ of communist propaganda, the American magazine *New Masses* was a site of competing viewpoints and shifting editorial lines during its two decades of existence from 1926. Concentrating on its most modernist and plural phase, before increasing political and aesthetic entrenchment after 1934, Sanders examines the varying strategies of its artists and the responses of editors and writers to developments in Soviet and Comintern policies such as the Third Period Line and the emergence of the Popular Front. By focusing upon one painting by Stuart Davis - previously mistitled *Artists Against War and Fascism* - Jody Patterson demonstrates how the traditional binary opposition between a supposedly agitational social realism and a purported disinterested abstraction in the 1930s American art world is patently unworkable. She brings new iconographic arguments to bear upon Davis's work to argue that while it may indeed represent a critique of the rise of fascism in the 1930s - in particular in terms of the Spanish Civil War - it also comments upon the struggles between various trade-union factions on the waterfront on

the East Coast, whose more radical members were protesting the use of American ships to carry arms to the forces of Franco, a multivalency made possible by the painting's very abstraction.

In the following text, Fred Orton returns to, and revises, his essay on Harold Rosenberg's celebrated account of American postwar gestural painting, 'The American Action Painters'. Orton's essay, first published in the *Oxford Art Journal* in 1992, and thus seven years before Rosenberg's papers were released by the Getty Research Institute, reads Rosenberg's account as a continuation of his earlier political commitments in the 1930s when he was within the orbit of the American Communist Party and then Trotskyism. After Stalinism and Nazism had destroyed any claims that Moscow and Paris may have had for cultural supremacy, Rosenberg sees in the New York Abstract Expressionist artist a surrogate proletarian agency defined by the changed political circumstances of the early 1950s, when the opportunities for political dissent had withered under McCarthyism. The last two essays in this section offer a different take on the relations between Marxism and modernism. Instead of focusing on projects where these two are more or less unproblematically allied, James A. van Dyke and Paul B. Jaskot employ a sensitive and fine-grained materialist approach to the concrete details of the relations of art and politics, allowing a more complex picture of these relations to emerge. Van Dyke takes as his subject a portrait by Otto Dix, a painter who stayed programmatically clear of political commitments. Van Dyke argues that a non-revolutionary painter, even in potentially revolutionary times, offers valuable material for a

materialist history of art, revealing clearly the networks of institutions, discourses and social forces that such an artist needed to negotiate, and showing the precise ways specific works of art were produced and functioned socially. Jaskot, in turn, reconsiders the National Socialists' political mobilization of images of the Bauhaus, teasing out the local conditions and subtle chronology of this engagement of enemies. Focusing on institutions and events allows a more complete and complex account of entities that are usually generalized and considered only in terms of ideologies whose contours are sketched with an unhelpfully broad brush.

The final section, 'Marxism in a New World Order', considers Marxist perspectives on recent and contemporary art. As such, it does not so much echo or engage in debate with the writings of this book's dedicatee, but represents work that is nonetheless part and parcel of the Marxist milieu in which he and others operated. In the first chapter, Alex Potts considers the politics of the investment in materiality of European artists in the postwar years, specifically Renato Guttuso's and Asger Jorn's development of innovative, alternate realist practices that simultaneously diverged from older conventions and newer trends of leftist culture, such as social realism or neo-realism. Although differing in degrees of legible subject matter, Guttuso and Jorn shared a commitment to the necessity of the physicality of painting that superseded their relative disparities around the dualism of abstraction and figuration, and their practices proposed a sustained affective experience of materiality in the production and reception of art

with the potential for an interdependent model of agency. In the next contribution, we publish posthumously a text by the late Frances Stracey, a colleague and friend whom the editors of this book, and many of its contributors, miss deeply. She explores the position of women in relation to the Situationist International: first in terms of how they were depicted in the representational strategies in its journal *Internationale situationniste*; and second, how the role they played within the group was articulated at a theoretical level in their writing. Stracey argues that the seemingly random images of women culled from glossy magazines and pornographic sources constituted two different levels of *détournement* as a critique of the commodity fetishism in consumer society and the sexism endemic to it. Furthermore, she argues that in its renewed call for a more inclusive proletariat, the Situationist political programme was proto-feminist, despite the limited number of female participants within the SI itself. Peter Smith's 'Photography, Language and the Pictorial Turn' considers the radical interplay of word and image in the hybrid medium of the photo-essay, in which the photograph and the text are placed in a critical relation to each other that emphasizes, rather than blurs, their discrete ontologies. Smith highlights the radical possibilities for contemporary art practice of the dialectical photo-essay format, exemplified by the work of Allan Sekula, one that mobilizes the photograph's non-linguistic basis rather than relying on the simplifying anchorage of captions. The juxtaposed text, he argues, acts as a provocative foil for enquiry into the represented social reality.

In the first of three essays on contemporary practice, Chin-tao Wu considers the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo, questioning the ways that she has negotiated, even colluded with, a Western art world in which the insatiable demand for so-called 'Third World artists' among curators and collectors can appear cynical and opportunistic. Often typified by evocative arrays of associative found objects, Salcedo's work involves an examination of the traumas in Colombian society of the civil war and political suppression of the 1980s, but Wu considers that the extent of the artist's adherence to the aggressively speculative art market risks sacrificing political import about a local situation for global success. In a project she cheerfully admits is 'perverse', Gail Day considers the work of Allan Sekula, Chto Delat, Freee and Radek Community through the lens of Lukács's concepts of reification, realism and totality. Reading Lukács against the grain, Day has little trouble reconnecting with the complexity of his thought, circumventing the crude statements of his positions (including his own statements) and mobilizing it in productive ways. In the last contribution, Kerstin Stakemeier begins with an exploration of Adorno's concept of *Entkunstung* or 'deartification', the ineluctable encroachment in modernity of the outside world on the autonomy of art. She finds there a productive place to reopen the negative dialectic of Adorno's critical theory, focusing on the issue of artistic labour, one not dealt with adequately by Adorno (or other critical theorists). Her reflections draw sustenance from and yield insight on a range of postwar contemporary practices whose projects centre on a consideration of labour, from Italian Workerism to feminist art and theory.

The reader will notice a lack of texts from beyond the Anglo-American and German art-historical communities. There are reasons for this. Isolated examples have appeared elsewhere, but the constellations of intellectual momentum, institutional politics and publishing opportunities have worked against the development of sustained and vigorous production of scholarship in these contexts. In France, for example, the journal *Histoire et critique des arts* served as a focus for a group of that name, holding important conferences and engaging in international discussions that were very much part of the advanced debates of the late 1970s. Scholars such as Nicos Hadjinicolaou, Michel Melot and Patrick Le Nouëne had much to say, but the group, and the journal itself, served more as a forum to publish work from North America and Germany than actually establishing an autonomous discourse in its own right. In Italy, the architectural history of the so-called 'Venice School' around Manfredo Tafuri, Massimo Cacciari, Francesco Dal Co and Marco De Michelis at the IUAV (Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia) generated work of impressive philosophical rigour and depth, which was combined with an active involvement in communist politics. Yet a certain narrowness of focus – architecture and the issue of the capitalist city – has prevented this scholarship from serving as a model beyond these respective fields. Isolated within the academic context of their country, the most important resonances of the Venice School have been felt, as is often the case, in North America, and there more in schools of architecture than within the field of art history.

As this book and others show, it is possible to draw a genealogy of a Marxist history of art, but this should not blind us to the contingencies of each moment in this complex trajectory. A Marxist art history was a necessity a century ago, but it was necessarily scattered and heterogeneous due to the institutional bases open to it (political parties of the left with their own institutional problems) and those avenues that were closed (the academy). The energy of the 1960s and 1970s generated by the New Left similarly made a Marxist art history seem necessary. The efforts of an embattled younger generation in Germany, the United States and Britain, against great odds and opposition, showed too that it was possible, and that conservative institutions could be both challenged and transformed in the process. But the momentum and sheer weight of these institutions allowed them to assimilate and incorporate, and ultimately to diffuse and defuse, the energies of that particular moment. Thus the tradition with which we are dealing saw its energies divided and its alliances fractured as its insights were incorporated within a hegemonic academy and its larger perspective was rejected. But now this tradition of thought has new opportunities to negotiate its relationship to institutions, as these latter no longer look so secure, so insulated and so isolated. The paradoxical situation of Marxist art history today - oppositional but intellectually strong, marginal in terms of personnel but integral to the thinking of the discipline - means that there is reason neither for fatalism nor for withdrawal. This collection of essays is, in the best sense, incomplete, full of remnants of the past and promises of the future, the balance of which we can not yet be sure. While

drawing on, and simultaneously challenging, the as yet unexhausted work of Marx and Marxist views of the past, new interventions and frameworks are being developed. For example, recently formed groups such as Historical Materialism (a journal, a set of conferences and a publishing venture) will feed into the further development of Marxist art history. We are aware that figures such as Alain Badiou, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri and others who have opened up lines of enquiry and critique are only occasionally alluded to in this collection. But we are confident that these perspectives, and others, will be represented – and that Marxism will look quite different – the next time someone attempts a project such as the one we have undertaken in the pages that follow.



The editors would like to add just two final notes. First, our thanks to our publisher Andrew Brown of Art / Books and to Tamar Garb and Stephen Smith at University College London for their belief in and support of this project over several years. And second, the dedication of this book from all those involved: to Andrew Hemingway.

PREFACE

Warren Carter, Barnaby Haran and Frederic J. Schwartz

'Here we wish only to affirm that a theory of social and historical change is a prerequisite of any discourse that claims to engage with the historically specific circumstances involved in the generation of art objects or other cultural products.'¹

In his entry on the 'Social History of Art' for the 1996 anthology *Critical Terms for Art History*, Craig Clunas begins with the question: 'What might a social history of the "Social History of Art" look like?'² In an introduction to an anthology devoted to 'renewing' Marxist art history, this is something that obviously needs to be considered. It is also an appropriate question to begin with, for it is a subject to which Andrew Hemingway, to whom this volume of essays is dedicated, has been committed (and, moreover, is still thinking about) over the course of his academic life. Not only has he produced highly commendable models of a Marxist history of art in terms of the production of early nineteenth-century English landscape imagery; the art produced by those artists either in, or associated with, the Communist Party in the United States between 1926 and 1956; and more recently his interpretation of American Precisionism in the interwar period. He has also been concerned for many years in historicizing the shifts within the discipline itself, incisively assessing how a Marxist take on the subject has been affected by political and economic transformations within the wider culture as a whole.³ This is a project crystallized in Hemingway's study of the Marxist art historian Meyer Schapiro, and codified (if unfinished in terms

of his own continuing work on the subject) in his 2006 anthology *Marxism and the History of Art*.⁴

What distinguishes this latter text is that it brings together the two significant traditions within the Marxist history of art: the interwar generation of Schapiro, Max Raphael, Francis Klingender, Frederick Antal and Arnold Hauser; and a subsequent New Left one which, radicalized by the utopian impulses of 1968, attempted to regenerate a Marxist art history after the impasse of the Cold War years.⁵ If the intellectual efforts of T. J. Clark and Otto Karl Werckmeister loom large in this renewal, they nevertheless differ in their approach.⁶ At his most extreme, Werckmeister has argued that the subject of aesthetics has no basis in the works of classical Marxism

and is therefore purely ideological; moreover, in terms of its centrality within critical theory, this subject has become a utopian surrogate for, and obstacle to, the potential for actual revolutionary transformation.⁷ It should thus be jettisoned for a more thoroughgoing materialist critique of the ideological role that art has played, and continues to play, within bourgeois society.⁸ Werckmeister calls for specific concrete historical work over philosophical abstraction. For him, the Marxist history of art is a contradiction in terms in that the science of Marxism is by its very nature a totalizing system of thought with disciplinary boundaries being little more than one of the obfuscations of bourgeois thought. Clark, by contrast, in his focus upon the particular historical conjuncture of art and politics in revolutionary France in 1848 and afterwards, has persuasively provided accounts of how art works during moments of social upheaval can become 'a disputed, even effective, part of the

historical process' and, moreover, have the potential to work against the grain of dominant regimes of power.⁹ The form of immanent critique here clearly has a relationship to the work of Theodor W. Adorno, and this has become more explicit in later years; while the focus upon the agency of painting in-and-of itself shares more than a passing resemblance to the Greenbergian model of modernist canon building. Indeed, it was the codification of this tradition, and the claims that Clement Greenberg made for this type of painting, with its relationship to nineteenth-century French painting, that became one of the principal sites of critique for the social history of art within the anglophone world. The combination of both - the canon and the claims made for it - became the object of analysis for Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock when they began teaching on the masters programme in the Social History of Art at Leeds from 1979 onwards, a course that had been initiated by Clark several years earlier.¹⁰

If Clark's later writing skirts perilously close to upholding the modernist canon - reading negativity as value where Greenberg reads formal purity - then Werckmeister has consistently sought to knock down such edifices. Whereas Clark stays with the more traditional objects of art history, Werckmeister has instead engaged with a far more diffuse range of cultural artefacts, from the music of Kraftwerk to Japanese anime - objects clearly beyond the purview of a more traditional (and Clarkian) history of art.¹¹ Yet both of them locate this radical impulse within the discipline to the political upheavals of 1968. Werckmeister understands the radicalization of the discipline as a product of the 'second and general crisis of late

capitalist society' that ran until 1973; and Clark attributed his seminal books of that year to political quietism, representing the shift from his involvement in Situationism to academia, from the street to the archive.¹² So whereas Werckmeister locates the radical critique of the discipline within 'the larger intellectual and academic movements of that time', Clark reads it as already symptomatic of defeat, with its rapid absorption into what was to become a far-from-Marxist 'social history of art' that contributed to a rejuvenation of the subject within the strict confines of the academic marketplace.¹³ For Clark, then, this shift ultimately played a recuperative role for the discipline 'as the 60s slipped away and the academic world returned to its old habits'.¹⁴ A Marxist art history became the social history of art, which, alongside competing methodologies representing the rival claims of feminism, psychoanalysis, sexuality and race, transmogrified into the smorgasbord that became known as 'the new art history'.¹⁵ (This moment was captured in the title of the well-known 1986 book of the same name edited by A. L. Rees and Frances Borzello.¹⁶) This is what we would like to posit as one of the key differences between Marxist art history and the new art history: the former was always in some meaningful way somehow refracted through the struggles of 1968, an attempt to think through some productive relationship between the subject of art history and the broader social upheavals of that moment; while the latter represents an institutionalized effort with no necessary connection to such radical energies.

When Clark writes in his 'On the Social History of Art' (an acknowledged reference to Hauser) that 'it is easier to define what methods to avoid than

propose a set of methods for systematic use', he is clearly distancing himself from that former generation of Marxist art historians mentioned earlier.¹⁷ By flagging up the 'taboos' of 'the notion of works of art "reflecting" ideologies, social relations, or history'; or talking about 'history as "background" to the work of art'; or offering analysis depending upon 'intuitive analogies between form and ideological content', Clark is making a sideswipe at the likes of Schapiro, Raphael, Klingender, Antal and Hauser.¹⁸ In this way they are positioned - as right-wing critics liked to argue - as historians who worked with a simplistic economic model of cultural analysis that directly reads off the class interests of those who patronize art into the formal composition, and ideological character, of the works produced. Yet the work of these earlier pioneers within the Marxist tradition cannot simply be subsumed under the kind of crude historicism that characterized the Second International and must instead be seen as part of a broader attack upon a Stalinist economism that attempted to grant a greater specificity to the cultural by introducing a more complex set of relations between the base and the superstructure. They were successful in this to different degrees. While Klingender can probably be understood as the one member of his generation who most crudely conceives of artistic production and analysis within a Soviet framework indebted to Georgi Plekhanov, Raphael and Schapiro instead had a more sustained and complex engagement with modern art, and Hauser and Antal were always critical of any tendency within the discipline that reduced extra-artistic phenomena to mere background material.¹⁹

As early as his 'The Marxist Theory of Art' of 1932, Raphael was distancing himself from both bourgeois and historicist accounts of the discipline and was using the dialectical method to grant art a greater autonomy than it had been formerly been

allowed.²⁰ According to John Roberts, this was possible because in the 1920s Raphael had read Marx's 'Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy', which expanded the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, first published in 1859, and was published by Karl Kautsky in his journal *Die Neue Zeit* in 1903.²¹ Marx's discussion of methodology in this text, in particular his dismissal of the dialectic as a unitary philosophical method, allowed Raphael to counter both economist and historicist misreadings of Marx. It also allowed him to break the crude binary opposition between modernism and social realism that became increasingly entrenched after 1934, when the latter became the official Soviet line in all matters aesthetic. While Raphael, like Schapiro (who befriended him while he was in New York), never uncritically celebrated modernism *per se*, both were clear that it represented the most significant art of their time, and they therefore treated it with the theoretical sophistication that it properly deserved.²² For Schapiro, modernism in the visual arts was deeply contradictory in that, while representing a historically progressive ideal of individual freedom within bourgeois society, in its mediation via the privatized market it was in part constitutive of class divisions under capitalism.²³

If the anti-fascist diaspora of the 1930s led Raphael to New York, then the Hungarian Antal left Germany for Britain, where he became part of a Communist Party-dominated critical art milieu that

included Klingender as well as the likes of Anthony Blunt and Herbert Read. Unlike the community of exiles that washed up in New York, which had a strong and vibrant anti-Stalinist and, at times, pro-Trotskyist element, that in London was more orthodox communist with a concomitant emphasis on realist and popular traditions within the arts (Read's sympathetic embrace of modernist formal innovation being the notable exception here).²⁴ This probably marked the work of Klingender more than the others, particularly during the period of the Popular Front - although even here it had the positive effect of widening the purview of the objects deemed suitable for art-historical enquiry, as well as radical readings of canonical artists such as Hogarth and Goya.²⁵ Despite this more orthodox communist milieu, it would be wrong to characterize, for example, Antal's work as purely a form of crude reflectionism for, as Roberts makes clear, he 'was instrumental in weakening some of the historicist and populist inflections of vulgar Marxist art history'.²⁶ Formed within the intellectual circles of Central Europe, he had contact with a far more sophisticated conception of art history as a discipline, and Marxism as a totalizing critique, than that enjoyed by the likes of Klingender in Britain.²⁷ This enabled him to develop a more nuanced and complex position than the latter, and one, moreover, in which he could challenge the typically orthodox Soviet valorization of realism over modernism; yet at the same time assert the value of artists such as Hogarth and Goya for the very formal complexity being celebrated by the likes of Clive Bell and Roger Fry within the tradition of pictorial modernism.²⁸

These interwar initiatives within the field of the Marxist history of art in Britain find their fruition in the postwar work of Hauser, also an émigré from Hungary to Britain and – like Antal – a participant in the Sunday circle organized around Georg Lukács and Béla Balázs, and then in the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic.²⁹ His two-volume *The Social History of Art* of 1951 was the first major attempt in the anglophone world to produce a non-isolationist history of art.³⁰ The wide-ranging synthesis of the history of art from cave painting through to the industrial art of film was widely criticized, by no less a figure as Ernst Gombrich as well as others, as being too sweeping in its range and guilty of a type of class reductionism that was typically deemed to characterize Marxist art history in the interwar period.³¹ In response to these attacks, and in an effort of self-criticism, Hauser then published *The Philosophy of Art History* in 1959, which is not only anti-Hegelian and anti-historicist but also contains the first mention in English of Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' from 1936.³² Despite the fact that the work drew deeply from the spheres of the social sciences and philosophy, for Roberts 'Hauser's book was at the end of one tradition, and not at the beginning of another, for all its prefigurations'.³³ Yet the work was largely ignored and it was business as usual within the subject, as the Courtauld Institute of Art and its connoisseurial commitments reigned supreme during the Cold War period.

It was the expansion of working-class and lower-middle-class student numbers in the 1960s and the opening up of the new universities and polytechnics, combined with the emergence of a

local Marxist theoretical culture indebted to continental philosophy, that would revivify the Marxist history of art in the early 1970s. Roberts has also rightly pointed to the specific role of British art schools within these wider shifts in access to higher education, and the radical theorization of visual culture that they undertook, which then provided the ideological lead in the critique of traditional art history.³⁴ This radicalization of the subject took place slightly earlier in Germany and the United States and was, as Werckmeister has made clear, part of the political unrest that swept Western European and American universities during the economic crisis of 1968–73, prompted most notably by the Grand Coalition between Christian Democrats and Social Democrats in Germany, and by the Vietnam War in the United States.³⁵ As early as 1968, progressive art historians in Germany formed the Ulmer Verein für Kunst-und Kulturwissenschaften at the congress of the Verband Deutscher Kunsthistoriker in Ulm with the intention of radically reforming the subject in opposition to what they perceived as the reactionary nature of the discipline within a German university sector that still included former National Socialists.³⁶ They launched their own journal in 1974 – *Kritische Berichte* – which published articles by a range of radically committed historians, including Horst Bredekamp, Jutta Held, Berthold Hinz, Norbert Schneider and Martin Warnke.³⁷ As Hemingway has made clear, however, this generation of Marxist art historians was never that interested in the example set by their interwar predecessors and, perhaps unsurprisingly given the institutionalization of the Frankfurt School within postwar West German academic culture and its

appropriation by the New Left, turned towards critical theory as the most useful model for radical intellectual work.³⁸ Werckmeister, as mentioned earlier, provided a pervasive critique of this preoccupation with aesthetic philosophy in general, and the Frankfurt School in particular, to argue instead for the need for detailed and systematic conjunctural analyses of art works to expose how they worked ideologically within bourgeois society.

It is worth pointing out here that Werckmeister had been teaching at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) since 1965, and this geographical distance not only allowed him perhaps to resist the allure of the Frankfurt School as a model for radical intellectual labour, but also meant that he was to play an important role within the institutional history of the radical art community in the United States. And the word 'community' is appropriate here because, as Hemingway has pointed out, unlike its counterpart in Germany, this grouping included both artists and art historians - itself a product of the fact that it was bound up with the rise of militant artists' organizations and the women's movement, with the College Art Association (CAA) being the principal institutional forum for both art historians and artists alike.³⁹ Just like in Germany, a group that had been radicalized by the political crisis in the United States formed the New Art Association within the CAA in 1970. It included art historians such as Carol Duncan, Patricia Hills, Linda Nochlin and Alan Wallach. While this organization was already fading by 1972, many of its members would provide the personnel for the Caucus for Marxism and Art History (subsequently renamed the Caucus for Marxism and Art) that came out of the 1976 CAA session

organized on the theme of 'Marxism and Art History' by Werckmeister, Clark and David Kunzle – the latter two also at this point in California. Like its predecessor, the Marxist Caucus included radical artists among those who participated in its sessions, including Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula.⁴⁰ Despite the early vitality of the Marxist Caucus, it nevertheless failed to generate enough interest to produce its own journal, and it folded by 1980. And, like its German counterpart, it showed relatively little interest in the work of the interwar generation of Marxist art historians. Yet as early as its first session, the fault lines between the competing versions of what a post-1968 Marxist art history should be were already sketched out in respective papers by Clark and Werckmeister, and both were highly conscious of how their proposed models sat alongside a now solidly reconstituted 'social history of art' that was essentially denuded of any conception of class as a transformative category.⁴¹ It is also worth noting that many of those involved with the Marxist Caucus would go on to produce some of the most important politically engaged work within the subject in that decade and afterwards.⁴²

In Britain this institutional radicalization happened later, mainly because, as Hemingway himself has remarked, academic art history was a relative latecomer, with those involved numbering far fewer than in the United States. As a consequence, the discipline in this country did not have its own professional body until the formation of the Association of Art Historians (AAH) in 1974.⁴³ While there was interest in the conjunction of art and social history in individual papers at AAH conferences, and Clark gave a plenary in 1977, the

first session devoted to the relationship between Marxism and the history of art was that organized by Adrian Rifkin in 1980 entitled ‘Art / Politics’.⁴⁴ Marxist art history also had an institutional base in academia with the above-mentioned masters programme in the Social History of Art at Leeds from 1976 onwards. Key moments in the formation of this counter-tradition for Orton and Pollock include the publication of John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* in 1972 (and the critical response to this from the left) as a broadside against the conservative conception of art presented in Kenneth Clark’s *Civilisation* television programme and book of 1969; the publication of Kurt Forster’s manifesto-like critique of the discipline in his ‘Critical Art History or the Transfiguration of Values’ in the pages of *New Literary History* in 1972, which included within its roll-call of Marxist art historians Schapiro, Antal, Hauser and Werckmeister, among others; the 1973 texts by Clark on the relation between art and politics during the revolution of 1848 and its aftermath; the formation of the Marxist Caucus in the United States; and the free-and-easy traffic between North American radical art historians and their British counterparts after the formation of the AAH as an institutional home in the United Kingdom, as well as the role of its journal *Art History* in publishing work by both British and American Marxist art historians after 1980.⁴⁵

These transformations within the discipline, and the emergence of a renewed Marxist history of art after the impasse of the Cold War years, have to be situated alongside other institutional and academic shifts that fed into this process. The important collective work done at the Centre of Contemporary

Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham under the leadership of Stuart Hall from 1968 until 1979 is just one.⁴⁶ The broadening of the scope of the term 'culture' to include working-class customs and rituals that was such an important part of the Centre's output no doubt served as a critique of the comparatively limited nature of the term within traditional art history, one that threw a vivid spotlight upon the relationship between the latter and the art market. Its work also acted as one of the places where the ideas of contemporary continental Marxists entered into British academia, in particular that of Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci - a form of radical sociology that its counterpoint in the anglophone world had successfully resisted at all costs.⁴⁷ Another influence on the development of Marxist art history was the complex theoretical work done in the journal *Screen* under the new editorial board between 1971 and 1982, which combined a similar emphasis upon continental Marxism with a focus upon Russian

Formalism, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Jacques Lacan and psychoanalysis as a way of reading film - again a shift from the rarefied objects of high art to the objects of industrially produced mass entertainment, with an engagement with the radical contemporary cinema of Jean-Luc Godard and, in particular, his collaboration with Jean-Pierre Gorin in the Dziga Vertov Group, as a counter to the blandishments of typically Hollywood fare.⁴⁸ And just as the focus upon class at the CCCS gave way to a discursive practice that would go on to privilege race in the process of identity formation, then *Screen* would increasingly become preoccupied with gender and sexuality, and how

these were understood in relation to Lacanian psychoanalysis, as the prism through which to read film.

When Orton mentions the importance of Clark's work in his reflections on the formation of a Marxist history of art, he refers not to the example of Hauser, whom Clark mentions (ironically or not), but to Pierre Macherey's symptomatic and thoroughly Althusserian reading of the literary canon.⁴⁹ Orton's and Pollock's radicalization as art historians precipitated not a return to the older interwar generation but rather to Marx himself, in particular *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and the *Grundrisse*, filtered through the new theoretical work being done within the more radical contemporary contexts of sociology and film. These interests converged in the magazine *Block*, which was produced at Middlesex Polytechnic from 1979 to 1985. This institutional basis clearly registers just how integral the emergence of the new polytechnics and their widening intake, as well as non-traditional academic departments like art and design catering to a more working-class student population, were to the development of a Marxist art history in Britain.⁵⁰ A close relationship to art practice is reflected in the fact that the magazine opened its pages to artists, including Terry Atkinson, Martha Rosler and Jo Spence, some of whom contributed not just art works, but critical and historical texts as well. That *Block* published important work in Marxist art and design history and theory in its first three years is undeniable: it included an article on Max Raphael by John Tagg, and calls for a proper appraisal of the work of the interwar generation of Marxist art historians.⁵¹ But the model of Marxism that it drew upon was very

much that forged within the pages of *Screen*: a *mélange* of the Marxist structuralism of Althusser and his followers, a semiology indebted to Roland Barthes, and a theory of the subject found in Lacanian psychoanalysis. As Hemingway puts it: 'In the fervid embrace of French intellectual trends, the achievements and complexities of the German-language tradition of art history were consigned to the has-beens.'⁵² If these models shared, in some form or other, a relation to Hegelianism, this was to have no place in the cultural politics of the 1970s, especially after Althusser had supposedly detached Marx from these pre-scientific residues and opened up a space for the non-sublimated complexity of the whole that could now be analysed by a whole range of different disciplines.⁵³

Jon Bird has argued that there were in fact two intellectual paradigms at work in the pages of *Block*: one that emphasized the social and material components of cultural production, and another that focused upon representation and the way it interpellated subjectivity.⁵⁴ Yet these two strands were not as compatible as some at the time had hoped. The potential and necessary rapprochement between Marxism and feminism was always part of the New Left project that came out of 1968, and, even if this was never finally realized in any satisfactory way, it did lead to extremely promising and productive work.⁵⁵ The feminist critique of Clark's model of art history had begun as soon as the seminal texts of 1973 had been published: the claim that in his celebration of male artists Clark not only reproduced the same canon as the traditional art history he supposedly set out to contest, but also that both his model and its

conservative counterpart were essentially interchangeable in their subordination of women. Clark had attempted to address these criticisms in his discussion of *Olympia* published in *Screen* in 1980, yet despite these efforts, the type of Marxist history of art he practised came under virulent attack in a reconfigured Althusserian strain of feminism in the pages of *Block*.⁵⁶ The importance of Pollock's critique in 'Vision, Voice, and Power: Feminist Art History and Marxism' is undeniable in that it mobilized the latest theoretical insights from continental philosophy and film theory to take apart the masculinist assumptions of Clark's model of Marxist art history, as well as the interwar tradition that predated his post-1968 variant.⁵⁷ While she critiqued certain types of feminist art history from the vantage point of Althusserian Marxism, she nevertheless called for a 'fruitful raiding of Marxism for its explanatory instruments' for the purposes of advancing feminist critique, with any belief in the potential reconciliation between the two positions seemingly remaindered.⁵⁸ Even when Pollock attempts to keep Marxism and feminism in some kind of productive relationship, there is a problem. As Roberts has made clear, a purported feminist historical materialism – as Pollock later defined her project – in which gender is not substituted for class, but instead shown to be somehow coterminous with it, and with race as well, is not actually any form of Marxism at all.⁵⁹ As he puts it, historical materialism foregrounds class relations and class exploitation as the primary mode of analysis, '[n]ot because the working class is the most oppressed social group, but because its structural relationship to the means of production expresses the fundamental asymmetrical relations

of power locked into the capitalist system'.⁶⁰ This does not necessarily mean that Marxism is a mono-causal system of historical explanation, but neither is it a totally open one based on symmetric relations of power, as Pollock seems to posit. As such, Roberts is clear that Pollock's critique of Clark was right in its criticism of his 'classist' treatment of gender, but wrong in its positing of gender difference as the fundamental historical division within bourgeois society.⁶¹

Nevertheless, the feminist critique of the Marxist history of art fed into the emergence of the new art history with its distrust of singular modes of explanation and a

corresponding emphasis upon methodological difference that became a characteristic feature of intellectual life in the post-Althusserian period. This, like the Marxist history of art practised by Werckmeister and Clark, also has its roots in 1968, in particular the May events in France. For if the combined student and working-class action that brought Paris and other parts of the country to a standstill was crushed, or dispersed, then these radical impulses found a more durable expression in developments in contemporary French theory. As Perry Anderson makes clear: 'structuralism proper ... passed through the ordeal of May and re-emerged phoenix-like on the other side - extenuated and modulated'.⁶² If structuralism, at least in its Althusserian manifestations, offered points of contact with Marxism, then poststructuralism was, by contrast, resolutely anti-Marxist: it emphasized the discursive over and above the ideological, and was even more vociferously anti-totalizing, these themes being exemplified paradigmatically in the work of Michel

Foucault. Thus the critique of Marxist art history – or its containment within a reinvigorated ‘social history of art’ as part of an academically institutionalized eclecticism – is cognate with the wider intellectual trends within academia as a whole. The fact that these shifts coincided with a period of political and economic retrenchment after 1979, and then the fall of the wall and the consolidation of the capitalist market within the sphere of the former Soviet Union and beyond after 1989, comes as no great surprise. That many of the figures associated with the radicalization of the subject in the aftermath of 1968 were able to establish successful teaching and publishing careers is not necessarily symptomatic of the success of the Marxist history of art in overturning its more traditional counterpart, but more – as Hemingway has argued – that their practice had been absorbed into academic art history and tolerated as one of just a number of competing methodologies within a reinvigorated discipline.⁶³ This is a process of which Clark, Werckmeister and others of their generation were acutely aware from the mid-1970s onwards.

This process of absorption is nowhere more apparent than in the success of the journal *October*, which was first published in 1976.⁶⁴ Here the conflation of contemporary avant-garde theory and the contemporary avant-garde art work forged in the pages of *Screen* has a clear afterlife within the subject of art history. Somewhat ironically – given a title that would seem to indicate some kind of meaningful relationship to the Soviet avant-garde – *October*, in its initial stages at least, represented something of a break with Marxist art history.⁶⁵ Two of its founding editors, Rosalind Krauss and

Annette Michelson, resigned from the editorial board of *Artforum* when their colleagues John Coplans and Max Kozloff attempted to shift the journal in a leftward direction to reflect the radicalization of the discipline in the United States in the early to mid-1970s. Instead, the editors of *October* are better known for promoting poststructuralist theory than Marxism, for which they showed only limited sympathy.⁶⁶ Influenced by journals such as *Tel Quel*, they drew upon the likes of Jacques Derrida,

Foucault and Lacan in analysing practices that in some cases are informed by the work of these thinkers, although, as with *Screen*, this was fused with theoretical components from Western Marxism, in particular the writings of Brecht and Benjamin, and especially the latter's work on allegory. Indeed it was through this emphasis upon the allegorical, as it was read through certain contemporary art practices, that the *October* group's particular postmodern project initially became crystallized.⁶⁷ However, as Gail Day has convincingly argued, by the 1990s any radical impulse in the earlier formulations of this project had become uncritically recuperated to represent little more than 'a loose symbolic aesthetic of the ineffable nature of art'.⁶⁸ This model of art history reproduced a binary opposition between the 'inorganic' and the 'organic' art work, and 'fragment' against 'totality', in which the attack upon any dialectical component within Marxist art history, initiated within the discipline in its Althusserian formulations, now seemed complete.⁶⁹

The fate of *October*, with its undeniable energy and rigour, is in important ways a result of the local conditions of the development of French

poststructuralism and its re-emergence in a different field. The negative stance of scholars such as Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida and others towards Marxism had much to do with the stranglehold of an institutionalized French Communist Party, one that combined a crude instrumentalization of theory with unfortunate political tactics, especially in the wake of the events of 1968. In other contexts, these figures' politically charged analysis of power and challenge to psychoanalysis could have led to an internal critique within Marxism itself - but not in France. These political sensitivities and their discursive habits crossed the Atlantic, but they had different political valences in *Tel Quel* and *October*. In the North American art-historical context, heterodox Marxisms willing to shed their name had genuine left credentials and appeal, but merged all too easily and seamlessly with the theoretical eclecticism of a new art history divested of its radical origins and energies. Thus, despite the seeming redundancy of this model of art history for the Marxist history of art, *October* has, nevertheless, published important translations of Western Marxist theory, as well as some sophisticated neo-Marxist criticism of contemporary art. This is the case particularly after 1991, when Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Hal Foster, both already contributors to the journal, joined the editorial board on a full-time basis. As with Fredric Jameson, who has since the early 1980s consistently sought to bring the theoretical departures represented by post-structuralism within the orbit of historical materialism and hold them in a productive tension, so the art criticism of Foster and Buchloh has attempted to utilize, to different degrees, the insights provided by these intellectual

shifts to bear upon a sophisticated contemporary engagement with European and American neo-avant-garde art practices - all within the remit of a Marxist emphasis upon political economy.⁷⁰ Buchloh's political formation was within the German New Left, and his criticism is more insistently

dialectical, situated as it is within the tradition of critical theory.⁷¹ In a sustained series of largely monographic essays since the late 1970s, he has increasingly turned against the politically pessimistic post-Adornian framework provided by Peter Bürger, with its outright dismissal of the potential political import of any artistic production after the failure of the historical avant-garde in the early decades of the twentieth century, to argue instead that certain artistic practices in the postwar period maintain an important critical distance from the culture industry of late capitalism.⁷² Indeed it is in the interstices of both - the avant-garde and the culture industry - that the work of the neo-avant-garde draws its critical purchase. If Buchloh rarely makes reference to poststructuralism in his writing, then Foster, in a series of essays since the early 1980s, has regularly sought to argue for a self-reflexive and oppositional postmodern art practice that has a critical relationship to a fully spectacularized commodity culture.⁷³ Buchloh invokes Benjamin and his concept of the allegorical, but more through the prism of Brecht with a concurrent emphasis upon the political project of the historical avant-garde; whereas Foster is clearly more indebted to a Jamesonian model that appropriates some of the key tenets of poststructuralism but turns them against the supposed all-encompassing processes of

recuperation that have all too often characterized discussions of the term. In this respect, Foster is also critical of Bürger's dismissal of the potential political efficacy of the neo-avant-garde.⁷⁴

As such, the work of both Buchloh and Foster represents an important extension of the Marxist history of art, if not the only contemporary variant, as we believe the essays in this anthology will demonstrate. That it is hegemonic in terms of the present state of the discipline is probably as much to do with its institutional basis within the pages of *October* – where it sits alongside work that is stridently anti-dialectical, anti-totalizing and unapologetically anti-Marxist – as it is to do with its complex and nuanced theoretical insightfulness in relation to the critical claims they make for certain neo-avant-garde art practices. Despite various institutional and collegial overlaps, none of the contributors to this volume is associated with a particular journal, set of institutions or specific discursive mode. In short, they are not centred upon the Ivy League, the ironic ultimate destination of the new art history, now no longer so new.

To return to Craig Clunas's question posed at the outset, what we hope to have made clear in this introduction is that a social history of the social history of art – or what we would want to call more specifically a Marxist history of art in its interwar, post-1968 and contemporary incarnations – has inevitably to be an institutional one. Such a history would track how the various interventions, counter-hegemonic strategies and theoretical disruptions of this tradition were explicitly pitched against the discipline in its more conventionally conservative, connoisseurial and neo-formalist

variants – ones that we would like to argue have a strange afterlife in the current headlong rush towards the contemporary and the concomitant celebration of the products

of a now fully globalized art market, a development that can in many ways be understood to have its antecedents in the pages of *October*. In this sense, we present this collection of essays as a continuation of this counter-tradition, seeking to exemplify how the dominant discourses of the subject can be subverted, reread and constantly challenged. As such, the book seeks to demonstrate that a Marxist history of art is an ongoing project, even if it has to consistently renegotiate its position vis-à-vis the ever-present dangers of incorporation and appropriation – now more persistent than ever in terms of the increasing institutional pressures of research assessment exercises and the all-important need for academics to publish. But more than this, the theoretical tools provided by Marxism are not only indispensable in any meaningful attempt to historicize the Marxist history of art, but also because their ability to systematize and totalize are essential to the wider project of critiquing the discipline of art history as a whole, in all its forms, both past and present.

¹ Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan (eds.), ‘Preface’, *Art in Bourgeois Society, 1790–1850* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998), p. xi.

² Craig Clunas, ‘Social History of Art’, in Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (eds.), *Critical Terms for Art History*, 2nd edn (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2003), pp. 465–78.

³ Andrew Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge and New York, 1992); *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926–1956* (Yale University Press: New Haven

and London, 2002); *The Mysticism of Money: Precisionist Painting and Machine Age America* (Periscope Publishing: Pittsburgh, 2013). It is also worth noting here the important anthology of texts that he co-edited with William Vaughan on the concept of bourgeois society and theoretical issues around the category of class in relation to art produced in Britain, France, Germany, and the United States in the period 1790–1850; see Hemingway and Vaughan (eds.), *Art in Bourgeois Society*, op. cit. On the Marxist history of art more generally, see Andrew Hemingway, 'Marxism and Art History after the Fall of Communism', *Art Journal*, vol. 55, no. 2 (1996), pp. 20–7; and 'Introduction' and 'New Left Art History's International', in Andrew Hemingway (ed.), *Marxism and the History of Art: From William Morris to the New Left* (Pluto Press: London, 2006), pp. 1–8, 175–95.

- 4 Andrew Hemingway, 'Meyer Schapiro and Marxism in the 1930s', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1 (1997), pp. 13–29; 'Meyer Schapiro: Marxism, Science and Art', *Marxism and the History of Art*, pp. 123–142.
- 5 It is worth pointing out here that although the major work of Hauser and Antal appeared after the war, this was because of their displacement as exiles, first from Austria and then from National Socialism in Germany. See Gail Day, *Dialectical Passions: Negation in Postwar Art Theory* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2011), p. 10.
- 6 For perhaps the most sophisticated engagement with the work of Clark, which also discusses the pertinent differences in methodology between him and Werckmeister, see Day, 'T. J. Clark and the Pain of the Unattainable Beyond', *Dialectical Passions*, op. cit., pp. 25–69.
- 7 For his critique of Adorno's aesthetic see Otto Karl Werckmeister, 'Das Kunstwerk als Negation: Zur geschichtlichen Bestimmung der Kunsttheorie Theodor W. Adorno', *Ende der Ästhetik: Essays über Adorno, Bloch, das gelbe Unterseebot und der eindimensionale Mensch* (S. Fischer: Frankfurt am Main, 1971), pp. 7–32; and of Benjamin as a misplaced model of a revolutionary intellectual, 'Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, or the Transfiguration of the Revolutionary into the Historian', *Icons of the Left: Benjamin and Eisenstein, Picasso and Kafka after the Fall of Communism* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1999), pp. 9–35.
- 8 See in particular Otto Karl Werckmeister, 'Marx on Ideology and Art', *New Literary History*, vol. 4, no. 3 (Spring 1973), pp. 501–19; 'Radical Art History', *Art Journal*, vol. 42, no. 4 (Winter 1982), pp. 284–91; 'A Working Perspective for Marxist Art History Today', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1991), pp. 83–7.

- ⁹ T. J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (Thames & Hudson: London, 1973), p. 10; *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France, 1848–1851* (Thames & Hudson: London, 1973).
- ¹⁰ See Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1996).
- ¹¹ Clark came under particular attack for this from both his supporters and detractors when he followed up the 1973 texts with his book on Manet. See T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Thames & Hudson: London, 1985). For perhaps the most sustained and trenchant critique from the left, see Adrian Rifkin, 'Marx's Clarkism', *Art History*, vol. 8, no. 4 (December 1986), pp. 488–95. This alleged hagiography of the venerable tradition of great artists could also be levelled at Clark's almost *fin-de-siècle* anthology *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1999). For an example of Werckmeister's engagement with cultural works that fall outside of such canonical histories, see *Citadel Culture* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1991).
- ¹² Werckmeister, 'Radical Art History', op. cit., p. 284; Clark, 'Preface to the New Edition', *Image of the People*, 2nd edn (Thames & Hudson: London, 1982), p. 6. For Clark on Situationism, see T. J. Clark and Donald Nicholson-Smith, 'Why Art Can't Kill the Situationist International', *October*, vol. 79 (Winter 1997), pp. 15–31.
- ¹³ Werckmeister, 'Radical Art History', op. cit., p. 284; Clark, 'Preface to the New Edition', *Image of the People*, 2nd edn, op. cit., p. 6.
- ¹⁴ Clark, *Image of the People*, 2nd edn, op. cit., p. 6.
- ¹⁵ As Clark succinctly put it: 'For diversification, read disintegration.' T. J. Clark, 'On the Conditions of Artistic Creation', *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 May 1974, p. 562.
- ¹⁶ A. L. Rees and Frances Borzello (eds.), *The New Art History* (Camden Press: London, 1986). It is worth noting that this anthology did contain essays that were already critical of both the term and what it might represent. See in particular Tom Gretton, 'New Lamps for Old', pp. 63–74; and Adrian Rifkin, 'Art's Histories', pp. 157–63.
- ¹⁷ Clark, *Image of the People*, 2nd edn, op. cit., p. 10.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.

- ¹⁹ On Klingender, see David Bindman, 'Art as Social Consciousness: Francis Klingender and British Art'; on Antal, see Paul Stirton, 'Frederick Antal'; and on Hauser, see John Roberts, 'Arnold Hauser, Adorno, Lukács and the Ideal Spectator'; all in Hemingway (ed.), *Marxism and the History of Art*, pp. 67–88, 45–66, 161–74.
- ²⁰ See Max Raphael, 'The Marxist History of Art', John Tagg (ed.), *Proudhon, Marx, Picasso: Essay in Marxist Aesthetics* (Lawrence & Wishart: London, 1981), pp. 75–112; and Tagg, 'The Method of Max Raphael: Art History Set Back on Its Feet', *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 12 (Winter 1975), pp. 3–10; 'The Method of Criticism and its Objects in Max Raphael's Theory of Art', *Block*, vol. 2 (1980), pp. 2–14.
- ²¹ John Roberts, 'Introduction: Art Has No History! Reflections on Art History and Historical Materialism', Roberts (ed.), *Art Has No History!: The Making and Unmaking of Modern Art* (Verso: London, 1994), p. 5. The *Grundrisse*, of which this text was the opening section, was not published in its entirety until 1939–41 in Moscow.
- ²² Raphael and Schapiro eventually fell out over their different responses to the Moscow Trials.
- ²³ For Schapiro on modernism, see his celebrated 'Nature of Abstract Art', *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries: Selected Papers II* (George Braziller: New York, 1978), pp. 185–211.
- ²⁴ See in particular Herbert Read, *The Politics of the Unpolitical* (Routledge: London, 1943).
- ²⁵ See in particular Francis Donald Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution* (Royle: London, 1948); *Hogarth and English Caricature* (Transatlantic Arts: London, 1944); and *Goya in the Democratic Tradition* (Sidgwick & Jackson: London, 1948).
- ²⁶ Roberts, 'Introduction: Art Has No History!', op. cit., pp. 6–7.
- ²⁷ See Frederick Antal, *Classicism and Romanticism with Other Studies in Art History* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1966).
- ²⁸ Hemingway, 'Introduction', *Marxism and the History of Art*, p. 6. See Frederick Antal, *Hogarth and his Place in European Art* (Basic Books: New York, 1962), pp. 213–17.
- ²⁹ Under the Hungarian Soviet Republic, Antal was chair of Budapest's Museum of Fine Arts and Hauser was a literary theory specialist at the Secondary-School Teacher-Training College alongside Karl Mannheim. See Day, *Dialectical Passions*, op. cit., p. 11.

- ³⁰ Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, 2 vols (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1951). Reprinted in four volumes in 1962.
- ³¹ Ernst Gombrich, 'The Social History of Art', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 35 (March 1935), pp. 79–84.
- ³² Arnold Hauser, *The Sociology of Art* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1982); Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations* (Fontana: Glasgow, 1973), pp. 219–53.
- ³³ Roberts, 'Introduction: Art Has No History!', op. cit., p. 8. For Roberts, these prefigurations include a range of themes that would be taken up within the subject after the impact of Althusserianism, most significantly, perhaps, in Nicos Hadjinicolaou, *Art History and Class Struggle* (Pluto Press: London, 1978), which directly linked its author's work to the earlier tradition in Marxist art history, even if it in fact represents a distinct break in its embrace of structuralism.
- ³⁴ Roberts, 'Introduction: Art Has No History!', op. cit., p. 2. In particular he mentions the important role played by Victor Burgin and Art and Language in this context. On the radicalization of art schools at the time, see Lisa Tickner, *Hornsey 1968: The Art School Revolution* (Frances Lincoln: London, 2008).
- ³⁵ Werckmeister, 'Radical Art History', op. cit., p. 284.
- ³⁶ For an analysis of the development of Marxist art history in West Germany with specific relationship to the residual role of National Socialism within academia, see Jutta Held, 'New Left Art History and Fascism in Germany', Hemingway (ed.), *Marxism and the History of Art*, op. cit., pp. 196–212.
- ³⁷ See Hemingway, 'New Left History's International', op. cit., pp. 175–7, for a detailed history of the formation of radical art history in Western Germany in the period in question.
- ³⁸ Ibid., p. 176.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 177.
- ⁴⁰ Again, see Hemingway, 'New Left History's International', op. cit., pp. 177–81, for a detailed institutional history of these events.
- ⁴¹ T. J. Clark, 'Preliminary Arguments: Work of Art and Ideology' and Otto Karl Werckmeister, 'From Marxist to Critical Art History', *Papers Presented to the Marxism and Art History Session of the College Art Association and Meeting in Chicago, February 1976*, pp. 5–6, 29–30.

- 42** This, as Hemingway has flagged up, includes Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, 'The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis', *Marxist Perspectives*, vol. 1, no. 4 (Winter 1978), pp. 28–51; Duncan and Wallach, 'The Universal Survey Museum', *Art History*, vol. 3, no. 4 (December 1980), pp. 447–69; Eunice Lipton, 'The Laundress in Late Nineteenth-Century French Culture', *Art History*, vol. 3, no. 3 (September 1980), pp. 295–313; Serge Guilbaut, 'Greenberg, Pollock, or from Trotskyism to the New Liberalism of the "Vital Center"', *October*, no. 15 (Winter 1980), pp. 61–78; and David Kunzle, 'Bruegel's Proverb Painting and the World Turned Upside Down', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 59, no. 2 (June 1977), pp. 197–202.
- 43** Hemingway, 'New Left History's International', op. cit., p. 181. For his analysis of the genesis of Marxist art history in Britain, see pp. 181–7.
- 44** Ibid., p. 181.
- 45** See Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, 'Memories Still to Come ... An Introduction', *Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed*, op. cit., pp. viii–xii; John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1972); 'Ways of Seeing', *Art-Language*, vol. 4, no. 3 (October 1978); Kurt W. Forster, 'Critical History of Art, or a Transfiguration of Values?', *New Literary History*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1972), pp. 459–70.
- 46** For a classic text in this vein, see Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds.), *Resistance Through Rituals* (Hutchinson: London, 1976).
- 47** For a CCCS text that deals more overtly with the theoretical impact of Althusser and Gramsci, see Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies, *On Ideology* (Hutchinson: London, 1978). For an account of the institutional resistance to Marxism within British sociology, see Perry Anderson, 'Components of the National Culture', *English Questions* (Verso: London, 1992), pp. 48–104.
- 48** For a sympathetic history and analysis of *Screen*, see Anthony Easthope, 'The Trajectory of Screen', Francis Barker et al. (eds.), *The Politics of Theory: Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature, July 1982* (University of Essex: Colchester, 1983), pp. 121–133. Ben Brewster was an important link between the *Screen* editorial board and New Left Books, which translated and published key texts in Western Marxism from Lukács through to Althusser.
- 49** Orton and Pollock, 'Memories Still to Come ...', op. cit., p. xii. Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1978).

- 50** See George Robertson (ed.), *The Block Reader in Visual Culture* (Routledge: London, 1996).
- 51** See John Tagg, 'The Method of Criticism and its Objects in Max Raphael's Theory of Art'; Adrian Rifkin, 'Can Gramsci Save Art History?', *Block*, no. 3, pp. 37–9 (1980); and Alan Wallach, 'In Search of a Marxist Theory of Art History', *Block*, no. 4 (1981), p. 17.
- 52** Hemingway, 'New Left History's International', op. cit., pp. 182–3.
- 53** Roberts, 'Introduction: Art Has No History!', op. cit., p. 9. On the problems with Althusserianism in general, see Simon Clarke et al., *One-Dimensional Marxism: Althusser and the Politics of Culture* (Allison & Busby: London, 1980); and for its implications for art history, see Roberts, 'Introduction: Art Has No History!', op. cit., pp. 9–14; and Hemingway, 'New Left History's International', op. cit., pp. 187–95.
- 54** Jon Bird, 'On Newness, Art and History: Reviewing *Block* 1979–85', Rees and Borzello (eds.), *The New Art History*, op. cit., p. 37.
- 55** See in particular in this regard, Annette Kuhn and AnnMarie Wolpe (eds.), *Feminism and Materialism: Women and Modes of Production* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1978); and in the sphere of Marxist-feminist art history, Carol Duncan, *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in a Critical Art History* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1993).
- 56** T. J. Clark, 'Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of "Olympia" in 1865', *Screen*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring, 1980), pp. 18–41.
- 57** Griselda Pollock, 'Vision, Voice, and Power: Feminist Art History and Marxism', *Block*, no. 6 (1982), pp. 2–21. The importance of this intervention, and the problems associated with it, are discussed by both Roberts and Hemingway. See Roberts, 'Introduction: Art Has No History!', op. cit., pp. 13–20; Hemingway, 'New Left History's International', op. cit., pp. 183–4.
- 58** Pollock, 'Vision, Voice, and Power', op. cit., p. 21.
- 59** See Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (Routledge: London, 1988).
- 60** Roberts, 'Introduction: Art Has No History!', op. cit., p. 16.
- 61** Ibid., p. 17.
- 62** Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 39.

- 63** Hemingway, ‘New Left History’s International’, p. 194.
- 64** For an overview of the first decade of the journal, see Annette Michelson, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp and Joan Copjec (eds.), *October: The First Decade* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986).
- 65** For a nuanced account of the political problems with this particular trajectory within *October*, see Day, ‘Absolute Dialectical Unrest Or, the Dizziness of a Perpetually Self-Engendered Disorder’, *Dialectical Passions*, op. cit., pp. 132–81.
- 66** This direction was signalled at the outset in that Krauss and Michelson resigned from *Artforum* specifically because the editorial board refused to publish Foucault’s 1968 essay ‘*Ceci n’est pas une pipe*’, which then appeared in translation in the very first issue of *October*. See *ibid.*, p. 134.
- 67** *Ibid.*, p. 134. For an important contribution in this regard, see Craig Owens, ‘The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism’, *October*, vol. 12 (Spring 1980), pp. 67–86 and ‘The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism Part 2’, *October*, vol. 13 (Summer 1980), pp. 58–80.
- 68** Day, *Dialectical Passions*, op. cit., p. 133.
- 69** *Ibid.*
- 70** For the initial, and now canonical, example of this argument, see Fredric Jameson, ‘Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism’, *New Left Review*, no. 146, (July–August 1984), pp. 53–92; and Day, ‘The Immobilizations of Social Abstraction’, *Dialectical Passions*, op. cit., pp. 182–245, for a sustained engagement with the work of Buchloh, Foster and Jameson – and the problems with what she describes as the ‘dematerialisation’ in their particular brand of post-1968 Marxism.
- 71** For a collection of his essays, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000); and for his own lucid account of his political and intellectual trajectory, see ‘Introduction’, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry*, pp. xvii–xxxiii.
- 72** Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (University of Minneapolis Press: Minneapolis, 1984). This influential critique of the autonomy of art as an essentially bourgeois concept argues that only Dada,

Constructivism and Surrealism constituted an avant-garde in their turn against the bourgeois institutions of display.

- ⁷³ See Hal Foster (ed.), 'Postmodernism: A Preface', *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodernist Culture* (Bay Press: Seattle, 1983), pp. ix–xvi, for an early attempt at theorising this critical distinction; and *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Bay Press: Seattle, 1985), for a collection of his earlier essays that apply this to contemporary art practices at that time.
- ⁷⁴ See Hal Foster, 'Introduction', *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996) for his most sustained polemic against Bürger.

INTRODUCTION

TOWARDS A HISTORY OF THE MARXIST HISTORY
OF ART

Warren Carter

MARXIST THEORY IN PRACTICE

LANDSCAPE, CLASS AND IDEOLOGY

MARXISM AND THE SHAPING OF MODERNISM

MARXISM IN A NEW WORLD ORDER

ART HISTORY'S FURIES

John Roberts

'There is a solidarity based on something other than victimization.'
Meridel Le Sueur

It is easy to forget how conservatively entrenched art history was in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. Its governing institutions embraced a mixture of empiricism, traditional iconographic studies and evolutionary formalism, with Ernst Gombrich as its ruling *maître* and gatekeeper. Its narrowness was matched by its reactionary addiction to certain notions of 'quality' and 'value'. There were exceptions to this consensus – for instance, Arnold Hauser's brilliant work on art history, agency and subjectivity in his still overlooked masterpiece *The Philosophy of Art History* (1959)¹ – and the continuing work of an earlier generation of Marxist art historians, but the majority of the work was marginal to the discipline to say the least. More importantly though, Marxist art history itself was trapped, like its conservative antithesis, within a methodological impasse. Oblivious or indifferent to the extraordinary technical, cognitive and cultural transformation of art and its criticism in the first decades of the twentieth century, the attempt on the part of Marxist art historians in the 1940s and 1950s, such as Francis Klingender and Frederick Antal, to reconstruct an artisanal painterly realism at the centre of a would-be radical art history

looked bathetic and after-the-fact.² No wonder Hauser left Britain: the pincer movement of a Stalinized counter-canonic historicism on the one hand and a historicizing panoply of Great Western painterly achievement on the other presented a dismal mixture of righteous politicking and bourgeois genuflection. Indeed, both traditions shared all the old and familiar traits of an inflationary humanism in which a succession of Great Art and Great (Male) Artists brings to life the unfolding ‘drama of humanity’. That is why, if you were fortunate enough to have read Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ in French in Britain in the 1940s,³ and taken its problems seriously – as Hauser had done – your sense of the place of Western art and Western art history would certainly be less sanguine. In fact, you might say that the aestheticism and formalism of traditional art history were strikingly morbid. Moreover, you also might say, in an echo of Nietzsche in *Untimely Meditations*,⁴ that both Stalinist humanism’s and bourgeois humanism’s obsession with the glories of precedent was a way of beating the modern over the head.

With art history in Britain at such an impasse, it is no surprise that it imploded in the way that it did in the early 1970s. Unable to shift its objects of reflection in any meaningful sense, or to open them up to new forms of historical scrutiny, it ran aground when faced with the new social forces (the post-1968 workers’ movement, the women’s movement, postcolonial struggle) and new methodological demands (anti-humanist Marxism and psychoanalysis; the critique of the art object as artefact; the hermeneutic significance of heterodox

or ‘secondary’ forms of cultural production) that were then sweeping through the discipline. The initial response on the part of traditional art history was quick and sharp: the new methodologies, the new evaluations and judgments, the new traditions, the new categories were relativistic, didactic, aesthetically impoverished, imperious – art history will overcome this and see this out. This reaction was in many ways clearly driven by a conservative alliance of anti-Marxists, anti-feminists and the intellectual patrons of art history’s prominent place in the Great Tradition. But these condemnations were in fact less to do with reactionary bravura than an explicit material recognition of where art history had to sit if it were to do its job, or any worthwhile job: that is, to provide a reliable service of connoisseurship and attribution for the museum. In this respect, the worldly place that art history recovered for itself out of what I would describe as the discipline’s intellectual ‘nervous breakdown’ in the 1960s made its subservient role to the museum and its market imperatives all the more explicit. Thus, paradoxically, in confronting its own intellectual limitations and occlusions, it reattached itself to its traditional function, making art history of necessity – and, therefore, without evasion – an adjunct to museology. This is why most art history today survives largely as a servant of the intimate relationship between the market and the museum, in which the business of attribution, evaluation and judgment-towards-procurement makes the market safe for the museum and the museum safe for the market – no different in fact from Bernard Berenson’s forays into the world of private consultation at the end of the nineteenth century (which Berenson and his generation of art

historians were desperate to keep secret, for fear of undermining the image of impartial and independent scholarship).

Thus if the new art history in the 1970s sought to jam up, or disrupt, these lines of support and provision, it soon became clear that reshuffling or expanding the canon was no answer to the fundamental relationship between art history and the facilitation of a free exchange of commodities on the market. Expanding the canon, reversing hierarchies and opening up aesthetic judgment to objects traditionally excluded from its purview simply revivified the relations between the market and the museum. Indeed, in this respect, it was just what the traditional machinery of attribution and judgment-towards-procurement called for in order for it to stay in business.

Consequently, many radical art historians of this generation withdrew from the traditional domain of canonically defined artistic judgment, either moving into areas that art history had always looked down upon and had little interest in reclaiming (the graphic arts, posters, native or indigenous arts) or exiting art history altogether into other realms of study such as philosophical aesthetics or photo-theory.⁵

There was a clear question to be addressed then for the fledgling radical or Marxist art historian: where should one place one's transformative energies? Inside this expanded orbit of high culture, or outside of it in the sphere of popular visual practices? Many writers chose the latter and were central to establishing what we now know as cultural studies, urban and environmental theory, moving-image theory and their interdisciplinary

offshoots. (The nervous breakdown of art history was also the rebirth of cultural theory more generally.) Those who decided to stay within the bounds of art history, however, saw the nature of the political and critical work to be done from a different position. For all the museal limitations of the discipline, it was imperative that the historicization and critical reception of *art* was not left unopposed to the conservative and liberal connoisseurship that was regaining ground. As such, historicization was made to function as an explicit intervention in, and reflection on, the present as a means of defining the new *in art*, or, conversely, exposing its limitations. At one level, this strategy was no different from Hauser's art history and the older Marxist approach: the problems of the past have a determinate bearing upon the blockages and hiatuses of the present. But under conditions where the very ontology of the art object had broken down (post-Constructivism, post-Dada, post-conceptual art), the questions and issues art history posed to the past became defined by their overt relationship to the present. This methodological shift to an art history of the present, so to speak, was clearly discernible in British and North American art history following the English translation of Theodor W. Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* in 1984.⁶ Admittedly, Adorno was not the only intellectual source for this shift - Gramsci's work on hegemony and post-Althusserian studies of ideological state apparatuses were also contributory factors, along with Lacanian feminism - but for those on the left who 'stayed in' art history, Adorno's anti-historicism and emphasis on form as a political problem were increasingly influential, either directly or indirectly, and established a space

for new research. In this respect, after art history's nervous breakdown, Adorno's writing operated as an explicit anti-historicist 'shifter' in challenging the methodological limits of the legacy of Marxist and bourgeois humanism, irrespective of his actual influence on specific art historians. Hence, in Adornian terms, historicization became a source of reflection, not simply on 'quality' or 'maintaining quality' in art, but on the value of the questions art history asks of the art of the past, pushing art history closer to the heuristic demands of art theory. In these terms, the value of art history is premised on the quality of the questions it poses to the present, as much as those it asks of the past. This means

exposing art history - following German critical theory more generally - to a transcendental method, in which political economy and the social production of art are not simply the 'backdrop' to artistic exemplariness but the very *substance* of its structural limitations, aporiae and possibilities. In other words, the historical art work becomes a set of conflicts that artists inherit, deflect, obscure, remake, expand or redefine under different conditions and with different expectations. Indeed, if art history is to be adequate to the contemporary and future conditions of art's production, it must proceed from the blockages and hiatuses of the present. This means breaking, in a fundamental way, with the old historicist and evolutionary machinery of 'influences' that assume an unproblematic symmetry between art work, artist and social context.

This is not exactly the revival of Heinrich Wölfflin's art history without names, in which individual artistic production is subject to the accumulated

weight of formal precedent. But, nevertheless, making the art work visible as a site of conflict in this way means that the unfolding of art cannot be seen in terms of the mystifications of self-expression. The subjectivity of the artist is the outcome of the problems and aporetic conditions in which he or she finds him- or herself. This art history is materialist in its disregard for 'creativity' over and above artistic production as a determinate set of inherited (destabilizing) problems. The materialist instantiation of the art work as subject to internal conflict, therefore, redefines art history as a dialectical encounter with the art work as set of productive troublespots and symptoms.

One can see a little bit clearer, then, why Marxist and radical historians stayed in art history. To historicize art in these terms is also to defend it as a source of counter-knowledge and resistance to the culture that would domesticate it or academicize its affects and insights. Hence, as Adorno's influence deepened in leftist art history in the 1990s, the advocacy of a dialectical 'art history' became first and foremost a defence of the dissensual and negative powers of art within the culture. Art is not just an ideological effect of the market and the museum, but also a set of practices and knowledges that are at variance with, and unassimilable to, the logic of the commodity-form. Artistic forms may circulate as commodities but this does not mean that the use-values of art are thereby simply subordinate to the equivalence of exchange-value. Even if the majority of art works circulate as dry goods within the market and museum, art's non-equivalent status as a commodity (its irreducibility to the timelines and repetitions of the value-form) is the condition of its theoretical

emergence and self-transformation as art. In other words, the art work-as-commodity stands outside the terms of commodity relations as normally understood. Thus, staying in 'art history' is precisely about defending this residual non-equivalence (or autonomy) of art *against* its subordination to inherited academic practices, the democracy of 'mass culture' and the technical dissolution into the domain of the popular technological image. Art, as emergent category, represents an irreducible source of speculative and non-identitary practice and thinking.

As such, the rush into popular culture, as a way of resolving art's museal status, begins to appear as a potential categorical error.

That is why, if exiting art history for this generation of radical art historians was about 'democratizing' art as a diverse range of reproducible cultural practices, staying within the discipline was, conversely, about defending art's autonomy against its reduction to the effects and demands of the capitalist sensorium (although it was never simply a debate about non-reproducibility and autonomy as such; 'staying in' art history was never about defending the non-reproducible modernist object *per se*). For Marxist art historians, such a defence becomes a holdout, or a placeholder, in Adorno's classic formulation, for the delayed promise of a non-alienated culture. And, therefore, the reworking of the canon, for all its limitations, is the site where this defence of non-equivalence must occur.

Andrew Hemingway's art-historical writing is very much the product of this preceding history and its intellectual horizons. As a historian who has 'stayed in' art history, he has focused largely on defending

the emancipatory promise of art as the fulcrum for the reworking and extension of the canon. As such, his work through the 1990s and into the new millennium insisted on providing a counter-hegemonic space within the discipline. But the development of this position has been far from straightforward. It was not as if Hemingway simply settled on an 'enlightened' (Adornian) dialectical method. On the contrary, his early work was still sympathetic to a Marxist-humanist critique of the bourgeois canon, in which it is the job of the historian both to rub the bourgeois artefact against the grain (to expose its ideological fissures) and, coterminously, to propose an alternative range of artefacts that either expose the divisions and exclusions of 'bourgeois culture' or directly confront it through an explicit alliance with socialist or radical politics. The first position derives from the reading of primary and would-be secondary works in the canon as aporetic sites of class tension (as in John Barrell's pioneering and exemplary work on Constable, Gainsborough and the eighteenth-century English landscape tradition, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*);⁷ and the second comes from an orthodox Marxist defence of social realism as a source of 'class consciousness' that is veiled or excluded by modernism more generally. Crucially, therefore, Marxism in art history occupies here the classical territory of postwar Marxist aesthetics in which modernism is as much a problem for artistic form as the solution. Modernism may have won the cultural high ground, but the histories of realism provide a range of resources for reshaping the canon in productive, heterodox ways (certainly after the demise of late American modernism). Accordingly, Hemingway

largely operated at first within this conventional dyad of modernism/realism, in which the antinomies of representation provide the source for both a rewriting of the exclusions of the pre-modern painterly canon and the proposal of an alternative painterly aesthetic after the cul-de-sacs of late modernism.⁸ The possibilities and limits of realism in painting thereby became the primary terrain upon which a new Marxist history set out its stall.



1 Greg Sholette, *A Scholar on the Left: Andrew Hemingway*, 2013, bas-relief sculpture, plaster, 21.6 cm × 27.9 cm.

One can see the extent to which the traditional armature of art history as a discipline aligns itself with the classical ideals of Marxist humanism: the

defence of non-equivalence is best serviced through the medium of painting, in so far as a painting remains the principal artistic site of sensuous vitality and complexly embedded social meaning. As such, it has remained the focus of Hemingway's major interests throughout his career. Painting - be it Constable, Cotman, Neue Sachlichkeit, 1930s social realism, the Mexican muralists or the Precisionists - is where his dialectical and counter-hegemonic work has taken him. Indeed, surprisingly for an art historian who was formed in the period of art history's disconnection from its pre-modern and modern objects of painterly reverence,

Hemingway has hardly ever referenced, let alone written about, photography, conceptual practices, installation art or post-object aesthetics. Whatever counter-hegemonic principles have been formulated and worked through have been solidly grounded in a conventional leftist canon of realist and realist-modernist painterly achievement. This has produced a tension in his avowal to 'stay in' art history, between his commitment to a dialectical encounter with the art object as a conflicted and aporetic entity and his broader advocacy of a popular democratic culture from below that is reliant neither on museums nor on the commercial calendar and mass cultural provision, and in which painting would play only a subsidiary role (if one at all). In some sense, the commitment to the latter has been shaped and constrained by the vicissitudes of the former.

This position derives from Hemingway's attachment to the social programmes of the arts in the United States in the 1930s. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that his counter-hegemonic art

history is overwhelmingly determined by the experience and achievements of this period, the most extensive and successful confrontation with bourgeois culture from below in the whole of twentieth-century capitalism. Consequently, Hemingway appears to place a greater emphasis on the significance of New Deal cultural democracy above that of the Russian Revolution itself. This is not because the 'cultural front' of the New Deal produced works of greater merit than the Russian Revolution, or that it generated a more enduring literature or persuasive theory, but because it mobilized far more workers in the production and reception of a range of cultural practices, both inside and outside of the market, than the heroic days of the Russian avant-garde. This might appear adventitious, and indeed conservative; without the world-transforming precedents of the Russian Revolution there would have been no American 'cultural front' in the 1930s, just as without the Russian avant-garde there would have been no rethinking of the objects of art history. But Hemingway is not downplaying the structural connection between the Russian avant-garde and a new art history for any transformative understanding of the category of art and its social claims. Rather, the New Deal's 'cultural front' offers a critical purchase on cultural change from below *under capitalism*, in a historical epoch where the memory and actuality of the Russian Revolution and the Russian avant-garde is obviously attenuated. In this sense, the politics of Hemingway's dialectical art history are closer to the worldliness of state policy than they are to the challenges of art as revolutionary technique. That is why much of his writings on the modern period have been embedded

in the language of social and political provision rather than the language of avant-garde resistance. He is less interested in the cognitive transgressions and interruptions of works themselves – of the negations of artistic form – than in how art speaks to, or fails to speak to, its possible extra-artistic visibility and efficacy.

Of course, the radical achievements of the ‘cultural front’ are no less delimited as an exemplar for culture today than those of the Russian avant-garde itself, but this

does not obscure what Hemingway takes to be the real intersection between cultural production and popular democracy as a model of non-market capitalist statecraft that New Deal culture instantiated. What is at stake for him as an art historian is a kind of making legible of those moments within capitalism where the possibility of another world, another set of cultural relations, is made palpable. Thus it is not surprising that the New Deal ‘cultural front’ – an era in US history all too easily erased by ideologues of the ‘American Century’ – looms so large in his vision because it represents the most extensive period under capitalism in the twentieth century when the coordinates of an alternative cultural actuality were put in place. Bourgeois culture did not lose its hegemony in the United States, obviously; nevertheless, for almost ten years it had to contest the legitimacy of its products and ideals with organized labour, which resulted in an extraordinary range of experiments from below, across the fields of realism and modernism. One may ask then: does Hemingway see the ‘cultural front’ as lost opportunity in a way that is no different from the Russian Revolution (and thus to

be mourned) or as a model of provision and political alliance that contemporary art under late capitalism might learn from now? His writing from the left is not noted for its mournfulness, so we must presume that the dominance of the New Deal ‘cultural front’ in his thinking represents something close to the latter – namely, an exemplary moment in art in which a progressive popular culture and working-class creativity intersected: ‘the arts projects stand out as a striking anomaly through which the subordination of artistic production to the market was for a brief period effectively challenged’.⁹ Yet if he acknowledges the institutional and practical achievements of this moment, pointedly revealing how the US state took on a ‘progressive’ role in the 1930s, he is clear how much of this culture was built on shifting political sands, as evidenced by the demise of the left once the United States entered the war in 1941. Thus, although he remains an ardent defender of Michael Denning’s view of the ‘cultural front’ as establishing a new historical bloc and moral economy,¹⁰ he distances himself from Denning’s view that this produced an engaged class consciousness. Despite the widespread support of popular democracy and the left cultural turn, there was a seeming inability of working-class discontent in the United States in the 1930s and early 1940s to ‘cohere into a sustained class politics’.¹¹ In this respect, Hemingway follows David Brody and Gary Gerstle’s work on US labour politics in the 1930s: inter-ethnic alliances and anti-capitalist politics in the period were surprisingly fragile, indeed overly ‘culturalist’ as opposed to class-based.¹² As such, he is absolutely frank about the political limitations of the ‘cultural front’ once capital regained the

initiative during and after the war. He has no illusions about how such counter-hegemonic cultural initiatives can survive in the long run without a fundamental confrontation with capital and the state.

What distinguishes Hemingway's art history from most social history operating in the wake of art history's nervous breakdown is that it is profoundly attached to the

history of the left itself. Indeed, for Hemingway, the objects of art history and the struggles of the left in the twentieth century mutually presuppose each other. This makes his counter-hegemonic art history quite distinct from the majority of the new social art history, which is either utterly generic in its radicalism, or indifferent to the political struggles immanent to shifts in cultural policy and artistic transformations. As a result, it has been concerned to lay to rest the assumption that one can 'do' art history's relationship to politics through recourse to the most generalized of oppositions – Stalinism versus liberalism; Trotskyism versus Stalinism; realism versus modernism; artists versus the state – as if designating a work, or set of works, as 'modernist' (and therefore anti-Stalinist) settles the complex relationship between realism, modernism and political commitment between 1930 and 1970. On the contrary, these familiar polarities enclose a shifting range of alliances and overlaps that make the production of the political in modern art – and the production of modern art in and through the categories of the political – a more fraught question than either the social history of art or modernist art history would accept. Crucial to this for Hemingway is the ideological and cultural status of Stalinism itself. Stalinism, because of its overwhelming

identification with the figures of ‘communism’ and ‘anti-capitalism’, has served little more than a cipher for aesthetic and cultural repression in postwar art history, resulting in an unwillingness on the part of historians to accept the divisions, oppositions and antinomies within its political and cultural formation for fear of endorsing Stalinism as such. The Trotskyist and liberal autopsy of cultural Thermidor in the Soviet Union after 1929 and ‘actually existing socialism’ after the 1950s has, therefore, failed to recognize the difference between Stalinism (as a repressive and reactionary programme of defence of ‘socialism in one country’) and non-Soviet Stalinism as internally conflicted space of the ‘communist idea’. To defend the reality of the latter is not to defend the iniquities of the former, but rather to recognize that in countries outside of the immediate influence of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) – such as the United States in the 1930s – the designation Stalinism/communism was a wider space of dissensus and anti-capitalist identification than ‘Sovietism’. Indeed, in the US between the late 1920s and late 1930s, the formation of ‘Stalinism’ had to contend with (accommodate and negotiate with) a range of popular democratic impulses and forces that had a distinct Americanist tenor and character, making it impossible for the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) to ‘Sovietize’ its counter-hegemonic strategies, particularly in the area of race and racism. Accordingly, to be a (non-Trotskyist) communist or radical leftist in the United States was in no sense to endorse all the things the CPSU or CPUSA believed ‘Stalinism’ to be, even if one accepted the historic prestige of the Soviet Union itself.

Thus for Hemingway to open up the dyad Stalinism/communism in this way is not only to acknowledge the range of political subjectivities that shaped the historic bloc of the 'cultural front' (under CPUSA leadership), but to dissociate realism from a Sovietized Stalinism, an association fundamental to modernist (and quasi-Trotskyist) art history, as exemplified by Clement Greenberg's 1939 essay 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch'.¹³ In fact, recognizing the value of the former entails the necessity of the latter. Therefore, what is at stake for Hemingway is precisely a dialectical art history that is adequate to the vicissitudes of modernity and to recent political history: an art history in which anti-Stalinism is not to override the opening up of Stalinism to its heteroclite political formation. Anti-Stalinism may have defined the modernist narratives of the twentieth century but, to date, such a position has also allowed a huge amount of radical work to be lost to condescension or crude divisions. In his major book on American politics and art, *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926–1956*, Hemingway's aim is no less a complete reassessment of social-realist practices along these lines, practices that once played such a large part in the visual cultures of the New Deal, yet have fallen out of favour since the historic 'victory' of postwar American modernism and the subsequent retreat from painterly realist modes. As he asserts, such a revision in the book is not an apology for Stalinism, or to make a Stalinized culture more palatable, but to show how Stalinism/state communism served as 'a focus for socialist aspirations' across a range of artistic practices.¹⁴ *Artists on the Left*, then, at one level follows Denning in discussing the visual arts and cultural

form as part of the historic bloc of the ‘cultural front’; but, unlike Denning, it also looks at how the cultural policies of the CPUSA and the political subjectivities of the ‘cultural front’ actually intersected and clashed as a constitutive part of this bloc and its diverse cultural practices and artistic allegiances. Thus, although there have been many studies in which social realism and the left cultural turn have been invoked in relation to the cultural policies of the CPUSA and ‘Stalinism’, there have been few studies, as Hemingway argues, in which there is a discussion of ‘the organisations through which this was effected, [and] how the CP’s shifting aesthetic ideology was registered in artistic practice’.¹⁵ Moreover, his revisionism is also temporal. He dissents from the view that the left cultural turn was in decline in the late 1930s with the collapse of the anti-fascist front (which was so crucial in spreading the influence of cultural leftism beyond the remit of the party). On the contrary, work within the – albeit depleted – ‘cultural front’ continued well into the late 1940s, when, with the arrival of the Cold War, state repression finally made it impossible to openly pursue any popular counter-hegemonic project.

This restorative history of the left *in* art in the United States, then, serves a particular methodological function for an art history resistant to the usual narrative of modernism against realism. Realism and popular claims on the public sphere are not external to the claims of modernism more broadly in the 1930s, nor are these claims exhausted by the end of the decade. Greenberg’s reductive polarization of realist kitsch to modernist self-reflection serves only to simplify the New Deal conjuncture in

the interests of a tendentious expulsion of ‘politics’ from matters of artistic judgment. Hemingway believes, therefore, that any broader assessment of this period – beyond the clichés of modernist anti-Stalinism – cannot begin without the political and factional history of the period being put into place as the means whereby other critical judgments can be legitimately made: ‘from a better history to better judgement. My point is not that aesthetic criteria can be finally decided – knowledge only provides the grounds for judgement in this area, it cannot itself deliver them – but that with a better history we can at least have more grounded and fruitful dialogues about such matters.’¹⁶ But providing better grounds for making such judgments is a fraught business when it comes to the primary concern of *Artists on the Left*: namely, the refurbishment of realist painting in the 1930s and 1940s as a rational, humanist antipode to the alienated affects of mass culture and the capitalist sensorium. For, although Hemingway may revise and nuance our assessment of the place of ‘Stalinism’ within the realist/modernist debate in the period – ‘dereifying’ it, so to speak – the painterly materials that he has to work with are limited to say the least. Much of the social-realist easel painting he discusses – irrespective of its varied debts to expressive or geometric modernist form or the superimpositions of montage – is weakly academic or insidiously imitative of both European realism and modernism. There are isolated works of note, and periods in various artists’ careers where the dialogue between modernism and realism can match European achievements, but, overall, painting in this period is too easily won over to sentiment or pathos. Consequently, if Hemingway is

concerned to stress the significance of debates on modernism from *within* the Americanized 'Stalinist' purview of realism, the broad ambition during the 'cultural front' for a 'socialized modernism' in painting never really catches fire. The achievements of the New Deal mural stand, in some sense, separate from easel painting and, as such, constitute what is truly innovative about painting's contribution to the 'cultural front': a public wall painting that gave interpellative clarity and collective symbolic form to the aims and achievements of the 'left turn'. However, the possibility of developing these experiments as a public social-modernist practice never got off the ground and so was never in a position to test or rebuff the hubris of Abstract Expressionism. Yet, the affection in which the remaining murals are still held indicates that before the recrudescence of modernist easel painting after 1945, this model of a public painting had a residual ideological role to play in the development of a popular democracy in the United States. The murals were important sites of public dissensus and non-compliance. Pointing to this, though, does not obviate the wider problems that Hemingway's reclamative painterly-humanist art history faces at this juncture: painting, even in public mural form, could not do the requisite critical work on modernism some believed possible in the 1930s and 1940s; and nor could it do so, even more emphatically, after the 1950s and 1960s. *Artists on the Left* is therefore a long goodbye not just to the state interventionist idealism of Roosevelt's New Deal, but also to the classical humanist association between the left, realist painting and the politics of non-equivalence. In an increasing

meta-technological world after the 1950s, the appellative claims of social-realist painting were not only bathetic, but actually impeded the left's engagement with the complex cultural forms and affects of capitalism.

The reality of this situation is precisely what split the new art history in the early 1970s: painting, in either its high-modernist or its social-realist modes, was clearly unable to do the necessary transformative work of non-equivalence and autonomy; that is, it could no longer produce knowledge *through* painterly form. And this is why the post-critical theoretical art history of Peter Bürger and the early *October* writing on modernism in the early 1970s insisted on the crucial difference between modernism (as painterly canon) and the historic avant-garde (as praxis) as a way of defining a new technical regime for art (the readymade, assemblage, interdisciplinarity, reproducibility as authorship, conceptualization) irreducible to painterly hierarchy. One might ask, therefore, why Hemingway did not choose to write a history of all visual practices (photography, film, posters, design, crafts) within the 'cultural front' as an account of the contribution that New Deal plebeian modernism made to this emergent regime. How does the 'cultural front', for example, negotiate the legacy of the Soviet/European avant-garde? What impact did photography have on the popular democracy of the period? What were the productive relations between photographic image and text at this time? What is noticeable about *Artists on the Left* is that its critical dormancy precipitates a methodological crisis in Hemingway's writing that announces a determinate shift away from the humanist-realist tradition in the structuring of his

counter-hegemonic art history. For just as the recovery of the social-realist painterly object fails to generate a productive encounter with the present, the defence of the realist painterly object as an Enlightenment (communist) barrier against abstraction and reification narrows the range of exemplary and suasive objects that a dialectical art history might want to consider important. Indeed, the notion of the object as a productive troublespot and symptom becomes subordinate to the exigencies of recovering a lost political history.

It is possible to detect, then, an increasing openness to Adorno in Hemingway's writing after *Artists on the Left*. Adorno allows Hemingway to recover or extend the range of modernist objects worthy of dialectical approbation. This is not to say that Hemingway's art history becomes expressly Adornian, or that he completely drops his commitment to the classical legacy of painterly modernism/realism but, rather, that he recovers what Adorno and Hauser considered axiomatic for an art history not caught up in an affirmative 'realist ethics' and the construction of an exemplary leftist canon: the work of art as symptomatic critique and negative or aporetic space. This shift is expressed in Hemingway's turn, not just to Adorno and Hauser themselves, but to that German tradition of romantic anti-capitalism from which Adorno and Hauser both draw, and which shapes the preoccupations of late-nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century German art history and philosophy. As Hemingway argues in an unpublished essay, 'Arnold Hauser: Between Romantic Anti-Capitalism and Marxism'¹⁷ Hauser's post-Adornian art history in the 1960s offers an anti-classicizing defence of modernism in which the

alienated and ‘corrupted’ materials of artistic production offer a utopic glimpse into the future. For Hauser, art works are not truer or more perspicacious because they ‘match’ or do not ‘match’ ordinary empirical reality, but because of their conspicuous failures and formal incongruities – that is, the materials of artistic critique are not necessarily those of explication. As he argues, it is precisely as a result of ‘their imperfections and inherent meaninglessness [that art works] point towards a fuller more meaningful whole, which is not there for the taking, but has to be striven for’. ¹⁸ Consequently, for Hauser, the leftist defence of social realism as a site of rational self-reflection is self-defeating in so far as it assumes that the irrationalism associated with the modernist dissolution of form can lead only to bad art. On the contrary, as Hemingway says, quoting Hauser approvingly, ‘the artist’s sense of alienation can also lead to “the most profoundly self-revelatory creations” becoming “the raw material” of the work – a conclusion that points towards an Adornian rather than a Lukácsian aesthetic’. It is hard not to assume, therefore, from Hemingway’s endorsement of Hauser/Adorno here, that the attempt to revivify the painterly social-realist tradition from inside the history of the left could not sustain itself as either art history or as counter-hegemonic practice. Indeed, there is a larger methodological question at stake for Hemingway. What is crucial to Hauser and the anti-capitalist tradition (which also takes in the early Lukács) is the insistence on the aporetic status of the art work as a site of expressive homology with the contradictions and conflicts of the age. This ‘historicism’ has rightly been attacked for its easier conflation between the artist’s

intentions and the social and political conditions under which the work of art is produced; art is evidence not just of its conditions of production, but also of the artist's resistance or indifference to these conditions. Yet expressive homology has a significant role to play in any adequate assessment of the relationship between artistic subjectivity and artistic form. For what the concept of expressive homology permits is precisely the construction of a space for defence of the art work as troublespot and symptom. The art work is not just the determinate outcome of the causal relations that constitute its material visibility as a designated thing we can call an art work - the institutional arrangements of studio, patron and gallery; the allegiances of artistic tradition - but also the experiential evidence of the culture's ideological habitus. The work may reject that habitus, exceed it or inhabit it without resistance, yet the range of formal moves it makes will inevitably define a place for itself within the *Weltanschaung* of the culture. This is 'expressive homology'.

Now I would rather not use the term *Weltanschaung*. It plays hostage to a crude historicism in which the concept pre-exists its own historic construction. This means

that art works either unknowingly participate in a shared culture that is happening behind their back or, retrospectively, find a place that has already been created for them in the culture. Neither position is satisfactory in so far as both dissolve the self-consciousness of artistic production as a site of non-equivalence. Yet even if one rejects the notion that individual works 'express' the prevailing relations of the culture in such a fashion - as Althusser and Adorno famously do - one still has to

answer the vexed question of the relationship between the formal decisions/*qua* options of art and art's generic meaning; and this, essentially, is a transcendental hermeneutic issue. Why do art works appear to inhabit their historical moment, even if they ostensibly reject its prevailing or given forms? This is so because the problems that art works seek to resolve (or dissolve) are defined by the ideological frameworks and material conditions that artist and art work are obliged to inhabit or negate. Consequently, Hemingway says something quite revealing at the end of the essay on Hauser, although is not quite clear whether it represents an auto-critique or a riposte to the positivistic tendencies of the art-historical left more generally: 'in retrospect it seems to me now that the New Left's social history of art (and its liberal progeny) has been too narrowly confined to what it understands as specific causal mechanisms and too unwilling to confront the necessarily intuitive character of those homologies that become inescapable when we enter the domain of meaning'. In other words, the social history of art, and certainly an older Marxist art history, has consistently failed to recognize the internal vicissitudes of the art work as a condition of its truth claims. In this sense, the formal truths of art are made *from* the reified materials of a given *Weltanschaung*. This Hauserian/Adornian shift is clearly visible in *The Mysticism of Money: Precisionist Painting and Machine Age America*, in which Precisionist painting is prised from its official productivist and technologist rhetoric to find a more ambiguous critical identity in the widespread romantic anti-capitalism of 1920s America.¹⁹

Hemingway's work on Precisionism, then, serves to correct some of the 'affirmativist' shortcomings in his earlier defence of the classic modernist/realist painterly tradition. Here the nascent interface between realism (photographically derived referents) and modernism (geometric atmospherics and architectural abstractions) produces an object of study that is singularly at odds with the technological culture and formal traditions that produced it, rendering the prevailing optimism about machine civilization at the time, and subsequently, 'facile'. Indeed, the Precisionist paintings of George Ault, Charles Sheeler, Louis Lozowick and Ralston Crawford become, for Hemingway, exemplary objects of ideological 'irresolution'. That is, they serve to define a space or spaces between the crass objectivism and boosterism of the machine age and its rural obverse, the pastoralist invocation of romantic anti-capitalism, so widespread at the time in elite and regionalist artistic circles, and best represented by such figures as William Carlos Williams and the early Alfred Stieglitz. Precisionism's romantic anti-capitalism - its cultural disaffection - is haunted, therefore, not by images of rural idylls but by the irresolvable anxieties of being modern as the outcome of technological development and the expansion of the commodity-form. In this sense, technology in Precisionism is a realm of conflict and not the neutral or picturesque backdrop to industrialization or the 'American scene'. That is why, for Hemingway, it does not simply set out to *represent* the objects and surfaces of a newly technologized industrial world but to translate these forms and effects into an experientially coherent whole that is defined by an empathy-free

return of the object to the spectator's gaze. Precisionism's famed obliqueness is precisely what establishes the truth-conditions of the work: its resigned qualities produce a range of formal/metaphoric effects in which the loss of empathy on the part of the spectator becomes a homology of capitalist abstraction.

One can see, therefore, why Hemingway's book on Precisionism represents a decisive Hauserian/Adornian shift in his art history and is far closer to their reading of the truth-claims of art as symptomal and aporetic. Indeed, in his conclusion Hemingway makes this shift explicit, quoting Adorno from *Aesthetic Theory*: 'for Adorno truth in artworks cannot be separated from ideology ... [it is] the "distorted image of the true". "Art cannot have one without the other" ... and thus "in art, ideology and truth cannot be neatly distinguished from each other". Precisionism, as I understand it, exemplifies this point.'²⁰ The assumption, therefore, that, Precisionism might either be praised or condemned as a celebration of the 'American Scene' does a palpable injustice to the complex romantic anti-capitalist milieu from which the work emerged, perhaps best represented by the writing of Sherwood Anderson. But if Precisionist painting is valued precisely because of its aporetic status, Hemingway's account of Precisionism is not an Adornian history per se. If an Adornian dialectics is a way of releasing the art work from moral judgment and from aestheticizing categories, it is not, thereby, a way of overruling a Marxian commitment to a 'totalizing' social history of art. In this sense, Hemingway's art history remains defiantly Lukácsian in its ambitions.²¹ The autonomous production of the art work becomes

legible only once it is brought to life relationally as part of a broad social and political analytic. There is no art work and artistic judgment without the definitional framework of culture and politics out of which the struggle for art's autonomy is produced. And this is one of the reasons why Hemingway is so interested in reviving the concept of *Weltanschaung*. *Weltanschaung* is another name for a Lukácsian meta-historicization of form, in which the requirement is to think the 'totality' philosophically, even if the totality is always out of reach. In an article in 2012 on art history and methodology, he brings the legacies of Adorno and Lukács 'together' to reflect on this question. In order to open up a gap between what we might call a defence of an aporetic-dialectical art history and a causal-centric and positivistic social history of art and aestheticized Adornian valorization of the art object, art history must produce its modes of historicization in tension with the truth-claims of philosophy. 'If one accepts a cognitive definition of the aesthetic - that is, one that makes it something more than the prompt to a form of disinterested pleasure - then the measure of value will be a work's truth. This is not something that historical inquiry alone can determine; it depends on a totalizing and philosophical approach to the understanding of a cultural moment.'²² That will be very much Hemingway's critical legacy: the formation of a post-Adornian art history that grounds the social legibility of the art work within a non-totalizable 'totality' (although he may contest 'non-totalizable' in this context). Consequently, for all his traditional (humanist) respect for the canon – or canon building – the privilege given to certain art works is never at the expense of would-be

secondary works and the cultural relations that make them possible, thereby rendering the judgment of all art works as *historical*. So we might say, then, that the split that occurred in the early 1970s between art history and cultural studies after art history's nervous breakdown is a profoundly false and debilitating one. There is nothing to be gained by defending art's non-equivalence in opposition to the heteronymous cultural conditions that bring it into being. And this is why Hemingway's decision to stay in 'art history' was more than just a defence of art's autonomy: at a significant level it was always about allowing art history and cultural theory to speak together, even if their paths remain far from congruent.

- 1 Arnold Hauser, *The Philosophy of Art History* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1959).
- 2 For example, Francis Klingender, *Marxism and Modern Art: An Approach to Social Realism* (Lawrence & Wishart: London, 1943); and Frederick Antal, *Hogarth and His Place in European Art* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1962).
- 3 Walter Benjamin, 'L'Oeuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproduction mécanisée', *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1936), pp. 40–68.
- 4 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, ed. D. Breazeale, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1997)
- 5 One key text in this shift is Adrian Rifkin's 'Can Gramsci Save Art History?', *Block*, no. 3 (1980).
- 6 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. E. B. Ashton (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1984).
- 7 John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730–1840* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1980).
- 8 A symptomatic text of this conjuncture is Francis Frascina (ed.), *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* (Harper and Row: New York, 1985).

- ⁹ Andrew Hemingway, 'Cultural Democracy by Default: The Politics of the New Deal Arts Programmes', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2007), pp. 269–87.
- ¹⁰ Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Verso: New York, 1996).
- ¹¹ Andrew Hemingway, 'Middlebrow: For and Against', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1999), p. 171.
- ¹² David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1993); and Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914–1960* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1989).
- ¹³ Clement Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', *Partisan Review*, vol. 6, no. 5 (1939), pp. 34–49.
- ¹⁴ Andrew Hemingway, *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926–1956* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2002), p. 4.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 1. One interesting exception to this rule in histories of this period is David Evans, *John Heartfield: AIZ/V1 1930–38* (Kent Fine Art: New York, 1992).
- ¹⁶ Hemingway, *Artists on the Left*, op. cit., p. 282.
- ¹⁷ Andrew Hemingway, 'Arnold Hauser: Between Romantic Anti-Capitalism and Marxism', delivered at the international colloquium 'L'histoire de l'art: généralogies et enjeux d'une pratique', Institut national d'histoire de l'art, Paris, 11–12 December 2009.
- ¹⁸ Hauser, *The Philosophy of Art History*, op. cit., quoted in Hemingway, 'Arnold Hauser: Between Romantic Anti-Capitalism and Marxism', op. cit.
- ¹⁹ Andrew Hemingway, *The Mysticism of Money: Precisionist Painting and Machine Age America* (Periscope Publishing: Pittsburgh, 2013).
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 205.
- ²¹ For Hemingway's sympathetic discussion of the early Lukács, see his reflections on Lukács's 'Art for Art's Sake and Proletarian Writing' (1926), 'The Historical and Political Context of Lukács's "Art for Art's Sake and Proletarian Writing"', in Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall (eds.), *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence –*

Aesthetics, Politics, Literature (Continuum: London and New York, 2011).

- [22](#) Andrew Hemingway, 'Reading Art and Art History', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 94, no. 2 (June 2012), p. 164.

THE POLITICAL LOGIC OF RADICAL ART HISTORY IN CALIFORNIA 1974–85

A MEMOIR

Stephen F. Eisenman

1974: Henry Kissinger, Muhammad Ali, T. J. Clark

In the fall of 1974, I was an eighteen-year-old sophomore at the State University at Albany. I was an indifferent student, but my engagement with literature, art and politics was deepening. For example, I bought at the Strand Bookstore in Manhattan – but did not actually read – a remaindered copy of Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations*. And I read, but did not understand, Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*. Critical theory was not yet on my horizon. Like many others of my age, I was furiously opposed to the Vietnam War – now a decade old – and brimming with hatred for my country. The Watergate hearings the previous spring, followed by Nixon's resignation, had been the highlights of my life, and I despaired only that the president's perfidy was not revealed before his trouncing of the sainted George McGovern in the 1972 elections. Even prior to Watergate, however, my family and I, living in the Jewish enclave of Forest Hills, Queens, had a profound hatred for Nixon and his Rasputin, Henry Kissinger. Joseph Heller summarized our antipathy

and shame in 1976 in his novel *Good as Gold*, when he called Kissinger 'a moral defilement' and staged the following exchange between 'the Governor', a stand-in for Nelson Rockefeller, and the author's protagonist, a middle-aged English professor named Gold, with ambitions to become secretary of state: 'Gold, every Jew should have a big gentile as a friend, and every successful American should own a Jew. I'm big Gold, and I am willing to be your friend.' Scholarship, like radical politics, is motivated by resentment as much as the spirit of enquiry, and hatred of Nixon and Kissinger undoubtedly spawned more than one academic career.

In 1974, I did not need the Frankfurt School to teach me about the intersection of culture and politics. My sports idol, Muhammad Ali - whose first championship bout against Sonny Liston in 1964 I heard on a radio console in my family living room - was a figure who, because of his Muslim faith and opposition to the draft, occupied both the news and sports pages of the *New York Times*, and his championship fight against George Foreman in Kinshasa, Zaire, in October 1974 ('the Rumble in the Jungle') was as political as much as it was about boxing. Foreman's flag-waving antics following his 1968 Olympics victory - the games in which Tommie Smith and John Carlos made their Black Power salutes - was to me unforgivable, so I was naturally jubilant when, in spite of all predictions, Ali knocked out Foreman in the eighth round.

At Albany that year, I took courses with, among others, Ann Sutherland Harris, a connoisseur of Italian baroque art, and an expert on the versatile

but insipid painter Andrea Sacchi. Harris was impatient in the classroom; she often projected more than a hundred slides in her fifty-five-minute volleys, many of them upside down or sideways. I also studied with Robert D. Kinsman, a professor of modern art who was both punctilious and insightful in the classroom. He had studied with Meyer Schapiro at Columbia in the late 1950s and conceived of works of art as riddles or dreams that required long and patient explication. (Like many of the great man's pupils, Kinsman had not completed his dissertation on Ozenfant, Le Corbusier and *L'Esprit Nouveau*, and he left behind few scholarly traces, apart from an exhibition catalogue from 1963 devoted to Jimmy Ernst.) We used as our textbook George Heard Hamilton's *Painting and Sculpture in Europe: 1880–1940*, in the Pelican History of Art series, which inspired me. The book has many limitations, not least its teleological structure (abstraction is made to seem the preordained aim of modern art), and its bizarre portmanteau chapter titled 'Other Schools and Masters', which strings together German Dada, Max Beckmann, Egon Schiele, Paul Klee, Gerhard Marcks, Rik Wouters, Giorgio Morandi and Henry Moore, among others. But unlike Fritz Novotny's prior volume in the Pelican series, Hamilton's book was actually filled with ideas, not merely descriptions and sources. (One forgets these days how truly terrible was most of the scholarship on modern art before the 1980s.) It was also in 1974 that I read Schapiro's great article 'The Apples of Cézanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still Life', published six years earlier in the *ARTnews Annual*, and gained an inkling that art history could address both the dynamics of form and psychology. 'In

[Cézanne's] habitual representation of the apples as a theme by itself', Schapiro wrote, 'there is a latent erotic sense, an unconscious symbolizing of a repressed desire.'¹

Meanwhile, two thousand miles to the west at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), there arose for the first time an institutionalized version of radical or Marxist art history, a type of scholarship that had previously been practised only sporadically and without official sanction in New York with Schapiro, in London with the émigrés Frederick Antal, Arnold Hauser and Francis Klingender, and in Paris with Henri Lefebvre. In Los Angeles, however, under the leadership of Otto Karl Werckmeister it became the house style. Werckmeister, a German from Berlin with rebarbative manners and an annihilating intellect, was appointed chair in 1971 and immediately began a Robespierrean purge, determined to force his department colleagues to be free. He supplanted the four old boys who previously ran the place and initiated a regime of radical democracy - for example, granting full department voting rights to graduate students as well as to junior faculty. He also fostered, as Carol Duncan described to me, 'a culture of intellectual confrontation' that became notorious in a discipline renowned for its good manners.

Werckmeister hired the radical feminist Duncan as a visiting professor in 1973, the year she published in *Artforum* her iconoclastic essay 'Virility and Domination in Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting'. There she argued that, for all their supposed originality, the Fauves and Expressionists relied upon the most trite of clichés: that women

are either weak vessels or *femmes fatales*, and that the avant-garde male artist must by rights exercise his authority - either actually in the studio, or virtually on the canvas - over the bodies of women. These artists' vaunted freedom, articulated by means of 'large and spontaneous ... painterly gestures' and a 'barely controlled energy', as Duncan wrote, was in fact merely the expression of the 'fantasies and fears of middle-class men living in a changing world'.²

Though by outward signs no feminist himself, Werckmeister clearly approved of Duncan's work. Her conclusions were aligned with his own conviction, stated in his 1973 article 'Marx on Ideology and Art', published in *New Literary History*, that the 'semblance of [art's] autonomy ... was in fact contrived to serve particular interests of socially organized material production.... The historical investigation of art, like that of any other human product, is bound [required] to go beyond its confines and reach the basis of these conditions.'³ Rejecting the theory of 'non-simultaneity of the development of material and artistic production', found in Mikhail Lifshitz's *Karl Marx's Theory of Art*, Werckmeister insisted that putatively leftist critics had falsely imputed 'notions of social progress and historical critique' to works of modern art, thus severing them from their actual material base. Duncan, who in 1973 also published in the *Art Bulletin* her article 'Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in French Art', exploring the impact of natalism on late-eighteenth-century paintings of women, shared her UCLA department chair's insistence upon the need for a rigorous examination of art's social base and the need to challenge its supposed autonomy. Neither Werckmeister nor

Duncan, in sum, believed that works of modern art could significantly advance politics – or indeed even cogently represent it – in the absence of an organized mass movement. That view was soon proposed, with additional energy and subtlety, from a new quarter.

It was Duncan who in 1973 (so she tells it) pulled from the bottom of a pile of job applications that belonging to one T. J. Clark, an almost unknown thirty-year-old Englishman who had just published two books devoted to the art of the 1848 Revolution and Gustave Courbet, *The Absolute Bourgeois* and *Image of the People*.⁴ The quality of the works and the confidence of the voice were undeniable, and Clark was quickly offered a position. His decision to leave England and come to the United States was undoubtedly the result of many factors, but the dire economic circumstances in Britain may have been one. The year 1974 saw the end of the almost three-decades-long expansion of the United States and European economies. From an average growth rate of 7.2 per cent during the previous two years, the US economy slid into a contraction of more than 2 per cent; the situation was even worse in England, where the decline was

nearly 4 per cent. And unlike in the United Kingdom, hiring in the California system was largely unaffected by the downturn. (That the decline in both countries marked the beginning of a major contraction – phase B of a Kondratieff wave that still continues – was at the time unrecognized, except perhaps by Paul Sweezy, Immanuel Wallerstein, Ernest Mandel, Robert Brenner and a handful of other radical economists and historians.)⁵

Another factor in Clark's defection may have been Los Angeles' well-known, if not always congenial, left history. It was called 'Weimar on the Pacific' in the 1940s for its large population of German-speaking intellectuals, many of them communist, including Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Alfred Döblin, Arnold Schoenberg, Lion Feuchtwanger and Bertolt Brecht. The latter's poem about the city, entitled 'Contemplating Hell', was no doubt familiar to Clark, but did not deter him. It begins:

Contemplating Hell, as I once heard it,
My brother Shelley found it to be a place
Much like the city of London. I,
Who do not live in London, but in Los Angeles,
Find, contemplating Hell, that it
Must be even more like Los Angeles.⁶

More significantly, Los Angeles was now becoming a magnet for New Left scholars, with posts taken by the young Marxist historians Brenner and Russell Jacoby. In addition, David Kunzle, the British social historian of art – in self-deprecation he would say 'Marxisant' – was a lecturer at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia and the author in 1973 of *The History of the Comic Strip*, a genre that had always been beneath the radar of art historians more disposed to Ingres than Cruikshank. He was hired at UCLA in 1977.

Clark remained at UCLA for only a couple of years, but in that time became the teacher or advisor of several graduate students including Thomas Crow,

Holly Clayson, Serge Guilbaut and Joan Weinstein, all of whom practised, at least for a time, some variant of radical or Marxist art history. They concerned themselves with the ways in which works of modern European or American art articulated divergent class and political interests; described artists as commodity producers rather than as geniuses outside of time; and understood art works as sites of contestation more than as expressions of social consensus. But each of them also succumbed, to a greater or lesser extent, to what Jacoby called a 'fetish of the defeated' - that is, a tendency not just to reject the autonomy of art as Werckmeister and Duncan had done, but to see revolutionary failure or defeat as preordained, and reification as inevitably triumphing over resistance regardless of the activation of the underlying social base. Guilbaut, for example, published in 1985 his *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, arguing that Abstract Expressionism was hardly the radical voice its champions made it out to be,

but rather a rhetoric of Cold War liberalism, barely distinguishable from the shrill cries of anti-communism.⁷ (Guilbaut's error, ironically enough, was the vulgar Marxist one of assuming that he who pays the piper always calls the tune.) Weinstein, a student of Werckmeister, published in 1990 a book entitled *The End of Expressionism*, which argued that German state institutions, and the various pre-First World War vanguard movements, combined to turn Expressionism into a veritable language of revolution, only to see that association dissolve in the disastrous aftermath of the actual revolutionary upsurges in Berlin, Munich and elsewhere in 1918-19.⁸ In both books, avant-garde strategies are presented as hopelessly

compromised, with collapse or accommodation inevitable. Crow, too, in the end accepted this undialectical *parti pris*, although in his first major publications he assumed a different posture, the result perhaps of his closer emulation of the theory and method adumbrated in Clark's two early books.



1 Gustave Courbet, *A Burial at Ornans*, 1849–50, oil on canvas, 315.2 × 660.4 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

What characterized Clark's work immediately before he came to UCLA was its recognition of the class-component of vision and its supple use of the Marxian concept of mediation. For example, he showed that Gustave Courbet, in his trilogy of works from 1849–50 – *The Stonebreakers*, *A Burial at Ornans* [1], and *The Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair*, marshalled a set of styles and techniques derived from popular art – for example, cheap woodcuts and broadsheets from Épinal [2] – for the purpose of putting history painting (that mode of high-mindedness, if not pomposity, that dominated the walls of the Salons) at the disposal of workers and peasants. The distinctive attributes of modernist painting therefore – such as its flatness and affectlessness –

were not the consequence of some quasi-Kantian redefinition of the medium, but signs of affiliation with an entirely alternative and demotic artistic tradition. Clark demonstrated, as well, that while the success of that avant-garde gambit ultimately depended upon the mediating circumstances of viewership - economic, geographic, ideological and biographic - its outcome could not be forecast at the beginning. A *Burial*, as one of its contemporary antagonists wrote, was an 'engine of revolution', and Clark agreed, notwithstanding the Napoleonic *coup d'état* in December 1851 that left in tatters both the socialist cause and Courbet's project of Realism. Some popular movements fail not because of the theoretical impoverishment of their leaders or, as Marx wrote, their 'speaking and writing section, politicians and literati', but because of the sheer strength of the forces of order. These were lessons no doubt learned from Clark's own experience with the Situationist International, a circle of artists and revolutionaries who during the uprisings of May 1968 in Paris lent their efforts to organizing students and workers in a massive general strike that nearly brought down the French government of President Charles de Gaulle. Within weeks of de Gaulle's dissolution of the National Assembly on 30 May 1968, however, revolutionary energies were dissipated, and the opportunity had passed for what the Situationists called *détournement* - the diversion or reorientation of commodity culture for the purpose of enabling the free pursuit of primitive desires. But that defeat did not invalidate all of the political and aesthetic strategies that preceded it. These, anyway, are some conclusions that may be drawn from Clark's writing and teaching of the

early and mid-1970s, ones not fully absorbed by his UCLA students.



2 Anonymous, *Le Convoi de Malborough*, lithograph, Pellérin lithographers, Épinal, c. 1860.

Back in Albany, New York, the halcyon days of seemingly unlimited educational and arts spending were over, and the mood was grim. Three years before, Governor Rockefeller had overseen the brutal suppression of a prison uprising at Attica near Buffalo, leading to the deaths of thirty-nine prisoners and ten guards, and in 1973 he signed a series of anti-drug laws that mandated long prison terms for possession and sale of so-called narcotic drugs, regardless of the age or record of the offender. (The sale of two ounces of marijuana, opium, heroin or cocaine was punished with a minimum sentence of fifteen years to life.) 'Law and Order' – Nixon's, Agnew's and other Republicans' racially inflected slogan – remained the byword in Albany as elsewhere in late 1973 and 1974, as

Rockefeller resigned the governorship to become Gerald Ford's appointed vice-president. The State University of New York was still the largest system of public higher education in the country, with over 230,000 students, and Albany remained one of its flagships (its campus designed in 1954–6 by Edward Durrell Stone), but now retrenchment was the order of the day. Ann Harris found her tenured position under threat, and at the end of 1974 left for greener pastures at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Robert Kinsman was summarily fired. Though there was a modest recovery underway by the time I graduated in 1977, and the unemployment rate had declined, the lure of a fellowship from the wealthy Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, just thirty miles to the east, was irresistible.

1978: Albert Boime, Herbert Marcuse and Jimmy Carter

I received my initial graduate training in art history at Williams College between 1977 and 1979. There I studied with, among others, Julius Held, George Heard Hamilton, Daniel Robbins and Albert Boime. At Williams, Boime was visiting professor in 1978 and taught a seminar on the French *juste milieu*, the art that developed in the wake of the 1830 revolution and the regime of Louis Philippe. Thomas Couture – part Classicist and part Romanticist, part modernist and part *pompier*, part radical and part conservative – was the key figure in Boime's course, and the subject of a massive monograph he published two years later. We spent a long time in that class looking at *Romans of the Decadence* and *The Enrolment of the Volunteers of 1792* [3], the latter of which was housed in the nearby Springfield Museum of Fine Arts. Later that year, Boime took

up his position at UCLA – he was hired by Werckmeister – and his seminar on *juste milieu* led me down a path that eventually intersected with that of Werckmeister, Clark, Crow and southern California’s radical intellectual tradition.

First, Boime was unapologetically Marxist. He would more or less repeat Karl Marx’s two least nuanced formulations of method that became the basis for what in the twentieth century was called ‘dialectical materialism’, or what Stalin called ‘Diamat’. The first is from *The Communist Manifesto*: ‘The history of all hitherto existing societies

is the history of class struggle’; and the second, from the 1859 *Critique of Political Economy*: ‘The totality of the relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite forms of consciousness.’ Though these statements still seem to me, in a general sense, true, they do not take us very far down the path of an art history that is both historical and material in outlook. Yes, the struggle between patrician and slave, peasant and lord, and proletarian and bourgeois has in successive ages shaped the disposition of power and distribution of resources, but this binary formulation denies the dynamic character of the contest: that each class is always in a process of transformation, and that subsidiary groupings – some of which are organized according to ethnic, gender, national or religious characteristics – may also be determining of the outcome of a given political dispute. And while it is also true, as Marx said, that the idealist Hegel must be stood on his feet, the materialist approach to history does not argue that the superstructure –

philosophy, law, literature, art and culture in general - is merely a *reflection* of the economic foundation of a given society. Rather, as Marx himself realized, and as generations of scholars who followed him also understood, the two domains could not be so easily separated; culture or ideology, as Marx elsewhere wrote, 'becomes a material force when it grips the masses'.⁹



3 Thomas Couture, *The Enrolment of the Volunteers of 1792*, 1848–51, oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts.

Without these two correctives, a radical art history would be impossible since the discipline is most of all concerned with understanding why works of art look the way they do and what they meant to their original audiences, questions that cannot possibly be answered except by examining the changing subsets of the large social formations that actually made, looked at, responded to and collected works of art. And we must also recognize that art works – at least at certain key moments in history – actually

changed minds and moved bodies to act in the sphere of the political. (This, as we have seen, was one of Clark's key insights concerning Courbet in 1850. It was also fundamental for his pupil Crow, whose dissertation was completed in 1978 and concerned the political impact of Jacques-Louis David's *Oath of the Horatii* when it was exhibited at the Salon of 1785.) Moreover, the distinction between the economic foundation and the cultural superstructure is not always clear. Take, for example, the French Salon, the particular focus of Boime's research before he came to UCLA: it was from the mid-eighteenth to the late nineteenth century at once a marketplace for a particular type of luxury good and an institution for the inculcation of ideology. Or take the many other arts and manufactures that exist on the border between base and superstructure and that clearly fall within the domain of art-historical research - Wedgewood, Thonet, Morris and Company, Liberty, the Bauhaus and even Andy Warhol's Factory!

But back in 1978, my dissatisfaction with Boime's teaching did not lay primarily in his conventional or 'vulgar' Marxism - I had read very little Marx up to that point - but in his almost complete dismissal of psychoanalysis. I spent my second summer in Williamstown reading the complete works of Sigmund Freud (I cannot now remember why, except that I had just finished reading Jane Austen) and, given the investment, I could not accept the idea that the Id, Ego and Superego, the Oedipus Complex, the Castration Complex, parapraxes, the Pleasure Principle, Thanatos and all the rest were mere superstructure and without any foundation in the actual matter and dynamics of the human mind and brain, or without any practical or historical

significance. What I turned towards as the result of the challenge from Boime, therefore, was the work of Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse. Brown's two best-known works, *Life Against Death* (1959) and *Love's Body* (1966), were efforts to achieve a synthesis of Marx and Freud, at the time the holy grail of left intellectuals. Capitalism itself, Brown argued, effected a colossal repression or group neurosis, a childlike anality marked by an extreme of possessiveness, acquisitiveness (what Marx in 1844 had called 'the sense of having'), a preference for control and an infatuation with 'filthy lucre'. What was needed, therefore, was a revolution of desire - a 'polymorphous perversity' that would be communal, erotic, expressive, anti-authoritarian and anti-establishment.

Marcuse, who like Brown taught in California in the early 1970s (the former at San Diego, the latter at Santa Cruz), argued by contrast, in *One Dimensional Man* (1964), that 'technological rationality' - the achievement of material wealth under the aegis of monopoly capitalism, combined with a high degree of personal freedom in the West (remember this was written at the apogee of the postwar economic expansion) - had effected not a widespread repression but a general 'desublimation', an emotional and bodily pleasure that had rarely if ever been so widely available.¹⁰ But far from being liberating, this desublimation was, in fact, 'repressive' since it blunted more profound drives for emancipation and the good life, and even blocked the very 'polymorphous perversity' that Brown had celebrated in his earlier *Life Against Death*.¹¹ Art and literature themselves had succumbed to 'repressive desublimation', not so much because

they were subsumed by kitsch, as Clement Greenberg had once argued, but because they were assimilated in a ‘harmonizing pluralism’ that permitted everything and was threatened by nothing. No longer did the arts function as ‘the Great Refusal – the protest against that which is’; instead ‘they were absorbed by what they refuted’,¹² and functioned to entertain rather than challenge.

I should note here that Marcuse’s views about art changed in the last decade or so of his life. When in La Jolla in 1975 he met with Werckmeister, Clark, Lee Baxandall, Bram Dijkstra and Fredric Jameson as part of a new (and short-lived) ‘California Group’, he was asserting the intellectual and political significance of an idealist ‘aesthetic dimension’ as a riposte to modern instrumental and technological rationality.¹³ Emancipated from its material base, Marcuse claimed, nineteenth- and twentieth-century art announced revolutionary change long before such change could actually occur in material reality. Werckmeister and Clark, as we have seen, and Jameson too, took an opposite tack to argue that what Marcuse called ‘cultural revolution’ was a chimera and that recent art had become ‘affirmative’, a handmaiden to, if not indistinguishable from, the culture industry, in effect using early Marcuse to argue against late Marcuse.

What Brown and Marcuse offered me in 1978 – a decade after they were taken up by the American New Left for their bracing anti-establishmentarianism and apparent hedonism – was an understanding that what we then called ‘high art’ was in constant struggle and negotiation with technological and capitalist development, and

that in fact, the two domains could not be disaggregated. Moreover, I learned that the achievements of the previous decade - in the domains of civil rights, free speech, anti-war and arms control, women's and gay liberation - were at best partial and provisional, and potentially repressive forms of desublimation. Indeed, the new social order proposed by Jimmy Carter - despite lip service paid to international human rights - consisted of little more than weak moral homilies and cultural pluralism tinged with asceticism, precisely the opposite of what Brown, Marcuse and the New Left championed. And, of course, within two years progress in all social and political domains would be rolled back with the anointing of Ronald Reagan. Major sectoral changes in the United States economy - the decline of the automobile and steel industries and growth of the service sector, disinvestment in national infrastructure, and the rapid rise of the London and New York financial services sector - all combined to destabilize and frighten the national electorate and render nugatory theories of revolution that had flourished in the 1960s.

But the art history of my time did not then seem crippled by the 'harmonizing pluralism' described by Marcuse. The work of Clark and a group of other young British Marxist and feminist scholars - including Adrian Rifkin, Lisa Tickner, Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, who wrote for the new journal *Art History* and the magazine *Block* - suggested to me that there was an emerging model for art-historical work that might soon conquer the field. It entailed close and sustained attention to the style and structure of works of art in the confidence that it was precisely in their subtle formal

interstices - and especially in anomalous or otherwise inexplicable elements (shades of Schapiro) - that the operations of a larger political and ideological dynamic could be most clearly seen and understood. The scholarship required careful archival as well as formal discriminations if a case were to be made for an art work's particular critical salience, and radical art historians were, as a group, committed to making them, especially since the constant, disingenuous complaint of right-wing art history was that the left wing lacked 'an eye', the connoisseurial capacity that supposedly distinguished real from ersatz art historians. The result of this marriage of formal and archival attentiveness was a social history of art that at its best was true to objects and their changing histories and, as Thomas Crow recently wrote to me, provided 'a deeper analysis of the ways of capital [than was otherwise available]'. In 1978 therefore, at the age of twenty-two, I believed that art historians might themselves revive an avant-garde impulse that was inoperative, if not defunct, in the current artistic and political spheres during the waning months of the 1970s, when Carter was walled up in the White House Rose Garden, Reagan lay waiting in the wings, and the American art scene - which I covered as a critic for *Arts Magazine* - was dominated by the affectation and empathy of the triad of Robert Longo, Julian Schnabel and David Salle.

1984: Art History in the Age of Reagan

In 1984 I completed at Princeton my dissertation on Odilon Redon under the guidance of Thomas Crow, and travelled out to Los Angeles to begin teaching

at Occidental College, while Werckmeister soon thereafter left UCLA and moved to Northwestern, where he and I would eventually become colleagues. At almost the same time, Crow was denied tenure despite having published what was widely considered the most important book ever written on David and the art of the French Revolution. The antagonism of East Coast art history towards the West Coast insurgents was manifest at Harvard as well as Princeton, where Clark (hired by Harvard in 1981) faced attacks from his senior colleague Sidney Freedberg and from Irving Lavin at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. But then suddenly a peculiar thing happened: the old guard modernists folded and the social art historians (or at least a subset of them) prevailed, but in their victory left behind some of the very insurgent energies that were their initial impetus.

That the old boys packed it in - the Eitners, Elsens, Champas, Ackermans, Jansons, Dorras, Hamiltons and Rosenblums - is not surprising: they were approaching retirement and had accomplished surprisingly little. Most of their work was pre-art historical: collecting and cataloguing images, identifying subjects and sources, addressing changes in style, and sometimes examining patronage - but avoiding serious analysis and interpretation. When the work was more ambitious, as in the case of Rosenblum, it was ahistorical and untheorized: a matter of reflection theory and zeitgeist.¹⁴

Crow's work - on David and other subjects - was obviously more ambitious, and clearly revealed his Californian upbringing, experience and training. In an article entitled 'Modernism and Mass Culture in

the Visual Arts', he theorized and historicized the relationship between the two, using Impressionism as the pivot. Impressionism, he said, revealed a complicity between modernism and commodity culture that previous critics – notably Greenberg – were at pains to deny. Quoting at length from Schapiro's 1937 essay 'The Nature of Abstract Art', Crow noted that the art of Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir and the rest depicted (this is Schapiro via Crow):

breakfasts, picnics, promenades, boating trips, holidays and vacation travel. These urban idylls not only present the objective forms of bourgeois recreation in the 1860s and 1870s; they also reflect in the very choice of subjects and in the new aesthetic devices the conception of art solely as a field of freedom for an enlightened bourgeois detached from the official beliefs of his class. In enjoying realistic pictures of his surroundings as a spectacle of traffic and changing atmospheres, the cultivated *rentier* was experiencing in its phenomenal aspect that mobility of the environment, the market and of industry to which he owed his income and his freedom.¹⁵

But rather than conclude from this, as had Schapiro, that the Impressionist painter simply 'succumbed to the general division of labor as a full-time leisure specialist', he proposed that the very relentlessness with which these artists went about their pursuit of leisure – at the levels of both subject and style – revealed a coordinated group effort to rescue some kind of rich and affective communal life from the damaged goods of provisioned recreation and commodity culture – the bread and circuses of late Second Empire and early Third Republic France. In this respect, the Impressionists more resembled subsequent resistant subcultures – think Beats, Mods,

Skinheads, Punks, Hip Hop – than previous artistic schools and movements. Such resistant subcultures employ style in its widest sense – hair and clothing, patterns of speech, drug use, and modes of recreation and representation – to establish imagined relations to arenas of life and labour that are cut off to them by virtue of their class or race. In making this argument, Crow obviously reached outside art history to anthropology and sociology, in particular to the English theorists Phil Cohen and Stuart Hall from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University, as well as the latter's protégé Dick Hebdige. (He may also have been drawing upon his knowledge and recollection of southern California's rich history of subcultural styles, from zoot suit and low-rider in the 1940s to waacking and hardcore in the 1970s.)

And later modernist artists too – from Picasso and Braque to Andy Warhol and beyond – similarly immersed themselves in the detritus, ephemera and erotic blandishments of mass and commodity culture in order to create an alternative social and symbolic space that might be more satisfying and arresting than the ones in which they found themselves. In this way, modernism may be seen as parasitical upon mass culture. But the energy extends in the opposite direction as well: precisely because of their extremism and intensity, and their constant prowling for new experiences and sensations, the modernist avant-garde revealed to the wider capitalist culture areas of expressive deficit, that is, modes of experience and affective intensity that had not yet been fully colonized and exploited by capitalist culture, or what Theodor Adorno called 'the Culture Industry'. In Crow's now well-known formulation, 'the avant-garde serves as

a kind of research and development arm of the culture industry'.¹⁶

That final, jaundiced conclusion - which has been enormously influential for subsequent work on modernism and the avant-garde - does not seem to me quite right. To my view, the history of the European and American avant-garde - taking account of its diffusion to Latin America, Africa, India and elsewhere - indicates that some art works possess a cognitive force whose effect can be either immediate or delayed, proximate or remote, but in any case material and political, and that the consequences of an aesthetic intervention cannot be forecast at the outset. In their first major works, Clark and Crow argued this, but their writings of the early and mid-1980s bear the stamp and tenor of their time: California in the age of Reagan. It was a period of particular despair for the left - a president and former movie actor, whose warmongering was only matched by his insouciance - held a country in his thrall by means of an extraordinarily well-managed media apparatus. Why wouldn't critics and art historians assume that mass culture and 'the spectacle' - that synonym for reification coined by the Situationist Guy Debord - were capable of overwhelming all challenges, indeed able to subsume and utilize all resistance. Why wouldn't they argue, as Werckmeister had in 1973, that 'cultural revolution' was a meaningless term in the absence of a fully fledged social and political revolt? 'There is no alternative' intoned Margaret Thatcher on a regular basis during those depressing years, meaning that free markets and globalization, organized and orchestrated by the principal capitalist powers of the northern hemisphere, must inevitably have their way. The

power of Hollywood and Disney – or ‘the Industry’ as everyone calls it in Los Angeles – seemed equally certain in those years.

Thus it appeared to many that the circuit between art and capital was closed, and the possibility that the avant-garde may actually intervene into the circuitry of real life was ended, if it ever existed. In the 1980s and after, Clark too seemed convinced that the historic avant-garde was a myth. After pages of careful attention to the form

of Manet’s *Olympia* [4] in the chapter devoted to it in *The Painting of Modern Life* (1985) – its location in the tradition of the nude, and analysis of the voluminous and often shrill critical response to it – Clark concludes that the work was at once particular and general, multivocal and singular: ‘The achievement of *Olympia*, I should say, is that it gives its female subject a particular sexuality as opposed to a general one. And that particularity derives, I think, not from there being *an order* to the body on the bed but from there being too many, and none of them established as the dominant one. The signs of sex are present in plenty, but they fail, as it were, to add up.’¹⁷ Opacity and negation, Clark argued, are the best that modernists can hope for.

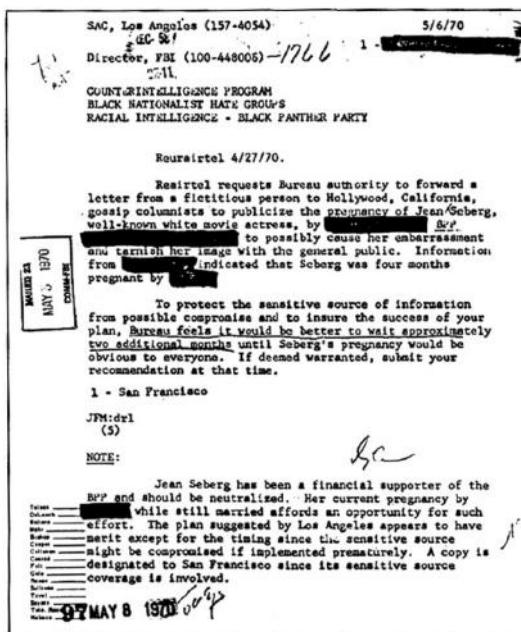


4 Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863, oil on canvas, 130.5 cm × 190 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Conclusion: Counter-intuition

I will be brief. Southern California, and in particular UCLA was the birthplace of a version of radical art history that was deeply influential. It was the product of two distinct European intellectual and political traditions, as well as southern California's peculiar culture and history. The Frankfurt School theorists Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Leo Lowenthal (who taught at Berkeley from 1956 to 1972) and, of course, Marcuse had a significant impact on radical or critical art history. Werckmeister, Brenner and Jacoby at UCLA, Jameson at the University of California, San Diego, and Martin Jay at Berkeley were all instrumental in transmitting and clarifying this intellectual legacy. The Situationist tradition too - though rarely invoked explicitly by Clark

during his brief spell at UCLA – was also significant, especially since it offered so many useful terms for analysing the highly mediated culture and industry of southern California.



5 Internal FBI memo concerning
'Black Nationalist Hate Groups', 6
May 1970.

But what is surprising or counterintuitive here is that radical art history did not arise - as might be expected - from a robust movement for social change, but from a world-historical political defeat. By 1971, when Werckmeister became chair at UCLA, the anti-war and civil rights struggles that marked campus politics in the 1960s were mostly over. The FBI's Counterintelligence Programs [5]

had successfully infiltrated the Los Angeles Black Panther Party and instigated fratricidal warfare, and the struggles of Chicano and Asian students and community leaders for equal rights and opportunities settled into demands for so many ethnic and cultural studies programmes. This was the period of what Jameson called 'the cultural turn' and the idea of a radical art history - one that was fully adequate to objects and histories, while providing 'a deeper analysis of the ways of capital [than was otherwise available]' - was buffeted by enormous assimilative forces. In the face of these forces, radical art history blinked, accepting either what was taken (mistakenly) to be the Situationist orthodoxy that resistance to the power of the spectacle is futile, or the Marxist orthodoxy that revolutions in culture are phantasmatic in the absence of political revolution.

But alternative perspectives still exist and remain to be fully explored. (1) That art is one of many expressive systems that have at times in the past gripped the masses and become a material force, and that even when their power is cognitive more than instrumental, they may aid in the restructuring of consciousness as to once again merit the designation materialist and political. (2) That however great the recuperative power of the avant-garde, its function in highlighting the affective deficits generated by capital may be even greater. Today increased diagnoses of depression and the massive dispensation of both psychotropic drugs and cognitive behavioural therapy indicate that the happiness gap - the space between the capitalist promise of pleasure and its deliverance - is continuing to grow in much of the economically most dominant powers. 'Depressive hedonia' is

Mark Fisher's pithy diagnosis of the antic search for pleasure and its constant retreat; it is a disease that grows more acute as the economic crises lasts longer.¹⁸ (3) That the authority of contingency must be better recognized - that the results of a particular ideological and cultural struggle cannot be determined before it has even been waged, and that success is always a possibility. This, anyway, was an intuition some of my generation had in the mid-1970s as we witnessed the defeat of the United States in Vietnam, the overthrow of Richard Nixon, and the succession of victories by the aging Muhammad Ali. It is one that we should keep in mind as we watch, or participate in, present or future Springs, Occupations, Awakenings and other social movements in the Middle East, United States, Europe and beyond.

- ¹ Meyer Schapiro, 'The Apples of Cezanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still Life', in *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries* (George Braziller: New York, 1978), p. 12.
- ² Carol Duncan, 'Virility and Domination in Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting', *Artforum*, vol. 12, no. 4 (December 1973), p. 31.
- ³ Otto Karl Werckmeister, 'Marx on Ideology and Art', *New Literary History*, vol. 4, no. 3 (Spring 1973), p. 508.
- ⁴ T. J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France 1848–1851* (Thames & Hudson: London, 1973) and *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (Thames & Hudson: London, 1973).
- ⁵ See, for example, 'The Depression: A Long-Term View', *MR Zine*, 10 October 2008, <<http://www.monthlyreview.org/mrzine/wallerstein161008.html>>, accessed 25 August 2013.
- ⁶ Erhard Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles and the Crisis of Modernism* (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2007).

- ⁷ Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1985).
- ⁸ Joan Weinstein, *The End of Expressionism: Art and the November Revolution in Germany, 1918–19* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1990).
- ⁹ Karl Marx, ‘Introduction’, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (1844), <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/df-jahrbucher/law-abs.htm>>, accessed 25 August 2013.
- ¹⁰ Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced, Industrial Society* (Beacon: Boston, 1964), *passim*.
- ¹¹ Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (Wesleyan University Press: Middletown, 1959), *passim*.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, op. cit.
- ¹⁴ See for example, Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (Harper and Row: New York, 1977).
- ¹⁵ Thomas Crow, ‘Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts’, in *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1998), p. 12.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 35.
- ¹⁷ T. J. Clark ‘Olympia’s Choice’, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1999), p. 131.
- ¹⁸ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realist: Is There No Alternative?* (O Books: Winchester and Washington, DC, 2009), p. 21.

THE DIALECTICAL LEGACIES OF RADICAL ART HISTORY

MEYER SCHAPIRO AND GERMAN AESTHETIC DEBATES IN THE 1930S AND 1940S

Warren Carter

Meyer Schapiro's work has had a greater impact upon the development of radical art history in the anglophone world than that of any other Marxist art historian. His often essayistic contributions have influenced later studies on medieval sculpture, Courbet and mid-nineteenth-century French Realism, Impressionism and Abstract Expressionism.¹ Schapiro was a 'Western Marxist' in that he rejected the positivistic Marxism of the Second International and the vulgar philosophical orthodoxies of the Soviet Union, aligning himself instead with a more expansive and critical approach to the Marxist tradition. In keeping with the thesis of British historian Perry Anderson, Schapiro - like other Western Marxists in a period shaped by working-class defeats - became increasingly more concerned with questions of philosophy and aesthetics, as opposed to more explicitly political and economic ones.² Many of the ideas and themes in his writing were developed in tandem with those of European Western Marxists, particularly those associated with the classic German debates of the 1930s and 1940s who would later be collated in the celebrated volume *Aesthetics and Politics*.³ He was

influenced by the theoretical and historical framework developed by Georg Lukács, even if he ultimately inverted his aesthetic judgments; had a *friendship* with Bertolt Brecht while he was in New York in 1935–6 and afterwards; admired the work of Walter Benjamin, whom he visited in Paris in 1939 in a failed attempt to get him to come to the United States; and had a friendship and somewhat ambiguous intellectual relationship with Theodor W. Adorno, alongside whom he published in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* in 1938.⁴ With this in mind, I want to tentatively sketch out an analysis of Schapiro's thought as being formed in some kind of conjunction with the central figures responsible for these classic debates, and with Lukács in particular.

I want to begin with what is undoubtedly Schapiro's most celebrated essay, 'Nature of Abstract Art' of 1937, and the paper of the previous year with which it is nearly always counterposed, 'The Social Bases of Art'. Both of these texts have been the subject of critical attention from, among others, Serge Guilbaut, Thomas Crow and T. J. Clark, all exemplars of the social history of art. Each argues that there is a marked shift between the two texts. For Guilbaut, these supposed differences in Schapiro's position played a pivotal role in the move from the communist-led Popular Front to Trotskyism and

thereby the 'art for art's sake' that triumphantly followed.⁵ Crow characterizes the first essay as the kind of leftist art history that dismissed 'all avant-garde claims to a critical and independent stance as so much false consciousness', while the second instead 'offered a qualified apology for modernism'.⁶ And Clark dismisses the voice of the first essay as 'any old Stalinist in full cry', one that,

moreover, produces ‘false alternatives’ (and that ‘the same could be said of Lukács, largely’), whereas the second essay represents little more than an ‘inconsequential hedging of bets’.⁷ As Andrew Hemingway has made clear, however, the differences between the two texts are overstated and perhaps more the product of their respective contexts and functions.⁸ ‘The Social Bases of Art’ was delivered to the first American Artists’ Congress Against War and Fascism in New York – which Schapiro helped to found and organize – and was therefore in part a polemical call-to-arms; ‘Nature of Abstract Art’ was a review of Alfred H. Barr’s catalogue to the 1936 show ‘Cubism and Abstract Art’, which Barr had curated at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, published in *Marxist Quarterly* – a journal devoted to Marxist scholarship, of which Schapiro was an editor – and it was therefore more dispassionate and theoretical in tone.

Contrary to the interpretations of Guilbaut, Crow and Clark, rather than disparaging modern art in his earlier 1936 paper, Schapiro merely argued that it was just as ‘social’ as the art that preceded it: ‘The preponderance of objects drawn from a personal and artistic world does not mean that pictures are now more pure than in the past, more completely works of art. It means simply that the personal and aesthetic contexts of secular life now condition the formal character of art, just as religious beliefs and practices in the past conditioned the formal character of religious art.’⁹ While the very conception of artistic individualism becomes homologous to bourgeois individualism via the mediations of the art market, and is in this sense therefore predicated upon the exploitation of

the working class under capitalism, Schapiro argued that ‘the social origins of such forms of modern art do not permit one to judge this art as good or bad; they simply throw light upon some aspects of their character and enable us to see more clearly that the ideas of modern artists, far from describing eternal and necessary conditions in art, are simply the results of recent history’.¹⁰ And, as befitting a paper written for an audience of artists radicalized by the economic crisis of the 1930s, Schapiro finished with the rallying cry that it is only by ‘recognizing the dependence of his situation and attitudes on the character of modern society’ that ‘the artist acquires the courage to change things, to act on his society and for himself in an effective manner’, to produce one in which ‘all men can be free individuals’, to the extent that individuality will lose ‘its exclusiveness and its ruthless and perverse character’.¹¹

As already mentioned, the later paper, ‘Nature of Abstract Art’, was written as a critique of Barr’s ‘Cubism and Abstract Art’. While, for Schapiro, Barr’s catalogue essay may have provided a precise chronology of the development of abstract art, it nevertheless ‘excludes as irrelevant to its history the nature of the society in which it arose, except as an incidental obstructing or accelerating atmospheric factor’.¹² In opposition to such formalism, and in line with historical materialism, Schapiro instead insisted that ‘the banal divisions of the great historical styles in literature and art correspond to the momentous divisions in the history of society’, a thesis that he then demonstrated in an analysis of a series of modern movements from Impressionism onwards.¹³ On the mutability of realism and abstraction, Schapiro is

again clear that both ‘affirm the sovereignty of the artist’s mind, the first in the capacity to recreate the world minutely in a narrow, intimate field by series of abstract calculations of perspective and gradation of colour, the other in the capacity to impose new forms on nature, to manipulate the abstracted elements of line and colour freely, or to create shapes corresponding to subtle states of mind’.¹⁴ So that ‘as little as a work is guaranteed aesthetically by its resemblance to nature, so little is it guaranteed by its abstractness or “purity”’.¹⁵ For Schapiro then, ‘Nature and abstract forms are both materials for art, and the choice of one or the other flows from historically changing interests.’¹⁶

In this sense, there is more continuity in the two essays than has generally been acknowledged, their differences being more about context than shifts in Schapiro’s politics. Nowhere in the earlier text does Schapiro reduce avant-garde art to ‘false consciousness’ *tout court*, or present ‘false alternatives’ between realism and modernism. As he said in an interview years later: ‘My essay on the social bases of art was never meant to be a blanket condemnation of modern art, but only a criticism of some aspects of it. I was never interested in any position that forced you to choose between social realism and modern art.’¹⁷ That this was the case was also suggested by an essay entitled ‘Rebellion in Art’ that he wrote as late as 1950 on the subject of the 1913 Armory Show as part of a series of lectures on the theme of ‘America in Crisis’.¹⁸ For Schapiro, whereas the more naturalistic art of the past was formed within the institutional confines of the Church, aristocracy and the state, and therefore ‘remained in all its innovations within the bounds of widely accepted values, and continued to express

feelings and ideas that had emerged or were emerging within these institutions', modern artists wishing to paint comparable works of broad human content for large audiences were denied such opportunities.¹⁹ Instead, they had little alternative 'but to cultivate in their art the only or surest realms of freedom - the interior world of their fancies, sensations, and feelings, and the medium itself'.²⁰ Despite the harsh political climate of McCarthyism, Schapiro still managed to inflect these developments politically in that, while the new art may seem to be 'a fulfilment of an American dream of liberty, it is also in some ways a negation'.²¹ As in the focus upon the individual, the modern artist is isolated 'from activity in the world' and thereby 'confirms the growing separation of culture from work and ideal social aims' - that is, an emancipatory politics that constituted the framework of these debates in the 1930s.²²

As Crow has noted, Schapiro's two earlier essays were clearly marked by a close reading of Marx's interpretation of the 1848-51 crisis in France: *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Schapiro himself acknowledged the importance of Marx's 'brilliant' essay, as well as his *The Class Struggles in France*, in a footnote to his 'Courbet and Popular Imagery' of 1941.²³ Schapiro was convinced by Marx's theory that the forcible exclusion of oppositional groups from the political process between 1848-51 necessitated a kind of cultural suicide on the part of the republican bourgeoisie, the willed destruction of its own democratic institutions, values and expressive forms under Bonapartism. As Marx eloquently put it, after the events of 1848-51 the bourgeoisie fully realized that it 'had to destroy all its instruments of defence

against absolutism with its own hand as soon as it had itself become absolute'.²⁴ For Schapiro, as for Marx, this political acquiescence necessitated a renewed conception of individual autonomy outside of the official public sphere; hence the first flowering of consumer culture in the newly constructed spaces of individuated leisure that were pictured in Impressionist painting under the Second Empire. It was this bourgeois retreat from the public sphere, and its conceptualization within Marx's analysis, that also underpinned Benjamin's unfinished study of Baudelaire, a point made clear in his claim that 'the theory of *l'art pour l'art* assumes decisive importance around 1852, at a time when the bourgeoisie sought to take its "cause" from the hands of writers and poets'.²⁵ So that, for Benjamin, Baudelaire 'owed his enjoyment of this society as one who had already half withdrawn from it'.²⁶

This is, of course, also the main premise of Lukács's theory of realism in the bourgeois novel and its decline after the political upheavals of the mid-nineteenth century. For him, the period from 1789 to 1848 was one in which the European bourgeoisie heroically pitted itself against political absolutism and aristocratic society, and in the process produced a rich culture of literary realism that was the heir to the great classical and humanist traditions of the past - from Shakespeare and Cervantes through to the nineteenth-century novels of Scott, Stendhal, Goethe, Dickens and especially Balzac and Tolstoy. Following Marx, Lukács defined realism as a literary mode in which the lives of individual characters were portrayed as part of a narrative that situated them within the entire historical dynamics of their society. That he

could include the renowned royalist Balzac in his pantheon of great realist writers set his theory squarely against the more reductive one of the Second International, which, with Georgi Plekhanov and Franz Mehring, reduced art works to the political ideology of their authors. After the revolutions of 1848, the bourgeoisie ceased to be a progressive class, but one instead intent on consolidating its power over both a vanquished *ancien régime* and a revolutionary proletariat. For Lukács, this produced a corresponding shift in culture as realism was superseded by naturalism, and the evocation of the social totality was replaced by the relativized voice of the author and the various psychologies of his characters. In naturalism, which for him was the precursor to modernism in

general, the world is reduced to static situations with fetishized objects described in only isolated, fleeting, subjective impressions.²⁷

Schapiro comes closest to a Lukácsian position in the essay on Courbet when he convincingly demonstrated how the artist's 'taste for the people' was 'nourished and directed by the artistic and social movements of his time'.²⁸ Schapiro emphasized the fact that whether the artists and authors associated with the movement were from a peasant or lower-middle-class background, they were, nevertheless, filtered through the capital where 'they encountered a higher culture and consciousness of social life'.²⁹ He therefore focused upon the artists, authors, poets and critics who gathered around Courbet in Paris, and examined how the precise nature of their political commitments varied and were transformed by 'the broader shifts within the class politics of the period'

- that is to say, he studied 'the stratification of peasants and small proprietors, of factory workers and artisans, the first group attached to its soil, conservative, often religious; the others, without possessions, brought together in work and more apt to independent resistance and struggle', and, moreover, how Bonapartism rested upon the support of the former at the expense of the latter.³⁰ For Schapiro this produced a bifurcation in culture. Whereas Courbet remained committed to revolutionary politics and joined in the Paris Commune twenty years later, the poet and critic Champfleury - 'often identified as the apostle of realism' - nailed his colours to the mast by accepting the Legion of Honour from the emperor himself in 1867.³¹ According to Schapiro, 'In proposing two arts, a traditional, popular art and a more realistic urban art, one conservative and didactic, the other reproducing the spectacle of modern progress, Champfleury satisfied perfectly and in the language of an official adviser the requirements of the regime of the third Napoleon by whom he had just been decorated.' Bonapartism rested upon both support of the peasantry and the economic expansion and prosperity of France between 1850 and 1870, and for Schapiro, 'The latter assured the final triumph of realism, not in its plebeian or insurgent aspect, but as a personal aesthetic tendency toward the representation of the privately experienced and matter-of-fact world which culminated in Impressionism; the former determined the taste for the arts of the static peasantry and primitive cultures which in the crises and social pessimism at the end of the century could replace realism as models of a personal style.'³²

As for Lukács in literature, so for Schapiro in painting then: the events of 1848–51 had destroyed any utopian impulses or democratic aspirations in cultural production. The attempt by Courbet to reach a working-class and peasant public was ultimately crushed under the weight of political reaction, and Realism was surpassed by the privatized and subjective world pictured in Impressionism – a view consonant with Schapiro’s earlier essays, as well as lectures that he gave in the 1940s and 1950s.³³ But here the two men part. If Lukács remained forever welded to a now outmoded form of literary realism, denouncing everything that broke from its strictures as mere formalism, then

Schapiro would find some progressive value in formal experimentation, even as he might condemn the limited horizons of its class origins and allegiances. Despite his admiration for Balzac, Stendhal, Courbet and Daumier, Schapiro inverted Lukács’s position in that for him, as Hemingway makes clear, ‘realism in the visual arts was an essentially nineteenth-century bourgeois aesthetic, and his interest in it was as the forcing ground of the more radical culture of modernism’.³⁴ There is an echo here of his two groundbreaking essays on Romanesque sculpture and manuscript illuminations of 1939 in which the ‘discoordinate’ composition of the sculpture at the Benedictine monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos in Spain was interpreted as the expression of class antagonisms between ecclesiastical and secular authority, between spiritual conformity and freedom; and the secular motifs in the abbey church at Souillac in France were similarly understood as heralding an accommodation of religious art to lay preferences,

on a historical trajectory of social progress leading away from the dogmatic affirmation of church authority in the latter part of the twelfth century and beyond.³⁵ As Otto Karl Werckmeister has argued, in this way ‘Schapiro ventured into an interpretation of Romanesque art by analogy to modern art, where prevalence of aesthetic form and expression of individual sentiment are linked’ – in the former, tied to a forward-moving progressive bourgeois class, and in the latter, a now backward and reactionary one.³⁶

In discussing 1930s American painting years later, Schapiro made it clear that he was not enamoured with the type of nineteenth-century naturalism produced by the Soyer brothers, Moses and Raphael, with whom he had studied at the National Academy of Design while an undergraduate at Columbia. Indeed, the only social realist artist he professed to admire was Philip Evergood, who produced a more strident political art using techniques partly derived from German Expressionism.³⁷ Such preferences distance Schapiro from the vulgar sociological critiques of modernism, and also the crude label of being a Stalinist, the charge that Clark makes against him and Lukács. Indeed, the materialist theories of culture pursued by Schapiro and Lukács, and the debates around realism and modernism – in particular German Expressionism – were circumscribed by similar arguments over the relative merits of the Popular Front as a political response to fascism in Europe and the United States. Yet whereas Lukács’s theory of literature was congruent with the Popular Front, in fact preceding it by several years, Schapiro’s hostility to this tactical turn by the communist movement was

never in doubt. This is not the place to discuss Lukács's strategic membership of the Communist Party under Stalinism – what he described as his 'entry ticket into history' – but the charge against Schapiro is unfounded on both political and aesthetic grounds.³⁸ Like many of the 'New York Intellectuals' with whom he associated, Schapiro was radicalized by the Depression and became a fellow-traveller, publishing in communist magazines such as *New Masses*. Yet, unlike them, by the 1936 presidential elections he was voting not for the Communist Party

candidate, but the Socialist Party one – Norman Thomas – in line with the Trotskyist Workers Party, who also rejected the Popular Front as an accommodation with capitalism and the abandonment of revolutionary principles. While he never described himself as a Trotskyist, he supported the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky, headed by his mentor John Dewey; he published in the reconstituted *Partisan Review* in the late 1930s during its period of identification with Trotsky; he was one of the first to sign up to the statement issued by 'The League for Cultural Freedom and Socialism' that appropriated the demand for the 'complete freedom for art' made in the 'Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art' of 1938 written by Trotsky in collaboration with André Breton and Diego Rivera; and it was Schapiro who led the walkout of the American Artists' Congress in 1940 after the Nazi-Soviet Pact.³⁹

Yet, despite the fact that Schapiro had broken with the Communist Party after the first round of the Moscow Show Trials in 1936, his criticism of Stalinism was perhaps most pronounced in his critique of Soviet Socialist Realism, as it had to be

for Brecht, who, like Lukács, strategically remained within the Communist Party, even if at a distance from Moscow, first in Scandinavia, then America, and finally in East Germany. In a lecture given as early as 1938 entitled ‘Social Realism and Revolutionary Art’, Schapiro declared that: ‘There is a vast body of painting dedicated to the glorification of the government and especially of Stalin’, one that, moreover, ‘corresponds to the emergence of a labour and bureaucratic aristocracy that is plebeian and enjoys a petty bourgeois leisure’.⁴⁰ That Schapiro still subscribed to the original aims of the Bolsheviks is intimated in the fact that he argued that those paintings in which Stalin appeared ‘are notoriously falsified historically, being based on recent textbooks, which supplant the accounts published shortly after the Revolution’.⁴¹ This art is also, for him, aesthetically *retardaire* for, after the liquidation of the Soviet avant-garde, they are painted ‘in a dull literal style that continues the native historical painting of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a painting based on the academic salon art of the 1870s and 1880s in Paris and Munich’.⁴² And, he finished with a swipe at his former comrades in the United States by asserting that the ‘sympathisers in capitalist countries who echo these doctrines or tacitly accept the present state of Russian art as a model for their own countries do socialism the greatest disservice’.⁴³

It is this combination of a purportedly radical art in outmoded forms that drove Brecht’s critique of Soviet Socialist Realism also, and of the figure that he considered to be its main spokesperson and most sophisticated theoretical defender, Lukács. As Brecht notoriously said of him (and other Soviet cultural theoreticians) to Benjamin: ‘They are, to

put it bluntly, enemies of production. Production makes them uncomfortable. You never know where you are with production; production is the unforeseeable. You never know what's going to come out. And they themselves don't want to produce. They want to play the *apparatchik* and exercise control over other people. Every one of their criticisms contains a threat.⁴⁴ Like Schapiro, Brecht was deeply critical of the idea that nineteenth-century novelists, essentially bourgeois writers, could be held up as the model for the proletarian avant-garde of the present, a different and antagonistic class altogether. Turning the debate on its head, Brecht charged Lukács with formalism and, parodying him, demanded: 'Be like Tolstoy - but without his Weakness! Be like Balzac - only up-to-date!'⁴⁵ For Brecht, as for Schapiro, modernist formal devices represented yet another technical means that could be used alongside existing, more traditional ones in the creation of a vanguard art produced to radicalize the masses. As such, they were aligned in their resistance to both the fetishization of artistic form and the type of technological determinism that, for the pair of them, had become crystallized under Stalinism in the reactionary style of Soviet Socialist Realism.⁴⁶

Such a combination of modernist formal devices with traditional techniques of artistic production was a significant component of the mural practice of Rivera, whom Schapiro counted as a friend, and whose art he described in a review of Bertram Wolfe and Rivera's *Portrait of Mexico*, published in *Marxist Quarterly* as 'The Patrons of Revolutionary Art' in 1937, as 'the nearest to a modern epic painting'.⁴⁷ After returning to Mexico in 1921 to paint the revolution, Rivera fused the formal

techniques of Cubism that he had learned in Paris with a renewed commitment to history painting in the traditional medium of fresco. Schapiro's designation of Rivera's murals as 'epic modernism' was later taken up by David Craven, who argued that the term was most probably deployed by Schapiro in relation to the concept of Brechtian 'epic theatre'.⁴⁸ To support this claim, he makes a point-by-point comparison between the main tenets of Brechtian theatre and a reading of Rivera's National Palace mural completed between 1929 and 1935, highlighting most significantly: (1) the deployment of an open narrative over and above a closed one; (2) the desire to provoke the spectator into action rather than passive contemplation; (3) the construction of a human agency that is malleable rather than fixed; (4) the use of montage over linear narrative; (5) and the appeal to reason as opposed to emotion.⁴⁹ For Craven, Rivera used the techniques of modernist montage in his mural to produce a collage of various moments in Mexican history that, in its lack of linear development, standard plot or easy resolution, placed the viewer ascending the staircase in the middle and actively at the centre of interpretation.⁵⁰

While Schapiro may well have had Brecht in mind in terms of his designation of Rivera's art as a form of 'epic modernism', I feel that there is in fact a more suggestive correspondence to be made between this description of the murals and Lukács's conception of Tolstoy's work as a form of 'epic realism'. Lukács followed Lenin in describing Tolstoy as the 'poetic mirror of the peasant revolution' that lasted from 1861 to 1905.⁵¹ For Lukács, the reason that his novels deserve the designation of 'epic realism', and represent the culminating moment in realist

literature in the period following 1848–51, is because Tolstoy ‘lived in a country in which the *bourgeois* revolution was still the order of the day’, so that the ‘social conditions which favoured realism and which determined the development of European literature from Swift to Stendhal were still in existence’.⁵² From his Hegelian and pre-Marxist *The Theory of the Novel* onwards, epic narration – the first stage in Greek literature – was possible for Lukács only when there was an organic unity in everyday life, when it felt meaningful and immediately comprehensible in all its minutiae.⁵³ Once this had been sundered, it fell upon the novel, and in particular narrativity, to produce this lost wholeness once again, a sense of the totality that – following Hegel – had become even more obfuscated by the processes of industrialization. For Fredric Jameson, it is Lukács’s seminal *History and Class Consciousness* that marks the shift from a metaphysical to a historical analysis of the social totality, one that is already latent in the passages on Tolstoy in the earlier work, and one that would become central to his later fully Marxist readings of the bourgeois novel.⁵⁴ For Lukács then, ‘Tolstoy’s great and truly epic mentality ... aspires to a life based on a community of feeling among simple human beings closely bound to nature’ – that is, the peasantry under what Lenin referred to as a form of ‘Asiatic’ capitalism within pre-revolutionary Russia.⁵⁵

In his ‘The Patrons of Revolutionary Art’ essay, after describing Rivera’s murals as ‘pervaded by a sincere hatred of oppression and by sympathy with the masses’, Schapiro made a strikingly similar claim for them being examples of ‘epic modernism’:

If Mexican art after 1920 is really fertilised by the revolution – at least more than the art in Russia or any other country in the world – it is partly because the movement was a bourgeois revolution enlisting the support of almost the entire cultured stratum of the country in the struggle against the great landholders and foreign imperialists. The backwardness of this colonial country with no film industry and general illiteracy, the positive survival of native arts, gave to monumental painting an importance it could hardly win in more developed cultures.⁵⁶

As mentioned, this monumental wall painting combined the age-old medium of fresco with cubistic compositional techniques that Rivera had learned while in Paris in the teens. Hence, yet again, Schapiro adopted the same historical, political and economic coordinates of Lukács's analysis of bourgeois culture, but ultimately inverted them to celebrate the 'epic modernism' of Rivera over the 'epic realism' of a writer such as Tolstoy. In this, instead of following Lenin, Schapiro once again concurred with Trotsky, who in a letter published in *Partisan Review* the following year wrote: 'In the field of painting, the October Revolution has found its greatest interpreter not in the USSR but in faraway Mexico', with 1917 being the catalyst for Rivera's 'power of creative penetration into the epic of work, oppression and insurrection'.⁵⁷ It therefore came as no surprise that Schapiro was one of the first to endorse the 'Statement of The League for Cultural Freedom and Socialism' that was published in *Partisan Review*. Following the 'Manifesto' produced by Trotsky, Breton and Rivera, Dwight Macdonald argued that 'if art and science are to be true to the revolution, they must first be true to themselves'.⁵⁸

For Crow, this enthusiasm for modernism in the visual arts culminated in Schapiro's 'anodyne celebrations of abstract painting in the 1950s', and here he refers to his 1957 defence of Abstract Expressionism, 'The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art'.⁵⁹ Yet this essay is related to the debates of the 1930s and 1940s, if only under distinctly different historical conditions. As the editors of *Aesthetics and Politics* make clear, one of the key axes of these exchanges was 'the relations between "avant-garde" and "commercial" art under the dominion of capital', 'the one subjectively progressive and objectively elitist, the other objectively popular and subjectively regressive'.⁶⁰ Schapiro had made such a distinction himself in his Courbet essay. And even earlier, in a little-known essay entitled 'Public Use of Art' published in 1936 in *Art Front* - the paper of the Artists' Union - Schapiro had questioned the very efficacy of high art, monopolized by the bourgeoisie, in a culture pervaded by the mass media. Like Benjamin in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Schapiro called for a fusion between the means of technical reproduction developed by the mass media and the relatively archaic realm of high art: 'To make art available to everyone the material means for diffusing the degraded contemporary art, the printing presses and the admirable techniques of reproduction, must become the vehicles for the best art.'⁶¹ Yet for Schapiro, unlike Benjamin perhaps, the techniques of mechanical reproduction were not, in and of themselves, enough to revolutionize life. Real cultural democratization was possible only on the condition that 'art embody a content and achieve qualities acceptable to the masses of the people', and that 'the people control

the means of production and attain a standard of living and a level of culture such that the enjoyment of art of a high quality becomes an important part of their life' – that is, only under socialism when the working class actually owned the 'means of production' was a thoroughgoing and pervasive cultural democracy ever really possible.⁶²

In the context of 1950s America, Schapiro's utopian belief in the emancipatory potential of technology and the mass media had, understandably, withered. The postwar boom in the United States was predicated upon the wholesale generalization of Fordism and the ideas of scientific management. The trade-union militancy of the 1930s had been tempered by Taft-Hartley and the purging of its most militant members under McCarthyism.⁶³ Automation had led to deskilling and the driving down of wages, both at home and abroad, as the ever-increasing militarization during the Cold War period ensured that the United States had access to foreign markets and their cheap raw materials. The burgeoning entertainment industries – Hollywood, TV, radio and the commercial press – were mobilized to ensure acquiescence, political quietism and a willing submission to such conditions.⁶⁴ The subject became a staple of mainstream American sociology in the period with works such as C. Wright Mills's *White Collar* and *The Power Elite* being perhaps the most celebrated examples.⁶⁵ This is the context for the Frankfurt School's analysis of administered capitalism with its pessimistic prognosis for human emancipation – best captured in Horkheimer and Adorno's earlier, yet prescient, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, with its withering critique of 'positivism', which, they argued, had produced a situation in which 'thought finds itself

deprived not only of the affirmative reference to science and everyday phenomena but also of the conceptual language of opposition'.⁶⁶ This is also the context for Schapiro's defence of postwar American abstraction.

For Schapiro, the generalized division of labour characteristic of postwar American industry had ensured that there was 'a separation between the individual and the final result', no longer any 'bond between maker and user'.⁶⁷ As a consequence, few people 'were fortunate enough to make something that represents themselves, that issues entirely from their hands and mind, and to which they can affix their names'.⁶⁸ The process of alienation was only reinforced by the mass media, which produced 'a world of social relationships that is impersonal, calculated and controlled in its elements, aiming always at efficiency'.⁶⁹ In opposition to the coercive manipulation of the entertainment industry, 'The experience of a work of art, like the creation of the work of art itself, is a process ultimately opposed to communication as it is understood now.'⁷⁰ In such a depersonalized and technocratic society, abstract painting had a critical edge in that it symbolized 'an individual who realises freedom and deep engagement of the self within his work'.⁷¹ Yet Schapiro emphasized the importance of gesture over abstraction per se, 'the mark, the stroke, the brush, the drip, the quality of the substance in paint itself ... all signs of the artist's active presence' - painterly techniques that had become synonymous with Abstract Expressionism.⁷² Thus these works, 'the last hand-made, personal objects within our culture', represented, for Schapiro at least, an 'affirmation of the self or certain parts of the self, against devalued social norms'.⁷³ Under the

dehumanizing conditions of postwar capitalism then, gestural painting thereby assumed a progressive quality as ‘a means of affirming the individual in opposition to the contrary qualities of the ordinary experience of working and doing’.⁷⁴

Rather than Schapiro’s essay being a crass paean to Abstract Expressionism, Francis Frascina has argued that it was ‘a product of a Marxist intellectual writing to support a critical version of the avant-garde in the face of the great traumas of Stalinism, the Holocaust and McCarthyism’.⁷⁵ These were the same historical coordinates of Adorno’s work in exile, which also sought to defend, what he considered to be, an embattled subjectivity under the administered conditions of postwar American capitalism. Like Schapiro, Adorno found it in the most esoteric forms of high art; and like Schapiro, the autonomous art work was counterposed to the reified world of mass culture in its potential to resist appropriation. Indeed, Craven points to the similarity of Schapiro’s assertion in his text on Rivera – ‘The fact that a work of art has a politically radical content therefore does not assure its revolutionary value. Nor does a non-political content necessarily imply its irrelevance to revolutionary action’ – to Adorno’s claim, just five years after Schapiro’s defence of Abstract Expressionism, that ‘politics have migrated into autonomous art, and never more so when they seem to be politically dead’.⁷⁶ But here the similarities end. As with Benjamin, Schapiro ultimately had a more discriminating view of popular culture and a clearer sense that the rarefied objects of high art – like the paintings that he sought to defend in the 1950s – could, as Jameson reminds us, be used ‘to embellish the

splendid new structures of the great insurance companies and multinational banks'.⁷⁷ Schapiro himself pointed to the contradictory nature of the autonomous art work under capitalism, its 'value as an investment, its capacity to survive in the market and to symbolise the social quality of the owner', at the same time that he was arguing for its potential liberatory qualities.⁷⁸ Nowhere does Adorno seem as concerned, to continue with Jameson, 'That Schoenberg's Hollywood pupils used their advanced techniques to write movie music.'⁷⁹

Unlike Adorno, Schapiro was never really convinced by Lukács's conception of reification, or the necessary negative moment in dialectical materialism. While Schapiro was no positivist, as Hemingway has made clear, he was far too attracted to empiricism and the 'scientific model' derived from the natural sciences to renounce the enlightenment project as resolutely as Adorno and Horkheimer.⁸⁰ It was this that underpinned Schapiro's continuing belief in Marxism as a source of knowledge and the working class as the potential agency of emancipation – something that is entirely absent in the writings of Adorno. And ultimately it was this scepticism towards the explanatory power of the dialectic that prevented Schapiro from fully embracing Trotskyism, despite his long-standing admiration for the Russian revolutionary leader from an early age. While the dialectic may have had some explanatory value for Schapiro, he was rightfully suspicious of the way in which it had become appropriated, traduced and ossified into dogma under Stalinism.⁸¹ Indeed, for Schapiro modern science and modern art were analogous in their potential for human liberation, so that by the late 1950s the tension in his writing between his

desire to keep realism and modernism in some form of equal and productive relationship was finally decided in favour of the latter. Yet unlike Adorno, Schapiro had a greater belief in the affirmative role of art over and above its capacity for negation, and the artists he most admired – whether they be Courbet, Rivera or Brecht – always orientated their work towards a wider and more inclusive audience. It is for these reasons that Schapiro's writing is more closely related to the heritage of classical Marxism.

- 1 For Schapiro's influence on medieval sculpture, see Otto Karl Werckmeister, 'The Emmaus and Thomas Relief in the Cloister of Silos', *El románico en Silos: IX centenario de la consagración de la iglesia y del claustro* (Abadía de Silos: Silos, 1990); on Courbet, Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1971); on Impressionism, Robert Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1988); and on Abstract Expressionism, David Craven, *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique: Dissent During the McCarthy Period* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1999).
- 2 Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (Verso: London, 1979).
- 3 Theodor W. Adorno et al., *Aesthetics and Politics* (Verso: London, 1980). Michael Denning characterizes Schapiro as one of America's 'equivalents of "western marxism"'. Michael Denning, "The Special American Conditions": Marxism and American Studies', *American Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 3 (1986), p. 359.
- 4 Meyer Schapiro, 'Review of Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of the Modern Movement*', *Zeitschrift fur Sozialforschung*, vol. 7, nos. 1–2 (1938), pp. 291–3.
- 5 Serge Guilbaut, 'The New Adventures of the Avant-Garde in America: Greenberg, Pollock, or from Trotskyism to the New Liberalism of the "Vital Centre"', in Francis Frascina (ed.), *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* (Harper and Row: London, 1985), p. 154.
- 6 Thomas Crow, 'Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts', *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1996), p. 18.

- ⁷ T. J. Clark, ‘Jackson Pollock’s Abstraction’, in Serge Guilbaut (ed.), *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945–1964* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990), p. 224 and n. 89, p. 238. This rather disparaging dismissal of Schapiro’s 1937 essay seems surprising considering Clark’s acknowledgment elsewhere that ‘the few lines it devoted to Impressionist painting still seem to me the best thing on the subject, simply because they suggest so tellingly that the form of the new art is inseparable from its content’. T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1984), p. 5.
- ⁸ Andrew Hemingway, ‘Meyer Schapiro and Marxism in the 1930s’, *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1 (1994), p. 20.
- ⁹ Meyer Schapiro, ‘The Social Bases of Art’, in Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams (eds.), *Artists Against War and Fascism: Papers of the First American Artists’ Congress* (Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, 1986), p. 123.
- ¹⁰ Schapiro, ‘The Social Bases of Art’, p. 126.
- ¹¹ Ibid., pp. 126–7.
- ¹² Meyer Schapiro, ‘Nature of Abstract Art’, *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries: Selected Papers II* (George Braziller: New York, 1978), pp. 187–8.
- ¹³ Ibid., p. 190.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Meyer Schapiro, Lillian Milgram, and David Craven, ‘A Series of Interviews’ (July 15, 1992–January 22, 1995), *Res*, no. 31 (Spring 1997), p. 164.
- ¹⁸ The essay was delivered at Bennington College, Vermont, in the winter of 1950–1 and published as Meyer Schapiro, ‘Rebellion in Art’, in Daniel Aaron (ed.), *America in Crisis: Fourteen Crucial Episodes in American History* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1952), pp. 202–42.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 217.
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 241.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 240.

- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Meyer Schapiro, ‘Courbet and Popular Imagery’, Schapiro, *Modern Art*, op. cit., p. 83, fn. 126; originally published as Schapiro, ‘Courbet and Popular Imagery: An Essay on Realism and Naïveté’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 7, no. 1 (Fall 1946), pp. 164–91.
- ²⁴ Karl Marx, ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte’, in David Fernbach (ed.), *Surveys from Exile: Political Writings Volume 2* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 190.
- ²⁵ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire’, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Age of High Capitalism* (New Left Books: London, 1973), p. 106.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 59.
- ²⁷ For an early and concise elaboration of Lukács’s critical distinction between the realist and naturalist novel published in 1936 in *International Literature* –and one that Schapiro could therefore have conceivably read – see Georg Lukács, ‘Narrate or Describe’, *Writer and Critic and Other Essays* (Merlin Press: London, 1978), pp. 110–48.
- ²⁸ Schapiro, ‘Courbet and Popular Imagery’, op. cit., p. 54.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 67.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 68.
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 58.
- ³² Ibid., p. 71.
- ³³ See the lecture Schapiro gave at Columbia University in March 1948, and again at Dartmouth College in May 1950, for a particularly strong restatement of this Lukácsian framework: Meyer Schapiro, ‘The Value of Modern Art’, *Worldview in Painting and Sculpture: Selected Papers V* (George Braziller: New York, 1999), pp. 154–6.
- ³⁴ Andrew Hemingway, ‘Meyer Schapiro: Marxism, Science and Art’, in Andrew Hemingway (ed.), *Marxism and Art History: From William Morris to the New Left* (Pluto Press: London, 2006), p. 140.
- ³⁵ Meyer Schapiro, ‘The Sculptures of Souillac’, W. R. W. Koehler (ed.), *Medieval Studies in Memory of A. Kingsley Porter, Vol. 1* (Harvard University Press: Boston, Massachusetts, 1939), pp. 359–87; and Meyer Schapiro, ‘From Mozarabic to Romanesque in Silos’, *Art Bulletin*, vol. 21 (1939), pp. 312–74.

- ³⁶ Otto Karl Werckmeister, 'Review of Meyer Schapiro, *Romanesque Art*', *Art Quarterly*, vol. 2 (1979), p. 213.
- ³⁷ Hemingway, 'Meyer Schapiro and Marxism in the 1930s', op. cit., p. 17.
- ³⁸ Quoted in Fredric Jameson, 'Reflections in Conclusion', in Adorno et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, op. cit., p. 202.
- ³⁹ Dwight McDonald, 'Statement of The League for Cultural Freedom and Socialism', *Partisan Review*, vol. 6, no. 4 (Summer 1939), p. 127; and André Breton and Diego Rivera, 'Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art', *Partisan Review*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Fall 1938), pp. 49–53. See Hemingway, 'Meyer Schapiro and Marxism in the 1930s', op. cit., for an overview of Schapiro's political allegiances throughout this period; and Otto Karl Werckmeister, 'Jugglers in a Monastery', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1 (1994), pp. 60–4, for the similarity between Schapiro's position and that of the authors of the manifesto.
- ⁴⁰ Meyer Schapiro, 'Social Realism and Revolutionary Art', Schapiro, *Worldview in Painting and Sculpture*, op. cit., p. 225.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 223.
- ⁴² Ibid., p. 224.
- ⁴³ Ibid., p. 226.
- ⁴⁴ Quoted in Walter Benjamin, 'Conversations with Brecht', in Adorno et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, op. cit., p. 97.
- ⁴⁵ Bertolt Brecht, 'On the Formalistic Character of the Theory of Realism', in Adorno et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, op. cit., p. 76.
- ⁴⁶ For an analysis of how Brecht, like Schapiro, inverted Lukács's prescriptions for realism, see Steve Giles, 'Realism after Modernism: Representation and Modernity in Brecht, Lukács and Adorno', Jerome Carroll, Steve Giles and Maike Oergel (eds.), *Aesthetics and Modernity from Schiller to the Frankfurt School* (Peter Lang: Bern, 2012), p. 182.
- ⁴⁷ Meyer Schapiro, 'The Patrons of Revolutionary Art', *Marxist Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 3 (October–December 1937), p. 463.
- ⁴⁸ David Craven, *Diego Rivera: As Epic Modernist* (G. K. Hall & Co.: New York, 1997), p. 102. For one of Brecht's best elaborations of what actually constituted 'epic theatre', see Bertolt Brecht, 'The Modern Theatre is Epic Theatre', in John Willett (ed.), *Brecht on Theatre* (Hill & Wang: New York, 1964), p. 37.

- ⁴⁹ Craven, *Diego Rivera*, op. cit., p. 123. It should be noted here that in ‘The Patrons of Revolutionary Art’, Schapiro does not make reference to Rivera’s National Palace murals, but instead those that at the Ministry of Education, Mexico City, and at the University of Chapino, Texcoco, Mexico State.
- ⁵⁰ Craven, *Diego Rivera*, op. cit., p. 112. For perhaps the most sophisticated reading of this mural scheme, see Leonard Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico, 1920–1940: Art of the New Order* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998), pp. 86–137.
- ⁵¹ Georg Lukács, ‘Tolstoy and the Development of Realism’, *Studies in European Realism* (Merlin Press: London, 1972), p. 147; Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, ‘Leo Tolstoy as the Mirror of the Russian Revolution’, *On Literature and Art* (Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1970), pp. 28–33; originally published in *Proletary*, no. 35 (11 September 1908).
- ⁵² Lukács, ‘Tolstoy and the Development of Realism’, op. cit., pp. 135, 147.
- ⁵³ Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971).
- ⁵⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1971), pp. 181–2; Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Merlin Press: London, 1971); and for a good example of Lukács’s later Marxist analysis of the novel, see Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (1937) (Merlin Press: London, 1962).
- ⁵⁵ Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, op. cit., p. 145 and Lukács, ‘Tolstoy and the Development of Realism’, op. cit., p. 162.
- ⁵⁶ Schapiro, ‘The Patrons of Revolutionary Art’, op. cit., p. 464.
- ⁵⁷ Leon Trotsky, ‘Art and Politics in Our Epoch’, Paul N. Siegel (ed.), *Leon Trotsky on Literature and Art* (Pathfinder Press: New York, 1970), p. 110.
- ⁵⁸ McDonald, ‘Statement of The League for Cultural Freedom and Socialism’, op. cit., p. 127.
- ⁵⁹ Crow, ‘Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts’, in Frascina (ed.), *Pollock and After*, op. cit., p. 246. It should be pointed out here that Crow later omitted this rather crass assessment of Schapiro’s 1957

essay in a revised version of the text that appeared in the anthology of his collected essays. See Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture*, op. cit., p. 18.

60 Perry Anderson et al., ‘Presentation II’, in Adorno et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, op. cit., p. 66.

61 Meyer Schapiro, ‘The Public Uses of Art’, *Art Front*, vol. 2, no. 10 (November 1936), p. 4. See Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production’, in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: New York, 1968), pp. 217–52.

62 Schapiro, ‘The Public Uses of Art’, op. cit., p. 5.

63 The Labor Management Relations Act, commonly known as Taft-Hartley, was a direct response to the postwar labour upsurge of 1946. Among other things, the legislation prohibited jurisdictional, wildcat, solidarity or political strikes; secondary boycotts; secondary and mass picketing; closed shops; and monetary donations by unions to federal political campaigns. It also required union officers to sign non-communist affidavits and empowered the federal government to obtain strikebreaking injunctions if it was deemed that an impending or current strike imperilled national health or safety.

64 David Craven provides a useful overview of these developments in his expansion of Schapiro’s 1957 essay, predicated upon the economic analysis of the ‘third technological revolution’ as theorized by Ernest Mandel. See both David Craven, *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique*, op. cit., pp. 141–5; and Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (New Left Books: London, 1975), pp. 184–222.

65 C. Wright Mills, *White Collar* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1951); C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1956).

66 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (1944) (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2002), p. xv.

67 Meyer Schapiro, ‘The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art’, *Art News*, vol. 56, no. 4 (Summer 1957), pp. 36–42; and republished as Meyer Schapiro, ‘Recent Abstract Painting’, *Modern Art*, op. cit., pp. 213–26.

68 Ibid., p. 217.

69 Ibid., p. 223.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid., p. 218.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid., pp. 216–17.

74 Ibid., p. 218.

75 Francis Frascina, ‘My Lai, Guernica, MOMA and the Art Left, 1969–70: Part 2’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 30, no. 4 (October 1995), p. 717.

76 Craven, *Abstract Expressionism an Cultural Critique*, op. cit., p. 1; Schapiro, ‘The Patrons of Revolutionary Art’, op. cit., p. 465; Theodor Adorno, ‘Commitment’, Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (eds.), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (Blackwell: Oxford 1978), p. 318.

77 Fredric Jameson, ‘Reflections in Conclusion’, op. cit., p. 209.

78 Schapiro, ‘Recent Abstract Painting’, op. cit., p. 224.

79 Jameson, ‘Reflections in Conclusion’, op. cit., p. 209.

80 Hemingway, ‘Meyer Schapiro and Marxism in the 1930s’, op. cit., p. 24.

81 On Schapiro’s relationship to Trotsky and dialectical materialism, see Hemingway, ‘Meyer Schapiro and Marxism in the 1930s’, op. cit., pp. 22–5; and Hemingway, ‘Meyer Schapiro: Marxism, Science and Art’, op. cit., p. 138.

APPROACHING MARX'S AESTHETICS

OR, WHAT IS SENSUOUS PRACTICE?

Stewart Martin

The elaboration of Marx's aesthetics faces a fundamental problem: Marx never wrote on aesthetics. Of course, he was a cultured intellectual with a profound artistic sensibility, and his writings are littered with remarks on art, not to mention the literary mode of his texts themselves. However, as for an aesthetic theory, there is very little to go on. One may make the most of what there is and elaborate the consequences of his fragmentary remarks, but this is a formidable and precarious task. There remains another approach, a more fundamental solution: that Marx did in fact write an aesthetics, disclosed in his early writings on sensibility. All that is required, therefore, is to recognize this hidden treasure and bring it to light. This fundamental problem and solution has framed much of the tradition of Marxist aesthetics, at least since these early writings were first published in the 1920s and 30s.¹

And yet, a further problem appears within this frame, no less fundamental: Marx's early understanding of sensibility is written in the shadow of Ludwig Feuerbach. Therefore, the essential sources of his aesthetics, above all his 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', are indebted to a

philosophy from which he unequivocally breaks in the flashes of insight constituting his so-called 'Theses on Feuerbach'. Yet again, we face a formidable and precarious task of sifting through what remains after this explosion in Marx's thought. Much of what he wrote about sensibility is ruined and must be abandoned in pursuit of his radicalized conception of practice. But a few fragments remain, a few clues, above all Marx's commitment to a practice that is sensuous, a sensuous practice, that emerges as a new principle of his thought. But what is this exactly? What are its consequences? And what is the new conception of sensibility and perhaps aesthetics that it inaugurates? These are the questions this essay addresses. They may appear to be familiar. Certainly, no one has been able to read Marx's 'Manuscripts' without the horizon of his critique of Feuerbach. This remains nonetheless a matter of intense controversy. In any case, what is original to these questions can be made evident only by grasping the profound problems from which they emerge.

Let us start with the issue of Marx's debt to Feuerbach. Self-evidently, we will have no chance of understanding the nature of Marx's break with Feuerbach - both its character and its depth - without understanding his investment in, even identification

with, his forerunner. Marx outlines his unreserved commitment to Feuerbach's philosophy in greatest detail in his 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts' (hereafter 'Manuscripts') as follows:

Feuerbach's great achievement is:

- (1) To have shown that philosophy is nothing more than religion brought into thought and developed in thought, and that it is equally to be condemned as another form and mode of existence of the estrangement of man's nature.
- (2) To have founded *true materialism* and *real science* by making the social relation of 'man to man' the basic principle of his theory.
- (3) To have opposed to the negation of the negation, which claims to be the absolute positive, the positive which is based upon itself and positively grounded in itself.

Feuerbach explains the Hegelian dialectic, and in so doing justifies taking the positive, that is sensuously ascertained, as his starting point.²

Here we can read Marx's emphatic commitment to Feuerbach's conception of sensibility. It appears as only one of three interrelated debts, but, as will become evident, it is a pivot around which revolves Marx's whole project to follow Feuerbach into an alternative philosophical world to that occupied by Hegel and left Hegelianism. However, within a year, in the spring of 1845, we can see in his 'Theses on Feuerbach' (hereafter 'Theses') a withdrawal from or, rather, transformation of each of these commitments in the attempt to radicalize his conception of the reality of practice. Understanding these transformations therefore provides an invaluable key to understanding Marx's originality and its consequences for all that came before and after this revolution in his thought.

Starting with the first point, concerning religion, it is theses 4, 6 and 7 that stand out. In thesis 4, Marx writes:

Feuerbach starts out from the fact of religious self-estrangement, of the duplication of the world into a religious world and a secular one. His work consists in resolving the religious world into its secular basis. But that the secular basis lifts off from itself and establishes itself as an independent realm in the clouds can only be explained by the inner strife and intrinsic contradictoriness of this secular basis. The latter must, therefore, itself be both understood in its contradiction and revolutionised in practice. Thus, for instance, once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then itself be destroyed in theory and practice.³

This thesis does not appear to depart from Marx's debt to Feuerbach, since it concerns the 'secular world' rather than philosophy. And even if we read the 'fact of religious self-estrangement' as referring to Feuerbach's critique of Hegel's philosophy - namely, that

it restores religious estrangement - then Marx appears to reaffirm this fact. Nonetheless, a new and more fundamental starting point is announced: the fact of secular self-estrangement, or the estrangement within the secular basis itself. This transformation is derived from a consequence of Feuerbach's argument. If religion is an estrangement that is produced by its secular basis, then why does the secular basis produce this estrangement in the first place? This is not explained by the critique of religion as estrangement; that only presupposes estrangement. It must be explained by the critique of the secular basis, its contradictions and how they produce estranged forms such as religion. In fact, without such a critique there has been no substantive critique of religion. Marx hereby subjects

Feuerbach to the same criticism that he makes of left Hegelianism in general.

This criticism is extended in thesis 7, where we can also see Marx withdrawing from his second debt to Feuerbach concerning the social: 'Feuerbach, consequently, does not see that the "religious sentiment" is itself a social product, and that the abstract individual which he analyses belongs to a particular form of society.' However, it is thesis 6 that exposes the conceptual basis of Marx's objections by introducing his decisive criticism of Feuerbach's conception of *Gattungswesen* or genus-being:

Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the essence of *man*. But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations. Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence, is hence obliged:

(1) To abstract from the historical process and to define the religious sentiment [*Gemüf*] by itself, and to presuppose an abstract – *isolated* – human individual.

(2) Essence, therefore, can be regarded only as 'genus' [*Gattung*], as inner, mute, which unites the many individuals *in a natural way*.⁴

Clearly, these three theses unequivocally contradict Marx's prior debt. Suddenly, Feuerbach is transformed from the philosopher of the social into a philosopher of the abstract individual. This claim is in many ways more contentious than the first. There is an obvious sense in which Feuerbach did not pursue the kind of criticism of the secular world

that Marx pursues in his critique of political economy – which, it should be noted, Marx had been pursuing before the ‘Theses’ under the auspices of a contribution to and extension of Feuerbach’s insights. With respect to the social, however, we face a direct conflict testified to by a struggle over the same terms. Feuerbach had declared in his *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* that: ‘The highest and last principle of philosophy is ... the unity of man with man.’⁵ And Marx was evidently thinking of just such a claim when he was outlining his debt to Feuerbach in the ‘Manuscripts’. So how are we to understand Marx’s volte-face in the ‘Theses’?

The pivot may be located in the idea of *Gattungswesen*. This is an idea that Marx had deployed throughout his attempt to elaborate a historical and social conception of man in the ‘Manuscripts’. So its rejection in thesis 6 is no less dramatic than the criticism of Feuerbach’s conception of the social. But the fact that Marx is seemingly prepared to abandon the term *Gattungswesen* indicates that it is the source of what he objects to. And, indeed, this is confirmed when we examine Feuerbach’s own words. The introduction to *The Essence of Christianity*, reads as follows:

Consciousness in the strictest sense is present only in a being to whom his genus [*Gattung*], his essentiality [*Wesenheit*], is an object. The brute is indeed conscious of himself as an individual – and he has accordingly the feeling of self – but not as genus-object [*Gattung Gegenstand*]: hence, he is without that consciousness which derives its name from science. Where there is this consciousness, there is a capability of science. Science is the consciousness of genera [*Bewußtsein der Gattungen*]. In life we

have to do with individuals, in science with genera. But only a being to whom his own genus, his own essentiality, is an object, can make the essential nature of other things or beings an object of thought.⁶

What is evident here is that Feuerbach does not say that the essence of man is revealed socially or historically. Rather, man's essence is revealed by a distinctive capacity of consciousness to apprehend itself not as an individual but as a genus, that is, as a generic or universal being. To the extent that this being is universal, it discloses the universality within which all beings exist. In other words, the apprehension of nature by consciousness is the apprehension of the condition of all natural beings. And this is possible because consciousness is not an individual or specific apprehension, but a universal or abstract apprehension. Hence, Marx's objections are confirmed. *Gattungswesen* is disclosed to consciousness as such, as the capacity of universalization or abstraction by man in general, regardless of his social and historical relations. The unity of man and man is therefore 'natural' or a function of coexistence within a natural universe. Feuerbach does not say that this is the capacity of an isolated individual, but since consciousness is not determined socially it is effectively isolated.

As has already been mentioned, Marx's 'Manuscripts' contain extensive passages that do little else than paraphrase or improvise around the idea of *Gattungswesen*. Given the problems the 'Theses' expose, the question arises of what can be salvaged, if anything, from these passages? In the critical light cast back by the 'Theses', it is evident that the 'Manuscripts' discern a contradiction between abstract consciousness and

Gattungswesen. Thus, Marx objects that ‘universal consciousness is an abstraction from real life and as such in hostile opposition to it’.⁷ And yet, he opposes this abstract consciousness to *Gattungswesen*. This tension is evident in his proposition of a speculative identity of ‘genus-consciousness’ and ‘genus-being’: ‘As *genus-consciousness* man confirms his real *social life* and merely repeats in thought his actual existence;

conversely, genus-being confirms itself in genus-consciousness and exists for itself in its universality, as a thinking being.’⁸ The problem here may be attributed to Feuerbach himself, for there is a change in his writings, from *The Essence of Christianity* to his later more polemical works, such as the *Principles*, which are orientated to an intensified critique of abstract consciousness and Hegel through recourse to sensibility. It seems likely that Marx’s ‘Manuscripts’ were influenced by this later phase of Feuerbach’s writing. However, what Marx’s ‘Theses’ expose is not a distinction between early and late Feuerbach, but rather a radical critique of his thought as a whole. This means that, however influenced Marx was by Feuerbach’s critique of abstract consciousness, he decides in the ‘Theses’ that Feuerbach’s alternative of sensuous consciousness offers no real alternative: that it is still abstract, still presupposes the abstraction of all beings in the disclosure of being in general, since it is only in the space of this abstraction that the objective, or sensuous, or anything that is opposed to consciousness, can appear.

The critique of *Gattungswesen* therefore provides an invaluable introduction to the issues surrounding

the third of Marx's debts to Feuerbach: namely, his commitment to the 'sensuously ascertained'. It also introduces us to the decisive issues surrounding Marx's radicalized conception of practice, which is presented as a new mode of sensibility opposed to Feuerbach. This is stated most concisely in thesis 5: 'Feuerbach, not satisfied with *abstract thinking*, wants *intuition* [*Anschauung*]; but he does not conceive of sensuousness as *practical* human-sensuous activity.'⁹ Marx does not therefore abandon sensuousness altogether, but rather its intuitive or conscious mode. What is at stake here is intimated further by the complex propositions of the first thesis:

The chief defect of all previous materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that the thing [*Gegenstand*], reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the *object* [*Objekt*], or of *intuition* [*Anschauung*], but not as *human sensuous activity*, *praxis*, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active* side was set forth but abstractly by idealism – which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from conceptual objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective* activity. In *The Essence of Christianity*, he therefore regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and defined only in its dirty-Jewish form of appearance. Hence he does not grasp the significance of 'revolutionary', of 'practical-critical', activity.¹⁰

Clearly, the 'Manuscripts' had also sought a theory of the reality of practice. What has changed, therefore, is not so much the end as the means. Suddenly, Marx sees Feuerbach's sensuous materialism as just another obstacle to grasping the reality of practice, even worse than idealism.

In order to demonstrate Marx's realization here it is worth looking at his reference to Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, which is ostensibly to the chapter on 'The Significance of the Creation in Judaism'. Here we find this striking passage:

The standpoint of theory is the standpoint of harmony with the world. The subjective activity in which man contents himself and allows himself free play is the sensuous imagination [*sinnliche Einbildungskraft*] alone. Satisfied with this, he lets Nature subsist in peace, and constructs his castles in the air, his poetical cosmogonies, only out of natural materials. When, on the contrary, man places himself only on the practical standpoint and looks at the world from thence, making the practical standpoint the theoretical one also, he is in disunion with Nature; he makes Nature the abject vassal of his selfish interest, of his practical egoism. The theoretic expression of this egotistical, practical view, according to which Nature is in itself nothing, is this: Nature or the world is made, created, the product of a command.... Utilitarianism, use, is the essential principle of Judaism.¹¹

The consistency of this passage with Feuerbach's own on *Gattungswesen* quoted above is evident. Practice limits nature, does not allow it to stand objectively in its independent universality, and instead reduces it to individual interest, something created in order to be useful. It is rather the theoretical standpoint that grasps the object of nature as a whole, and it does so by abstaining from practice. Sensuous imagination, the essential faculty of artistic production since Kant, which is free from interest, is therefore proto-theoretical for Feuerbach: 'for the theoretic view was originally the aesthetic view, the *prima philosophia*'.¹²

The full extent of Marx's need to turn away from Feuerbach is now exposed. Far from offering a

route to a theory of practice, beyond Hegel, Feuerbach is a cul-de-sac from which Marx must turn back and start again. Feuerbach's whole orientation towards nature, towards the sensuous object, is revealed to be opposed to practice, to be theoretical, since the sensuous objectivity of nature only appears within the abstract space opened up by theoretical consciousness, which is characterized by its withdrawal from any individuality or specific practical interest. Feuerbach's sensualism is therefore misunderstood if it is simply opposed to theory or consciousness – even if this is a confusion that Feuerbach himself often generated. The sensible, the individual or even the practical interests are not excluded from theory in so far as they are included in the generic space of nature that a universal consciousness discloses. But this inclusion presupposes an abstraction that is the act of consciousness, not activity itself. To conceive of sensuousness, individuality or practice independently of this abstraction of consciousness requires an altogether different approach.

Having realized this, Marx begins afresh. But his new starting point is a stumbling block. He recognizes that intuition and objectivity ('the form of the object') are theoretical, not practical, and that he must turn against Feuerbach's sensualism. And yet, he goes on to describe practice as both objective and, repeatedly, sensuous. How are we to negotiate these apparently contradictory claims? Is this pivotal moment in Marx's self-understanding also one of theoretical confusion, perhaps even of collapse?

In broad strategic terms, Marx's alternative is obvious. He realizes that Feuerbach does not offer

him a theory of practice or, rather, of the reality of practice. He then

realizes that idealism offers him a theory of the reality of practice in the mode of the constitutive subject, whose activity constitutes itself and its world. But he maintains his critique of idealism – that it is abstract theory, or abstract mental labour. Evidently, sensuousness and objectivity are his terminological markers for an activity that is not idealist, not abstract. This much is clear. But still, how are we to grapple with the contradictions these markers generate? How can objectivity be a mode of intuition or non-practical materialism, and yet remain the measure of real practice, as opposed to idealism? And what of the fact that sensuousness is typically a mode of passivity, not activity? It is as such that Feuerbach opposes it to the activity of idealism, and Hegel would agree to disagree. Is not the idea of a sensuous activity simply a contradiction in terms?

We can make more substantive sense of Marx's goal by considering how he argues for the reality of practice elsewhere. Let us take the example he offers in his elaboration of his critique of Feuerbach in *The German Ideology*: a cherry tree. The reality of a cherry tree may appear to reside in its objectivity, which we grasp as something beyond ourselves, independent of ourselves, and which we therefore grasp most appropriately through sensibility, that is, through our passive reception of it as a reality existing independently of us. This certainly differs from Hegel, for whom the reality of the tree resides in our knowledge of it, since the cherry tree exists only to the extent that the concept 'cherry tree' adequately determines the sensations appearing to consciousness. In these

terms, the tree's reality is generated through an activity or practice of consciousness that knows or conceptualizes what it senses. However, for Marx, the reality of the tree resides in the fact that it is a product of human activity. That is, in the sense that it is transplanted and maintained by human labour, by human industry. If it were not for this activity, there would be no cherry tree for Feuerbach to sense.¹³ Nor would there be a tree for Hegel to know, and producing knowledge of the cherry tree does not amount to producing the cherry tree.

Reality is therefore practical, produced and reproduced by human labour on nature. This means that reality is historical to the degree that history is the course of this activity of production, the evolution of different ways or modes in which these activities transform nature from something external to human activity to something increasingly internal to it. Marx even concedes that Feuerbach's approach may be appropriate to pre-historical nature, where nature is independent from human action, but that such nature is increasingly marginal to the modern world in which Feuerbach lives.¹⁴

Hence we can see how the practical transformation of sensibility underpins Marx's other criticisms of Feuerbach. To approach reality as practice is to approach it as produced through history and the social relations that individuals enter into in order to produce and reproduce their lives throughout history. To approach reality

as merely sensuous is to treat it as an externality appearing to man. Man is therefore abstracted from any historical or social determination, and the sensuousness or objectivity of the object effectively presupposes an abstract man, a consciousness that

takes a theoretical standpoint, not a practical standpoint.

Feuerbach suddenly ceases to present an alternative to Hegel. He even regresses behind him, for Hegel had grasped the constitution of objectivity by consciousness as an activity, which indeed reduces the world to something created by man. Feuerbach suppresses this by treating objectivity as a natural or independent reality that consciousness only exposes to view or contemplates.

But with this realization of what Feuerbach and Hegel share, the task facing Marx is clarified: the critique of abstraction as a critique of consciousness as such. Whereas previously Marx had pursued this through Feuerbach's critique of idealism, he now realizes that Feuerbach and idealism are both forms of abstraction inasmuch as they are both philosophies of consciousness. Feuerbach's investment in sensuousness is not enough, in itself, to overcome the abstraction of reality by consciousness. Sensuous particularity, however insistent, remains a phenomenon within the abstraction that consciousness generates by separating itself from sensuousness. Ironically, Feuerbach's very act of apprehending the object as real, in opposition to the human consciousness that apprehends it, reduces the object to a determination of the abstract realm of objectivity constituted by consciousness, namely, as what is opposed to consciousness. Feuerbach wants to avoid just this problem by counterposing abstract consciousness to sensuous consciousness, but the abstraction is generated by the very infinitude of otherness that consciousness establishes as its field of objectivity, and since sensuousness appears

within this field it is constituted by this act of abstraction.

Henceforth, the task of grasping the reality of practice is premised on the critique not only of abstract consciousness, but of sensuous consciousness too – that is, a fundamental critique of consciousness as such. The ‘Theses’ only appear to shuttle endlessly between Feuerbach and Hegel in so far as this new opposition of practice to consciousness is not grasped. This radicalized critique of consciousness characterizes Marx’s progress into *The German Ideology*, generating its axiomatic propositions:

Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious being, and the being of men is their actual life-process.¹⁵

It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness.¹⁶

The first historical act is ... the production of the means to satisfy ... needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life.¹⁷

However, if the problem with Feuerbach’s philosophy of sensuous consciousness is now exposed, and thereby the negative conditions of Marx’s alternative conception of sensuous practice, we have yet to directly consider the other side to all this, namely, Hegel. Indeed, without understanding Marx’s relation to Hegel we cannot fully grasp either his relation to Feuerbach or the originality of his conception of practice. To this end, it is

instructive to extend our critical review of the ‘Manuscripts’ and consider Marx’s critique of Hegel’s concept of labour there, since this offers one of the most illuminating elaborations of the ambivalence Marx displays in the first thesis towards the idealist conception of activity. The following passage from the ‘Manuscripts’ is seminal:

The importance of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and its final result – the dialectic of negativity as the moving and producing principle – lies in the fact that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process, objectification as de-objectification [*die Vergegenständlichung als Entgegenständlichung*], as alienation and as supersession of this alienation; that he therefore grasps the nature of *labour* and conceives objective man – true, because real man – as the result of his own *labour*.¹⁸

This investment in Hegel’s ‘importance’ – that Hegel grasps the nature of labour, and the nature of man as ‘the result of his own labour’ – presents an immediate problem when compared to Marx’s outline of his debt to Feuerbach. Marx’s third point claimed that Feuerbach’s importance was [t]o have opposed to the negation of the negation, which claims to be the absolute positive, the positive which is based upon itself and positively grounded in itself¹⁹ – which is to say, the ‘sensuously ascertained’.²⁰ Furthermore, Marx goes on to endorse the fact that Feuerbach ‘conceives the negation of the negation only as a contradiction of philosophy with itself, as philosophy which affirms theology’.²¹ However, here above, in Marx’s outline of Hegel’s importance, he commends the negation of the negation. It is no longer philosophy’s self-contradiction, but rather the essence of labour and hence of man.

This tension raises a question over the necessity of alienation as a moment of, or passage to, realization or dealienation. How is this possible in terms of the absolutely positive? Surely, the absolutely positive admits of no process, no alienation? This is a philosophically decisive issue, but it is apparently dissolved easily enough by Marx's procedure. This is revealed in Marx's claim that Feuerbach 'justifies taking the positive, that is sensuously ascertained, as his starting point'.²² In other words, the contention is not to oppose positivity to process, but to oppose the positive or sensuous to the abstract as the starting point of the process. Marx is saying, in opposition to Feuerbach, that Hegel: (1) starts with the abstract or religion, (2) negates this through positing the sensuous and the objective as alienation, and then (3) negates this negation by restoring abstraction or philosophy/religion. Now if we reconstruct

this process taking the positive-sensuous as the starting point, then we have: (1) the sensuous, in which man exists in an unrealized or limited form, (2) the negation of the sensuous, as a moment of objectification and alienation of man, and then (3) the negation of this negation, as the dealienation or realization of man.

Two things should be noted about this alternative dialectic. First, objectification is a negation or externalization of sensuousness for Marx, whereas for Hegel it is a negation or externalization of consciousness. Second, because sensuousness is the starting point and objectification is, following dialectical logic, not merely the externalization or alienation of sensuousness, but also the expression of sensuousness, this means that the supersession of alienation is a return to sensuousness, not

consciousness. In other words, it is because the subject or starting point of labour is not consciousness but sensuousness that the overcoming of its alienation is not the overcoming of its sensuousness in self-consciousness, but the expansion or realization of sensuousness. To the extent that objectivity is understood as a form of sensuousness, it is differentiated from alienation as such, and is absent from neither the starting point nor the finishing point. This explains Marx's famous critique of Hegel's conception of alienation:

The main point is that the *object* of consciousness is nothing else but *self-consciousness*, or that the object is only *objectified self-consciousness*, self-consciousness as object. (The positing of man = self-consciousness.)

It is therefore a question of surmounting the *object* of consciousness. Objectivity as such is seen as an estranged human relationship which does not correspond to *human nature*, to self-consciousness. The *reappropriation* of the objective essence of man, produced in the form of estrangement as something alien, therefore means transcending not only *estrangement* but also *objectivity*. That is to say, man is regarded as a *non-objective, spiritual being.*²³

At this point, defenders of Hegel typically point out that Marx is wrong to claim that self-consciousness is non-objective or spiritual. And they are certainly right inasmuch as Hegel distinguishes his 'absolute idealism' from 'subjective idealism' by precisely this point that absolute self-consciousness is determined by objectivity. However, it is evident that Marx knows this, and acknowledges it above in his claim that the object, for Hegel, is 'objectified self-consciousness'. A defender of Hegel might

persist by claiming that Marx is wrong to claim that: 'The only labour Hegel knows and recognizes is *abstract mental* labour.'²⁴ Hegel certainly does know labour that produces the objective world, not just its knowledge. Indeed, this is explicit in Hegel's account of the movement of objective spirit. It is also evident in his *Philosophy of Right*, where he conceives of private property as a product of free will and its labour, which, dialectically, is both the alienation and the realization of free will. But again, Marx knows this. The absence of Marx's commentary on Hegel's passages on labour in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* is more than unfortunate. (Marx's 'Critique of the Doctrine of the State' starts from paragraph 261, after these passages, which are located in Hegel's discussion of 'The System of Needs', paragraphs 189–208, and particularly paragraphs 196–8.) But these passages reveal what Marx addresses explicitly in the 'Manuscripts', namely, that:

Hegel adopts the standpoint of modern political economy. He sees *labour* as the *essence*, the self-confirming essence, of man; he sees only the positive and not the negative side of labour. Labour is *man's coming to be for himself* within *alienation* or as an *alienated man*.²⁵

Marx's critique of Hegel in terms of political economy is certainly instructive. Marx's basic objection to political economy revolves around its uncritical relation to wage labour, which is for him the fundamental form that labour takes under the conditions of private property. Wage labour enables the buyer of labour to put it to work in exchange for a wage that substitutes the value of what labour produces by a lower value. The wage therefore transforms the labour process from a process in

which labour realizes itself, into a process in which labour is derealized or alienated from what it produces. It thereby institutes, and accumulates, the alienation of labour from both its products and the means to produce and reproduce itself.

Hegel's labour of consciousness is obviously not the same thing as wage labour. But they are homologous. Wage labour produces objects, and thereby produces and reproduces the human world. As such, it does not just concern 'abstract knowledge'. However, the wage labourer returns to his or her life after work without the objects s/he produced, only with a wage instead, which is an abstract representation of the value of his or her labour, and which is worth less than the value s/he produced. Moreover, the wage labourer even returns home with a sense of relief that s/he is no longer at work, that life away from work is true life, since work is not a realization of life but merely a means to it. The wage labourer's life is therefore homologous to the philosophical life described by Hegel, returning to itself from labour and alienation. So Marx's critique of Hegel is not just directed at the abstract labour of consciousness, but at its reproduction of the abstract labour of wage labour.

This does much to clarify Marx's alternative conception of labour, or at least what is at stake within it. However, there remains a residual but significant ambiguity. It is in many ways obvious that Marx is seeking to overcome alienated labour. Indeed, at points he even suggests that labour itself must be overcome for it is intrinsically alienated. And yet, he often treats alienation as a necessary stage of this process. This is evident in his criticism

of Hegel's conception of labour. Concluding the passage on the *Phenomenology*'s 'importance', quoted above, Marx writes:

The *real, active* relation of man to himself as a genus-being, or the realization of himself as a real genus-being, i.e. as a human being, is only possible if he really employs all his *genus-powers* – which again is only possible through the cooperation of mankind and as a result of history – and treats them as objects, which is at first only possible in the form of estrangement.²⁶

Note: 'only possible'. And this claim is ostensibly reproduced in his repeated arguments for the need for, or productivity of, capital in generating the conditions for its overcoming or communism. Political or historical objections may be, and have been, made to the latter claim. But in the circuit of texts and ideas we have been examining here a philosophical objection may be raised. Namely, given the centrality of alienation to Hegel's conception of labour, how can this be maintained by Marx's alternative conception of labour, or sensuous practice? Indeed, can Marx maintain his critique of the abstract labour of consciousness, and of wage labour, while retaining a logic of alienation? In other words, if alienation is not a separation of subjectivity from objectivity – if, that is, the sensuous subject of labour is not alienated from the sensuousness of objectivity in this sense – can it still be properly described as alienation or estrangement?

This problem is in many ways concealed by Marx's approach to it as a passing historical phase, or in its somewhat suspended existence as an object of criticism. Marx criticizes alienated labour, projecting an alternative, but simultaneously

maintains it in so far as its alternative is projected into a future that will emerge only through the passage of alienated labour. But does he continue to presuppose elements that he nonetheless criticizes? In a way we might ask whether Marx has produced a similar problem to that which he diagnoses in Feuerbach and left Hegelianism as a whole: does he produce a critique of alienated labour in terms of non-alienated labour, but without elaborating non-alienated labour or how it generates alienated labour?

This suspicion returns us to the scrutiny of what is meant by sensuous practice. This can be advanced by extending our consideration of Marx's critique of Hegel via an inquiry into Hegel's own conception of sensation, since this offers a clarification of how alienation is integral to consciousness for Hegel. Moreover, it offers us a clarification of how sensation opposes both consciousness and alienation. To start with, it should be recognized that Marx's proposition that man becomes objective through starting out from sensation, rather than consciousness, makes no sense in Hegel's terms, since, for Hegel, the objective is a phenomenon of consciousness. Conversely, for Hegel, sensation as such admits of no objectivity. What distinguishes sensation from consciousness for Hegel is that sensation relates to what it senses as its own reality. Pure sensation is characterized by an immediate particularity, which generates distinctiveness but not separation between sense and what is sensed. As Hegel puts it: 'what I sense, I am, and what I am, I sense'.²⁷ This means that the differentiation of a subjective sphere from an objective sphere is not known to sensation. It is known

only to consciousness, which is thereby categorically distinct from sensation. Hegel elaborates this as follows:

Mere sensation ... has to do only with what is *individual* and *contingent*, with what is *immediately given* and *present*; and this content appears to the sentient soul as its *own* concrete reality. When by contrast I rise to the standpoint of *consciousness*, I enter into relationship with a world *outside* me, with an *objective totality*, with an internally *interconnected sphere* of manifold and complex objects confronting me. As objective consciousness, I certainly have initially an immediate sensation, but at the same time what is thus sensed is for me a point in the *universal interconnection* of things, something, therefore, which *points out beyond its sensory individuality* and immediate presence.²⁸

In other words, objectivity is a product of consciousness in the sense that it is consciousness that produces the separation of subjectivity from objectivity. Far from contradicting consciousness, objectivity can only be objective – that is, standing against subjectivity – to the extent that it stands in the space produced by consciousness. Consciousness can be conscious of sensations, but these are then determined according to a differentiation of subjectivity and objectivity. Thus, consciousness relates to sensation as the index of an inner or outer object. Mere sensation knows no objectivity, it merely ‘knows’ a manifold of sensations without objectivity or subjectivity. In this sense, the attribution of externality that is often given to sensation, including by Hegel, is an externality to consciousness, not to sensation itself. Perhaps most significantly of all here, consciousness’s separation of itself as a subject from everything that it is not presupposes an abstraction. Everything is reduced to the abstract

determination of being as opposed to consciousness, that is, as being objective. In other words, for Hegel, consciousness constitutes objectivity as an abstract realm or world, and it is only within this world that objects, as such, appear.

Now, to the degree that Hegel's account of sensation holds, it clarifies a number of characteristics of his philosophy and the problems it presents to both Feuerbach and Marx. It clarifies how objectivity is not opposed to the abstraction of consciousness, but rather derives from it. It also clarifies how sensuousness is not opposed to this abstraction in so far as it is apprehended by consciousness. Thus, it clarifies both why Marx needs to radicalize his critique of sensuous consciousness to a critique of consciousness as such - that it is only through this that he will overcome abstraction - and why he might nonetheless be right to retain sensuousness as a quality of practice that is irreducible to the practice of consciousness. Finally, it clarifies why alienation presents such a decisive issue, since if alienation is understood to be the separation of subjectivity from objectivity, then it is evident how it is an act of consciousness. If it is not this separation, then what exactly are we dealing with? This question is only part of the major problem that still needs to be resolved, since it is by no means

evident that pre- or non-conscious sensation grasps the reality of practice. We must therefore ask yet again: what is sensuous practice?

Perhaps the first thing to confront is the extent to which practice is irreducible to sensation. Marx describes practice as driven by needs, which he understands as forms of sensation. But surely

needs, by definition, generate a space between themselves and their satisfaction. Is this space the abstract space of consciousness, its differentiation of itself from all that stands outside of it? But needs are surely specific. Consciousness would be perhaps a universal need. But then perhaps this is just the point at which need is changed categorically into something beyond itself. We might say that needs generate a space within the internality of pure sensation, but that this space does not separate subject from object - it is not an abstract space. Furthermore, it is a space that surely dissolves again with its satisfaction. (Indeed, this is why Hegel thinks that need and consumption cannot sustain the self-determining independence of objects.) But what of the means towards satisfying needs, which are definitive of labour for Marx (and Hegel)? Are not means precisely a further extension of this space between need and satisfaction? Does this extension extend to infinity, to the whole of being or nature? And yet, surely means are specific too, bound to the immanent process of needs and satisfactions. Means, like needs or satisfactions, may appear within a universal realm of objectivity disclosed by consciousness, but that does not mean that they themselves disclose such a realm, or that consciousness does anything other than recognize or represent their independent existence. To conceive of itself as a means, consciousness would perhaps be like conceiving of a universal tool, a tool that was the means to everything. And yet again, surely there is no such tool. A universal tool would cease to be a tool. All tools, all means, are specific. But what of labour itself? Isn't labour itself such an impossibly universal tool? But surely this is yet again an abstraction of labour, which transforms it

categorically into something beyond itself. Labour is surely always specific, always concrete, and never abstract except in the treatment of it from outside, from the vantage of consciousness or capital.

I offer these tentative remarks at a moment when I am nonetheless attempting to resolve these issues since it is difficult to present a resolution confirmed by Marx's own writings. Whether this was due to Marx's confusion or my own, his texts seem to equivocate when it comes to defining the independence of practice from the practice of consciousness. For example, when he describes human labour by distinguishing a bee from an architect, where the architect constructs his building first in his mind before he does so in reality, how are we meant to understand this in opposition to the labour of consciousness? Is it to the degree that the actual building is distinct from the potential building? But is actualization all that is at stake in the notion of sensuous labour? This would suggest that needs or purposes are objects of consciousness, which sounds reasonable, but how does this distinguish consciousness from practice?

A more profound example emerges when Marx formulates his account of abstract labour. How are we to understand this in terms of sensuous practice? How can labour be sensuous and yet abstract? How can labour present an alternative to the labour of consciousness if both are abstract? Marx says that the abstraction of labour is real, not just an idea. And yet its reality derives from the artificial reality of capital. Labour is always concrete, he maintains, always specific to needs, means and ends. Abstract labour exists not by the dissolution of this specificity, but by its suspension

at another level of existence, the existence of capital, which itself exists only on the basis of labour in its concreteness. But, as with his early endorsement of the need for alienation, the distillation of labour power in abstract labour is presented by Marx as a liberating separation of traditional labour from its entwinement with nature, and the liberation of the needs and satisfactions that this enables. Are we to understand this merely as a disciplining of concrete labour that remains concrete throughout the abstractions of the wage and the value-form? Or, even if this is true, is this abstraction not constitutive of concrete labour, not only in organizing it under capital, but also in developing its richness as a prelude to communism? In other words, does not this abstraction ontologically transform labour and enable its liberation as free activity? The account of abstract labour may well present a profound contribution to Marx's general theory of labour, for it generates a conception of abstraction out of the constitution of labour itself, rather than the consciousness of it. But it also requires careful scrutiny of the terms in which Marx differentiates practice from abstraction.

Probably the most spectacular example of Marx's ambivalence over his conception of labour is presented by his 'Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction'. This text was written between the end of 1843 and the start of 1844, just before the composition of his 'Manuscripts', and so it comes before the revelations of his 'Theses'. However, it presents such a dramatic and ironic presentation of the concept of practice that he is grappling with that it warrants attention. Its notoriety also gives us the opportunity to see how Marx's ambivalence has infused his legacy. Marx

presents the proletariat as the ‘universal class’, who promise to become the class of humanity, rather than simply another limited political class, inasmuch as they are the class that has nothing. We might say that the proletariat are the class of universal need. Having nothing, their needs are not specific but universal. Hence their satisfaction is not the emancipation of one class against the others, but the emancipation of all classes, of humanity. The revolutionary class is therefore generated through the abstraction of particular interests. We are now in a position to understand that this conception of politics presents the most dramatic embodiment of all the aspects of Feuerbach and Hegel that Marx will go on to oppose. The only question is whether, when Marx says he is addressing ‘Germans’ – whom he mocks as being unable to conceive of politics other than philosophically – does this ironic interpellation extend to the full

awareness of the philosophical perversion it presents? Put simply, does Marx fully understand the irony? Does he present such a vivid image of the practice or politics of abstraction because he had grasped its alternative, and even to the degree that he could joke about it? Or because he had yet to grasp its alternative? What is nonetheless clear is that the idea of politics presented in this text profoundly contradicts the idea of revolutionary practice outlined in the ‘Theses’.

And what about aesthetics? We have grasped sensuous practice as the principle according to which Marx’s aesthetics must be elaborated – that is, if it is to be an aesthetics that is derived from what is essential and original to Marx, rather than Feuerbach or Hegel. And yet this task of

elaboration, with all the further issues it harbours, still lies ahead. We have reached the end but we have yet to begin. But at least we have reached the beginning.

- 1 The research of Mikhail Lifshitz and Georg Lukács into Marx's aesthetics on the basis of his early unpublished manuscripts and notebooks remains seminal here, despite their questionable orientation of it towards a theory of Socialist Realism. See in particular Lifshitz's *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx* (1933), trans. Ralf B. Winn (Pluto Press: London, 1973); and Lukács's 'Marx and Engels on Aesthetics' (1953), trans. Arthur D. Kahn, in *Writer and Critic and Other Essays* (Merlin Press: London, 1970), pp. 61–88. For an approach derived more exclusively from Marx's 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', see Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez's *Art and Society: Essays in Marxist Aesthetics* (1965), trans. Maro Riofrancos (Merlin Press: London, 1974).
- 2 Karl Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts' (1844), in his *Early Writings*, trans. G. Benton (Penguin: London, 1975), pp. 381–2.
- 3 Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach' (from original version from Marx's notebooks of 1845), in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology, Collected Works*, Vol. 5 (Lawrence & Wishart: London, 1976), p. 4. Henceforth all references to the 'Theses' refer to this text (pp. 3–5).
- 4 Marx, 'Theses'. Here, as elsewhere, I have translated *Gattung* as 'genus' and *Gattungswesen* as 'genus-being', or left the German untranslated. The received rendering as 'species' or 'species-being' collapses the distinction between species and genus, which is especially misleading in so far as it suggests specificity rather than generality, thereby obscuring Marx's objection to the abstraction of Feuerbach's conception of *Gattungswesen*. It may be noted that the English translation of thesis 6 tries to compensate for this by introducing 'general character', despite this being absent from Marx's text or Engels's edition of it.
- 5 Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (1843), trans. M. Vogel (Hackett: Indianapolis, 1986), § 63, p. 72.
- 6 Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), trans. G. Eliot (Dover Publications: New York, 2008), p. 1 (translation altered).
- 7 Marx, 'Manuscripts', op. cit., p. 350.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 350–1.

⁹ Marx, ‘Theses’, op. cit. (translation altered).

¹⁰ Ibid. (translation altered).

¹¹ Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, op. cit., pp. 94–5 (translation altered).

¹² Ibid., p. 94.

¹³ ‘The cherry-tree, like most fruit-trees, was, as is well known, only a few centuries ago transplanted by *commerce* into our zone, and therefore only by this action of a definite society in a definite age has it become “sensuous certainty” for Feuerbach.’ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, op. cit., p. 39.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁸ Marx, ‘Manuscripts’, op. cit., pp. 385–6 (translation altered).

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 381.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 382.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., pp. 386–7.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 386.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. (translation altered).

²⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A. V. Miller (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 2007), § 402, p. 85.

²⁸ Ibid., Zusatz to §402, p. 84.

A COMMUNION OF JUST MEN MADE PERFECT

WALTER PATER, ROMANTIC ANTI-CAPITALISM
AND THE PARIS COMMUNE

Matthew Beaumont

In April 1895, the German social democrat Eduard Bernstein, then living in political exile in London, where he acted among other things as one of Engels's literary executors, published an article in *Die Neue Zeit* on the trial of Oscar Wilde. In this bulletin from the British metropolis, 'On the Occasion of a Sensational Trial', Bernstein insisted, in relatively enlightened tones, that it was not Wilde's sexual activities or proclivities that might prove politically unhealthy but his aesthetics:

The doctrine of art for art's sake, the release of art from everything which lives and should live in the popular consciousness, the proclamation of art as the preserve of an initiated aristocratic freemasonry – this double think is corrupt: it is far more dangerous to society than the actions of which Wilde was accused.¹

Understandably, this critique of aestheticism, which accurately lances the movement's elitist tendencies, has proved influential on the left. It prevailed, for example, in Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974), where he argued that, in aestheticism, 'apartness from the praxis of life, which had always been the condition that

characterized the way art functioned in bourgeois society, now becomes its content'.² But it fails to capture aestheticism's contradictory, sometimes confrontational relationship to the reified reality from which it attempted to escape.

The point of this essay is to reexamine the particular mode of aestheticism that the impressionist critic Walter Pater, who had reluctantly acted as a mentor to the scandalous Wilde, practised in the 1860s and 1870s; and to consider that mode, to express it in Andrew Hemingway's terms, both as an instance of reification and as 'a mode of resistance to its effects'.³ There has been something of a consensus among historians of the *fin de siècle* in England that Pater is not susceptible to a political interpretation. This is in part no doubt because the biographical record is so scant. It is also, more importantly, because his writings appear to retreat self-consciously from politics into aesthetics. Traditional scholars of aestheticism have tended simply to accept this impression, overlooking the fact that no movement is more political than one that strives to retreat from politics into aesthetics (the phrase *l'art pour l'art*, Adorno once ominously observed, 'was the mask of its opposite').⁴

In the last couple of decades, queer theorists and other postmodernists have challenged the assumption that Pater is 'a political embarrassment'.⁵ But, in spite of the pioneering accounts of aestheticism this has produced, it has had the effect of emphasizing sexual politics to the detriment of, well, politics. Perhaps this situation is beginning to change. Benjamin Morgan has for instance recently argued in a sophisticated article

that ‘Pater’s interest in aesthetic freedom grounds the politics of his work in a way that does not depend upon his subversive queerness’.⁶ And Matthew Potolsky has made the ‘counter-intuitive claim’ that Pater ‘is a fundamentally political writer’.⁷ I prefer to think of him as at once an apolitical and a political thinker. In my meditations on Pater’s writings from roughly the mid-1860s to the mid-1870s, I posit him as a romantic anti-capitalist – one whose attunement ‘to the most fleeting individual reactions was bound up with the reification of these reactions’, as Adorno once formulated the problem, but at the same time constituted a concerted rebellion against this reification.⁸

Pater’s career as a published writer, from the mid-1860s to the mid-1890s, roughly coincides with the period in which – once the confidence in the capitalist system that had been characteristic of the third quarter of the nineteenth century had started to corrode, especially in the face of a sustained, if uneven economic depression – utopian literature became an almost compulsory form of political discourse. Hundreds of utopian fictions were printed in Britain, Europe and Japan in the final thirty years of the century, in addition to numerous polemical books and pamphlets that delineated the society of the future. ‘At the present day,’ G. W. Foote, editor of the journal *Progress*, put it in 1886, ‘social dreams are once more rife.’⁹ As I have explained in another context, an anticipatory consciousness shaped English culture in the late nineteenth century. A utopian structure of feeling helped to define the *fin de siècle* – one of those times in which ‘contradiction, fracture, or mutation within a class’, as Raymond Williams put it, ‘is at

once lived and articulated in radically new semantic figures'.¹⁰ Pater has not often been associated with this ideological climate, precisely because, as I pointed out, he is generally dismissed as anti-political, or apolitical. But his impressionist criticism can nonetheless productively be reconsidered as a species of social dreaming.

This proposition can be tested, in the first instance, in relation to Pater's anonymous assessment of William Morris's poems in 1868, which was first published in the *Westminster Review* and then adapted for the controversial conclusion to his most famous book, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873). The opening paragraph of this review proposes that, from ancient Greece right up to the present, poetry has 'project[ed] above the realities of its time a world in which the forms of things are transfigured'; but that, unprecedently, the kind of aesthetic poetry exemplified by Morris both 'takes possession' of this world and 'sublimates beyond it another still fainter and more spectral, which is literally an artificial or "earthly paradise"'. Beyond

the abstract utopianism that is definitive of all poetry, Pater seems to be contending, Morris's poetry contains a concrete utopianism - albeit of a paradoxically spectral sort. Pater goes on to argue that it articulates a spiritual longing: 'The secret of the enjoyment of it is that inversion of home-sickness known to some, that incurable thirst for the sense of escape, which no actual form of life satisfies, no poetry even, if it be merely simple and spontaneous.'¹¹ This is not a political longing. It is noticeable, for example, that the incurable thirst diagnosed by Pater is not for escape itself but 'the sense of escape'. So this is a peculiarly attenuated

form of escapism; and no doubt the aesthetic that it adumbrates is therefore doubly depoliticized. But it is, perhaps, proto-political (in this respect it anticipates Morris's exploration of both political and sexual longing, in *News from Nowhere* of 1891). It is best understood as a statement characteristic of romantic anti-capitalism, which according to the definition provided by Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy 'represents the revolt of the repressed, manipulated and deformed subjectivity, and of the "magic" of imagination banished from the capitalist world'.¹²

Pater's writings about art - which restlessly reach for 'a world in which the forms of things are transfigured', and for a 'fainter, more spectral' world beyond that - are visibly animated by what is sometimes described as a 'utopian impulse'. I am generally suspicious of this phrase, at least in terms of its analytical value, because a 'utopian impulse' can be detected in almost anything if one looks hard enough. The concept of 'an obscure yet omnipresent Utopian impulse', as Fredric Jameson terms it in a slightly more generous assessment than mine, is impossibly capacious.¹³ This is the problem with the appropriation of Ernst Bloch's celebration of the utopian impulse by the contemporary sub-discipline of Utopian Studies, as Matthew Charles has recently pointed out in a trenchant piece.¹⁴ But in relation to Pater it seems more promising, largely because he uses language precisely as a medium for registering and testing out impulses. And these impulses transmit a charge that is recognizable for its utopian energies. In his essay on Coleridge, to give a preliminary example, Pater observes that the poetry Wordsworth contributed to the *Lyrical Ballads* 'vibrates with that blithe impulse which

carried him to final happiness and self-possession'.¹⁵

An impressionist aesthetic like Pater's, as in the preface to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, is the impossibly self-reflexive attempt to intellectualize one's spontaneous response to an artefact, or some more quotidian phenomenon such as a face one happens to encounter in the street, in the precise instant of experiencing it - an aspiration quite as doomed as lighting the gas to capture a sense of what darkness looks like, as his exact contemporary William James put it in another context.¹⁶ It entails at the same time intellection and the cancellation of the intellect. 'The function of the aesthetic critic', he asserts in the preface, 'is to distinguish, analyse, and separate from its adjuncts, the virtue by which a painter, a landscape, a fair personality in life or in a book, produces this special impression of beauty or pleasure, to indicate what the source of that impression is, and under what conditions it is experienced.'¹⁷ The pseudo-scientific certainties from which this sentence starts steadily fall apart as Pater affirms the supremacy of the self, though they are reasserted once more in the reference to the conditions in which an impression is experienced. In *Studies*, aesthetics is a science of the faintest pulsations or sensations. It is an empiricist attempt to grasp almost imperceptible emotions.

In his comments on Wilde's trial, Bernstein underlined the idea that the archetypal decadent is a descendent of the romantic: 'Unlike the latter, [the decadent] does not look to the past, but neither does he look to the future, regarding which he remains sceptical.'¹⁸ Aestheticism, according to

him, is immersed in a perpetual present. But this assumption is inapplicable in Pater's case. In spite of his notorious claim, in the final sentence of the conclusion to *Studies*, that 'art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake', Pater understands the present as a dialectic of the past and future (p. 121). This is apparent, for example, in his discussion of the 'pictorial poetry' of the School of Giorgione, which he admires because 'it presents us with a kind of profoundly significant and animated instants, a mere gesture, a look, a smile, perhaps - some brief and wholly concrete moment - into which, however, all the motives, the interests and effects of a long history, have condensed themselves, and which seem to absorb past and future in an intense consciousness of the present' (p. 133). These moments, embodied in more or less erotic encounters with those looks, smiles and gestures, redeem the present, assimilating the past and future to it, and imparting a sense of completion to it. If under capitalism, as I have argued elsewhere in relation to Morris, the present is not present to itself, Pater's 'significant and animated instants' promise to redress this condition of alienation.¹⁹

The aesthetic that Pater excavates from the past, in particular that of the Renaissance, is in *Studies* intended to act as the foundation for an ethic that, in the future, might redeem the deformations of capitalist society (including the repression of homosexuality). The reception of this book, which was viciously attacked by conservative commentators, testified to the ethical implications of his impressionist criticism. As Michael Levenson

has recently pointed out, it was ‘an effect of Pater’s writings ... to promote new styles of life, as well as new works and opinions’. Levenson is thinking of aspects of what he calls ‘metropolitan experience’, including ‘conversational habit, dress’;²⁰ but Pater’s prose also promoted a kind of attitude or disposition that was inescapably political as well as cultural. He admitted as much when, partly capitulating to the backlash against the book, especially in religious circles, he omitted its conclusion from the second edition. He later maintained that he had taken the decision to do this because he thought ‘it might possibly mislead some young men into whose hands it might fall’ – a disingenuous claim that *Studies* had been in danger of falling into the hands of those to whom he had effectively directed towards in the first place.²¹ Pater’s interest had always been in ethics as much as aesthetics, though he secreted the former in the language of the latter.

Pater’s writings of the 1860s and 1870s do indeed look to the future. A principle of hope, to use Bloch’s concept, is for example constituent of the piece that, in the absence of a paper on Fichte, which has been lost, is generally said to inaugurate Pater’s intellectual biography. This is ‘Diaphaneité’, a paper he read aloud in July 1864 to his intimates in the Old Mortality Society, a fraternity of young, mostly agnostic intellectuals studying at Oxford. John Nichol had set up the Society in 1856, and for the next decade it thrived as an alternative, albeit exclusive forum for philosophical debate inside the university, attracting a number of intellectual luminaries, including A. C. Swinburne and J. A. Symonds. According to the one historian to have collated the scattered records of this group, in literature and art, but also in politics, ‘the Old

Mortality was radical'. Its four main causes, most vehemently prosecuted by Swinburne, were the nationalist struggle in Italy, the overthrow of tyranny in France, the abolition of university tests, and the campaign against 'all restrictions on the freedom of opinion'.²² The Society's reputation for radicalism, and a certain intellectual avant-gardism, probably persisted up to Pater's time; but I suspect that, in the 1860s, once Swinburne had moved on, its commitment to republicanism and agnosticism or atheism declined. Revealingly, Pater offended one of his more conservative confederates when he delivered a paper at his own lodgings in February 1864. S. R. Brooke, who in spite of his protestations might not have been representative of the Society's opinions, denounced Pater's defence of aestheticism on this occasion as 'one of the most thoroughly infidel productions it has ever been our pain to listen to'.²³

Pater devised the elusive title of 'Diaphaneité' in order to evoke a condition of diaphanousness; that is, a transparency of spirit at once luminous and mysterious. The paper is an enigmatic, highly poetic meditation on the 'type of life', as he puts it, that 'might serve as a basement type' (p. 140).²⁴ By 'basement type' he means the archetype that might form the foundation of a different social order, one that is peaceful and filled with a sense of completeness (again, not unlike the utopian society in *News from Nowhere*, which Morris characterizes as 'an epoch of rest'). Pater looks to the past, particularly the Hellenic past, for the proleptic image of a utopian future that might still be realizable: 'the character we have before us is a kind of prophecy of this repose and simplicity, coming as it were in the order of grace, not of

nature, by some happy gift, or accident of birth or constitution, showing that it is indeed within the limits of man's destiny' (p. 137). To claim, as Kate Hext has done, that in this paper 'the individual and society become dichotomies' is to depoliticize it.²⁵ Their relationship is dialectical rather than dichotomous. In its synthesis of individual and social perspectives, and of politics and aesthetics, 'Diaphaneité' is in effect Pater's manifesto. Certainly, in terms

both of form and content, it is closer to a manifesto than the conclusion to *Studies*. It is tempting, in fact, to claim that it is one of the forgotten manifestos of the *fin de siècle*. It is in some respects the equivalent of his disciple Wilde's essay 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism': 'The Soul of Man Under Aestheticism'.²⁶

'Diaphaneité', then, posits nothing less than the prototype of a utopian society. 'The type must be one discontented with society at it is', Pater declares; and the mass proliferation of this man of the future, he adds, 'would be the regeneration of the world' (p. 140). This is no activist, though, not even of an ascetic, transcendental kind. 'The philosopher, the saint, the artist, neither of them can be this type.' No, Pater's 'revolutionist', to use his ascription, is the diaphanous type (p. 138). The diaphanous character, innocent, transparent, sublimates 'the human body in its beauty', and so incorporates 'the true, though visible, soul or spirit in things'.²⁷ It creates a perfect communion of body and spirit. 'Like all the higher forms of inward life this character is a subtle blending and interpenetration of intellectual, moral and spiritual elements', Pater announces in 'Diaphaneité'; 'it is a mind of taste lighted up by some spiritual ray

within' (p. 137). In this, and in its perfect simplicity, it represents a critique of the dessicated, spiritually dissociated conditions of life in industrial society, one that is paradoxically both crystalline and quicksilver. In contrast to the saint, the artist or the philosopher, who is so often 'confused, jarred, disintegrated in the world', the diaphanous type is 'like a relic from the classical age, laid open by accident to our alien modern atmosphere' (pp. 137, 138). It floats in and out of both *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), Pater's novel, and his *Imaginary Portraits* (1887); and it haunts *Studies* too. One might even interpret its characteristic disposition, its 'wistfulness of mind', which he defines as 'a longing after what is unattainable', a longing that is social or political as well as intellectual, as a precise definition of the utopian impulse.

The diaphanous type embodies the youthful Pater's utopian dreams of a homosocial society that might reinstate the ethics and aesthetics associated with the spirit of Hellenism, and in particular 'the care for physical beauty, the worship of the body' that he celebrates in the preface to *Studies* (p. xi). His description in 'Diaphaneité', it is evident, like his characterization of *Marius*, is on one level an attempt to sublimate the painful, sometimes exquisite sensitivity that, as a man who loves other men, he feels as he confronts life in 'the adulterated atmosphere of the world' (p. 139). More immediately, it is thought to have been inspired by Charles Lancelot Shadwell, a friend and former student famed for his handsomeness and himself a member of the Old Mortality. 'Often the presence of this nature', Pater intones in a calmly controlled voice that nonetheless seems to tremble with erotic excitement, 'is felt like a sweet aroma in early

manhood' (p. 139). Adolescence, as this demonstrates, carried a certain utopian as well as erotic charge in the Hellenic milieu of Oxford in the 1860s and 1870s.²⁸ Pater subsequently dedicated *Studies* to Shadwell, who had in the summer of 1865 accompanied him on the trip to Italy during which he soaked up many of the impressions that permeate the book.

The chapters of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, especially the one on Winckelmann, which lifts some of its sentences directly from 'Diaphaneité', read like a sustained effort to recover the diaphanous character, this time by excavating the past rather more systematically, if still idiosyncratically. At one point in 'Diaphaneité' he characterizes diaphanousness as 'a thread of pure white light that one might disentwine from the tumultuary richness of Goethe's nature' (p. 139). *Studies* traces the thread of light that runs through the richness of the Renaissance; and, having unpicked this thread, as the conclusion reveals, it also attempts, in a far more violent movement, to weave it deep into the nineteenth century, in the hope that, like a late form of Romanticism, it might eventually redeem the dispiriting realities of life in an industrial society. Like Romanticism, it thus constitutes a critique of the present and, at least potentially, a utopian alternative to it (one critic has pointed out that 'Pater's volume might have been titled *Studies in the History of Romanticism*').²⁹ Romanticism, too, is for Pater an 'outbreak of the human spirit', as he puts it in the preface to *Studies* (p. xi). The book thus constructs an antinomian tradition – openly aesthetic, surreptitiously both homoerotic and atheistic – that it uses to recruit readers to a secret, elitist association that can

constitute the nucleus of an ideal society. As Rachel Teukolsky observes in an insightful discussion of Pater's art criticism, 'while he eschews violence, his writings constantly touch on a subtle thematics of revolt organized around an elite group identity'.³⁰ This coded thematics of revolt, which sublimates violence and ascribes responsibility for social transformation to an elite group, is characteristic of romantic anti-capitalism. It entails both an expression of oppositional politics and a displacement of it. Pater's paper on the diaphanous character might be described as an attempt to articulate a utopian politics that is apolitical. It acknowledges that to prognosticate about the Coming Race is to engage a political language; but it seeks at the same time to escape the logic of political language by etherealizing it, diaphanizing it.³¹ What Pater hopes for is a revolution without revolution (which is rather different from a process of evolution, and rather more radical):

Revolution is often impious. They who prosecute revolution have to violate again and again the instinct of reverence. That is inevitable, since after all progress is a kind of violence. But in this [diaphanous] nature revolutionism is softened, harmonised, subdued as by distance. It is the revolutionism of one who has slept a hundred years. [p. 138]

Pater's revolutionist is a Rip Van Winkle relieved to discover, on awakening from his epochal sleep, that the social transformation that has taken place in the meantime

embodies not the sudden appearance of modernity but its utopian displacement. This revolution has occurred 'with an engaging naturalness, without the noise of axe or hammer' (p. 140). Pater's utopia is thus ideological in the sense that Althusser

intended when he referred to the imaginary resolution of real contradictions.

As I have implied, ‘Diaphaneité’ sets the template for Pater’s thinking in the 1870s and 1880s to the extent that this thinking can be described as utopian. I have argued elsewhere that the decisive event of the final three decades of the late nineteenth century for the utopian (and dystopian) imagination is the irruption of the Paris Commune in 1871.³² Here, I want to speculate that it is at least partly in the shadow of this event that Pater shapes his social dream in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. In spite of the Commune’s tragic failure, which can be summarized by recalling that in the so-called *semaine sanglante* at least 25,000 proletarians were slaughtered by the French army, the democratic workers’ state briefly instituted by the Communards fundamentally, triumphantly reorganized the conception of the future that had prevailed in Europe up to that point. Marx said of the Communards that, ‘they have no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant’, thereby suggesting that they had simultaneously materialized the socialist utopia and made the concept historically irrelevant.³³ If for the emergent socialist movement the Commune represented a brave attempt to institute a utopian future, for the bourgeoisie it represented the apparition of a dystopia that had only narrowly been exorcized.

The impact of the Commune on aesthetics has in general been drastically underestimated; and not least because T. J. Clark, among others, has authoritatively argued that modernism emerged

largely from the bourgeois modernization of Paris. More recently, Albert Boime has instead emphasized the fact that 'Modernism is wrought out of the unexpected dislodging of that bourgeoisie and the replacement of its rule - if ever so brief - of Paris by that of another class: the proletariat and its political expression in the Commune'.³⁴ In late-nineteenth-century France, the emergent aesthetic of the Impressionists - the term was first used in this context in 1874 - was shaped to an important extent by the cultural politics of Paris in the aftermath of the Commune: 'The Impressionists - moderate republicans - descended into the public sphere to reclaim its sullied turf for the bourgeoisie.' 'Their aesthetic purposes', Boime adds, 'are inseparable from their participation in the political and cultural reclamation of Paris.'³⁵

At the time, conservative commentators often pointed to the elective affinities, as they perceived them, between Impressionism and communism or anarchism. For example, *Art Age*, an American journal, fulminated that Impressionist painting was 'communism incarnate, with the red flag and the Phrygian cap of lawless violence boldly displayed'; and, in *The Times*, a British critic of the first Impressionist exhibition commented, 'One seems to see in such work evidence of as wild a spirit of anarchy at

work in French painting as in French politics.'³⁶ These responses are intimations of the entanglement of aesthetics and politics that will characterize the avant-gardes of the early twentieth century. Levenson underlines the idea that 'the event of the Paris Commune hung over later Modernism as a memory' because it instituted the 'radical undecidability of the tie between aesthetics

and politics that became an abiding mark of Modernism'.³⁷

The relevance of the Commune to apparently esoteric debates about aesthetics in England at this time is revealed in an anonymous review from 1872 of J. A. Crowe and G. B. Cavalcaselle's *A History of Painting in North Italy* (1871), the prime example of the new scientific art criticism against which Pater defined his impressionist aesthetic in *Studies*.³⁸ In 'these days of "Communism" and "Internationalism"', it portentously notes, barbarism is once more a historical possibility. It is therefore of supreme importance that the morals of the proletariat should be schooled, in Arnoldian fashion, through the appropriate cultivation of artistic taste. I will quote from the opening pages of this review at some length:

The 'Communists' of Paris, whatever may be said to the contrary by their apologists, waged war against the arts and literature as a part of that civilization which they consider it their mission to destroy. If they had been allowed a few more hours to mature and carry out their plans, it has been proved, beyond question, that the public and probably the private libraries, galleries, and museums of the capital, would have been destroyed. We hope and believe that our working classes are not inspired by the same ignorant and fanatical fury. The interest they have hitherto shown in the collections of art and science, which at such vast expense and such infinite labour have been collected together in this great metropolis, leads to a contrary belief. If London had ever the misfortune of falling into the power of a mob, we trust that they would prevent the repetition of such scenes as were witnessed in Paris. But there are always reckless men to be found, and they would be encouraged and directed in their recklessness by foreigners, who, outlawed and expelled from the rest of Europe, conspire against civilization and order under the protection of our

laws, and would rejoice in being able to bring about the destruction of our most glorious national monuments.³⁹

More sympathetic commentators correctly argued that the English and European press had largely fabricated the destruction caused by the Communards. The positivist Frederic Harrison, for instance, who courageously praised the 'skill and efficiency with which the Commune has been organised' in an article for the *Fortnightly Review*, a periodical to which Pater contributed at this time, condemned the 'lurid inventions' of the English press.⁴⁰ For the reactionary critic in the *Quarterly Review*, though, the Commune represented an extremely dangerous political precedent; not least because, according to him, the exiled Communards who had fled to London threatened to foment a comparable destruction of bourgeois civilization in England. The prospect that the review of *A History of Painting in North Italy* opens up is of 'the return of Europe to a state of barbarism, anarchy, and misery scarcely surpassed in the darkest periods of the middle ages'. 'These considerations force themselves upon us', the anonymous author continues, 'when we take up Messrs. Crowe and Cavalcaselle's volumes.'⁴¹

Rather more significantly, these considerations also forced themselves, in the aftermath of the Commune, on Friedrich Nietzsche. He too was convinced, in the words of the *Quarterly Review*, that its representatives had 'waged war against the arts and literature as a part of that civilization which they consider it their mission to destroy'. Indeed, as Dominic Losurdo has alleged, the ethics and aesthetics elaborated by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), his meditation on ancient Greek

culture, were significantly shaped by the traumatic impact of the Commune. In a letter of 21 June 1871, referring back to the false rumour that the retreating Communards had set fire to the Louvre, he pontificated as follows:

For some days I was completely destroyed by doubts and overcome by tears: all scientific, philosophic and artistic existence seemed to me an absurdity, if a single day could obliterate the most marvellous works of art, or rather, entire periods of art.

This feeling of ‘the autumn of culture’, as Nietzsche put it in a letter several years later, persisted long after it had become obvious that the destruction of the Louvre was in fact a falsification used for propagandist purposes. As Peter Thomas has explained, ‘Losurdo demonstrates that whatever else *The Birth of Tragedy* became, it must also be understood in its own historical moment, as a theoretical response to a specific political event – the uprising of the Commune – articulated within a constellation of ideologies.’⁴²

A number of critics have emphasized the parallels between Pater and Nietzsche, almost exact contemporaries who, in spite of their cultural and intellectual differences, were both highly idiosyncratic Hellenists indebted to the example of Winckelmann’s classicism. J. Hillis Miller, for example, once described Pater as ‘the nearest thing to Nietzsche England has’, and Nietzsche, conversely, as ‘the Pater of the German-speaking world’.⁴³ I am not proposing that Pater, like Nietzsche, was positively traumatized by the Commune; but I am suggesting that, in spite of the unpromising biographical material available, we read Pater centrifugally rather than centripetally,

opening him up to the Commune.⁴⁴ On the continent, of course, the ideological effects of the Commune were considerably greater than in England. I would claim, however, that, if the Commune was a non-event in England, it was nonetheless a decisive non-event.

Pater's impressionism, it might be said, is a sustained effort to redeem the aesthetic in the face of its bourgeois degradation, on the one hand; and, on the other, its complete abolition, according to apologists for the bourgeoisie, by the proletariat. If the proletariat threatened to destroy the work of art, as in the propagandist caricatures of the Commune, then the bourgeoisie, through the processes of commodification and mechanical reproduction, had effectively already destroyed the aura of the work of art. Pater's aesthetic is an attempt to salvage the aura of art in the face of this dual prospect. The famous ekphrastic discussion of the *Mona Lisa* in *Studies*, first published in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1869, which is a sustained attempt to restore an auratic quality to the painting, takes on an especially intense resonance in this context – susceptible as this painting subsequently became both to the Communards' alleged attack on the Louvre and to the relentless capitalist logic of technological reproduction.

My deliberately provocative contention, then, is that the publication of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* in 1873, like that of *The Birth of Tragedy* in the previous year, represents an intervention, albeit a characteristically elliptical one, in aesthetic debates that had been fundamentally transformed by the example of the

Paris Commune (and in spite of the fact that a number of its chapters first appeared before the Commune). To put the claim at its most polemical, the 'Parisian Commune', as Pater briefly refers to it in a review of Edmund Gosse's poems published in 1890, is an absent determinant of his thought at this time.⁴⁵

By the early 1870s, almost a decade after the composition of 'Diaphaneité', the application of words like 'revolutionist' had of course become ideologically unacceptable, but Pater continues to develop an aesthetics that, in part because of its ethical and political implications, is shaped by the utopian structure of feeling characteristic of the late nineteenth century. The development of the concept of diaphanousness, first in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, then in *Marius the Epicurean*, embodies a double movement. It describes both an interiorization, most emphatically in *Studies*; and a kind of collectivization, most obviously in *Marius*. In the former, diaphanousness operates as a principle of hope, momentarily perceptible in the Paterian subject's response to the art object - a fine alchemical deposit of the utopian impulse. In the latter, Pater recasts interpersonal relationships, in so far as they are reminiscent of a forgotten culture, specifically a homosexual pagan culture, as 'a communion of just men made perfect', as he calls it, that might redeem the society of the future.⁴⁶

A communion of these men, of course, is not a commune. This utopian emblem is a delicate, probably fragile equilibrium of the political and the spiritual. In his attempt to find a refuge from the reification of contemporary culture, Pater is an

exemplary romantic anti-capitalist – because he reaches both into the past and, less overtly, into the future; and because he strives for both an individualist and, more covertly, a collectivist solution. The inner and the outer life are dialectically interfolded. In a review of Dostoevsky's novellas from 1922, Lukács identified the Russian writer as a man who, 'as the "forerunner" of the human being living out his inner life and liberated both socially and economically, attempted to portray the soul of this man of the future'.⁴⁷ Pater too might be interpreted as someone whose prose explores the inner life of someone as it might be recast in a society that had been socially, economically and sexually liberated. His prose, in its persistent, delicate attention to the most refined of aesthetic impulses, is an evocation of the soul of the man of the future.

In the conclusion to *Studies*, Pater famously used an image of a 'swarm of impressions' in order to portray individual experience (p. 119). It is perhaps significant that, five years later, in an essay on 'The Bacchanals of Euripides' (1878), he redeployed the image of the swarm in the context of collective, socially transformative, even violent experience:

Coleridge, in one of his fantastic speculations, refining on the German word for enthusiasm – *Schwärmerei*, swarming, as he says, 'like the swarming of bees together' – has explained how the sympathies of mere numbers, as such, the random catching on fire of one here and another there, when people are collected together, generates as if by mere contact, some new and rapturous spirit, not traceable in the individual units of the multitude. Such *swarming* was the essence of the strange dance of the Bacchic women.⁴⁸

An emphatically interior metaphor, the swarm of impressions, opens out onto an unexpectedly exterior one, the swarming of people spontaneously generating ‘some new and rapturous spirit’. The seething inner life of the conclusion, imprisoned by the ‘thick wall of personality’, is in the piece on Euripides momentarily liberated (in part, perhaps, because it is identified with the disruptive and joyfully subversive sexuality of female dancers). In a striking metaphorical shift, the involutions of the spirit are suddenly and surreptitiously transformed into a carnivalesque, if not revolutionary movement. Here is an explosive reinscription of the hope Pater had expressed at the end of ‘Diaphaneité’, that the diaphanous type, ‘discontented with society as it is’, might form a ‘majority’, and so ensure ‘the regeneration of the world’.

- 1 Eduard Bernstein, ‘On the Occasion of a Sensational Trial,’ in *Bernstein on Homosexuality: Articles from ‘Die Neue Zeit’ 1895 and 1898*, trans. Angela Clifford (Athol Books: London, 1977), p. 17. He continues: ‘We will think no worse if Wilde [is] found guilty, and no better if the jury acquit him. Whatever the law says, his *actions* were quite inconsequential. It is the mental outlook which he represented and to which he gave expression which is important.’
- 2 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1984), p. 48.
- 3 See Andrew Hemingway, *The Mysticism of Money: Precisionist Painting and Machine Age America* (Periscope Publishing: Pittsburgh, 2013), pp. 22–3.
- 4 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Athlone Press: London, 1997), p. 239.
- 5 Heather K. Love, ‘Forced Exile: Walter Pater’s Queer Modernism,’ in Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (eds.), *Bad Modernisms* (Duke University Press: Durham, North Carolina, 2006), p. 39.

- 6** Benjamin Morgan, 'Aesthetic Freedom: Walter Pater and the Politics of Autonomy,' *ELH*, vol. 77, no. 3 (2010), p. 733. 'Perhaps what is aesthetic about aestheticism', Morgan explains, 'is not just its obsession with "convulsed sensuousness" or purified ideals, but rather its recognition that physical beauty dramatizes the dilemma of the modern subject who is immersed in the material world, but striving to be free of material contingency' (p. 749).
- 7** Matthew Potolsky, 'Literary Communism: Pater and the Politics of Community', in Elicia Clements and Lesley J. Higgins (eds.), *Victorian Aesthetic Conditions: Pater Across the Arts* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2010), p. 185. Slightly implausibly, Potolsky goes so far as to identify Pater with 'a properly activist politics' (p. 186).
- 8** Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p. 239.
- 9** G. W. Foote, 'Social Dreams', *Progress*, vol. 6 (1886), p. 190.
- 10** Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1977), pp. 133–5. See Matthew Beaumont, *Utopia Ltd.: Ideologies of Social Dreaming in England, 1870–1900* (Brill: Leiden, 2005), p. 3 – the final version of this book, it should be noted, was indebted to the characteristically scrupulous and perceptive comments that Andrew Hemingway made in a report for the publisher.
- 11** Peter Faulkner (ed.), *William Morris: The Critical Heritage* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1973), pp. 79–80.
- 12** Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy, 'Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism', in G. A. Rosso and Daniel P. Watkins (eds.), *Spirits of Fire: English Romantic Writers and Contemporary Historical Methods* (Associated University Presses: London, 1990), p. 36. By the time they came to adapt this article, first published in *New German Critique* in 1984, for their book *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. Catherine Porter (Duke University Press: Durham, North Carolina, 2001), Löwy and Sayre had decided to reject the term 'romantic anti-capitalism' on the grounds that it is a pleonasm: 'for us Romanticism is anticapitalist by its very nature' (p. 15). Hemingway has wisely commented that 'such a usage ignores the functions and value of romanticism as a period concept', thereby dehistoricizing romanticism and missing 'the force of its revivals and the work of updating and adaptation that needs to be done with each phase of neo-romanticism'. Hemingway, *The Mysticism of Money*, op. cit., p. 207.
- 13** Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 3.

- ¹⁴ See Matthew Charles, ‘Utopia and Its Discontents: Dreams of Catastrophe and the End of “the End of History”’, *Studies in Social and Political Thought*, vol. 18 (2010), p. 31: ‘It is Bloch’s failure to properly resolve the theoretical tension between these two aspects – Utopianism and Utopia’ [i.e., the utopian impulse and the utopian blueprint] – that makes his work so amenable to the kind of jettisoning of the Utopia in its *historical* form that is currently being performed.... In *The Principle of Hope*, that which Adorno describes as the innermost antinomy of Bloch’s thought is stretched so wide that it appears as if one problematic half can simply be lobbed off [sic], and the other half uncritically taken up by Utopian Studies.’
- ¹⁵ Walter Pater, ‘Coleridge’, in *Appreciations, with an Essay on Style* (Macmillan: London, 1924), p. 85.
- ¹⁶ William James, ‘On Some Omissions of Introspective Psychology,’ *Mind*, vol. 9 (1884), p. 3.
- ¹⁷ Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2010), p. 4. Hereafter, references to this edition appear in parentheses after the quotation.
- ¹⁸ Bernstein, ‘On the Occasion of a Sensational Trial’, op. cit., p. 15.
- ¹⁹ See my discussion of ‘Utopia and the Present in *News from Nowhere*’ in *Utopia Ltd.*, op. cit., chapter 5.
- ²⁰ Michael Levenson, *Modernism* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2011), p. 28.
- ²¹ For further discussion, see Matthew Beaumont, ‘Introduction,’ in Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, op. cit., p. xxv.
- ²² Gerald C. Monsman, ‘Old Mortality at Oxford’, *Studies in Philology*, vol. 67 (1970), p. 372.
- ²³ Cited in Monsman, ‘Old Mortality at Oxford’, op. cit., p. 371.
- ²⁴ Walter Pater, ‘Diaphaneité,’ Appendix B in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, op. cit., p. 140. Hereafter, references to this edition appear in parentheses after the quotation.
- ²⁵ Kate Hext, ‘The Limitations of Schiller-esque Self-Culture in Pater’s Individualist Aesthetic’, in *Victorian Aesthetic Conditions*, op. cit., p. 216.

- ²⁶ For a discussion of 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism', see Matthew Beaumont, *The Spectre of Utopia: Utopian and Science Fictions at the Fin de Siècle* (Peter Lang: Oxford, 2012), chapter 8.
- ²⁷ These phrases are taken from Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, ed. Michael Levey (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1985), p. 87.
- ²⁸ See Regenia Gagnier, *Individualism, Decadence and Globalization: The Relationship of Part to Whole, 1859–1920* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2010), p. 59: 'The value of adolescence to admirers of classical art like Schiller and Pater was precisely in its characterlessness, the smoothness of a vacuous face showing something of the detached indifference of the Gods.'
- ²⁹ John J. Conlon, *Walter Pater and the French Tradition* (Bucknell University Press: London, 1982), p. 65.
- ³⁰ Rachel Teukolsky, *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2009), p. 147.
- ³¹ See E. G. E. Bulwer-Lytton, *The Coming Race* (Alan Sutton: London, 1995). Lytton's post-human is sphinx-like in 'its calm, intellectual, mysterious beauty' (p. 8) – in short, it is diaphanous.
- ³² See Beaumont, *Utopia Ltd.*, op. cit., chapter 4. Lukács noted that 'the years 1870–1 marked [a] turning-point in the development of ideology': see *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter Palmer (Merlin Press: London, 1980), p. 310.
- ³³ Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, in *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1977), p. 545.
- ³⁴ Albert Boime, *Art and the French Commune: Imagining Paris after War and Revolution* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1995), p. 3. See also John Milner, *Art, War and Revolution in France 1870–1* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2000), pp. 139–81.
- ³⁵ Boime, *Art and the French Commune*, op. cit., pp. 7–8.
- ³⁶ Both judgments are cited in Adam Parkes, *A Sense of Shock: The Impact of Impressionism on Modern British and Irish Writing* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2011), p. 10.
- ³⁷ Levenson, *Modernism*, op. cit., p. 14.
- ³⁸ See Rachel Teukolsky, 'The Politics of Formalist Art Criticism: Pater's "School of Giorgione,"' in Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins and Carolyn

Williams (eds.), *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire* (ELT Press: Greensboro, 2002), op. cit., pp. 152–8.

39 Anonymous, review of *A History of Painting in North Italy*, *Quarterly Review*, no. 133 (July 1872), pp. 119–20.

40 Frederic Harrison, ‘The Revolution of the Commune,’ *Fortnightly Review*, no. 53 (1 May 1871), p. 558.

41 Anonymous, review of *A History of Painting in North Italy*, op. cit., p. 121.

42 For both Losurdo’s argument and Nietzsche’s comments on the Commune, I am reliant on Peter Thomas’s review of the former’s intellectual biography of the latter, *Nietzsche, il ribelle aristocratico* (2002), ‘Over-Man and the Commune,’ *New Left Review*, vol. 31 (Jan/Feb 2005), p. 139.

43 J. Hillis Miller, ‘Walter Pater: A Partial Portrait’, *Daedalus*, vol. 105, no. 1 (Winter 1976), p. 97.

44 The terms centrifugal and centripetal, used in this sense, are taken from Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1988), p. 10.

45 See Walter Pater, ‘Mr. Gosse’s Poems,’ in *Essays from ‘The Guardian’* (Macmillan: London, 1901), p. 109.

46 Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, op. cit., p. 178. The phrase is taken from a Stoic professor who acts as Marius’s mentor and who expounds ‘the idea of Humanity – of a universal commonwealth of mind, which becomes explicit, and as if incarnate, in a select communion of just men made perfect’.

47 Georg Lukács, ‘Dostoevsky: Novellas’, in *Reviews and Articles*, trans. Peter Palmer (Merlin Press: London, 1983), p. 51.

48 Walter Pater, ‘The Bacchanals of Euripides’, in *Greek Studies: A Series of Essays* (Macmillan: London, 1918), pp. 56–7.

WHAT REMAINS OF ADORNO'S CRITIQUE OF CULTURE?

Norbert Schneider

The major reference works on culture like to begin their reflections with Cicero, who used agriculture as a metaphor for intellectual processes in the expression *cultura animi* – ‘cultivation of the mind’.¹ It soon becomes clear, however, that this solitary source in antiquity offers little assistance in relation to the history of the concept and the problem. Although the word *cultura* appears sporadically in the Western tradition, not infrequently in the context of *cultus*, it was at a very late stage that it acquired the semantic content and ideological charisma with which we are familiar today. It was only during the eighteenth century that the concept of culture started to gain in significance, as the economically and socially advancing bourgeoisie was beginning to define its own values and interpretations. In Herder, ‘culture’ is closely related to the idea of humanity, a state of civilized behaviour, which – as he describes it in *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* – only emerged through an infinitely long process of evolution. Herder accordingly associates *Kultur* (culture, civilization) with *Kultiviertheit* (cultivation), although he already notes sceptically:

Nothing can be more vague than the term [cultivation] itself; nothing more apt to lead us astray than the application of it to whole nations and ages. Among a cultivated people, what is the number of those who deserve this name? in what is their preeminence to be placed? and how far does it contribute to their happiness? I speak of the happiness of individuals; for that the abstract being, the state, can be happy, when all the members that compose it suffer, is a contradiction, or rather a verbal illusion, evident to the slightest view.²

Leaving aside the fact that pessimistic tones can already be heard in this remarkable paragraph, the overall impression is suggested that culture has something to do with happiness, that Herder's philosophy of culture has clearly eudaemonic traits. The evolutionary aspect alone - which was later taken up in Hegel's philosophy of history³ - allows all that is past to be viewed in Herder from the horizon of the present as a movement of ascent, in a secularized expectation of salvation.

It is obvious that the experience of the advances made in productive forces during the Industrial Revolution⁴ entered into these conceptions of perfectibility.⁵ The bourgeoisie, which was increasingly playing the leading role in society, was now actively

exploring and defining new value systems and forms of behaviour, new forms of sociability and politics that were in harmony with the new state of technology and the resulting improvement in the standard of living. Whereas the high bourgeoisie, which was profiting from industrialization, had sufficient reason to base optimistic views of cultural progress on these new achievements, the petty bourgeoisie was only too well aware of the social

effects of mechanization and industrial-capitalist profit-making.

It was therefore hardly an accident that the first significant critique of culture came from an intellectual descended from this social sphere. In 1749, Rousseau famously gave a decisively negative answer to the prize question set by the Académie in Dijon regarding what the sciences and arts had contributed to the improvement of morals.⁶ Rousseau associated culture with 'artificiality' and 'unnaturalness', which he primarily perceived in aristocratic forms of behaviour, their luxury, their extravagant wastefulness at the expense of the oppressed and the exploited. Since the only way of correcting this state of affairs was to eliminate inequality, Rousseau attempted to provide historical and genetic evidence that equality existed in the original state of humanity, the '*état d'animalité*', when humans were supposedly at one with nature and there were no endogenous factors driving them away from it. It was *amour propre*, love of oneself and the desire to take priority over others and to outdo competitors, that had led to '*inégalité parmi les hommes*'.⁷ Rousseau was thus tracing an affective structure that had been identified before him by Hobbes and Spinoza, who spoke of *appetitus* or *conatus* as the instinctive source of human actions - and which, beyond the realm of philosophical terminology, we may identify with profit-seeking. His critique of culture, which appealed to Nature - as both a retrograde and ultimate utopia - to act as a corrective, was thus directed not only against hedonism, luxury and the fashions of aristocratic culture, but also within the Enlightenment itself against the self-referential perfectibilism of a sated bourgeoisie with an

unquestioned belief in progress. The Jacobins and the social-revolutionary movements of the nineteenth century were able to draw potential political implications from this.

In Rousseau's critique of culture, the ideologemes of the conservative provincial aristocracy, which felt pushed into a marginal position by the upstart aristocrats at court,⁸ and those of the petty bourgeoisie, threatened with being overrun by the rise of industrial capitalism, appear to be bound together. His critique thus represents the initial phase of this pessimistically inflected form of discourse. The second phase can be dated to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this case, however, it primarily concerned the educated bourgeoisie, among whom individual theorists expressed their 'discontent with culture' in ways that had mass appeal.⁹ The style and above all the ideological goals of this critique of culture were decisively defined by Nietzsche. Faced with advancing industrialization, with the natural sciences and technological disciplines in the midst of a rapid rise, and the humanities and cultural disciplines becoming increasingly obliged to justify themselves, writers such as Nietzsche made efforts to open up fresh horizons for philosophy, which had supposedly lost its purpose, for the unsettled educated bourgeoisie. Although such authors made concessions to the new spirit of the age to the extent that they rejected all forms of antiquarian, historicist thinking and all 'nostalgia for the past' in general (as Nietzsche presented it in 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life'), and in this way were able to catch up with modernity, they also castigated 'so-called industrial culture' as 'altogether the most vulgar

form of existence that has ever been'.¹⁰ As a remedy against this culture, Nietzsche held up the ideal of the 'noble' artist who, not unlike the Übermensch, 'breathes' power.¹¹ Nietzsche regarded his ideal of culture as being realized in a 'unanimity of life, thought, appearance and will',¹² with a destiny 'to promote the production of the philosopher, the artist and the saint within us and without us and thereby to work at the perfecting of nature'.¹³

Nietzsche's critique of culture was already strongly orientated towards the philosophy of life. It was mainly directed against the ossified dogma, lacking all vitality, of academic philosophers and philologists that was often enough to become the object of satirical mockery around and after 1900. During this period, thinkers such as Georg Simmel endorsed Nietzsche's conclusions. In a volume of essays entitled *Philosophische Kultur* (1911) and in his book *Der Konflikt der modernen Kultur* (1916),¹⁴ Simmel complained that culture - still regarded by him and other philosophers of the period as representing an objectification of the mind - was constantly in danger of losing contact with life, becoming sterile and congealing into formality.

During this historical period, the critique of culture mainly served the function of pushing forward a mental process of self-purification and renewal within the educated classes - and a Dionysian aspect, a body-affirming vitality in the sense adopted by the Life Reform Movement,¹⁵ was intended to contribute to this. Freud introduced the idea of liberating the libido into the debate as well. However, in an effort to preserve its own sphere, cultural criticism continued to immunize itself

against everything technological, from which only disaster or even barbarism appeared to emanate.

The phenomenon regarded in this negative way was given the name 'civilization'. This is seen most clearly in Oswald Spengler, who wrote that 'the "Decline of the West" comprises nothing less than the problem of Civilization'.¹⁶ While 'culture' for Spengler signified a climax, 'civilization' marked the degeneration that was inevitably to follow: 'The Civilization is the inevitable *destiny* of the Culture.'¹⁷ While 'culture' represented 'life', Spengler associated 'civilization' with withering and death: 'Culture and Civilization - the living body of a soul and the mummy of it ... Culture and Civilization - the organism born of Mother Earth, and the mechanism proceeding from hardened fabric. Culture-man lives inwards, Civilization-man outwards in space and amongst bodies and "facts".'¹⁸

Reckless and distorted though Spengler's hypotheses and theories appear to us today, to his contemporaries they seemed utterly plausible. *The Decline of the West* was one of the most widely debated works of cultural criticism during the 1920s and also represented a challenge for left-wing intellectuals. The young Adorno was not unaffected by this, and in 1955 he published an essay in *Frankfurter Hefte* entitled 'Was Spengler Right?' 'Where among all of Spengler's disputatious critics', the essay asks, 'was there one who was his peer?'.¹⁹ Adorno therefore attempted nothing less than to adopt a similar role - albeit with a considerable delay and in the light of the experiences of the Second World War, the emergence of totalitarian dictatorships and the

development of a ‘civilization in which innocent millions were done to death in gas-chambers’,²⁰ which afterwards simply went back to its normal routine.

Adorno admits that some of Spengler’s ‘predictions’, such as his ‘thesis of the metamorphosis of democracy into dictatorship’ had been borne out as a result of the emergence of totalitarianism. Also ‘striking’ was the prediction of certain phenomena of ‘modern mass society, especially its atavistic aspects for which he developed the image of “modern cave-men”, and this long before contempt for the masses itself became an article for mass consumption’.²¹ Adorno elsewhere mentions, not without admiration, ‘Spengler’s sharp eyes’,²² but he reconstructs the motifs and the *cui bono* of Spengler’s hypotheses critically. Despite the accurate diagnoses and prognoses (for instance, the prediction of a ‘mounting intellectual indifference’,²³ which Adorno saw as being manifested in the positivism of the social sciences), Spengler’s pessimism ultimately implied an affirmation and reinforcement of existing conditions instead of an indictment of them. His contempt benefited the elites ‘whose approval the author of *The Decline of the West* craved’.²⁴ Adorno counts Spengler as one of the ‘fore-runners’ of fascism, even though Hitler had never been ‘*fein genug*, well-bred enough’ for him.²⁵ He reproaches him for having mistaken ‘the “natural” qualities of previous history’ – which he had only been able to see as belonging to a blindly coursing fate – for ‘Nature and the nature of things itself’. Spengler had thereby slandered the Enlightenment: ‘He was a patron of that dark doom whose coming he had so gloomily forecast.’²⁶

Lorenz Jäger has correctly described Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, first published in hectographed form in 1944, as representing a leftwing response to *The Decline of the West*, 'with a similarly grand claim to present a comprehensive interpretation of history'.²⁷ As its title suggests, the two authors were concerned with showing that Enlightenment is always ambiguous. On the one hand, it was a precondition for freedom – that is, for leading humanity out of the constraints of Nature using the tools of reason. On the other hand, however, in the form of instrumental rationality – that is, in the reified form of objectified structures and institutions – it was susceptible of becoming impenetrable for 'each individual'. According to them, this became manifest in every form of bureaucracy in the state and the economy,²⁸ and in the unsurpassable brutality, the barbarism of the systematic, industrial-scale murder committed by the Nazi henchmen. 'The absurdity of a state of affairs in which the enforced power of the system over men grows with every step that takes it out of the power of nature, denounces the rationality of rational society as obsolete.'²⁹

Horkheimer and Adorno were concerned among other things with showing that totalitarian features prevail even in societies with democratic constitutions, through systemic moments that are already phenomenologically evident from the products of the culture industry alone: 'Culture now impresses the same stamp on everything. Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part.... The decorative industrial management buildings and exhibition centers in authoritarian countries are much the same as anywhere else.'³⁰ According to

Adorno, who wrote the chapter ‘The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception’, the monopolistic character of production enforces identical structures; there is no space for diversity or resistance in this world concerned only with business and with profit. The schematization of ‘formats’ (hit songs, stars, soap operas, etc.) affects not only their outward form of serial production. In addition, it also penetrates into the content, the structure of which is so standardized that the story can be anticipated from the very first moment. Adorno wanted to show how the culture industry makes everything interchangeable and debases the aesthetic quality to the level of a commodity. For him, criticism of the all-encompassing predominance of exchange-value is also undertaken from a psychosocial point of view, as he is concerned to highlight its effects on people’s affective structure and mental-cognitive constitution: everything, he argues, leads to a disenfranchisement and debasement of consciousness. Although the products of the culture industry are intended to divert people from the compulsions of work by providing ‘amusement’, drawing consumers into an apparently different sphere, the mechanized labour process with its unvarying rhythms reproduces itself in the manufacturing of ‘amusement commodities’: ‘What happens at work, in the factory, or in the office can only be escaped from by approximation to it in one’s leisure time. All amusement suffers from this incurable malady.’³¹

In Adorno’s critique of the culture industry, the analytic instruments for which were provided by Marx’s and Lukács’s theory of alienation and reification,³² the old opposition between culture and

civilization still shines through, as well as the pattern of high culture followed by decay. Admittedly, this analogy does not weaken the substance or legitimation of Adorno's approach. His method of negative dialectics protected him, at least in most cases, from adopting emphatic stances regarding what culture ought to be. He did not wish to be an 'advocate of culture' like the representatives of a bourgeois cultural criticism that he regarded as 'imprisoned within the orbit of that against which it struggles'.³³ For him, such critics were merely a 'salaried and honoured nuisance' who work their way up to being experts and judges and in the process acquire an 'arrogance' based on the fact that 'in the forms of competitive society in which all being is merely there *for* something else, the critic himself is also measured only in terms of his marketable success - that is, in terms of his *being for* something else'.³⁴ Adorno usually only described culture *ex negativo*, to avoid any conformist affirmation. To demonstrate the extent to which the bourgeois concept of culture had degenerated, he turned again and again to the example of the Nazis, whose canon of culture included only its shell, such as the names of classic authors for whom they demanded narrow-minded reverence - without noticing the potential for criticism and resistance which, according to him, is inherent in culture *a priori*.

Admittedly, Adorno occasionally offers positive examples of what culture is: 'Culture is only true when implicitly critical, and the mind which forgets this revenges itself in the critics it breeds. Criticism is an indispensable element of culture which is in

itself contradictory.³⁵ A desire to define this ontologically would imply fetishizing it:

But the greatest fetish of cultural criticism is the notion of culture as such. For no authentic work of art and no true philosophy, according to their very meaning, has ever exhausted itself in itself alone, in its being-in-itself. They have always stood in relation to the actual life-process of society from which they distinguished themselves. Their very rejection of the guilt of a life which blindly and callously reproduces itself, their insistence on independence and autonomy, on separation from the prevailing realm of purposes, implies, at least as an unconscious element, the promise of a condition in which freedom were realized.³⁶

This paragraph contains in a nutshell the most important criteria for defining culture according to Adorno - or at least it reveals what are, for him, its central semantic connotations. Ultimately, culture coincides with the 'authentic work of art', which is characterized by 'autonomy', as the governing force for a utopian claim to freedom, an emergence from the realm of purposes, or - speaking less philosophically - from the sphere of labour with its conditions of exploitation and mental and physical disintegration.³⁷ Cultural theory is thus subsumed into aesthetics, in a theory of the 'work of art' as a monad, which, although it is inseparable from social processes, nevertheless has the power to resist them. Adorno believes the work of art is capable of asserting itself, as an inner form of organization, against a thoroughly and monopolistically organized society. As evidence for this he invokes everything that enjoyed respect and repute in the classic avant-garde - from an opaque Symbolism with Mallarméan leanings to Schoenberg's twelve-tone music. Depersonalization ('Je est un autre'), dissonance and disintegration, although their

inherent tendency is to generate neuroses, paradoxically become the guarantors of an anti-ascetic form of hedonism.³⁸

There is no concealing the fact that Adorno, through this aesthetic of the 'autonomous' work of art, was in fact providing his own educated bourgeois preferences with a consistent form of legitimization. It was no accident that this aesthetic was capable

of being adapted seamlessly by precisely those high priests of elitist culture whom he mocked as philistines, and that it could even be integrated into a quietist model of iconicity whose interpretative glass-bead game forever amounted to no more than a demonstration of harmonious coherence.³⁹

Adorno's concept of autonomy has certainly passed through different theoretical waters than that of the various immanentist trends that have been taken in by the ideology of self-styled autonomous art. The latter is incapable of admitting to its commodity-like nature, precisely because it secretly knows that the law governing its stylistic differentiation, the logical conclusion of which is the recognizable logo of the works themselves, follows the competitive mechanisms of a market that promotes continuing innovation. Adorno, by contrast, was well aware of the character of art as a commodity. But although he always showed his reverence for Benjamin during the postwar period - perhaps from a sense of guilt over failure to provide support during Benjamin's exile - he did not wish to follow his politicization of the issue in his 'Work of Art' essay, which famously concludes with the epigrammatic sentences, 'This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism

responds by politicizing art.⁴⁰ Adorno accepted in principle Benjamin's theory that works of art had to be appropriate to the most advanced state of the productive forces; and he also agreed with his view of the transition from cult-value to exhibition-value.⁴¹ However, while Benjamin - closer to Brecht here - wished in principle to see the aura destroyed, Adorno rescued it by stopping at Benjamin's phenomenological description of the aura ('We define ... the latter as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be').⁴² Adorno: 'What is called aura in this passage is something that is familiar to artistic experience. It generally goes by the name of "atmosphere". The atmosphere of a work of art is the connection of its moments in so far as they point beyond themselves.'⁴³ The auratic moment, Adorno continues, does not deserve any sort of Hegelian ban, because 'Careful analysis reveals aura to be an objective property of the work of art.'⁴⁴

With this type of formulation, he was able to hold the work of art, as the epitome of his concept of culture, away from any economic causal nexus. He regarded the latter as operating - to an extreme extent - only in the culture industry. In the United States, where he suffered such a culture shock, he experienced the way in which the culture industry, the aesthetic of triviality, had entered so-called 'high art' in the form of the consumerist iconography of Pop art. However, with his orientation towards the classic avant-garde, he had not reflected on the problem this raised. Pop art was cynically implementing a demand raised by early left-wing movements for the elimination of the contrast between high and low culture,⁴⁵ which always also represented a class antagonism. When

Warhol assimilated his works to the phenotype of commodity aesthetics (such as product packaging) to the extent of making the two visually indistinguishable, he was sarcastically demonstrating the commodity character of all art under capitalism.

Adorno remained in his normative positions and trimmed his concept of art so that that only opacity, mysteriousness, dissonance and blackness remained as criteria.⁴⁶ Otherwise able to speak eloquently about the commodity character of cultural objectifications, he was here subscribing to idealist premises in the belief that it was possible to distil something ontologically (and thus essentialistically) from art that was untouched by, and undebasable by, the economy. This shows the limitations of his approach, which like no other was to shape the thinking of the critical intelligentsia of 1968.

In structural terms, Adorno's procedure was hardly different from that of Lukács, whom he often criticized. They both raised their own personal preferences to the level of a universally valid standard - nineteenth-century realism in the case of Lukács, and the avant-garde inclined towards abstraction in the case of Adorno. Adorno gave practically no empirical attention to artistic processes at all. For this would have meant grasping in categorical terms the polymorphism of everything that throughout history has counted as art. Adorno subscribed only to the conceptual standard of 'modern art'.

Despite all the revivals in the field of abstraction, however, modern art had ultimately come to an end already around 1960. The name 'Zéro'⁴⁷ - quite

unintentionally – was an indication of this terminal state, and while Clement Greenberg's demand for 'flatness' insisted on flattening within aesthetics, from today's point of view it can also be regarded in a figurative sense as a demand for semantic shallowness. Along with the 'expansion of art'⁴⁸ there came greater awareness of the fact that art is a consensus term that needs to be approached not through analyses of its essence, but instead historically and functionally. The institutional analysis⁴⁹ of the 'Artworld'⁵⁰ by Arthur Danto and George Dickie promises greater insights here than an aesthetic theory that is perpetually asserting apodictically what works of art allegedly 'want'. When Adorno, usually with aphoristic brevity, spoke in an unmistakably affirmative way about the twentieth century's '-isms', he was regarding them as something decreed by nature, as they appeared to be sufficiently justified by their expressive or ideological achievements. He never reflected on the mechanisms of selection initiated in the art market or on the processes of canonization arising through the accreditation provided by the museums. Another blind spot in his theory was the fact that in celebrating the authentic work of art he was still subliminally paying tribute to the aesthetics of genius – which by no coincidence first arose at the time when the capitalist art market was starting to establish itself. With the prospect of acquiring economic capital, the market even today finds indispensable the consecration of artists that is provided by the system of gallery-owners, art critics and the associated museum personnel, as Bourdieu in particular has shown in his analyses of 'symbolic capital'.⁵¹

What remains, then, of Adorno's critique of culture? The gloomy diagnoses of his critique of the culture industry may still have force – and everything that has since supervened in the entertainment industry in the age of digitalization would have driven him to irretrievable despair. However, in view of the objections presented above, the elitism of his theory of the work of art seems to me to be a most unsuitable alternative – no matter how fascinated we may still be by his thinking even today.

¹ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. J. E. King (Harvard University Press/Loeb Classical Library: Cambridge, Massachusetts, rev. edn, 1945), pp. 158–61, II 13: 'Cultura autem animi philosophia est; haec extrahit vitia radicitus et praeparat animos ad satus accipiendos eaque mandat iis et, ut ita dicam, serit, quae adulta fructus uberrimos ferant.' / 'Now the cultivation of the soul is philosophy; this pulls out vices by the roots and makes souls fit for the reception of seed, and commits to the soul and, as we may say, sows in it seed of a kind to bear the richest fruit when fully grown.' It should be noted that strictly speaking, Cicero is not discussing *cultura animi* here, but rather describing *cultura* as *philosophia animi*. This is by no means a minor distinction, but it has not been taken into account in the endless lexicographic traditions in which the formula has been passed down, as the source reference is almost never used. On the term *cultura*, see Karl Ernst Georges, *Ausführliches lateinisch-deutsches Handwörterbuch* (Hahn: Hanover, 1992; reprint of 8th edn, 1913), vol. 1, col. 1793.

² Johann Gottfried Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (1784–91), trans. T. Churchill (Johnson: London, 1800), p. v.

³ See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction, Reason in History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, intr. Duncan Forbes (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1975), p. 54: 'World history is the progress of the consciousness of freedom – a progress whose necessity it is our business to comprehend.'

⁴ See T. S. Ashton, *The Industrial Revolution 1760–1830* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1968); Sidney Pollard, *Peaceful Conquest: The Industrialization of Europe 1760–1970* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1981); Dieter Ziegler, *Die Industrielle Revolution* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt, 2005), pp. 13–14.

- ⁵ The idea of *perfectibilitas*, the perfection and improvement of people's living conditions, is already found earlier than the eighteenth century in Bacon, Galileo, Descartes, Pascal and Malebranche, as well as in the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* – for example, in Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, 'Digression sur les anciens et les modernes' (1687) in *Oeuvres de Fontenelle*, ed. Georges-Bernard Depping (Belin: Paris, 1818; reprinted Slatkine: Geneva, 1968), vol. 2, pp. 353–65, here p. 357.
- ⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours qui a remporté le prix à l'Académie de Dijon, en l'année 1750, sur cette question proposée par la même académie: 'Si le rétablissement des sciences et des arts a contribué à épurer les moeurs', par un citoyen de Genève* (Barrillot: Geneva, n.d. [? 1751]); also in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. B. Gagnebin and M. Raymond, vol. 3 (Gallimard: Paris, 1964), pp. 1–107.
- ⁷ See Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes' (Amsterdam, 1755); in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, op. cit., pp. 109–225.
- ⁸ See Renato Galliani, *Rousseau, le luxe et l'idéologie nobiliaire: Étude socio-historique* (Voltaire Foundation at the Taylor Institution: Oxford, 1989).
- ⁹ See *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, the original German title of Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. Joan Riviere, ed. James Strachey (Hogarth Press: London, 1963; International Psycho-Analytical Library, no. 17).
- ¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian del Caro (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2001), p. 56.
- ¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1997), p. 120 ('in both cases the aristocratic culture breathes power').
- ¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1997), p. 123.
- ¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator', in *Untimely Meditations*, op. cit., p. 160.
- ¹⁴ Georg Simmel, *Philosophische Kultur: Gesammelte Essais* (Klinkhardt: Leipzig, 1911) and 'The Conflict of Modern Culture' [1916], trans. D. E.

Jenkinson, in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, ed. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (Sage Publications: London, 1997), pp. 75–89.

15 See Ulrich Linse, ‘Die Lebensreformbewegung (Sammelrezension)’, in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 17 (1977), pp. 538–43; Wolfgang R. Krabbe, *Kulturkritik und Lebensreformbewegung, 1870–1930* (Fernuniversität: Hagen, 2005), part 1: *Kulturkritik und Lebensreformbewegung*.

16 Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. Charles F. Atkinson (New York: Knopf, 1927), p. 31. German original: *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (Braumüller: Vienna, 1918).

17 Ibid., p. 31.

18 Ibid., p. 353. As early as 1914, Thomas Mann – who then still held pro-war attitudes – in his *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* reprimanded his brother Heinrich Mann for being a ‘literatus of civilization’, implying not only decadence but also Francophilia, and above all a lack of literary cultivation. See Hermann Kurzke, ‘Die Quellen der “Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen”: Ein Zwischenbericht’, in *Internationales Thomas-Mann-Kolloquium: 1986, in Lübeck* (Francke: Berne, 1987; Thomas-Mann-Studien, vol. 7), pp. 291–310, esp. pp. 298–9 (with numerous references).

19 Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Was Spengler Right?’, *Encounter*, vol. 26 (1966), pp. 25–8, here p. 26. German original: ‘Wird Spengler recht behalten?’, in Adorno, *Kritik: Kleine Schriften zur Gesellschaft* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1971; edition suhrkamp, 469), pp. 96–103.

20 Adorno, ‘Was Spengler Right?’, p. 26.

21 Ibid., pp. 26, 28.

22 Ibid., p. 28.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., p. 29.

27 Lorenz Jäger, *Adorno: Eine politische Biographie* (Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag: Munich, 2005), p. 173.

- ²⁸ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 38.
- ²⁹ Ibid., pp. 38–9.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 120. See also Adorno, ‘Culture Industry Reconsidered’, trans. Anson G. Rabinbach, *New German Critique*, vol. 6 (Fall 1975), pp. 12–19, reprinted in Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Routledge: London, 1991), pp. 98–106.
- ³¹ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, op. cit., p. 137.
- ³² See Karl Marx, ‘The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret’, in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1976), pp. 163–77; here p. 165: ‘In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.’ Georg Lukács, ‘Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat’, in Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Merlin Press: London, 1971), pp. 83–222.
- ³³ Adorno, ‘Cultural Criticism and Society’, in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967), pp. 19–34, here p. 20.
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 20.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 22.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 23.
- ³⁷ Elsewhere, he writes, ‘That which legitimately could be called culture attempted, as an expression of suffering and contradiction, to maintain a grasp on the idea of the good life. Culture cannot represent either that which merely exists or the conventional and no longer binding categories of order which the culture industry drapes over the idea of the good life ...’ – Adorno, ‘Culture Industry Reconsidered’, in *The Culture Industry*, op. cit., p. 104.
- ³⁸ ‘By representing deprivation as negative, they [works of art] retracted, as it were, the prostitution of the impulse and rescued by mediation what was denied. The secret of aesthetic sublimation is its

representation of fulfilment as a broken promise.' Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, op. cit., pp. 139–40.

- 39 Max Imdahl, who explicitly appealed to Adorno, stated for example as the quintessence of his interpretation of Picasso's painting *Guernica* that 'the cohering of incoherence and coherence is the real message' – Max Imdahl, 'Zu Picassos "Guernica": Inkohärenz und Kohärenz in moderner Bildlichkeit', in Rainer Warning and Winfried Wehle (eds.), *Lyrik und Malerei der Avantgarde* (Fink: Munich, 1982), pp. 521–65, here p. 560.
- 40 Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (Fontana: Glasgow, 1973), pp. 219–53, here p. 244.
- 41 Ibid., p. 227: 'This is comparable to the situation of the work of art in prehistoric times when, by the absolute emphasis on its cult value, it was, first and foremost, an instrument of magic. Only later did it come to be recognized as a work of art. In the same way today, by the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function, later may be recognized as incidental.'
- 42 Ibid., pp. 224–5: 'The concept of aura which was proposed above with reference to historical objects may usefully be illustrated with reference to the aura of natural ones. We define the aura of the latter as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be. If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch. This image makes it easy to comprehend the social bases of the contemporary decay of the aura.'
- 43 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Christian Lenhardt (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London and Boston, Massachusetts, 1984), p. 386.
- 44 Ibid., p. 386.
- 45 See Leslie A. Fiedler, *Cross the Border – Close the Gap* (Stein and Day: New York, 1972).
- 46 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p. 58: 'If works of art are to survive in the context of extremity and darkness, which is social reality, and if they are to avoid being sold as mere comfort, they have to assimilate themselves to that reality. Radical art today is the same as dark art: its

background colour is black. Much of contemporary art is irrelevant because it does not take note of this fact, continuing instead to take a childish delight in bright colours. The ideal of blackness is, in substantive terms, one of the most profound impulses of abstract art.'

⁴⁷ See Klaus-Gereon Beuckers (ed.), *Zero-Studien: Aufsätze zur Düsseldorfer Gruppe Zero und ihrem Umkreis* (Münster: Lit, 1997); Karlsruher Schriften zur Kunstgeschichte, vol. 2).

⁴⁸ See Jürgen Claus, *Expansion der Kunst* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1970).

⁴⁹ See George Dickie, *Aesthetics: An Introduction* (Pegasus: New York, 1971); Dickie, 'Defining Art', in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1969), pp. 253–66.

⁵⁰ On the 'Artworld', see Arthur C. Danto, 'The Artworld', in *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 61 (1964), pp. 571–84; Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1981); Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1986); Danto, *The Madonna of the Future: Essays in a Pluralistic Art World* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York, 2001).

⁵¹ Bourdieu regards 'symbolic capital' as representing 'the capital of consecration – implying a power to consecrate objects (this is the effect of a signature or trademark) or people (by publication, exhibition, etc.) and hence of giving them value, and of making profits from this operation' – Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1996), p. 148. He regards the art market as a sphere in which symbolic capital is converted into economic capital. However, he also points out that the economy penetrates every pore of aesthetic and intellectual endeavours, even when they are opposed to the market under the banner of the avant-garde. One should not believe 'that there is no economic logic in this charismatic economy founded on the sort of social miracle which is an act free of any determination other than the intrinsically aesthetic intention. We shall see that there are economic conditions for the economic challenge which leads to its being oriented towards the most risky positions of the intellectual and artistic avant-garde, and for the aptitude to maintain oneself there in a lasting way in the absence of any financial counterpart; and there are also economic conditions of access to symbolic profits – which are themselves capable of being converted, in the more or less long term, into economic profits' (*Rules of Art*, p. 216).

Translated by Michael Robertson

ABY WARBURG AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

Frederic J. Schwartz

In March 1907 Aby Warburg read the first edition of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism* and responded enthusiastically.¹ He called it 'magnificent' (*prachtvoll*) in his journal, adding 'We must have him [Weber] for Hamburg.'² To his wife Mary, he wrote that the essay was among 'the most impressive' texts he had read since the works of Thomas Carlyle and Hermann Osthoff.³

Warburg read *The Protestant Ethic* at an important moment, as he was painstakingly drafting his essay 'Francesco Sassetti's Last Will and Testament'⁴ in isolation in Berlin, and he claimed the treatise gave him the courage of his convictions in his own work. The overlap of Weber's and Warburg's interests is clear: both explore the emergence of a modern turn of values towards active involvement in the world, towards the rational exploitation of natural resources or trade opportunities for the accumulation of wealth. Both were tracing the development by which, in the West, the otherworldly demands of religion turned towards an ethical interaction with the larger world. For Warburg at the time, this was a process of enlightened reconciliation, part of the civilizing

process; for Weber, it was part of a more ambivalent development of Western modernity.

Yet the fundamental incompatibility of the sociologist's bold thesis about the origins of capitalist modernity and the art historian's interrogation of the afterlife of antiquity is equally clear, and an examination of the latter's response in the light of his own work has led commentators to characterize Warburg's reading of Weber as idiosyncratic.⁵ Warburg claimed to find important confirmation in Weber of his own exploration of the process by which Sassetti, a merchant in the service of the Medici, balanced a deeply felt religiosity with worldly concerns in quattrocento Florence. But if the sociologist was concerned with the same issue – the way Christian values came to be harmonized with worldly life – his argument was very different. Weber traced the development of a methodical mode of living orientated towards the accumulation of wealth combined with a worldly ascetic lifestyle to Protestant, and particularly Calvinist, notions of vocation and predestination. His argument was, in fact, that the secular advances of modern capitalism did *not* find fertile soil in Catholic Renaissance Florence, as had been asserted by Werner Sombart in his *Modern Capitalism* of 1902 and repeated, in qualified and contradictory form, in several works thereafter.⁶

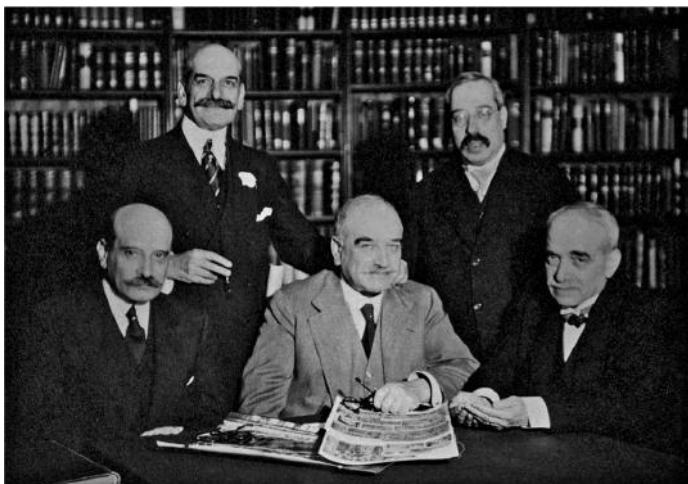


1 Max Weber, c. 1918, from
Marianne Weber, *Max Weber: Ein Lebensbild* (J. C. B. Mohr:
Tübingen, 1926).

Bernd Roeck and Charlotte Schoell-Glass have pointed to some of these contradictions and also noted the strong identificatory aspect of Warburg's reading of Weber. In his notes and letters to his wife, the art historian seems to have been most affected by the pathos of Weber's discussion of the Protestant ethic: the demand for an ascetic life that must nonetheless be orientated towards secular and worldly pursuits, what Weber called the 'iron cage' (*stahlhartes Gehäuse*) of duty, of selfless toil in a calling that had become detached from the deep values that once gave it meaning.⁷ In *The*

Protestant Ethic, Warburg found deeply affecting terms by which to understand his discomfort with his own Jewish and mercantile Hamburg environment – but in a description of Calvinism and other Protestant sects. Thus we find in his private writings a deeply personal reading of Weber, one that seems to conflate a ‘Jewish’ with a ‘Protestant’ ethos; while in his published work, Warburg refuses to argue in the open with Weber about whether the origins of capitalism are to be found in Catholic Italy or in the Protestant new world.

Warburg sent his Sassetti study to Weber, and Bernd Roeck has located and published Weber’s polite reply.⁸ That would seem to be the end of the Weber-Warburg dialogue. But a closer look reveals two things: first, it shows some good grounds for Warburg’s rejection of Weber’s thesis, as well as reasons not to engage in open debate; and second, it points to a longer afterlife of this exchange, both in and beyond Warburg’s and Weber’s work. And if Warburg’s complex response leaves him open to accusations that he was a careless reader of Weber, the sociologist’s writings show his own inability to get to grips with the work of the art historian. Teasing out the complexities of this interchange allows important historiographical and epistemological concerns to come into focus around the complex issues of both ‘spirit’ and capitalism in the early twentieth century.



2 Aby Warburg (right) with his brothers (left to right) Paul, Felix, Max and Fritz, 1929.

Photo: Warburg Institute, London.

When Weber wrote to Warburg to thank him for sending a copy of the Sassetti essay, it seems at first glance that the sociologist had understood the art historian quite well. Weber was fascinated by the simultaneous presence, in Sassetti's testament, of mutually exclusive sets of values and approaches to the world, by Warburg's attention

to conflicting *Weltanschauungen* that could nonetheless be reconciled or held in some sort of balance. We can call these *Weltanschauungen* sacred and secular - or Christian and world-denying, on the one hand, and 'pagan' and world-affirming on the other. Weber wrote that he found Warburg's account '*extremely* convincing', and points to the way the essay captured:

the wonderful lustre that fell upon this [Florentine] bourgeoisie, that it was *not* like the Calvinist one, standing on firm ethical ground,

that it could *not* play the ‘Superman’ with good conscience, the consciousness of the inner conflict and doubt, the suffering under the sudden incursion of economic forces that demand a *new style of life*, but which they cannot achieve on *this* ground.⁹

Weber understands, in other words, Warburg’s attention to contradiction. Yet he reads the Florentine situation backwards through the lens of his own conclusions about the Protestant ethic, seeing in the Renaissance merchant an incomplete historical state, more particularly an inability to achieve a ‘new style of life’. He implies a teleology tending towards capitalist modernity, but this teleology in fact contradicts what he described as a fateful *coincidence* of value-rationality (*Wertrationalität*) and means-end rationality (*Zweckrationalität*) that produced, by a historical accident, the ideological preconditions for the development of a modern economy, one in which the desire to display the worldly signs of God’s grace paradoxically led to the methodical pursuit and generation of wealth. This casts light on the differences between the two scholars and suggests that there are methodological reasons for Warburg’s reluctance to get to grips with Weber’s real thesis. For Weber was looking for a unified point of view, a consistent set of values that would characterize a powerful ethic and would create a consistent ‘style of life’. Wilhelm Hennis, perhaps the most important recent commentator on Weber, has analysed the ‘spirit’ of capitalism as the principle behind a consistent form of the conduct of life, and indeed finds in the question of *Lebensführung* the central problematic of the sociologist’s entire oeuvre.¹⁰ Hennis’s argument, which seeks to redefine the relation of Weber’s

work to the academic sociology that followed in its wake, is corroborated by the pithy but peculiar response to Warburg. Warburg, for his part, found no consistent styles of life or of art in history, but rather discontinuities and contradictions, agonistic negotiations between competing values and beliefs that could be reconciled but resisted identity. In his letter, Weber sees such clashes as a sign of incomplete development; and while Warburg implied at times a similar teleology, he was more interested in these inconsistencies and came to see them as constants of human history.

The difference was not merely one of temperamental or methodological inclination. At the time of the so-called *Methodenstreiten*, or methodological debates in the human sciences, much more was at stake. Warburg's attention to contradiction, his refusal to focus on form alone, and his rejection of linear development and neat periodization

dization amount to an implicit critique of prevailing art-historical models of style. This model represented a compelling convergence of idealism, formalism and historicism that saw in visual form a more or less faithful image of a historically specific spirit or world view, a constellation perhaps most powerfully expressed in Heinrich Wölfflin's famous remark that one could see the spirit of the Gothic as clearly in the shoes worn at the time as in the greatest cathedrals.¹¹ It was an unstable convergence, creating methodological conundrums and inviting both circular reasoning and cliché; but the model and its problems were at the centre of Alois Riegl's important conception of the *Kunstwollen*, Wölfflin's sophisticated but ambivalent attempt to define the visual root of form, and Erwin

Panofsky's neo-Kantian exploration of 'symbolic form'. All of these attempts involved the need to abstract from works of art the common denominator of a consistent visual style, the conviction that such a visual idiom expressed something essential about a culture - its 'spirit' - and the axiom that this common form alone was an adequate expression of the culture.

The likes of Riegl, Wölfflin and Panofsky were attuned to the methodological problems of this view, but they were equally attached to the paradigm. And the specificity of Warburg's art-historical practice lay in his rejection of it. Though notes of the time reveal a conviction about the 'organic' nature of a culture, he drew attention to the stylistic discontinuities in word and image; he insisted on the complex and sometimes contradictory textuality of the visual; and he resisted the attempts to characterize cultures as harmonious or unified. In his essay on 'Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Image at the Time of Luther', for example, he wrote as follows of Raphael's frescos for the tomb of Agostino Chigi at Santa Maria del Popolo:

The formal beauty of these figures and the exquisite taste with which the artist reconciles pagan and Christian belief, must not be allowed to obscure the truth that even in Italy, around 1520, at the time of greatest artistic freedom and creativity, the antique was – as it were – revered in the form of a Janus-faced herm. One face wore a daemonic scowl, exacting superstitious awe; the other face was Olympian and serene, inviting aesthetic veneration.¹²

The serenity, balance and anthropocentric forms of the High Renaissance cannot, in other words, be taken as evidence of a consistent, harmonious

humanist culture. Warburg took images to be symptoms rather than essences, and dealt with them as singular artefacts rather than examples of a type. And if his alternative conceptual framework formed around anthropological poles of myth and enlightenment, *Aberglaube* and *Besonnenheit*, created its own problems, Warburg's interest in the afterlife of antiquity played havoc with usual periodizations and productively troubled historicist assumptions about historical time.¹³

Compared with Warburg's mix of philological positivism and methodological modesty or scepticism, Weber's work looks rather different, for all its sophistication.

Weber worked with abstractions that combined the characteristics of the diverse phenomena of history, fully aware, at least in his methodological writings, that they never existed in pure form: he called these abstractions 'ideal types', and indeed 'capitalism' and 'the Florentine bourgeoisie' were two examples.¹⁴ He was also aware that the process of concept formation was rooted in the present and had no claim for absolute historical validity. The 'ideal types', he writes in the second edition of *The Protestant Ethic*, are 'absolutely necessary, in order to bring out the characteristic differences', but also 'in a certain sense [do] violence to historical reality'.¹⁵ Such concepts were abstractions that unified and harmonized, that neatly packaged the past into unproblematic entities that simply did not exist. Weber was attuned to the risks of his conceptual tools, the trap of hypostatization, but parted company with orthodox neo-Kantians by seeing the types more as a concentrate of historical reality than the result of mere reflection. In Joachim Radkau's, words the types were, for Weber,

'structurally present within reality and not just projected into it by the human mind.'¹⁶ If for Warburg there was no one, fundamental 'spirit' of the Renaissance, or for that matter capitalism, it was precisely such a 'spirit' that Weber, Sombart and others at the time sought.

Indeed the orthodox art-historical approach based on the concept of style - the 'ideal type' par excellence - was often taken as a model by the economists of the younger Historical School of Political Economy and the sociologists who emerged from it. Weber discusses Riegl's notion of the *Kunstwollen* extensively in his fundamental methodological essay 'Der Sinn der "Wertfreiheit" der soziologischen und ökonomischen Wissenschaften', written in 1913 and published in *Logos* in 1917/18. Though he found it productive, Weber finds problems in a history of art in which aesthetic judgments inevitably play havoc with causal accounts. This problem of the 'heteronomous' way in which the objects of art history are given to the knowing subject notwithstanding, he notes that 'in the field of painting, the delicate modesty of the problematic in Wölfflin's *Classic Art* is a quite outstanding example of the achievements possible in empirical work.'¹⁷ Sombart refers to the work of Wölfflin in writing that the task of the economist was to identify the 'stylistic context' of economic systems as art historians had identified the 'spirit of the Gothic',¹⁸ and Max Scheler praised Sombart's success in discovering the 'strict inner stylistic unity [*Stileinheit*] of historical economies.'¹⁹ In his magisterial essay on the state of hermeneutics between the wars, published in the *Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* in 1921/2, Karl Mannheim treats

the work of Riegl, Sombart and Weber as related attempts to determine historical world views.²⁰ For all his circumspection, Weber was working within this problematic; Warburg was not.

The argument that Warburg read in 1907 was, certainly, an extraordinary one. Weber saw the emergence of modern capitalism in the West as the result of a particular convergence. In his terms, the path to modernity was opened by the fact that means-end rationality, so characteristic of the modern economy and domination

of nature, could lay claim to Western culture only when it became value-rational. The Calvinist belief in predestination, and in the signs of worldly success as evidence of God's grace, led to a religious drive behind an ascetic, methodical organization of life combined with the ruthless quest for financial gain. And the argument led to extraordinary conclusions. First, Weber asserted that capitalism had irrational roots, or roots that were based on religion and not instrumental logic: the desire to display the signs of grace. And second, that capitalism had become irrational once again: once these two forms of rationality converged, leaving subjects locked into the need for a calling in the absence of other values, modern industrial society no longer needed the religious bases of its origin. The result was rationality and specialization, the ascetic drive for the accumulation of wealth without the belief in God's grace or any other values, what Weber called the 'iron cage' of capitalism.

With its compelling logic and extraordinary derivation of a specifically modern form of alienation, the argument spoke to Warburg, though

the art historian clearly rejected both Weber's methodological presuppositions and indeed his conclusions. And we see in his work how Weber turned a deaf ear to Warburg's implicit objections. The reasons are clearly the hermeneutic habits of thought that I have explored elsewhere as the result of romantic anti-capitalism, the positing of a unified spirit and culture in the past that was, in fact, a fantasy, a projection onto the past of precisely the qualities of life that were felt to be missing from an alienated present. Already in the first edition of *The Protestant Ethic* we see the search for a unified 'spirit' as a causal factor. We see the positing of a corresponding 'style of life' as the root of capitalism, not as the result of practical imperatives or opportunities (and here we must leave aside entirely the question of Weber's complex engagement with Marx). In the book, Weber echoes the *Kulturkritik* of his time that bemoaned the loss of unity: Goethe, he writes, 'tried to teach us the basic *ascetic* motive of the bourgeois style of life - if it is indeed to be Style and not its lack'.²¹ The lack of style of contemporary life, its failure to develop a unified spirit and culture, was of course a commonplace of contemporary thought. Cut off from values and from spirit, life was no longer, says Weber, the expression of a style. Style - an abstraction, a concept - was at some level very real for Weber. As attuned as he was to the risks of his conceptual tools, the risk of hypostatization, the ideal type had its own energy that led it to be taken by Weber as historical and social reality.²² In the second edition, Weber shows more such tendencies. For one, he removes the sceptical quotation marks around the notion of the 'spirit' of capitalism.²³ And he inserts a long footnote on Leon Battista Alberti,

the Florentine humanist and son of a businessman. In one of his responses to *The Protestant Ethic*, Sombart had pointed to Alberti's simultaneous piety and practical economic attitude; Weber insists that his religion was merely formal, that he was 'inwardly already emancipated from ... the tradition of the Church'.²⁴ The Renaissance figure as resolutely secular, with a clear-cut attitude and style of life:

it is as if Weber had forgotten the case of Sassetti, Warburg's lesson about how the things that matter in history and drive it are often those that make a mockery of ideal types and the concept of style, with their tendency to homogenize and hypostatize.

Yet significant though they are, these methodological differences should not blind us to larger and more significant implications of the brief meeting of minds between Weber and Warburg. Two points need to be made: first, that in his works on the Florentine bourgeoisie and on pagan-antique prophecy at the time of the Reformation, Warburg had wandered into a large debate on the origins of capitalism; and second, that he wanted absolutely no part in it. Studying the complex afterlife of antiquity in the Renaissance, Warburg was working from the same sources as, for example, Sombart in his *Modern Capitalism*, *The Bourgeois*, and other studies; in his work on Dürer and Luther, Warburg was covering much of the same ground as Weber and also Ernst Troeltsch, in his monumental work *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches* of 1911;²⁵ and in his work on the complex interrelations of religion, economies and culture, he was in the very same territory as Georg Simmel, whose *Philosophy of Money* appeared in 1900 and whose *Religion* appeared in 1906.²⁶ And Warburg

was surely aware that the common ground needed to be traversed very carefully. For as is now clear, the debates about capitalism were inseparable from debates about religion. With his sensitivity to anti-Semitism, for example, he knew well Sombart's notorious *The Jews and Economic Life* of 1911, a book in which the author attributed the calculating and exploitative aspects of capitalism to a specifically Jewish ethic.²⁷ Sombart's book was later than the Sassetti essay, but it expanded on points Sombart had been making since 1903 while it fleshed out, with an extensive scholarly apparatus, the current tendency to equate Jews and the problems of a modern economy that was a mainstay of the anti-Semitism of the time. Thus another reason for Warburg's resolute refusal to establish the sort of precise links between religious beliefs and economic ethos that are so obvious in the work of Weber.

Yet Warburg's refusal to accept the terms of the debate that raged in this scholarly area came at a cost. His 'Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Images in the Age of Luther', for example, looks dated compared with other writings of the time on the Reformation. Luther is the hero of Warburg's account, remaining sceptical of Phillip Melanchthon's intense engagement with astrology. For Warburg, Melanchthon's attention to the astral arts reveals a 'primitive, totemistic obsession with correspondences (as embodied in the pagan nativity cult)', while Luther is cast as one of the 'leaders of the struggle for historical objectivity'.²⁸ Yet seeing Luther as the pioneer of an enlightened Christianity, answerable to individual thought and eschewing the pagan trappings and magical ritual of Catholicism, is a specifically nineteenth-century

conception of the Reformation. It is a view espoused chiefly by perhaps the most influential theologian of the late nineteenth century, Albrecht Ritschl, who codified the view of Luther's rejection of Rome as part of a German tradition of freedom of conscience;

it is also in line with the nationalist, Prussian investment in Luther as representing a modern form of Christianity that was deeply implicated in Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*.²⁹ In Warburg's time, Luther came to be cast in a much less favourable light. Ernst Troeltsch's *Reason and Revelation in Johann Gerhard and Melanchthon* of 1891³⁰ was a first move in a new picture of Luther as a more ambiguous figure; and twenty years later in *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, Troeltsch focused on Luther's compromise with prevailing political powers and judged it harshly.³¹ Troeltsch's work was key not only to Weber's view of Protestantism,³² but also a line of thought that followed, privileging Thomas Münzer, opponent of Luther and rebel leader during the Peasants' War, as the preeminent political theologian of Protestantism. Ernst Bloch, a student of Troeltsch and Weber, developed this critique of Luther in his expressionist *Thomas Münzer as Theologian of the Revolution* (1921), as did Hugo Ball in his left-wing but disturbingly anti-Semitic *Critique of the German Intelligentsia* (1919).³³ Both works were acquired by Warburg's library immediately upon publication; and if they arrived too late to be of use to Warburg, his lack of interest in Troeltsch's earlier work implies that they might in any case never have been pressed into service.

And there is something else that separates Warburg (before his Kreuzlingen years) from the sociologists

emerging from the Historical School of Political Economy and the critical theorists who followed. The project the sociologists set themselves was, in Weber's words, to develop 'historical and theoretical knowledge of the general cultural significance of capitalist development', with the search for the origins of a modern economy the historical prerequisite of the enquiry.³⁴ And the project was part and parcel of a critique of technological and economic progress. The discourse represented by figures such as Ferdinand Tönnies, Simmel, Weber and Troeltsch, so trenchantly labelled by Lukács as 'romantic anti-capitalism', was structured by a narrative of decline from pre-capitalist communities united by common values to an alienated capitalist society based only on the bonds of self-interest.³⁵ The subtext of the historical projects was the feeling of cultural crisis at the turn of the century, which was also behind the urgency and pathos of the works of Weber and others. The potentially crude distinctions between the pre-capitalist and the present and the tendency toward an asymmetry of values in analysing cultures notwithstanding, such a standpoint was extraordinarily productive, especially in the subtle hands of Weber and Simmel. Weber's thesis is typical: exploring the origins of the modern economic system, it allows a view of contemporary capitalism that reveals the causes of the alienation it engenders and the deeply irrational nature of its manifestations. Yet if the tone of the argument was very much of its time, Warburg's thought again looks even more dated, often structured by simpler and unproblematised notions of enlightenment and myth. The will of Sassetti is analysed through a simple dichotomy of inward-looking piety and a

secular, active approach to the world inspired by the ancients, with the latter privileged; and while Warburg establishes that Sassetti's invocation of the figure of Fortuna and the pagan references in his *impresa* allow a complex negotiation of these conflicting beliefs, this tension is in no way simply overcome. Warburg shifts the terms somewhat in the Luther essay, with the Protestant form of Christianity and its alliance with an independent and enlightened approach to the world privileged over a backward belief in magic and a relinquishment of active control over the world. Here, too, Warburg's work looks like a holdover from the previous century. He certainly believed that capitalist modernity represented an advanced, if always endangered, epistemological position, at least until the 'Serpent Ritual' lecture. In a statement of 1900 - he was writing to his brother Max, asking for funds for his library - he says that 'capitalism is ... capable of intellectual achievement of a scope which would not be possible otherwise'.³⁶ Though framed triumphantly, it is an extraordinary statement, one that posits a link between the nature of knowledge and specific economic forms and that points to Weber's theory of rationalism and rationalization, to Simmel's exploration of modern intellectuality, and to Lukács's analysis of reification. Yet we have a good sense of why it might have proved difficult for Warburg to develop this line of thought in a satisfactory way.



3 'Centaurus and Lups', from Christoph Semler, *Coelum stellatum in quo asterismi* (Magdeburg, 1731).

Thus, despite the subtlety of his micro-historical studies, Warburg's terms remain ahistorical. It is the timeless starry sky that served Warburg as a figure for the transcendental ambivalence of both knowledge and the image in human thought, showing the possibilities of enlightenment always haunted by the tendency to fall into magical or mythic thought. 'The celestial globe', he said typically in a lecture of 1911, 'the customary symbol of the heavenly vault, is a genuine product of Greek civilization arising from the dual gift of the ancient Greeks: their talent for the immediacy of a concrete poetic imagination and their power of mathematically abstract visualisation.'³⁷ The gods the Greeks found in the sky, he writes in the 'Pagan-Antique Prophecy' essay, 'were beings of sinister, ambivalent, and indeed contradictory powers: as star signs they expanded space, marking the way for the soul's

flight through the universe; as constellations they were also idols, with whom, as befitted the childlike nature of man, the mere creature might aspire to mystic union through devotional practices'.³⁸

For Warburg here, the constellations were an ambivalent map of the heavens, the horizon of possible relations to the world. These differing possibilities, however, were transhistorical, not taking into account the specificities of modes of production and the varieties of political power. But for the two generations for whom capitalism came into focus as an object of study, one with its own very specific political, existential and epistemological puzzles, the skies were crowded with figures of thought, with *Denkfiguren*. Such figures give a sense of the various possibilities of knowledge in the terrain entered by Warburg, possibilities opened up by Weber and the debate over the emergence of economic modernity, but with the potential to point beyond the limitations of a merely romantic anti-capitalism. For the early Lukács, writing in the winter of 1914–15, however, there was as yet no contradiction in the heavens:

Happy are those ages for which the starry sky is the map of all possible paths – ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars; the world and the self, the light and the fire, are sharply distinct, yet they never become permanent strangers to one another, for fire is the soul of all light and all fire clothes itself in light. Thus each action of the soul becomes meaningful and rounded in this duality: complete in meaning – in sense – and complete for the senses; rounded because the soul rests within itself even while it acts; rounded because its action separates itself

from it and, having become itself, finds a centre of its own and draws a closed circumference round itself.³⁹

Here the mix of magic and calculation was an effective horizon for orientation. The anthropomorphic tendencies and the intermingling of the human and the divine created an adequate state of half-knowledge, allowing for the full unfolding of the subject; for all its irrationality it was preferable to a world drained of magic by the limitless instrumental knowledge of a calculable world, one understood through and dominated by means-end rationality. For the alternative was the knowledge of the lack of meaning. This is what had to be faced, in 'manly' fashion, by anyone who chose 'Science as a Vocation', the title of Weber's famous speech to students at the University of Munich on 7 November 1917.⁴⁰ But this lack of answers to the fundamental questions of life brought forth its own demons. Weber's metaphors in this lecture are revealing; they hover between irony and argument. A world devoid of orientation was, said Weber, the 'fate' of modern man in a world he describes as one in which different world views, all equal and equally false in their denial of meaninglessness, fought for the allegiance of human subjects like the heathen gods.

We live as did the ancients when their world was not yet disenchanted of its gods and demons ... as Hellenic man at times sacrificed to Aphrodite and at other times to Apollo, and, above all, as everybody sacrificed to the gods of his city, so do we still nowadays, only the bearing of man has been disenchanted and denuded of its mystical but inwardly genuine plasticity. Fate, and certainly not 'science', holds sway over these gods and their struggles.... Many old gods ascend from their graves; they are disenchanted and hence take the form of impersonal forces. They strive to gain power over our lives and again they resume their

eternal struggle with one another.... Who is to answer the question ... 'Which of the warring gods should we serve?'⁴¹

Weber's references to 'fate' here - a paradoxical characterization of a world devoid of magic - stands in sharp tension with his analysis of rationalism and complicates it. The relation between reason and conviction, however, takes place for him across a void and describes a sort of *mise en abyme* rather than generating a dialectic.

When Bloch looked to the heavens in *Thomas Müntzer*, he seems to stay closer to Warburg's than Weber's interpretation but describes reason as politics instead of taking it as a reified category. Like Warburg, he saw in astrological habits a tendency that would undermine the positive energies of the Reformation. 'Pagan pride', he wrote, had played a role in the peasants' revolt, but at a fateful moment, 'their gazes went upwards, they sought to read [God's] will in the stars.'⁴² The revolution fell prey to what Bloch in the second edition called (certainly after familiarity with Warburg) 'this other side of the Renaissance, one not guided by the Muses but instead chiliastic'.⁴³ This was his political commentary on Weber's and Troeltsch's Luther, one turned into a trenchant critique of capitalism. Luther's 'idolisation of the State' led, he wrote, 'to a new "religion": capitalism as religion [which] inaugurated a veritable church of Satan'.⁴⁴

'Capitalism as religion': this is the title of one of Walter Benjamin's most compelling and mysterious writings, a fragment written in 1921 and inspired by Bloch's phrase.⁴⁵ We know from the bibliographical notes that are part of this fragment that it

represents Benjamin's reading of Weber's *The Protestant Ethic* and Troeltsch's *Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*.⁴⁶ Benjamin seeks to turn the tables on Weber's famous thesis: instead of seeing capitalism merely as religiously conditioned, he takes it to be a fundamentally religious phenomenon, a new religion in a godless world. In this he was perhaps simply following the metaphorics of Weber's 'Science as a Vocation' to their conclusion, seeing the fate of capitalist rationality and disenchantment as inseparable from the revival of the pagan gods.⁴⁷ In any case, capitalism creates simultaneously guilt and debt (both *Schuld* in German) and does so completely without dogma, but 'serves essentially to allay the same anxieties, torments and disturbances to which the so-called religions offered answers'.⁴⁸ Benjamin radicalizes Weber's collapsing of the poles of rationality/capitalism and irrationality/religion but declines to prove his point, writing that, 'We cannot draw closed the net in which we are caught. Later on, however, we shall be able to gain an overview of it.'⁴⁹

'We cannot draw closed the net in which we are caught': this is a figure for a typical hermeneutical paradox, the impossibility of achieving knowledge from within a context and the simultaneous impossibility of escaping one's own position as a place from which to know. But it is also an image that describes Warburg's historical predicament particularly well. He was unable to address the tightly knotted questions of the relation of religion to capitalism, and capitalism to knowledge, because, as an assimilated Jew of a specific generation, he was caught in their net. In his *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiel* (The origin of

German tragic drama) of 1925/8, however, Benjamin would develop this paradox more fully and productively, interestingly enough using the Warburgian figure of the constellation that was thoroughly familiar to him. For the book, we know, was born under the ambivalent star of Warburg, intellectually productive but professionally a dead end.⁵⁰ Many others have explored this elective affinity so I shall limit myself to a few comments. For one, Benjamin was no doubt impressed by the way Warburg managed to avoid the trap of the art-historical notion of style. Benjamin, too, had little use for bland concepts that subsumed complex works and reduced them to a common denominator. Style, or the ideal type, wrote Benjamin, was a fallacy: 'As far as historical types and epochs in particular are concerned, it can, of course, never be assumed that the subject matter in question might be grasped conceptually with the aid of ideas such as that of the renaissance or the baroque.'⁵¹ Rejecting an easy approximation of concepts to the world to be known, he preferred an epistemology of the extreme:

It is ... erroneous to understand the most general references which language makes as concepts, instead of recognizing them as ideas. It is absurd to attempt to explain the general as an average. The general is the idea. The empirical, on the other hand, can be all the more profoundly understood the more clearly it is seen as an extreme. The concept has its roots in the extreme.⁵²

Benjamin gave limited credence to concepts in general, which were 'spontaneous products of the intellect' and not 'ideas', for which Benjamin claimed ontological validity.⁵³ This was a distinction that broke the chains of neo-Kantianism in a way

that created a speculative realm of thought instead of (like Weber) sinking into hypostatization.⁵⁴

Like Warburg, Benjamin was interested in the way a work's relation to its period exploded the ideal type. For while many have pointed out that Benjamin's approach to the Baroque occurred in the wake of the contemporary art-historical rehabilitation of the period, they have not pointed to the way his work deviated from this tendency. If art historians such as Wölfflin and others found a proper *style* in the Baroque, one they said was equal to that of the Renaissance, Benjamin studies the work of this period as precisely *not* coalescing into a harmony, rather one that had no harmonizing principle because it was predicated on rupture, on the lack of coherence. It was the reverse projection of the romantic anti-capitalist plaint of the lack of unity in the modern age

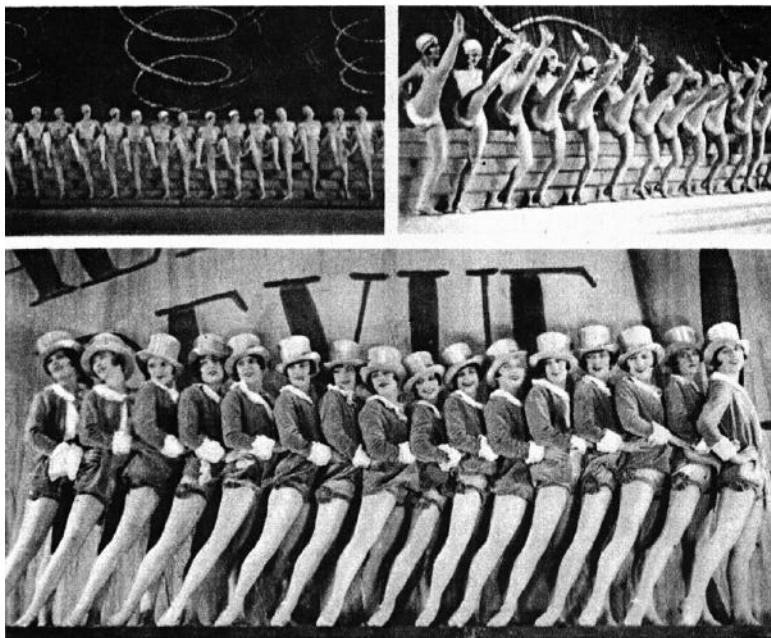
back onto previous centuries, a critique of the kind of thinking that served as the motor of the work of Wölfflin, Riegl, Weber and the early Lukács. And Benjamin worked out the anti-hermeneutical possibilities of knowledge by considering man's relation to the heavens. 'Ideas are to things', he writes, 'as constellations are to stars.'⁵⁵

The conceptual space Benjamin opens up by his image of the stars is an extraordinarily complex one. He complicates Warburg's sceptical sense of the constellation as a sort of map, one that gives orientation but whose image could assume an autonomous and threatening life of its own. For Benjamin, the stars or things have no meanings in themselves; this is to be found, as for the ancients, only in their configurations. But the constellation cannot tell us what the star is, just as the star has

no power to determine its own position – it cannot see how we see it. The individual existence of the star is preserved, as the individual work of art is rescued from the reduction to style for Warburg. Yet the constellations are not simply there to grasp – they are too far away, empty without the stars and too dependent on the knowing subject's own position. It is an image of knowledge in a world of fragments that cannot be reassembled into any easy form of meaning. It is balanced – or stranded – between the premodern plenitude of meaning and modern disenchantment, a position of debilitating stasis between different kinds of certainty. For Benjamin in the *Trauerspiel* book, this is the only epistemology possible under the conditions that Weber called – ironically? – the revival of the pagan gods' fight for human allegiances.



4 Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera*,
c. 1482, tempera on panel,
202 cm × 314 cm, detail.
Uffizi, Florence.



5 'Tiller Girls', from *Film-Photos wie noch nie* (Kindt & Bucher: Giessen, 1929).

Benjamin's image of the stars was not the only such epistemological figure current in the wake of the sociologists' account of the disenchantment of the world. In 'The Mass Ornament' of 1927, Siegfried Kracauer combines Weber's account of rationalization with the traditional categories of art history in a new way.⁵⁶ In the organic movement of the forms of the past, the ornaments of their dance, one could, Kracauer said, read the spirit of the age, the spiritual bonds of an organic community. One could do this in the present too – his example is the Tiller Girls – but such an exercise yielded another paradox: that the ornament had become autonomous, that it existed above the

human subjects of which it was formed, that they no longer could see the ornament, understand their place within it. The search for spirit to be read in an unmediated way from form showed only the lack of spirit governing form in modernity.⁵⁷



6 Albrecht Altdorfer, *The Battle of Alexander*, 1529, oil on panel, 158.4 cm × 120.3 cm, detail. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

In these related figures of the limits of knowledge, both Kracauer and Benjamin are, no doubt, playing with a formulation of Nietzsche's from *The Birth of Tragedy*: 'It is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified* – while of course our consciousness of our own significance hardly differs from that which the soldiers painted on canvas have of the battle represented on it. Thus all our knowledge of art is basically quite illusory.'⁵⁸ But Benjamin and Kracauer lacked Nietzsche's faith that allowed for the leap into the realm of the aesthetic.

Warburg was aware that progress was always precarious; by the time of the Serpent Ritual lecture, delivered in Ludwig Binswanger's Kreuzlingen sanatorium, he saw that it was endangered from the inside. His description could come straight from Weber's 'Science as a Vocation':

Our own technological age has no need of the serpent in order to understand and control lightning. Lightning no longer terrifies the city dweller.... Scientific explanation has disposed of mythological causation.... Whether this liberation from the mythological world view is of genuine help in providing adequate answers to the enigmas of existence is quite another matter.⁵⁹

Indeed, the extraordinary fact is that the description might well have come from 'Science as a Vocation': letters show that Warburg was again reading Weber's work while in Kreuzlingen.⁶⁰ Like Weber, Warburg sees the risk that disenchantment itself could lead to the destruction of the distance he thought necessary to enlightenment: 'The culture of the machine age destroys what the natural sciences, born of myth, so arduously achieved: the space for devotion, which evolved in turn into the space required for reflection',⁶¹ into *Denkraum*. Like the constellations taken as gods, technology without *Denkraum* could become dangerously tangible, turning the transformative potential of science into the destructive forces once found in magic. In an essay of 1926 with the Warburgian title 'To the Planetarium', Benjamin described something similar. Like Warburg in the Serpent Ritual essay, and like him probably thinking about Weber, whose insights he valued but whose methodology he rejected, Benjamin saw a reversion to myth; like Warburg's Melanchthon and Münzer's peasants, he saw a return to the stars:

Nothing distinguishes the ancient from the modern man so much as the former's absorption in a cosmic experience scarcely known to later periods.... [But] it is a dangerous error of modern men to regard this experience as unimportant and avoidable ... it is not; its hour strikes again and again, and then neither nations nor generations can escape it, as was made terribly clear by the last war, which was an attempt at new and unprecedented commingling with the cosmic powers.⁶²



7 *Sternsaal* in Hamburg Planetarium, c. 1930.
Photo: Planetarium Hamburg.

Typically, he was ambivalent: the collective intoxication of cosmic experience had led to disaster but could nonetheless not be banished from modern culture. It could, however, become enlightened in the overthrow of the capitalist organization of this dangerous knowledge, redeemed by revolution. This was a different revolution from Bloch's, one that kept a consistent view of the heavens as a guide for worldly action, however ambivalent, Janus-faced, Delphic.

The spectre of revolution was, we know, more than Warburg could handle, tainted as it was, so often, by anti-capitalism framed as anti-Semitism. But both the possibility of it and its failure were part of the complex moment of modernity that he, Weber, Benjamin and others were trying, over these decades, to grasp. It is a fascinating configuration of scholars who sought to determine the relationship of modernity to reason, deeply aware that the tools of reason were a net in which they stood but could not draw closed, scholars struggling for an overview but thematizing its impossibility. The view skywards gave no such overview, there was no map there of all possible paths. What we can say, however, is that even if Warburg only accidentally wandered underneath this sky, onto the terrain of a debate about the emergence of capitalism and the nature of knowledge possible under those conditions, there are ample signs that he did, nonetheless, leave his mark there.

My thanks to Claudia Wedepohl, Eckhart Marchand, Spyros Papapetros and Bernd Roeck, who sparked my interest in this topic in a lecture at the Warburg Institute many years ago.

¹ Max Weber, 'Die Protestantische Ethik und der 'Geist' des Kapitalismus', *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, part 1, vol. 20, no. 1 (1904), pp. 1–54; part 2,; vol. 21, no. 1 (1905), pp. 1–110.

² Quoted in Bernd Roeck, 'Aby Warburg und Max Weber: Über Renaissance, Protestantismus und kapitalistischen Geist', in Enno Rudolph (ed.), *Die Renaissance und ihr Bild in der Geschichte, Die Renaissance als erste Aufklärung*, vol. 3 (J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck]: Tübingen, 1998), pp. 189–205, here p. 205.

³ Ibid., p. 205.

⁴ Aby Warburg, 'Francesco Sassetts letzwillige Verfügung', in *Kunstwissenschaftliche Beiträge August Schmarsow gewidmet* (K. W. Hiersemann: Leipzig, 1907); Aby Warburg, *Werke in einem Band* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 2010); translated as 'Francesco

Sassetti's Last Injunctions to his Sons', in Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, trans. David Britt (Getty Research Institute: Los Angeles, 1999).

- 5 Roeck, 'Aby Warburg und Max Weber', op. cit.; Charlotte Schoell-Glass, *Aby Warburg und der Antisemitismus: Kulturwissenschaft als Geistespolitik* (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1998), pp. 109–16.
- 6 Sombart's influential and widely read views on the origins of capitalism were complex and changing. In the first edition of his *Der moderne Kapitalismus*, he advocated a multi-causal view of these origins, arguing that the late medieval/early Renaissance Catholic Church created conditions in which merchant capitalism could thrive: Werner Sombart, *Der moderne Kapitalismus*, vol. 1, *Die Genesis des Kapitalismus* (Duncker and Humblot: Leipzig, 1902). He did not frame his views in terms of the importance of religion per se as the decisive factor in this development until one year later, in his *Deutsche Volkswirtschaft im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, where he discussed specifically 'the influence of quite immense proportions' of the Jewish 'spirit' and 'nature' (*Wesen*) on the development of capitalism in Germany: Sombart, *Die deutsche Volkswirtschaft im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (1903), 4th edn (Georg Bondi: Berlin, 1919), esp. pp. 112–19. He devoted an entire book in 1911 to his argument that the Jewish 'spirit' was key to the development of the capitalist 'spirit'. The book was widely read, with 15,000 copies printed by the last (unchanged) edition of 1928. Sombart, *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (1911) (Duncker and Humblot: Munich and Leipzig, 1928). In his 1913 *Der Bourgeois*, he specifically argues (now explicitly against Weber) that Catholicism was significantly more fertile ground for the development of capitalism than Puritanism: Sombart, *Der Bourgeois: Zur Geistesgeschichte des modernen Wirtschaftsmenchen* (Duncker and Humblot: Munich and Leipzig, 1913), passim. At the same time, however, he published studies on *Luxus und Kapitalismus* and *Krieg und Kapitalismus* (both Duncker and Humblot: Munich and Leipzig, 1913). Whether this palimpsest represents a subtle view of the complex interactions behind the development of a modern economy or is simply contradictory has been argued for the past century. Current appraisals of Sombart's profuse and often belle-lettistic work tend towards the latter view. On the debate between Weber and Sombart regarding the origins of capitalism, see, from an extensive literature, Joachim Radkau, *Max Weber: A Biography*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2011), pp. 204–7; Bernhard vom Brocke, 'Werner Sombart, 1863–1941: Eine Einführung in Leben, Werk und Wirkung', in Vom Brocke (ed.), *Sombarts*

Moderner Kapitalismus': Materialien zur Kritik und Rezeption (dtv: Munich, 1987), esp. p. 39ff; Hartmut Lehmann, 'The Rise of Capitalism: Weber versus Sombart', in Hartmut Lehmann and Guenther Roth (eds.), *Weber's Protestant Ethic: Origins, Evidence, Contexts* (University of Cambridge Press: Cambridge, 1995); and Malcolm H. Mackinnon, 'The Longevity of the Thesis: A Critique of the Critics', in *Weber's Protestant Ethic*.

- 7 'The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. This order is not bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which to-day determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt. In [Richard] Baxter's view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the "saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment". But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage.' Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, trans. Parsons, p. 181. See Radkau, *Max Weber*, op. cit., chapter 8; Gordon Marshall, *In Search of the Spirit of Capitalism: An Essay on Max Weber's Protestant Ethic Thesis* (Hutchinson: London, 1982), and more generally Arthur Mitzman, *The Iron Cage: An Historical Interpretation of Max Weber* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1969) and Lawrence A. Scaff, *Fleeing the Iron Cage: Culture, Politics, and Modernity in the Thought of Max Weber* (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989).

- 8 Roeck, 'Aby Warburg und Max Weber', op. cit., p. 205.

- 9 Ibid.

- 10 Wilhelm Hennis, *Max Webers Fragestellung* (J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck]: Tübingen, 1987) and Hennis, *Max Webers Wissenschaft vom Menschen* (J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck]: Tübingen, 1996).

- 11 I explore these issues in the first chapter of my book *Blind Spots: Critical Theory and the History of Art in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2005).

- 12 Aby Warburg, 'Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten', *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse*, no. 26 (1920); 'Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Images in the Age of Luther', in Warburg, *The Revival of Pagan Antiquity*, op. cit., p. 621.

- ¹³ This is explored most energetically (and controversially) in Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'Image survivante: Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Les Éditions de Minuit: Paris, 2002).
- ¹⁴ The use of ‘ideal types’ is discussed most extensively in Max Weber, ‘Die “Objectivität” sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis’ (1904), in Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck]: Tübingen, 1922), pp. 146–214; ‘Objectivity’ in Social Science and Socal Policy’, in Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, trans. and ed. Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (The Free Press: New York, 1949), pp. 50–112. See also Hans Henrik Bruun, *Science, Values and Politics in Max Weber's Methodology* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2007), pp. 41–8, 207–38.
- ¹⁵ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, op. cit., p. 233, n. 68.
- ¹⁶ Radkau, *Max Weber*, op. cit., p. 259. Radkau here draws on Helmuth Plessner’s brief but penetrating comments on the tensions within Weber’s epistemology: Plessner, ‘Erinnerungen an Max Weber’, in René König and Johannes Winckelmann (eds.), *Max Weber zum Gedächtnis: Materialien und Dokumente zur Bewertung von Werk und Persönlichkeit* (Westdeutscher Verlag: Cologne and Opladen, 1963), pp. 32–3.
- ¹⁷ Max Weber, ‘Der Sinn der “Wertfreiheit” der soziologischen und ökonomischen Wissenschaften’, in Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, p. 481ff, here p. 485. See also the slightly different translation of this passage in ‘The Meaning of “Ethical Neutrality” in Sociology and Economics’, in Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, op. cit., p. 32.
- ¹⁸ Werner Sombart, *Die drei Nationalökonomien: Geschichte und System der Lehre von der Wirtschaft* (Duncker und Humblot: Munich, 1930), pp. 211–13, referring to Heinrich Wölfflin, ‘Das Problem des Stils in der bildenden Kunst’, *Sitzungsberichte der Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, vol. 31 (1912), pp. 572–8. On the relations between the ‘Younger Historical School’ of political economy and the historiography of art, see my *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture Before the First World War* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1996), pp. 75–81.
- ¹⁹ Max Scheler, ‘Der Bourgeois’, in Scheler, *Abhandlungen und Aufsätze*, vol. 2 (Verlag der Weissen Bücher: Leipzig, 1915), pp. 312–13.

- 20** Karl Mannheim, 'On the Interpretation of "Weltanschauung"' (1923), in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Keckskemeti (Oxford University Press: New York, 1952). An interesting example of historical sociology that combines the historiography of art with the perspectives of Weber, Sombart, Simmel and Scheler is Alfred von Martin, *Soziologie der Renaissance: Zur Physiognomik und Rhythmisierung bürgerlicher Kultur* (Ferdinand Enke: Stuttgart, 1932); Eng. edn, *Sociology of the Renaissance*, trans. W. L. Luetkens (Kegan Paul: London, 1944).
- 21** 'Daß die Beschränkung auf Facharbeit, mit dem Verzicht auf die faustische Allseitigkeit des Menschentums, welchen sie bedingt, in der heutigen Welt Voraussetzung wertvollen Handelns überhaupt ist, daß also "Tat" und "Entsagung" einander heute unabwendbar bedingen: dies *asketische* Grundmotiv des bürgerlichen Lebensstils – wenn er eben Stil und nicht Stilosigkeit sein will – hat auf der Höhe seiner Lebensweisheit, in den "Wanderjahren" und in dem Lebensabschluß, den er seinem Faust gab, auch *Goethe* uns lehren wollen.' Weber, 'Die protestantische Ethik und der 'Geist' des Kapitalismus', op. cit., pp. 107–8; see also the different translation in Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (Penguin: New York, 2002), p. 120. Weber is even more explicit in his response to one of his critics: 'capitalism *no longer* appears to the most serious-minded people as the outward expression of a style of life founded on a final, single, and comprehensible unity of the personality'. Weber, 'A Final Rebuttal of Rachfahl's Critique of the "Spirit of Capitalism" (1910), in Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism and Other Writings*, op. cit., p. 294.
- 22** And indeed, some of the most trenchant criticisms of Weber concern precisely this matter. Consider Joseph Schumpeter's devastating dismissal: 'So soon as we realize that pure Feudalism and pure Capitalism are equally unrealistic creations of our own mind, the problem of what it was that turned the one onto the other vanishes completely.' Quoted in Peter Baehr and Gorden C. Wells, 'Introduction', in Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism and Other Writings*, op. cit., p. xxviii.
- 23** As noted in Radkau, *Max Weber*, op. cit., p. 180.
- 24** Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, op. cit., pp. 196–8. Sombart discusses Alberti in *Der Bourgeois*, op. cit., pp. 278–9, 433. Weber and Sombart's disagreement about Alberti is discussed in Marshall, *In Search of the Spirit of Capitalism*, op. cit., pp. 97–9.

- 25 Ernst Troeltsch, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen, Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1 (J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck]: Tübingen, 1923); *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, trans. Olive Wyon, 2 vols (Allen and Unwin: London, 1931).
- 26 Georg Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes* (Duncker und Humblot: Leipzig, 1900). This is the first edition, which was acquired by Warburg; the second and final edition was published in 1907 and appeared in English as *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1978); Georg Simmel, *Die Religion* (1906; Rütten und Loenig: Frankfurt am Main, 1912).
- 27 The first edition in the Warburg Institute Library shows a few marks in Warburg's hand. They are limited to the correction of typographical errors and a single ironic marginal comment on the putative recent decline in Jewish 'sexual morals'.
- 28 Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, op. cit., p. 611. Warburg recognizes, however, that Luther nonetheless believed in the significance of 'natural' portents.
- 29 Albrecht Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, 6 vols (Adolph Marcus: Bonn, 1870–4). *Die christliche Lehre* is not in Warburg's library, though he did own Ritschl's *Fides implicita: eine Untersuchung über Köhlerglauben, Wissen und Glauben, Glauben und Kirche* (Adolf Marcus: Bonn, 1890). In a recent exploration of Warburg's 'Pagan-Antique Prophecy' and Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* book, Jane O. Newman emphasizes Luther's belief in portents and sees a significant compromise on his part, going on to construct a notion of a 'Lutheran astrology' in the Reformation. She also posits Warburg's acceptance of what she sees as Luther's position and the art historian's belief 'in the cohabitation of modernity with something like divine magic at a kind of primordial level in the German unconscious', relating this to the Protestant war theology in the wake of Karl Barth's interpretation of the position of the Church in the First World War. Though a fascinating and energetic reading of the material, I find it tends to distort Warburg's position and also overcomplicates his understanding of Luther; as Newman writes, Warburg 'does not explicitly rely on war theological claims'. Jane O. Newman, *Benjamin's Library: Modernity, Nation and the Baroque* (Cornell University Press and Cornell University Library: Ithaca, 2011), chapter 3, here p. 164.
- 30 Ernst Troeltsch, *Vernunft und Offenbarung bei Johannes Gerhard und Melanchthon: Untersuchung zur Geschichte der altprotestantischen Theologie* (Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1891).

- ³¹ See Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, vol. 2, pp. 467–515, 561–76. On Troeltsch's revisions of the views of Ritschl, his teacher, see Harry Liebersohn, *Fate and Utopia in German Sociology, 1870–1923* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1988), pp. 45–51; on his social and political critique of Luther, pp. 58–60.
- ³² The relation between the thought of Ritschl, Troeltsch and Weber is discussed in W. R. Ward, 'Max Weber and the Lutherans' and in Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, 'Friendship between Experts: Notes on Weber and Troeltsch', in Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Jürgen Osterhammel (eds.), *Max Weber and his Contemporaries* (Unwin Hyman/The German Historical Institute: London, 1987) and in Graf, 'The German Theological Sources and Protestant Church Politics', in Hartmut Lehmann and Guenther Roth (eds.), *Weber's Protestant Ethic*, op. cit.
- ³³ Ernst Bloch, *Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution* (Kurt Wolff: Munich, 1921; 2nd edn, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1972); Hugo Ball, *Zur Kritik der deutschen Intelligenz* (Der Freie Verlag: Bern, 1919); see *Critique of the German Intelligentsia*, trans. Brian L. Harris (Columbia University Press: New York, 1993).
- ³⁴ 'Geleitwort', *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, vol. 19 (1904), p. v. The authorship of this text, published on Weber, Sombart and Edgar Jaffé's assumption of the editorship of the *Archiv*, is discussed in Scaff, *Fleeing the Iron Cage*, op. cit., p. 84.
- ³⁵ On romantic anti-capitalism, see Michael Löwy, *Georg Lukács: From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, trans. Patrick Camiller (NLB: London, 1979) and Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* (Duke University Press: Durham, North Carolina, 2001).
- ³⁶ 'Dass der Kapitalismus auch Denkarbeit auf breitester, nur ihm möglicher, Basis leisten kann': letter of 30 June 1900, quoted in E. H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography*, 2nd edn (Phaidon: Oxford, 1986), p. 130.
- ³⁷ Warburg, 'Über astrologische Druckwerke aus alter und neuer Zeit', lecture to the Gesellschaft der Bücherfreunde, Hamburg, 9 February 1911, quoted in Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, op. cit., p. 199.
- ³⁸ Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, op. cit., p. 599.
- ³⁹ Georg Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans: Ein geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch über die Formen der großen Epik* (Paul Cassirer: Berlin, 1920), p. 9; and Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic*

Literature, trans. Anna Bostock (Merlin Press: London, 1971), p. 29 (translation modified).

- 40 Max Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', in Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, op. cit.; 'Science as a Vocation', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Oxford University Press: New York, 1958). On the date of the original lecture, see Radkau, *Max Weber*, op. cit., pp. 487–9.
- 41 Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', op. cit., pp. 546, 547, 551; 'Science as a Vocation', op. cit., pp. 148, 149, 152–3. The paradoxical relation of rationality and fate in Weber's work is discussed in Peter Lassman and Irving Velody, 'Max Weber on Science, Disenchantment and the Search for Meaning', in Lassman and Velody (eds.), *Max Weber's 'Science as a Vocation'* (Unwin Hyman: London, 1989), esp. pp. 175ff, 187ff. See also Bryan S. Turner, *For Weber: Essays on the Sociology of Fate*, 2nd edn (Sage: London, 1996), esp. chapter 1.
- 42 Bloch, *Thomas Münzer*, 2nd edn, op. cit., p. 57. Bloch refers here to the scene in the fifth act of Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen*, in which Metzler and Link, leaders of the revolting peasants, discuss the meaning of a comet and stars for their rebellion. Michael Löwy discusses Bloch's and others' responses to Weber's *Protestant Ethic* in 'Anticapitalist Readings of Weber's *Protestant Ethic*: Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, György Lukacs, Erich Fromm', *Logos: A Journal of Modern Society and Culture*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2010).
- 43 Bloch, *Thomas Münzer*, 2nd edn, op. cit., p. 59
- 44 Ibid., p. 123. The phrase 'inaugurated a veritable church of Satan' was replaced in the second edition by 'brought a church of Mammon'.
- 45 Walter Benjamin, 'Kapitalismus als Religion', in Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, vol. 4 (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1985); 'Capitalism as Religion', in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, vol. 1 (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996).
- 46 Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, p. 290. On this text, see Uwe Steiner, 'Die Grenzen des Kapitalismus. *Kapitalismus, Religion und Politik* in Benjamins Fragment "Kapitalismus als Religion"', in Dirk Baecker (ed.), *Kapitalismus als Religion* (Kadmos: Berlin, 2009); Michael Löwy, 'Capitalism as Religion: Walter Benjamin and Max Weber', *Historical Materialism*, no. 17 (2009); Werner Hamacher, 'Guilt History: Benjamin's Sketch "Capitalism as Religion"', *Diacritics*, vol. 32, no. 3/4 (2002); Samuel Weber, 'Closing the Net: "Capitalism as

Religion”, in Weber, *Benjamin’s – abilities* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2008); and Löwy, ‘Anticapitalist Readings of Weber’s *Protestant Ethic*’, op. cit.

- 47 I follow here Steiner’s argument in ‘Die Grenzen des Kapitalismus’.
- 48 Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 288.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 One of the best accounts of the relation of Benjamin to the work of Warburg and his circle remains Wolfgang Kemp, ‘Fernbilder. Benjamin und die Kunsthissenschaft’, in Burkhardt Lindner (ed.), *Walter Benjamin im Kontext*, 2nd edn (Athenäum: Königstein im Taunus, 1985). On Warburg and Benjamin more generally, see Matthew Rampley, *The Remembrance of Things Past: On Aby M. Warburg and Walter Benjamin* (Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 2000).
- 51 Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1928), in Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, vol. 1 (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1972); Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (NLB: London, 1977), p. 41.
- 52 Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, op. cit., p. 35. On Benjamin’s epistemological extremism, and also its relation to Weber’s notion of disenchantment, see Norbert Bolz, *Auszug aus der entzauberten Welt: Philosophischer Extremismus zwischen den Weltkriegen* (Fink: Munich, 1989).
- 53 Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, op. cit., p. 30.
- 54 Benjamin and the problems of Neo-Kantianism are discussed with great insight in Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (Routledge: London, 1988).
- 55 Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, op. cit., p. 34.
- 56 Siegfried Kracauer, ‘The Mass Ornament’, in Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995).
- 57 For other complexities of Kracauer’s remarkable epistemological figure, see Schwartz, *Blind Spots*, op. cit., pp. 137–44.
- 58 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Vintage: New York, 1967), p. 52 (Section 5).

- ⁵⁹ Aby M. Warburg, *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1995), p. 50.
- ⁶⁰ Letter of 3 November 1921, Heinrich Sieveking and Rosa Sieveking to Mary Warburg: 'On the whole we could not speak much about scholarly matters. Nonetheless, your dear husband showed us the works of Max Weber that he had acquired after our last conversation and apparently had also read.' Warburg Institute Archive GC/29668.
- ⁶¹ Warburg, *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians*, op. cit., p. 54.
- ⁶² Walter Benjamin, 'Zum Planetarium', in *Einbahnstrasse* (Ernst Rowohlt: Berlin, 1928), pp. 80–1; 'To the Planetarium', in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 486.

MARXIST THEORY IN PRACTICE

LANDSCAPE, CLASS AND IDEOLOGY

MARXISM AND THE SHAPING OF MODERNISM

MARXISM IN A NEW WORLD ORDER

A NOTE ON AESTHETICIZING TENDENCIES IN AMERICAN LANDSCAPE PAINTING 1840–80

Alan Wallach

In an essay published in 2011 entitled ‘Rethinking “Luminism”’, I attempted to develop a social-historical basis for studying American landscape painting in the period 1840–80 – roughly the lifespan of the Hudson River School.¹ Artists associated with the school – among them such well-known figures as Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, Frederic Church, Albert Bierstadt and John F. Kensett – flourished during the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s. However, from the mid-1850s onward their work came under increasing critical attack. By the late 1870s, the newly invented label ‘Hudson River School’ reinforced a growing critical consensus that the artists in question were now passé.² In 1883, Clarence Cook, a long-time critic for Horace Greeley’s *New York Daily Tribune* and probably the most astute observer of the New York art scene from the 1850s on, could write, ‘Nothing more alien to what is recognized as art everywhere, outside England at least, has ever existed than the now defunct or moribund school of landscape once so much delighted in as the American school, but now so slightly spoken of as the Hudson River School.’³

Cook stood for the advanced taste of his day. By the late 1870s, he was championing Blake, Thoreau and Whitman in literature, and Albert Pinkham Ryder, William Merritt Chase, Frank Duveneck and Augustus Saint-Gaudens in the visual arts.⁴ The sharp distinction he drew between 'what is recognized as art everywhere' and the productions of the 'moribund' Hudson River School followed logically from his aversion to anything that smacked of the academy or academic routine, and from his fascination with Barbizon painting and the work of Courbet and Manet.⁵ In 1883, Cook was willing to acknowledge that the Hudson River School 'had played its part and played it well' in 'the pleasant and peaceful if a trifle tame and tedious days "before the war"'.⁶ Yet by setting up an antithesis between the academic (the Hudson River School) and the avant-garde, the provincial and the cosmopolitan, he obscured a historical dynamic that was already at work in the 1850s and 1860s within the school itself.

Cook's was an influential voice in the debates of the period and it would be wrong to fault him for a lack of historical perspective. However, more recent commentators have tended to compartmentalize movements within the New York art world and have thus failed to appreciate the extent to which aestheticizing tendencies were already present in the work of artists active in the 1850s and 1860s. The problem has been compounded by 'Luminism', a term invented in the 1950s and applied to the work of such artists as Kensett, Sanford Robinson Gifford, Martin Johnson Heade and Fitz Henry Lane.⁷ John Baur, Barbara Novak and John Wilmerding, among others, defined 'Luminism' as a movement that epitomized an indigenous or native

style, thus furnishing what in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s seemed to be a compelling answer to the once ubiquitous question: ‘What is American about American art?’⁸ ‘Luminism’ – both the term itself and the arguments that accompanied it – has proved a formidable obstacle in the way of understanding the evolution of the Hudson River School and later movements in nineteenth-century American painting. Although most scholars now place the term in scare quotes, signalling scepticism or disbelief, ‘Luminism’ has shown remarkable staying power.⁹ In ‘Rethinking “Luminism”’, I argued that the phrase ‘aestheticizing tendencies’ more precisely described developments within the Hudson River School during the period 1840–80, and that a historical account of these tendencies necessarily involved an analysis of class, taste and the institutionalization of the category fine or high art.

1

To make my case, I pursued three interrelated arguments. First, I maintained that however much their scholarship was distorted by nationalist belief, Cold War ideological imperatives and collecting preferences, the early students of ‘Luminism’ identified tendencies or currents in mid-nineteenth-century American landscape painting that contrasted with, and in some respects stood in opposition to, the Hudson River School ‘mainstream’ – Cole, Church, Bierstadt and Thomas Moran among others. I call these tendencies ‘aestheticizing’ because they led to a seemingly autonomous art in which formal qualities took precedence over subject matter.

Second, I argued that the appearance of aestheticizing tendencies in American landscape painting in the period was inextricably bound up with the growth of New York City's bourgeois fractions, which, as the historian Sven Beckert and others have shown, coalesced to form a unified bourgeois class or bourgeoisie in the years immediately following the Civil War.¹⁰ My argument here mainly concerned the class's evolving cultural needs, especially its need to institutionalize, and thereby exert control over, the definition of art.

Third, I attempted to show that, far from being an offshoot of the Hudson River School or a peripheral phenomenon, the aestheticizing tendencies under consideration originated within the school, and their appearance could be attributed to the contradictory needs and expectations of artists, patrons and publics (none of these terms, I would add, can be separated from the issue of class). These tendencies represented a radical shift in meaning and artistic value. The growing popularity during the 1840s,

1850s and 1860s of the painted sketch as well as more finished small-scale landscapes anticipated the aesthetic exclusivity that increasingly defined fine or high art in the United States during the decades following the Civil War.

I began the essay with a quotation from Adorno's *Minima Moralia*: 'The aestheticism of the nineteenth century cannot be understood internally ... but only in relation to its real basis in social conflicts.'¹¹ By invoking Adorno at the beginning of a study devoted to opposing tendencies within the Hudson River School, I hoped to signal not only my alignment with the critique of ideology associated

with the Frankfurt School, but also my belief that it is impossible to produce a historical account of aestheticism, or for that matter almost any artistic phenomenon, by treating it as a *Ding an sich*, a thing in itself that conforms to its own inherent or immanent laws of development. Thus, with the epigraph, I hoped to prepare the reader for a critique of earlier attempts to explain 'Luminism' - the arguments put forth by Baur and especially Novak, who tried to develop an analytical vocabulary from sources ranging from the nineteenthcentury American critic James Jackson Jarves, a favorite of Baur's, to Heinrich Wölfflin. In *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century*, which appeared in 1969 and remains in print, Novak characterized American art not only in terms of 'the real' and 'the ideal' à la Jarves, but also in terms of a stylistic pathology in which 'Luminism' falls on the side of the classical in Wölfflin's well-known cyclical scheme and is often associated with the primitive.¹² Like Baur, Novak asserted that the term 'Luminist' could be applied to artists as different as Lane and Kensett. In both instances, Novak's claims were based on what could be called 'pseudo-isomorphism' - apparent formal similarities that in effect override differences in cultural context and social function. Thus, according to Baur, Novak and Wilmerding, Heade, along with Lane, epitomized 'Luminism' despite the crucial differences in background, training, culture and historical context that separated these two artists from each other and from a more culturally and sociologically coherent group of New York painters, which Novak et al also considered 'Luminists', including Kensett, Durand, Gifford and James A. Suydam.¹³

2

In addition to anticipating my critique of immanent theories of stylistic development – theories central to Novak’s and others’ efforts to define ‘Luminism’ – I intended the epigraph from Adorno to set the stage for my main argument: that the emergence of aestheticizing tendencies in mid-nineteenth-century American landscape painting was based in social conflict and, in particular, the conflicts that accompanied the coalescence of the new bourgeois class that emerged during the Civil War. By conflict I do not mean only violent confrontations between classes or class fractions, although the history of New York City in the mid-nineteenth century is replete with such conflicts, perhaps most famously the 1849 Astor Place riots and the draft riots of 1863.¹⁴ I mean as well the way in which a class can unselfconsciously or, as it were, instinctively work to advance its interests in the face of opposition from other classes. In the case of a dominant class like New York’s newly powerful bourgeoisie, the class would want to maintain and augment its economic, political and cultural hegemony.



1 John F. Kensett, *Long Neck Point from Contentment Island, Darien, Connecticut*, 1870-2, oil on canvas, 39 × 62 cm. Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; gift of the Women's Committee, 80.51.

Broadly put, I am concerned with the relation between the social (the domain of classes and class relations) and the aesthetic (the domain of art). Adorno's statement implies that the social forms the 'real basis' for the aesthetic. Thus in order to account for 'Luminism', or what I prefer to call aestheticizing tendencies, it is necessary to analyse the relation between the social and the aesthetic – in this instance between, on the one hand, a newly powerful bourgeoisie and, on the other, aestheticizing tendencies in the mid-nineteenth-century New York art world.

To begin with the aesthetic, consider Kensett's *Long Neck Point from Contentment Island, Darien, Connecticut* [1] a view of a sunset over Long Island Sound that the artist painted between 1870 and

1872.¹⁵ A close study of the painting reveals the artist's attentiveness to nuances of light, colour and atmosphere. Such details as the sailboat that pierces the horizon line, the spit of land - Contentment Island - that extends into the Sound in the distance, the clumps of grass that straggle into the water at the

lower right, the rocky shoreline and trees in the middle distance - these details make credible a composition that otherwise appears to verge on abstraction. The basic arrangement of forms is disarmingly simple. The horizon line divides the painting into two unequal rectangles. The sky, with its combination of soft pinks, blues and greys, occupies more than two-thirds of the canvas. The pale blue of the water contrasts with the luminescent pinks of the sky. The shoreline and trees break up what would otherwise be a banal composition. Linking earth and sky, they close off the right side of the composition and form a contrast with the left, which opens onto a space that extends beyond the edges of the canvas. These contrasts between left and right and top and bottom set up a palpable tension between the three-dimensional space Kensett represents and the canvas's two-dimensional surface.



2 Thomas Moran, *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*, 1872, oil on canvas, 213 × 266.3 cm. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC, lent by the Department of the Interior Museum.

Long Neck Point from Contentment Island readily speaks to what today might be called aesthetic sensibilities. Indeed, it appeals to nothing much more than the viewer's capacity for visual pleasure. However, the mid-nineteenth-century art public for the most part assumed that a painting should tell a story, teach a lesson, depict a subject of national or religious significance. When, for example, Thomas Moran exhibited *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* [2] in 1872, a mammoth seven-by-ten-foot canvas celebrating one of the nation's greatest natural wonders, the painting proved to be a popular sensation. Congress purchased it that same year and put it on display in the Capitol rotunda where, two years later, it was joined by a companion piece, Moran's *Chasm of the Colorado*.¹⁶



3 Frederic Church, *Heart of the Andes*, 1859, oil on canvas, 168 × 302.9 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Margaret E. Dows, 1909, 09.95.

Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone embodied on an epic scale the ambition present in the work of leading Hudson River School artists. Consider Frederic Church's *Heart of the Andes* [3], a work that glossed American imperial aspirations. The painting excited great popular enthusiasm when Church exhibited it in New York and London in 1859.¹⁷ Or take Albert Bierstadt's *Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* of 1863 [4], another work that exemplifies the Hudson River School. This large canvas, which includes in the foreground scenes in a Shoshone village, was carefully calculated to gratify the curiosity of eastern audiences about western scenery and the ongoing conquest of Native American tribes. Two years after he exhibited the painting at the National Academy of Design's annual exhibition, Bierstadt sold *Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* for \$25,000, at the time

the highest price ever paid for an American painting.¹⁸

Even though Kensett was closely associated with the Hudson River School, his mature paintings stand at a far remove from the work of Church and Bierstadt, a fact contemporary critics readily acknowledged.¹⁹ Kensett's paintings teach no lessons in patriotism, offer no paeans to Manifest Destiny. Landscape is no longer sublime spectacle but an occasion for reflection (literally in the case of Kensett's *Long Neck Point from Contentment Island*). Indeed, it barely registers that for all their careful detail, the canvases he painted between the mid-1850s and his death in 1872 depict American scenes. Moreover, Kensett's painting is tiny by comparison with such works as Church's *Heart of the Andes*. Its size - 39 × 62 cm - indicates that the artist anticipated an audience of one or at most two viewers at a time as opposed to the crowds that lined up to see *Heart of the Andes*. The painting thus offered a more private, a more personal or subjective experience, than the works of mainstream Hudson River School artists - an experience in which the viewer focuses on the artist's choices, his technique, his touch. The viewer might appreciate the extraordinary - one might say photographic - exactitude of *Long Neck Point from Contentment Island*, but if the painting can be considered a record of the appearance of nature, it is also a record of a second nature. For it was the artist's sensibility, his refined perception of qualities of light, colour and atmosphere, and his unique way of translating visual experience into an artistic language or code that the viewer also admired. And that admiration was then reflected back upon the viewer, for the appreciation of

Kensett's painting required skills associated with connoisseurship.²⁰ As observed earlier, subject matter has lost most of its importance: the painting functions more as an embodiment of a rarefied artistic sensibility than as a record of the appearance of a place. Viewers' capacity for appreciation, their cultivated aesthetic sensibility, their aspiration to what the influential art journal the *Crayon* called 'the ideal of Art', demonstrated their love of art - what Pierre Bourdieu has sardonically described as '*l'amour de l'art*'.²¹



4 Albert Bierstadt, *Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*, 1863, oil on canvas, 186.7 × 306.7 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1907, 07.123.

3

And it is to Bourdieu that we must now turn to account for the transformations of taste that led to the rise of the aestheticizing tendencies I have been

describing. Bourdieu argues that in the nineteenth century, a striving for ‘distinction’ lay at the core of bourgeois identity.²² By ‘distinction’ Bourdieu means possession of the competencies and skills, like those associated with connoisseurship, that were needed to properly appreciate works of art. A taste for art resulted from a privileged background and lifestyle – Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’. Although a product of education, it was often thought of as innate. Ultimately it defined an insuperable social barrier between those who were blessed with it and those who were not.

If we accept Bourdieu’s argument, then it stands to reason that the appearance of aestheticizing tendencies in mid-nineteenth-century American landscape painting coincided with and was, indeed, integral to the emergence in the 1860s of an increasingly powerful and unified bourgeoisie – a class that was working towards securing its cultural hegemony through the creation of the Metropolitan Museum and other institutions of high art that could set standards of taste for society as a whole.²³ But cultural hegemony was not only a matter of institutions. The ability to appreciate art primarily in terms of form and aesthetic sensibility was to become a feature of the class’s claims to ‘distinction’, in effect legitimatizing its drive for cultural hegemony.

4

In this respect, Kensett’s career is symptomatic.²⁴ Born in 1816, he was trained as an engraver but in his early twenties decided on a career as a painter. In 1840, he travelled to Europe in the company of Durand and two younger landscapists, John Casilear

and Thomas Rossiter. He remained for seven years, studying art and producing landscapes for the New York and London art markets. By all accounts, he had a congenial personality and a gift for what today would be called ‘networking’. While still in Europe, he corresponded with Abraham M. Cozzens, Robert Hoe, Henry Marquand, Frederick Sturges and Robert Olyphant - financiers and industrialists with an interest in art. (Olyphant, a merchant in the China trade and later a railroad executive, became a close friend and the artist’s chief backer.²⁵) Kensett also counted among his friends and patrons the collector-clergymen Henry W. Bellows, Elias Magoon and Samuel Osgood, the politician Hamilton Fish, the historian George Bancroft, the publisher George P. Putnam, and the writers William Cullen Bryant, Nathaniel Parker Willis and George William Curtis. In 1848, shortly after his return to the United States, Kensett was elected an associate of the National Academy of Design. He was elected a full academician a year later. His election to membership of the Century Association

that same year was, according to John Howat, ‘central, perhaps key, to his career at this time’, but it was also the inevitable outcome of the connections and alliances he had formed during the preceding eight years.²⁶ Kensett was an early member of New York’s powerful Union League Club, which was founded in 1863, and the principal organizer of the League’s art exhibition at the 1864 Metropolitan Sanitary Fair. He was also a founding trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and, at his death in 1872, president of the Artist’s Fund Society.²⁷

Kensett's artistic evolution is inseparable from the roles he played in the New York art world, not only his close identification with his patrons and friends and the institutions that enabled patronage, but also, more generally, with the outlook and interests of an emerging bourgeoisie. His success – from the mid-1850s on he was ranked on a par with Church and Bierstadt, the leading figures of the American School – can be attributed not only to whatever talents he possessed, but also to a sharp instinct for what was wanted. As John Paul Driscoll writes, in the mid-1850s, the painter 'shifted from the more conventional anecdotal picturesque mode derived from the tradition of Cole and Durand, to the quiet openness, light, and simplification of form, color and composition that is now recognized as his mature style and associated with the phenomenon of "luminism"'.²⁸ This shift, which came at a moment when new aesthetic criteria were being put forth in the pages of the *Crayon* and elsewhere, could not have been at all fortuitous.²⁹ The line that stretches from Kensett's Newport and Shrewsbury River paintings of the later 1850s to the minimalist landscapes that comprise the 'Last Summer's Work', as it is now called, accorded with both the artist's inclinations and a growing demand for rarefied art forms. Critics lauded Kensett's art not only for its fidelity to nature, but also for its 'refinement'. And as Melissa Trafton has observed, the term 'refinement', so often used by Kensett's contemporaries to characterize his art, stood for 'opposition to popular taste associated with commercialism, and eventually [in the post-Civil War period, to] affiliation with European [aesthetic] values'.³⁰ 'Refinement' was a notable feature of American culture during the 1850s and 1860s, and

it went hand-in-hand with the class's striving for distinction.³¹

5

Kensett's career reached its apex in the early 1860s, after which his art began to lose critical favour. In 1864, in a scathing critique of the five paintings he contributed to the art exhibition at the New York Sanitary Fair, Cook condemned Kensett's work as superficial and monotonous, a charge that other critics later levelled against his art.³² Kensett died in 1872 and for a brief moment his reputation soared. A retrospective exhibition filled the National Academy of Design's galleries with his work; an executors' sale of the contents of his studio generated a frenzy of enthusiasm and reaped the then stupendous sum of \$130,000.³³ In 1874, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in deference to the memory of one of its artist-trustees, mounted a memorial exhibition.³⁴ Thereafter Kensett's reputation along with that of the Hudson River School went into precipitous decline.

Still, to paraphrase Cook, Kensett had played his part and played it well. No artist of the preceding decades had been more identified with the New York bourgeoisie and its interests, and none had done more when it came to making artistic sensibility the subject of art. As we have seen, Kensett's late landscapes stood in opposition to the more popular forms of Hudson River School painting. They thus presaged the school's demise even as they anticipated the aesthetic exclusivity that Cook had long advocated and that would characterize so much of American painting in the decades ahead.

- ¹ Alan Wallach, 'Rethinking "Luminism": Taste, Class, and Aestheticizing Tendencies in Mid-Nineteenth Century American Landscape Painting', in Nancy Siegel (ed.), *The Cultured Canvas: New Perspectives on American Landscape Painting* (University of New Hampshire Press: Durham, New Hampshire, 2011), pp. 115–47.
- ² See Gerald Carr, 'Initiating and Naming "The Hudson River School"', *Thomas Cole National Historical Site Newsletter* (Fall 2011), pp. 5–6. For a discussion of the context in which the term first appeared, see Kevin Avery, 'A Historiography of the Hudson River School', in John K. Howat (ed.), *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School* (Metropolitan Museum of Art: New York, 1987), pp. 3–4.
- ³ Clarence Cook, 'Art in America in 1883', *Princeton Review*, vol. 11 (May 1883), p. 312.
- ⁴ Clarence Cook, 'Society of American Artists', *New York Daily Tribune* (11 April 1880), p. 7, cited in Barbara Jean Stephanic, 'Clarence Cook's Role as Art Critic, Advocate for Professionalism, Educator, and Arbitrator of Taste in America', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Maryland, 1997), pp. 82–3.
- ⁵ See Cook, 'Art in America in 1883', pp. 315–16.
- ⁶ Ibid., p. 312.
- ⁷ See J. Gray Sweeney, 'Inventing Luminism: "Labels are the Dickens"', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2003), pp. 93–120. John Baur first coined the term. See Baur, 'American Luminism: A Neglected Aspect of the Realist Movement in Nineteenth-Century American Painting', *Perspectives USA*, vol. 9 (1954), pp. 90–1.
- ⁸ See Baur, 'American Luminism', op. cit.; Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience*, 3rd edn (Oxford University Press: New York, 2007; orig. publ. 1969); John Wilmerding (ed.), *American Light: The Luminist Movement, 1850–1875, Paintings, Drawings, Photographs* (National Gallery of Art: Washington, DC, 1980).
- ⁹ See, for example, Katherine E. Manthorne and Mark D. Mitchell, *Luminist Horizons: The Art and Collection of James A. Suydam* (National Academy of Design Museum and School of Fine Arts and George Braziller: New York, 2006).
- ¹⁰ See Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850–1896* (Cambridge University Press: New York and Cambridge, 2001); Frederic Cople

Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles* (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 1982); Edward Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power Before the Civil War* (Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick, 1990; orig. publ. 1973); E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class* (Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick, 1989; orig. publ. 1958); Peter Dobkin Hall, *The Organization of American Culture, 1700–1900: Private Institutions, Elites, and the Origins of American Nationality* (New York University Press: New York, 1982).

¹¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (Verso: London, 1978), p. 93.

¹² Baur was deeply influenced by Heinrich Wölfflin and Henri Focillon, leading proponents of formalist theories of art history (see Sweeney, p. 98, n. 11). Novak twice refers to Wölfflin directly in *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 5, 81, and his influence is apparent throughout the book. See Jochen Wierich, 'Mutual Art History: German Art History and American Art', in Barbara Groseclose and Jochen Wierich (eds.), *Internationalizing the History of American Art* (Pennsylvania State University Press: University Park, 2009), pp. 54–7.

¹³ Manthorne and Mitchell, 'Luminism Revisited, Two Points of View', in *Luminist Horizons*, p. 124, distinguish between Heade and Lane, on the one hand, and the group of New York artists that included Kensett and Suydam. They see the latter group as 'luminists' who advanced an aestheticizing or, as they put it, 'modernist' aesthetic, but they fail to grasp the social and historical dynamics underlying this development.

¹⁴ See Peter Buckley, 'To the Opera House: Culture and Society in New York City, 1820–1860', unpublished PhD thesis (State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1984); see also the informative and well-documented Wikipedia entry regarding the draft riots, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City_draft_riots>, accessed 5 March 2013.

¹⁵ For Kensett's late work, see Oswaldo Rodriguez Roque, 'The Last Summer's Work', in John Paul Driscoll and John K. Howat (eds.), *John Frederick Kensett: An American Master* (Worcester Art Museum in association with W. W. Norton: New York and Worcester, 1985), pp. 136–61.

¹⁶ See Joni Kinsey, *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West* (Smithsonian Institution Press: Washington and London, 1992), pp. 43, 63–6, 95, 115–16, 149–50.

- ¹⁷ See 'Heart of the Andes', in Natalie Spassky et al., *American Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art II: A Catalogue of Works by Artists Born Between 1816–1845* (Metropolitan Museum of Art: New York, 1985), pp. 269–75; J. K. H. (John K. Howat), 'Heart of the Andes, 1859', in Howat (ed.), *American Paradise*, op. cit., pp. 246–50; Frank Kelly, *Frederic Edwin Church* (National Gallery of Art: Washington, DC, 1989), pp. 54–8.
- ¹⁸ 'The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak', in Spassky et al., *American Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art II*, op. cit., pp. 321–6.
- ¹⁹ See, for example, James Jackson Jarves, *The Art Idea*, ed. Benjamin Rowland, Jr. [1864] (The Belknap Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960), pp. 190–3.
- ²⁰ Between the 1850s and 1870s, American collectors grew increasingly sophisticated. Many factors influenced this development: critics' efforts to educate the art public, the expansion of the art market, the appearance of art dealers, new art institutions, especially the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Connoisseurship was especially important when it came to Kensett's art, a point I develop further below. See Melissa Geisler Trafton, 'Critics, Collectors, and the Nineteenth-Century Taste for the Paintings of Frederick Kensett', unpublished PhD thesis (University of California, Berkeley, 2003), pp. 77–8. Trafton's dissertation is the most comprehensive study of Kensett to date.
- ²¹ See Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbell, *The Love of Art: European Museums and their Public*, trans. Caroline Beattie and Nick Merriman (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1990); originally published as *L'Amour de l'art* (Éditions de Minuit: Paris, 1966).
- ²² See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1984).
- ²³ See Alan Wallach, 'The Birth of the American Art Museum', in Sven Beckert and Julia B. Rosenbaum (eds.), *The American Bourgeoisie: Distinction and Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2010), pp. 247–56.
- ²⁴ For Kensett's biography, see Mark Sullivan, 'John F. Kensett, American Landscape Painter', unpublished PhD thesis (Bryn Mawr College, 1981), pp. 2–81; John K. Howat, 'Kensett's World', in John Paul Driscoll and John K. Howat (eds.), *John Frederick Kensett: An American Master* (Worcester Art Museum in association with W. W. Norton: New York and Worcester, 1985), pp. 15–47; see also Driscoll, 'From Burin to Brush', ibid., pp. 49–135; and Trafton, 'Appendix A: Chronology of

Kensett's Life', in 'Critics, Collectors and the Nineteenth-Century Taste for the Paintings of Frederick Kensett', op. cit., pp. 351–9.

²⁵ See 'Olyphant, Robert Morrison', *Archives Directory for the History of American Collecting*, <<http://research.frick.org/directoryweb/browserecord.php?action=browse&recid=6332>>, accessed 15 May 2013.

²⁶ Howat, 'Kensett's World', op. cit., p. 35.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 40–7.

²⁸ Driscoll, 'From Burin to Brush', op. cit., p. 99.

²⁹ Edited by William Stillman and John Durand, son of the painter Asher B. Durand, and drawing upon the talents of well-known writers and poets, the *Crayon* is usually if somewhat mistakenly remembered as an American vehicle for Ruskin's ideas. Ruskin played an important role in the early years of the journal but, as Janice Simon has shown, under the influence of German idealism, it evolved a Unitarian-Transcendentalist critique of Ruskin. See Janice Simon, 'The *Crayon* 1855–1861: The Voice of Nature in Criticism, Poetry, and the Fine Arts', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Michigan, 1990). For an earlier discussion, see Roger B. Stein, *John Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought in America, 1840–1900* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967). See also William James Stillman, *The Autobiography of a Journalist* (Houghton, Mifflin and Company: Boston and New York, 1901), vol. 1, pp. 222–31.

³⁰ See Trafton, 'Critics, Collectors and the Nineteenth-Century Taste for the Paintings of Frederick Kensett', op. cit., pp. 11–13.

³¹ In a chapter entitled 'Domesticating the Sublime', Angela Miller has characterized the work of Kensett, Gifford et al., as 'atmospheric luminism', which she links to refinement and the feminization of American culture during the 1860s and 1870s. See Miller, 'Domesticating the Sublime: The Feminized Landscape of Light, Space and Air', in *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825–1875* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1993), pp. 244–88

³² See Clarence Cook, 'Exhibition of Pictures at the Sanitary Fair', *New York Daily Tribune* (16 April 1864), p. 12.

- ³³ See Howat, 'Kensett's World', op. cit., pp. 46–7; Eleanor Jones Harvey, *The Painted Sketch: American Impressions from Nature, 1830–1880* (Dallas Museum of Art: Dallas, 1998), pp. 101–4.
- ³⁴ See Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, 'Museum Exhibitions 1870–2011', p. 82,
[http://libmma.org/digital_files/archives/
Museum_Exhibitions_1870-2011.pdf](http://libmma.org/digital_files/archives/Museum_Exhibitions_1870-2011.pdf), accessed 15 April 2013.

MEANING, CHANGE AND AMBIGUITY IN CANADIAN LANDSCAPE IMAGERY

HOMER WATSON AND *THE PIONEER MILL*¹

Brian Foss

The subject of landscape looms large for historians of Canadian art. 'Every damn tree in the country has been painted', the abstract artist Graham Coughtry (1931-99) famously complained, frustrated as he was at almost every turn by the value invested in landscape painting by Toronto critics and patrons. Canada, the second-largest country in the world and one of the most geographically diverse, has long been defined by its landscape. It informs and shapes everything in the national superstructure. For example, the University of Toronto political economist Harold Innis, in a series of publications, chronicled the country's economic reliance upon resource extraction to build his argument that 'the present Dominion emerged not in spite of geography but because of it'. For Innis, Canada's very size (its extension fully west to the Pacific Ocean), as well as its political structures, can be traced firmly back to its economic grounding in its resource-extraction economy.²

There is also, however, a grim side to the Canadian obsession with geography. Here, too, important aspects of Canada's superstructure derived – in

varying degrees of explicitness – from the omnipresent and sparsely inhabited landscape. In the field of cultural criticism, Northrop Frye characterized Canadians as having an enduring wariness vis-à-vis nature: a ‘garrison mentality’ in which everything that lies outside the barriers that we construct against the ever-threatening natural environment is to be feared.³ Frye thus reversed the more optimistic ‘frontier thesis’ proposed in the American historian Frederick Jackson Turner’s 1893 essay ‘The Significance of the Frontier in American History’: an essay that cast the westward march of American migration within an Edenic myth of national self-fulfilment. Novelist, poet and critic Margaret Atwood has identified fear and ambivalence towards the landscape as central themes in Canadian writing,⁴ and has made those qualities the driving forces in her eerie short story ‘Death by Landscape’, in which the principal character, Lois, collects iconic examples of twentieth-century Canadian landscape painting because ‘she wanted something that was in them, although she could not have said at the time what it was. It was not peace: she does not find them peaceful in the least. Looking at them fills her with a wordless unease.’⁵ A symbol both of national potential and uniqueness on the one hand, and of suspicion, even dystopia, on the other, the landscapes of Canada have long been an internally conflicted cornerstone of the nation’s thought, celebration, criticism and analysis.

Although my work on Canadian landscape imagery has relied more explicitly on social history and cultural studies than it has on Marxist methodology, it owes much to two key thinkers of the left: Raymond Williams and Andrew Hemingway.

Williams's 1975 monograph *The Country and the City* proposes a cogent analysis of landscape representation, with English landscape - and its relationship to urban life - dissected by means of a sweeping survey of four centuries of poetry and prose.⁶ His analysis of the complexities involved in the countryside's frequent presentation as an embodiment of an idealized past, as compared with the rampant capitalism and social confusion of the city, has been germane to my studies of the Canadian scene. So has his rejection of a dualistic approach to country and city in favour of his stance that the two phenomena are indissolubly related to each other in ways that have everything to do with the definition of landscape's cultural and economic use-value.

As for Hemingway, his 1992 monograph *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* has long been a crucial book for me. That publication builds upon the proliferation of scholarship from the previous two decades concerning the social construction of British nature and its imagery.⁷ Much of this body of work was inaugurated by *The Country and the City*, and is explicitly based upon - or is implicitly inflected by - Marxist methodologies. These are studies that have been taken well beyond formal analysis of the oeuvres of individual artists. They instead situate landscape paintings solidly within the parameters of cultural studies, with all the attention this requires vis-à-vis issues of class, socioeconomic and political contextualization, and questions of labour, power and consumption. How, for example, fine-art representations of landscape exist on a continuum with a range of popular and commercial imagery. How these complementary

forms of imagery are promoted to specific audiences or fractions of audiences, and how those recipients may subsequently valorize them as objects of consumption by investing them with overt ideological attributes. How, in other words, an insistence upon the ‘naturalness’ of nature and a taste for fine-art images of that self-same nature are inevitably obscurantist. These are questions that a Marxist approach to art history is singularly well positioned to address.

For its part, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture* asks how naturalistic landscape painting – an innovative phenomenon in early nineteenth-century Britain – came to be so central to popular and critical middle-class taste during the years from around 1805 to 1830. The book addresses this question through an exhaustive analysis of published material that ranges from philosophical texts of the Scottish Enlightenment to art reviews in newspapers of differing political stances. This extensive literary research is justified on the grounds that, as Hemingway notes early on in the book, ‘Landscape paintings were produced for use primarily within urban spaces,

and what we can know of their meanings comes mainly from texts produced by urban intellectuals.’⁸

Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture is never reductive in its materialist, documentary probing of evolving ideas about beauty and taste – notably the development of associationist aesthetics, the privileged status such aesthetics gave to middle-class subjectivity in interpretations of visual imagery, the ways in which such interpretations could be linked to modern-themed, naturalistic landscape painting, and the multi-platform means by which these conjoined phenomena were

marketed to middle-class publics that were happy to expand their appropriation and consumption of the visual arts. Sophisticated, subtle, grounded in meticulous research and rigorous analysis, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture* is a masterful Marxist exploration of the relationships between social class, taste, fine art, popular culture, published texts, and the appropriation and consumption of art. Suffice it to say that the book was within constant reach when I began to examine the work of the Canadian landscape artist Homer Ransford Watson (1855–1936).

Watson was a landscape painter right down to his fingertips. Born in the village of Doon, on the Grand River in Waterloo County of south-central Ontario, he attributed his fascination with landscape to his intense psychological, emotional and physical involvement with the geographical setting in which he had been born and in which he spent virtually his entire life. '[G]reat landscape artists', he proclaimed in a 1900 lecture at the University of Toronto, 'are no more cosmopolitan than are great patriots, and no immortal landscape has been painted which has not had as at least one of the promptings for its creation, a feeling its creator had of having roots in his native land and being a product of its soil.'⁹ Watson's life story, carefully defined and tended by the artist, by his friends and patrons, and by journalists, is a variation on a biographical conceit common since at least the time of Vasari. Born in a backwater settlement, Watson lost his father when he was a child, was reprimanded by the village schoolmaster for drawing caricatures in his school notebook, taught himself to draw based on illustrations in magazines, and won occasional, modest prizes by exhibiting his early paintings at

local fairs. Not until he lived in Toronto for several months when he was in his late teens did he actually encounter the work of professional artists. With their encouragement, he visited New York state from 1875 (possibly 1876) until late 1877. His travels there are known in only the vaguest detail, but he probably saw canvases by members of the Hudson River School. Certainly he sketched in the Adirondack Mountains and along the Susquehanna, Mohawk and Hudson rivers: terrain that was central to the Hudson River aesthetic. He got as far as New York City but, as he later recalled, 'I got so impatient to rush back home and use all this knowledge that I could not stay in the city any longer. So home I went and commenced to paint with faith, ignorance and delight.'¹⁰ For almost the entirety of the rest of his long career, Watson would devote himself to recording the landscapes around Doon and along the Grand River.



1 Homer Watson, *The Pioneer Mill*, 1880, oil on canvas, 86 × 127 cm. Royal Collection Trust. Photo: copyright © 2013 HM Queen Elizabeth II.

An essential part of Watson's reputation was based on the well-publicized fact that other than a handful of lessons from an unnamed New York painter who 'kindly offered to teach me how to use a maul stick [sic] and spread paint on a palette'¹¹ he was entirely self-taught. This self-presentation relied, especially near the start of his career, on the cultivation of a backwoods persona cut off from all things urban. Thus, recalling how in 1880, at the age of twenty-five, he had submitted a painting – *The Pioneer Mill* [1] – to the inaugural exhibition of the Canadian Academy of Arts (which was soon thereafter given permission to add the word 'Royal' to its name), Watson described how anxious he had been. 'Of course,' he asserted, 'I knew nothing about painting, and how I got through the job of making a picture ... I do not know.'¹²

This self-deprecation makes for an endearing story, but like many such stories it incorporates fictional elements. By 1880 Watson had already been a member of the Ontario Society of Artists, easily the brightest star in the province's rather meagre art firmament, for two years. He had exhibited there twice, and had received complimentary newspaper reviews as someone who was 'very rapidly coming to the front in the estimation both of the public and his fellow-artists'.¹³ Nor do the dimensions of his paintings from these early years suggest someone who was hesitantly feeling his way.

Watson had in fact begun producing large canvases in about 1877, when he was in his early twenties. *The Castellated Cliff* of 1879 (now in the National

Gallery of Canada) measures 88 × 126 cm, and *A Coming Storm in the Adirondacks* (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal), of the same year, is 86 × 119 cm. *The Pioneer Mill* - the painting he submitted to the 1880 Canadian Academy exhibition - has similar dimensions: 86 × 127 cm. In short, it seems unlikely that when Watson sent that painting to the academy's first show he was as trepidatious as he later claimed.

The Pioneer Mill made Watson's reputation. It was purchased, for the equivalent of his two previous years of earnings, by Canada's governor-general, the Marquis of Lorne, the husband of Princess Louise, daughter of Queen Victoria. Lorne had bought the painting as a gift for his mother-in-law. Victoria hung it in Windsor Castle, where it remains to this day.¹⁴ Nor was Lorne alone in his admiration for Watson's work. Newspaper reviewers unreservedly approved of *The Pioneer Mill*. The *Globe*, one of Toronto's two most respected daily newspapers, described it as 'an admirable landscape, wonderfully truthful in design, with rich but quiet colouring; rocks, water, sky and foliage are all strong and realistic'.¹⁵ But Watson's recollection of the *Globe*'s headline as reading 'Country Boy Paints Picture Bought by Princess Louise' sounds almost too good to be true - and that's exactly what it was. The announcement of the painting's purchase in the 8 March 1880 issue occupied only part of a single paragraph in what was otherwise a long, multi-column report. Contrary to Watson's romantically embroidered memory, the article's title made no reference to him. Nor did the headlines of any other reviews.

Also contrary to Watson's memory, none of the reviews referred to him as a 'country boy'. The *Canadian Spectator* did ask how it was possible that the art of painting should flourish 'among men who are of humble parentage - men who have not received a classical or liberal education', but the reviewer was referring to Canadian artists in general, not to Watson in particular. 'Genius', the *Canadian Spectator*'s reviewer wrote, 'fills a void which education cannot do. Among the founders of the great European schools of painting were men of humble origin, yet men upon whose heads it pleased Heaven to accumulate gifts and graces not generally bestowed upon mortals.'¹⁶ That same year (1880), reviewing Watson's comparably large *A Coming Storm in the Adirondacks* at the Art Association of Montreal, two newspapers described him as a 'genius comparatively unaided by culture' and a 'back woods' figure who had enjoyed 'no advantages for the study of art but those furnished by dame nature'.¹⁷ Refrains like these would become central to Watson's reputation, repeated in published appraisals throughout his long life. A relatively early instance dates from 1902, when Katherine Hale, the author of an admiring article about a visit to his home in Doon, described coming upon 'a charming old stone house in the last stages of decay, enwoven in vines and orchard-set. Convinced that it is our Mecca we turn for confirmation to a respectable citizen on the sidewalk. "Last house to the right, stranger", he says decisively, and disappointed we drive on.'¹⁸

The success of Watson's art was thus presented by Watson himself and by others as an exemplification of the cliché of inexplicable, untrained genius soaking up inspiration and talent from 'dame

nature'. The origins of that characterization lay in a confluence of factors: broader aesthetic and cultural trends; the economic development of southern Ontario; relationships between rural and urban realities, expectations and attitudes; and the personal histories of Watson and his forebears. The remainder of this essay considers these interrelated issues, with particular attention to the painting that launched Watson's career in spectacular fashion: *The Pioneer Mill*.

Nostalgia and death: Water-wheel mills in North American culture

Abandoned mills driven by water wheels – especially mills powered by vertically mounted breastshot and undershot wheels (the most stereotypically familiar types)¹⁹ – feature in several large and small Watson canvases during three decades beginning in about 1879, and also in numerous undated drawings and a large, accomplished etching.²⁰ The latter sold badly: an unfortunate result of the inexperience of Watson's Toronto dealer when it came to marketing etchings, the high customs duties imposed on imported prints (Watson had made the print in 1889–90 while living in England), and a serious lack of Canadian support for the Etching Revival.²¹ These reasons had little to do with the appeal of the subject itself, however. Ruskin distrusted representations of decaying mills and other workaday architecture because of what he described as their sentimentalization of human poverty and decay,²² but many laypeople, artists and critics saw that very characteristic as integral to the attractions of the imagery.

In the field of romantic literature, for example, *Scribner's Monthly* did nothing unusual when in 1874 it published a long poem recalling the glory days of an antiquated grist mill, and linked the building's emotional and psychological resonance to its now deceased owner's home in heaven.²³ Mary Dwinell Chellis's novel *The Old Mill*, published in Boston in 1884, luxuriates in the travails of a man who, out of despair after the loss of his wife and children, closes down the family's mill, consigning it to a process of evocative decay. '*Neath the Maple by the Mill*', a song published in Toronto in about 1881, associates the titular building with the singer's wooing of his sweetheart, revealing only in the final verse that their courtship took place long ago and that the beloved is now dead and buried "neath the maple by the mill". Such unabashedly anti-modernist texts and songs were produced and consumed throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Among a multitude of examples, 'The Old Mill' – an undated poem by Ontario native Wilson Pugsley MacDonald – concludes with a description of 'phantom millers [who] move in rhyme / Even as when in life, and on clear nights / You can behold them toiling as though time / Had never passed the Humber's silvered heights.' (The Humber River is one of two waterways flanking Toronto.)



2 *The Aldine: The Art Journal of America*, vol. 7, no. 12
 (December 1874), back cover.
 Photo: Library and Archives Canada.

Interest in the associational potential of old mills was not, though, limited to popular novels, poems and songs. North American painters and illustrators also made regular use of the theme, which at least in the United States mutated from a pre-Civil War emphasis on what has been termed an 'almost daemonic omnipotence' to a postwar rusticated nostalgia.²⁴ The latter connotation, growing out of the Picturesque aesthetic's formal and psychological exploitation of mills, was quite unlike the celebration of bourgeois economic prosperity

that had characterized the first sustained appearance of mill imagery in European art, in seventeenth-century Holland. During the mid-to late 1870s, the *Aldine* - a magazine noted for its high-quality engraved reproductions and from which Watson may well have drawn much of his skill in depicting dramatic, stormy skies²⁵ - published nostalgia-invoking representations of small, antiquated, wheel-powered mills in reassuringly pastoral settings. One of these images [2], issued in 1874, illustrates a poem in which the deadness of the season, the decay of the mill and the end of human life are unambiguously conflated: 'A wreck, beyond repair, the old mill seems, / A type alike of manhood and the time - / Decay o'ercreeping all his busy schemes: / Himself low buried 'neath the winter rime.'²⁶ Other views of water-powered mills from yesteryear, prepared by American printmakers such as the prolific John Douglas Woodward, were used less to invoke death than to suggest a bygone rural simplicity that was out of step with the hurly-burly of the modern world. Woodward's engravings were included in, among other publications, the hugely popular *Picturesque America; or, The Land We Live In* of 1872-4. 'Labor mars the landscape it enters,' wrote O. B. Bunce, one of *Picturesque America*'s many essayists, 'but the mill seems to partake in the spirit of its surroundings, to gain a charm from woods and waters, and to give one.'²⁷

George Inness, described by Watson as the outstanding figure in American landscape art, was one of many well-known contemporary painters who depicted this subject. Watson may have met the American when they were both in New York, Inness having relocated there from Europe in 1876. At the

very least, Watson could have encountered Inness's paintings during his New York sojourn of the late 1870s, perhaps at the National Academy of Design, where old mills were frequent subjects in post-1860 annual shows and where Inness enjoyed a well-publicized critical triumph in 1877.

A society in flux

The fascination with the remnants and symbols of a disappearing past was abetted in Ontario by sea changes in the province's economic and social infrastructures. Its industry at the time of Watson's birth in 1855 consisted mostly of small businesses, although there was already significant evidence of steam-based technology and, consequently, of industrial expansion and specialization of labour.²⁸ Until the 1860s, however, most mills were powered by water wheels. Only 41 of Ontario's grist mills were steam-driven in 1854, compared with 569 that used wheels.²⁹

During the 1870s and 1880s, however, many of the latter had fallen or were falling into picturesque decay, among them Doon's first grist mill.³⁰ Those that were powered solely by water wheels accounted for only about twelve per cent of all industrial establishments in Ontario in 1871.³¹ And other, related technological changes were also occurring. For example, a grist business in the village of German Mills, midway between Doon and the nearby town of Berlin (the latter would be patriotically renamed Kitchener in 1916), became in 1863 the first in Canada to employ the new gradual reduction, multi-stage grinding technique. Patented in Canada that same year, this technique challenged the single chop, fast-reduction method, which

required two traditional grindstones mounted close together. Twelve years later and only a few miles further afield, at his mill at St Jacobs, also in Waterloo County, E. W. B. Snider established Ontario's first gradual-reduction rolling mill. Rolling mills used corrugated iron (or, from the early 1880s, porcelain) cylinders instead of the grindstones that had been the defining technology throughout the preceding decades and centuries. Rolling mills quickly proved their value: they produced whiter flour, required less supervision, were more easily maintained, did thirty-seven per cent more work than traditional grist mills and needed forty-seven per cent less power.³²

Of the six establishments named in an 1884-5 summary of flour mills in Waterloo County, only two were comparatively small-scale concerns that utilized millstones; the others were all large-scale commercial rolling mills.³³ Inexorably, the small wheel-driven mills lovingly chronicled by Homer Watson - buildings that had been centres of community life (marriage banns had often been posted on their doors, for example) - were replaced by businesses that were less concerned with building relationships with local farmers than they were with acting as hubs for large geographical areas.



3 Winslow Homer, *The Old Mill (The Morning Bell)*, 1871, oil on canvas, 61 × 96.8 cm. Yale University Art Gallery, bequest of Stephen Carlton Clark, BA 1903. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery.

These changes happened quickly, and were usually drastic and always noteworthy. The American artist Winslow Homer, for example, tracked changes in textile manufacture in his *The Old Mill* of 1871 [3]. In this painting, female factory workers begin to traverse an inclined walkway that leads past an abandoned textile mill (the empty-windowed building on the left of the canvas) to arrive at a new facility just beyond the forsaken structure. The only part of the more recent building that is visible (seen just above the roof of the abandoned one) is a bright, shiny bell, the ringing of which embodied the new tyranny of timed labour: ‘the most distinctive fixture and defining attribute of the new mills’.³⁴ As an 1898 description of an idyllic picnic on the banks of Waterloo County’s Grand River, near Doon, put it:

It seems to me I'd like to go
Where bells don't ring, nor whistles blow,
Nor clocks don't strike, nor gongs don't sound,
And I'd have stillness all around.³⁵

The changes in technology and scale that characterized mills of all types were symptomatic of a larger phenomenon: the increasing urbanization of southern Ontario. During the 1850s, railway incursions by the Grand Trunk and the Great Western led to the expansion of manufacturing in Berlin, Galt, Preston, Doon and other Waterloo County towns. An 1860s gazetteer described Berlin as lacking water power and other resources necessary for industry, but even as that judgment was being published the foundations were being laid for a dramatic economic and population boom that led to Berlin being incorporated as a town in 1871. By then Waterloo County had an industrial workforce of some four thousand: the ninth largest in Ontario's thirty-seven counties.³⁶ An 1872 observer – with, it should be noted, a fair degree of poetic licence – compared the concentration of industry in the small town of Hespeler (near Doon) to that in the British industrial centre of Bradford.³⁷ Doon itself had a population of only 150 in 1871, but this rose to about 300 in the 1880s (when a resident could justly describe it as 'a busy and prosperous village'),³⁸ and to 600 by the end of the century. By that time the once bustling but now outdated Grand River canal system had been largely displaced by the urban concentration of large-scale, technology-driven industry that relied on the railways for the mass transport of raw materials and finished products alike. 'The artist', according

to an 1893 magazine article, referring to visual artists in general rather than to Watson in particular, 'now delights to haunt its [the Grand River's] banks and transfer some of its numberless bits of enchanting scenery to his canvas or his paper.'³⁹

Canada officially became a dominion of the British Empire in the final third of the nineteenth century (in 1867), and in this era of nation-building a great deal of faith was invested in economic growth and in the related rise of cities. But that faith was tempered by an increasing association of urban life with noise, dirt, a hectic pace, materialism and artificiality. All of these were blamed for what were claimed to be escalating levels of stress, poor mental and physical health, and the loss of the self-reliance that rural life, trumpeted as an organic social order founded on simplicity and natural virtue, supposedly fostered and symbolized. Chronologically coincident with the fame of *The Pioneer Mill*, an 1881 book entitled *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences* argued that 'Americanitis' was creating neurasthenic conditions among urbanites in the United States, and that 'a restful time away from modern civilization in a park, at a cottage, or in Canada should return the sufferer, at least temporarily, to health'.⁴⁰ Yet despite Canada's presumably bucolic character, concerns similar to those highlighted by *American Nervousness* gave pause to the recently established (1868) Canada First Movement. Beginning in the 1870s, its members, conservative nationalists all, championed the already fragile idea of Canada as a principally agrarian nation. In a related vein, nascent urban moral reform and social-welfare projects were

promoted in newspapers as early as the 1880s. Twenty years later, they were complemented by the growth of presumably restful suburbs, the popularity of the village community ideal, and a drive towards town planning. The latter manifested itself as early as 1890 in the town of Waterloo, near Doon, when the municipality adopted Ontario's Public Parks Act and was thus positioned to acquire land to preserve as salutary parkland.⁴¹

It was under these circumstances that city dwellers became key proponents and consumers of nostalgia for an idealized rural past. The 1880s were marked by North American journalists reaching largely urban readerships (including many Canadians) through such periodicals as *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Atlantic Monthly* and *Saturday Evening Post*. These were magazines that often espoused what a later analyst described as 'a philosophy which seems in retrospect appropriate only to *Outing* and *Forest and Stream*'.⁴² Previously understood and championed primarily by those who actually lived there, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century the southern Ontario countryside became increasingly understood in terms of its therapeutic relationship to Toronto and other burgeoning cities.⁴³ In this regard, railways supported the most striking travel trend to blossom during the last three decades of the century: a fashion for rural spas and waterside resorts that catered to urbanites. Preston, next door to Doon and much noted for its mineral baths, was one such locale. But city dwellers were also cycling, hiking and boating through non-resort areas, as well as spending time as guests on farms.⁴⁴ The Grand River was popular with large groups and single day-trippers alike, including artists both amateur

and professional.⁴⁵ *Cycling* magazine in 1893 specified the attraction of the area around Doon: 'A number of Toronto waifs ... [who were] sent out to breathe the pure air and give a sight of green fields and woods' had 'pale pinched faces' before their arrival; but when they 'first caught sight of the flowers near the track at the [train] depot they ran and plucked them in the wildest glee'.⁴⁶ Picnics, too, were a popular pastime along the Grand River. In the words of American art historian Angela Miller, picnics epitomized 'the contradictory experience of men and women benefiting directly from economic expansion and reluctant to slow the juggernaut of progress yet concerned with maintaining a sense of continuity with the past'.⁴⁷

This reciprocal relationship between the rural and the urban also played itself out in Watson's career. The cities of Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa were where his work was most frequently exhibited. Although many of his paintings were initially subsumed

into the collections of his friends and admirers in the towns around Doon, his most visible and acquisitive collectors tended to be city dwellers associated with high finance and industry, including railway development. Like John Constable and the Barbizon artists to whom he was compared by Oscar Wilde at the time of Wilde's May 1882 visit to Toronto,⁴⁸ Watson dedicated himself to lovingly recording a local landscape with which he was intimately familiar and then selling those paintings to powerful figures whose lives and activities were thoroughly urban, much as cosmopolitan Parisian collectors had earlier been the driving force behind the popularity of the decidedly anti-urban Barbizon artists.⁴⁹ The same rural/urban relationship

characterized the art and audience of the English artist George Clausen (1852–1944), whose paintings Watson first saw at the Goupil Gallery in London and with whom he established a warm friendship after meeting him in 1887. Described by Watson as a devotee of truth,⁵⁰ Clausen – like his contemporaries Henry Herbert La Thangue in England and Jules Bastien-Lepage in France – espoused a rural nostalgia painted in a painstakingly realist aesthetic that was rooted in a close connection with his immediate milieu and that supplanted Jean-François Millet's imagery with a more uncritical, and therefore more palatable and 'timeless' depiction of old-world country lives, infrastructures and economies.

Like the Barbizon artists, like Constable and like Clausen, Watson offered a view of rural society that actively avoided heavy industry and urbanization, which were expanding throughout southern Ontario during the last decades of the nineteenth century. At the same time, the sentimental identification of Watson's art as embodying a relationship of both negation and desire between his bucolic world and his patrons' modern urban lives was referenced by commentators such as the anonymous critic who reviewed the Royal Canadian Academy's 1892 annual exhibition for the serial publication *The Week*. To that author, Watson's 'romantic pastorals' exemplified why 'landscapes [are] the most lastingly soothing of all pictures; they bring the tired and harassed drudge of city life back to the playgrounds of his youthful truant days, and woo the memory away from present care'.⁵¹ This rural/urban relationship reached what was perhaps its apogee of verbal expression in 1929. In that year, R. C. Reade, writing in the *Toronto Star Weekly*, adopted

an aggressively anti-modern vocabulary for bringing Watson once again to the attention of Toronto readers. Reade described making a ‘pilgrimage’ to visit ‘the hermit of Doon’, who ‘lives hidden in the woods ... because he has no passion for painting rubber plants and artificial palms’. Appropriately enough, Watson’s ‘sylvan retreat’ (Doon: ‘a shrinking violet as modest as its most illustrious citizen’) proved difficult for the adoring journalist to find, ‘[e]ven with the most detailed road directions’.⁵² Just five months before the cataclysmic stock market crash that would gut the financial security that Watson had accumulated over the course of a career stretching far beyond Doon and Waterloo County, his image remained that of a recluse inhabiting an anachronistic idyll.

Family and pioneer legacies

However, the emphasis that Watson laid on a serene antidote to urbanism went beyond Victorian romanticism, beyond the psychological and social impacts of the changes that were transforming southern Ontario’s industrial infrastructure, and beyond the relationship between rural subject matter and urban desires and expectations. Equally important was Watson’s family history. The two previous generations of Watsons had been bound up with small-scale milling in Waterloo County. Their involvement appears to have led the artist to base the eponymous building in *The Pioneer Mill* roughly on a sawmill built by his grandfather James following the latter’s emigration to Canada from the United States.⁵³ ‘The fondest recollections I had of the place [Doon] dwelt there [in the mill]’ the artist wrote in an undated and fictionalized

autobiographical manuscript. ‘A history was connected with it and the place was now a ruin.’⁵⁴ The business operated by Ransford Watson (James’s son and Homer’s father) was a combination saw and woollen mill that failed three years after his death in 1864 and was sold.⁵⁵ An uncle leased the property in 1872 and opened a sawmill and pail factory, at which the seventeen-year-old Homer worked. Sixteen years later, in 1888, the mill was sold a second time. That event, which Watson’s wife described as having made her husband ‘blue for three days’, furnished an indication of Watson’s psychological investment in his family history.⁵⁶

Small wonder, then, that many of Watson’s images of mills are permeated by a sense of personal longing and loss more profound than the generalized and histrionic Victorian sentiment about the past. The titles of his paintings and drawings frequently incorporate words such as ‘deserted’ and ‘haunted’, the latter term particularly resonant in view of the twelve-year-old Watson having witnessed the death of his older brother Jude in a milling accident. ‘Life and thought hath fled away’ is the regretful inscription below another drawing of a crumbling mill. Indeed, Watson’s progress from the most detailed surviving preparatory drawing for *The Pioneer Mill* to the painting itself evinces an increasing emphasis on age and disuse, as if the artist’s steps towards the final painting recapitulated the decline in the family’s fortunes from one generation to the next. The drawing includes a male figure carrying an object that may be a fishing pole.⁵⁷ But in the finished painting that figure has been changed into an elderly man with a long white beard. Rather than carrying a pole over his shoulder, he leans upon a

stick or cane for support. The tall, flourishing tree that anchors the left side of the drawing has become a corpse: a dead trunk, exposed roots and a few remaining but lifeless branches. The roof and walls of the mill itself show the damage wrought by time, and the foliage that merely surrounds the building in the drawing now overwhelms it.

These points of transition between the preparatory drawing and the painting demonstrate that *The Pioneer Mill*, perhaps more than any other art work by Watson, embodies the moral tensions he felt between linked binaries: nature and progress, creation and destruction, civilization and excess. Of those pairs, progress, creation and civilization were closely associated with the whole phenomenon of pioneering. Significantly, throughout his long life, Watson described himself as a proud grandson of homesteading pioneers. '[M]y love', he wrote, late in life, 'has always been where cultivation went on to furnish a living to men who came out of the pioneer stage to a more refined rural life, where people were growing into what Canada will be more and more.'⁵⁸



4 George Agnew Reid, *Logging*, 1888, oil on canvas, 107.4 × 194 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Photo: copyright © 2013 NGC.

This dedication to pioneer activities and values was far from an isolated point of view. Nineteenth-century Ontario was fixated on the figure of the pioneer as the embodiment of enterprise, persistence, resourcefulness and bravery.⁵⁹ Over the course of the half century beginning in 1850 there appeared hundreds of Ontario pioneer-related fiction and non-fiction publications of every type, the best known today being memoirs by the English immigrant sisters Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill, including Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush, or, Life in Canada* (1852), *Life in the Clearings Versus the Bush* (1853) and *Life in the Backwoods: A Sequel to Roughing It in the Bush* (1887). Many in this genre cast pioneers as noble warriors felling trees that are described as worthy opponents: as 'Caesars' (in Alexander McLachlan's poem 'The Emigrant' of 1861) and 'kings' (in Isabella Valancy Crawford's

1884 poem ‘Malcolm’s Katie: A Love Story’).⁶⁰ The same themes appeared in art. George Agnew Reid’s sizeable 1888 painting *Logging* [4] was described by him as representing ‘a phase of the development of Canada which in its main aspects ended about seventy-five years ago in old Ontario, where the farms were cleared by the heaping together of the large and small

logs and brush’.⁶¹ Nine years later Reid donated two large mural paintings to decorate Toronto’s city hall: *The Arrival of the Pioneers* and *Staking a Pioneer Farm*. Moreover, the huge (and hugely popular) Toronto Industrial Exhibition annually included a pioneer-style log cabin, built to order on the site. In 1879, exploiting the truism that pioneer values and skills were all too lacking in modern society, the *Mail* remarked that the cabin had been built by ‘old men ... who are still capable of performing work which, if imposed on young men, would make them wish they never were born’.⁶²

But if the pioneers encapsulated progress, creation and civilization, what followed on from their arrival in southern Ontario also had a dark side. In Wellington County, where European settlement had begun in about 1820, it was estimated in 1881 that the length of time between initial settlement in relentlessly treed bush and the occupation of all the available land and the need to import firewood was a mere twenty-five years.⁶³ There is no reason to believe that the situation in neighbouring Waterloo County was any different. In paintings such as *Log-Cutting in the Woods* [5], Watson envisioned human economic activity taking place within a natural setting of which it makes use but which it does not push beyond the bounds of sustainability. However, it had been in 1880 - the year *The*

Pioneer Mill was completed, exhibited and sold – that the first warning was raised that the felling of woodlands along the Grand River was resulting in flooding: a new phenomenon in the area.⁶⁴ Only about a decade later, Watson's unpublished essays 'A Landscape Painter's Day' and 'The Village' were unequivocal about how the sawmill built by his grandfather had eventually undercut its own viability by destroying the trees upon which it depended. 'A Landscape Painter's Day' describes its author's thoughts when, during a thunderstorm, he took shelter in the by-then abandoned mill:



5 Homer Watson, *Log-Cutting in the Woods*, 1894, oil on canvas, 45.7 × 61 cm. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, gift of Lord Strathcona and family. Photo: Brian Merrett.

I thought of those earlier years when the mill in its vigorous life tore into sections with the giant force of its devouring saw the bodies of all the neighbouring trees. Year after year the forest was spoiled in order to furnish food for the saw. Into its depths rolled resinous timber, and gorged with such richness, a ruinous waste came about. No forests rose anew in place of those shreds. The pulse of the life of the mill became less and when the last of those cloud-cleaving pines were laid low to supply man with his needs, then the mill wrought its own death.

The floods of water that the forests once held in their mould bore down every year with might, until at last they wreaked vengeance upon the old mill for being the agent that had loosed them to turbulent life.⁶⁵

The Pioneer Mill, more than any other of his art works, was the ground on which Watson worked through the tensions between the admiration he and his society had for local pioneers, and his deeply personal awareness of the ultimately destructive relationship between the pioneers and the environment that had originally sustained them.

Postscript

Two decades after writing ‘A Landscape Painter’s Day’, Watson would take very public action to strike a balance between the advantages of pioneer activities and the ensuing loss of the qualities that made rural life so desirable. In 1913 he became instrumental in a successful campaign to preserve a wooded area near his home and studio: a tract threatened by population growth and the corresponding demand for more land to develop. As a key organizer and the president of Waterloo County Grand River Park Limited, he helped to

raise funds to buy and preserve the forty-acre stand of trees named Cressman's Woods (rechristened Homer Watson Memorial Park in 1944), located next to Doon. The site was about to be auctioned and was expected to be purchased by an entrepreneur who was determined to replace the trees with something more 'civilized'.⁶⁶ Fittingly, the warning that Watson had tried to convey in *The Pioneer Mill* about an ultimately self-defeating relationship between civilization and nature was marshalled by him again in 1913, this time to thwart a twentieth-century version of that same menace. In the next year, however, began the war that would employ technology of unprecedented rapaciousness to inflict devastation upon the natural and built environments of Europe. *The Pioneer Mill* became, more than ever, a symbol of the unrecoverable past.

The years following the successful preservation of Cressman's Woods were not kind to Homer Watson. His wife Roxa died in January 1918. Deeply distressed, he began to take solace in spiritualist séances and in doctored photographs that showed him surrounded by the translucent bodies of deceased relatives and friends, much as his paintings and drawings of settler life captured fondly recalled but increasingly ghostly rural and pioneer histories. His eclipse as a key figure in contemporary Canadian art was implicit in the rise of the Group of Seven, whose frankly modernist approaches to picture-making he occasionally admired but which he also criticized for proposing too narrow a definition of 'Canadian' and for focusing too much on landscapes that rarely contained Euro-Canadian settlements of much significance. ('Let him [the artist] paint where he

can dominate the scene, and not be dominated by the scene', Watson advised.⁶⁷) As if to emphasize his outmoded status, the Depression blighted his final years by plunging him into financial chaos from which he never recovered.

In 1957, however, two decades after Watson's death, the pioneer ethos to which he had been so devoted was made the subject of what was hoped to be a revival. In that year, the Doon Pioneer Village was opened to the public. Its goal was to celebrate the settlers of Ontario and especially those of the Grand River area, commemorating a period in which (according to one proponent of the project) 'men and women had purpose, perseverance, thrift and sincerity, qualities not as prevalent in our own age'.⁶⁸ In an almost painful bit of irony, the location proposed for the Village in 1954 was Cressman's Woods, although that plan was, mercifully, scuttled. Over the next two decades, the outdoor museum acquired large numbers of buildings and artefacts, many with little or no connection to the district around Doon or even to the pioneer era. The driving force was instead a fuzzy, generalized nostalgia for 'old things' of every description: an approach very different from the intensely personal presentation of local scenery and architecture by which Watson had established his credibility and reputation. Not until the implementation of a 1979 master plan was this ahistorical tactic abandoned, but at the cost of redefining the museum's focus away from the pioneer era altogether. From now on, the site, renamed Doon Heritage Crossroads, would present 'a typical, rural Waterloo County crossroads of 1914'.⁶⁹ Nineteen-fourteen marked, ironically enough, the definitive arrival of twentieth-century modernity in the form of the First World War: a

phenomenon in opposition to everything for which Watson's depictions of Doon and its landmarks stood and were valued. By that time, however, Watson's bucolic but (as in *The Pioneer Mill*) conflicted imagery had already established itself as a template for the ambiguity that the work of Harold Innis, Northrop Frye, Margaret Atwood and others would enshrine as the pervading relationship between Canadians and the landscapes that surround them.

- 1 An earlier, more detailed version of this essay was published in the *Journal of Canadian Art History*, vol. 33 no. 1 (Spring 2012), as part of a two-volume homage to the Québécois art historian François-Marc Gagnon. I am very grateful to the *Journal*, and especially to Sandra Paikowsky, who conceived the project, for their permission to publish this reworked version of that text.
- 2 Harold Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History*, rev. edn (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1977), pp. 392–3.
- 3 Northrop Frye, 'Conclusion', in Carl F. Klinck (ed.), *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English* (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1965).
- 4 Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (House of Anansi Press: Toronto, 1972).
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- ⁹ Homer Watson, 'The Methods of Some Great Landscape Painters' (1900), in Gerald Noonan, *Refining the Real Canada: Homer Watson's Spiritual Landscape* (mlr editions canada: Waterloo, Ontario, 1997), pp. 267–8.
- ¹⁰ Homer Watson to John M. Lyle, 15 February 1933 (Homer Watson fonds, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives).
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Quoted in Jane VanEvery, *With Faith, Ignorance and Delight: Homer Watson* (Homer Watson Trust: Doon, 1967), p. 47.
- ¹³ 'Ontario Society of Artists: Seventh Annual Exhibition – Second Day', *Toronto Globe*, 17 May 1879.
- ¹⁴ Oliver Millar, *The Victorian Pictures in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen*, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1992), p. 280.
- ¹⁵ 'Academy of the Arts', *Toronto Globe*, 9 March 1880.
- ¹⁶ Thomas D. King, 'Fine Arts at the Capital', *Canadian Spectator*, vol. 3, no. 12 (20 March 1880), p. 137.
- ¹⁷ 'Comparatively unaided by culture': 'Art Association of Montreal: Exhibition of Works by Canadian Artists', *Montreal Gazette*, 14 April 1880. 'Back woods': 'Something To Be Proud Of', *Montreal Daily Witness*, 14 April 1880.
- ¹⁸ Katherine Hale, 'The Art of Homer Watson: A Leading Canadian Landscape Artist', *Canadian Magazine*, vol. 20, no. 2 (December 1902), p. 140.
- ¹⁹ The breastshot wheel – the most common North American type – rotated when falling water struck it near the centre of the wheel's circumference. The undershot wheel – the oldest type, commonly used in conjunction with shallow running water – rotated when water struck the bottom of the wheel.
- ²⁰ Among the paintings dated 1879 are: *The Grist Mill* (71 × 56 cm; private collection), *Old Mill and Stream* (60 × 88 cm; Castle Kilbride, Baden, Ontario) and *The Old Mill* (34.0 × 60.5 cm; Homer Watson House and Gallery, Doon).

- ²¹ Rosemarie L. Tovell, 'Homer Watson's *The Pioneer Mill*: The Making and Marketing of a Print in the Canadian Etching Revival', *Journal of Canadian Art History*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2011), pp. 12–36.
- ²² John Macarthur, 'The Heartlessness of the Picturesque: Sympathy and Disgust in Ruskin's Aesthetics', *Assemblage*, vol. 32 (April 1997), pp. 126–41.
- ²³ 'The Brook and the Mill: How the Brook Went to Mill', *Scribner's Monthly*, vol. 8, no. 2 (June 1874), pp. 199–201.
- ²⁴ Kenneth W. Maddox, *In Search of the Picturesque: Nineteenth-Century Images of Industry along the Hudson River Valley* (Edith C. Blum Art Institute, Milton and Sally Avery Center for the Arts: Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, 1983), p. 19.
- ²⁵ J. Russell Harper, *Homer Watson, R.C.A., 1855–1936: Paintings and Drawings* (National Gallery of Canada: Ottawa, 1963), n.p.
- ²⁶ *The Aldine: The Art Journal of America*, vol. 7, no. 12 (December 1874), back cover. See also 'The Old Mill', *The Aldine: A Typographic Art Journal*, vol. 6, no. 6 (June 1873), p. 126; and 'The Old Mill', *The Aldine: The Art Journal of America*, vol. 9, no. 9 (September 1879), p. 278.
- ²⁷ O. B. Bunce, 'Scenes on the Brandywine', in William Cullen Bryant (ed.), *Picturesque America; or, The Land We Live In*, vol. 1 (D. Appleton and Company: New York, 1874), p. 222. Woodward's antebellum mill imagery is discussed in Sue Rainey and Roger B. Stein, *Shaping the Landscape Image, 1865–1910: John Douglas Woodward* (Bayly Art Museum, University of Virginia: Charlottesville, 1997), pp. 28–9.
- ²⁸ Darrell A. Norris, 'Migration, Pioneer Settlement, and the Life Course: The First Families of an Ontario Township', in Donald H. Akenson (ed.), *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, vol. 4 (Langdale Press: Gananoque, Ontario, 1984), pp. 130–52.
- ²⁹ Felicity Leung, *Grist and Flour Mills in Ontario: From Millstones to Rollers, 1780s to 1880s (History and Archaeology series, no. 53)* (National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Parks Canada, Environment Canada: Ottawa, 1981), p. 89.
- ³⁰ Geoffrey Hayes, *Waterloo County: An Illustrated History* (Waterloo Historical Society: Kitchener, 1997), p. 15.
- ³¹ G. T. Bloomfield and Elizabeth Bloomfield, 'Water Wheels and Steam Engines: Powered Establishments of Ontario', in Elizabeth Bloomfield

(ed.), *Canadian Industry in 1871*, Research Report, no. 2 (University of Guelph: Guelph, Ontario, 1989), p. 8.

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- 33 *Gazetteer and Directory of Waterloo County*, cited in Leung, *Grist and Flour Mills in Ontario*, op. cit., pp. 205–6.
- 34 Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr, 'Winslow Homer's (So-Called) *Morning Bell*', *American Art Journal*, vol. 29, no. 12 (1998), p. 6.
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- 36 Hayes, *Waterloo County*, op. cit., p. 62.
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- 38 A. O. Kummer, 'Reminiscences of A. O. Kummer, Early Settler, Doon', Waterloo Historical Society, *Annual Volume*, no. 52, 1965, pp. 63–4.
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- ⁴⁴ Hayes, *Waterloo County*, op. cit., pp. 99–100; Roy I. Wolfe, ‘The Summer Resorts of Ontario in the Nineteenth Century’, *Ontario History*, vol. 54 (September 1962), p. 159.
- ⁴⁵ The popularity of the area with artists of all kinds is documented in the Berlin *Daily Record* newspaper, including ‘Town Topics’, 24 July 1893, and ‘Art School’, 27 September 1893.
- ⁴⁶ Quoted in ‘Fresh Air Youngsters’, Berlin *News-Record*, 10 July 1893.
- ⁴⁷ Angela L. Miller, ‘Nature’s Transformations: The Meaning of the Picnic Theme in Nineteenth-Century American Art’, *Winterthur Portfolio*, vol. 24, no. 2/3 (Summer–Autumn 1989), p. 124. Doon area picnic getaways of five and six hundred people are mentioned in ‘Doon’, Berlin *Daily Record*, 1 November 1894.
- ⁴⁸ Primary sources for Wilde’s reaction to Watson’s art include: ‘Oscar at the Gallery’, Toronto *Telegram*, 25 May 1882; ‘Art Decoration’, Toronto *Daily Mail*, 26 May 1882; and ‘Oscar Wilde’, Toronto *Globe*, 26 May 1882. Wilde’s Canadian tour as a whole is the subject of Kevin O’Brien, *Oscar Wilde in Canada: An Apostle for the Arts* (Personal Library: Toronto, 1982), while his views on art in Canada are discussed in detail in Kevin O’Brien, ‘Oscar Wilde and Canadian Artists’, *Antigonish Review*, vol. 1, no. 4 (Winter 1971), pp. 11–28.
- ⁴⁹ Nicholas Green, *The Spectacle of Nature: Landscape Painting and Bourgeois Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 1990).
- ⁵⁰ Quoted in Wyly Grier, ‘Art Notes’, *The Week*, vol. 12, no. 11 (8 February 1895), p. 258.
- ⁵¹ ‘Art Notes’, *The Week*, vol. 9, no. 10, 8 April 1892, p. 298.
- ⁵² R. C. Reade, ‘Hermits of Art’, *Toronto Star Weekly*, 4 May 1929, p. 3.
- ⁵³ The building in *The Pioneer Mill* differs somewhat from the one depicted in Watson’s drawing titled *My Grandfather’s Sawmill* (Sketchbook Z, 7898.18, National Gallery of Canada). The artist later insisted that ‘[w]hen I want to paint a picture I make a number of studies of things I want to put in the composition and when I have these done I sit down in my studio and paint as suits my fancy using the sketches where I feel they suit’ (quoted in R. M. Fleming, ‘Homer Watson, Painter of Canadian Pictures’, *Ottawa Journal*, 15 November 1913).
- ⁵⁴ Homer Watson, ‘A Return to the Village’, in Noonan, *Refining the Real Canada*, op. cit., pp. 310–11.

- 55** Elizabeth Bloomfield and Linda Foster, *Families and Communities of Waterloo Township in 1861* (Caribou Imprints: Guelph, Ontario, 1995), p. 18; Muriel Miller, *Homer Watson: The Man of Doon* (Summerhill Press: Toronto, 1988), pp. 22–3.
- 56** Roxa Watson to Susan Mohr Watson (mother) and Phoebe Watson (sister), 5 May 1888 (Homer Watson fonds, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives).
- 57** Homer Watson, Sketchbook B, 7874.1v and 7874.1r, National Gallery of Canada.
- 58** Homer Watson to Arthur Lismer, 30 September [1930], (Homer Watson fonds, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives). This aspect of Watson's thought is considered throughout Noonan, *Refining the Real Canada*, op. cit.
- 59** Michael Bunce, in *The Countryside Ideal: Anglo-American Images of Landscape* (Routledge: London and New York, 1994), argues that whereas the British rural landscape was valued primarily in aesthetic (often picturesque) terms, the North American ideal 'has tended to value the settled rural landscape more as a symbol of agricultural progress and of bygone lifestyles' (p. 36).
- 60** Susan Glickman, *The Picturesque and the Sublime: A Poetics of the Canadian Landscape* (McGill-Queen's University Press: Montreal and Kingston, 1998), p. 47. The valorization of pioneer themes in Victorian Canadian literature is also addressed in Susan Wood, *The Land in Canadian Prose, 1880–1945* (Carleton University: Ottawa, 1988), and Carole Gerson, *A Purer Taste: The Writing and Reading of Fiction in English in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1989).
- 61** George Agnew Reid, typed note dated 7 October 1941, in Reid Scrapbook no. 1, p. 132 (Edward P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario).
- 62** 'The Industrial Exhibition', *Toronto Mail*, 25 September 1879.
- 63** Elizabeth Waterston and Douglas Hoffman (eds.), *On Middle Ground: Landscape and Life in Wellington County 1841–1891* (University of Guelph: Guelph, Ontario, 1974), p. 31.
- 64** Hayes, *Waterloo County*, op. cit., p. 189.
- 65** Homer Watson, 'A Landscape Painter's Day', quoted in VanEvery, *With Faith, Ignorance and Delight*, op. cit., pp. 61–2.

66 See especially David Brownstein, 'Early Conservation Efforts in Waterloo County', Waterloo Historical Society, *Annual Volume*, no. 86, 1998, pp. 17–31.

67 Quoted in Noonan, *Refining the Real Canada*, op. cit., p. 27.

68 Mary Tivy, 'Dreams and Nightmares: Changing Visions of the Past at Doon Pioneer Village', *Ontario History*, vol. 94, no. 1 (Spring 2002), p. 84. My entire discussion of Doon Pioneer Village is heavily indebted to Tivy's excellent analysis.

69 Ibid., p. 93–4.

'ONE SPECTATOR IS A BETTER WITNESS THAN TEN LISTENERS'

ROGER NORTH, MAKING THE PAST PUBLIC¹

Charles Ford

There has been much interest of late in the English lawyer and essayist the Honourable Roger North (1651–1734) and his work as a musical theorist, biographer and autobiographer, and eccentric natural philosopher. North published little during his lifetime, and nothing under his own name, but he left numerous manuscripts, including several complete works that were later published by his son, Montagu. At the end of the first decade of the eighteenth century, when he was in his sixties, North initiated an asymmetrical dispute with the bishop and historian White Kennett (1660–1728). Although almost invisible in recent historiography, Kennett was a significant public figure in his time, publishing a great deal, both under his own name and anonymously, notably *A Complete History of England* of 1706. North subsequently 'named' Kennett in a vitriolic, anonymous pamphlet published in 1711 in response to the *Complete History*, and then again in a sustained, seven-hundred-page attack, *Examen, or an Inquiry into the Credit and Veracity of a pretended Complete History*, which appeared later under his name (although not until 1740, after both men were already dead, in one of the books that Montagu

North issued). There is no evidence that the two ever met, although it is possible; they certainly shared acquaintances.

In order to situate and examine the non-parallel relation between the two men, both are considered here as typical historical agents within a third historical entity: Habermas's notion of the Bourgeois Public Sphere. In this context, I attempt to explore issues connected with each writer's declared identity as an author before a public. It is quite possible, and very profitable, to understand North's career as an author and his dispute with Kennett within the general topic of class, or of political party (the ostensible cause of the dispute), or even of cultures of informational exchange, but the Bourgeois Public Sphere offers a general theory of the period that brings these elements together in an enabling way. Such an enquiry into the North-Kennett dispute tests the Bourgeois Public Sphere's effectiveness as an explanatory device, for even though it was conducted between typical characters, it was not carried out according to the ideal conditions described by Habermas.

Habermas's account of the Bourgeois Public Sphere described 'private people come together as a public'² at a moment in early modernity.³ (Habermas himself did

not, in fact, use the term 'Public Sphere' - his own term *Öffentlichkeit* is perhaps better translated as 'Public-ness' - but 'Public Sphere' has been used in the English-speaking world as a double-sided tool of reference both to the ostensible historical object and to the Habermas-ness of that topic.⁴) 'The public' was for Habermas a new entity or force in the world that first comes into view (for us, looking

back from now) in England around 1700. It emerged as a political and cultural player, claiming the right to establish knowledge, to determine the rules of commodity exchange, and to decide who was, and who did, what. The formation overlaps with something we might today call ‘public opinion’; it is simultaneous with the emergence of ‘public credit’; and it inaugurates an age of new standards such as ‘public taste’, ‘public decency’ and (with all its dark baggage) ‘public safety’. New sites such as stock exchanges, coffee houses and newspapers produced, or were produced by, a self-consciously emergent, literate, informed and opinionated property-owning class. The published materials that constitute this historical entity as a site, or (for us) an archive of discourse(s), were written in the vernacular. The Bourgeois Public Sphere enclosed a large readership with insufficient Latin for its Other, the Republic of Letters.⁵ For anyone who enters the literature of the period via *Mac Flecknoe*, *The Battle of the Books* and *The Dunciad*, Habermas’s Bourgeois Public Sphere is a curiously anodyne abstraction. The lived experience of ‘reasoned debate’ included the drab, sometimes brilliant, and often unreasonably toxic pamphleteering of Grub Street party politics. The only checks on excess were the emerging and linked concepts of politeness (not itself necessary to reason, although it may have been polite to reason that it was) and the laws of libel.

At the imagined moment of the perfectly round Bourgeois Public Sphere, in its ideal manifestation (which is hardly a historical object, rather a metaphysical one, and more of a ‘device’ for understanding a set of conjuctions), authority was not granted by the status of the individual speaking

(‘publicness (or publicity) of representation’⁶), but by the quality of their reasoning. Reasoned argument would produce truths and authorize knowledge. Membership of this public was open to all. To be a qualifying private person, you needed literacy, property and opinions (or, later, Tastes, for the Bourgeois Public Sphere inauguates the Critic). The imagined Bourgeois Public Sphere is therefore rational, secular and open, reverse-engineered out of Kant’s ‘What is Enlightenment?’ The spherical form brought to mind by the English translation of *Öffentlichkeit* is something to play with. The moment of bourgeois publicness is also the moment of financial bubbles. The conditions under which information circulated, authoring and authorizing new knowledges (within ‘informed and critical discourse’⁷), were exactly the conditions required to facilitate speculation.

Roger North was the youngest of fourteen children, ten of whom survived into adulthood. His father was Dudley, the fourth Baron North, who had sat in the Long Parliament; his mother was Anne Montagu, an accomplished woman who features

prominently in North’s biographical writings. The eldest son inherited the baronetcy and plays no part in this narration. The second, Francis, was trained as a lawyer. He rose through the profession to become Lord Keeper of the Seal during the last years of Charles II. He died in late 1685, but at the time of his death was just months past the peak of his legal and political career. Under Charles, he had been at the heart of court and government, but James II, who became king in the spring of 1685, preferred others. Francis had been the patron of Roger’s rapid ascent through the legal profession during the 1670s and 1680s. The two brothers were

close, sharing professional interests, an enthusiasm for natural philosophy and a love of music.⁸ A third brother, Dudley, five years younger than Francis and ten years older than Roger, was a merchant engaged in trade primarily with Turkey.⁹ After returning from Constantinople in 1680, Dudley was thrust into politics, being appointed as a pro-crown sheriff of the City of London, entering parliament and serving as a commissioner of the Treasury. Together, all three brothers acted as fixers for Charles II. All three were embroiled in the corrosive legal politics of the Exclusion Crisis and the Popish Plot. Roger, for example, was involved in the trial of the Rye House Plotters, and was a prosecutor in the trials of Algernon Sidney and Lord Russell; Dudley was involved in bullying the Corporation of London. All three became wealthy through these activities (not to mention advantageous marriages).

James II's determination, upon his accession, to accommodate and even reintroduce the Catholic religion created problems for families such as the Norths. Whereas they were unquestionably loyal to the Stuart monarchy, they were also Protestants. Roger North could not unquestioningly support the king's policies on toleration, nor his plans for a standing army with Catholic officers - neither could he obstruct his king. He remained a courtier, but not an important one, and definitely not a player. He retained his posts as attorney-general to the Queen and steward to the See of Canterbury, that is, legal advisor to Archbishop Sancroft. In the latter role, he became immersed in the Anglican resistance to James's Declaration of Indulgence. When James quit the country in 1688 and William and Mary were given the joint throne the following year, Roger found himself further confounded by

circumstances. He lost his seat in parliament. He was called before a House of Lords committee to answer for his previous actions. Although he welcomed James's departure, and would have accepted William and Mary as regents (he was not a believer in divine right, rather in constitutional authority), he felt unable to sign the oath of loyalty to the new regime. He became a non-juror, and remained a suspected Jacobite for the rest of his life.

In December 1690, Roger North completed his purchase of a country seat, Rougham, in the remotest north of Norfolk. A few days less than a year later, Dudley died. At the age of forty, Roger now entered his long retirement from public life. But he remained extremely busy. He became involved in helping other non-jurors, and was approached by many for his advice, especially on legal matters (he was an expert executor and managed the estates of both of his brothers as well as, famously, that of Sir Peter Lely). He married the daughter of a Jacobite City magnate, Sir Robert Gayer, and raised a large family. He indulged his delight in building, music and the improvement of his estate. But most of all, and it would seem every day, he practised his obsession: writing.

As has been said, Roger North published little in his lifetime, committing himself largely to manuscript.¹⁰ His first identified writing was the preface to the *Discourses on Trade*, a short treatise now generally accepted as the work of Dudley North.¹¹ This text was ignored at its publication and, according to Roger's later biography of his brother, was unobtainable only a few years later.¹² There is a rare, original copy in the British Library,

where there is also a manuscript version. The manuscript contains a number of marginal comments and emendations, perhaps in Dudley's hand.¹³ It would seem that Roger saw what was to be a posthumous and anonymous publication through the press. Perhaps the main text was written by Dudley as a bid for influence upon, or for a place within, the new administration, in which case, had he lived, it is conceivable that it may have been published under his own name.¹⁴ The conceit with which the preface opens is the fiction that this is a private document prepared for a public readership:

These Papers came direct to me, in order, as I suppose, to be made Publick: And having transmitted them to the Press, which is the only means whereby the University of Mankind is to be inform'd, I am absolved of that trust.¹⁵

The preface argues for plain English, plain-speaking and the conversational presentation of arguments. It commends 'Mechanical' scientific thinking ('built upon clear and evident Truths'¹⁶), citing Cartesian 'Method'. It argues in favour of free trade and deploys a commodity theory of money, turning radically from the ruling 'balance of trade' and bullionist dogmas. The preface is expressed in a humorous and conversational tone, confirmed by the conventional, rhetorical anxiety with which the pamphlet is presented before the 'University of Mankind':

The publick is an acute, as well as merciless Beast, which neither over-sees a Failing, nor forgives it; but stamps Judgment and Execution immediately, thô upon a Member of itself; and is no less Ingrateful than common Beggars, who affront their Benefactors, without whose Charity their Understandings would starve.¹⁷

All in all, the reasoned manner of argument, and argument for reason, along with the rhetorical apprehension of prejudiced and unreasonable readers (albeit phrased so as pleasantly and politely to exclude the present reader), fits with our assumptions about the communication of knowledge and ideas within a Habermasian Bourgeois Public Sphere. Yet, the disappearance of the text from the Public Sphere, lamented by Roger, indicates its power to exclude or not to hear unwanted voices. It is a place where reasoned debate could become lost or appear irrelevant. We need to build this into our model of the Sphere's function as a space of communicative practice, for it suggests that it was a place where communication could be obstructed or fail. North's manuscript copy ensured its survival, but only in the Intimate Sphere.¹⁸

The fact that North never published under his own name during his lifetime was typical of his class and of his period. But anyone who has read books and pamphlets from this period will be familiar with pencilled-in attributions on their title pages, some of them dating from the time of publication. Anonymity did not protect an identity from identification: John Locke confessed to his authorship of the 'anonymous' *Treatises on Government* only in his will, but the text had been long identified as his. Hilkiah Bedford was fined and went to prison as the identified author of *The Hereditary Right of the Crown of England asserted* rather than reveal the name of the real author, George Harbin. The publication of Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad* was followed by a number of 'keys' to the anonymized objects of his satire. Identifying authors was part of the process of reading in the early years of the Bourgeois Public Sphere, and

being ‘identified’ could lead to obscurity, celebrity or even confinement. It is unlikely, therefore, that North’s, or anyone’s, use of anonymity was meant absolutely to conceal identity, rather only to screen it and to provide a space for legal manoeuvre. We might argue that, in the context of the Habermasian Bourgeois Public Sphere, those who adopted the screen of anonymity may be eschewing the representation of their status before the public, thus becoming instances of reason (even if public opinion might identify and exclude them). North published three books under the pseudonym ‘A Person of Honour’.¹⁹ In the scheme proposed by Habermas, this particular persona, or screen, the ‘Person of Honour’, might indicate a kind of residual ‘publicity of representation’, that is, an identity by kind, for it might refer to North’s title as the son of a baronet, ‘the Honourable’. As Habermas makes clear, the Bourgeois Public Sphere did not bring to an end all the older forms of publicity, and many features of the traditional authority of kind remain (if ‘only’ in ritual) to the present day. The reference to an author as a ‘Person of Honour’ might, on the other hand, or even also, be intended to refer to the writer’s non-juror status, someone standing upon their honour, and function as a coded identity to a specific readership. Then again it may simply and neutrally imply a certain worthiness, appropriate to a private person in the self-assembled public; in support of this we could refer to Steven Shapin’s account of late-seventeenth-century authorship.²⁰

Francis, Dudley and Roger North had unsuccessfully lobbied in parliament during the 1680s for the adoption of a land register. The *Arguments & Materials*, an anonymous pamphlet published in 1698, is a reworking for the press of

their arguments.²¹ The conceit deployed in the text is that of the anonymous author as an amanuensis, who had written down verbatim and in a busy, engaging style, the opinions expressed in private conversation by 'A Gentleman of the Long Robe' (presumably a screened reference to Francis).²² The scandal of multiply sold land; the tortuous processes of transfer

and inheritance; the profitability of such confusion to lawyers; the extraordinary legal problems of resolving the situation - all are discussed in a plain and conversational presentation. Like the *Discourses*, the *Arguments & Materials* is written with a good humour, but no polemical vigour of its own, rather one that is attributed to a character within the text. A third text, *The Reflections on our Common Failings* of 1701,²³ anonymously presented a translation of an anonymous French original and was decidedly different in tone from Roger North's own essays on manners.²⁴ It appeared shortly before the appearance of periodicals such as the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, the apotheosis of the topical essay that plays such a role in Habermas's account of the transformation of the Public Sphere. (Such essays characteristically ventriloquized the world view of their actual, and widely identified, authors through a cast of pseudonymous characters.)

Together these three texts - the *Discourses*, *Arguments & Materials* and *Reflections* - dropped into and through the Public Sphere leaving hardly a ripple, although all three represent and contribute to our understanding of what the Public Sphere might have comprised in an ideal community of texts imagined to represent an ideal community of communicating agents. Two other publications by

North can be understood as contributions to the growing bibliography of advice literature. *The Gentleman's Accomptant* of 1714 provides a comprehensive introduction to household economy. It was in a long tradition of such advice, a tradition to which Roger's own father had contributed.²⁵ In the same vein is his advice on fish-keeping, which links out to a new genre of advice on land improvement; it was his most reprinted publication during the eighteenth century.²⁶ North's manuscripts contain a number of possible additions to this kind of advice literature: there are multiple versions, at different levels of finish, of works on architecture, music, the education of lawyers and much else.

One other anonymous work was published during his lifetime, of a quite different tenor: *Reflections upon some passages in Mr Le Clerc's Life of Mr John Locke*, signed as by 'Your humble Servant'.²⁷ This 1711 pamphlet will disappoint anyone curious to understand North's reading of the great philosopher. Instead, it is a critique of Le Clerc's history of recent times, which he calls 'pure Extract and rectified Spirit of History'.²⁸ It attacks Le Clerc's presentation of the 'Secret History' of the reign of Charles II:

the rankest Libels in their time, by degrees become *Secret History* (forsooth) and by succeeding Generations are valued as great Curiosities, and Discoveries of concealed Truth, till at length they gain the honourable Title of *Anecdotes*, turning the Verities of former Times into worse than Fable or Romance [...] [T]here were not many, if any Secrets in that Court.²⁹

North especially criticizes Le Clerc's sympathetic treatment of the early political career of John

Locke's patron, the Earl of Shaftesbury ('that the Court was bad, and he was good; the Court Popish and Tyrannous, and he a Protestant, and a Protector of Liberty'³⁰).

As the full title of the work indicates, the pamphlet included North's first mention of White Kennett's third volume of the *Complete History of England* ('If he had nam'd it any thing but *History*, he had come off better'³¹). Both the *Life of Mr John Locke* and the *Complete History* had been in the public domain since 1706. North had apparently not felt the need to comment publicly (or, indeed, privately in his manuscripts) on either, until urged to do so, several years later, by others.³² Retired, retiring and approaching sixty, he was an unlikely political player, and as we shall see, disavowed any party affiliation. But he had been an eyewitness in Charles II's court, he had been a privy councillor, and before that, from his earliest days as a law student, he had sat in the background, listening and playing bass viol, while his older brother Francis entertained courtiers. Furthermore, he was in possession of the former Lord Keeper's diaries, notes and correspondence. Certainly, his personal knowledge and his evidently undiminished forensic skills qualified him for the task. Le Clerc's text was subjected to a prosecuting counsel's interrogation.

Three important works were published in the early 1740s by Roger's son, Montagu. These included two biographical volumes – the life of Francis North and the lives of Dudley and John North – and the *Examen*.³³ All appeared under Roger North's own name and represent his emergence as an identified author in the Bourgeois Public Sphere. They set straight the public record (call it 'history') with regard to both the reputation of King Charles II and

those of his brothers. The earlier *Reflections upon some passages in Mr Le Clerc's Life of Mr John Locke* had been published soon after the Whig prosecution of Henry Sacheverell in 1710; it can be related to a widespread furore that defined the territory of the Public Sphere at that time, reaching from Parliament to Grub Street, a furore that resulted in the passing of the Riot Act in 1714. It is clear from internal evidence that the *Examen* was substantially complete by then. Why was it not published until 1740? Why was it not pitched into the reasoned exchange of 'private persons come together as a public' twenty-five years earlier at a moment when it may have had a greater impact? It is hard to believe that it was likely to lead to the prosecution of someone of North's status.³⁴ Why were all of the posthumous books published under his name (and this includes the reprint of the 1711 *Reflections*, which was added as an appendix to the *Examen*)? There is another puzzle. In the advertisement following the dedication in the *Examen*, Montagu North states that the original manuscript was to be placed in the library of Jesus College, Cambridge, 'where, whoever shall entertain any Doubt of the Fidelity of the Publisher, will be permitted to peruse it'.³⁵ The manuscript is still there. What is being proved? The answer to some of these questions, and clues to answers for the rest, can, as Schmidt has argued, be discovered in the preface to the *Examen*.

First, something needs to be said of White Kennett's book that prompted North to write. The third volume of the *Complete History* is a remarkable piece of historical synthesis and a foundational work for the Whig interpretation of history.³⁶ It was

very successful, being reprinted four times before 1715, and an amended edition appeared in 1719. It is organized in strict chronological order: the marginalia run relentlessly through the calendar of the seventeenth century from 'Born Nov 19. 1600' ('The Life and Reign of Charles the First', p. 1) to '1701. Question, Whether the Convocation was dissolved with the King's Death.' ('The Life and Reign of King William the Third', p. 849). It is a 'scriptural' history, assembling a comprehensive array of printed materials with scarcely any paraphrase. The transcribed material is glossed by a linking editorial commentary, which not only leads the reader through the ostensible object of the history (that is, what was imputed to have happened), but also reveals an agenda (for example, that popery and religious dissent result in the seizure of arbitrary power). The commentary is notably understated, and the reader is obliged to look out for the implications of the lengthy quotations. Overall it is a remarkably secular and pragmatic account, avoiding any kind of constitutional metaphysics. Charles II and James II are negatively reviewed. Charles was characterized as a secret papist and criticized for his protection of his brother. The Exclusion Crisis and the Popish Plot were presented as manifestations of arbitrary power at its ugliest. If Titus Oates was not exactly made a hero, he was certainly allowed to have been generally in the right. Many 'court party' personalities were assigned to *damnatio memoriae*, or misremembered. Francis North, who had been Lord Keeper throughout the crucial period of the early 1680s, has only two citations in the index. His brother Dudley is wrongly given a baronetcy, rather than a knighthood. The book lacks any sense of the

author's own direct experience of the events covered (even less his personal knowledge of or involvement in them). Kennett was not well connected; he knew few of the personalities discussed; he had not been there; he had not been a spectator. The volume was published anonymously, attributed to 'a Learned and Impartial Hand'.

In his preface to the *Examen*, Roger North makes a number of points that, while criticisms of Kennett, stand also as declaration of his own investment in historical writing.³⁷ His opening statement claims that he writes to defend Charles II against the slanders of 'defamatory Pretenders'. He declares that all historians have some 'Political scheme of their own'; for his own part, he 'pretends not to be exempt from that Infirmity'. One side stands for the 'Preservation ... of the National Interest'; the other side, though 'pretending uncommon Zeal for the Protestant Religion and Law, at the Bottom, mean[s] only private Interests' (and 'all the scandalous Atheists, Sectaries and Heretics, are generally found to herd with the latter'). The dispute is presented as being between the 'constant' and the 'querulous'. Histories such as Kennett's are declared to be continuations of the very squabbles that gave rise to the formation of parties in the time of Charles II.

[T]his Writer [i.e., North himself] defies the Imputation as being of a Party, so long as it is the Side of Truth and Sincerity, which cannot properly be termed a Party, but a Duty, and justly is in no Man's Election to take and leave, as Party-Dealers commonly suppose; otherwise common Honesty, as well as Fidelity to lawful Governments may be a Party Character.

Here North alludes to the reputation of ‘trimming’ that stuck to Kennett throughout his interesting career. Kennett had been a devoted Stuart loyalist,³⁸ then a defender of the Church against James II, then a signer of the oath of loyalty to William and Mary,³⁹ then a supporter of the Williamite bishops, and eventually a propagandist of Whig ecclesiastical policy (ending up in the House of Lords as Bishop of Peterborough).⁴⁰ North argues that is the task of historians to reveal the facts, but a historian must not present history without comment:

whoever, on Pretence of Impartiality, in that Distinction is mealy-mouth'd, may be accounted not only a sneaking Neutral in the Cause of Good and Evil, but a positive Traitor to Goodness itself.⁴¹

Here North satirizes Kennett’s representation of himself on the title page of the *Complete History* as ‘a Learned and Impartial Hand’, as well as criticizing his practice of insinuating rather than declaring his judgments. For North, impartiality was not an option. As he saw it, one can *only* write with a ‘Political scheme’; the only positions available are ‘constant’ avowal of right or ‘querulous’ private interest.

North turns next to a criticism of Kennett’s method. Kennett (and/or John Hughes, the general editor of the *Complete History*) laid claim to using the ‘best writers’ as sources. North disputes the claim. First, he criticizes the poor citation that compromises the evaluation of sources. Second, he disputes whether the sources were indeed ‘the best’, pointing to the numerous citations from partisan pamphlet literature. North pounces on Kennett’s claim that

contemporary history is problematic, that it was difficult for people to judge of their own times. Kennett had been understandably apprehensive of ‘Imperfect Remembrances, confused Notions, Partiality to one Side, and Prejudice to another’, but, North argues, ‘[h]e makes no Distinction; but Divines, Statesmen, Scholars, lawyers, Gentle, Simple, Wise, Unwise, Honest, or Dishonest, all are involved’, going on to point to ‘the most violent Party-Men’ who ‘have wrote the most useful Histories’. The proposition is then turned against Kennett, who had himself used the accounts of ‘Contemporaries’, albeit material drawn only from printed sources (‘Acts of State, Records, Proclamations, Declarations, and the like’). In eschewing the direct expression of experience, North argued, Kennett missed the point of documentary material: ‘What is most useful to be known is seldom or never to be found in any public Registrations; and is not to be expected or hoped for, but from private Memoirs.’ North dismisses Kennett’s history as a mere compilation of stuff that was eavesdropped.⁴²

Posterity is like to want the chief Truths, of our Times, and (subducting private Memoirs and Remembrances until the World will be pleased to accept of them) the Work of Compilers, that is Critical History, will grow exceeding difficult ... at present, the Current of History is muddy, and instead of clearing, the Stream grows continually more foul.

In the last paragraphs of the preface, North turns to Kennett’s decision to publish his history anonymously. Kennett had said that ‘No prudent Writer will set a Name to the History of his own Times.’ North’s reply is that not only have many ‘prudent Writers’ done just that, but that it is ‘not

only prudent, but just to do it, for the Character of the person always known, is a Character of the History'. North sums up his own intention by stating that he will embrace controversy, from time to time directly criticizing Kennett's text (the 'examen' element), but also allow himself licence to pass back and forth over the issues. He says that he will employ digressions and anecdotal material from memoirs (he refers specifically to those of his brother, Francis). In this way, he intends to produce a 'New Work'⁴³ thereby implicitly criticizing Kennett's rigid chronological organization. On the first page following the preface, page one of the *Examen* proper, he writes: 'I shall follow him not by Years, as he moves with an hobbling Pace, but by Subjects, which may assist Unity.' No reader will have failed to have noticed that before the author's preface the book had begun with 'a Concise Chronology of the Chief Passages Taken Notice of in the Examen [...] from the Chronological History of England put out by Mr. Pointer 1714, Vol. I.'⁴⁴ In North's history, chronology was not irrelevant; it was useful, but it was no more than a tool.

From this, several overlapping responses can be given to the questions asked above. Clearly North could not, by his own admission, publish the *Examen* or the biographies of his brothers anonymously. The character of the person is the character of the history; authorship determines authority; anonymous publication would have diminished the books' value and meaning. The unambiguous identification of the author by definition authorizes the narrative of remembered experience. If, as Schmidt argues, he was apprehensive for his own safety, then it might have been prudent to forbear publication until after he

was dead and immune from prosecution, although (and here I make a sentimental investment and declare) that was not his style. But then, maybe what was at stake was not so urgent. Maybe what was at stake was not to be hazarded in the poisonous atmosphere of London during the last years of the last Stuart. I am not convinced that North thought that the vindication of his king and his brothers should take place in the same forum as the polemics of contesting parties, not least for fear of that vindication being mistaken for a matter of those parties. The books may have worked better in Latin, in the Republic of Letters, but their intended readership was not to be found there. The books required a more considered readership, something closer to the imagined 'private' people come together as a public' of the ideal Habermasian Public Sphere, although it is likely that North did not consider that yet to be properly assembled. They were written for a better future and were left to his son. They self-consciously inaugurate an archive of direct experience for generations to come.

The recessive authorization of the text of the *Examen* by the deposition of Roger North's manuscript in the library of Jesus College might be understood as a quaint

manifestation of that same ambition. A manuscript represents authorship in a different way from a printed text, even one issued under a name. Roger North (or rather, his manuscript trace) was placed outside his book, as a reference or witness. This is hardly a kind of proof by the criteria of what he called 'critical history', but it is an impressive investment in the value systems of both traditional 'publicity of representation' and self-representation

through reason within the Bourgeois Public Sphere. One is reminded of the *Arguments & Materials for a Register of Estates*, or the system of double-entry bookkeeping advocated in *The Gentleman's Accomptant*, where property (and commodities) do not 'belong' within the property itself, to be asserted by possession and defended by legal disputation, but in the identification of the property as a relation marked by a separate record in the public domain and beyond dispute.

On the other hand, there may be an alternative anxiety that prompted Montagu North, and his printer Fletcher Gyles, to establish the authenticity of the text of the *Examen*. On 6 March 1740, Philip Yorke, 1st Earl of Hardwicke, passed judgment on a dispute in Chancery: Gyles v. Wilcox. This was a dispute over 'fair use'. Fletcher Gyles had published an edition of Matthew Hale's *Pleas of the Crown*.⁴⁵ Wilcox and Barlow had produced an abridgment (with the Old French and Latin translated into English) as the *Treatise of Modern Crown Law*. The dispute was whether such abridgement was piracy ('colourably shortened only' in the terminology developed by Yorke) or the production of a 'new work'. The case is of further interest inasmuch as it removed responsibility for judgment in such cases from a jury, handing it over to arbitration by experts (who in this case ruled that Wilcox had produced a 'real and fair abridgement'). Gyles v. Wilcox set a common-law precedent that remains influential, not only in establishing the means by which copyright should be determined (expert witnesses), but also in establishing that a literary work was the product of a writer's labour (including in this case the labour of the abridger), rather than the property of a publisher.⁴⁶ The manuscript in Cambridge provides

substantial proof of the authorship of the *Examen*. Should anyone acting on behalf of the *Complete History* wish to argue that the *Examen* depended upon the *Complete History*, and that it was not a ‘new work’, the manuscript would refute them. Furthermore, should publication be complicated by any litigation, the original text would be accessible through the ‘publicity of representation’ offered by the status of a Cambridge college. This is not the absolute answer to my earlier question, any more than the previous meditation on recessive referencing of authorship, but it places the issue firmly in a Bourgeois Public Sphere policed by legal innovation during early modernity.

We have seen that for Roger North, writing about the past should embrace the opacity and complexity of localized, immediate experience, something we could call ‘the personal’. Memoir and anecdote tell us truths about human desire, motive and agency.⁴⁷

Furthermore, as North freely acknowledged, the writing of history itself is no more than desires, motives and agencies at work in opaque, complex, local and

immediate situations (for example, party interest). As we have also seen, in North’s judgment, White Kennett’s *Complete History* was incomplete, and its author deluded as to the possibility of his impartiality.

‘Anecdotal’ is a word very often deployed as a derogatory term by professional historians.⁴⁸ Before 1771, parliamentary business could be known only anecdotally; after that date, its reporting the proceedings of Parliament ceased to be punished, although limits remain in place to this day. Parliament retains privileges (‘private laws’) that

exempt it (like parts of the legal process and many parts of government process) from full and immediate exposure to publicity. Anecdotes enter the Public Sphere on the authority of the source ('a government spokesman', 'someone close to the minister', etc.). These limits of public knowledge mark the boundaries of any imagined Public Sphere, and to understand them is to understand the rules of civil society. It is still possible, wherever one lives in the world, to go to prison for sharing anecdotes.

For North, the self-regulating reason of a public did not necessarily offer a neutral space of judgment. That space was polluted by what he called 'Party'. He was a reader of Hobbes as well as Descartes, and we can trace in his writings a Hobbesian apprehension regarding private reason. Reason, in its reasoning, could not always be trusted to understand itself as separate from private interest and individual desire.⁴⁹ As Jamie C. Kassler has argued,⁵⁰ for North it was the English common law that provided a rein on the possible excesses of self-regulating reason. With law comes our understanding of our 'Duty' (this notion of Duty is about as metaphysical as North ever gets) to respect and maintain the Crown, Parliament and the Reformation settlement.

The *Examen*, together with the biographies of North's brothers, constitutes a Stuart-loyalist version of the recent past. These texts have remained marginal in the dominant narratives of the period, becoming interesting only recently in micro-histories of resistance and of a lost cause. Perhaps they should be read in conjunction with Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* as framing devices for

an enquiry into the failure of the Great Rebellion to attract the support of English Jacobites. While the biographies of the North brothers have enjoyed several revivals by antiquarian and revisionist historians since the early nineteenth century, the *Examen* has never been reprinted, despite Coleridge's enthusiastic endorsement.⁵¹

I would like to turn briefly, and in conclusion, to the intimate sphere of Roger North as represented in the manuscript materials. They document a life occupied in continual, laborious writing. They have been called 'a trackless sea of loose papers and manuscripts';⁵² one can get lost, but they are not that indeterminate. One can read for an underlying system and for a chronology of topics. His Cartesian anti-Newtonianism articulates a distinctive position in natural philosophy that we must attend to.⁵³ His manuscripts on music have been a resource for musicologists for nearly two hundred years.⁵⁴ His observations on the law, and advice to anyone studying law,⁵⁵

together with numerous descriptions, characters and anecdotes of legal personalities, are another remarkable resource. As Kassler has shown, such material makes up a complex, fractured but readable whole, and in her persuasive account, presents us with a conservative, neo-stoic intellectual.⁵⁶ North's manuscript materials included not only his own writings but also those of his brothers, as well as manuscripts and letters, deeds and records inherited from previous generations of the family. They passed on to his son and remained in the North family until they ceased to do their job or their purpose was forgotten and they were sold off as waste paper. They are now

distributed between a number of libraries; some even remain at Rougham.⁵⁷

It is unlikely that I have exhaustively explained why Montagu North published his father's works, but I can point to Roger North's own explanation of why he wrote. In the preface ('p^rfando') that opens BL Add MS 32526, he states:

Insatiable desire to know, ambitious thincking, care of p^rserving
Even y^e hints, & Embrio's of thought /designe of Improving.\
facility, as well as pleasure, In scribbling, and Courting a style, are a
Combination of Inducem^{ts} to what you find here, and /also\ Much
More of like fustian, In other places, w^{ch} by their solemne
appearance In books, seem to have had somewhat of y^e polite,
[but?] In truth are but Extemporaneous sentiments, from one that
writes swifter then thincks, and hath No test of his owne thoughts
but his Review after wrighting.

We might pathologize his writing as graphomania.
We might empathize with a painful loneliness. What
inhibited him from publishing his writings?

Men of collegiate conversation, have often freedome of
communicating sentiment's, & so test them upon others
understanding, w^{ch} where candor dwells, is of admirable use and
satisfaction! but few ages allow a sett of Men of [this?] candor, to
admitt such freedomes without censure, Either [the?] church or
some stage principles may be hurt by y^e Consequence even of a
truth as they thinck, & then it is discourag[ed?] or Els some state
policy, or faction may be Interested, & for that cause, truth Is to be
supprest, or Els ill Nature, love of contradiction, ~~raish~~ raiseth a
battery Impertinently, or a plagiary humour, If a thought be good, to
run away [with?] & then claime it, hinder this freedome of
Conversation, [Whereby?], In our pudle & slough of time, that
advantage is denied.

Oh! for the Age of hero's. Galileo, Gassendi, Pieriesk. [...] Kepler, /[Cartesius?] [&?] with y^e Noble [train?] of humanists, Erasmus /[longolius?] [...] etc. who sent their thought about by letters.⁵⁸

North's longing for the collegiality of honourable persons, where ideas would not be abused, stolen or twisted, but could circulate anecdotally in the private realm and remain unalienated, where the printed form is simply an extension of that process of communication, can be read as a proposal as much for an alternative modernity as for a lost past. The device of the Bourgeois Public Sphere reveals a set of relations (of people, law and technologies) where some such extended privacy, or domesticated

publicity, ought surely to have been available, but was not. The Bourgeois Public Sphere was essentially a market for and of information. Inasmuch as that market was an agent in history, it represented its claims to reason, progress and modernity against its own characterization of a darker, traditional past. Persons like Roger North stand for, and in, that darkness. Other Tory intellectuals engaged with the Bourgeois Public Sphere more effectively through satire; they played upon the insecurities of their readership, pointing to a different darkness shining through the gaps in the imagined rationality of modernity. An enquiry into the relationship of North's published and unpublished works reveals a negotiation of the distinctions between the private and the public, and a nostalgia for, or maybe aspiration for, separate and unmixable domains. This nostalgia is played out in a complicated relationship with the new forms of publicity. It produces a curious publishing career,

one that requires careful interpretation by twenty-first-century readers.

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- 1 'Unus oculatus testis praestat auritis decem', Roger North's misquotation of a line from the second act of Plautus' *Truculentus*. The line is employed as the epitaph, on the title page of Roger North, *Life of Francis North*. The implication is that (for North) the testimony of a direct witness has greater value than that of any number of secondhand eavesdroppers, a point returned to later in the essay. The primary texts discussed are referred to in shortened form throughout the essay and footnotes; full publication details are given in the bibliography.
- 2 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Polity Press: Cambridge, 1989), p. 27. The English-language edition emerged long after the German and French editions (*Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Luchterhand: Darmstadt, 1962) and *L'Espace public: archéologie de la publicité comme dimension constitutive de la société bourgeoise*, trans. Marc Buhot de Launay [Payot: Paris, 1978]). Habermas's concept had a delayed impact on Anglo-American scholarship, arriving at the moment of post-structuralism and the 'collapse' of Marxism, a moment marked by the publication of Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1992).
- 3 There is an enormous literature. Three articles have helped me understand current options for contemporary readers: Harold Mah, 'Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 72, no. 1 (2000), pp. 153–82; Peter Lake and Steve Pincus, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2006), pp. 270–92; and Conal Condren, 'Public, Private and the Idea of the "Public Sphere" in Early-Modern England', *Intellectual History Review*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2008), pp. 15–28. Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2009), especially chapters 5, 6 and 7, gives a compelling account of the pre-emptive foreclosure of any Public Sphere as a 'real space' by what the author convincingly calls a Catholic, modernizing king, James II. Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private and the Division of Knowledge* (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2005) is a productive utilization of the concept, both as a device and as an object of study, for a social and cultural history of early modernity.
- 4 Mah, 'Phantasies', op. cit., p. 154, states that the Habermasian Public Sphere has become 'a prescriptive disciplinary category – a category to be

invoked in studies that aspire to disciplinary significance'. That is an assertion to make one cautious, and encourages a degree of circumspection, if not inhibition, in the rest us.

- ⁵ Gareth V. Bennett, *White Kennett, 1660–1728, Bishop of Peterborough: A Study in the Political and Ecclesiastical History of the Early Eighteenth Century* (SPCK: London, 1957) lists sixty-eight printed works by White Kennett. These can be divided into learned works addressed to the 'Republic of Letters' and those presented for the 'Public Sphere'. An example of the former would be his *Parochial Antiquities*, which was rare, expensive and full of Latin (and also sent out under the author's name); of the latter, *Witt Against Wisdom* (a translation of Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly*, published anonymously), which was rightly popular, and frequently reprinted, appearing with Holbein's illustrations in later editions.
- ⁶ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, op. cit., p. 7.
- ⁷ Ibid., p. xi.
- ⁸ See, for example, Anonymous (Francis North), *A Philosophical Essay on Music*.
- ⁹ For a thorough account of, and context for, Dudley North's career, see, Richard Grassby, *The English Gentleman in Trade: The Life and Works of Sir Dudley North 1641–91* (Clarendon Press: London, 1994).
- ¹⁰ See Peter T. Millard, 'The Chronology of Roger North's Main Works', *Review of English Studies*, New Series, vol. 24, no. 95 (August 1973), pp. 283–94; and Jamie C. Kassler and Mary Chan, *Roger North: Materials for a Chronology of his Writings, Checklist No. 1* (University of New South Wales: Kensington, New South Wales, 1989).
- ¹¹ Two earlier pamphlets have been attributed, at least in part, to Roger North: 'The Narrative of Sir Francis North ...' (1680) and 'A Letter Concerning the Disabling Clauses ...' (1690), see Jamie C. Kassler, *The Honourable Roger North, 1651–1734: On Life, Morality, Law and Tradition* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2009), pp. 363–8. No doubt more will be presented, or come to light, in the future.
- ¹² Anonymous (Dudley North), *Discourses upon Trade*. The Discourses was installed in the canon of economic literature only at the moment of political economy. It features in John Ramsay McCulloch, *A Select Collection of Early English Tracts on Commerce, from the originals of Mun, Roberts, North and others* (Political Economy Club: London, 1856), and was highly commended by Ricardo 'I had no idea that

anyone entertained such correct opinions, as are expressed in this publication, at so early a period.' See *Letters of David Ricardo to John Ramsay McCulloch*, ed. Jacob H. Hollander (Publications of the American Economic Association: New York, 1895), p. 126; this reference from Jacob H. Hollander, (ed.), *Discourses upon Trade: A Reprint of Economic Tracts* (Johns Hopkins Press: Baltimore, 1907). Roger wrote in his *Life of Dudley North*, p. 181: 'it is certain the pamphlet is, and hath been ever since, utterly sunk, and a copy not to be had for money'. Julian Hoppit, 'The Contexts and Contours of British Economic Literature, 1660–1760', *Historical Journal*, vol. 49 (2006), p. 102, quotes Terence Hutchison, *Before Adam Smith: The Emergence of Political Economy, 1662–1776* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1988), who noted that the *Discourses* 'seems to have disappeared from view almost completely very soon after its publication'.

¹³ BL Add MS 32522; this volume also includes transcripts of letters from Dudley, sent in the 1660s when he travelled to Archangel, and then via Italy to Turkey; they form part of Roger's *Life of Dudley*. The manuscript is not discussed in George D. Choksy, 'The Bifurcated Economics of Sir Dudley North and Roger North: One Holistic Analytical Engine', *History of Political Economy*, vol. 27, no. 3 (1995), pp. 477–92, a comprehensive analysis of the North brothers' economic and social theory.

¹⁴ See Julian Hoppit, 'Contexts and Contours', pp. 89–91, for a discussion of the 'typical' anonymity of economic texts in the period.

¹⁵ Anonymous (Dudley North), *Discourses upon Trade*, A2.

¹⁶ Ibid., A4v.

¹⁷ Ibid., A2r.

¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 28, '*Intimsphäre*' – this is Habermas's only reference to a spherical object and it is clearly used figuratively. We may infer a limited circulation of texts within the intimate sphere (which includes letters as well as drafts and 'problematic' texts). See Harold Love, *The Culture and Commerce of Texts: Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst, 1998) for an account of texts moving from hand to hand within coteries. Such circulation, for example, was Sir William Petty's principal means of 'publication'.

¹⁹ Anonymous (Roger North), *Reflections in Our Common Failings* (1701), *A Discourse of Fish and Fish-Ponds* (1713), and *The Gentleman's Accomptant* (1714). There are 803 entries (books and

musical scores) in the British Library catalogue for 'A Person of Honour'. The earliest is dated 1642; nearly all 'originals' are from this moment of the Bourgeois Public Sphere. Many are scholarly reproductions, many are duplicates. The number of identified authors is few – attributions run to some twenty suggested names, most, but not all aristocratic.

- 20 Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1994).
- 21 Anonymous (Roger North), *Arguments & Materials for a Register of Estates*. Land registration for the whole of the United Kingdom was introduced only following the Land Registration Act of 1862, and was not properly, or universally, achieved until the twentieth century. Local systems existed at that earlier time – reference is made to one such in Norfolk, which Roger North, as a Norfolk landowner, knew well.
- 22 Anonymous (Roger North), *Arguments & Materials*, p. 1. The device of representing 'philosophical' arguments in this way is as old as philosophical literature – that is, first person accounts of the conversations of others.
- 23 Anonymous (Roger North), *Reflections in our Common Failings, Done out of French, By a Person of Honour*, after Anonymous (Pierre de Villiers), *Réflexions sur les défauts d'autrui*, Paris, 1691. The original preface, also translated, discusses the anonymity of authors, and the anonymization of the 'real' persons discussed in the essays. We might conclude that the effect of their 'reality' was enhanced through their screening in this way – the implication being that they had been anonymized to avoid scandal, or to protect the author (an implication that might, furthermore, increase the sense of social prestige of any reader who believed that they could identify them). This kind of reality-effect and double-take was employed ubiquitously in literature of the period, and with great comic effect by numerous satirists.
- 24 A number are included in Franciscus J. M. Korsten, *Roger North (1651–1734): Virtuoso and Essayist* (Holland University Press: Amsterdam, 1981).
- 25 Anonymous (Dudley North, fourth Baron North), *Observations and advices oeconomical*.
- 26 Anonymous (Roger North), *A Discourse of Fish and Fish-Ponds*. It is likely that Roger North was himself responsible for its republication in 1726, accompanied by Sir Richard Weston's *Discours of Husbandrie* (originally edited and published by Samuel Hartlib in 1650).

²⁷ Anonymous (Roger North), *Reflections*, p. 33.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 5, 18.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 27.

³¹ Ibid., p. 6.

³² Roger Schmidt, 'Roger North's Examen: A Crisis in Historiography', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1 (Autumn, 1992), pp. 57–75, provides evidence that the *Examen*, and likely the *Reflections*, too, came about at the urging of George Hickes, the non-juror 'Bishop of Thetford' and former friend (and subsequently enemy) of White Kennett (see especially pp. 61–4).

³³ Roger North (1740), (1742), (1744). Montagu North (he spells it 'Mountagu') later published an edition of Roger (and Dudley) North's *A Discourse upon the Poor*.

³⁴ Bearing in mind and respecting Schmidt's suspicions of Roger North's apprehensions on this point, the *Examen* is far from being a 'dangerous' ideological statement like *The Hereditary Right of the Crown of England asserted*, which saw Hilkiah Bedford fined and imprisoned in 1714.

³⁵ Roger North, *Examen*, p. b.

³⁶ Butterfield writes (in Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (G. Bell and Sons: London, 1931; Norton: New York and London, 1965), p. 6.) 'We cling to a certain organisation of the past which amounts to a whig interpretation of history, and all our deference to research brings us only to admit that this needs qualifications in detail [...] there is a tendency for all history to veer over into whig history.' White Kennett and other Whig historians of his generation not only represent Whig party positions, but a methodology and purpose in historical representation for a public that inaugurates a 'modern' idea of history, or 'history in the public sphere'; Habermas is in direct descent from this.

³⁷ Roger North, *Examen*, pp. i–xiv (in order not to clutter the page and the lower margin, the numerous quotations in the following paragraphs have not been given their own specific reference).

³⁸ Anonymous (White Kennett), *An Address of Thanks to a Good Prince*.

- 39** Anonymous (W.K. A.M. = White Kennett?), *A Dialogue Between Two Friends*.
- 40** See Bennett, *White Kennett*, op. cit., for an excellent review of Kennett's career as an author and churchman; see Anonymous (William Newton), *The Life of the Right Reverend Dr. White Kennett* (1730) for a contemporary defence of Kennett against his detractors. Kennett was a remarkably interesting scholar of history in his own right, a fact not properly acknowledged in this present essay, and scarcely put right in this note.
- 41** Schmidt, 'Roger North's Examen', op. cit., p. 70, astutely relates this to a Whig cultural politics of 'politeness', citing J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1985), p. 236.
- 42** Thus the title of this essay; see note 1, above.
- 43** See below for a discussion of what might be implied by the term 'New Work'.
- 44** Roger North, *Examen* (1740), unnumbered page at front of volume.
- 45** Sir Matthew Hale (1609–76), Chief Justice, was one of the most important jurists of the seventeenth century, a colleague and adversary of Francis North, known personally to Roger North, who wrote a pungent, though admiring 'Character' him in his autobiography: Roger North, *Notes of Me: The Autobiography of Roger North*, ed. Peter T. Millard (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2000). Roger North drafted the manuscript of *Notes of Me* during the first years of his retirement. The text was first published as *The Autobiography of the Hon. Roger North [...]*, in a very corrupted transcription, edited by Augustus Jessopp (D. Nutt: London, 1887).
- 46** For a full account of this case and its contexts, see R. Deazley, 'Commentary on *Gyles v. Wilcox* (1741)', in L. Bently and M. Kretschmer (eds.), *Primary Sources on Copyright (1450–1900)*, accessed via <www.copyrighthistory.org>.
- 47** Although, bearing in mind that this would require that the anecdote was true, such a judgment depends upon our evaluation of the author's character and motives – what Aristotle would put under the heading of 'ethos' in his trio of artistic proofs in rhetoric.
- 48** 'Anecdote noun: origin French *anecdote*, or its source, medieval Latin *anecdota* [...] from Greek ἀνέκδοτα things unpublished, ἀν priv. + ἔκδοτ-ος published, from ἐκ-διδόναι to give out, publish: applied by

Procopius to his 'Unpublished Memoirs' of the Emperor Justinian, which consisted chiefly of tales of the private life of the court; whence the application of the name to short stories or particulars.' OED online, <<http://www.oed.com>>, accessed 24 November 2012.

49 Individual desire as a motive force in the economic life of a nation was one of the insights (found also in the writings of his fellow radical Tory, Nicholas Barbon) offered by Dudley North in the *Discourses upon Trade*.

50 Kassler, *The Honourable Roger North*, op. cit., *passim*.

51 In an essay in *The Friend* in 1809, Coleridge wrote: '[Roger North's] language gives us the very nerve, pulse, and sinew of a hearty, healthy conversational English', see *The Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Prose and Verse: Complete in One Volume* (Thomas, Cowperthwait and Co.: Philadelphia, 1840), p. 487. Pages 329–41 of the *Examen* were republished as 'A Discourse on the English Constitution' in William Jones (ed.), *The Scholar Armed against the Errors of the Time; or, a Collection of tracts on the principles and evidences of Christianity, etc.* (F. C. & J. Rivington: London, 1795).

52 Schmidt, 'Roger North's *Examen*', op. cit., p. 70.

53 John P. Friesen, 'The Reading of Newton in the Early Eighteenth Century: Tories and Newtonianism', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Leeds, 2004), pp. 184–209.

54 See Mary Chan and Jamie C. Kassler, *Roger North's 'The musical grammarian and Theory of sounds': digests of the manuscripts; with an analytical index of 1726 and 1728 'Theory of sounds'* by Janet D. Hine (University of New South Wales: Kensington, New South Wales, 1988).

55 North, *A Discourse on the Study of the Laws*, op. cit.

56 Kassler, *The Honourable Roger North*, op. cit., *passim*.

57 See Millard, 'Chronology', op. cit., and Kassler and Chan, *Materials*, op. cit.

58 BL Add MS page 32526, f. 2r. I have sought to carry over the provisionality of the manuscript draft by including the illegible, his strikings out and insertions; it is edited to appear unedited – as if presented 'anecdotally'.

AN 'EVER-RECURRING CONTROVERSY'

JOHN THOMPSON, WILLIAM JAMES STILLMAN
AND THE BOOTBLACKS¹

Steve Edwards

John Thompson's photographs, originally published in monthly parts through 1877 and 1878 as *Street Life in London*, have long had a place in the history of photography, but an uncertain one. *The Crawlers* or '*Hookey Alf*' of Whitechapel have often been reproduced, while frequently being confined to the dismal category of proto-documentary, which establishes an unproblematic teleology between the nineteenth-century document and its later inflections. As the publisher's note to the 1994 reprint of *Street Life in London* puts it: 'John Thompson was a pioneering documentary photographer - one of a breed for whom arduous travel under extremely difficult conditions did little to dampen enthusiasm.'² None of this tells us much. While the first historians of photography - Beaumont Newhall, Helmut Gernsheim, Walter Benjamin, Gisèle Freund and Lucia Moholy - took up a range of photographic forms in search of a 'new vision', those who followed tended to narrow their focus to constitute the history of photography on the grounds of the museum and its approved forms of taste. Documents, in contrast, belonged in

institutional archives and reports of both official and non-governmental organizations.

During the 1980s, a group of theorists and historians began to pay attention to the photographic document and its role in culture. Molly Nesbit's account of Eugène Atget and the document is for me the outstanding description and definition, and I hope to develop on her categories in this essay.³ Nesbit approaches the document as a form through the work of Atget, who, she suggests, made and sold photographs for a variety of clients. In particular, he supplied pictures to workers in the skilled Parisian trades: decorative-metal workers, illustrators, theatre designers and people who traded on nostalgia for '*vieux Paris*'. Atget was not an artist and he did not claim anything special for these images. Art was of little significance for the craft workers or designers who employed these pictures. In this sense, Nesbit characterizes the photo-document as a 'nonaesthetic', workaday form. Atget's documents, she argues, displayed two principal features: first, they were practical, utilitarian images; second, they were built on semiotic polysemy or 'openness'. Usually, they were frontal and planar, but documents have no absolute form: the same image might be used by different specialists, and so it had to be available to different kinds of specialist attention. Information, clarity and detail

are what matter in such images. According to Nesbit, 'an architectural photograph would be called a document, as would a chronophotograph, a police i.d., or an X ray. They had one thing in common: all of them were pictures that went to work.'⁴ However, before considering how the document figured in nineteenth-century debates, I

want to comment on one of the main lines of the research from the 1980s, which drew heavily on Foucault's account of 'carceral society'. As we know, for many anglophone readers and writers, this work seemed to offer an alternative to Marxism, dissolving class politics and the state into an amorphous power.⁵ The account, first advanced by John Tagg and subsequently adopted by David Green and others, suggested that these photographs represented a crucial point at which the camera extended the disciplinary gaze of the Panoptican out onto the streets.⁶ Tagg argued that Thompson's work, along with that of Thomas Annan, Dr Hugh Diamond, Arthur J. Mumby and others, entailed 'a "procedure of objectification and subjection", the transmission of power in the synaptic space of the camera'.⁷ During the second half of the nineteenth century, it was said, photography became a pervasive technology of power-knowledge that cast its web over society. Foucault was concerned with an institutional or professional 'normalizing gaze, a form of surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them.'⁸ In the 'regimes of truth' that emerged from this process, visibility was particularly important. Subjecting the bodies of the poor, the outcast and the marginal to disciplinary visibility, these theorists insisted, photography played an important role in constructing discourses of 'otherness'. Visibility exposed the objects of knowledge to controlling scrutiny. It was by defining and demarcating the 'deviant' that a normative conception of the self could be established: the 'abnormal' or 'deviant'

defined what it was to be normal. This process of investigation entailed a hierarchical vision, because in each case the person with the camera had the social authority, or money, to arrange and pose others for scrutiny: Thompson, for instance, noted the ‘trifling sums’ that he paid to poor Chinese people for ‘the privilege of taking such subjects’.⁹ Some people were authorized to look; others were subject to what Tagg called the ‘burden’ of being the ‘bearers of meaning’.¹⁰ There is reason enough to locate *Street Life* in this context. As a reviewer in the *Graphic* put it: ‘The manifold industries of the poor in our great city are transferred from the street to the drawing-room by “Street Life in London”.’¹¹ Whose street? Whose drawing-room? Another writer suggested: ‘If, henceforth, there should continue to be truth in the proverb that “there is a half of the world which knows not how the other half lives,” it will not be the fault of Mr. Thompson, or his literary coadjutor, Mr. Smith.¹² Similar comments are to be found in the *Leeds Mercury*, *Northern Echo*, *Morning Post* and a host of others; they demarcate ‘us’ from ‘them’. The account of photography that emerged in the 1980s re-evaluated these images, positioning them at the centre of photography and assigning them a determining social weight.

Of course, this is to go over old ground and the debate has moved on. For one thing, we know there is much more to Foucault than this story allows.¹³ Nevertheless, the attention to Thompson and his ilk appears to have been short-lived. The kind of images that drew so much attention during the 1980s are again slipping from view as a younger generation, shaped by the experience of neoliberalism and postmodern theory, have turned

away from power, ideology and documents. In their place, we find a new engagement with auteurism, playfulness and self-reflexivity. The current obsession with Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* and Michael Fried's photographic turn are just surface ripples of a deeper current.¹⁴ In recent historiography, the document as evidential mode has been replaced by a few key areas of investigation that bear on the nineteenth century. First, there is an exploration of the pioneers of photography (principally William Henry Fox Talbot) perceived through the lens of postmodern theory; second, there is a growing body of work concerned with photographs by women - Julia Margaret Cameron, Clementina Hawarden and those elite amateurs that created elaborately decorated picture albums; third, in line with revisionist histories of an anti-modernist stripe that find complex effects in academic art, there is attention to the elite makers such as Camille Silvy. Whether it is Talbot, Cameron or Silvy, the photographer is positioned as a self-conscious picture-maker whose work can be mined for art-historical allusions and references, and the likes of Thompson are once again occluded. These readings are heavily influenced by the art of the 1980s and the art history that has spiralled out of it, but they often seem impervious to the wider emplotment of their work: if we put aside the veneer of theory and feminism, we find ourselves not so far from Mike Weaver's 'Talbot' or Helmut Gernsheim's 'Cameron'.¹⁵ Canon critique has given way to a revivified aestheticism-cum-Victorianism, and the document again finds itself in the role of poor relation. My question is what are we to make of pictures such as those produced by Thompson? What kind of knowledge do we require to think

about these images; to imagine their appearance and disappearance from the histories of photography?

There is a wider pattern of continuity across these historiographical shifts, which involves the 'retreat from class'.¹⁶ The problem is that without the dialectics of capital and class - the critique of political economy - it is not really possible to come to terms with Thompson's work or with the character of the document, and I do not just mean the content or subject of the images.¹⁷ These are images of the casual poor, but there is more to the matter than that. Thompson's street figures will be familiar to any reader of Henry Mayhew and the emerging literature of social exploration, but one of them [1] strikes me as particularly symptomatic.¹⁸ This untitled picture appeared along with the photograph of 'the donkey boy' as illustrations to the section of *Street Life* entitled 'Clapham Common Industries'. The presence of this image suggests some awkward questions about the social position of the photographer at this time. The accompanying text by the journalist Adolphe Smith - who was to become a labour and union activist - brings out the marginal status of the photographer. The success of such itinerant photographers, Smith argued, depended more on their manners than on skill. He wrote:

Many practiced hands, who have highly distinguished themselves in the studio, when the work is brought to them, are altogether unable to earn a living when they take their stand in the open air. They have not the necessary impudence to accost all who pass by, they have no tact or diplomacy, they are unable to modify the style of language to suit the individual they happen to meet, and they rarely induce any one to submit to the painful ordeal of having a

portrait taken. On the other hand, men who are far less skilled in the art often obtain extensive custom by the sheer force of persuasion.¹⁹

According to Smith, many of the itinerants who worked Clapham Common had come down in life. They had, he said, previously: 'been tradesmen, or owned their own studios in town; but after misfortune in business or reckless dissipations, they were reduced to their present less expensive and more humble avocation'.²⁰ In the off-season, Smith argued, these men made portraits at the racetracks: often 'being locked up by the police under the Vagrancy Act', or 'sleeping in a tap-room'.²¹ The character in the photograph, Smith claimed, is represented 'with the class of subject which generally proves most profitable. Nurses with babies and perambulators are easily lured within the charmed focus of the camera'.²² This is a tale of class and gender, seduction and gullibility and there is much to be said. However, historians of photography seem to be drawn to Silvy's gentlefolk rather than to nurses, babies and common photographers.

We do not need to rely on Smith's text for our sense of the dubious nature of this practice; it is also figured by Thompson's illustration. Thompson goes out of his way to include in our field of view all those questionable features that the photographer he depicted would have carefully excluded from his portrait of baby. Look at the mean handcart rigged up as a portable developing tent; the simple display of his wares that are hopelessly out of date; the empty, plain chair, the nurse and above all the presence of the two other men. The man behind the nurse, who is dressed roughly, is, I presume, the

photographer's assistant or 'tout'. The young man, lurking in the shadow behind the tree, with what I take to be a basket, seems to be a decisive detail; he introduces a brooding and sinister presence into the frame. All this seems significant because it mirrors just what Thompson was himself doing; travelling the streets making photographs. Thompson, who was born in Edinburgh, spent most of the 1860s travelling and working in Asia: the Himalayas, Siam, Vietnam, Cambodia, Hong Kong and China.²³ The albums and books he produced reveal a simultaneous attraction and repulsion to his subjects.²⁴ In what was to become a cultural pattern, Thompson turned to photographing the English poor as something of an outsider.²⁵



1 John Thompson, 'Clapham Common Industries', from *Street Life in London*, 1877/8. Library of the London School of Economics and Political Science, R(SR)/1146.

There is a distance between Thompson and the Clapham Common photographer, but it is not clear-cut or decisive. Audrey Linkman has suggested there was a critical reorientation of perceptions of this kind of work during the 1860s.²⁶ Previously itinerant photographers had been viewed as pioneers, and their work was viewed as a decent or legitimate trade, but during this period they were repositioned by the photographic gentlemen as 'travelling bunglers' who undermined the status of the profession. These photographers made cheap portraits - sometimes for as little as sixpence - often they worked in old or cheap formats; the daguerreotype and the tintype were more common in this field than paper prints. These men were also prone to the odd dodge. The photographic gents were concerned with the way such men would tarnish their precious status; they seemed too proximate to the world of the huckster, showman or street musician. These figures congregated at sites of popular amusement, such as fairs, parks, seaside spots, race meetings and even pubs. Thompson's photographer mentions these rounds of work, and it will be remembered Smith refers to 'race meetings', 'tap rooms' and 'vagrancy'. As Linkman correctly observes, this was an area linked in the popular imagination with 'cheapjacks and tricksters, operating in the twilight zone of petty criminality beyond the pale of respectability'.²⁷ The

inclusion of this image in *Street Life* casts its shadow over all the others, and suggests that we are not looking at the secure gaze of power, but at an unstable point of view. From this perspective, the photographer appears to belong – along with other street traders such as purveyors of ‘old clothes’ and patent medicine men – in a marginal and economically precarious circle of occupations. One batch of images in *Street Life in London* focuses on cabmen, another on assorted labourers, and there are miscellaneous traders, but it is worth noting just how many of the pictures take as their subject forms of artistic labour – admittedly in its low modality. There are, in addition to Clapham Common photographers, “Caney” the Clown and ‘Italian Street Musicians’; there is a portrait of ‘Tickets’, a sign painter, and ‘The Wall Worker’ who hangs advertisements on a fence. Yet another group focuses on aesthetic pleasure: ‘Covent Garden Flower Women’; ‘Street Advertising’; the ‘Dealer in fancy-Ware’, ‘November Effigies’ and that walking picture ‘The London Boardman’. By extension, it is possible to recognize that many of the traders selected bear on bodily pleasure and taste: as well as the cheap fish seller, there are ‘Half-Penny Ices’, ‘The Street Fruit Trade’, “Mush-fakers” and Ginger Beer Makers’ and ‘The Seller of Shell-Fish’. The point is that *Street Life in London* seems, if not internal to all of this, at least proximate to it. Photographers and reporters also walked the streets plying their trade. Thompson and Smith glimpsed a connection and traced a line that put together street life and the sensations.

There is a historiographical problem here. It seems to me that once you cut away conceptions of class and ideology from the analysis of images like this

they can only appear as objects of aesthetic irony – that is to say, the moments of social anxiety, self-recognition or imbrication will be misrecognized as the defining tropes of modernist or postmodernist art. Discourse analysis dislocated from social interests means social unease can be recast as a formal *mise en abyme* of representation. The current obsession with the photo-document in conceptual art is symptomatic of this structure of feeling, because it turns on an ironized conception of the evidential mode. The fixation on ‘photo-conceptualism’ reveals a period disdain for those naive enough to actually believe in truth or reality.²⁸ My point is that, in the condition of the long 1980s, the rejection of photography as a fine art generated its aestheticist antipode. But to make sense of this anxiety we need to think about the relation between documents and pictures revolving around patterns of social division and framed by, or set against, the intense debate on the labouring poor during the period.²⁹ To be clear, I do not think *Street Life in London* engages in aesthetic irony or self-reflexive artfulness. Rather, it is a book redolent with petty-bourgeois doubts (and perhaps fears). The relation of self and other is much more immanent in Thompson’s work than that allowed for in the existing account. The respectability of photography is the key point in this instance, but it ran through everything photographers did during this period; they were profoundly insecure and the press repeatedly reinforced their association with the city’s low life and rabble. Some photographers wanted to force a clear distinction and insist on their own place in the circle of respectable professions, but what is compelling about Thompson and Smith’s book is that they seem to

have worked through both proximity and distance, attraction and repulsion, as if they were not quite sure whether they were internal or external to the precarious forms of life they depicted.

Art works and documents were torn halves of photography in the period, and they have been further prised apart in recent scholarship. Photographers wrote endlessly about art, and their discussions constantly turn on the relation to an underling, usually figured as slave, servant or mechanic. The relation of art works and humble documents is embedded in a distinction between mental and manual labour and the concomitant oppositions between abstraction or generalization and particularity or detail.³⁰ What we need to account for this problem is an oxymoronic construction – an art history from below. Here I am just going to look at one debate from the 1870s, initiated by W. J. Stillman, before returning once more to Thompson. In some ways this was the last great English debate on the character of photography before the rise of Pictorialism.

William James Stillman was an antiquarian and amateur photographer active in the Hellenistic Society. In February 1872, he published an essay that initiated an extensive controversy. If we include his replies, Stillman's argument elicited some thirty contributions. On at least three occasions, the editor of the *Photographic News* – the journal in which the debate took place – tried to call a halt to the discussion, but he found it impossible to hold back the flood of invective. Stillman's argument occasioned initial responses from H. P. Robinson and N. K. Cherrill, since they were directly implicated in his argument, but other

leading photographer-writers were also drawn in to the discussion. W. T. Bovey, George Croughton, William England and Edwin Cocking all had their say. As the editor of the *Photographic News* put it, this was an 'ever-recurring controversy'.³¹ The arguments are repetitive, but this kind of reiteration points to a knot or sticking point that registers a symptom or what we might call, shifting gear, a 'structure of feeling'.³² The discussion might appear tedious to the reader, but it animated its participants. At various points, Stillman re-entered the fray. The military metaphors - and they are ubiquitous - are apposite and register that photographers saw themselves under attack. It is an example of the hypertropic flood of figurative language that broke out whenever anyone broached the question of photography's status, and it provides access to key undercurrents of photographic ideology.³³

Stillman was a fascinating figure: an American journalist, diplomat, art critic and painter who spent most of his life in Italy, Greece, Crete and England. A friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Louis Agassiz and others, he was a key figure in the acclaimed Adirondack Club. Sometime revolutionary conspirator associated with Lajos Kossuth in Hungary and Francesco Crispi in Milan, he proved unfit to fight in the Union Army during the American Civil War and instead became US consul to Rome and Crete. He edited the first American art journal, the *Crayon*, was for a while editor of *Scribner's Magazine*, and then became a journalist for *The Times*; he wrote on the Cretan Insurrection and the revolution in Herzegovina. Stillman was not an artistic naïf: he was himself a painter and was close to Ruskin and Rosetti (Ruskin was godfather

to his son). For what it is worth, he has been called 'the first American pre-Raphaelite painter'.³⁴ In 1870, he published *The Acropolis of Athens, Illustrated Picturesquely and Architecturally in Photography*.³⁵ He also published a handbook for photographers and made technical improvements to apparatus. Leading photographic publishers sold his albumen prints, and his work is to be found in the archives of Alma-Tadema and others.³⁶ Stillman could not be ignored by the gentleman guardians of photography.

The published responses to Stillman insisted that photography was a fine art, and I have argued elsewhere that by this time their sense of self was wrapped up with this idea,³⁷ but attending to the dispute, which sometimes became very bad tempered, provides us with a way into the photographic imaginary around the time Thompson was working. One commentator signing himself 'an indignant photographer' claimed that they had 'an enemy in our camp'. He referred to the 'heresies' that Stillman's had set out 'in all their naked hideousness'. Stillman, this writer said, 'depreciated photography' and was determined to 'sink it in the estimation of its admirers as a mechanical trade'.³⁸ What had Stillman done to deserve being afflicted with this set of mixed metaphors?

The answer is that Stillman had committed the primal sin when he wrote in the *Year-book of the Photographic News* for 1872 that photography was not a fine art but a record of fact; it rendered 'what the eye may see, but no hand be it ever so skillful, render in perfection'. Photography was a 'handmaid of the knowledge of the visible world'.³⁹ Taking as

his example Robinson and Cherrill's *In the Gloaming*, he suggested this picture was a 'mis-statement made by a combination of truth'.⁴⁰ It should be remembered that Robinson's book on *Pictorial Composition* had recently appeared.⁴¹ In this account, artistic beauty sits alone and apart, while handmaids and facts keep company. Immediately, the dispute began. A writer using the pseudonym of Theophilus Thiddlemitch described these views as 'utterly heterodox and heretical' and they could not be allowed to pass.⁴² This already suggests a consensus had descended with the gloaming over photography during the 1860s. 'Thiddlemitch' responded to Stillman's suggestion that photographs were records of fact by suggesting that such pictures were: 'dry, uninteresting, hopelessly uninstructive, very "primeval forests" of useless information'. What is being said here is that documents were primitive, shapeless or unformed and unselective - according to 'Thiddlemitch', this was a 'tremendous mistake' - what was needed he thought were not copies and records but 'art'.⁴³ Stillman responded that he had not ridiculed *In the Gloaming*; in fact, he thought it was excellent, if a work of artifice. Still, he 'stood by his guns'. What makes art, he said, is not what is taken from nature, but the 'poetic regard - a charm of memory, or an intensifying of some meaning which he found in nature'. Art entailed 'idealization', 'greater unity and harmony' and in this 'photography must inevitably plead destitution'.⁴⁴ There is a basic dichotomy in Stillman's account - and it is one shared by his opponents - framed in the terms of academic aesthetics. While he was much more careful than many critics in formulating his terms, he was

suggesting that art results from the idealization of nature; in contrast, photography is an accurate record or copy of existing phenomena. Art and photography, he said, were 'antipodal'. He claimed that 'substantially and materially, photographs are records of nature' and not amenable to what the photographer thought about the subject.⁴⁵ The imagination was central to art and the document or record was the form of image which had not been marked by imagination or subjective presence. An important line demarcated photography from art, and documents from pictures.

In a published response, Robinson and Cherrill begin in military frame noting that Stillman 'has let off his guns, but the shot did not come our way particularly'. They insisted that photography was amenable to 'artistic feeling' and was more than a 'mere map-making copy of the mechanical camera'. While Stillman admitted that the work of Robinson and Cherrill displayed 'harmony and unity' and could not be dismissed as mere mechanical reproduction, he insisted that 'photography is not an art in the sense of the term which we imply when we talk of its higher meaning'. Robinson and Cherrill conceded this point, but attempted to hold back the full force of Stillman's argument and sustain a link between art and idealization.⁴⁶ Stillman's response suggested (citing the *Journal of Arts and Sciences*) that there many arts that 'manifest great technical excellence', such as glass polishing, and then continued 'a clever and dexterous boot black [is] an artist in his way'.⁴⁷ Here Stillman put his foot in it, by contrasting an art of 'technical achievement' such as bootblacking - the cleaning of shoes done on the street, often by the very poor - and an art of design in a way that

lined photography up with the manual work. And then he offered another analogy that was bound to rankle. He wrote:

There is a turning of a lathe which will, if you place a model of a statue in one compartment turn you out a perfect copy in another. Suppose the model to be a living figure and the copy to be a statue, would the mechanist, no matter what his part in the arrangement of the figure be a sculptor?⁴⁸

By the beginning of the 1870s, the term 'mechanical' had become slippery and could refer to mechanics (workers) or machines and sometimes confounded the two. Turning the handle in this dispute clearly refers to machine work, but it echoes with the constant references in the photographic literature to street musicians working with a barrel-organ as a simulacrum of artistic labour.⁴⁹ Like barrel-organ players, the effect seemed artistic, but it was utterly mechanical and mindless. Here we can already see some key terms and oppositions: ignorant mechanics, glass polishers, bootblacks, lathe turners and copies stand in opposition to art works, imagination, selection and gentlemen. Photography was another word for social division. Citing Peter Le Neve-Foster, Stillman insisted that 'photography should maintain its place in the witness-box' if not as a clue to identity of the criminal then as 'a certain witness to the harmony, majesty, and actual beauty of nature'.⁵⁰ This did not mean running down photography, since a great engineer did not have to be an artist, the relation of photography to art, was akin to that of philosophy to poetry or 'the school master to the singing master'. It was better, he said and his republicanism came through in this,

to be ‘photographer-in-ordinary to nature than portrait painter to Her Majesty’.⁵¹

W. T. Bovey picked out a key sentence from Stillman, who had said: ‘With mechanical aid and guidance, photography truthfully transcribes; *ergo*, it produces that which is not art.’⁵² Bovey rightly observed that Stillman was separating out:

‘art’ as opposed to ‘the arts’, which last he stintedly defines ‘arts of execution or technical achievement’. The term art, which when not proceeded by the definite article, he interprets as ‘an art of design’ implying, I presume, that it designs before it executes.⁵³

Photographers responded by attempting to subjectivize themselves, stressing the guiding intelligence behind the camera. Stillman gave a list of the techniques that photographers tried to assert their presence: ‘the contrivance of Rembrandt tricks, and double printing’; the ‘multiplication of dodges, &c.’; ‘designing a picture, and picking up parts here and there to print together in one whole’.⁵⁴ The latter referred directly to the work of Robinson and Cherrill. In any case, Bovey had put his finger on the wound by noting Stillman’s distinction between art and the mechanical arts. It is a story of architects and bees. Among the many published comments in this dispute, Albert Dumsday drew attention to Dr Nuttall’s distinction between mental arts that required ‘the exercise of mind more than that of the body’; and physical arts ‘in which manual labour is chiefly concerned including the various trades and manufactures’. The mental arts were subdivided into ‘*Liberal*, *Polite*, and *Fine* arts’. This is a neat summary of an old dichotomy in Western thought running back at least to Plato and structured around the mental/manual

labour couplet.⁵⁵ Dumsday would like to have included photography in the Liberal Arts, but he knew that painting depended on the ‘mind’s eye’ and photography on the ‘bodily eye’. Where painting was an ideal art, photography was a material one.⁵⁶ On the one side was the mind and the imagination and on the other the material body. The distinctions between ‘noble’, ‘worthy’ and ‘cultivated’ mental work and vulgar labour – between the ‘mind’ and the ‘hand’ or ‘body’ – structured thinking on art and work from the ancients through the Renaissance and Reynolds up until the nineteenth century and beyond. It is interesting that shoes play such a profound role in this debate.

You will remember that Stillman compared photographs as records to the work of the shoebblack. Jacques Rancière has constructed an account of art, knowledge and work in which the lowly shoemaker plays a prominent figural role. This is not the place to discuss Rancière’s anti-foundational philosophy of equality and its relation to Marxism; there are overlaps, but the difference is marked and the perspectives are not easily reconciled. Here, I am concerned with the way that he has revealed the shoemaker as a structuring point for orders of knowledge in philosophy and sociology from the ancient Greeks to our own time. High-flown language, the language of experts, has often been produced by allocating the shoemaker a fixed place outside thought; think of Pliny the Elder’s tale of the ignorant shoemaker who dared to criticize details in a painting by Apelles and was told that he should ‘stick to his last’ – a phrase still used in English for someone who speaks of things beyond their competence.

According to Rancière, the rule of anti-egalitarian thought turns on the distribution of roles or places; artisans are expected to stick to their task and know their place. At the same time, the shoemaker poets of early nineteenth-century France, in refusing to accept their place in the social hierarchy and aspiring to write poetry or philosophy, confounded the allotted positions of class.⁵⁷ It is in this mixing of roles or crossing of lines that Rancière locates equality. His argument need not be confined to his French examples. Looking back from 1880, Thomas Frost recalled spending time with Jem Blackaby ‘in the shoemaker’s garret, talking by turns of politics and poetry’.⁵⁸ These two Chartist cobblers made no distinction between politics and poetry; it was the elision that made them who they were, enacting a double dislocation from the worker’s world that was simultaneously a claim to social transformation. In *Street Life in London*, the shoebblack, even lower than shoemakers, stands for a form of work that encapsulates the social division of mental and manual labour and positions photography with the latter.

A critical examination of the photographic writing of the period reveals that art and labour are mutually exclusive categories, and yet they depend on each other for their values and associations. The concept of the artist as a free subject rests on the ideology of the worker as a servile copyist: the worker is a man, or woman, without a mind who must work because he or she is not free to determine their own destiny. The worker in bourgeois ideology is narrow, constrained and lacking in imagination. The claims that begin to be made in the 1860s for the photographers as artistic

subjects inscribed a contradiction at the heart of the practice. The veracity of the photograph – its intellectual force – depended upon its being ascribed the attributes of *mechanical* labour. This conception of photography established a hierarchy of the forms of work with the artist at its apex. In the contrast of mechanical and intellectual labour – of vulgar photographs and elevated art – a dialectical relation was set in train. The mechanical character of the photograph emancipated the artist in a way the traditional historians of art could not imagine, since it occupied the structural position of manual, rather than intellectual, labour. In doing so, photographers found themselves playing the role of under-labourer, or maid servants, or slave, to the artist, who had been cast as the subject who was at the furthest remove from the world of work. This relation could be mobilized internally and externally. Internally, it demarcated photographic pictures from photographic documents; externally, it separated photography from true art. Professional photographers needed the language of art – often in a full academic idiom – in order to assert their own subjective presence in the face of the contaminating apparatus.⁵⁹ At the other pole of this dialectic stood the document – a subjectless and immediate form. To make pictures with a machine was tolerable – important even – only so long as no one claimed these images were art works. The moment that claim was made, then *both* the truth content of the document *and* the work of a free and liberal subject were called into question. The field of debate was fluid, but the practice we know as photography is made from the fragments produced in this collision of worlds.

Stillman was smart. He knew that that photography did not slot simply into the available conceptions. He wrote: ‘When photography condescends to flatter and be agreeable, and tries to make things prettier than they are, it is of no importance what it does, it is damned as photography and fallacious as art.’ This is not so far from Baudelaire’s view.⁶⁰ It might seem that he advocated that modernist old chestnut a ‘new form of communication’; after all, he did say that ‘every guild must define its own qualifications’. The real point is that he located photography on the wrong side of a divide. Photography was a useful art, as well as industrial, but it most definitely is not an art of design, but of record. Just to give one last telling citation from this important paper, he said:

I mean that photography is an art-science, and has nothing to do with anything but truth and the best way to tell it; and that it is, therefore, the antipodes of art, as science is of poetry, just the other pole of representation – the essential elements in one being imagination and the expression of artistic individuality; and of the other, the absolute physical fact.⁶¹

This is about as clear as statement as could be imagined of what Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* called the ‘antinomies of bourgeois thought’, or what Allan Sekula, following Lukács, described as the ‘chattering ghosts’ of bourgeois art and bourgeois

science that shape what we might call photography’s hauntology.⁶² Photographers needed this dirempt practice, but they did not want to admit to it or talk about it, certainly not with this kind of directness. They preferred to shuffle between poles, covering themselves with the lustre of art while deploying the mechanical guarantee.

For his lucidity, Stillman drew their ire. The editor of the *Photographic News* responded, stating that Stillman ‘utterly erred’ and referring to his ‘pernicious error’ and his ‘cardinal error’.⁶³

The debate went on and on, circling the same basic distinctions and antimonies.⁶⁴ Stillman shifted his terms somewhat, focusing on hand work, but his argument remained basically the same. Photography is ‘an art’ or an ‘art-science’. The editor intervened insisting that photographers had refuted all of Stillman’s arguments, and yet again Stillman replied.⁶⁵ The arguments continued, without anything substantive added to the basic distinctions. In fact, these same oppositions have been repeated throughout much of the history of photography. The year 1888 – in which George Eastman launched his Kodak – represents one moment in a process of pathological repetition. It was the development of the second wave of amateur photography that once more injected a tone of *ressentiment* into the photographic press. For one thing, the rise of the amateur was already well under way when Eastman made his contribution. For example, John Taylor has examined the vituperative tone that permeates the writing of P. H. Emerson and that is fixed on the new amateurs and day-trippers.⁶⁶ In the debates of the 1880s and 1890s, the amateur appeared to transport the characteristics of the vulgar and the mass into photography itself. The figure of the amateur opened old wounds, and again suggested the photographer’s proximity to the world of work. This argument is equally applicable to the very different aesthetic tendency of Pictorialism, which came to the fore in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. All that gum-smudging offered another

petty-bourgeois utopia of art. Take, for instance, the category of ‘fuzziness’ that appeared in an exchange in the *British Journal of Photography* in 1897. J. H. Baldock, defending the concept of sharp pictures, wrote: ‘Fuzziness, I take it, is one of the attempts to make a photographic picture rival a hand painted-picture. As well might a player on the barrel-organ try to emulate Paganini on his violin!'⁶⁷ While C. Moss in the same debate argued:

It may be, and is, argued that the camera is a machine and therefore cannot give anything but mechanical results, and, consequently, photography is doomed to stand for ever outside that circle of art to which painting and drawing are admitted.⁶⁸

The only thing that it seems appropriate to say at this point is *déjà vu*.



2 John Thompson, 'The Wall Worker', from *Street Life in London*, 1877/8. Library of the London School of Economics and Political Science, R(SR)/1146.

Despite the many changes that have taken place, the splits between elevated and base, esteemed art and vulgar document, artist and worker, remain the ordering conditions of photographic knowledge. But these days the allotropic form and its allegorical shadow are simply assumed rather than openly debated. The terms of this structure run through the avant-garde, the new social landscape and conceptual art, all the way to the practices that

figure in Michael Fried's book and considerations of tableau photography. But I want to conclude by returning to Thompson one last time, because I think there is a fragment of another vision in his book, or at least a point for allegorisis that opens up a different image of the worker, and it is one that if taken seriously might necessarily reconfigure our account of the photography. *Street Life in London* includes a photograph of a cobbler and two images of bootblacks. 'The Wall Worker' depicts three men outside a pub with one figure standing and two seated [2]. The man on the right, who has neither pipe nor tankard, is 'Cannon', who was once a prosperous shoemaker employing as many as thirty workers and specializing in children's morocco boots. Mortgaged and losing skilled men to 'sodgerin' during the Crimean War, Cannon ended up in the workhouse. From there he became a crossing sweep and then a wall worker - hanging cheap advertising on a fence or wall. Here he is idle, a cobbler out of place. Not that we should romanticize, Cannon attributed the decline of the English tradesman to the 'pride of the working classes' (trade unions and strikes) and fashion. He is one of the Thompson's figures who have come down in life, and his presence suggests that viewers in their drawing rooms might not be entirely secure. There is not much more to this example than that, and I have included it mainly for the sake of completing a little series.



3 John Thompson, 'The Independent Shoe-Black', from *Street Life in London*, 1877/8. Library of the London School of Economics and Political Science, R(SR)/1146.

'The Independent Shoe-Black' concludes the volume [3]. Here a boy cleans a gentleman's boot while four men look on; it is likely that their attention has been caught by the presence of the photographer and journalist. Smith's narrative concentrates on the conflicts between those competing in the trade; between men and boys; the able bodied and the disabled: 'useful, though perhaps unfair, patronage is accorded to the members of the Boot-black Brigades' – licensed bootblacks. The story told here is of an independent black and the hardships of the trade. This is an odd choice of subject for a book or

an image addressed to the respectable, because it was those organized in the Shoe-Black Brigade, with their scarlet jacket, peaked cap and identifying number, who suggested paternalistic intervention against 'demoralization'.⁶⁹

The blacks in the Brigade were licensed by the police, moralized and tolerated by the authorities, whereas an unlicensed black like the one depicted suggested a different kind of licence: the unordered life of the pauper or the 'residuum', usually perceived as heathen, unruly and criminal.⁷⁰ Perhaps the boy is meant to present the viewer with all those associations called up by demoralized labour. Except Smith's text openly identifies with this figure and his independence; in contrast, he suggests the Brigades and the process of licensing shoeblacks has 'decidedly trespassed on the freedom of the street industries'.⁷¹ Gareth Stedman Jones has argued that the primary ideological lens through which pauperism was perceived in the 1870s was that of 'demoralization', and he links this directly to the agenda of a professional middle class in the making. Moralizing intervention was to be their task and their guarantee of authority. This photograph of a young shoeblack and accompanying text do not fit that ideological purview. Whatever its problems, *Street Life in London* is closer to life on the street than professional moralizers.



4 John Thompson, 'Jacobus Parker, Dramatic Reader, Shoe-Black, and Peddler', from *Street Life in London*, 1877/8. Library of the London School of Economics and Political Science, R(SR)/1146.

Another image [4] provides, if anything, a stronger interruption, once more pointing to Thompson's uncertainty, but also refusing the story set out by Stillman and

his critics. 'Jacobus Parker, Dramatic Reader, Shoe-Black, and Peddler' is represented standing at his accustomed "pitch".⁷² Seventy years old, half blind and pro-temperance, Parker had been a vellum binder in the Treasury Office, while working in his spare time in the theatre and improving himself. After an illness that cost him the sight of one eye, he left his place, failed in business with his son as an independent bookbinder and found himself in the Lambeth Workhouse. Parker

discharged himself from this Bastille and made a living as a dramatic reader performing Shakespeare, Goldsmith, Burns and others on the streets. By the time Thompson found him, he was poor – living in a ‘garret’ – and combining blacking shoes with performing poetry. The presence of Parker in *Street Life in London* gives the lie alike to ancient philosophers and Royal Academicians, to bourgeois journalists and gentlemen photographers. The poor man may be compelled to graft and grind, but his place is not fixed or immutable. The division of mental and manual labour that shaped the categories of photography might correspond to social division, but this was a historical and not a natural process. Parker too would have liked to put behind him bootblacking and grovelling at the feet of rich men; his great dream was to perform a ‘Shakespearian evening’. We do not know if it ever came to pass, but we do know that boot blacks, even lower down the social scale than cobblers, might also contemplate poetry while cleaning shoes. How then would we need to think of photography?

¹ A version of this essay was presented in 2010 at the conference ‘Why Photography Matters as Document as Never Before’, Rovira i Virgili University, Tarragona, Spain. That paper appeared in Catalan in Jorge Ribalta (ed.), *Per què la fotografia és avui més important com document que mai* (The Private Space Books: Barcelona, 2012), pp. 73–103. I would like to thank Jorge Ribalta, who invited me to speak and edited the conference proceedings.

² John Thompson, *Victorian Street Life in Historic Photographs* (Dover Publications: New York, 1994).

³ Molly Nesbit, Atget’s Seven Albums (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1992). See also Nesbit, ‘The Use of History’, *Art in America*, vol. 74 (February 1986), pp. 72–83; Nesbit, ‘Photography, Art and Modernity (1910–30)’, in Jean-Claude Lemagny and André Rouillé (eds.), *A History of Photography: Social and Cultural Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1987), pp. 103–23. For a

detailed account of Nesbit's argument, see my review 'A Walk on the Wild Side: Atget's Modernism', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1993), pp. 86–90.

⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵ Foucault has recently reappeared as a different kind of thinker.

⁶ John Tagg, 'A Means of Surveillance: The Photograph as Evidence in Law', in *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1988), pp. 66–116; David Green, 'On Foucault: Disciplinary Power and Photography', *Camerawork*, no. 32 (1985), pp. 6–9; 'A Map of Depravity', *Ten.8*, no. 18 (1985), pp. 37–43.

⁷ Tagg, 'A Means of Surveillance', op. cit., p. 92.

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1977), p. 25.

⁹ John Thompson in Vicki Goldberg (ed.), *Photography in Print* (University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque, 1981), p. 164.

¹⁰ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, op. cit., p. 6.

¹¹ 'Christmas Books', *The Graphic*, 1 December 1877.

¹² 'Illustrated Books', *Daily News*, 26 November 1877.

¹³ Foucault's late lectures addressing 'biopower', 'biopolitics' and 'subjectivization' provide a different perspective and one of more interest to contemporary Marxists. See, for example, Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France* (Picador: New York, 2007); *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France* (Picador: New York, 2008). Foucault's late lectures and writing made an impact on a range of radical thinkers from Daniel Bensaïd to Toni Negri.

¹⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (Vintage: London, 1993); Geoffrey Batchen (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2011); Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2008). This is to reduce neither Barthes nor the debates on his work to this symptom. It is also fair to note that Fried has his own long-standing agenda.

- ¹⁵ Mike Weaver, 'Henry Fox Talbot: Conversation Pieces', in Mike Weaver (ed.), *British Photography in the Nineteenth Century: The Fine Art Tradition* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1989), pp. 11–23; Weaver, 'Diogenes with a Camera', in Weaver (ed.), *Henry Fox Talbot: Selected Texts and Bibliography* (GK Hall: Boston, Massachusetts, 1993), pp. 1–25; Helmut Gernsheim, *Julia Margaret Cameron: Her Life and Photographic Work* (Aperture: New York, 1975).
- ¹⁶ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat From Class or a New 'True' Socialism* (Verso: London, 1986).
- ¹⁷ Art history as a discipline seems impervious to the current renaissance in Marxist theory. It is as if art historians did not have to bother themselves with Marxism once Althusser exited the scene.
- ¹⁸ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those That Will Work, Those That Cannot Work and Those That Will Not Work*, 4 vols (Dover Publications: New York, 1968).
- ¹⁹ Adolphe Smith, in Thompson, *Street Life in London* (1877); republished as *Victorian Street Life in Historic Photographs*, op. cit., p. 31.
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 33.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Ibid., p. 31.
- ²³ David Jacobs, 'Thompson, John (1837–1921)', John Hannavy (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, vol. 2 (Routledge: New York, 2008), pp. 1387–8.
- ²⁴ Thompson published *The Straits of Malacca, Indo-China and China* (1875) and *Illustrations of China and its People* (1873–4). All are available, with different titles, in modern reprints.
- ²⁵ For the outsider's view in photography, see Steve Edwards, 'Disastrous Documents', *Ten.8*, no. 15 (1984), pp. 12–23.
- ²⁶ Audrey Linkman, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits* (Tauris Parke Books: London and New York, 1993).
- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 148.
- ²⁸ In fact, I think the current mood significantly misrecognizes the relation to photography in some of the best works of conceptual art and what

followed. See John Roberts, *The Impossible Document: Photography and Conceptual Art in Britain 1966–1976* (Camerawords: London, 1997); Blake Stimson, *The Pivot of the World: Photography and its Nation* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2006); and Steve Edwards, *Martha Rosler: The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems* (Afterall: London, 2012).

- ²⁹ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1976).
- ³⁰ For this debate, see Steve Edwards, *The Making of English Photography, Allegories* (Penn State University Press: University Park, Pennsylvania, 2006). Perhaps this is the place to acknowledge my debt to Andrew Hemingway's work on British art and aesthetics: Andrew Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge and New York, 1992). I should also mention John Barrell's *The Body of the Public: The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1986). Of course, that makes it necessary to point to Hemingway once more: Andrew Hemingway, 'The Political Theory of Painting Without the Politics', *Art History*, vol. 10, no. 3 (September 1987), pp. 381–95.
- ³¹ Editorial, 'An Art Critic on Photography in Relation to Art', *Photographic News*, 15 March 1872, p. 122.
- ³² Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (New Left Books: London, 1970); Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1978). For a version of this argument in art history, see T. J. Clark, 'On the Social History of Art', *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (Thames & Hudson: London, 1974); On 'structure of feeling', see Raymond Williams, *The Country and City* (Paladin: St Albans, 1975); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1977).
- ³³ For the heightening of metaphorization, see Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900* (Verso: London, 1998).
- ³⁴ William James Stillman, *The Autobiography of a Journalist* (Houghton, Mifflin and Company: Boston and New York, 1901); Elizabeth Lindquist-Cock, 'Stillman, Ruskin and Rossetti: The Struggle Between Nature and Art', *History of Photography*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1979), pp. 1–14; Barbara Rotundo, 'William James Stillman', in *Catalogue of the William James Stillman Collection* (Friends of the Union College Library:

Schenectady, 1974), pp. xi–xxi; Deborah Harlan, *William James Stillman: Images in the Archives of the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies* (Council of the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies and Council of the British School at Athens: London, 2009).

35 William James Stillman, *The Acropolis of Athens: Illustrated Picturesquely and Architecturally in Photography* (F. S. Ellis: London, 1870).

36 His two-volume autobiography contains the odd line on his photographic activities, but there is not a word about the controversy. He mentions having to leave his photographic apparatus when fleeing down a mountain in Crete; he notes that when his first wife was dying in Crete, he himself ‘was prostrated mentally and physically, and unfit for anything but my photography’; he also refers to the publication of his Athens photographs, which he said ‘cleared for me about \$1000’. William James Stillman, *The Autobiography of a Journalist*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 62, 69, 76. This is not unusual; these disputes mattered for photographers, but were incidental matters for those bourgeois professionals who became embroiled in them. See, for example, the autobiography of Frederick Pollock, *Personal Remembrances of Sir Frederick Pollock, Second Baronet*, 2 vols (Macmillan: London, 1887). For many years, Pollock was president of the Photographic Society, but this activity does not figure in his large book.

37 Edwards, *The Making of English Photography, Allegories*, op. cit.

38 An Indignant Photographer, ‘The Art Controversy’, *Photographic News*, 8 March 1872, p. 117.

39 William James Stillman, *Year-book of the Photographic News*, 1872, p. 51.

40 Ibid.

41 H. P. Robinson, *Pictorial Effect in Photography, Being Hints on Composition and Chiaroscuro for Photographers* (Piper & Carter: London, 1869).

42 Theophilus Thiddlemitch, ‘Recent Opinions of Photographic Art’, *Photographic News*, 9 February 1872, p. 68.

43 Ibid. It is notable that Peter Le Neve-Foster was expressing similar views about Robinson’s work: ‘clouds gone mad’. For this, Thiddlemitch sanctioned and forgave him, but not Stillman. See also W. T. Bovey, ‘Mr. Foster and his Critics’, *Photographic News*, 16 February 1872, p. 78.

- 44** William James Stillman, 'The Art Question', *Photographic News*, 16 February 1872, p. 80.
- 45** Ibid. According to Stillman, photography 'may substitute an agreeable and well composed sky for a bad one, a good corner of a hedge row for a bad one – may even, by judicious turning a head this way or that, hide the worse and show the better view of a face; but it still remains what the lens sees it and the camera records. With all your thinking you cannot make a hair that is white on the screen come black on the film.'
- 46** H. P. Robinson and N. K. Cherrill, 'The Art Question: In Reply to Mr Stillman', *Photographic News*, 23 February 1872, p. 94. They added a note that *In the Gloaming* was the least appropriate of their pictures for the kind of error Stillman thought he had found, implying it was not a combination print.
- 47** Stillman, 'The Art Question', op. cit., p. 105. Spinoza earned his living as a glass polisher, and if I were really clever I would work that in here.
- 48** Ibid., p. 106. He continued: 'I have seen a machine, in fact in which a person might be laced, and accurate measurements be taken, at hundreds of points, of his figure, and then a mass of clay substituted for him, the points closed in again, left his figure completely indicated in the clay, so that only the intervals between the points needed to be cut away to make the entire statue, accurately roughed out. Will my opponents admit that in either of these cases the operator is an artist? If not, in what sense is the photographer as such, an artist; and if a good photographer is not necessarily an artist, how can photography be asserted to be Art?'
- 49** See Edwards, *The Making of English Photography, Allegories*, op. cit.
- 50** Stillman, 'The Art Question', op. cit., p. 106.
- 51** Stillman, *Year-book of the Photographic News*, op. cit., p. 51; Robinson and Cherrill, 'The Art Question: In Reply to Mr Stillman', op. cit., p. 117. Robinson and Cherrill responded by claiming that 'Mr. Stillman runs into the fatal error of separating the *man* and the *means*. We have never claimed for photography that it could do pictures by turning a handle.' The same point is made by another critic who noted the 'ever recurring controversy' about art and photography 'consists in confounding the unintelligent means with the intelligent agent and in measuring the result by the method.' Anonymous, 'An Art Critic on Photography in its Relation to Art', *Photographic News*, 15 March 1872, p. 122.
- 52** Bovey, 'The Art Question', op. cit., p. 127.

- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ William James Stillman, Letter, *Photographic News*, 15 March 1872, p. 129.
- ⁵⁵ For a consideration of these distinctions in the contemporary literature of photography, see Antoine Claudet, 'The Art Claims of Photography', *Photographic News*, 20 September 1861, p. 447. For the extended ramifications, Edwards, *The Making of English Photography, Allegories*, op. cit. Also of interest is Joel Snyder, 'Res Ipsa Loquitur', in Lorraine Daston (ed.), *Things that Talk: Object Lessons From Art and Science* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2004), pp. 195–221. For the wider debate, see Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (1867) (Lawrence & Wishart: London, 1954); Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (Macmillan: London, 1978).
- ⁵⁶ Alfred Dumsday, 'The Division in the Arts', *Photographic News*, 28 March 1872, p. 155.
- ⁵⁷ Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labour: The Worker's Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 1989); Jacques Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor* (Duke University Press: Durham, North Carolina, 2004). For the history of militant shoemakers, see also Eric Hobsbawm and Joan Scott, 'Political Shoemakers', in Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson: London, 1984), pp. 103–30.
- ⁵⁸ Mike Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2009), p. 6.
- ⁵⁹ Edwards, *The Making of English Photography, Allegories*, op. cit.
- ⁶⁰ Charles Baudelaire, 'On photography' [1859], in Beaumont Newhall (ed.), *Photography: Essays and Images* (Secker & Warburg: New York, 1981), pp. 112–13.
- ⁶¹ William James Stillman, Letter, *Photographic News*, 15 March 1872, p. 129.
- ⁶² 'The antimonies of bourgeois thought' is the title of Section II of Lukács's great essay 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', in Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Merlin Press: London, 1971). This idea was applied to photography by Allan Sekula: Allan Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973–1983* (The Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design: Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1984), p. xv. For 'hauntology', see Jacques

Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (Routledge: London, 1994). Much of the subsequent debate is collected in Michael Sprinker (ed.), *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium On Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx* (Verso: London and New York, 1999). For a different version of Gothic Marxism, see David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism* (Brill: Leiden, 2011).

- 63 Editorial, 'Is Photography a Fine Art?', *Photographic News*, 28 March 1872, p. 145. 64 Stillman reiterated: 'The proper function of photography is the recording of truth – facts, if you please – and that any work which has been mended for the sake of pictorial modifications, or to make it resemble a work of design (as I use the word), has lost just so much of its value as a photograph – that, in fact, so-called art-photography (i.e., employing photography to produce artificial combinations) is not increasing, but diminishing the value of the result, and is, in fact, really an obstacle to the perfecting of the true art of photography, just as retouching is a cause of toleration of much bad work, and of much photographic shortcoming.' William James Stillman, 'The Art Question: An Explanatory Rejoinder', *Photographic News*, 5 April 1872, p. 165.
- 65 Editorial, 'Is Photography a Fine Art?', op. cit., pp. 169–71; W. J. Stillman, 'The Art Question', *Photographic News*, 12 April 1872, p. 179.
- 66 John Taylor, 'Landscape and Leisure', in Neil McWilliam and Veronica Sekules (eds.), *Life and Landscape: P. H. Emerson – Art and Photography in East Anglia, 1885–1900* (Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts: Norwich, 1986), pp. 73–82; 'The Alphabetic Universe: Photography and the Picturesque Landscape', in Simon Pugh (ed.), *Reading Landscape: Country – City – Capital* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1990), pp. 177–96; 'Travellers, Tourists and Trippers on the Norfolk Broads', *A Dream of England: Landscape, Photography and the Tourist's Imagination* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1994), pp. 90–119.
- 67 'Sharp Versus Fuzzy Photographs', *British Journal of Photography*, 31 December 1897, pp. 840–2. It should be noted that the categories of 'fuzziness' and 'woolliness' are to be found in the middle of the 1860s.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 For a discussion of the shoeblack and the Brigades in paintings of the period, see Nancy Rose Marshall, *City of Gold and Mud: Painting Victorian London* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2012), pp. 169–77.

70 Jones, *Outcast London*, op. cit.

71 Thompson, *Street Life in London*, op. cit., p. 131.

72 Ibid., p. 47.

CALAVERAS AND COMMODITY FETISHISM

THE UNHALLOWED SUPERNATURAL IN THE WORK OF JOSÉ GUADALUPE POSADA¹

Tom Gretton

This essay discusses some of the printed pictures of devils and animated skeletons that José Guadalupe Posada made in Mexico City from his arrival there in 1888 through into the 1910s; he died early in 1913.² Posada produced thousands of printing blocks on a huge range of topics, both variously secular and variously religious for illustrated newspapers, pamphlets and books. However, his major claim to posthumous fame derives from the illustrations he made for Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, a publisher of cheap newspapers, chapbooks and single-sheet 'street literature'.³ This is an exceptional body of work, not least because it has survived in quantities unusual for cheap mass-produced printed material, which almost always suffers from the law 'the more there were, the fewer there are'. Vanegas Arroyo kept the blocks Posada made for him, and used them for different subjects, in different layouts, with different texts, for years and indeed decades afterwards.

One must assume that most of Posada's blocks were made on commission, that Vanegas Arroyo asked

Posada, whose business was located a few city blocks away, for a treatment of a specified subject in an image of a certain size. So although it may be accurate to call the images 'Posadas', it is not helpful to give that name to the objects in which the pictures were printed.⁴ On any Vanegas Arroyo sheet or pamphlet, several cultural agents (one or more print-makers, one or more writers, the people who did the typesetting and the page-making as well as the press-men) have been at work. So I will call these objects Posada/Vanegas Arroyo sheets, or PVA sheets for short.

Posada's work has been celebrated now for ninety years, in Mexico, in the United States, in South America, and in Europe both east and west, via a flow of articles, books and exhibitions and the opening of museums in Mexico (Aguascalientes, 1972) and museum and library collections in the US and elsewhere. It has achieved this status through a combination of factors, including the need to construct a 'national-popular' culture in Mexico in the aftermath of the Revolution, the requirement of modernist art practice to identify and find value in its 'primitive' and ancestral other, and the availability of this body of work as a screen on which to project ideas of 'the political artist', 'the people' and 'Mexican identity'.⁵ Alongside these accidental influences on Posada's critical fortune, there is the fact that his output as printed in the PVA sheets

has a striking materiality, a complex position in the play of cultural influences in modernizing Mexico City, and a considerable strength of design and draughtsmanship. These qualities enable his output to sustain the cultural work that for the best part of a century it has been asked to undertake.⁶

This essay frames Posada's printed pictures in a different way. They can be understood to have provided a set of bleak metaphors for and commentaries on the realities of city life for subaltern groups under modern capitalism. They can also be understood to have provided representational and behavioural 'weapons of the weak'.⁷ At the same time, they provided, for a significant section of the population of Mexico City and its hinterland, an ironizing and self-devaluating induction into a commodified visual and printed-news culture. These pictures reward such interpretations, and respond to such hypotheses, as least as richly as they have until now rewarded interpretations that have cast them as 'popular' in the drama of the myth of origin of the Mexican nation.⁸

Of the huge and various set of pictures made by Posada for Vanegas Arroyo, one group has had an especially splendid critical fortune: the *calaveras* (skulls) and those *ejemplo* (example) images that show devils attending the devastation of families. For this body of images, I will construct an argument that links what is represented with the commodity-form functions of these sheets, in particular their embodiment of 'cheapness' and their negation of the benefits that print-culture pedagogy was understood to bring to those interpellated by it. That is to say, I offer an analysis that shows that the power of the PVA sheet lies, at least partly, in its synthesis of iconography, visual form, genre and commodity-form. I interpret these synthesized aspects of the sheets in the context of the incomplete, imperfect and contested processes of class formation in Mexico City in the generation before the Revolution.⁹ In this frame, I take their

iconography to be a representation of migration to cities as the work of the devil, and of life in the city as a purgatory at best. I argue that the primary audience for these prints was urban, literate and with occasional spare cash for recreational reading. This audience was not drawn from the *pelados* and *léperos*, whose presence on the street evoked bourgeois disgust and fear (and who are well represented, often with that spin, in Posada's oeuvre), but from another group, marginalized in ways and by processes different from those that pauperized the *pelados*.¹⁰ For the consumers of PVA sheets, whose integration into the urban socioeconomy had not been completely disastrous, the sheets produced and reproduced both a material inclusion in and a cultural exclusion from a commodified, modern urban existence – that is, a subaltern position. This chapter does not deal with the question of whether the role of these sheets was causal or symptomatic; but for me, the production and reproduction of a relationship to the means of consumption within a given mode of consumption has a claim to be thought of as causal.

My title is adapted from that of a book by Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*.¹¹ Taussig, at that time a Marxist anthropologist, investigated

the history, and the contemporary significance, of devil-worship in the tin mines of Bolivia and on the sugar plantations of western Colombia.¹² ‘Devil’ here is a collective noun: in this context Catholicism has to some extent managed to simplify the spirit world into two opposing cartels, one of good and one of evil, but it has failed to convert those cartels into stable monopolies. Taussig found that both in mining communities and among manual workers on

sugar plantations an intensification of capitalist exploitation was accompanied by an intensification of forms of devil-cult. The mine, and the ore, have a 'devil' guardian, and groups of workers maintain altars to him within the mines. This spirit owner of the mountain has evolved into a devil, a malevolent power, since the Spanish arrived. In contrast, the spirit owners of agricultural resources, which are much less turned to the market, remain, as the sources suggest they were in the pre-Columbian world, supernatural powers with the capacity to help or hurt us, a tendency to do both indiscriminately, and an unstable willingness to be drawn into relations of reciprocal benefit. Individual cane-cutters are said by their colleagues to make bargains with what they characterize as the devil to increase their productivity, and thus their income. Such diabolical bonuses are fated to be sterile: the worker concerned will spend the gains on drink or on similar pleasures, not on accumulation. Taussig understands these phenomena as being produced by social groups whose world view is based on analogical relationships rather than causal ones (the barter relationship, the exchange of different but similar use-values, being one of analogy) as they are forced to make adjustments to a world in which use-values are replaced through the capitalist market by exchange-value, by the fetish forms that are money and the commodity.

Taussig's ambitions for his data are enormous and focus on the desire to make us see the workings of the market not as natural but as a social construct, one that to these outsiders looks to be sterile, diabolical, unnatural. He argues that participation in 'devilish' activities gives those involved a set of resources through which to resist smooth insertion

into the market; for him, devil beliefs show that the culture of these neophyte proletarian miners is in an important respect antagonistic to the process of commodity formation. In mediating the oppositions intrinsic to these acculturations to capitalism, such beliefs may even stimulate the political action necessary to thwart or transcend it.¹³ Thus, for Taussig, devil-cults are not some picturesque outcrop of ‘primitive’ or ‘traditional’ beliefs that have till now withstood the erosions of time and ‘reality’, but a cultural innovation, a new way of dealing with new circumstances, though one that gains much of its power by making a plausible claim to being old. For Taussig, devil beliefs are antithetical rather than antecedent.

I want to use Taussig’s schema to provide an analogical understanding of the processes of which I take Posada’s devils and skeletons for the PVA sheets to be both constitutive and symptomatic. Antonio Vanegas Arroyo printed and published many different sorts of cheap commodities: a non-periodical newspaper called the *Gazetta Callejera*, as well as several actual periodicals; images of Christ, the Virgin and saints to sell on the street or outside shrines; song-sheets (including *corridos*) and song-books to sell in the market and the drink-shops; chapbooks with household hints and recipes; conjuring tricks and spells; short stories and playlets for children or for puppet booths; broadsheets on the occasion of disasters, crimes and executions; fake-news sheets that mixed the lurid with the moralizing; and sheets for the *Dia de los Muertos*, the Day of the Dead (All Souls’ Day), 2nd November, the morrow of All Saints’ Day. All of Vanegas Arroyo’s stock-in-trade was illustrated, the pamphlets and chapbooks having at

least a cover picture. His business in Mexico City had been going for perhaps eight years by the time Posada started to provide prints for him, supplementing and then probably supplanting the work produced by Manuel Manilla. With Posada's arrival, the pictures became bigger in area and visual impact and more inventive than they had earlier been.

Pictures of devils visiting this world, or views from a world just like this one but populated by skeletons, figure largely. Many of the moralizing fake news stories (collectively *ejemplos*) are illustrated with devils urging on invented criminals and sinners to their violent, and almost always intrafamilial, sins and crimes. Devils like monkeys urge on daughters to kill their parents, sons to kill their fathers, or fathers their children; devils like bat-lizards prompt men to immolate and then snack on their whole family; while the visitors from the underworld wait for their own takeaway. Devils deliver to the mouth of hell a daughter who had told lies about her parents. And for the Day of the Dead, Vanegas Arroyo produced a range of sheets, which he called *calaveras*, on which skeletons do things that belong to this world.

Critics and historians have tended to deal with this material as though it were in one way or another 'traditional'. It has been examined as a continuation of the European *danse macabre* convention, in which skeletons haul off to judgment men and women who represent the range of social stations, an iconographic tradition revisited in late-eighteenth-century Mexico.¹⁴ Perhaps more usually, it has been seen as a reincarnation of Aztec death-cults, a symptom of an essential aspect of an

essential national character, of Mexico's special relationship with death.¹⁵ Of course, cultures do have their *longue durée*, and it is very tempting to interpret these devils and skeletal presences as evidence of the survival of an Aztec imaginary through four centuries of Spanish cultural imperialism, another example of the syncretic relations between Hispanic and pre-conquest belief systems that is taken to characterize Mexican culture. Despite the fact that they tell us nothing particular about the nature and direction of cultural change in Mexico in the generation before the Revolution and fail to address the particularities of Posada's oeuvre, such interpretations are so comfortable that few have moved beyond them. It is striking that few have tried to understand the emergence of the *calaveras* and the devil *ejemplos* in terms of the social pressures of nation-building, class formation and induction into the imperialist-capitalist world economy and culture.¹⁶

Vanegas Arroyo developed a new commodity, and for it Posada invented an imagery, a stock of pictures to make it desirable. These sheets are not only representations, they are also bits of an innovative material practice. They are things for sale, directly dependent for their substance, their appearance and their market on the most recent technological advances spawned by industrial capitalism. PVA sheets were printed on wood-pulp paper, new to Mexico and to the world in the second half of the nineteenth century, and utterly transforming the cost and supply of their raw material. Vanegas Arroyo printed his merchandise on modern rotary or treadle-platen presses. The pictures that Posada supplied were cheap and plentiful because he made inventive use of line

blocks, one of the new photomechanical processes that, emanating from Vienna, Paris and New York after 1870, were by the 1890s transforming printmaking regimes in Calcutta as well as Mexico City. The sheets were sold to and consumed by men and women who had a choice of commodity in this price range: a PVA sheet typically cost the same as the government-sponsored *El Imparcial*, or as the wide range of downmarket four-page penny-press newspapers. Vanegas Arroyo distributed his prints around the Federal District using the network of newsboys that had developed with the growth of the low-price newspaper press. So the PVA sheets were new sorts of things: new in the manufacturing and distribution techniques and resources which made them possible; new in terms of the development of a 'modern' relationship between news and the everyday; new as material objects that structured and were structured by that broad evolution that we call the commercialization of culture.

Antonio Vanegas Arroyo sold his single-sheet products and his pamphlets to a market that is hard to define: we do not know who bought PVA sheets and have to work from internal and contextual evidence. Internal evidence is harder to come by than it is with newspapers: there are no advertisements through which to correlate the market, no letters to the editor. We are left with the nature of the objects themselves, the limited range and register of their texts, and whatever the style and iconography of the images can tell us. We will come back to these.

Contextual evidence must begin with the city. Mexico City was both a boom town and a relatively small one in the period. Its population had been

more or less static at between 150,000 and 200,000 from the middle of the seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries; from the 1850s to 1910 it almost tripled.¹⁷ This growth depended on immigration from the rest of Mexico, made up to a large extent of more or less literate adults, many from the country's central states, rather than from the arid 'frontier' north or the tropical and still largely uncolonized south.¹⁸ Posada was typical of an important strand of this immigration, a skilled artisan-entrepreneur arriving from Aguascalientes via Léon in his late thirties; Vanegas Arroyo was also typical, coming from Puebla in his late twenties. Mexico City's economy was being shaped by considerable foreign investment in waterworks, public transport, power generation, and the metropolitan retail sector, and by the growth of a state with modern ambitions, ideology and bureaucracy. The postal and telephone system, the drainage and sewage system, the tramway and railway system, the booming newspaper industry, the growing police force and swelling ministries all provided both skilled and unskilled 'working-class' metropolitan jobs that do not fit the archetype of the industrial proletariat. There was also a diverse and adaptable artisan and service-sector workforce. Manufacturing was overwhelmingly in small workshops, typically in premises open to the street or the courtyard. Women worked as servants, in the clothing industry, in the booming and mechanizing tobacco industry and the few large cotton mills; but in huge numbers they worked on or just off the street, providing food and drink to a workforce, of both sexes, that was still largely without the means of preparing or storing food.

'Working class' will do as the name of this metropolitan workforce, and of the market for the PVA sheet, only if one recognizes how badly it fitted the classic definitions of what at the end of the nineteenth century the working class was supposed to be - supposed not only by the leaders of the Second International and their alarmed opponents in national and municipal governments over the developed and developing world, but by politically aware men and women in every place where books and newspapers were read. The idea of the proletariat was paradigmatic: its relation to the means of production within a specific mode of production, its organizational forms, its cultural ambitions, its critique of capitalism provided the models and the yardsticks. In this context it is significant that in Mexico City, where there seem to have been fewer 'worker peasants' than in Moscow or Saint Petersburg, the most developed oppositional political movement among workers was not socialist but anarchist.¹⁹ Politically aware workers in Mexico, for the most part, did not want to think of themselves precisely as members of an organized working class struggling for the state. But they, like the rest of this population sucked in by the labour demands of modernization, needed to distinguish themselves from agricultural workers, both of the peasant and of the new agri-proletarian sort.²⁰

Life on the city street was one of the tools of this double differentiation, a site of struggle both between the forces of order (broadly experienced) and the people who occupied the streets of the metropolis, and between metropolitan 'popular culture' and patterns of deference and solidarity that had been adequate away from the city.

Baudelaire's street, the boulevard, was a great river that swept the observer along in its powerful course, leaving him, as once had the River Jordan, baptized into a modern state of grace. The paradigmatic street in Porfirian Mexico City was something more like a swamp: it teemed with noxious life, it was dangerous if you did not know your way about it, it was hard to extract yourself from, and living in it made you unfit to enter bourgeois spaces and places. In this context, it is worth noting that one of the inescapable characteristics of the PVA sheet is its hostility to those who try to make the street a Baudelarian site of spectacle.²¹ Not only gringo tourists but also *catrins*, dandies who may be more or less hard up, are represented in hostile ways and particularly subject to a plebeian violence with which devils have nothing to do.²² The PVA sheets are also very frequently hostile to forms of transport that prioritize the street as a communications network rather than as a cultural space. Vanegas Arroyo used the play on the word slaughter, *matar*, to produce sheets featuring a *motorista matarista*; but bicycles and especially electric trolley-cars are also represented as murderous.



1 José Guadalupe Posada, *Asombroso y funesto suceso ... Eleuterio Mirafuentes* (Shocking and terrible incident that really took place in the city of Saltillo on the first day of this month, and the miracle full of portents done by the Most Holy Virgin Mary of Guadalupe for Anastacia Mello, the mother of the wretched Eleuterio Mirafuentes), c. 1890–1900, photomechanical line-block from scratch-board original, 8.2 × 13.4 cm. This title comes from the 1918 republication preserved in the Vanegas Arroyo collection.

The violence that devils promote is of a different sort. It breaks up families rather than impinging on already disarticulated lives lived on the street, and especially it breaks up the lineage structures that give those families their value and their stability. Family relationships are understood in this iconography as sacred. Relations of duty and dependence are part of an order that is natural and divine: that is why devils promote the profane, unnatural, diabolical acts that destroy it. In the

families of the poor especially, such acts take the form of physical violence. They often involve reversals of sanctioned roles: women act violently to men, children kill parents. In '*horroroso asesinato! Acaecido en la ciudad de Tuxpan el 10 del presente mes y año*', a woman has asked a man for sex. Because they are linked in a pseudo-family through shared

godparenthood, the man turns her down, so she knifes him to death. While one devil gives her a helping hand, another reaches out, symbolically to take her to hell. In rich families, too, violence may take its toll, but in such cases the PVA sheets tend to represent devils promoting behaviours of unnatural greed; avarice and disinheritance break up the flow of the lineage – sacrilege in a different mode.²³

In *Asombroso y funesto suceso ... Eleuterio Mirafuentes* [1], another image for a pseudo-news sheet, probably made in the 1890s and last republished in 1918, a son drops a rock on his father while his mother looks on and a devil gives him a helping nudge. The sheet tells of the miracle the Virgin of Guadalupe granted to the mother: the father survived the son's murderous attack. It is worth pointing out the disjunction in graphic register between the two-dimensional and summary graphic code used to represent son, mother and devil and the subtle rendering of the father's body position and clothing: the picture embodies an assault on 'high' culture and its values in every respect, from its aggression against news (as with '*horroroso asesinato!*', the assault is announced as having taken place 'this month') to its concentration of artistic competence in the body of the brutalized father.

This iconography is not of itself particularly surprising. Parricide and thus its cognates have long been singled out as diabolical in Western culture, and for centuries devils have carried sinners gleefully to hell. But the emergence of this imagery aimed in this commodity at this audience in Mexico City at this time was not determined by the recurrent nightmares of recurrent family dramas or by the representational resources that made up the historical dimension of Mexican visual culture. Mexico City, which until the last third of the eighteenth century had been represented as an Utopia, was by this time very clearly established as a focus of chaos, crime and debauchery, as a place at least a little hellish.²⁴ The people who formed the audience for these sheets were very likely to be newcomers to the city, and to its economic and cultural relations. It seems probable that in this period, migration to Mexico City was provoked by 'pull' motives more than by 'push' ones (even if pressure on customary landholding from the beneficiaries of liberal laws and judicial favours had played a part), which may differentiate it from the city's even more explosive growth after the Revolution. By coming to the capital, the men and women who made the journey had destroyed their 'natural' family-based community and done violence to their own lineage in search of worldly gain. The argument by analogy, that choosing to take a place in globalizing metropolitan capitalism entails taking a place in hell, is at least implicit.

I have argued elsewhere that one of the dominant characteristics of Posada's imagery of family violence (and of criminal violence other than with guns in general) is its lack of specific location, so that the association in the family-devil genre is

rather between dislocation and the anxiety of cultural dissolution than between Mexico City and cultural dissolution. Family violence thus represents marginality rather than

urbanity.²⁵ The *calaveras* add a dimension to this argument. In them, location is very often perfectly clear. The already-dead are on the streets of the city, which is not exactly how the Christian festival of All Souls seeks to represent them. The two-day festival in memory of all the dead has since the seventh century been important in the Christian calendar. All over Christendom it has two phases: on 1 November to celebrate a catch-all saints' day for those saints whose deeds and names and achieved passage into heaven have slipped the earthly Church's attention; and on 2 November, to pray, in a portmanteau *memento mori*, for the souls of all the departed, whatever their destination. By emphasizing the inevitability and the imminence of the passage between this world and the next, the festival asserts and maintains the difference between them. In Mexico the festival concentrates on the souls more than on the saints. Its dominant ritual takes the form of a visit to the graves of relatives, where special food and drink is both consumed and sacrificed (left on the grave), and the grave is decked with *cempasúchitl*, marigolds. Onto this firmly established and important festival – which (*mutatis mutandis*) closely resembles Spanish, French and other European practice in the closing decades of the nineteenth century – have grown, in Mexico, a couple of other, linked, functions. The first is prophylactic: if the dead are not acknowledged and honoured on 2 November, they may come back and command our attention in unwelcome ways. The second expresses the

participants' sense of place and of lineage. The grave must be visited. The visit reties the bonds between the generations, and emphasizes the lineage as localized and rooted.²⁶ This requirement to visit the grave made the ritual celebration problematic in Mexico City in the 1890s and 1900s, given the fact that cities until the installation of 'modern' public-health facilities needed steady immigration even to maintain a constant population, the great majority of living men and women in the booming city would be much more likely to have children in the ground locally than ancestors.²⁷

Since the second half of the eighteenth century, the festival in Mexico City had developed a specialized market. The food to be consumed included the widespread *pan de muerto*, dead bread, but also sugar skulls as well as little edible (sacrificial) sculptures of priests, soldiers, market women and figures representing other social positions, perhaps originally made of marzipan but already by the 1780s typically made of sugar. Sugar is special, as Stanley Brandes has pointed out.²⁸ Sugar tied Mexico to global capitalism nearly as strongly as silver had done, and as baler twine for Mr McCormick's harvesters was beginning to do. And sugar is empty calories; it gives much pleasure, but it is sterile. The diabolical pacts supposed to be made by cane cutters had that same trajectory. Do the PVA sheets, by analogical projection, fulfil the same function? Do they represent a sterile pleasure, an integration into consumer capitalism that devalues the values that 'modernization' is promoted as bringing? I think that that question can best be answered by looking at the nature of the commodity, rather than at the representations it

carried. But first there are things to be said about the representations.

In the 1880s Vanegas Arroyo had published sheets illustrated not by Posada, but by a designer/relief engraver called Manuel Manilla. The illustrations that survive, from later printings, are of two sorts. First, there are spin-offs from a play about the Don Juan story, *Don Juan Tenorio*, written in Spain in 1844 by José Zorilla with the Day of the Dead in mind and by the 1880s performed at that time every year both in Spain and in Mexico. Then there are *danse macabre* images, in which skeletons usher or haul the living into the land of the dead, represented as the cemetery: *Calaveras, saltad de la tierra*, in which Hercules wrestles a skeleton, is an example. Manilla's seems to me to be a conservative imagery, supporting the performative emphasis of the Day of the Dead festival, and following the established representational forms and ambitions of the Church's version of it. No sheets printed by Vanegas Arroyo in the 1880s seem to have survived, so we cannot know precisely what they looked like.²⁹ We may assume that they had a mixture of representational and emblematic images, as sheets made in and after the 1890s had, even if we guess that the profuseness of illustration came with Posada.

Posada's dominant iconography is different. Manilla showed the inevitability of contact between the living and the dead, but there are a limited number of surviving Posada *calavera* prints that show interactions between us and them, and in none of them is the skeleton that inexorable summoner of the *danse macabre*. Instead, Posada most usually showed the dead as functionally the same as the

living, so that our fleshliness became a distinction without a difference. It is as though the purpose of the Days of the Dead, to keep the departed securely in their place, has itself been turned on its head. It is not even that Posada is deploying the convention that reminds us of the skull beneath the skin, as did a contemporary, and in social terms more successful, Mexican caricaturist such as Villasana.³⁰

Posada's *calavera* images are of two main sorts. There are the set pieces, scenes in which large groups of skeletons interact in some this-world environment, and sets of smaller blocks (the smallest no more than 20 millimetres square), made to be used over and over again scattered among the texts of a whole range of different *calaveras*. These small blocks give us typical and representative figures. They represent the parade of social types. The composite overleaf [2] is made from much recycled blocks from the 1890s, each about 60 millimetres high; out of the group, I have selected a priest, a street entertainer, a nattily dressed but aging bourgeois man and rich woman of uncertain age. Here as elsewhere, Posada has collapsed the couple doing the *danse macabre* into a single figure: death is not imminently coming for the whole range of social types but has already taken possession of them.

Such small blocks often represent work, and particularly the retail food industries on and just off the street. In another composite of images [3], perhaps 75 millimetres high at most, dating from the later 1890s or the 1900s, I see three women and one man: the bird-seller with the baby on her back is the poorest, the man at the drink machine with

the bottle of *aguardiente* on the table is the most prosperous and may, like the baker, be working in a shop. These figures come from a set of street traders, probably all done for the two-sided *Calavera chusca, dedicada à las placeras, tortilleras, verduleras y toda gente de lucha ...*, and again much recycled: trades also figure prominently in the thumbnail set.³¹



2 José Guadalupe Posada, Composite of four figures from a set of social types, c.1890–1900, photomechanical line-blocks from scratch-board originals, from 5.8 to 6.2 cm high. The earliest surviving examples of these blocks seem to be distributed between the *Calavera*

de Cupido and the *Gran Panteon Amoroso*, both from the 1890s.

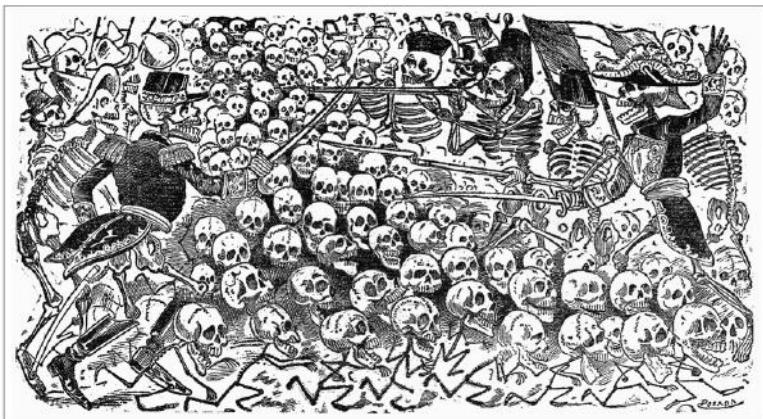
In Posada's images, the skeletons do what we do, and particularly what we do on the street. They fight, they court and they flirt, they saunter arm in arm. There is another loose series, or maybe it is an observer's conflation, in which the friendships, sentimental adventures, hard knocks and conflicts of the street are pictured, again in scratch-board images from the 1890s no more than 70 millimetres high. A prosperous man up from the country flirts with a woman; a poorer couple shout and argue. A policeman hauls a streetwalker away. Two poor men drink *pulque* arm in arm; and a similar pair are in the last act of a dispute: a standing man holds a curved knife over a kneeling, screaming companion. One has to wonder on what plane of existence the murderees will find himself next.

The set-piece images cover much of the same ground. They represent life in the market and on and off the street, including the noisy work of *calavera* sellers (*Rebumbio de calveras*). The *Calavera de las Artes* shows workers plying their different trades on the street. In *Calaveras Zalameras de las Coquetas Meseras*, a party is going on in a bar.³² In the *Calavera de los Patinadores*, three men work off their night-court sentences by sweeping the streets under the eye of an equally skeletal policeman.³³ Sometimes these *calaveras* represent crowds involved in all the business of nation-building and state-formation, for example reacting to the affair of Mora and Morales, executed in June 1907 for assassinating the ex-president of Guatemala; fleeing from a man with a bloody knife (*Calavera Oaxaqueña*, 1903, reissued

several times, in 1912 as *Calavera de Pascual Orozco*); or riding bicycles decked out as personifications of Mexico's newspapers, an image from the 1890s much recycled and reworked (for example in *De Este Famosa Hipódroma en la Pista ...*).



3 José Guadalupe Posada,
Composite of four
food-and-drink-sellers from
the *Calavera Chusca*, 1911
printing. Photomechanical
line-blocks from pen drawings;
the blocks are all c. 7.5 cm
high.



4 José Guadalupe Posada, *Calavera Revuelta de Federales, Comerciantes y Artesanos*, c. 1910, photomechanical line-block from pen drawing, 14.4 × 26.5 cm. Title from 1911 printing.

The roles of history and of armed struggle are invoked [4], as in an image that was probably made for the *Centenario* of 1910, the celebration of a hundred years of independence from Spain. It was much recycled and is here used in 1911 as *Calavera Revuelta de Federales, Comerciantes y Artesanos*, with verses about the Federales, their regiments and their officers, and about named street traders and artisans; it was used later for a *calavera* about the First World War.³⁴ The imagery thus involves the dead both in street life and in the emerging national culture.

The imagery also scrambles the relationship between the dead and the living in the cemetery, as in *llorando el hueso* [5], where a group of skeletons in modern dress looks at a shrouded skeleton weeping upon a grave.³⁵ Skulls litter the foreground; the well-dressed skeletons on the left

run away in terror; those behind the weeper and on our right, representing a wider cross-section of types, either frown in disapproval or seem to laugh at the weeper, whom Western traditions of tomb iconography prompt me to call 'her'. Posada's iterative iconography draws no line between metropolis and necropolis, and the success of the commodity suggests that his way of seeing struck a chord.

This way of representing the dead goes some way towards solving the growing capital's cultural problem of dislocation. If life on the city street can be shown as a vigorous and eventful living death, then, in a macabre way, migration has not severed the cord that links this world to that of the departed. But although this innovation lessens the problem of dislocation, it reinforces that of dissolution. These images turn a sacred ritual of separation into a secular spectacle of assimilation and demystification.

That which was sacred is profaned, and the everyday experiences of urban life are represented as identical with activities in the ectoplasm; thus that which was solid is melted not into energy, as are sugar skulls, but into air.³⁶

So far I have concentrated on a discussion of Posada's imagery of devils and skeletons as representations available to recently arrived and subaltern urban groups and have not discussed them as objects that play their part in constituting a commodified print culture dominated by bourgeois values, as producers, not merely denizens, of the subaltern. The PVA sheets are not just representations, they are things made, sold, bought and consumed. So are sugar skulls, so what is the

difference? The analogy of empty calories, of sterile pleasures, is useful here. Food is supposed to be consumed without residue, so that nothing is thrown away, and also so that the consumer does not get obese. From this point of view, the sugar skull, though peculiar, is not flagrantly transgressional. But the whole logic of print culture is (or at any rate was, for men and women educated in the nineteenth century) that it is cumulative: its twin apotheoses are the library and the well-stocked mind, given that paper is too valuable to throw away. Even its characteristic ephemeral form, the newspaper, takes its identity from the (anti-ephemeral) series to which it contributes. Thus, while getting fat on food is a sin, getting fat on print is a virtue.



5 José Guadalupe Posada, *llorando el hueso*, c. 1905, photomechanical line-block from pen-drawing, 12.5 × 16.3 cm; taken from a sheet

entitled *la Calavera de los Peleles*. '*Calavera de los Peleles*' is difficult to translate: a *pelele* is a wimp or a simpleton, but also a puppet or a guy (as in Guy Fawkes).

The PVA sheet is, within this analogy, transgressionally 'lite'. It provides an integration into (bourgeois, commodified) print culture that, given its occasional nature and its sacrificial destiny, undermines the possibility of accumulation: thus it integrates the group defined by its market as outsiders, people who belong on the street, not in the book-room. The *calavera* is sold and bought at a festival whose theme is sacrificial consumption, so that it would be sacrilegious to keep such a sheet and add it to your library. In this, the *calaveras* are typical of the PVA sheet. In all the collections that I have examined, only one print, probably a theatre poster, bears evidence of having been used (in this case, of having been pinned up). The rest all seem to have come from the stock-in-trade of the Vanegas Arroyo family, switched over in the mid-1920s from the street market to the collectors' market. This is reasonably good evidence that the original people who bought these sheets bought them to use them up, not to lay them down.

The nature of the different sorts of sheets reinforces this tendency to treat them as something that is bought to be thrown away - bought, in a sense, to be garbage. The recycled and reissued bogus moral stories of familial murders violate the primary requirement of the newspaper, that it be at the same time always the same as itself and always different; they violate the primary requirements of news, that it specify place and time, and that it make truth claims of the 'fact' sort, rather than of

the ‘value’ sort: the devils pictures make this incompatibility flagrant. To choose to buy such a product is to choose a specific negation of print-centred ‘modern’ culture, one that is newly (that is, ‘modernly’) produced by that culture. Again: ‘real’ news reports in PVA sheets may be acknowledged as being quoted from a newspaper, but in their material form they specifically refuse to become newspaper-like.

The *calaveras* both embody and represent abundance. They were various in any one year, and they were cheap. *Calaveras en monton* is a very common headline: a whole heap of *calaveras*. *Barata de calaveras*, cheap skulls, and *rebumbio de calaveras*, racket, crowd-noise of *calaveras*, are other repeated titles. Posada and Vanegas Arroyo developed the *calavera* as a form with a mass of verses, and typically a jumble of different prints, often evidently in different styles, and printer’s decorative blocks, large and small, decorating each page. Thus chaotic plenty is a theme both of the way the commodity is marketed and of the way it is constructed. They are cheap, they are plentiful, and they represent cheapness and plenty in both their design and their rough and fragmentary facture. So buying them is no sacrifice; but they are produced to be consumed for an occasion in which sacrificial consumption is required. They were thus both some sort of surrogate of sacrificial food and a debasement of the sacrificial ritual; the fact that the paper on which they were printed is of the same relatively high quality as is now (and perhaps then was) used for decorative cut-outs around the Day of the Dead tends to confirm the sacrificial circuit in these prints. Buying these sheets thus functions to represent the triumphalist

claim of capitalism, that the production and consumption of commodities produces growth, as that proposition's own negation: capitalism offers its neophytes sterile gratification at best.

The commodity nature and the representational function of the PVA sheets were powerfully contradictory. They give us, cultural historians, access to a set of material practices through which men and women both accepted the cultural relations of print-commodity capitalism and developed a subversion of these relations. But the terms of that subversion made it rather a disempowering than an empowering one, at least in the way it tended to close off access to disciplined and informed political organization and activity. Those forms of cultural power depend on and derive from the sort of this-worldly cumulative behaviours that the PVA sheet represents as sterile.

And aesthetic merit? In the case of Posada's imagery it is a complex matter: *post-mortem* publishers have had the luxury of severing the images from the texts that always accompanied them in Posada's lifetime and for almost twenty years after that. If artists and art historians had not found aesthetic merit in these pictures, the archive – consisting partly of printing blocks, but largely of printed sheets constituting the stock-in-trade of Vanegas Arroyo's heirs – would not have survived. If I did not find various of the strengths and depths in these images that go under the collective title of aesthetic merit, I probably would not go working on or thinking about the work. I do not think that if Vanegas Arroyo had gone on working with Manilla, rather than with Posada, the archive would have survived, and I do not think historians would have

found themselves prompted to ask the same questions, or find such various and relevant answers, if by chance it had. But what about the first consumers of the work? Did they seek or find aesthetic gratification in the shoddy sheets in which his images appeared? There is no evidence about the problem, but there is no reason to suppose that the people who bought the PVA sheets could not see the sorts of merits of design and draughtsmanship that I see, no reason to suppose that Posada helped to make Vanegas Arroyo (relatively) rich and powerful only because of his astute identification of subject matter and iconography. And this presents a final complexity. These sheets make material a contradictory identification with what is worthless, bad, in the 'goods' that modernity offers, but their 'popular' commercial success also suggests that in that 'bad', men and women identified and valued something that we might be able to agree was a good.

- 1 This essay first saw the light of day as a paper for the seminar 'Comparative Labour and Working-Class History' that Andrew Hemingway and Rick Halpern ran at the Institute of Historical Research. Andrew urged me to publish it: his wish is my command. I dedicate it to Posada, a hundred years after his death.
- 2 Posada was born, the son of a baker, in Aguascalientes (430 kilometres north-east of Mexico City).
- 3 Tom Gretton, 'Posada's prints as photomechanical artefacts', *Print Quarterly*, vol. 9 (1992), pp. 335–56. My account of Posada's use of line-block technology is not fully accepted in Mexico.
- 4 'Posada' was the trademark of a block-making shop as well as the signature of a picture-maker: many of the standard publications on Posada attribute to him images that may be contested on connoisseurial grounds, as well as more than a few that legibly bear other signatures and are clearly by other hands.

- 5 David Forgacs, 'National-popular: genealogy of a concept', in Simon During (ed.), *Cultural Studies Reader* (Routledge: London, 1993), pp. 177–90.
- 6 A brief introduction to the first half-century of his critical fortune appears in chapter one of Ron Tyler (ed.), *Posada's Mexico* (Library of Congress: Washington, DC, 1979). Fernando Gamboa curated the first monographic exhibition 'Posada Printmaker to the Mexican People' at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1944.
- 7 James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1985).
- 8 For a recent interpretation of Posada's work that reads it against the 'revolutionary precursor/essential Mexican' grain, see Raphael Barajas Durán, *Posada: Mito y Mitote: la Caricatura Política de José Guadalupe Posada y de Manuel Manilla* (Fondo de Cultura Económica: Mexico City, 2009).
- 9 Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution: Volume 1 – Porfiriots, Liberals and Peasants* (University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln and London, 1986), pp. 42–4, 127–39.
- 10 *Pelado* literally translates as skinned/skint, and *lépero*, leper, means both a shunned outcast and someone whose skin/clothing is hanging off in tatters. In both cases, the nakedness, the lack of resources, is both real and metaphorical.
- 11 Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1980).
- 12 His current web autobiography characterizes his thinking as 'strongly influenced by both the Frankfurt School of critical theory and French post-structuralism', <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/michael-taussig/biography/>, accessed 12 December 2012, which tell us not much more than that he has moved on.
- 13 Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, op. cit., p. 17.
- 14 Fray Joaquín Bolaños, *Portentosa vida de la Muerte, Emperatriz de los sepulcros, Vengadora de los agravios del Altísimo, y muy señora de la humana naturaleza* (Mexico, 1792).
- 15 Peter Wollen, J. G. Posada, *Messenger of Mortality* (Redstone Press: London, 1989), p. 15, puts it thus: 'a crucial connection can be discerned between the calaveras and the art of the pre-Columbian

period, with its own profusion of skulls and pressing reminders of death'.

- 16 Patrick Frank, *Posada's Broadsheets: Mexican Popular Imagery 1890–1910* (University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque, 1998) has shown how closely Vanegas Arroyo's 'ephemeral' production followed and referred to scandals and catastrophes made famous in the 'mainstream' press.
- 17 See, for example, Jonathan Kandell, *La Capital: The Biography of Mexico City* (Henry Holt: New York, 1988), p. 354.
- 18 Mexico had even by 1910 about 40 per cent as many kilometres of railway as Britain, and in a count of railway metres per square kilometre, less even than that of the Russian Empire.
- 19 John Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class, 1860–1931* (University of Texas Press: Austin, 1978).
- 20 Tom Gretton, 'Posada and the "Popular": commodities and social constructs in Mexico before the Revolution', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 17, no. 2 (October 1994), pp. 32–47.
- 21 *Curiosidades mexicanas* shows Gringo tourists react with horror to the sight of a sewage-collection cart. *Asalto en Teplito: Corrido* gives us a toff mugged at night in a park. *Los Atropellamientos electricos: Corrido* shows a cyclist slaughtered by an electric tram.
- 22 What is perhaps Posada's most famous single image (and the most famous Mexican woman after the Virgin of Guadalupe), the *calavera catrina* (the *calavera* of the female *catrín*) reprised by Diego Rivera in his 'Dream of a Sunday afternoon in Alameda Park', had been known on an earlier sheet as a *garbancera*, a chick-pea-stew-seller.
- 23 There is no catalogue raisonné of Posada's oeuvre; given the disputable attribution of many 'Posadas', the dispersion and duplication of holdings of his work, and the recycling and reworking of many of his pictures from sheet to sheet, there may never be one. The most accessible collections of his (and others') work in the Anglo-Saxon world remain Stanley Appelbaum and Robert Berdecio (eds.), *Posada's Popular Mexican Prints* (Dover Publications: New York, 1972) and Julian Rothenstein (ed.), *J. G. Posada, Messenger of Mortality* (Redstone Press: London, 1989). In Mexico, the 1930 publication by Frances Toor et al., *Posada: Monografía de 406 Grabados* has been re-editioned since the 1990s, most recently by Diego Rueda (RM Verlag: Barcelona, 2003). There is also the much fuller Carlos Pellicer (ed.), *José Guadalupe Posada: Ilustrador de la Vida Mexicana* (Fondo

Editorial de la Plástica: Mexico, 1963). One may also consult the even more inclusive compilation by Hannes Jähn, *The Works of / Das Werk von José Guadalupe Posada* (Zweitausendeins: Frankfurt am Main, 1976).

- 24 Jérôme Monet, *La Ville et son double: Images et usages du centre – Le parable de Mexico* (Nathan: Paris, 1993).
- 25 Tom Gretton, ‘The Cityscape and “the People” in the prints of José Guadalupe Posada’, in Iain Borden, Joe Kerr and Jane Rendell (eds.), *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2002), pp. 212–27.
- 26 Elizabeth Carmichael and Chloe Sayer, *The Skeleton at the Feast: The Day of the Dead in Mexico* (University of Texas Press: Austin, 1992).
- 27 For this ‘negative net reproduction rate’ in early modern cities in the Western world, see for example Peter Clark (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cities in World History* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2013), p. 404.
- 28 Stanley Brandes, ‘Sugar, colonialism and death: on the origins of Mexico’s Day of the Dead’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 39, no. 2 (1997), pp. 270–99.
- 29 There are no surviving *calavera* prints either with the Calle Incarnacion address, or with Vanegas Arroyo appearing named simply as Vanegas, both of which would date the production from the 1880s and before the era of Posada.
- 30 La Situacion: a lithograph probably from the 1880s republished without further identification in Aida Sierra Torre, *José María Villasana: Caricatura Política y Costumbrista* (CNCA: Mexico City, 1998).
- 31 ‘Saucy *calavera* dedicated to the street-vendors, tortilla-sellers, greens-sellers [all female] and all struggling people. Clothes-dealers, stall-holders and meat-sellers ...’. Title taken from the British Museum’s copy, published before c. 1905.
- 32 ‘Flattering *calavera* about the cute waitresses’.
- 33 ‘Street-cleaners *calavera*’. This is an unusual image, in that the four skeletons share the picture space with a live man. He is unaware of their presence, and stands drinking *pulque* in a bar. He drinks from a skull.
- 34 The messy/turbulent/scrambled *calavera* of the Federales (national militarized police force) traders and artisans.

35 'The bone is weeping', or perhaps 'weeping over the bone'.

36 I do not simply pull 'ectoplasm' out of the ether. Many prominent people, in Mexico as elsewhere, were committed to spiritualism in these years. In Mexico, the belief had a focus in opposition to the official positivism of the Porfiriato.

READING AHAB

ROCKWELL KENT, HERMAN MELVILLE AND C. L.
R. JAMES

Angela Miller

'All great books are symbolical myths, overlaid like a palimpsest with the meanings that men at various times assign to them.'

Clifton Fadiman¹

In 1930, two editions of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* appeared, both illustrated by Rockwell Kent.² A leading American artist of the interwar years, Kent had already made a considerable contribution to the revival of book arts, fuelled by the desire to raise publishing standards while at the same time encouraging greater public interest in the classics. Kent's broad reading – evident in a considerable personal library of the classics from Chaucer to Shakespeare, Voltaire and Melville, along with the Russian works of Gorky, Tolstoy and Turgenev – prepared him well as an illustrator; his sense for what the artist Abbott Thayer called 'interstellar austerities' earned him a request from no less than Thomas Hardy, who wished to have him illustrate a collection of late poems.³

By 1930, Kent's reputation as an image-maker and illustrator was so considerable that the editors at Random House not only gave him top billing in the design of the book, but left off Melville's name altogether.⁴ The oversight was satirically marked by

Robert Frost in a poem of 1947: 'There is a story you may have forgotten / About a whale. / Oh, you mean Moby Dick / By Rockwell Kent that everybody's reading.'⁵ For the commission, Kent made black-and-white pen-and-ink drawings that laboriously reproduced the appearance of woodcut (and wood engraving), drawings that were then translated for the deluxe edition into woodcut itself.⁶ The choice may seem odd; unlike illustrators of other editions of *Moby Dick* from the 1920s and 1930s, Kent interpreted Melville through the lens of an anachronistic medium that was itself contemporaneous with the history contained in *Moby Dick*. In doing so, his illustrations added one further layer to the dense texture of historical and mythic references that characterize the great book. Paralleling Melville's own encyclopedic range of genres, Kent mined a variety of historical styles, referring not only to sixteenth-century European engravings and nineteenth-century woodcuts and almanacs, but also to emblem books, and Blake-inspired nudes.⁷

On receiving his assignment, Kent avidly researched the history of whaling at the Museum of Natural History in New York and the New Bedford Whaling Museum, driven by his own interest in the whaling communities he encountered while residing in Maine and Newfoundland. But his illustrations far exceeded an antiquarian approach. Skilfully matching the retrospective quality of Melville's own narrative of whaling, which already by 1851 appeared in a historical light, Kent also captured something of the mythic quality of the book, a text that produced inexhaustible meanings for generations of readers. Published in the years when the nation lurched forward into industrial

modernization, *Moby Dick* arced across the decades to link the founding of the republic with its unrealized destiny.⁸

In what follows I hope to demonstrate that Kent's version is as interesting for its blind spots as for its considerable power in translating Melville's text for his own generation. These blind spots are most apparent in relation to the politically charged figure of Ahab at the centre of the book, whose meaning unfolded across several generational and historic registers both before and after Kent tackled the subject. In an extraordinary interpretation of *Moby Dick*, written by the Trinidadian Marxist intellectual and writer C. L. R. James twenty-three years after Kent's illustrations, we may locate the elements of a radically different understanding of the book. James's *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways* fully articulates the implications of the 'totalitarian' personality for artists and writers on the left, a historical type yet to emerge when Kent contrived his Ahab in 1930. Bracketing either end of the period that witnessed the global rise of fascism and the Second World War, Kent's and James's readings of Melville make glaringly apparent the shift in the political valence of personality following the rise of Hitler and Stalin, and expose one source of the ambivalent allegiance to collectivism within the American left itself.

The choice to illustrate *Moby Dick* was Kent's: the book resonated with his own myth-inspired imagination, sense of epic grandeur, and taste for forbiddingly desolate landscapes. From the beginning of the commission, William Kittredge – director of design and typography at Lakeside Press – perceived a strong fit between artist and author.

He wrote to Kent, ‘it is as though you were working side by side – Melville with words and you with pictures’.⁹ Both artists confronted a world that – in 1850 and again in 1930 – seemed on the brink of vast and tumultuous changes, an unsettling of fundamental political and social landmarks and structures of value. Both decades ignited a sense of cultural doubt and self-appraisal at parallel periods of political and social crisis.

For the commission, Kent made 135 drawings for each of the chapter headings; another 95 appearing at chapter conclusions; 23 full-page illustrations; and 8 half-page designs, along with a range of epigrammatic or emblematic medallions and smaller images scattered throughout the text. Exploiting the stark tonal contrasts of the woodcut medium he was emulating in his pen-and-ink drawings, he produced a series of formally distilled, highly stylized images [1]. As a bitonal medium, woodcut flattened tonal gradation in favour of starker dark and light value contrasts, largely restricting or eliminating the chiaroscuro gradations and subtle tonalism possible in other print media such as aquatint, lithography or even wood engraving. Far removed from the symbolist suggestiveness of Pictorialist photography that emerged a few decades after Melville’s book, woodcut nonetheless captured Kent’s vision of *Moby Dick*. He wrote to Kittredge that *Moby Dick* was ‘a most solemn, mystic work, with the story and the setting serving merely as the medium for Melville’s profound and poetic philosophy.... The color, so far as I can see, is determined; night, the midnight darkness enveloping human existence, the darkness of the human soul, the abyss.’¹⁰



1 Rockwell Kent, 'Moby Dick', from *Moby Dick* (R. R. Donnelly and Sons Company, Lakeside Press: Chicago, 1930), letterpress and woodcut, vol. 1, p. 273 (chapter 41).

This allegorical turn of thought in Kent's response to *Moby Dick* also characterized how he translated the book into visual imagery. His choice of woodcut, as I would like to argue, served his personally inflected reading, and in the end brought him closer to Ahab than to Melville. His own dramatic (and self-inflating) account of why he was drawn to woodcut was staged in Melvillian rhetoric of dark

and light: 'How like the night the wood block, coated black! How like a shaft of light the tool that cuts the black - and by its touch illuminates an object hidden there! Wood, then, shall be, must be, the medium.'¹¹ Woodcut - with its stark value contrasts - also captured contemporaneous readings of Melville's book as a universe defined around the moral polarities of good and evil. Lewis Mumford's 1929 account, for instance, noted the sudden manner in which the early naturalism of the opening chapters disappears from the book with the arrival of Ahab: 'Once *Moby Dick* gets under way, the fable itself belongs to Heaven and Hell,... so that everything which would relieve men's exasperation or take the edge off their lonely delight, disappears, as the land disappears beyond the horizon's edge.'¹² This impulse to read Ahab in terms of conventional moral polarities, however, falls short of realizing the full philosophical complexities of the book; the black-and-white values of the woodcut medium at times worked poorly with its wealth of symbolist association, its moral tenebrism, its elusive and shaded multiplicity of meanings.¹³ Nonetheless, these symbolist qualities helped drive the literary rediscovery of Melville - finding its counterpart in the contemporaneous revival of interest in the art of Albert Pinkham Ryder.¹⁴ Despite the limited suggestiveness of woodcut, it was a medium that would prove peculiarly well adapted to representing Ahab, the 'godless godlike' captain of the *Pequod*, whose quest for absolute meanings and control of an indecipherable universe drove the collective fate of the shipboard community.

Manipulating the relative ratio of white to dark that constituted the primary expressive dimension of

woodcut, Kent introduced a range of different moods into his illustrations for *Moby Dick*, modulating from daytime vistas of the ocean to the sooty dark imaginings of Melville's more psychologically charged passages. Kent's imitation of woodcut and wood engraving also proved versatile enough to capture the shifting moods and landscapes of the book. The genre-like quality of its opening chapters, for instance, found expression in charmingly naive, toylike images reminiscent of eighteenth-century New England street signs: 'genre pictures in the manner of Teniers, with a dash of Hogarth or Rowlandson', as Mumford put it, belonging 'to the land and its ... little ways'.¹⁵ After these accurately detailed opening passages, however, the book takes a profoundly different turn.

By the 1920s, *Moby Dick* was no longer understood as a boy's adventure story about a man and a whale. Indeed, the reception history of the book from that point on revealed, in Nick Selby's words, 'a changing understanding of what America and its culture might mean'.¹⁶ Any consideration of Kent's illustrations must reckon, therefore, with both the extent to which they engage the broader histories of the nation and with Kent's own psychological profile, deeply imprinted with the peculiar vulnerabilities and obsessions of those decades of crisis and national reinvention between the wars. Three years in the making, Kent's drawings participated in – and contributed to – the Melville revival taking shape between the two world wars. Charting nothing less than the voyage of the American soul, to paraphrase D. H. Lawrence, *Moby Dick* drew powerful responses from a range of critical voices.¹⁷ The interwar rediscovery of

Melville was driven by a fascination with his symbolic reach and his epic synthesis of different ways of knowing the world. Lawrence's 1923 *Studies in Classic American Literature* helped launch the symbolic reading of Melville's dark book; of the whale, he wrote 'Of course he is a symbol'.¹⁸ Lawrence read *Moby Dick* as an allegory of the 'ghastly maniacal hunt' of a doomed white race, severed from self-knowledge by its alienation from a mythologized blood consciousness - a source of cosmic wholeness without which European post-Enlightenment culture would atrophy. If Lawrence found the book's 'esoteric symbolism' to be of 'considerable tiresomeness', he still proclaimed Melville 'a deep, great artist'.¹⁹ In its scepticism towards positivist science, and towards the fixed certainties of natural taxonomies and inherited categories of meaning, Melville's book spoke to the critical engagements of the artists and writers in the 1920s who grappled with the celebratory myths that underwrote the expansion of business and what Mumford called 'the harassed specialisms which still hold and preoccupy so many of us'.²⁰ Mumford found in *Moby Dick* a fully realized and richly symbolic universe.²¹ Melville furthermore heralded a new 'interAmerican ... hemispheric' sensibility; questioning the foundations upon which his contemporaries built their 'vast superstructure of comfort and complacency', Melville refused to shrink 'from the cold reality of the universe itself'.²²

The Melville revival was part of a growing awareness of American history and culture that characterized the second generation of modernism in the United States. Over the next decade, artists and writers, following the call of cultural critics

such as Van Wyck Brooks, writing for the little journal *Seven Arts*, turned to cultural resources grounded in their own native experience to forge new pathways into their histories. They explored issues of cultural and national identity through the lens of such mythic figures as Columbus, the Puritan, the pioneer and the voyager.²³ This interest in the mythic construction of America took many forms in these years, from F. Scott

Fitzgerald's invocation of the 'green breast of the New World' at the end of *The Great Gatsby*, to the revival of sixteenth-century maps of the New World by *New Yorker* cartoonist John Held to satirize the growing gap between America's original promise and its current degradation by standardized commerce. All of these texts were part of a broader cultural effort to reclaim the mythic dimensions of American identity from a society desiccated by the effects of mass culture, consumerism and sham. The famous conclusion of *Gatsby*, in particular, invokes the wonder that accompanied the original encounter with the New World, only to reflect upon its fatal and tragic historical course. Recollecting this capacity for wonder, Fitzgerald then proceeded to his melancholic meditation on the breach between myth and history. For this interwar generation, *Moby Dick* reignited a sense of the immeasurable scale of the universe, a scale reasserted in face of the blighting quest of Ahab at its centre.



2 'Ahab', vol. 1, p. 179 (chapter 28).

The immensity of Melville's themes call upon an imagistic power that exceeded Kent's emblematic imagination and his jewel-like images. Kent was limited both by his own imaginative disposition and by the black-and-white medium he chose, which ill equipped him to visualize a universe that resisted – like the white whale at its heart – the contracted and finite measures of individual significance. Kent's illustrations best match Melville's text when it is most emblematic, as for instance in 'Ahab' [2], in which the elusive captain first appears on deck. Ishmael notes the 'slender rod-like mark, lividly whitish' and resembling the seam made in a lightning-struck tree that runs like a brand down Ahab's face and neck, and – he imagines – continuing perhaps from crown to sole. Kent translated this passage into its most metaphoric terms: lightning striking the trunk and tangled roots of a great tree in an abstract composition that opens the chapter.

Kent's most symbolically charged images are those least tied to the explicit narrative of the novel – for

instance, the spectral image of the giant squid [3] projected onto a cosmic scale that expands across the horizon – gently cradling, or engulfing, the frail whaler in an ambiguous image of protection threatening destruction. Kent uses the woodcut style to desubstantialize the mass of the squid in a manner that bridges the narrative and the symbolic. His activation of this more symbolist imagination is largely outweighed, however, by a mode of image-making that seems to issue from Ahab's own Manichean vision of a universe defined around clear dualities of good and evil. The compositions themselves – full-page illustrations, vertical in orientation, and organized around a horizon line dividing the sea from the heavens – play off the 'abyss' of marine darkness against the vastness of the star-studded skies in an allegory of an imprisoning nature and a celestial realm of freedom. This form of pictorialization served the two-dimensional universe of allegory, but flattened Melville's far more ambiguous and environmentally complex vision.²⁴



3 'Squid', vol. 2, p. 136 (chapter 59).

Kent's Ahab both builds upon and complicates the characterization that Melville offers in the text by borrowing from a Freudian discourse of repression and psychosis within which the loss of the character's leg is linked to a sexual wound. This allusion to

castration is there in Melville's text, but it takes a more explicit form in Kent's interpretation. ²⁵

Ahab's monomania – in this Freudian narrative – is the product of his wounded manhood. Other illustrations suggestively link his compromised masculinity to his will to dominate nature. The illustration for 'The Quadrant' draws a link to the specifically phallic quest for mastery of the sea; Ahab's leg – amputated at the knee – projects from the crotch as if to suggest that scientific instruments are a substitute for the lost wholeness of Ahab the man [4]. In chapter 106, Ahab's ivory leg causes him an accident of such severity that it

pierces his groin, an injury whose associations with castration Kent renders explicit in one illustration.²⁶



4 'The Quadrant', vol. 3, p. 171 (chapter 118).

Ahab's tyrannical will is also linked to the imperial arrogance of the nation itself and associated with the fate of the *Pequod*, named after a tribe of New England Indians fighting against extinction. The link between Ahab and the ill fate of the community he leads is most powerfully invoked at the end of the book, when a sky-hawk is pinioned by the harpooner Tashtego as he grasps the spar of the main mast of the sinking whaler subsiding into the waves. '[H]is whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab', the bird of heaven is drawn down into the 'great shroud of sea' like the archangel Michael to whom he is linked, 'his imperial beak thrust upwards'. If Melville's earlier work had implied a

spread-eagle patriotism that granted the nation its historical exceptionalism, he had, by the time he wrote *Moby Dick*, arrived at a far darker vision of the historical forces driving the nation's destiny, a vision realized in this, the book's penultimate image.²⁷ Kent's image of Tashtego sinking beneath the sea is matched on the next page by an image of Ishmael - arm shooting towards heaven - borne skyward by the buoyancy of the coffin that saves him [5, 6]. Kent's illustrations offer their own commentary on the text, pitting the destructive energies of 'the flag of Ahab' against the salvation offered to the one individual who - Kent's image seems to imply - was able to buck the charismatic hold of Ahab over his crew. What Kent suppresses in this pair of images, however, is the orphaned condition of Ishmael himself in Melville's text: utterly abandoned in the vastness of the ocean, he is picked up by the emblematically named Rachel searching for her lost children. Abandoning the melancholic message at the end, Kent's final image serves instead as an emblem of the artist-prophet and Promethean saviour of the race, miraculously resurrected - a message far removed from Melville's tragic existential vision.



5 'The Chase — Third Day',
vol. 3, p. 282 (chapter 135).



6 'Epilogue', vol. 3, n.p.

Kent's emphasis on physical and psychic wounding and Promethean rebirth had relevance both to his own life and to his interwar generation. A man of energetic contradictions, Kent's cult of self emerged in tandem with his long association with international communism.²⁸ Isolation – alternating with periods of excessive socializing and womanizing – would become part of the repeating rhythm of his life, in a familiar pattern that carried him through three wives and considerable public fame. For Kent and others in these years of intensifying collectivism and political action, the need for isolation existed in tension with his

commitments to develop new networks and new agents of collective action. This tension – between the solitary ways required by the artist and the political and topical pressures drawing artists beyond themselves – was not peculiar to Kent. In 1936, Peppino Mangravite published a statement rife with conflicting loyalties – between the need for ‘aesthetic independence’ unconstrained by social ties, and the need for ‘an association ... in which all artists of standing can meet on common ground’ to act on behalf of shared concerns. Simultaneously calling for artists to mobilize in collective actions and for them to be wary of sacrificing their independence in the process, Mangravite’s message reveals the ambivalence that artists felt concerning the impact of such activity on their own production.

Committed as he was to collective organizing, and an ardent socialist, Kent gave his first loyalty to his own work; he remained somewhat indifferent to the actual working-class cultures and everyday realities of ordinary people on whose behalf such actions were dedicated. A rousing public speaker, he was never more rhapsodic than when he was writing about himself. Kent’s political allegiances were loosely formed but deeply held. As early as 1904 he was drawn to the socialist labour politics of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW); later he would become involved in the efforts to unionize artists in the 1930s, participating and speaking at the American Artists’ Congress of 1936.²⁹ At the heart of his socialist politics was a belief in the autonomy of labour, a conviction grounded ultimately in his own frequently inflated pride in submitting to no one and remaining his own master. Along with his presidency of the Artists’ League of America, and his membership in both the American

Labor Party and the International Workers Order, Kent proudly listed his union and labour credentials, including the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, the United American Artists; the United Office and Professional Workers of America; the National Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union.³⁰

Kent's truculence in asserting his own independence, however, is hard to reconcile with his abiding loyalty to the Soviet Union under Stalin, which, unlike many of his Trotskyite colleagues, he never renounced.³¹ Overlooking decades of Stalinist 'state capitalism', he continued to believe in the possibility of a new society organized around labour, even while he professed contempt for the American working classes in the concrete.³² While never a member of the CPUSA, he refused, during the McCarthy hearings, to deny his involvement. His principled defiance all but shut down his career.³³ A guest of the Soviet government in the 1950s, he was pilloried, threatened and boycotted by US arts institutions during these years.³⁴ Kent saw his radicalism as a badge of masculine honour, recognized, alongside Paul Robeson, by the labour and union movement. In his 1955 autobiography, he represented his politics as anti-fascist well into the 1950s, casting the anti-communism for which he was persecuted as driven by the powerful fascist sympathizers he believed to be still running the government.³⁵ His political narrative hued closely to the anti-fascism of the 1930s, long after his colleagues had moved past it and into the familiar terrain of Cold War anti-communism. Kent thus remained unmoved by the structural similarities that linked fascism with Soviet communism, similarities that would become

fully apparent to C. L. R. James twenty-three years later.

Enmeshed in these contradictory impulses and commitments, Kent was bound to Melville's book – and in particular to Ahab – by a series of complex affinities. Kent's vision of Ahab – the isolated and solitary captain of the *Pequod* – bore the mark of his own personal need for self-testing in a harsh and punishing wilderness. It was out of such experiences – in Newfoundland, Alaska, Tierra del Fuego and Greenland – that his art took shape, fuelled by his legendary energies.³⁶ Like Ahab, a man aloof and untethered by social relations, Kent fled domestic entrapments with predictable regularity, devising all manner of ways to avoid any sustained period of time at home with his first wife and growing family. His associates speculated on the reasons for his restiveness: a nomadic impulse driving him to the literal ends of the earth. Kent recounted how – motivated by a desire to subdue his own sensual nature – he sought out extreme weather and physically challenging conditions in the far north.³⁷ Like Ahab – in flight from the comforts of his landlocked domestic haven – Kent's rebellion against physical weakness sent him in pursuit of the rigours of harsh arctic extremes.³⁸ It was also a reaction against his own submissive tendencies, and against a feminized entrapping nature.³⁹ In *N by E*, his account of a voyage on a thirty-three-foot cutter from New York Harbor to the rugged shores of Greenland, Kent told of a terrifying moment when during his watch on board, the vessel was engulfed in a darkness 'sullen and ominous'. Surrounded by this 'huge brown cloudbank', he felt his sight smothered, 'I could have screamed for horror of it, shrieked into the

silence to tear it and precipitate whatever cataclysm it so long held back.' Such moments of suffocating terror verge on fears of self-annihilation. Kent's sensibility required panoptic visibility; he felt stifled by darkness, unstrung by any loss of vision. It may have been this terrifying loss of a securely charted self in relation to world that drew him so strongly to the blinding clarity of northern light and space.

Kent's self-testing shared wider anxieties about a newly vulnerable masculinity in the years between the wars: a fear intensified by the broad cultural exposure to disease and bodily fragmentation that gave rise to a range of physical regimens, and more generally, to an obsession with the impermeable and hard male body.⁴⁰ Such anxieties found expression in a broader impulse in the visual culture of the interwar decades towards stark outlines and impenetrable forms, along with a movement away from what one defender of Kent called the 'abyssmal present-day slough of self-expression'.⁴¹

Kent's characteristic rhythmic outline and his incisive silhouetted figures clearly situated against their backgrounds and often monumentally scaled in relation to the landscape, as well as the often blandly smooth surfaces of his prints and paintings, give evidence of related efforts to visually manage anxieties about psychic dissolution and loss of selfhood. He was also drawn towards subarctic climates where he was able to escape the strain of social negotiation and intersubjective exchange. Like Ahab, Kent seemed persistently to have fled 'the interdebtedness between mortals'.⁴²

This psychological profile may also offer insight into the artist's tight and assertive control over his medium. At least one reviewer would link this quality of formal and technical control to Kent's will-driven personality. In a prophetic 1927 essay, the author noted that Kent exerted 'too strong a will ... on the paint ... signs of too determined a control of the substance of his medium'. Kent's vast illuminated unpeopled landscapes imply a world without boundaries or constraints except those of nature itself. And yet 'Within this freedom and boldness ... in Mr. Kent's pictures, there is implicit another freedom which he tends too much to deny: the freedom and miracle of the pigment, that kind of subconscious life that appears in the medium, and might be said to exist in it, just as it exists in the artist himself.⁴³ It is a striking anticipation of the trajectory that would define advanced American art after the Second World War, a movement towards the medium as part of the very nature in which artists like Kent - defined by the romantic frontier mythos of the previous century - were utterly unprepared to participate. The unconscious life of paint itself - like the vast watery world of the Pacific - was a world inaccessible to human will and ambition, a world over which the artist self would come to relinquish control. The medium with which Kent was most identified - wood engraving - reassured the fine manual motor skills that had been seemingly ceded in the Second Industrial Revolution to mechanization, with the advent of half-tone and other machine forms of reproduction.⁴⁴ Kent exercised his desire for control through his most fundamental aesthetic procedures. Yet these procedures soon gave way in the next generation to new attitudes towards the medium of

paint and to new environmental forms of knowledge that would exceed the grand frontier romance of wilderness conquest and the subjugation of nature in its myriad forms. This presumption of control exercised upon the world of paint – or of nature – was one Kent could not give up. His own personal mythos remained deeply implicated in it. Yet even his contemporaries glimpsed how limiting his approach was, and how outmoded it soon would be. Melville's most imagistic moments exceeded Kent's allegorical imagination, conjuring worlds of inchoate shapes and phantasmal realities through which we glimpse other ways of being.⁴⁵ As *Moby Dick* implies through its shifting knowledge frames and forms, it is these older inheritances – as well as more modern scientific taxonomies of knowledge – that impose conceptual limitations on the ability of Ahab and his world to move beyond their species-centric vision.

C. L. R. James's *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways*, published in 1953, was separated by only twenty-three years from Kent's illustrations of *Moby Dick*. James drew explicit links between the unholy alliance of Ahab and his crew and twentieth-century mass politics; his text exposed the underlying social pathologies of an emerging world system of industrial production. For James, Ahab was the dialectical product of a world in the grip of the inanimate and deterministic forces of mechanization, industrialization and growing scientific knowledge. The totalitarian type embodied in Ahab, which James explicitly linked to both Hitler and Stalin, represented an impulse to control a set of forces created by humans and yet very quickly appearing to exceed their control.⁴⁶ In place of Ahab's world-destroying mission, James

would emphasize the collective energies of the *Pequod* crew, from which all forms of individual hubris and charismatic self-fashioning have been burned away. James affirmed the power of ordinary men, united by labour and a shared liberatory quest across geographical and cultural divides, a dimension nowhere apparent in Kent's focus on Ahab.

What makes James's analysis of particular interest is that he acknowledges Ahab as a product of a specifically American historical environment. James writes that, 'He has been trained in the school of individualism and an individualist he remains to the end.'⁴⁷ From his historical vantage, James captured with great force the relationship of extreme forms of individualism to the rise of totalitarian drives in the twentieth century. Individualism for James would also come to be associated with the destructive power of mental abstraction and subjective thought to enshroud human beings and blunt the force of the real. *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways* situated an exceptional American character type - the frontiersman, the pioneer - within world historical forces shaping modernity. Centred on a receding industry - whaling - that appeared to face *away* from the modern world, *Moby Dick* for James unlocked its deepest meanings in relation to the rise of both Hitler and Stalin in the 1930s.⁴⁸

Ahab's quarrel - for James - is with the very mechanical and industrial civilization that has raised him up, a civilization that assaults personality as an autonomous force. James's analysis here builds on a broader critique of industrialization traceable to nineteenth-century

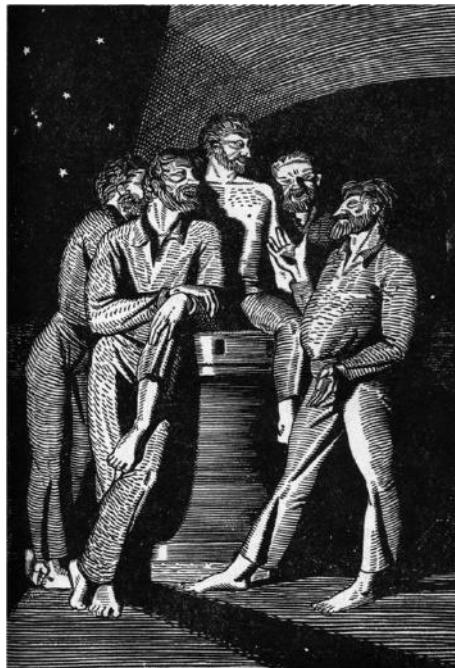
Romanticism, and which resurfaced in the twentieth century in the notion of personality as a force of cultural redemption.⁴⁹ Ahab thus represented a perversion of the desire for meaningful action in the world. James brought together this quite human need with the totalitarian impulse for willed control, in Ahab's case, control over an inchoate universe of vital energies.

To all these tendencies and their associated dangers – including subjectivity and megalomania – James would counterpose the crew – an 'Anacharsis Clootz' deputation' crossing lines of nation, race and ethnicity. For James, only the 'ever-present sense of community ... the grace and wit and humor' offered by the crew of the *Pequod* held out any chance of salvation. This shipboard community was for James proleptic, anticipating a new democratically realized global community, and a ballast – ineffectual in the end – against the despotic ambitions of Ahab.⁵⁰ Ahab, 'trained in the school of individualism', is unable to see how his human distance from his crew was itself the product of the very system against which he rebels: a system grounded in a hierarchy of workers and authoritarian masters, in which autonomy emerges as the sole prerogative of those in command, an arid, desolate condition of isolation.⁵¹ Ahab's stark existential choice is to organize the world he hates or to destroy it.⁵² In James's view, individualism was an ideology that blocked any mediating social formation that would moderate and redirect the atomizing force of industrial production. It left its agents marooned, in a condition of social fragmentation generating spiritual despair. The lack of human association then breeds an introspective turn seeking answers

in the ‘inner consciousness’. It was here – in the ‘deepest soil of Western Civilization’ – that the madness of Hitler and Stalin was nurtured.⁵³ In James’s account, the very conditions of capitalism generate this type, whether among Nazis, or Soviet ‘administrators, executives, organizers, labor leaders, intellectuals’. Here, in the managerial excesses of ‘advanced’ societies lay the seeds of a personality type uncontaminated by any form of social or communal experience. For James, Ahab has become the monomaniacal haunted man he is because of his isolation from the crew of the *Pequod*. This form of tyranny – the product of the individual cast loose from anchoring human and social bonds – was directed at managing things and men, producing an unprecedented centralization of power. James concludes, ‘He is the most dangerous and destructive social type that has ever appeared in Western Civilization, the totalitarian type itself.’⁵⁴

Acting against this power was the ‘world-federation of modern industrial workers’ that was the crew of the *Pequod*. In contrast with the self-consuming energies of Ahab are the three savage harpooners who remain untouched by the ‘intellectual and emotional self-torture’ from which Ahab suffers, and which propels the madness of the *Pequod* universe. The alternative to the hypertrophy of the self was the full realization of personality through communal action.⁵⁵ Binding self and others together was a common tie to nature through the agency of tools: technologies brought to heel by their social purpose. James’s Hegelianism is here most apparent in this vision of the productive dialectic through which self – interacting with the object world – attains to full consciousness through its own

objectification. It is solipsism that short circuits the realization of the self through its material relations, and for James, Ahab was the very type of the solipsist.⁵⁶



7 'Midnight, Forecastle', vol. 1, p. 259 (chapter 40).

Kent's Ahab – conceived in the late 1920s, while the 'stomach ulcer of fascism' was still a gurgle – nonetheless prophesied unwittingly the rise of what James would label the 'totalitarian'.⁵⁷ Like James, Kent was a socialist. In this respect, the two responses to *Moby Dick* are branches of the same trunk. Yet there the commonalities cease. A closer examination of Kent's ambivalent relationship to the

figure of Ahab reveals his contradictory allegiances, at once to collectivism and to the romantic vision of imperial selfhood. Verging on a decade of renewed collectivism, Kent's 1930 illustrations for *Moby Dick* give a surprisingly attenuated treatment of the shipboard community that drew James's admiring analysis more than twenty years later.⁵⁸ In contrast to James's collectivist vision, Kent falls notably short in capturing the global reach of the crew, or the vivacity with which Melville evokes their social worlds. One is a Shakespearean low shipboard interlude among the sailors, who in Kent's illustration are a grizzled and generic group that fails to capture the diverse cultures of the crew, from China and Spain to Malta, Sicily and Tahiti [7]. In this scene - chapter 39 - Melville also conjures the life-affirming erotically charged energies that unite the crew in human camaraderie against the backdrop of Ahab's obsession and then threaten to draw them down into primordial rhythms of violence. The illustration at the head of this chapter shows the miniaturized and faceless crew in profile. Another scene of human community is the frank depiction of Queequeg in bed with Ishmael in a moment of homosocial intimacy across vast social and cultural distances ('The Counterpane', chapter 4). The majority of the scenes of the *Pequod* crew, however, frame the shipboard experience as one of isolation and confrontation with a vast impersonal natural world ('The First Lowering', chapter 48).⁵⁹ This view of the ship experience maps the existential dread of Ahab onto his crew in a manner that suggests just how far Kent himself fell short of grasping the social basis of collectivism.



8 'The Symphony', vol. 3,
p. 237 (chapter 132).

Kent's most powerful visualizations centre on Ahab, a figure whose will-driven obsessions ultimately deform and distort the element of enchantment that emanates from the watery Pacific world in which the action unfolds. It is Ahab who absorbs the bulk of Kent's interests in the second half of the book. In the concluding image of 'The Chase - First Day', (chapter 133), Kent endows the doubloon – sign of Ahab's blasphemous mission – with a sacramental aura, making of Ahab one who worships graven images, in violation of the biblical commandment. Kent captured this in the horrific image of Ahab's skeletal face rippling in the water [8], suggesting a Melvillian understanding that nature was inherently mute, and that whatever the individual saw in it was a projection of himself.⁶⁰

Attracted to the figure of Ahab, Kent overlooked such picture-worthy subjects as offered themselves throughout the book; in his illustration for 'A Squeeze of the Hand' (chapter 94), Kent opens with a horizontal image of a detached arm and hand

squeezing globules of whale sperm, losing an opportunity to pictorialize Melville's image of communal intimacy in which shipboard labour is transformed into a utopian dissolution of boundaries.⁶¹ That Kent chose not to translate such scenes in his illustrations is revealing of what he found most compelling in his own reading of *Moby Dick*.⁶² Raymond Bishop's illustrations for the book, published by Albert and Boni in 1933, grant more attention to the collective labour performed by the ship's crew, although they are somewhat more generic in appearance.⁶³ Gripped by the riven and tortured figure of Ahab, Kent was unable to visualize the shipboard camaraderie that might have balanced the ghastly intensity of Ahab's obsession. Kent portrays Ahab, as he appears in *Moby Dick* itself, alone and isolated, confronting the universe through no mediating frames except those of his own monomania, signalled by his piercing and bulging eyes - the physical attributes of a world-commanding will. Ahab remakes the world in the image of his obsession; his prophetic force as a figure of modernity is the manner in which he commands a Promethean power to overcome the gravity field of other egos through the sheer magnitude of his personality. Melville, Kent and James all grasped the implications of this form of authoritarian individualism: the peculiar charismatic power that Ahab exercises over those on board, collapsing world into self through the voiding of agency among those around him. Yet Kent's focus on Ahab, and his debilitating and disempowering impact on his crew, reveals an attraction that balances the repellent power of Ahab's monomania. The seeds of this attraction are in Melville's text itself; Melville's Ahab is at once

commandingly godlike and demonic. Melville's anatomy of the doubled Promethean impulse is the thrust of chapter 94, 'The Chart'. This symbolic duality - both godlike and godless - is evident in Kent's treatment of Ahab, and indeed in his own Luciferian pencil self-portrait of 1934. Kent's emblematic image of calipers measuring the globe that concludes the chapter captures these interlocking contraries. Evoking William Blake's image of Urizen as the god creator, the image associates this with Ahab's blasphemous thirst for mastery of the natural world. Kent graphically imagined Ahab's madness in a vocabulary of stark skull-like imagery, bulging eyes and contorted features. Indeed, Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* frames the three-volume Lakeside Press edition of *Moby Dick*, from the opening image of a youth with arm extended as he gazes out (frontispiece to volume one), to the final stylized image of a figure plummeting to darkness, Icarus-like (title page of volume three).

For Kent, the autonomous self was the primary force of resistance against the enslaving regimens of industry and of mechanized forms of labour.⁶⁴ An essay by his friend Carl Zigrosser reveals this charismatic quality in the make-up of Kent, about whom he wrote that, 'He might have been and may still become a great leader of men through his personal magnetism, his adherence to principles and his unquenchable personal vitality.' Zigrosser pondered 'through what arduous self-discipline [Kent] achieved such mastery over himself ... Perhaps it was because from birth onwards, he has never allowed any challenge to his will to remain unanswered.' Zigrosser goes on to describe Kent in terms that recall eugenic discourse in the decades

between the wars.⁶⁵ Kent – seen through Zigrosser's eyes, emerges as the very type of the *übermensch*. His public persona spoke to modernist fears of enervation and degeneracy. Kent admired Nietzsche, producing a series of drawings of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, and engraving a motto in German from the book onto his fountain pen.⁶⁶ He shared with Alfred Stieglitz and Marsden Hartley a deep attachment to German culture and history that placed him under suspicion in the First World War, along with shared racial biases against 'French degeneracy'.⁶⁷ Also in common with Stieglitz and Hartley, he expressed moments of aristocratic disdain for democracy, as when he wrote to Zigrosser in 1919, 'I don't like today.... I don't like our Democracy which appears to me more and more clearly as the last word in brute tyranny.' And like others similarly formed, Kent expressed a selfardour bordering on the messianic: 'I begin to be conscious of power – of an absolute power unrelated to anything else in the world. I begin to see a purpose to it all ... and to believe profoundly in my own destiny, but with a kind of wonder *why* it happens to be I who has been chosen to carry on for a while the cloud-hidden ideals of the race.'⁶⁸ He fantasized a complete withdrawal from the present, fencing himself against intrusion to turn 'to eternity and the Cosmos ... within'.⁶⁹ Energized by his trip to Alaska in 1919, he rose to dithyrambic heights: 'I want to paint the rhythm of eternity.'⁷⁰ Kent the socialist appears in such moments to be deeply divided in his loyalties, contemptuous of those weak enough to be followers, and yet seduced by the power to dominate, and by the charismatic force of his own personality.

Such a reading places Kent in strange company with the spiritual godmother of libertarianism Ayn Rand, and her character from *The Fountainhead*, Howard Roark. In these years, Ben Duggar linked Kent and Frank Lloyd Wright - who inspired the figure of Roark - as sharing much 'in spirit, in philosophy'. Kent, like Wright and Roark, was trained as an architect. All three figures - real life and fictional - were given to self-mythologizing; each was marked by sententious pronouncements, truculently principled stances, and an unflinching sense of purpose. And finally, all three shared elements of what Meyer Schapiro would call - in a review of a book by Wright in 1935 - a 'theogonic' form of self-mystification. Reasserting the hierarchy of individual over mass, the theogonic elevated the creative self to a position of central authority, and in doing so bucked all forms of authority beyond the self - a type of 'anti-authoritarian individualism' with which Kent's biographers associated him. Kent saw history through the lens of his own personality and as the product of individual actors.

Lacking in his repertoire of wood engravings is any developed sphere of the social. His Blakean figural language featured low horizons, colossal figures looming above the landscape, grand vistas of mountains and starry heavens. In this symbolic world, the human element assumed cosmic dimensions.⁷¹ His lifelong friend Zigrosser wrote of Kent that, 'Man is the hero of most of his pictures.... He stands almost alone in his use of symbolism among the artists of today.'⁷² Kent's subject, however, was not man as social actor but man in his most eternal and epic form, remote from the developmental challenges presented by the social realm. Reading Kent's Ahab through the lens of

Nietzsche counterbalances James's reading of the totalitarian bent of Ahab with a different if complementary understanding: a man, not unlike Kent himself, who was intent on remaking the world in his own image by overcoming the constraints imposed on him by nature.

Kent recorded his own theogonic moments, as when he 'had stood in spots where I have known that I was the first white man who had ever seen that country, that I was the supreme consciousness that came to it. I have liked the thought that maybe there was no existence but in consciousness and that I was in a sense the creator of that place.'⁷³ Kent's robust self-mythologizing – and his theogonic attitude towards a nature he created out of his own form-giving powers – sat uneasily with his social dedication to unionization and collective action on behalf of the newly formed artists' groups of the 1930s. Poised between his socialist commitments and his individualistic mythos, Kent was, all unknowingly, drawn to the authoritarian elements always embedded as a possibility within the double-edged figure of American monomania – a self-guided god-dethroning energy with the power to usurp and mobilize the democratic masses. Zigrosser framed the tragic dimension of Kent's world in Nietszchean terms: 'Man in all this mental struggle has ... come to the very end of his own resources. He has discovered that he can not fly at will into the universal, but is bound down to earth by the limitation of his senses. It is a tragic but at the same time an heroic conception.'⁷⁴

By the 1950s, however, the contrary terms that had occupied, sometimes uncomfortably, the same ground in the 1930s would become starkly

polarized. The theogone-cum-master of the universe embodied in such charismatic public figures as Wright and Kent were now arrayed in very different colours, filtered through the language of totalitarianism, of master and slave, of autonomy and domination. Such terms expanded in the 1950s across a broad spectrum, from the liberationist radicalism of James - deeply anti-Stalinist and dedicating his energies to anti-colonial movements - to the virulently right-wing anti-communism of the US under McCarthy.

Seeping into James's characterization of Ahab, the anti-totalitarian rhetoric of tyrants, masters and slaves was turned, in one instance, against Kent himself - steadfastly loyal to the Soviet Union.⁷⁵ In 1950, Max Eastman, former socialist editor turned rabid anti-communist, published a letter to Kent asking him to explain his continued allegiance to the Soviet regime responsible for disappearing and eliminating thousands of dissident writers as 'enemies of the people'. 'I keep trying to think of excuses for you. Is it perhaps just a zeal to be "radical," to be against the capitalist as of old, that constrains you to play the lackey to an infinitely more dreadful tyrant?... Is it necessary ... to adore, to bend your knees to a Lord and Master after all?'⁷⁶ Rising to a zealous pitch of condemnation, Eastman invoked the 'enslavement of men's minds and bodies to a tyrant', asking rhetorically what unanalysed 'demon in the Zeitgeist' was pushing Kent to such suicidal actions, in a manner that brings to mind Ahab's self-destructive pursuit of the phantasmal white whale.⁷⁷

Kent's contradictory behaviour and crossed loyalties are unusual only in bringing together in

one individual the range of sympathies and conflicted allegiances that characterized the 1930s more broadly. Both a socialist and a profoundly self-driven individualist, his career exposes fundamental tensions in the collectivism of the 1930s: between democracy and the individual; over the role of singular charismatic figures in mass movements; and concerning the place of personality as both a model of social redemption and a force capable of capsizing mass movements through a dangerously commanding self-obsession. Neglecting the communitarian ethos just coming into focus in the early years of the 1930s, and emphasized in James's 1953 book on *Moby Dick*, Kent's Ahab captured a different dimension of the novel with prophetic power: the maniacal force of an ego-driven madman who would remake the world in his own image. Ahab's charismatic force in bending the shipboard community to his will substituted a cult of personality for democratic communal action.

Complicating Kent's own moral and political stance towards the authoritarian personality embodied in Ahab was the extent to which he shared aspects of Ahab's overweening will and egoistic projections onto nature. Impelled by desires for mastery – over his own weaknesses and over those who would compromise or hedge Kent's unyielding nature, he may have been, like Milton, 'of the Devil's party without knowing it', drawn to the very qualities of Ahab that fascinated C. L. R. James while provoking his unambiguous political condemnation.⁷⁸ James the anti-Stalinist and Kent – loyally pro-Soviet until the end of his life – each found in the figure of Ahab a cipher of the present. But Kent, unable to wrest himself free of his own self-mythologizing, unwittingly retraced the apotheosis of the individual

that was, for James, the fatal force threatening his world.

- 1 Clifton Fadiman, 'Introduction', in Herman Melville, *Moby Dick; or, The Whale* (Heritage Press: New York, 1943), p. v.
- 2 Lakeside Press of R. R. Donnelly and Sons published a deluxe edition priced at \$70.00, one of four illustrated American classics. The other three in the series were Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales*; Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*; and Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*. On the commission, see David Traxel, *An American Saga: The Life and Times of Rockwell Kent* (Harper and Row: New York, 1980), pp. 159, 166. The Modern Library and Random House both published a concurrent edition with 283 illustrations, a Book-of-the-Month Club selection.
- 3 Thayer Papers, Archives of American Art, quoted in Constance Martin, *Distant Shores: The Odyssey of Rockwell Kent* (Chameleon Books Inc.: Berkeley, California, 2000), p. 12; Rockwell Kent, *Voyaging: Southward from the Strait of Magellan* (G. P. Putnam's Sons and Knickerbocker Press: New York and London, 1924), p. 24, quoted in Martin, *Distant Shores*, op. cit., p. 17; Jake Milgram Wien, *Rockwell Kent: The Mythic and the Modern* (Hudson Hills Press: Manchester and New York, 2005), p. 15. See also Alan Wallach, 'Rockwell Kent', *Arts Magazine*, vol. 54, no. 2 (October 1979), on Kent's mythic landscapes, with their 'calculated formality and deliberate emotional distance', resulting in 'a stylized and objective quality' quite distinct from the expressionist language that runs through a different current of American art.
- 4 Bennett Cerf, *At Random*, as cited in Wien, *Rockwell Kent*, op. cit., p. 105.
- 5 Quoted in Elizabeth A. Schultz, *Unpainted to the Last: Moby Dick and Twentieth-Century American Art* (University of Kansas: Lawrence, 1995), p. 27.
- 6 I am most grateful to Jamie L. Jones for sharing her chapter 'The Black Arts and the White Whale: Rockwell Kent's Illustrations for *Moby Dick*', from 'American Whaling in Culture and Memory, 1820–1930', unpublished PhD thesis (Program in the History of American Civilization, Harvard University, 2011).
- 7 Jones argues that American publishing in the 1920s deployed these older media – especially in the 'American Classic' series initiated by Lakeside Press – in a retrospective spirit.

- ⁸ A characteristic endeavour was the ‘Retrospective Exhibition of American Art’ in 1921, including some six hundred works of visual art, dating from 1689 up to the present. This was purportedly the first such retrospective ever given to American art, an overlooked moment of cultural self-construction that opened the way for many more such exhibitions featuring a range of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century arts, as well as for the grand inventories of the Federal Art Project (Index of American Design). See Wien, *Rockwell Kent*, op cit., p. 61.
- ⁹ Quoted in Schultz, *Unpainted to the Last*, op cit., p. 28.
- ¹⁰ In a letter to William Kittredge, 11 November 1926, quoted in Wien, *Rockwell Kent*, op. cit., p. 134.
- ¹¹ Rockwell Kent, *How I Make a Woodcut*, from the series *Enjoy Your Museum* (Esto Publishing Company: Pasadena, 1934).
- ¹² Lewis Mumford, *Herman Melville* (Literary Guild of America: New York, 1929), p. 160.
- ¹³ This more nuanced reading is already apparent in Clifton Fadiman’s 1943 commentary, in which he uses such terms as ‘chiaroscuro’: ‘the symbolic values of the book are not allegorically plain, as in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*’. Fadiman, ‘Introduction’, op. cit., p. ix.
- ¹⁴ See Wien, *Rockwell Kent*, op. cit., p. 50.
- ¹⁵ Mumford, *Herman Melville*, op. cit., p. 161.
- ¹⁶ Nick Selby (ed.), *Herman Melville: Moby Dick* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1998), pp. 8, 15.
- ¹⁷ D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (T. Seltzer: New York, 1923/1973), p. 153.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 145.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 160, 159, 146.
- ²⁰ Mumford, *Herman Melville*, op. cit., p. 181.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 171.
- ²² Ibid., pp. 4, 5.
- ²³ Lawrence’s *Studies in Classic American Literature* and William Carlos Williams’s *In the American Grain* are among the best known and most probing of these efforts, although they point in quite different directions. In 1943, Clifton Fadiman identified the adventurous readers of *Moby*

Dick in the twentieth century as the ‘lucky Balboas and Columbuses who ... rediscovered its Pacific rhythms and Atlantic rages’. Fadiman, ‘Introduction’, op. cit., p. v.

- 24** Allegory reads surface narrative or meaning in relation to a deeper subtextual meaning that is stable and contains the key that unlocks whatever internal significance resides in the surface. Surface and depth in allegory are hierarchically arranged as levels of truth; the manner in which surface and depth mutually animate one another in symbolist modes of meaning is flattened out in this more emblematic expression.
- 25** That Melville was aware of Ahab’s symbolic castration and its effects on Ahab is evident from the chapter ‘Ahab’s Leg’, in which he writes that ‘Ahab did at times give careful heed to the condition of that dead bone upon which he partly stood.’
- 26** ‘Ahab, Fallen in Nantucket’, in chapter 106, ‘Ahab’s Leg’, vol. 3, p. 122.
- 27** Schultz, *Unpainted to the Last*, op. cit., p. 32, gives a similar, though less explicit, reading of this image.
- 28** Typical of this self-mythologizing is this from *Wilderness*: ‘We came to this new land, a boy and a man, entirely on a dreamer’s search; having had vision of a Northern Paradise, we came to find it.’ Rockwell Kent, *Wilderness: A Journal of Quiet Adventure in Alaska* (Wesleyan University Press and University Press of New England: Hanover, New Hampshire, and London, 1996), p. 3.
- 29** According to Michele Bogart, *Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1995), p. 245, Kent joined the Socialist Party in 1904. See Traxel, *An American Saga*, op. cit., p. 43. See also Frances Pohl, ‘Rockwell Kent and the Vermont Marble Workers’ Strike’, *Archives of American Art Journal*, vol. 29 (1989), pp. 150–60; and Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams (eds.), *Artists Against War and Fascism: Papers of the First American Artists’ Congress* (Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, 1986).
- 30** See *Rockwell Kent*, published by the American Artists’ Group in 1945.
- 31** In 1952, Kent would write to a correspondent that he ‘had the honor of having introduced Melville to the Soviet people’. Traxel, *American Saga*, op. cit., p. 206.
- 32** Kent’s contempt for the working classes was phrased in Nietzschean rhetoric of ‘slavish self-abasement’: see Traxel, *American Saga*, op. cit. p. 176; Alan Wallach, ‘Rockwell Kent’, op. cit., p. 15, recalls hearing

Kent in his later years making a speech ‘which had as its theme, and frequent refrain, “Thank God for the Soviet Union!”’

³³ See Arthur Sabin, *Red Scare in Court: New York Versus the International Workers Order* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 1993), p. 253.

³⁴ Kent apparently wished to join the party but was advised against it on the grounds that he was more valuable working outside the party (presumably because his membership might erode his appeal to a broad public). Personal correspondance with Andrew Hemingway.

³⁵ Rockwell Kent, *It's Me, O Lord: The Autobiography of Rockwell Kent* (Da Capo Press: New York, 1955).

³⁶ Kent's cultural notoriety in the decades between the wars was nourished by the books he published of his exploits in the arctic and subarctic wilderness, and his daily exposure to danger. These published adventures in turn promoted other artistic enterprises in such widely varied spheres as advertising, lecturing, political activism and fine-arts exhibitions. Small wonder then that Kent – apparently without any saving irony – would incorporate himself, becoming a marketable entity in which the strands of charismatic personality, a recognizable and easily imitated style, and wilderness adventure would conjoin in a self-reinforcing product: ‘Rockwell Kent, Inc.’ See Merle Armitage, *Rockwell Kent* (Alfred Knopf: New York, 1932), p. 4.

³⁷ Carl Zigrosser, ‘Rockwell Kent’, *Print Collector's Quarterly*, 25 April 1938, p. 141.

³⁸ Jamie L. Jones notes one other striking affinity associating Kent with Ahab, in her chapter on Kent's illustrations of *Moby Dick*: writing about the illustration at the head of chapter 36 ('The Quarter-Deck', vol. 1, p. 236), she notes the manner in which Ahab's ivory leg cuts into the deck, like an engraving tool: ‘This image ... offer(s) a strong characterization of Ahab that concisely links the mad captain with his navigational powers and with Kent's own woodcutting practice.’ Jones, ‘The Black Arts and the White Whale: Rockwell Kent's Illustrations for *Moby Dick*’, op. cit., pp. 5–6.

³⁹ His biographer Merle Armitage referred, for instance, to ‘the suffocating effects of our lip-stick civilization’. Armitage, *Rockwell Kent*, op. cit., p. 42.

- ⁴⁰ See Christopher Wilk, *Modernism: Designing a New World: 1914–1939* (V & A Publications: London, 2006); Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1987).
- ⁴¹ Armitage, Rockwell Kent, op. cit., p. 24.
- ⁴² The phrase is from C. L. R. James, from *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (Bewick Editions: Detroit, 1978), p. 55.
- ⁴³ Stark Young, 'The World of Rockwell Kent', *New Republic*, vol. 50, no. 648 (4 May 1927), p. 302. This view was echoed in a passage quoted by Armitage, *Rockwell Kent*, op. cit., p. 41: 'Everything is done by pure intention and perfect values and no dependence for effect is placed upon accidents or surface appearance of paint.'
- ⁴⁴ Kent's commitment to the craft of wood engraving was acknowledged as unusual – a quality that – 'much out of fashion' and 'reactionary' – marked his departure from the spurious effects of 'broken color, exaggerated impasto', and 'surface appearance' that marked the school of Paris with which Kent was favourably compared by his defenders. Merle, *Rockwell Kent*, op. cit., p. 41. In addition, Kent rejected the modern hierarchy of the arts, blurring the lines between printmaking, fine arts and advertising. He drew a distinction, however, between artists working in advertising while maintaining their autonomy, and artists doing commercial art entirely driven by the needs of the patron. See Bogart, *Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art*, op. cit., pp. 243–55; also 'There is no such thing as commercial art: A letter from Rockwell Kent', *Professional Art Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 4 (Summer 1936), pp. 6–7.
- ⁴⁵ This is most apparent in chapter 87, 'The Grand Armada'.
- ⁴⁶ James was not alone in associating Ahab with Hitler; Fadiman, 'Introduction', op. cit., p. vi, indirectly linked them as well.
- ⁴⁷ James, *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways*, op. cit., p. 8.
- ⁴⁸ James's most explicit statement of this theme is in *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways*, op. cit., p. 60, in which he identified Melville's primary theme as 'how the society of free individualism would give birth to totalitarianism'.
- ⁴⁹ See here Casey Nelson Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and Lewis Mumford* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1990).
- ⁵⁰ James, *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways*, op. cit., pp. 71, 53.

51 Ibid., p. 8.

52 Ibid., p. 50.

53 Ibid., pp. 10, 31.

54 Ibid., pp. 5, 12.

55 Here however it should be pointed out that James's vision of collectivism exceeded that of Melville himself; the crew of the *Pequod* in truth is fully implicated in Ahab's maniacal quest, drawn – with the exception of Starbuck – into his obsessive vision by the sheer force of magnetic personality.

56 James, *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways*, op. cit., pp. 19–20, 32.

57 The phrase is Stuart Davis's in 'The New York American Scene in Art', *Art Front*, February 1935.

58 One possible reason for the virtual absence of scenes of the crew is that the full-page illustrations were vertical in orientation, making it quite challenging to conceive a composition of multiple figures that would fit the format.

59 See for instance 'Knights and Squires', p. 171; 'Dusk', p. 244; 'The First Lowering', p. 325; and 'The Spirit Spout', p. 339.

60 The theme of Narcissus in Kent's work is interesting in this regard. See his wood engraving 'Forest Pool', which reprises the Narcissus theme.

61 'I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands and looking up into their eyes sentimentally ... let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness.' On the ambiguity of Kent's version of Ahab, see Schultz, *Unpainted to the Last*, op. cit., p. 35.

62 Kent served as president of the International Workers Order (IWO), founded in 1930, a multinational federation formed out of immigrant Jewish subcultures to serve the mutual aid and insurance needs of workers, and comprised of communists and socialists. He would articulate a vision of multiculturalism at the heart of the IWO: 'more like a tapestry, woven of brilliant colored threads, every one of which can be distinguished and keep its own characteristics'. Given these sympathies, and his own argument with the melting-pot vision of

American assimilation, it is noteworthy that Kent did not pick up on the theme in *Moby Dick*, to which James had responded so forcefully two decades later. The quote appears in Sabin, *Red Scare in Court*, op. cit., p. 252; on Kent and the IWO, see Sabin, pp. 249–66 and *passim*.

⁶³ See for instance ‘Men at Try-Works’.

⁶⁴ On Kent’s frontier mythos, see Wallach, ‘Rockwell Kent’, op. cit.; also Kent, *Wilderness*, op. cit.: ‘To sail uncharted waters and follow virgin shores – what a life for men!’

⁶⁵ In Zigrosser’s words, Kent was impatient ‘with weakness, sickness, and the neurotic temperament in general. Enjoying superb health and vitality, he cannot understand a state of sickness. Having disciplined his faculties to the control of will, he cannot tolerate vacillation or irresolution.... His is a highly objectified art, clean, athletic, sometimes almost austere and cold.’ Zigrosser, ‘Rockwell Kent’, op. cit., p. 151.

⁶⁶ ‘Zarathustra and his Playmates’ (1919: brush and ink, Morgan Library); Kent also had Wagnerian moments, as when he described the northern lights of Greenland as like ‘a glorified Isolde’s veil; and where the breath of her desire touched it, it grew hot and bright’ (*Salamina*). Armitage, *Rockwell Kent*, op. cit., p. 44, humorously imagined his ascension to Valhalla. On the enormous impact of Nietzsche in the US, see Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2012). The book traces the scope of Nietzsche’s reception, which spanned the political spectrum, from Emma Goldman to Ayn Rand.

⁶⁷ Traxel, *An American Saga*, op. cit., p. 121.

⁶⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 111. Kent’s contempt shaded into eugenic language, as when he dismissed the ‘physically deformed, slouch-gaited, dull-eyed, dead-souled’ people he encountered in Vermont. Kent also invoked ‘knightly ideals’ from the age of chivalry for his children; see Traxel, *An American Saga*, op. cit., pp. 124–5.

⁶⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 108.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁷¹ Characteristic of this is his woodcut ‘Workers of the World Unite!’ – a heroic nearly nude man with a spade lunging out against an unseen bayoneted army against a toylike industrial backdrop.

⁷² Zigrosser, ‘Rockwell Kent’, op. cit., p. 151.

73 Ibid., p. 149.

74 Ibid., p. 153.

75 This at least is the assertion made by Traxel, *An American Saga*, op. cit., p. 178.

76 Max Eastman, 'An Open Letter to Rockwell Kent', *Plain Talk*, vol. 4, no. 7 (April 1950), p. 45.

77 Ibid., p. 41.

78 Melville may also have been of the devil's party, sharing with Kent moments of theogonic self-inflation in which he assumed divine powers. He famously wrote to Nathaniel Hawthorne that the secret motto of Moby Dick was 'Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!' My thanks go to David Blake for this connection.

WILLIAM MORRIS, ORNAMENT AND THE COORDINATES OF THE BODY

Caroline Arscott

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri suggest that a periodic surfacing of resistance on the part of the exploited and oppressed that Marx described has been replaced with a new form of struggle requiring new topological metaphors. Pointing out that Marx deployed the deep image of the mole for the working class, they propose that this should be rethought in the globalized world in terms of the movement of snakes: 'Well, we suspect that Marx's old mole has finally died. It seems to us, in fact, that in the contemporary passage to Empire, the structured tunnels of the mole have been replaced by the infinite undulations of the snake.'¹ The topology is redefined by the lack of depth that has been codified in postmodern theory, by the abolition of distance in the digitally connected world, by the openness of the external reaches of a network that can always be extended by adding new nodes. The systematic subterranean dismantling of the system, invisible until the moment of a sudden wholesale collapse, is replaced by a network that occupies the whole surface like a worldwide web.² The virtuality of location, however, is twinned to an insistence on bodily existence: the denizen of Empire is monstrous due to the continuous shaping pressures of labour and oppression; it is sheer flesh forever

remade by capitalism. To lean on China Miéville's version of the potential of the monstrous, we can interpret Hardt and Negri's idea of flesh in this way: the remade can turn to the voluntary refashioning of the body for their own purposes.³ Every point, every instance of flesh, connects to the virtual centre, so for Hardt and Negri any struggle constitutes a challenge to the organization of power *in toto*, as well as an expression of the unique circumstances of the point of subversion: 'Simply by focusing their own powers, concentrating their energies in a tense and compact coil, these serpentine struggles strike directly at the highest articulations of imperial order.'⁴ The new world order is defined by Hardt and Negri in terms of the way that power is smoothly diffused. The efforts to dominate and subjugate move not just horizontally to the frontiers but establish a hold 'throughout the biopolitical latticework of world society'.⁵ With this, they see a potential for challenges to the status quo to arise from the single points caught in the latticework.

Looking back to the nineteenth century, they see proletarian and anti-colonial internationalism as prefiguring and in some sense inventing the globalization that

they characterize as Empire.⁶ I, too, will be reading back to the nineteenth century, somewhat in the manner that Hardt and Negri reference nineteenth-century communist internationalism, and looking at the design work of William Morris as instances of latticework conceived of in biopolitical terms – as examples of coiled and distributed power and agency. The politics of the shallow field of pattern were Morris's speciality, always conceived

by him in relation to the depth of fleshed-out nature.

The question that comes to prominence in Hardt and Negri's discussion is how a complete system can yield any opposition. This is their first concern: where is the point of resistance if there is an abandonment of classic formulations of ideology in which truth or science could offer a ground on which to stand? How is resistance generated if the 'external standpoint no longer exists', and rather than the coercive quelling of difference, the system maintains itself by 'an insignificant play of self-generating and self-regulating equilibria'.⁷ Their answer is driven by an investment in energetics as linked to human potential. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, they take the position that the social arena is a dynamic field, subject to energy flows. Reimagining this social field as a muscular biological entity, in terms that challenge what they see as Deleuze and Guattari's rather general presentation of dynamism, they contend that the living, totalized entity has the capacity to break out in challenge everywhere and anywhere.⁸

In taking this discussion back to the latter part of the nineteenth century, I argue that the biopolitical latticework was already a political tool, a way of conceiving of submission and resistance. Topological metaphors were being explored in which political possibilities, questions of the concentration of energies, of affect, desire and subjectivity, were being presented. The new topologies of the latter part of the nineteenth century were biologically based, positing a new kind of organism viewed in terms of the morphological potential of flesh subject to the variations produced

by natural and artificial selection and the damaging impact of industrial labour and colonial and imperial warfare. Physiological aesthetics drew on evolutionary theory to vest life and identity in a total organism infiltrated by neural pathways. Mind and body dualities were set aside as consciousness was conceived of as dispersed through the mental apparatus not just of the brain's grey matter but in the neural fibres and ganglionic centres. Will in flesh became a viable concept rather than will as the controller of despised flesh. In Victorian physiological aesthetics, the proposal is that the organism interacts with the environment, receiving stimuli through the receptor points connected to the nervous system. Pleasure - associated with effective vital functions - and pain - associated with damage or wasting to the biological entity - can be experienced by the subject. Aesthetic pleasure is seen as a variant of this reception of stimulus on the part of the organism.⁹ Grant Allen, in his *Physiological Aesthetics* of 1877, following on from work by Henry Maudsley, Alexander Bain, Herbert Spencer and James Sully, focused on the sense organs, the 'peripheral end organs of the cerebro-spinal nervous system'. Indeed, Allen famously defined aesthetic pleasure as 'the subjective concomitant of the normal amount of activity, not directly connected with the life-serving function in these peripheral end organs of the cerebro-spinal system'.¹⁰ The passive processing of sense data is aesthetic pleasure for Allen, and play or aesthetic production would be the active equivalent.

Regenia Gagnier has pointed out the emphasis on consumption in this passive biological model that was important for the Aesthetic Movement and

contrasts it with William Morris's refutation of art for art's sake, his insistence that art should serve a purpose.¹¹ According to Gagnier, certain modes of Aestheticism were shaped by the logic of consumption in commodity culture. She rightly brackets Morris off from such aspects of Aestheticism (and, in the latter part of the century, Decadence).¹² In Morris's view, art was for the purpose of fulfilled being: art served a crucial purpose in sustaining and improving life. He considered it to be sheer deprivation, a vicious thwarting of natural human response, for there to be an absence of beauty in our utilitarian objects and in our surroundings. The pleasures of art are, for him, directly connected with a life-serving function and are a fundamental need for human beings. Additionally, he believed that, along with necessary access to the pleasures deriving from art, there was a need for both knowledge about making and skill in making – in other words, abstract *and* practical art and craft education, what he called 'a share of knowledge and access to skill of human hand'.¹³ We certainly cannot see Morris as fixated on a notion of the *consumption* of art as the central reference point for the aesthetic. Production for need and artistic production meeting aesthetic needs form an inescapable corollary to the enjoyment of art. Nevertheless his position does overlap with that of the full array of Aestheticist positions in that he conceives of aesthetic experience in terms of the activation of the senses and the processing of sense data. In so far as he puts the sentient organism to the fore, Morris, like members of the Aesthetic Movement, draws on the ideas being developed in physiological aesthetics. His organism is ready to play, ready to know, ready

to make, ready to fight. His aesthetic and social ideal centres on the healthy organism, active in supplying its appetites, polymorphous, libidinally charged, liberated from damaging or tyrannical inhibitions, and, like Grant Allen's aesthetic physical being, open to the extremes of stimulation. I have argued that the life forms envisaged in his designs, the twisting plant forms, stand as representatives of the human subject as social being, beautiful in itself and engaged in aesthetic experience.¹⁴

Bearing in mind Hardt and Negri's snakes and Marx's mole, we can assess Morris's designs in terms of slithering all-overness versus intimations of systematic tunnelling way below to enable a once-and-for-all caving in of a falsely integral surface. In one example of a Morris-designed printed fabric of 1876, *African Marigold* [1], the surging directional movement of the tulip stems in blue can be looked at to assess Morris's vision of the energies, location and temporality of social and physiological being in

its ideal form, its constitutional vigour enabling political action. The mutability and expansiveness of its flesh is the condition of organisms that can and do evolve. That mutability speaks of the future but also of the legacy of slavery (bond slavery and wage slavery) and the industrial deformities of the present. The biopolitical theme allows Morris to present utopian and dystopian visions simultaneously. The assumptions of physiological aesthetics oblige any vision of pleasure to consider the experience of pain as well.



1 Morris and Company, *African Marigold*, designed by William Morris, furnishing fabric, 1876. Victoria and Albert Museum, London (CIRC.42-1954). Photo: copyright © 2013 V&A Images. All Rights Reserved.

Ornament is well suited to plot the bodily and social coordinates of the decentred individual or the collective, viewed in terms of interconnected biological systems and an interdependent ecological system. Unlike the pictorial, ornament builds on two axes of the two-dimensional surface by repetition, potentially *ad infinitum*. Morris can be said to have put the proletarian body into ornament and thereby accessed the utopian possibilities of this art form. One way of thinking about this is to think of the Vitruvian theory of

ornament – in which ornament originates in the decoration of triumphal monuments with the severed body parts of conquered victims – as having been brought into dialogue with the nineteenth-century design theory of Gottfried Semper – in which ornament is seen as the formalization of the intrinsic craft actions of the maker, transmitting the structural elements of textiles or pottery to painted or printed patterns on the surface.¹⁵ Morris puts not just the action but the body of the maker onto the surface, reversing the Vitruvian idea to present the recombined potential victor rather than the disassembled victim. He makes the design function in the essentially two-dimensional geometric grid *and* in the depth of the forms indicated; the two propositions – that the design is flat and that the forms have depth and move through three-dimensional space – are held in paradoxical opposition in a way that is unique to his work. The conviction of rude corporeal presence (and the health and strength, and so *beauty*, that go with it) depends on the three-dimensionality of the motifs in the design. The waxy, somewhat pliable fleshy petals of the white blooms, each petal structured with interior grooves and exterior ridges, occupy space assertively. These are manifestly tulip flowers. Morris's choice of plant species is not always easy to determine, but comparison with a seventeenth-century Dutch watercolour of tulips accessioned by the South Kensington Museums in 1876, the year of Morris's design, allows us to be sure [2].



2 Simon (Pietersz) Verelst, *Tulips*, watercolour, after 1668. Victoria and Albert Museum, London (263-1876). Photo: copyright © 2013 V&A Images. All Rights Reserved.

In Morris's rendition, the tulip blooms with their primitivized stylization are vast, excessive. As the double ring of petals consists of some that fold inwards and others outwards, the bulk is magnified. The petals in the double ring are splayed and rolled together alternately along the nearest edge of the larger blooms, the rolling over of the petal serving to expose the stamens, which command attention within the design. They are as bright and almost as large as the African marigold blooms that act as the counterpoint to the tulips in the design. These stamens (in botanical terms, the male organs of the

plant) rise as plump, apparently swelling, impossibly smoothly rounded forms, top-heavy on their flexible stems, clustered together, mutually touching, potentially moving apart as their increasing weight outbalances the available support. For all the challenging tectonic mass of the tulip blooms, the design shows us accommodation and curbing. If the maximum point of affect in the large tulip heads is the stamen as peripheral-end-organ, a mobile sense receptor, then an equal charge is available in the smaller tulip heads at the point where there is a collision with the surging line of the other stem. The S and reverse-S of the blue foliage 'belonging' to the smaller tulip slides behind the other stem; but then at the triumphant point of delivery of the flower head into the heart of the spiral there is a point of coincidence with that stem; the petals are forced back and down, others find a space by placing their points over the foliage. These instances of deflection present touch and sensory stimulus as the stamens do, and in line with 1870s materialist physiology there is a switching between pleasure and pain. The deflection is evidence of the energy of the vectored forces, the velocity and substantiality of the snakelike stems. In this congested design, there is a necessity for accommodation: the tulips cannot occupy the whole space of the spirals' enclosure; they shift to left or right to give space to the less doughty marigold.

I wish to draw attention to the reformatting of the environment in terms of pattern in art of the 1860s (and beyond) and the importance to this reformatting of the biological. An early Victorian naturalistic presentation in which every object and figure held its place by virtue of its ability to signify

moral categories or objective certainty gave way to one in which the cumulative repetitions of ornament governed the pictorial field. Morris and contemporaries such as Christopher Dresser, William de Morgan and Walter Crane were looking again at the presentation of the natural world, coming back to the sixteenth-century ceramics of Bernard Palissy so admired in the early Victorian period for the variety of natural form and mimetic representation that they offered, and seeing them instead in terms of an interconnected system offering overall pattern.¹⁶ Examples of Palissy ceramics were bought by the South Kensington Museum in the 1850s and 1860s in the prime period of Victorian naturalism [3].

In the 1870s it was possible connect with Palissy in a new way: to picture the snake as is done in a watercolour by George William Mote [4]. In Mote's picture the snake stands both as an area of pattern and a biological entity, its breathing sentience indicated by the faintest touch of a grass stalk and two staring eyes. It is hardly a figure of sin, as Ruskin, spokesperson for Pre-Raphaelite naturalism, would have any snake (he called the snake 'a divine hieroglyph of the demoniac power of the earth').¹⁷ The adder's triangular markings are displayed as geometric shapes in a neat coil presenting an orderly area of patterning in amongst the rocks, fallen leaves and grasses. In paintings of the 1870s and beyond, subdued mood and ornamental order take the place of histrionics and multiplied symbols of natural theology. George William Mote, gardener-artist employee of the paper-mad aristocrat Sir Thomas Phillipps, was the artist who painted this work in 1870.¹⁸ His adder is probably painted from life on the estate at

Thirlestaine House. We can imagine that if it moves, it will encounter not just leaves but scraps of paper or vellum, given that Phillipps strewed the country with paper from broken wagons when he moved his vast collection of documents there in the 1860s. The information-technology tycoon of his day, he bought up every available book, manuscript and stray document available on the market, significantly distorting the trade in books and in waste paper. I am offering Mote's snake as a marker of the ground level of physiologically embodied aesthetic subjectivity that depends on an environment in which repetitive large-scale systems of accumulation occur. The parallel with a late-twentieth-century information age is deliberate.



3 Earthenware dish with coloured glazes,
probably by Bernard Palissy. Victoria
and Albert Museum, London
(5476-1859). Photo: copyright © 2013
V&A Images. All Rights Reserved.



4 George William Mote, *An Adder*,
signed and dated 1870, oil on canvas,
18.4 × 28.6 cm. Maas Gallery, London.

Biology, and in particular evolutionary biology, was arguably the sphere in which repetition on a vast scale and the overall results of minute variation were studied to greatest effect. Lying behind the formulations of physiological psychology were the findings of Charles Darwin on evolution. To draw attention to the forms of biological existence that Darwin proposed in the 1870s and at the start of the 1880s, I will refer in particular to the earthworm study that he produced as his last book: *The Formation of Vegetable Mould Through the Action of Worms* (1881).¹⁹ This is a book that explores bodily coordinates, sensibility and systems of accumulation. The worm is an index of any life form, and its achievements correspond to the possibilities inherent in nature, which accumulates minute changes and out of these produces the wonders of the natural world. The wonders that the worm produces are not diversity of form and colour but the beauty of the smooth and refined. At the end of the book Darwin says:

When we behold a wide, turf-covered expanse, we should remember that its smoothness, on which so much of its beauty depends, is mainly due to all the inequalities having been slowly levelled by worms.²⁰

The levelling is done by the repeated ingestion, internal grinding and excretion of earth, which makes it finer and finer. He measures the amount of earth shifted and refined by worms over periods of time and establishes the mechanical and chemical processes whereby they break down the matter that passes through their bodies. He establishes the sensitivity of the eyeless worm to touch, vibration and light with a series of experiments. This hermaphroditic organism is a primitive life form of minimal organization capable of moving forwards or backwards, with a body that grows incrementally as the segments multiply. The naked, unarmoured worm, ringed by nerves, is a responsive creature. Most importantly, Darwin's earthworms are credited with a form of subjectivity since he carried out experiments to show the decision-making powers of the creatures. He investigated the way that the worms draw leaves into their burrows, for food, to provide a cosy lining, and to plug the entrance as a weather-proofing measure. His interest in sensory apparatus gives way to a determination to demonstrate the worms' decision-making ability. Not just their responsiveness to sensation but their intelligence is being asserted, notwithstanding the small size of the cerebral ganglia, which he acknowledges.²¹ According to Darwin, they drag different-shaped leaves into their burrows in different ways; they adapt the orientation of the leaf to the best way of

plugging the entrance; the selection of orientation is not random.

Darwin tested this by introducing leaflike pieces of paper into the worms' environment. Narrow-based and very narrow-based triangles were cut out of writing paper and rubbed with animal fat to waterproof them somewhat. The worms' interaction with these objects left traces: dirt is left on the paper where the worm has covered any part of it with slime; some more easily removed dirt is to be seen on the side that dragged along the ground. Dirty base edges and creases are left on triangles grabbed and pulled into the burrow from the base. However, in the surprise result of the experiment, in the greater number of cases relatively clean triangles without creases, and without dirty base edges resulted from the worms' adoption of the most advantageous grab-and-pull method whereby the worm assesses the shape of the triangle and selects the sharp apex for the sucking grab. This Darwin takes as evidence of intelligence, careful decision-making on the part of the worms. He surmises that the blind worm moves around the object and touches it repeatedly with its front end, which Darwin explains serves as a tactile organ.²²

The claim for the aesthetic effects of earthworm activity must be taken along with the account of their singular subjectivity. Physiological evolutionist models of biological existence in the 1870s and 1880s offered fresh approaches to the aesthetic where the body was at the centre, and mental and psychological processes were considered as aspects of embodied sensibility. This involved a reconceptualization of the participation of the sensible individual in the wider collective, where

space and touch and force, accommodation and cooperation could come to be understood in terms of the

systemic and incremental. The change produced by the action of worms is not actually evolutionary, but it stands as a figure for evolutionary processes and offers a different presentation of the outcome of evolution from that which was apparent in Darwin's earlier work. Multi-coloured miscellany gives way to the smooth, 'wide, turf-covered expanse'. This placid uniformity is subtended by the intense physicality of the worldwide population of constantly labouring worms.

William Morris's design work was a conscious effort to envisage a healthy being under new conditions of life and to recognize the emotional and political ramifications of change, growth and contestation. He was interested in living labour and its fleshing out. He drew on the paradigms of evolutionist biology and physiological aesthetics to give an account of politics, the temporality of which does indeed seem closer to that of constantly slithering snakes than to the sporadically surfacing mole. Because this is a vision of a future unfolding of the commonwealth's power and beauty, the healthy flesh is omnipresent, not set in dramatic opposition to an opposing oppressor. The process of change is ongoing, though: there is nothing here that is fixed or inert and the process involves the agonies and pleasures of growth and movement. Somatic and psychic investment is amplified, not reduced, in this utopian vision, and it is through this investment that the utopian can be seen to carry with it an account of the cost of political change and the toll levied on the bodies and minds of the labourers in an alternative dystopia. Such a dystopia corresponds to

the late Victorian present or the continuation of the present into ever greater deprivation and provocation.

Hardt and Negri use the embodied labourer as a way of troubling postmodern theory, where the world is conceived of solely in terms of information flow. This puts fleshy depth of productive labour into the worldwide web. Equally they challenge an account of the all-embracing, disabling colonization of somatic being and mental life by the ruling forces in society, proposing that, while power has indeed been integrated into the bodies of populations in this way, the possibility of contestation remains. Glossing Foucault in order to revise his presentation, they write: 'Society, subsumed within a power that reaches down to the ganglia of the social structure and its processes of development reacts like a single body.'²³ Their claim is that the integration of every person through the annexation and control of somatic and mental processes relocates the position of social contestation, potentially, from the margins of the state to the substantial centre. The invasion of every physique and mind paradoxically creates a new context in which contestation is possible.²⁴ This yields somewhat wishful visions of spontaneous revolt, which sits with traditions of syndicalism and anarchism if seen as a programme for political organization. But it also represents the ongoing activity of living labour, wormlike, breaking down the fixed territorializing structures attendant on the accumulation of dead labour.²⁵ There is an analogy between the topologies explored in Hardt and Negri's 'omniversal' and Morris's vision of the commonweal: in both cases, there is a thickening of the web by the insistence on

laborious, fleshy presence. To be aware of this analogy is to suggest another way of reading their work and the biopolitical lattice that they describe, as a dystopian-utopian meditation on power and potential.

This essay is based on a paper delivered at Historical Materialism Conference, London, November 2009; my thanks to Steve Edwards for inviting me to participate in the session on 'Utopias, Dystopias and Socialist Biopolitics'.

- ¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000), p. 57.
- ² Karl Marx drew on the idea of the mole a number of times. In a letter of 1858, it is a figure for the undermining effects of unsustainable economic arrangements: 'From a paper which recently appeared in the *Moniteur* it transpires that, if compared with 1855 and '56, the stored up commodities in the French customs *entrepôts* are enormous, while the *Economist's* correspondent declares outright that Bonaparte caused the Bank to make advances on the same and thus enabled their holders to return them. But with the approach of spring they will inevitably be thrown on the market, and then, there is no doubt, there will be a crash in France, answered by crashes in Belgium, Holland, Rhenish Prussia, etc./ In Italy the economic situation is truly frightful.... Taken all in all, the crisis has been burrowing away like the good old mole it is. Salut. Your K. M.' *Marx-Engels Correspondence 1858*, Karl Marx to Friedrich Engels, 22 February 1858, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1858/letters/58_02_22a.htm>, accessed 22 March 2013.
- ³ China Miéville envisages a category of people or creatures remade by the punitive state in his Bas-Lag series of novels: *Perdido Street Station* (2000), *The Scar* (2002), *Iron Council* (2004).
- ⁴ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, op. cit., p. 58.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 41.
- ⁶ Ibid., p. 51.
- ⁷ Ibid., p. 34.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

- ⁹ See Robert M. Young, *Mind, Brain and Adaptation in the Nineteenth Century* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1970); Edwin Clarke and L. S. Jacyna, *Nineteenth-Century Origins of Neuroscientific Concepts* (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1987); and Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture 1850–1880* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2000).
- ¹⁰ Grant Allen, *Physiological Aesthetics* (Henry S. King: London, 1877), p. 34.
- ¹¹ Regenia Gagnier, *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2000), p. 137. See also Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1986).
- ¹² Regenia Gagnier assigns Morris to a category of ‘practical Aesthetes’ along with Ruskin and Wilde, whom she distinguishes from the Decadents.
- ¹³ William Morris, ‘How We Live and How We Might Live’, 1884.
- ¹⁴ Caroline Arscott, *William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones: Interlacings* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2008).
- ¹⁵ Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, *The Architecture: In Ten Books* (c. 15 BC), trans. Joseph Gwilt (Priestley and Weale: London, 1826), Book One, pp. 4–5; Harry Francis Mallgrave, *Gottfried Semper: Architect of the Nineteenth Century* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1996), chapter 4, ‘The Zurich Years 1855–69’.
- ¹⁶ Fiona McCarthy, *A History of British Design 1830–1970* (George Allen and Unwin: London, 1970; 2nd edn, 1979); Stefan Muthesius, *The Poetic Home: Designing the Nineteenth-Century Domestic Interior* (Thames & Hudson: London, 2009).
- ¹⁷ John Ruskin, *The Queen of the Air*, II (1869), ‘Athena Keramitis (Athena in the Earth)’ (George Allen: Orpington, 1883), p. 88.
- ¹⁸ Sir Thomas Phillipps (1792–1872) was a compulsive collector of books and manuscripts, buying secondhand material and job lots of papers. His collection included 40,000 books and 60,000 manuscripts. In 1863, he moved from Middle Hill near Broadway (Worcestershire) to Thirlestaine House, Cheltenham, and required over a hundred wagons to move his vast collections. When several of the wagons foundered in the process, papers were scattered; the countryside was said to be littered with scraps of paper for years. *Sir Thomas Phillipps: Portrait of*

a Collector, exhibition held at Grolier Club, New York, 1972 (no catalogue). See *The Middle Hill Press: A Checklist of the Horblit Collection of Books, Tracts, Leaflets, and Broadsides Printed by Sir Thomas Phillipps at His Press at Middle Hill, Or Elsewhere to His Order, Now in the Library of the Grolier Club* (Grolier Club: New York, 1997). Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22143>>, accessed 27 March 2013.

19 Charles Darwin, *The Formation of Vegetable Mould Through the Action of Worms* (1881) (Appleton: New York, 1882). In this book, Darwin came back to observations he had published early in his career in a paper for the Geological Society in 1837 and an article for the *Gardeners' Chronicle* in 1844.

20 Darwin, *The Formation of Vegetable Mould*, op. cit., p. 313.

21 He introduces, as a point of comparison, the worker ant.

22 'When a worm first comes out of its burrow, it generally moves the much extended anterior extremity of its body from side to side in all directions, apparently as an organ of touch', Darwin, *The Formation of Vegetable Mould*, op. cit., p. 28.

23 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, op. cit., p. 24.

24 This, the 'paradox of power' is that of a new context attendant on the invasion of every physique and mind: 'a new context, a new milieu of maximum plurality and uncontrollable singularisation – a milieu of the event', ibid., p. 25.

25 'As it contests the dead labour accumulated against it, living labour always seeks to break the fixed territorialising structures, the national organisations, and the political figures that keep it prisoner. With the force of living labour, its restless activity, and its deterritorialising desire, this process of rupture throws open all the windows of history', ibid., p.52.

MARXIST THEORY IN PRACTICE
LANDSCAPE, CLASS AND IDEOLOGY

MARXISM AND THE SHAPING OF MODERNISM

MARXISM IN A NEW WORLD ORDER

'RED HASHAR'

LOUIS LOZOWICK'S LITHOGRAPHS OF SOVIET TAJIKISTAN

Barnaby Haran

In April 1931, Louis Lozowick travelled to the new republic of Tajikistan in Central Asia, the lone visual artist among a group from the International Union of Revolutionary Writers (hereafter IURW).¹ During his stay in the country, he made sketchbook drawings that he subsequently developed into lithographs, which appeared in magazines and exhibitions over the next few years, constituting a portfolio of images of sovietization in action at the peripheries of the Soviet Union.² His travelling companions formed a 'Writers Brigade' that included the veteran Austrian journalist Egon Erwin Kisch, the Frenchman Paul Vaillant-Couturier, editor of the communist newspaper *L'Humanité*, the Polish modernist writer Bruno Jasieński, the Norwegian journalist Otto Liuhn, and Joshua Kunitz, a fellow American and an editor of the magazine *New Masses*.³ A revolving cast of Communist Party officials guided the travellers eastwards through the steppes towards Central Asia, extolling the marvels of sovietization in their particular localities in highly selective itineraries that avoided scenes of hardship or suppression. The Writers Brigade detailed this extensive journey in numerous publications that

typify the communist subgenre of travel writing by mixing observation with propagandist affirmation.⁴

Arriving in the mountainous Tajikistan, the writers conflated the epic transformations of sovietization with the rich history and dramatic landscape of the region. Lozowick enthused in *Theatre Arts Monthly*:

Here in the pathway of the Sassanian kings, Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, and Tamerlane, the radical changes brought by the Soviet have been greater than in the Soviet Union as a whole: from the wooden plow and the tiny individual plot to the latest agricultural machinery and collective farming; from polygamy and child marriage to complete equality of the sexes.⁵

Lozowick's lithographs betray a touristic fascination with this outer reach of the USSR, and while purporting to describe sovietization, they idealize the process and exoticize the setting. These images, writes Andrew Hemingway, 'suggest a magical transformation in a picturesque environment rather than a desperately poor Muslim region being wrenched into the twentieth century'.⁶

Rather than simply detailing sovietization, Lozowick's affirmative vignettes are redolent of the propagandist ritual of 'red hashar'. Lozowick explained 'red hashar' by describing a procession in the city of Kurgan Tiube:

Tajiks in colourful costumes, turbans, kerchiefs, astride diminutive donkeys and all singing in a chorus. Musicians played the drums and pipes and dancers headed the procession. The riders carried red flags with inscriptions: 'Soviet Cotton for Soviet Factories', 'Cotton Independence for U.S.S.R.' etc. The whole thing had the festive air of a wedding ceremony or a celebration of some holiday. It was a procession I was to see in all parts of the country, 'red hashar', representing an old Tajik custom of mutual aid, of helping

a neighbour behind in his field work; and it was a good illustration of the way in which the Soviet system utilizes old customs and institutions by transforming them to meet new needs.⁷

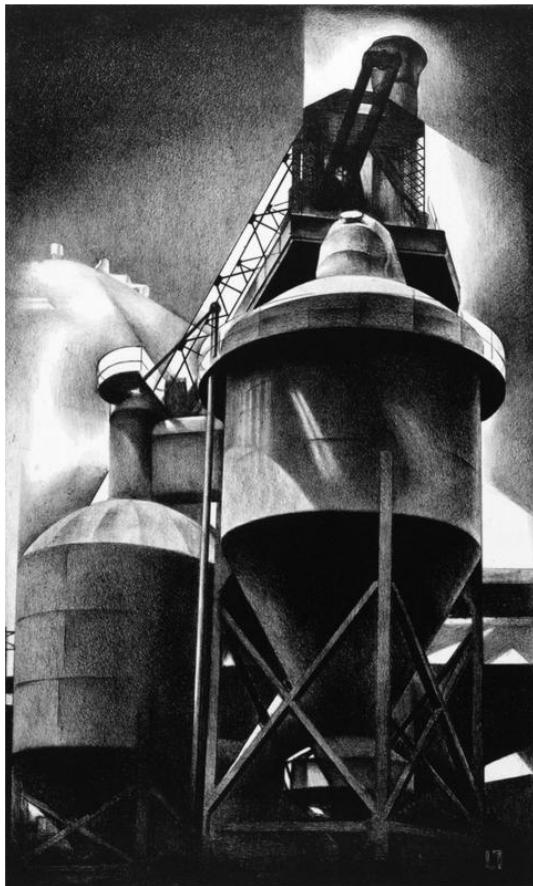
'Red *hashar*' was a performative representation of sovietization, a means of reframing potentially anti-Soviet Tajik traditional culture in a pageant of collective enterprise. If sovietization indicated the rapid modernization, collectivization and partial secularization of a society defined by residual feudalism, religious dogmatism, rigid gender hierarchies, and traditionalism in culture, while bypassing both the development of capitalism and the revolutionary event, then 'red *hashar*' epitomized the attempt to justify these dramatic changes through cultural rituals. Insisting upon harmonious redirection rather than disruption was crucial because these changes were controversial. Martha B. Olcott writes:

The Soviet takeover in Central Asia was a political, economic, and social revolution. The Bolsheviks called for the immediate nationalization of all land, including the *waqf* (clerically owned) lands; an action which threatened the power of the traditional leaders. The Soviet authorities in Tashkent introduced anti-religious legislation which outlawed Koran schools and closed all *Shari'a* (religious) courts. The social tensions implicit in these unprecedented actions were exacerbated by the previous isolation of Central Asia from even the most moderate ideas.⁸

Olcott explains that the Soviet state aimed to 'sculpt its citizenry in an ideal image'.⁹ Bringing Tajikistan into pace with the Bolshevik tempo involved the supplication of the old to the new, and 'red *hashar*' thus connoted obeisance, or enforced cooperation, to imposed transformations. 'Red *hashar*' licensed the continuation of traditional pastimes, such as

equine sports, to contain Tajiks who might resist sovietization by joining the Basmachi (a derogatory term meaning 'brigands'), a movement that violently opposed religious, land and gender reform. 'Red *hashar*' therefore balanced precariously between appeal to cooperation and forcible insistence.

Lozowick does not represent the Basmachi or any apparent obstacles to sovietization in his lithographs, which mark his most directly pro-communist subject matter. Yet despite the celebratory tone and consequent ideological glossing, they repeatedly show disparities between new and old with mild comic overtones, thus implying an incongruous nexus of Soviet and Tajik social orders. This is especially apparent in his representations of Tajik men, whose opposition to sovietization often constituted the old violently rejecting the new. In stylistic terms, his treatment of the images appears conflicted, mixing together modernist and outmoded techniques to produce an unstable but tendentious modernism. Lozowick mediates between his characteristic spatial arrangements, developed in the early 1920s in response to European avant-garde tendencies, and more traditional modes of description, marking his greatest adherence to conventional figuration yet retaining aspects of his prior innovations, as if seeking a bespoke visual idiom to communicate this troubled meeting of old and new.



1 Louis Lozowick, *Tanks #2*, 1929,
lithograph, 37.3 x 22.7 cm.
Smithsonian American Art Museum,
Museum purchase. Copyright ©
1929 Lee Lozowick.

In some respects, Lozowick's images are consistent with a gradual shift in his output from the schematic depictions of cities and machines with which he made his name during the previous

decade to a politically engaged mode that emphasized the social determinates of industry and urbanism [1].¹⁰ For Virginia Hagelstein Marquardt and Barbara Zabel, this turn towards a more literal and socially contingent mode emphasized the worker's role in constructing machines and buildings to suit the transformations brought by the Great Depression. In opposition to Marquardt and Zabel, Hemingway complicates this narrative by questioning the degree to which Lozowick's Precisionist machine aesthetic was essentially an American version of Constructivism predicated on technological optimism that gave way to social realism, and argues that his late 1920s figurative work was thematically nuanced and formally complex, borrowing compositionally from radical formalist photographic perspectives while asserting the continued importance of graphic art.¹¹ His representations of New York during this time offer a vision of an alienated capitalist metropolis that was more coterminous with the disconcerting 'magic realism' of Neue Sachlichkeit, with its residual faith in art, than the technophile, propagative ethos of Constructivism. In 1930, Lozowick wrote a short article on lithography in which he derided the polarities of 'ornamental abstraction' and 'photographic actualism' in favour of a medium that retained crafted qualities but witnessed the conversion of three-dimensional form through 'the grainy surface of the stone' into textural and tonal surfaces, into a post-abstract figurative art.¹² Furthermore, lithography as a medium bestrode the old and the new, with its prior innovativeness now an outmoded technology, yet suits this curious hybrid of residual gallery art with a type of visual travel reporting-cum-propaganda. Superficially, the

propagandist agenda underscoring his Tajikistan images might necessitate an abandonment of such critical potential, in that sovietized societies were purportedly non-alienated. Yet in these juxtapositions of old and new, Lozowick struggles to represent the Tajik as a worker, and suggests the alien nature of proletarianism in a hitherto feudal social order.

Perhaps the Tajikistan images witness Lozowick's ambivalent response to the communist debates about proletarianism at the turn of the 1930s, in which his work was strongly censured. Indeed, he was grudgingly caught up in the wave of cultural proletarianism through his involvement with the John Reed Clubs and *New Masses*. In *New Masses* in 1929, Pauline Zutringer claimed that Lozowick's 'machine art is bourgeois' because it glorified capitalist objects at the cost of the proletarian, a crude argument that he batted away as 'unsolicited heroicization of the worker' in a terse riposte printed below the article.¹³ Under the editorship of Mike Gold, *New Masses* interpreted the broad policies of the 'Third Period line', which distinguished communist parties from other leftist and especially social democratic political movements, to call for proletarian consciousness in opposition to a somewhat reductive model of bourgeois culture. Gold, Kunitz and several members of the communist milieu travelled to Kharkov for the Second World Plenum of the International Bureau of Revolutionary Literature in November 1930, and found that such proletarianism was not a rigid cultural policy.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Lozowick made an awkward attempt to validate his practice in an article entitled 'Art in the Service of the Proletariat' in *Literature of the World*

Revolution in 1931, with an optimistic statement that revolutionary artists 'have profited by the experiments of the last twenty-five years ... [and] utilize the laconic clear-cut precision of certain younger artists'.¹⁵ However, the following year Anne Elistratova, in *International Literature* (the new title of *Literature of the World Revolution*), harshly demonized Lozowick's machine art as a 'repudiation of the revolutionary class struggle' in an extensive critique of *New Masses*' riven cultural policy and ineffectual response to the Depression. Elistratova provided a more serious version of the 'machine art is bourgeois' thesis:

Lozowick depicts the process of production as devoid of personality and of human traits; the *human factor* in the class relations under the system of production escapes the field of his artistic vision. By showing the might of technique 'in general', outside of its class content, of technique *per se*, Lozowick falls into a fetishization of capitalist technique.¹⁶

The degree to which this public dressing down in *International Literature* influenced Lozowick in his coeval development of the Tajikistan lithographs is uncertain, although the almost exclusive focus on the 'human factor' of the citizens of this emergent republic is telling. Certainly, when the images appeared in *International Literature* the following year, they may have restored some faith in the political consonance of Lozowick's art with the IURW. Paradoxically, having reluctantly measured his machine art against a confused model of proletarianism, Lozowick's Tajikistan images depict a region where both machines and proletarians were in short supply, and capitalism was as alien a concept as communism. Here they encountered a world

far from the proletariat's industrial metropolitan locus, and a populace that was not predisposed towards proletarianism.



2 Louis Lozowick, *At the Gates of Pamir*, 1932, lithograph, 13.5 × 25.4 cm. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Adele Lozowick. Copyright © 1932 Lee Lozowick.

The overriding theme of the accounts by the group was the epic encounter of old and new in a dramatic environment. Tajikistan is predominantly made up of the mountainous topography of the Pamir Highlands, an outgrowth of the Hindu Kush, with a smaller area of flatlands in the Ferghana Valley around the capital Dushambe (renamed Stalinabad in 1931; now Dushanbe). In a *New Masses* piece of November 1931, which featured the first appearance in print of Lozowick's images, a set of four loosely rendered sketchbook drawings, Kunitz writes that Tajikistan 'is primitive, wild. Here and there one discovers traces of civilization: now a green patch of cultivated land rising on a steep incline - a triumph of human persistence and

ingenuity; now an ethereally woven bridge suspended perilously over the angry, roaring Dushambe'.¹⁷ Although not illustrating this text, Lozowick's representation of the precarious 'Devil's Bridge, Tajikistan' depicts a lone Tajik on a donkey cautiously progressing over a rickety structure high above a wild river that curls with an almost rococo flourish. In Kunitz's 'Red Roads in Central Asia' from the August 1932 issue of *Travel*, a photograph of the bridge has a caption citing the structure as proof of the necessity of modern bridges for road systems, whereas Lozowick's image does not have such purposeful anchorage, but merely displays aesthetic and touristic delight in this antiquated scene. In his bucolic lithograph *At the Gates of the Pamir* [2], Lozowick shows a Tajik shepherd blithely guiding his flock along a ridge overlooking a dazzling mountain panorama in a scene that strongly invokes romantic landscape paintings (it is worth noting that following the Tajikistan trip, Lozowick visited Yosemite National Park, joining a long lineage of American landscape artists, from Albert Bierstadt to Ansel Adams, who marvelled at this paradisiacal environment). Indeed, technical experimentation is entirely absent in this image, as if modernism is somehow ill equipped to communicate the grandeur and timelessness of a scene where modernity is almost an antithetical phenomenon. When the image appeared in *International Literature*, with the subtitle 'Taking Sheep to Pasture', it perhaps served as contextual scenery for other images showing sovietization's achievements, such as 'Pioneers Going to School' and 'Native Volunteers of the Red Army'. However, when used to illustrate Kunitz's 'Soviet Asia Sings' in *New Masses* in April 1935, the lithograph

acquired the caption ‘Sheep Collective – Tajikistan’, which might seem fanciful but is loosely credible, inasmuch as Vaillant-Couturier describes the party resting at the mountain collective farm of Kahalla in the Pamir borders.¹⁸ There is, however, a definite slippage in these images from the narrative of sovietization into generic Grand Tour wonderment at Tajikistan’s sublime vistas.

In *Free Soviet Tadjikistan*, Vaillant-Couturier recalls a conversation at Tashkent station when a guide called Marussya warned the embarking party: ‘Beware of romance and the picturesque.’¹⁹ As the written accounts and Lozowick’s images demonstrate, forsaking romantic, exoticizing tropes when conveying the particularity of Tajikistan’s topography was not easy. Such touristic marvelling at the republic’s natural beauty and atavistic customs offended the group’s Tajik communist guide. Kunitz relays that as the car rumbled through mountain passes, Vaillant-Couturier waxed lyrical about the passing scenery, thus aggravating Isai Khodsaiev, a member of the Tajik State Planning Commission, ‘a veritable dynamo, a typical Bolshevik’ and an unambiguous champion of the new.²⁰ Kunitz quotes his plea:

If you ever write about Tadjikistan ... please don’t fall into the error of most of our Russian literary comrades who visit us, don’t descend to exoticism, don’t become worked up over the magnificence of chaos ... the quaintness of our apparel, the mystery hidden beyond our women’s *paranjas* (veils), the charm of sitting on rugs under shady plane trees and listening to the sweet monotone of our bards, of drinking green tea from a *piala* and eating *pilaf* with your hands.²¹

Although Kunitz states that he replied that a smattering of exoticism would enliven the reportage and might encourage curiosity among American readers who had scant knowledge of the republic, he concurs with Khodsaiev's insistence that the Writers Brigade should highlight the achievements of sovietization, such as new irrigation systems, educational facilities, improvements in sanitations, advances in cotton farming, numerous inroads against religious intransigence, and the liberation of women.²²

Lozowick's lithographs address many of these details of sovietization, but I will focus primarily on images that witness the more controversial aspects - of which the most contentious issue was the unveiling of Tajik women. Lozowick's images of veiled and unveiled women illustrate Kunitz's 1935 two-part 'New Women in Old Asia' article in *New Masses* about the liberation of women. Kunitz relays women's conditions through the harrowing story of Khoziat Markulanova, the organizer of a village Women's Department, who experienced the forced wearing of a *paranja* from childhood and an unwanted arranged marriage. The new Soviet authorities facilitated Khoziat's escape from effective slavery, and provided her sanctuary and an education in Tashkent.²³ For the Soviets, the *paranja* symbolized the status of the Tajik woman as a chattel, liable to be married before puberty, sold, swapped, constrained or beaten - a situation sustained by *Adat* and *Shari'a* (common and religious laws, respectively).²⁴ Gregory J. Mansell terms Central Asian Muslim women 'the surrogate proletariat' through which 'intense conflicts could be engendered in society and leverage provided for its disintegration and subsequent reconstitution'.²⁵

While too cautious to outlaw the *paranja* for fear of a mass rebellion, the Soviets launched ‘a campaign to promote unveiling [that] culminated in the *hujum* (onslaught) of 1927, in which thousands of women tore off and burned their veils in public squares’, a performative display that heralded reforms for women and girls such as the banning of polygamy and marriage under the age of sixteen, and the granting of equal legal status and divorce rights.²⁶ As Marianne Kemp writes, in reference to neighbouring Uzbekistan:

Unveiling became a ritual act that had both personal and political significance for the women who chose to unveil, and who persuaded others to do so. In these public unveiling shows, identity with the state was performative, and gender subversion was a declaration of loyalty to the state and the Communist Party. Of the many thousands of women who rejected the norms of Central Asian urban Muslim culture by suddenly revealing their faces in public, hundreds were murdered between 1927 and 1929. The unveilings, and the social backlash that unveilings stirred, were the crucible within which women became Uzbek citizens.²⁷

The origins of these policies lay in the Muslim Jadid movement, which formed an ‘uneasy collaboration with the Soviet regime’ and provided the personnel for the local membership of the Communist Party.²⁸ Adrienne Edgar writes that it is easy to simplify a Soviet-Central Asian opposition: ‘One should be careful not to overstate the distinction between “alien” Soviet rulers and the “indigenous” leaders of Muslim nation-states. The Soviet state and party apparatus in Central Asia included indigenous communists who rhetorically and even enthusiastically supported female emancipation.²⁹ However, many aggrieved Tajik men opposed these measures with extreme violence. Lozowick writes

that a husband publicly murdered his actor wife on stage in Stalinabad, and recounts how, under orders of Fuzail Maksum, the Basmachi lynched four unveiled women teachers in Garm.³⁰ If, as Lozowick notes, such events became subjects for literal theatrical productions, then the imposed enlightenment manifested in public unveiling and its brutal responses were symbolic gestures in a contest about control, a performative counterpart to 'red hashar' that was incipiently divisive.³¹



3 Louis Lozowick, *Woman Unveiled*,
Tajikistan, 1932, lithograph, 21 × 14.5
cm. Smithsonian American Art Museum,
Gift of Adele Lozowick. Copyright ©
1932 Lee Lozowick.

For the Writers Brigade, the *paranja* was the repulsive emblem of reactionary Tajik tendencies,

but despite condemning sexual inequality, their accounts were disparaging and unsympathetic towards the veiled women. Vaillant-Couturier wrote harshly that 'the moving object which looks like a shapeless bundle set on a pair of feet is a woman, wearing her horsehair mask. This woman is the symbol of resistance to socialism, a perambulating conception of private property, of stark ignorance and religious bigotry.³² He shows no interest in the agency, identity or even substance of the woman herself but, like the other writers, conflates the unpleasant odour of the veil with malign intransigence against sovietization. In an equally condemnatory manner, Kunitz discusses veiled women as 'strangely amorphous, ghostlike creatures that glide, silent and mysterious through the narrowly-winding, deserted alleys of any Central Asian town or village ... these are the women of Central Asia, vestiges of a remote past, living corpses eternally imprisoned in their coffins'.³³ Lozowick's *Woman in Veil, Tajikistan* shows such a figure, a spectral form consisting of dark shapes against a forbidding background of a high village on a mountain with steep, jagged inclines where a goat stands on a precipice (the figure of the woman is an adaption of one of the sketches that accompany Kunitz's 'Soviet Tadjikistan' article, with an added landscape setting that dramatizes the *paranja*). Here Lozowick's marks are abrasive, with large areas of shadow contributing to a jarring, ominous atmosphere.

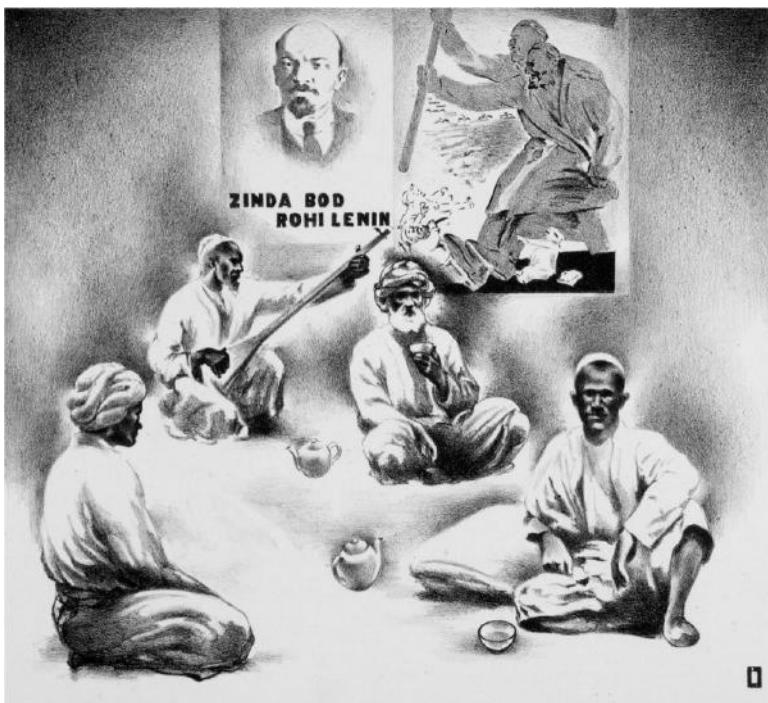
The counterpoint to this image appears on the following page of Kunitz's 'New Women in Old Asia' as *Woman Unveiled, Tajikistan*, and is similarly a development from a sketchbook drawing featured in the 'Soviet Tadjikistan' article. Whereas Lozowick

frames the tiny veiled figure in an eerie scene, the unveiled women and child dominate an airy and calm landscape [3]. Here, Lozowick's smooth, measured handling shapes an optimistic image of the Soviet liberation of women. Through unveiling, the figure becomes embodied as a woman – the act of revelation gives her both consciousness and physical substance. Indeed, Kunitz's statement that 'it is generally the adventurous, daring, and, naturally enough rather good-looking woman who flings aside her paranja' is indicative of an equation of enlightenment and natural sexuality in the Writers Brigade accounts, which often comment upon the attractiveness of female Party officials.³⁴ Illuminated by dazzling light, this graceful Soviet Madonna, with delicately drawn features and an affixed infant, strolls in a serene landscape, where in the distance a train passes by a modern conurbation nestled beneath a softly rendered mountain. If the mountain goat in *Woman in Veil, Tajikistan* perhaps symbolizes (male) native reaction, then here the train heralds the modern collective equality of sovietization. Indeed the 'red train' was a staple motif of communist culture (Vaillant-Couturier's 1922 collection of poems was entitled *Trains Rouges*) from the early years of the Bolshevik Revolution, with its feted propaganda trains, to Viktor Turin's 1929 documentary *Turksib* about the construction of the Turkestan-Siberia railway, from which Tajikistan's newly built railway line branched. The 'red train' and the enlightened liberated mother move in symbiotic progress. The combination of light, space and order presents sovietization as a cleansing as well as enlightening process, as if the removal of the odour of the

paranja eradicated the murk of mysticism (Kunitz notes how part of Khoziat's recuperation involved the donation of clean clothes and underwear).³⁵ Yet it is notable that the unveiled woman's sovietization manifests in motherhood, and therefore domestic work, rather than activity in the workplace, and ultimately proletarian consciousness. She is perhaps not a fully realized Soviet subject, but a conduit to, or carrier of, sovietization's future. If there is a progression in Lozowick's lithographs in Kunitz's 'New Women in Old Asia' from veiled darkness to unveiled illumination, then the ensuing image of a ludicrously joyous boy and an unveiled girl travelling on a donkey entitled *Pioneers on Way to School, Tajikistan* (dressed in a similar manner to the students in Vaillant-Couturier's photograph of Samarkand Workers' Faculty) concludes the liberation of women from the yoke of tradition and expresses optimism for both sexes of the next generation.³⁶

Yet while Tajik women and children could gain significantly from sovietization, their independence came at the expense of a traditional Muslim patriarchy characterized by proverbs such as 'there is only one God in this world; [but] for a women there are two: God and her husband' or 'just as the shepherd may cut the throat of any of his herd's sheep, so is the husband entitled to dispose of his wife's life'.³⁷ Sovietization catalysed a profound crisis for the male Tajik, involving a loss of rank, and restitution was sought with ferocity, often in the form of violence against women or members of the regime via the Basmachi, who represented, alongside restorative political ends and increasingly unrealistic military aims, a desperate bid to recapture a lost warrior identity. Lozowick's images

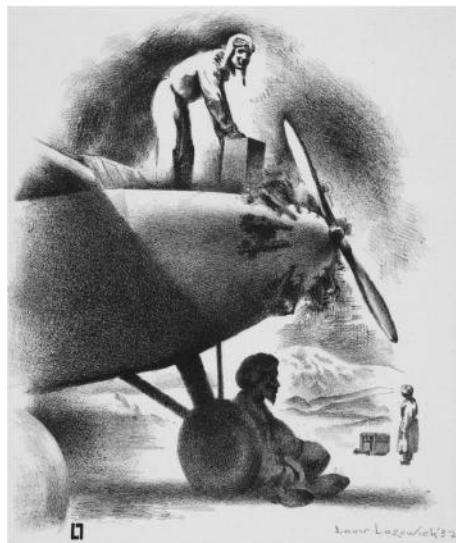
of Tajik men do not use the narrative device of progressive enlightenment. In the context of Kunitz's 'New Women in Old Asia', the scenes of male Tajik culture, which follow the process of unveiling, juxtapose old and new, suggesting an encounter of tradition with modernity rather than a development. Each of these images depicts traditionally dressed Tajiks men engaging with facets of sovietization, such as political propaganda, technology and collectivization.



4 Louis Lozowick, *Red Tea House, Tajikistan*, 1932, lithograph, 25.4 × 27.6 cm. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Adele Lozowick. Copyright © 1932 Lee Lozowick.

One of the manifestations of ‘red *hashar*’ in Tajikistan was the appropriation and redefinition of existing customs, religious centres and social forums to instil the alien ideas of the new regime in the local culture [4]. In *Red Tea House, Tajikistan*, Lozowick shows the sovietized version of the traditional male Tajik meeting centre. He notes that ‘in ancient tea-houses ... cloaked and bearded story-tellers squat cross-legged on the floor [discussing] industrialization, collectivization, emancipation of women, liquidation of illiteracy’.³⁸ As if illuminated by stage lighting, three men partake of chai while a fourth plucks a regional string instrument called a *dutar* beneath a generic propaganda piece with workers striding forward holding aloft a torch and a poster of Lenin, which states ‘Zinda Bod Rohi Lenin’ (meaning ‘Rohi Lenin for ever!’) in reference to the Tajik town where Lozowick presumably witnessed this scene. Like the slogans at the ‘red *hashar*’ parade, the Soviet posters permeate sovietization into their everyday lives. The Tajiks appear placid in their tea ritual, and comfortably familiar with the posters. Two of the men, one of whom is a village elder, face the viewer as if posing for a photograph, and the passivity of the group contrasts with the striding Bolsheviks on the wall and Lenin’s focused expression. Lozowick does not rigidly demarcate the walls and the floor, and the figures hover in a spatially dislocated realm, a transcendent zone of leisure where traditional music and communist slogans seemingly coexist in a ‘red *hashar*’ tableau. Yet the disparity of Lenin and the marching figures with the nonchalant tea drinkers is almost comical,

indicating two strikingly separate realities more than a logical relationship.

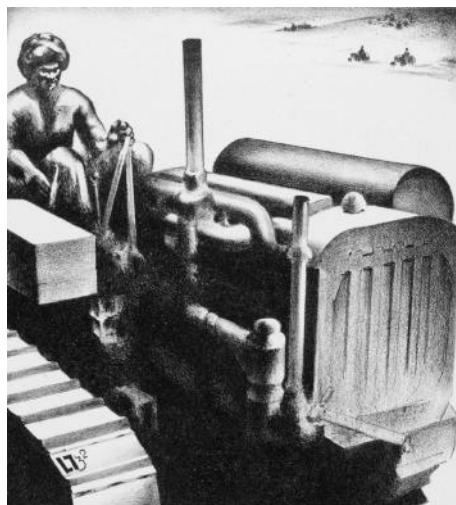


5 Louis Lozowick, *Airport, Tajikistan*, 1932, lithograph, 22 × 18.4 cm. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Adele Lozowick. Copyright © 1932 Lee Lozowick.

The contrast of sovietization and traditional Tajik society is more pronounced in *Airport, Tajikistan*, where a Soviet aviator cheerfully tinkers with his plane, amused at a lackadaisical Tajik shading himself beneath the fuselage, as if the aircraft was merely an elaborate sun awning [5]. Sitting squat in profile, his loose attire, turban and beard contrast with the aviator's sleek, modern appearance. In the distance, another Tajik gazes at a large van driving away from the airfield. The Tajiks seem primitive

and passive, as if oblivious to or entranced by technology, while the aviator looks towards the viewer to share an affectionate conspiratorial joke. Kisch's description of the arrival of Soviet officials in Dushambe, before the name change to Stalinabad, matches the jocular tone of Lozowick's image: 'Here the stages of evolution are curiously jumbled. The airplane, which dropped out of the clouds and alighted in Dushambe with the members of the Government, was the first vehicle seen in this part of the world. There was great astonishment, but, since birds can fly, why not human beings?'³⁹ Kunitz takes up this theme to describe the unfamiliarity of Soviet technology in a land where some of 'the inhabitants have never seen a wheel. The story is told that when some bandits saw an automobile advancing along the recently built road, they thought it was a devil and, panic-stricken, scurried off into the mountains'.⁴⁰ The new transport technologies brought the Soviet tempo to Central Asia, but invariably highlighted different temporalities - Lozowick describes how 'airplanes go from Stalinabad both east and west. Automobiles, busses, trucks whizz by the leisurely camels and donkeys'.⁴¹ If the plane, the train and the automobile signified sovietization, then few Tajiks had access to such vehicles but rather depended on beasts of burden for transport; Kunitz recalls how the president of Tajikistan referred to donkeys as 'our dear little Fords'.⁴² The Writers Brigade accounts all cite the airport in Stalinabad, with its fleet of twenty-eight planes, as a key symbol of sovietization, alongside the electric power station, railway station, cinema, restaurants and City Park.⁴³ Despite these constructions, photographs support the travellers' descriptions of

the shanty-town qualities of Stalinabad, which was in a rudimentary phase of development with basic housing and infrastructure.⁴⁴ However, its state of dilapidation was due – they largely neglect to add – to the Soviet obliteration of the city in the campaign against the Basmachi. The name change from Dushambe to Stalinabad was the symbolic marker of the Soviet sacking of the city, which was assisted by aerial bombardment, perhaps even from the plane depicted by Lozowick.⁴⁵



6 Louis Lozowick, *Collective Farmer*, 1932, lithograph, 17.1 × 15.7 cm. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Adele Lozowick. Copyright © 1932 Lee Lozowick.

In contrast to these two scenes of leisure, *Collective Farmer* shows a working Tajik in command of a

machine [6]. He drives a mighty tractor across a vast field of a collective farm, most likely cultivating cotton, which was the region's most valuable crop. His face registers steely determination for the huge task of collectivization, underscored by two distant tractors that mark out the scale of the field. As this tractor (or 'full-track crawler', to be precise) is steered by belts rather than a wheel, he seems to control the machine by reins as if riding a horse or camel. Removed from his customary transport, he appears incongruous and awkward, and constrained in the cramped composition, with its photographic close-up and oblique viewpoint.⁴⁶ Dominating the image, the tractor recalls one of Lozowick's early 'Machine Ornament' drawings, witnessing the artist reviving his machine-aesthetic techniques to convey the mechanization integral to sovietization. At the 1935 Weyhe Gallery exhibition, the image was entitled 'Tractor, Tajikistan', reflecting the predominance of the machine. In Central Asia, the tractor was imbued with significance beyond its agricultural functions, serving mutual ritual and practical functions such as providing wedding or funeral transport (Kisch shows a photograph of a tractor-drawn funeral).⁴⁷ The tractor was important in rationalizing farming, but also showed the benefits of modernization in a practical way and was therefore a powerful symbol of sovietization.⁴⁸ Kunitz wrote that the tractor was the machine that best communicated the transformative power of the revolution to the Tajiks: 'the moment the poor peasant discovered that working the soil with a tractor was easier, better, cheaper, faster than struggling with an *omach* (primitive plough), he became excellent potential material for a *kolkhoz* (collective farm').⁴⁹ Machine and Tractor Stations

were the organizational centres for collectivization throughout the Soviet Union, providing each *kolkhoz* with tractors, repairs, fuel, training and meetings, and were workplace hubs just as the red tea houses were leisure forums. Kunitz muses, ‘Is it surprising that one of the Bolshevik slogans in Central Asia was “the enemy of the tractor is our class enemy?”’⁵⁰ A photograph of a row of tractors parked outside the Emir’s palace in Bukhara, now the Machine and Tractor Station of a cotton-growing collective farm, demonstrates the potent Soviet symbolism of the tractor.⁵¹ The Basmachi frequently attacked the stations to undermine sovietization but also as symbolic targets.

Therefore, the tractor was not a sufficient bulwark against opponents of sovietization, but a site of the contest between equine and mechanical cultures. The Soviets used more momentous means of ensuring control over Tajikistan. Botakoz Kassymbekova

recounts that the Soviet authorities engaged in social engineering in an attempt to secure collectivization, moving five thousand households between 1925 and 1928 from Tajik sedentary groups from the mountainous Pamirs to replace Uzbek nomadic tribes in the Ferghana Valley. She writes that ‘human movement was central to the process of territorial production in early Soviet Tajikistan: human bodies were being used, quite literally, to secure and territorialize space’.⁵² In other words, the tractor driver in Lozowick’s image might even be a displaced migrant, grappling with an alien environment as well as new technological farming methods and collective organization (due to minimal roads and long winters when parts of the

country were entirely cut off from one another, there was little internal migration before the Soviets imposed such demographic movements). Apart from using forced resettlement to create a stable farming populace, Kassymbekova argues that Soviets also sought to guarantee border security against raids from the Basmachi out of their bases in neighbouring Afghanistan.

As the accounts by the Writers Brigade relay, the swansong of the Basmachi coincided with the trip to Tajikistan, in a revival of violence that persisted until the capture and execution of the leader Ibrahim Bek in June 1931 and continued sporadically until 1934. If the Basmachi were diminished in size from the Civil War years, then military sorties led by Maksum and Bek between 1929 and 1931 compensated with ferocity by destroying railways, burning down collective farms, attacking Machine and Tractor Stations and demolishing tractors, and massacring communist officials, pro-Soviet Tajiks, and women activists and teachers. The Red Army responded with a ‘scorched-earth campaign’ across Central Asia, and during 1929 deported 270,000 Turkestanis, destroyed four cities (Andidzhan, Namangan, Marghelan and Dushambe), and razed 1,200 villages.⁵³ In April 1931, Bek led a final expedition of a thousand troops from Afghanistan into Tajikistan and ‘with all the fury of a jihad, or holy war ... implemented a large-scale programme of mass terror’. ⁵⁴ The campaign was heralded by sermonizing from mullahs, and further publicized in a widely disseminated manifesto that claimed affiliation with the League of Nations, insisted that unveiling ‘converted women into prostitutes’, denounced collectivization and tractors, demonized

Soviet rule as ‘satanic’, and concluded that ‘this treacherous and horrid government deprives subjects of the rights to be masters of their wives and property’.⁵⁵ Despite such targeted propaganda, Bek failed to gain enough support among a populace who correctly doubted his chance of victory against the Red Army, and in June was arrested and subsequently executed. The Writers Brigade was camped outside Stalinabad as the plane transporting the captured leader circled victoriously over the city.⁵⁶

The Basmachi mobilized anti-Soviet sentiment by asserting traditional religious values, gender relations and property rights, and represented a violent revival of male warrior culture in the face of sovietization. Given that the Basmachi had no uniform, there was no discernible visual dissimilarity between them and other rural Central Asians. Vaillant-Couturier recalled seeing a group of men on a station platform near Tashkent: ‘The first of the men carried a revolver at the hip, the last a rifle behind his back. That was all the difference I could at first detect between them and the five others.’⁵⁷ The guard were transporting the Basmachi prisoners to Stalinabad, most likely for rehabilitation as proletarians. Vaillant-Couturier later encountered some apparently successful examples: ‘These men had fought against socialist construction. Now they also took part in it as shock-brigade workers! Communism had raised these ex-bandits to the dignity of workingmen.’⁵⁸



7 Louis Lozowick, *Border Guards*,
1932, lithograph, 26.6 × 18 cm.
Smithsonian American Art Museum,
Gift of Adele Lozowick. Copyright ©
1932 Lee Lozowick.

The government also recruited Tajik men, including former Basmachi, to guard the borders of Tajikistan, and these soldiers were known colloquially as 'Red Sticks'.⁵⁹ Charles Shaw notes that 'although locals may have joined up with the Red Army out of a calculus of personal safety, their willingness to take up arms was celebrated as proof

of the congealing of Soviet society'.⁶⁰ Lozowick's lithograph *Border Guards*, or 'Native Volunteers of the Red Army (Tadjikistan)' (as entitled in the *International Literature* suite), shows two Red Sticks on horseback on a winding mountain track [7]. The foreground figure has the noble authority of an equestrian statue on an improvised plinth, a representational sculpture whose magical presence marks the border and is analogous to the framing boulders, being metaphorically tough, durable and natural in the landscape. His great coat is an important detail that signifies a uniform, as in all other respects Basmachi soldiers similarly wore turbans, rode horses and carried rifles. Despite the dense rockiness of the backdrop, the image is light and elegant, due to the predominance of blank space, the economy of the details, the delicate tonal modelling and the slightly askew perspective, which is a schematic ordering that retains the decentring and angular perspective of his earlier work. The image is carefully constructed - the protagonist is mirrored by the second soldier, whose steep descent conveys the precarious nature of the environment - and amalgamates his erstwhile technique of radical spatial realignment with the iconography, handling and compositional relationships of more traditional pictorial idioms, as if seeking a composite argot, a 'post-Cubist' picturesque, to connote sovietization's melding of old and new.

The figures function as ciphers of the extensive policing of the Soviet Union's outer limits for, as Shaw states, 'the border was a sacred space in Soviet culture'.⁶¹ The authorities needed local volunteers with specialist knowledge of the area but also reliability and loyalty, a tricky balance that

nominally depended on cooperation but in practice was guaranteed by money or coercion. Shaw writes that ‘the Soviet border project was unusually ambitious because the “us” – or the new Soviet person in the border-guard uniform and the *kolkhoz* dungarees – was in a constant, self-conscious process of creation’.⁶² In Lozowick’s image, the Red Sticks are new Soviet citizens mobilized against the Basmachi, manifesting recuperated warrior rites now reframed as the means of defending sovietization. The border of Tajikistan and Afghanistan was one of the most important frontiers in the Soviet Union, and the Red Sticks were crucial to its success in guarding against the Basmachi but also in keeping Tajiks from fleeing from collectivization.⁶³ The Red Sticks therefore policed both sides of a porous border, and served as symbolic markers of the military power that accompanied sovietization, and the transformation of the resistant Tajik into an enforcer of the new regime. Only in this liminal performance, does the male Tajik find his Soviet substance, yet his agency is as agent of the ruling Soviet order; not quite the colonial policeman, but an example of native voluntarism, he is an allegory of the Soviet Union crystallizing at its indeterminate margins.

Soon after the arrest of Bek, the Writers Brigade attended a Red Sticks festival in the mountains, which involved dancing, songs and storytelling, and the martial-arts sport of *goshten* (a Tajik version of ju-jitsu). At another Red Sticks event in the Pamirs, the group witnessed the frenzied equine sport of ‘goat-ripping’, essentially a high-speed free-for-all polo for fifty players on horseback with a handheld goat carcass instead of mallets and a ball. Taking

place on mountainsides with intricate rules but also considerable violence, ‘goat-ripping’ often incurred injuries and sometimes fatalities of man or horse. As Lozowick details in his 1933 *Travel* article ‘Hazardous Sport in Tajikistan’:

This brutal game has been forbidden by the Soviet Government, because of its danger to the lives of men and animals and because it interferes with the people’s regular occupations. It’s impossible to keep them on the job when the game is played in their neighbourhood. Nevertheless, in spite of the ban, local authorities in the more isolated centres occasionally permit the sport as a concession to one of the old customs which is not particularly dangerous to the new social order.⁶⁴

Lozowick’s lithograph of two goat-ripping players, on anatomically suspect horses in a whirl of movement, contrasts with his representation of the heroic border guards. He conveys the dynamism of the sport in a friezelike figural arrangement in which one player attempts to steal the goat in a primal mêlée of men and animals. He writes that ‘obviously “goat-ripping” is a heritage of an ancient time – when the goat was a common zoomorphic symbol of many people in many lands’.⁶⁵ Goat-ripping involved a sanctioned venting of traditional warrior rites, an opportunity for performing horsemanship skills within the confines of a legitimized Soviet event that concluded with fireside songs, music and stories about defeating the Basmachi. On the borders of Tajikistan, the authorities permitted the Tajik a moment of licensed combative expression in the form of traditional sports, contained within the frame of a ‘red *hashar*’ ritual that circumscribed the limits of his new Soviet being, allowing a release of primal

antic energies followed by pacified participation in sovietized storytelling.

The collision of old and new in Tajikistan is ubiquitous to the point of platitude in the Writers Brigade accounts, as these foreign communists sought to explain the necessary revisionism of sovietization while expressing touristic yearning for elements of the disappearing society. The fascination of visitors with the old world of Central Asia was widespread, evident in Lozowick's almost rueful statement that:

Much of this legacy from the past is merely *exotica*, according to the crusading Soviet. It can serve no definite purpose in the new order and therefore is not worth retaining, except in the form of records. Such amusements are being registered, collected, photographed before they are gone and forgotten. In all parts of the country one meets composers taking down folk-songs, poets collecting folk-lore, philologists and archaeologists.⁶⁶

In an unpublished account about Samarkand's architecture, Lozowick details with lyrical intricacy the rich varieties of styles relating to the sedimented history of this ancient city without reference to sovietization except a brief mention of the new regime's commitment to conservation of historic monuments (although he does not mention the cities obliterated by the Red Army in the purge of the Basmachi).⁶⁷ Perhaps he felt it his task to provide pictorial documents of the customs and everyday scenes of traditional life that he witnessed, alongside recording the triumphs of sovietization. As Mikhail Kalatosov's astonishing 1930 documentary film *Salt for Svenetia* shows, the Soviets often expressed profound fascination with

the strange ancient rites of the indigenous people that they were remaking as new citizens. Certainly, Lozowick's images echo the selectiveness and paternalism of anthropological documentary – for instance, could a Tajik shading under an aeroplane ever be a comrade, let alone a proletarian, rather than an object of study, an 'other'?

Lozowick was admiring of ethnographic studies of the region. In reporting on the marginal Jews of Central Asia for the *Menorah Journal*, he fêted a regional museum where an ethnographic display demonstrated Soviet archival collation of the plants, animals and people of the area, and a photographic exhibit of 'Racial Types of Central Asian Jews' featured a legend that noted how by avoiding intermixing 'the Jews of Central Asia have retained their racial type in greater purity than the Arabs'.⁶⁸ He also marvelled at 'old photographs of Bokhara Jews' in the Central Asiatic Library, which had the 'straightforwardness and simplicity of early daguerreotypes'.⁶⁹ These archival traces of the dwindling Jews captivated him, but he also searched for signs of extant Jewish life. In Stalinabad, despite being told this was the only world capital with no synagogue, he found one, which was 'very primitive, hardly to be distinguished from the surrounding flat-roofed clay huts', but was informed that it was 'soon to be converted into a workers' club' because all the young Jews had migrated to the collective farms.⁷⁰ The text does not evince anxiety (his writing style was hardly emotive and this was a piece for the travel section of the magazine), and yet Lozowick's account details a narrative of Jewish diminishment due to sovietization that borders on nostalgic. It is worth recalling that his leftism was rooted in those encounters with anti-Semitism that

had originally caused him to emigrate from Imperial Russia, and his engagement with Russian art, culture and society bore traces of his experience as a specifically Jewish exile, displaced in the diasporic flight from pogroms.⁷¹ Drawn to past, present and future in Tajikistan, Lozowick witnessed temporal disjuncture that manifested pertinently in the scattered remains of the vanishing Jewish population.

'Red *hashar*' aimed for mutual harmony, but the process of sovietization was really a severe collision of old and new. Kunitz's enthuses:

Central Asia is in a paroxysm of change. The immemorial droning of the somnolent East is drowned out by the strains of the *Internationale* mingled with the sirens of new factories and the hum of American and Soviet motors.... For years now Central Asia has been a medley of clashing values. The revolution has unleashed a whirlwind of passion. The old fights back, desperately, brutally. But the new is triumphantly advancing. Even those who cling to the old cannot resist the magnificent upsurge of the new.⁷²

It was a violent clash, which calmed only when the Red Army crushed the Basmachi. In Lozowick's portfolio, old and new appear in degrees of tension in style as well as content, signifying competing techniques and themes that achieve only a fictive resolution. Additionally, Lozowick's own crisis with proletarianism found a mirror in the Tajiks who themselves were far from ready for sovietization, and his seemingly uncritical fealty veiled an acknowledgment of the difficulty of reducing his, or any, art to a unitary proletarian allegory or technique. While representing Soviet enlightenment clearly with the motif of unveiling, his images of male Tajiks incongruously encountering

sovietization suggest a society in conflict. In an undated note, he recalls receiving a radio message while flying over Central Asia about a Basmachi attack, and ponders ‘Thus the Civil War in the Soviet Union was not quite over even as late as 1931.’⁷³ While his affirmations of sovietization may contain elisions and border on misdirection, the treatment of contradictions between the old and new shows a stumbling performance of ‘red *hashar*’ that does not quite conceal several ongoing conflicts.

¹ Tajikistan, the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic, was founded in 1929. It was frequently spelled as ‘Tadjikistan’ in the 1930s, but I use the current official spelling except when citing a primary text. Tajikistan became an autonomous republic within Uzbekistan in 1924, before joining the USSR as the Seventh Independent Republic in 1929. Tajikistan was formerly known as Eastern Bukhara, a province of the Khanate of Bukhara, presided over by the Emirs but ruled by the Tsar since annexation by Imperial Russia in the mid-1840s.

² Lozowick’s images accompanied the following articles: Louis Lozowick, ‘Hazardous Sport in Tajikistan: the Daredevil Horsemen of Central Asia’, *Travel*, no. 61 (September 1933); ‘The Theatre of Turkestan’, *Theatre Arts Monthly*, November 1933; ‘4 Drawings from Tadjikistan by Louis Lozowick’, *International Literature: Organ of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers*, no. 3 (1933). His images also appeared in several pieces by Joshua Kunitz: Joshua Kunitz, ‘Soviet Tadjikistan’, *New Masses*, November 1931; ‘New Women in Old Asia’, *New Masses*, 2 October 1934; ‘New Women in Old Asia’, *New Masses*, 9 October 1934; ‘Soviet Asia Sings’, *New Masses*, 23 April 1935. The lithographs featured at the following exhibitions: ‘American Print Makers, Eighth Annual Exhibition’, Downtown Gallery, New York, 3–29 December 1934; ‘The Fifth Exhibition of American Book Illustration’, Gallery of the Architectural League, New York, 19–30 March 1935; ‘Paintings and Lithographs by Louis Lozowick’, Weyhe Gallery, New York, 6–18 April 1936.

³ The term ‘Writers Brigade’ appears in the text that accompanies Lozowick, ‘4 Drawings from Tadjikistan’, frontispiece.

⁴ See Egon Erwin Kisch, *Changing Asia*, trans. Rita Reil (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1935; Berlin, 1932); Paul Vaillant-Couturier, *Free Soviet*

Tadjikistan (Co-operative Publishing House of Foreign Workers in the USSR: Moscow, 1932); Joshua Kunitz, *Dawn Over Samarkand: The Rebirth of Central Asia* (International Publishers: New York, 1935); Bruno Jasieński, *Man Changes His Skin*, trans. H. G. Scott (Co-operative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the USSR: Moscow, 1935). There is some suggestion that Lozowick himself intended to write a book, as 'The Fifth Exhibition of American Book Illustration' exhibition note lists 'three illustrations for a book on Soviet Tajikistan'. See 'The Fifth Exhibition of American Book Illustration', Louis Lozowick Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter LLP), Reel 5989, Frame 860. As well as the publications listed above, Lozowick wrote 'New World in Central Asia', *Menorah Journal*, no. 20 (July 1932), which was not illustrated. He also produced two unpublished essays: 'Soviet Frontiers', undated manuscript, LLP, Reel 5896, Frames 471–82, and 'The Architecture of Samarcand' [sic], undated manuscript, LLP, Reel 5895, Frames 909–16.

⁵ Lozowick, 'The Theatre of Turkestan', op. cit., p. 887.

⁶ Andrew Hemingway, *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926–1956* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2002), p. 17.

⁷ Lozowick, 'Soviet Frontiers', op. cit., p. 1.

⁸ Martha B. Olcott, 'The Basmachi or Freemen's Revolt in Turkestan 1918–24', *Soviet Studies*, July 1981, p. 352.

⁹ Adeeb Khalid, 'Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective', *Slavic Review*, vol. 65, no. 2 (Summer 2006), p. 233.

¹⁰ Born into a shtetl in Kiev in 1892 and experiencing the anti-Semitic persecution of a pogrom in his childhood, Lozowick had fled to America in 1906 and began his career taking classes at the National Academy of Design. He travelled to the Soviet Union in 1922, chronicling its cultural developments and establishing a reputation as one of America's foremost experts on Soviet art and culture by giving lectures, writing several important articles, and producing the essay for the first American survey of post-revolutionary developments for the Société Anonyme's *Modern Russian Art* exhibition catalogue in 1925. He was closely involved in the 1927 Machine-Age Exposition, giving talks on Russian art. Lozowick produced numerous illustrations and publicity materials for *New Masses*. In 1930, he cemented his reputation as an expert of Soviet art with a chapter in *Voices of October*, a book on

Soviet culture that he coauthored with Kunitz and Joseph Freeman, wrote extensively on Soviet film and theatre, and was an active member of the communist John Reed Clubs.

- 11 Andrew Hemingway, *The Mysticism of Money: Precisionist Painting and Machine Age America* (Periscope Publishing: Pittsburgh, 2013), p. 148.
- 12 Louis Lozowick, 'Lithography', *Space*, vol. 1, no. 2 (March 1930), reprinted in Lozowick, *Survivor for a Dead Age*, op. cit., pp. 286–7.
- 13 Pauline Zutringer and Louis Lozowick, 'Machine Art is Bourgeois', *New Masses*, February 1929, p. 31.
- 14 Beyond asserting dialectical materialism as the basis for proletarianism, the conference's resolutions about style were opaque, non-proscriptive and centred on literature rather than visual art, stating in a special issue of *Literature of the World Revolution* that 'we must recognize that in the overwhelming majority of cases, except for the proletarian literature of the USSR, our movement has not even begun to formulate the problems of creative method'. 'The Results of the 2nd International Conference of Revolutionary and Proletarian Writers', *Literature of the World Revolution*, 1931, p. 6.
- 15 Louis Lozowick, 'Art in the Service of the Proletariat', *Literature of the World Revolution*, no. 4 (1931), reprinted in Lozowick, *Survivor for a Dead Age*, op. cit., p. 289.
- 16 A. Elistratova, 'New Masses', *International Literature*, no. 1 (1932), p. 110.
- 17 Kunitz, 'Soviet Tadzhikistan', op. cit., p. 12.
- 18 Kunitz, 'Soviet Asia Sings', op. cit., p. 18; Vaillant-Couturier, *Free Soviet Tadjikistan*, op. cit., p. 34.
- 19 Ibid., p. 6.
- 20 Kunitz, 'Soviet Tadzhikistan', op. cit., p. 12.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid., p. 13.
- 23 Kunitz, 'New Women in Old Asia', part one, p. 26.
- 24 Ibid., p. 23.

- ²⁵ Gregory J. Mansell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919–1929* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1974), p. xxii.
- ²⁶ Adrienne Edgar, ‘Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule’, *Russian Review*, vol. 62, no. 1 (January 2003), p. 132.
- ²⁷ Marianne Kemp, ‘Pilgrimage and Performance: Uzbek Women and the Imagining of Uzbekistan’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 34, no. 2 (May 2002), p. 264.
- ²⁸ Adeeb Khalid, ‘Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective’, *Slavic Review*, vol. 65, no. 2 (Summer 2006), p. 241. It should be noted that ‘the new’ was not an entirely Soviet introduction as many of the Tajik communists originated in the Central Asian Muslim reform movement called the Jadid (the New). The origins of the Jadid date back to the 1880s, when Ismail Gaspirinski, a reformist Muslim scholar who was editor of the journal *Tercümen*, proposed the notion of ‘Usul-e-jadi’ (new educational principles), encouraging modernization of Central Asia via education and reconciliation of Islam with Western science. See Ahmed Rashid, ‘The Fires of Faith in Central Asia’, *World Policy Journal*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Spring 2001), p. 46.
- ²⁹ Adrienne Edgar, ‘Bolshevism, Patriarchy, and the Nation: The Soviet “Emancipation” of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective’, *Slavic Review*, vol. 65, no. 2 (Summer 2006), p. 271. Recent scholars appraise the neglected role of Jadid Muslim feminists, who remain largely unrecognized in the accounts by Soviet writers and foreign communist or fellow-traveller visitors. Furthermore, there was considerable regional variation in Central Asia in the amount of women who wore the *paranja*, such as in Turkmenistan where women were largely unveiled. See Edgar, ‘Emancipation of the Unveiled’, p. 132. See also Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism* (University of Washington Press: Seattle, 2006).
- ³⁰ Lozowick, ‘Soviet Frontiers’, op. cit., p. 7. Mansell confirms that such reprisals occurred, involving the murders of many women activists, including Anna Dzhamal and Enne Kulieva, who were early Zhenotdel (the Party’s Women’s Department) members, and Hamza Hakim Zada Niyazi, a leading Uzbek writer. Mansell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, op. cit., pp. 282–3.
- ³¹ Lozowick, ‘The Theatre of Turkestan’, op. cit., p. 887.

- ³² Vaillant-Couturier, *Free Soviet Tadjikistan*, op. cit., p. 55.
- ³³ Kunitz, 'New Women in Old Asia', part 1, op. cit., p. 23.
- ³⁴ Kunitz, 'New Women in Old Asia', part 2, op. cit., p. 19; Lozowick, 'New World in Central Asia', op. cit., p. 169. There are some similarities with the 2004 ban on conspicuous displays of religious affiliation in French schools, which is the subject of Joan Scott's *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2007). Scott argues that while masquerading as a liberatory gesture, the ban contrasts healthy Western and aberrant Muslim sexualities, p. 127.
- ³⁵ Kunitz, 'New Women in Old Asia', part 1, op. cit., p. 26.
- ³⁶ For the Writers Brigade, the expansion of education was one of the Soviet's most tangible achievements, as within a generation an almost entirely illiterate populace had risen to 25 per cent literacy and 46 per cent of children attended schools. Vaillant-Couturier, *Free Soviet Tadjikistan*, op. cit., p. 17.
- ³⁷ Mansell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, op. cit., p. 114.
- ³⁸ Lozowick, 'The Theatre of Turkestan', op. cit., p. 887.
- ³⁹ Kisch, *Changing Asia*, op. cit., p. 97.
- ⁴⁰ Joshua Kunitz, 'Red Roads in Central Asia', *Travel*, vol. 59 (August 1932), p. 7.
- ⁴¹ Lozowick, 'New World in Central Asia', op. cit., p. 170. Botakoz Kassymbekova 'Humans as Territory: Forced Resettlement and the Making of Soviet Tajikistan, 1920–38', *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 30, nos. 3–4 (September–December 2011), p. 353.
- ⁴² Kunitz, 'Red Roads in Central Asia', op. cit., p. 7.
- ⁴³ Kunitz, *Dawn over Samarkand*, op. cit., pp. 242–3; Vaillant-Couturier, *Free Soviet Tadjikistan*, op. cit., p. 11; Kisch, *Changing Asia*, op. cit., p. 89.
- ⁴⁴ Kunitz, *Dawn over Samarkand*, op. cit., p. 242.
- ⁴⁵ Lozowick does mention that Dushambe was 'destroyed in the civil war', but does not indicate that this was a Soviet action. Lozowick, 'New World in Central Asia', op. cit., p. 170.
- ⁴⁶ Hemingway discusses the correspondence of his late 1920s images of New York with 'New Vision', or radical formalist, photographic

perspectives and subjects. Hemingway, *The Mysticism of Money*, op. cit., p. 136.

47 Kisch, *Changing Asia*, op. cit., opposite p. 154.

48 Sheila Fitzpatrick reports that in 1928 there were 33 million horses in the USSR; in 1934 there were 15 million. Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1994), p. 138. It was also a machine that a Tajik might well use. Kunitz notes that 'approximately sixty per cent of the peasant population of Tadjikistan is said to have joined the collective-farm movement and the tractor is now a familiar sight in a land where the hoe and the ox were the principal methods used for tilling the soil'. Kunitz, 'Red Roads in Central Asia', op. cit., p. 10. Vaillant-Couturier records a conversation with Comrade Petrov, manager of the Vaksh State Farm, who relayed that of the six hundred tractor drivers who would graduate from the farm's training school 70 per cent would be Tajik and Uzbek. Vaillant-Couturier, *Free Soviet Tadjikistan*, op. cit., p. 39.

49 Kunitz, *Dawn Over Samarkand*, op. cit., p. 205.

50 Ibid., p. 206.

51 Kisch, *Changing Asia*, op. cit., opposite p. 62.

52 Kassymbekova, 'Humans as Territory', op. cit., p. 349.

53 William S. Ritter, 'The Final Phase in the Liquidation of Anti-Soviet Resistance in Tadzhikistan: Ibrahim Bek and the Basmachi, 1924–31', *Soviet Studies*, vol. 37, no. 4 (October 1985), p. 488. In 1931, the Basmachi numbered about 2,000, whereas in the peak of the movement, c. 1922, they numbered about 18,000, although this was not a standing army but a loose network of opponents to the Soviets, but as the Red Army in Central Asia numbered 150,000 and were consistently brutal in suppressing revolt (killing 50,000 at Kokand in 1918), the resistance, although damaging, was limited in scope. See Marie Broxup, 'The Basmachi', *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 2, no. 1 (June 1983), pp. 58–60.

54 Ritter, 'The Final Phase', op. cit., p. 490.

55 For Bek's Manifesto of 1931, see Kisch, *Changing Asia*, op. cit., pp. 140–4.

56 Vaillant-Couturier, *Free Soviet Tadjikistan*, op. cit., p. 27.

57 Ibid., p. 8.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵⁹ Kisch, *Changing Asia*, op. cit., p. 126.

⁶⁰ Charles Shaw, 'Friendship under Lock and Key: The Soviet Central Asian Border, 1918–34', *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 30, nos. 3–4 (September–December 2011), p. 337.

⁶¹ Shaw, 'Friendship under Lock and Key', op. cit., p. 332. Shaw relays that the Central Asian border ran for 5,484 km and was consistently short of guards, or *Pogranichnye voiska* (border troops).

⁶² Ibid., p. 333.

⁶³ Shaw states that between 1931 and 1933, 3,153 Tajik families left the country, and in 1933 4,372 families were held at border. Eighty to eighty-five per cent were poor farmers or labourers, 'precisely the population that was supposed to benefit most from Bolshevik rule'. The authorities suppressed information about Tajik attempts at emigration. Ibid., p. 339.

⁶⁴ Lozowick, 'Hazardous Sport in Tajikistan', op. cit., p. 16.

⁶⁵ Lozowick, 'The Theatre of Turkestan', op. cit., p. 886.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 887.

⁶⁷ Lozowick, 'The Architecture of Samarcand', op. cit., p. 10.

⁶⁸ Lozowick, 'New World in Central Asia', op. cit., p. 167.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 168.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 170.

⁷¹ Hemingway, *The Mysticism of Money*, op. cit., p. 109. For examples of Lozowick's writings about Jewish art and culture in the Soviet Union, see: Louis Lozowick, 'The Art of Nathan Altman', *Menorah Journal*, February 1926; 'Eliezer Lissitzky', *Menorah Journal*, April 1926; 'Russia's Jewish Theatres', *Theatre Arts Monthly*, June 1927; 'The Moscow Jewish State Theatre', *Menorah Journal*, May 1928.

⁷² Kunitz, *Dawn Over Samarkand*, op. cit., p. 14.

⁷³ Louis Lozowick, 'Note on Russia and Russian Artists', undated note, LLP, Reel 5897, Frames 322–84.

LU MÄRTEN AND THE QUESTION OF A MARXIST AESTHETIC IN 1920S GERMANY

Martin I. Gaughan

In 1930, *Die Linkskurve*, the journal of the Proletarian Revolutionary Writers League (Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller, or BPRS), published a series of articles by Karl A. Wittfogel entitled 'On the Question of a Marxist Aesthetic' ('Zur Frage einer marxistischen Ästhetik'). Although it came at the end of the decade examined here, I refer to it at this point to establish retrospectively, as it were, some of the issues raised at the beginning of the decade. Central to Wittfogel's elaboration is a critique of a recently published edition of Franz Mehring's writings on culture. Long active in the cultural politics of the Social Democratic Party (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, or SPD) from the late nineteenth century, Mehring established the policy that the culture of the revolutionary period of the bourgeoisie, the so-called heritage or *Erbe*, was the paradigm for working-class reference and emulation, and rejected contemporary manifestations of modernist innovation from naturalism onwards as marking the decline of that class, its pessimistic capitulation to the challenges of the historically evolving. A founder member of the German Communist Party (Kommunistische

Partei Deutschlands, or KPD), Mehring died shortly after its foundation, but his cultural influence would be dominant in the pages of the KPD paper, *Die Rote Fahne*, through Gertrud Alexander, its cultural editor until her departure for Moscow in 1925, who was a staunch defender of the *Erbe* and intransigent critic of leftist innovation – a position shared with Lenin, among others. By the late 1920s, the KPD was taking a more organizational role in cultural politics: writers' and artists' groups were formed, particularly the BPRS and the Association of German Revolutionary Artists (Assoziation revolutionärer bildender Künstler Deutschlands, or ARBKD, known as ASSO). It was at this point that Wittfogel began his series, with a modified critique of Mehring's position. Mehring's Kantian origins, he wrote, would have to be subjected to Hegelian dialectical discipline in order to move forward towards a Marxist aesthetic. I shall return later to this series but would like to point to two related aspects of these discussions: first, the high level of abstraction at which the articulation of the aesthetic is conducted; and second, the general absence of reference to concrete practices – significantly it is only in a footnote that such reference occurs: 'also the performances of a good agitprop troop are art'.¹ In a critical response to Wittfogel, also published in *Die Linkskurve*, Lu Märtens, one of the major art-historically informed critics of the period and responsive to innovation in practice, countered: 'It appears to me that the requirement is for a practical aesthetic ... which would disclose that many bourgeois [art] forms simply cannot be adapted for revolutionary objectives.'² The struggle for a practice-based theory or a theoretically

informed practice characterizes cultural production on the left throughout the decade of the 1920s. This essay traces various stages of those struggles and Märten's role in them.

Practice and Theory 1919–20

These struggles arose soon after the November Revolution of 1918, involving Dadaist practitioners and the *Die Rote Fahne* critic. The first instance is known as 'The Art Scoundrel' (*Der Kunstlump*) debate, involving John Heartfield and George Grosz as authors of an article of that name attacking the bourgeois heritage published in *Der Gegner*, a journal sympathetic to Dadaist activity. In her reply in *Die Rote Fahne*, Alexander accused them of cultural vandalism with regard to the classical tradition, which she considered the site of learning for the proletariat. Her reaction is not surprising, since she was described as a 'student' of Mehring's.³ Alexander's response to the Dada Fair (*Dada Messe*) of June 1920, again in *Die Rote Fahne*, provided the next opportunity for the defence of the *Erbe*, the revolutionary bourgeois heritage. Yet Märten published a more insightful and nuanced criticism of the Fair a month later, also in *Die Rote Fahne*. Both reviews will be considered further below.

Given the reception of the avant-gardist Dada work, it is not difficult to understand the concern that Wieland Herzfelde, Heartfield's brother and with Grosz a member of the KPD, had with the status of criticism on the left. In 1921 he wrote a pamphlet, issued by his own publishing house, the Malik Verlag, entitled 'Society, Artist, Communism' ('Gesellschaft, Künstler, Kommunismus'). It dealt

with the relationship between the artist and bourgeois society, the artist's pathway to communism and subsequent role in bourgeois society, and the artist in the communist state. Herzfelde proposed that the artist bear the responsibility of transforming communism from a statist principle (*Staatsprinzip*) into one of active consciousness (*Prinzip des lebendigen Bewusstseins*).⁴ More immediately, he touched on the difficulty presented to the artist who takes the side of the proletariat, 'often subject to the shameful ignorance of revolutionary Marxist comrades with regard to contemporary art'.⁵ Herzfelde, of course, was not unaware of the problems arising from the tumultuous political and social conditions of postwar and post-revolutionary Germany: he was himself rescued from the infamous Moabit prison through the intervention of diplomat and Dada-circle acquaintance Count Harry Kessler. The transition period or *Übergangszeit* to a proletarian art may be a long time: 'During this period (years? decades?) many artists originally working for the bourgeoisie will have to be engaged on working for communist objectives.'⁶ How, then, would the developments already occurring in contemporary art overlap with the political project of the committed artist and produce this transition to a proletarian art?

Two critics mentioned above, Alexander and Märten, had crucial roles to play in the development of critical and theoretical positions, so some background details are necessary before going on to consider their contributions. In their *Linksradikalismus und Literatur*, Walter Fähnders and Martin Rector assess their contribution thus:

The controversies which she [Lu Märten] had with Gertrud Alexander from 1919 to 1921 over questions of content and method extend beyond issues of Mehring's [classical heritage] position and left-wing communism: with them [Alexander and Märten] begins a fundamental discussion on the question of a materialist aesthetic which would continue through to the formation of the Proletarian Revolutionary Writers League (BPRS) in 1928 at the end of the Weimar Republic.⁷

Both critics were members of the SPD before the foundation of the KPD, which they joined, and both contributed to left-of-centre women's journals in the pre-war period, including *Die Gleichheit*, edited by Clara Zetkin, who later assisted Märten in her publishing attempts. Differences in educational background and experience may be seen to account for the different cultural positions they adopted after the November revolution. Alexander attended university at Jena, then art school in Eisenach, followed by study at the Royal Academy of Arts in Berlin, where she also taught drawing. Mehring's advocacy of the *Erbe* was likely to be sympathetically received, and one is not surprised to find hostility to radical innovation in the arts in her reviews for *Die Rote Fahne*, for which she was appointed cultural editor. Märten's career was more varied: her formal education was severely constrained by illness and downward mobility, but contact with two very different cultural circles was to shape her experience and politics. The first was a turn-of-the-century Berlin 'Bohemia' in which she was encouraged to engage in creative writing, producing a number of novels and a staged play. The second was the applied arts movement (*Kunstgewerbebewegung*) and founder members Friedrich Naumann and Theodor Heuss, from which

her interest in the shaping role of the technical in the development of form would evolve. There is almost no material on either critic in English; only a little more in German.⁸

In 1906, Märten submitted the article ‘Kunst, Klasse und Sozialismus’ to the SPD journal *Neue Zeit*, but it was rejected by Karl Kautsky, on behalf of the board, ‘because in its present form it is too difficult to understand [...] for most of our readers’. She also submitted an essay on Vincent van Gogh, which was rejected by Mehring.⁹ In 1914, her *Die wirtschaftliche Lage der Künstler* (The Economic Situation of Artists) was published and cited in parliament during the discussion on the funding of the Reichswirtschaftsverband bildender Künstler.¹⁰ What these and other publications in the pre-war period demonstrate was Märten’s concern with the artist in society and

her interest in formal innovation, which placed her at odds with the Mehring-led SPD position vis-à-vis the tradition and the evolving.

The Dada Fair of June 1920 was the initial occasion for the exchange of fundamentally irreconcilable positions on what art should be and do in a post-revolutionary context. Herzfelde wrote the introduction for the catalogue: ‘We only need to take the scissors and cut out those things from the reproductions of paintings and photograph them for our own use [...] we can take objects themselves.’ The Dada programme is informed by ‘a duty to make current events in time and place the context of their images, sourced in the illustrated newspaper and lead stories in the press’.¹¹ This was no mere anarchy let loose upon the world but productive of ‘an intense awareness of the structure

and functions of the very diverse social elements, with true insight into the real conditions rising from the forces of production, all to be understood from the position of communism', as he would write in his 1921 pamphlet 'Society, Artist, Communism'.¹² As mentioned above, Alexander had already had, in the *Kunstlump* controversy, a critical engagement with Grosz and Heartfield: the emblematic photograph of them holding a large placard announcing 'Art is dead. Long live the machine art of Tatlin' was confirmation of her earlier negative response. For Alexander, the exhibition was a 'collection of perversities' reeking of bourgeois decadence. She took particular exception to the daubing of unacceptable language on reproductions of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* and Botticelli's *Flora*, displayed as examples of bourgeois art that must be trampled down - echoes of the *Kunstlump* controversy. Nor does she find significance in the new materials. She recognizes the intention of the assemblages 'Prussian Archangel' (ceiling mounted, a papier mâché pig's head, topped by an officer's cap and set in an officer's uniform) and 'Electro-mechanical Tatlin Sculpture' (a tailor's dummy with military medals and a lightbulb for a head), but suggests that they are out place. Their site is instead that of the 'anti-militarism Panopticum, where nobody would take exception to them'. Alexander takes it upon herself to warn the workers against such bourgeois decadence masquerading as Dada insolence (*Frechheit*): 'Die Arbeiter sind gewarnt'.¹³

Alexander characterizes the work one-dimensionally as '*Ulk*' (joke) and takes exception to the *Berliner Post* critic for invoking Rabelais in this context. Märten, on the other hand, places the work within

the more multi-dimensional historical category of satire in her review ‘History, Satire, Dada and other things’ (‘Geschichte, Satyre, Dada und Weiteres’), also published in *Die Rote Fahne*.¹⁴ What she characterizes as a ‘a dialectic of satire’ is at play in Dada’s engagement with bourgeois culture and capitalism. ‘Dada is a manifestation of its time’, she writes, ‘no mere invention’:

What it attempts to do satirically through its distinctive means curiously enough lands it up at the same time in non-dadaist territory. The fact is that there is no longer a medium, let alone an art, necessary to present the satire or the caricature, no intellectual instance required to transcribe this material into the dialectic of satire.

Instead, these times and this society, the material substance of capitalism overall – is in and of itself satire. All that is required is a simple reproduction of present circumstances in an age of world war and counter-revolution.¹⁵

Should Dada intend to fully make clear the cultural logic of capital, ‘the ambition for art must be abandoned’, a situation Märten perceives as a dilemma for Dada, for in abandoning art, the critical bridge to capitalism and its art would also be abandoned. Dada, ‘seriously revolutionary’, would have to negotiate this dilemma in order to become an enemy of the bourgeoisie and not a reflection of its culture.¹⁶ Märten’s thinking here would appear to be an early articulation, not fully realized, of the later more mature dialectic of ‘art and anti-art’ proposed by another Berlin Dadaist, Hans Richter, in his 1973 book *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*.¹⁷ Dada is not dismissed but is seen more as an indicative transitional phase, a phase in which a more honest art than that of the bourgeoisie will emerge, one initially possibly ‘even technically impoverished’.¹⁸

In correspondence with the Czech leftist artist Karl Teige in 1924, she wrote: 'I took Dada completely seriously, if not all its individual members.'¹⁹

A similar range of actors and issues are to be found in the setting up of the Proletarisches Theater in 1920. It was established by Erwin Piscator, another member of the Berlin Dada group; and two members, Grosz and Heartfield, would contribute visual material to its performances. In a sense it could be seen as positively applied Dada technique from the Dada Fair earlier that year. Piscator's statement of aims makes the relationship clear: 'It was not a question of a theatre that would provide the proletariat with art, but of conscious propaganda, nor of a theatre for the proletariat but of a Proletarian Theatre.' Moreover, '[we] banned the word *art* radically from our programme, our "plays" were appeals and were intended to have an effect on current events, to be a form of political activity.' The theatre opened on 14 October, and Alexander's review of the first night appeared in *Die Rote Fahne* three days later. There were three short plays on the bill, including 'Russlands Tag', for which Heartfield provided the set design.²⁰ The presence of Herzfelde's wife at the box office selling copies of the Dada-inclined journal *Der Gegner*, which, as a special issue, contained the Proletarisches Theater programme, written by Piscator, triggered much the same response from Alexander as did the Dada Fair: 'With that my expectation evaporated. Proletarian Theatre! Bourgeois literati connected with Dada swarmed around the entrance door.'²¹ She concedes that the intention may have been to put communist and proletarian ideas on the stage, but that in itself is not sufficient. Her inherited aesthetic (Mehring's

Erbe) requires a traditional approach. What she saw was 'not art but propaganda ... Theatre is a space pledged to artistic achievement.... Art is a hallowed affair whose concept should not be surrendered to the most vulgar, botched piece of propaganda carried out on a stage by way of a coloured poster style'.²² She is concerned about the workers 'not yet ready for independent judgement', and suggests productions of revolutionary bourgeois drama - Schiller's 'Die Räuber' is mentioned as providing 'the powerful art which frees the spirit and liberates'.²³

Märten's essay 'On the Necessity for a Proletarian Theatre and the Proletarian Theatre' ('Über proletarisches Theaterbedürfnis und proletarisches Theater') was published in the Berlin journal *Die Arbeit* in 1921. Her interest is precisely in the transitional phase between one historical form of theatre and its successor: in her opinion, 'the revolutionary question is whether the existence of a particular art - here the theatre - is at all necessary and self-evident for future culture'.²⁴ She supported 'the productivity of factographic theatre work'.²⁵ Contrary to Alexander, she understood the operation of the Proletarisches Theater as addressing the workers more effectively than political propaganda did. 'The question of material resources arises here', Märten wrote, 'and if the agitational effectiveness of proletarian theatre becomes so circumscribed, then the parties and groups should sustain it'.²⁶ Piscator's production of 'Russlands Tag' involved the range of material Märten would espouse in her various writings. The text was not scripted but assembled from a collage of newspaper reports, a Dada practice; it also used film and projection of text. She had addressed a

related issue in an article published in Herzfelde's *Der Gegner*, in 1921, 'The Revolutionary Press and the Feuilleton' ('Die revolutionäre Presse und das Feuilleton'). She is concerned with how art is presented in the feuilleton: 'Here and there the worker is presented with a discussion of the good and bad in art, the content of which he is incapable of understanding, a situation he must accept because he has not been furnished with the instrument of criticism, only with the criticism itself'.²⁷ The feuilleton must become an organizing function of the (KPD) party: the specialist and technical virtuosity of journalism and 'Feuilletonismus' that the bourgeois press-machine (*Press-Mechanismus*) has developed must be 'revolutionised from the ground up': 'If *Kapital* had to be retrieved from newspaper articles, and Marx's *Nachlass* stems from there', she wrote, 'then every newspaper or journal would be undying'.²⁸ In the introduction to her major work *Historical Materialism with Regard to the Substance and Transformation of the Arts* (*Historisch-Materialistisches über Wesen und Veränderung der Künste*), she writes that this 'short article' is 'a foreword to the work on matters of art that is postulated therein ... an orientation for shared thinking and cooperation, because every listener and questioner is here a co-worker'.²⁹ In both articles, Märten is setting the agenda for ideas that will later, in a more articulated form, contribute greatly to the development of a Marxist aesthetic: the factographic '*operierende Künstler*' and the concept of '*Umfunktionierung*' in the early 1930s.³⁰

The two examples of theoretical differences between Alexander and Märten set out above

concerned concrete examples of cultural practices aligning themselves with the left - the Dada Fair and the Proletarisches Theater. Their next engagement would be on more abstract ground, that of the concept of historical materialism and its role in elucidating cultural practices. The issues were raised across five articles, two in the *Internationale Jugend Bibliothek* and three in *Die Rote Fahne*. Märten initiated the discussion in the *Internationale Jugend Bibliothek* with her 'Historical Materialism with Regard to the Substance and Transformation of the Arts: A Pragmatic Introduction' ('Historisch-Materialistisches über Wesen und Veränderung der Künste. Eine pragmatische Einleitung'). As much of this material is raised and discussed in Alexander's responses and Märten's reply to her, my focus here will be on those three articles. The exchanges centred on the relationship of art to traditional handicraft (*Handwerk*), the machine and Marx's theory of labour (Märten); and on the ideological and spiritual in the conditioning of artistic form (Alexander). Although a charge of technical determinism would hang over Märten's position, that does not seem to be supported here, as she explicitly defines materialism 'not only according to technical features, but also according to the natural, the organism of the natural human being'.³¹

Alexander's response is the best starting point for the rehearsal of the issues. This appeared in both *Internationale Jugend Bibliothek* and *Die Rote Fahne*, entitled 'Historischer Materialismus und Kunstkritik'. She argues for a traditional concept of artistic production that accommodates the requirement of the historical-materialist method:

'through the artistic means fashioned by the genius of its creator [a work of art] grips and excites our soul'. Such 'psychic experience' of art is also historically materially conditioned because man is a social being.³² She refers to Märten's question whether 'new duties for the arts could be determined as a result of historical-materialist investigations', but rejects it on the grounds that 'the historical-materialist method must be dialectical and not used mechanically or from an external point of view', accusing her of 'failing to see the intuitive apprehension of relationships to penetrate through to the dialectic mediations of phenomena'.³³ These criticisms are preliminary to a long passage on the Gothic cathedral. For Alexander, the cathedral incarnates an ideological programme, that of the Catholic Church, and is essentially an art work; for Märten it is primarily the result of technical advance, partly influenced as she was by Gottfried Semper, the nineteenth-century architect, and his concept of the *Zweckbau* determined by material, function and technique. For Alexander, this 'would be to mechanise and flatten out historical materialism'.³⁴ She does, however, concede that Märten may in general be advocating an acceptable pathway to the future: 'If one from now on wishes to undertake in principle the issue of "proletarian art" as an art of the future, Lu Märten may be quite right if she means that a new art is realistically conceivable through a more intimate relationship with the social labour process, through the realisation of the material culture of mankind.' But Alexander cannot see the determining features in the 'technical possibilities'.³⁵ Her own pathway to the future is, again, traditional: it involves the 'complete

penetration of everyday life and its material culture with higher value objects ... a general raising in the education of the spirit ... the growth of a new ethos ... The feeling of association of all in communism by way of a shared purpose in work

and life is a prerequisite for the development of the arts.³⁶ Mistaking Märten's position for being only deterministically informed, she refers to an earlier piece by Märten, 'Maschine und Diktatur' of 1919. Märten was working at ROSTA, the Soviet telegraphic service in Berlin, when news of artistic innovations began to trickle through from Russia. That article brought a number of developing issues together: her own interest in *Handwerk* and the *Kunstgewerbebewegung* (applied arts movement), new Russian work, the 'social dictatorship' in cultural production and 'the overcoming of the machine by the machine'.³⁷ Alexander claims that they both share the same ground, the recognition of the need to guard against 'the flattening or narrowing of the historical materialist horizon through the reduction of a phenomenon to *one* cause instead of pursuing the dialectic of all factors, material as well as spiritual'.³⁸

Märten's response, 'Kunst und historischer Materialismus', appeared in *Die Rote Fahne*. Not unexpectedly she is critical of Alexander's conception of the operation of the historical-materialist method. Its objective is not that of 'intuitive recognition', the 'ideological ideal', but the demonstration by way of deduction and exactness of what the facts are. This operation threatens such ideological concerns as 'soul' or 'art', as their foundation is laid bare. Whoever reaches for historical materialism as if for a simple tool (*Handwerkzeug*) and delves no deeper than

ideas like ‘religious need’, ‘victorious church’, ‘the spirit of revolution’, ‘artistic essence’, ‘relinquishes the right to judge the outcome of the method’.³⁹ Nor can the invocation of the economic sphere be used as a shortcut. Whoever thinks that ‘handicraft (*Handwerk*) has never had anything to do with art has not grasped the ABCs of empirical research’.⁴⁰ The concept of labour stands at the beginning of all historical phenomena. Alexander had quoted Marx to the effect that each age fashions its necessary forms of expression with the requisite means to achieve its goals. Märten now invokes his chapter on *Handwerk* in *Das Kapital*, claiming that Alexander seems to be unaware of it: the ‘brilliant passage in this investigation where Marx states that the machine *has freed labour from its content* is either not known or is not understood by our comrade’. With Marx’s example, the historical materialist must grasp the subject while letting go of preconceptions.⁴¹ The Gothic ‘spirit’ must give way to the historical stage of labour and technique. As arts editor of *Die Rote Fahne*, Alexander had the last word. She characterized Märten’s prioritizing of technique as vulgar Marxism, a misunderstanding of what Marx meant by the relations of production. Rejecting Märten’s attention to the specifics of labour as too literal, Alexander wrote that labour must be considered more broadly: ‘Labour does not only stand at the beginning of all historical phenomena but is the condition for all human existence and consequently the foundation for the relations of production.’⁴²

As with their stances on Dada and the Proletarischies Theater, we find here also, within the official organs of the left, the KPD paper *Die Rote Fahne* and the

Internationale Jugend Bibliothek, two very different concepts on the demands of historical materialism in its investigation of culture. For Alexander it is a method for a more extensive elaboration of the art of the past; Märten instead wants to excavate that past through a concept of labour based on Marx in order to establish forms of art responsive to technological change in the present.

1924: *Wesen und Veränderung der Formen und Künste: Resultate historisch-materialistischer Untersuchungen* (Substance and transformation of forms and the arts: Results of historical materialist investigations)

The pre-publication phase of this book had many moments indicative of cultural activity on the left. Märten, as noted above, worked in Berlin for ROSTA between 1917 and 1919, tasked with cataloguing extracts from the international press and forwarding them to Russia. She came into contact with politicians and journalists who had worked for the revolution, and about this time occasional references to Proletkult and new cultural organizations are found in her work: references to the alliance between workers and artists on the basis of the ‘social dictatorship’, with artists becoming organizing engineers in production.⁴³ It was from this contact with Russian sources that the idea for her book arose, initially through a member of the Soviet Trade Mission. In November 1921, the commission for its composition was agreed by the scientific-technical section of the Counsel for Political Economy and ratified by the External Purchasing Commission for the Commissariat for Popular Education. There was a suggestion that Anatoly Lunacharsky, Director of the Commissariat for Enlightenment, might oversee its translation.

Unfortunately for Märten, negotiations finally fell through in 1922 due to limitations set on Russian funds in Germany. The book was published by a German publisher, Seehof, whose Taifun-Verlag published a wide range of Soviet Russian material in German translation.⁴⁴ Such contacts would undoubtedly have provided Märten with privileged access to current practical and theoretical concerns in the Soviet Union, informing and supplementing her own pre-war engagement with related issues.

Märten described her project thus: 'In the present work the attempt has been made to set out for the first time the forms of appearance of the so-called arts and to make clear and transparent the motivating forces of the spiritual and artistic production from the standpoint of historical materialism.'⁴⁵ The book contains eight chapters, covering music, architecture, sculpture, painting and literature, all subject to the overarching method quoted above. The salient theoretical concerns are discussed below. Two major strands constitute the core of her theorizing: fundamentally, the role of technique; the critique of the *Erbe* and her related sympathy for formal innovation and experimentation, as reflected in her articles on Dada and the Proletarisches Theater. All are interrelated. Later in the 1920s, she would extend more fully her interest in technique and innovation in a series of articles on radio and film. Writing on this aspect of Märten's work, Erhard H. Schütz claims that 'it contains the central ideas - pleasure, experiment, science - of discussion on film of the following years, as they were particularly marked by Brecht, Benjamin and Kracauer'.⁴⁶

Aside from her critique of Alexander's position, Märten was also unconvinced by arguments for a proletarian art as such: 'When, as happens today, proletarian art is discussed and debated, the concept of art is accepted without further ado as an eternally determined complex of forms. That is neither revolutionary nor scientific historical materialism: a concept of art in its socioeconomic dimension must be investigated.'⁴⁷ Like Piscator, she opposed the fetishization of a proletarian drama, and sought a more dynamic conceptualization of the post-revolution transitional phase, the *Übergangszeit*: 'All transitional phenomena which can be thus named are means of struggle, which will eventually be able to choose *other*, more effective forms.' Later in the same passage she wrote: 'it is ridiculous to want to reroute proletarian consciousness through bourgeois forms of artistic consciousness, to expect images and theatre performances which should completely reflect the content and form of the new social vitality, as yet latent and unconscious'. The 'new forms', she continues, 'are therefore to be discovered, exploited and, for the first time, to be developed ... [They are] no longer to be identified with the requirement "art" but rather with actual life.'

⁴⁸

Her most contentious claims were those made around the role of technique. As noted above, she had been involved with the Werkbund circle (Naumann and Heuss) in the pre-war period and had written on craft, the machine and the division of labour, and how these changes had impacted on the arts. She had come to see the activity of labour as the originary moment and had turned to Marx's theory of labour as *the* explanatory model, one over

which she had differed with Alexander. There was an unfulfilled plan to write ‘a “heroic epic” titled *Die Arbeit*, which would set out the entire development of human labour up to the self-conscious proletariat’.⁴⁹

For our purposes here, a long passage on Suprematism and Tatlin should suffice for the exposition of these ideas in their relationship to form. The Russian artists, she claimed, ‘had not contributed new words to the vocabulary of art but had created a new language itself’ in which ‘new problems demanded richer technical means for their resolution. Finally, the necessity to produce “pictures”, “artworks” that only amuse the layman or at best repulse him, is being reconsidered critically’. In this new language, ‘every material is suitable ... and its new grammar and aesthetic demand manual technical training and a closer bond with its powerful ally, the machine’. In Suprematism she sees ‘a revolutionary destructive force’ that is ‘the first intimation of future synthesis’.⁵⁰

This new language is not *art* but the media, languages and materials of new *forms*. Form in this production process displaces art: ‘No spiritual process needs to be embodied where everything in real life represents itself as it has really happened.’ Here

Märten makes a radical claim: ‘It cannot be called classless “art”.... It can only be called “classless forms”.’ The result will be ‘a perfect artistic culture, namely the type of forms appropriate to purpose, object and material; yet, perhaps, without “arts”’.⁵¹

In her 'Kunst und Proletariat' of 1925, Märten presents a precise account of what has been described above, where she posits the technique/form position against that of ideology/content: 'Material form is ignored; instead these expectations [for proletarian art] are automatically related to content, the idea, the tendency of the proletarian world-view. It is proposed that what is now known as "laboratory art", so designated by Trotsky and others, be rejected.⁵² 'All of socialism's spiritual insights', she claims, 'were in step with the facts of material production. Equally so with art attention must be paid to technical material conditions.'⁵³ The '*klassenlose Formen*' discovered through '*Laboratoriumskunst*' would reconstruct the '*Alltag*', the everyday, in order to enrich it ('*um es reicher zu machen*').⁵⁴

'Formalist barbarism'?

In the fifth part of his essay 'On the Question of a Marxist Aesthetic', Wittfogel accused Märten of 'failing to proceed in a materialist or dialectical manner', of 'formalist barbarism'.⁵⁵ It seems to be a question of the correct theory as 'Lu Märten often discovers the real material relation but not as a result of her theory, but despite it'.⁵⁶ Märten's counterattack is set on two fronts: her interventionist intention and her questioning of Wittfogel's exposition of a relevant aesthetic strategy. 'Do we want to create, even with deficient means, a class-based art, or should we wait until a fully realised socialist society drops from the sky?' she asks. Opting for the former requires 'not the standards of traditional aesthetics' but 'a practical aesthetic'.⁵⁷ She is not impressed with Wittfogel's

claim that his series has been a first step towards a Marxist aesthetic, built as it is on quotations from Hegel.⁵⁸ Wittfogel replied by accusing her of being an ultra-leftist Trotskyist, arguing from a Trotsky-informed nihilistic view of art and of neglecting proletarian art – this, we should recall, was the period of the Stalinization of the KPD.⁵⁹ He did, however, offer her a welcome if she forsook her earlier position and joined the *Linkskurve* programme. The invitation was not taken up.

By the date of publication of Märten's major work, the context for politics on the left had changed. 'The March Days' of 1923 saw the defeat of the last insurrectionary attempt, and 1924 brought the Americanization of the economy and the attempted stabilization of capital. An indication of how Märten's work would be received can be seen in a report of an address she gave to *Künstlerhilfe* members in *Die Rote Fahne* in February 1925 (*Künstlerhilfe* was one branch of Münzenberg's empire of assistance to KPD causes). The report was written by Alfred Kemeny (under the pseudonym Durus), who replaced Alexander after her move to Moscow. Kemeny would be an important figure in

promoting ASSO founded in 1928. Märten spoke on the machine and 'classless forms'; Kemeny reports on opposition to her ideas. For him, bourgeois art will automatically wither. At present, '[t]he most pressing and important objective of art is as the most effective form of revolutionary agitation and propaganda in class struggle.'⁶⁰ A rather different issue, not in relation to Märten's work specifically, was raised by Grosz on his return from Moscow in 1924, where he had participated in a large exhibition of German art. Because of the great

imbalance in technological advance between Germany and Russia, he declared that productivist-style art did not register as an objective for German artists.⁶¹ In 1929 Märten was invited to lecture at both the Marxistische-Arbeiter-Schule (MASCH) in Berlin and at the Bauhaus in Dessau. At MASCH she taught a series on philosophical and historical materialism. Her Bauhaus lecture, also published in their journal, was entitled ‘historischer materialismus und neue gestaltung’, a subject that supported the policy of the Marxist director, Hannes Meyer. Ignored by the ‘Stalinizing’ KPD, her ideas found interest in less orthodox leftist circles, ideas that attempted, on a materialist basis, to indicate a practice and aesthetic at odds with the espousal of the art of the revolutionary bourgeois period (the *Erbe*) and philosophical aesthetics by Mehring and Wittfogel. But, importantly, some of her ideas on practice would find resonance in the work of Heartfield and Brecht, with their applied materialist aesthetics.

¹ My references here are to the 1973 reprint of this series: Karl August Wittfogel, *Zur Frage einer marxistischen Ästhetik: Abhandlung* (Kölnkalkverlag: Cologne, 1973), here p. 28, n. 6.

² Wittfogel, *Zur Frage*, op. cit., p. 42.

³ The Heartfield/Grosz article was triggered by an episode in the immediate post-revolution period when workers and soldiers exchanged fire in the vicinity of the Zwinger Museum in Dresden, as a result of which a Rubens painting was slightly damaged. What angered Heartfield and Grosz was Oskar Kokoschka’s response to the combatants to vacate the scene of culture and remove themselves to the heath where no such damage could be done. The original documents are reprinted in Walter Fähnders and Martin Rector (eds.), *Literatur im Klassenkampf: Zur proletarisch-revolutionären Literaturtheorie 1919–1923* (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1974), pp. 47–60.

⁴ Ibid., p. 160.

5 Ibid., p. 143.

6 Ibid., p. 142.

7 Walter Fähnders and Martin Rector, *Linksradikalismus und Literatur: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der sozialistischen Literatur in der Weimarer Republik* (Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag: Reinbek, 1980), p. 129. Richard H. Schütz's periodization is also arresting: he writes about 'Lu Märten's contribution to the discussion on the theory of form, which lasted almost twenty years, from the "old" social democratic to the "Stalinisation" of the KPD.' Schütz, 'Zur Kontinuität des Geschichtsoptimismus in der materialistischen Literaturtheorie', *alternative: Zeitschrift für Literatur und Diskussion*, no. 89 (1973), p. 71.

8 Barbara McCloskey gives a brief but significant account of their controversy over the Dada Fair in *George Grosz and the Communist Party: Art and Radicalism in Crisis, 1918 to 1936* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1997). The only major study of Märten to date is Chryssoula Kambas, *Die Werkstatt als Utopie: Lu Märten's literarische Arbeit und Formästhetik seit 1900* (Max Niemeyer Verlag: Tübingen, 1988). The then West German journal *alternative: Zeitschrift für Literatur und Diskussion* reprinted some of the original exchanges between Alexander and Märten in issue no. 89 (1973). Before the dissolution of the GDR, there was a move towards rehabilitation of Märten, for which Rainhard Mai was responsible. See Mai, 'Theorie der "Formen" oder Theorie der "Kunste"? Lu Märten's Versuch eine marxistische ästhetische Theorie in Deutschland, Anfang der zwanziger Jahre zu konzipieren', in *Kunst im Klassenkampf: Arbeitstagung zur proletarisch revolutionären Kunst* (Verband Bildener Künstler der DDR: Berlin, 1979), pp. 84–92; and Rainhard Mai (ed.), *Lu Märten: Formen für den Alltag. Schriften, Aufsätze, Vorträge* (VEB Verlag der Kunst: Dresden, 1982).

9 See Kambas, *Die Werkstatt als Utopie*, p. 82. But Mehring was enthusiastic about her play 'Bergarbeiter' ('Miners'), which was staged in Stuttgart in 1909. He reviewed it in *Die neue Zeit*: 'A stirring and impressive episode from the life of miners, in which a successful balance between psychological insight and dramatic strength is maintained'. Reprinted in *alternative: Zeitschrift für Literatur und Diskussion*, no. 89 (1973), p. 100.

10 Kambas, *Die Werkstatt als Utopie*, op. cit., p. 118.

11 Uwe Schneede (ed.), *Die Zwanziger Jahre: Manifeste und Dokumente Deutscher Künstler* (DuMont: Cologne, 1979), pp. 31–4.

12 Fähnders and Rector (eds.), *Literatur im Klassenkampf*, op. cit., p. 152.

- ¹³ Ibid., pp. 100–2.
- ¹⁴ Märten was acquainted with a number of Berlin Dadaists: she published in Wieland Herzfelde's *Der Gegner*, and Hannah Höch and Raoul Hausmann were among her circle of friends. See Kambas, *Die Werkstatt als Utopie*, op. cit., p. 137.
- ¹⁵ Reprinted in the catalogue *Revolution und Realismus: Revolutionäre Kunst in Deutschland 1917 bis 1933*, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 1978, pp. 85–6. The reference to counter-revolution was the Kapp Putsch of March 1920.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 86.
- ¹⁷ Adorno would articulate it more fully: 'Just as all art is secularised transcendence, so all art participates in the dialectic of enlightenment. Art has faced the challenge of this dialectic by developing the aesthetic concept of anti-art. From now on, no art will be conceivable without the moment of anti-art. This means no less than that art has to go beyond its own concept in order to remain faithful to itself.' Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London and New York, 1986), p. 42–3.
- ¹⁸ *Revolution und Realismus*, op. cit., p. 86.
- ¹⁹ Kambas, *Die Werkstatt als Utopie*, op. cit., p. 203.
- ²⁰ Details of these productions are to be found in Erwin Piscator, *The Political Theatre*, trans. Hugh Morrison (Eyre Methuen: London, 1980), pp. 44–5. One of the plays, 'Der Krüppel' (The Cripple), was by K. A. Wittfogel, writing under the pseudonym Julius Haidvogel.
- ²¹ Fähnders und Rector (eds.), *Literatur im Klassenkampf*, op. cit., p. 209.
- ²² Ibid., p. 208.
- ²³ Ibid., p. 210.
- ²⁴ Kambas, *Die Werkstatt als Utopie*, op. cit., p. 143.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Reprinted in *alternative: Zeitschrift für Literatur und Diskussion*, p. 102.
- ²⁸ Kambas, *Die Werkstatt als Utopie*, op. cit., p. 133.

- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ When Brecht and Benjamin were discussing setting up the journal *Krise und Kritik*, her name was brought up: ‘Benjamin thought a “debate” was necessary on “what has until now been brought from the materialist side about literary criticism (Franz Mehring, Merten etc)”.’ Erdmut Wizisla, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht: The Story of a Friendship*, trans. Christine Shuttleworth (Libris: London, 2009), p. 79. Wizisla accepts Chryssoula Kambas’s argument that ‘the name, written from dictation, must conceal Lu Märten, based on the reception of Märten during the 1920s’. Wittfogel was also on the list.
- ³¹ Kambas, *Die Werkstatt als Utopie*, op. cit., p. 147.
- ³² *Die Rote Fahne*, 20 May 1921, reprinted in *alternative: Zeitschrift für Literatur und Diskussion*, pp. 63–4.
- ³³ Ibid., pp. 64–5.
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 66.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 70.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Kambas, *Die Werkstatt als Utopie*, op. cit., p. 127.
- ³⁸ Reprinted in *alternative. Zeitschrift für Literatur und Diskussion*, p. 70.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 60.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 61.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Kambas, *Die Werkstatt als Utopie*, op. cit., p. 149.
- ⁴³ Ibid., p. 127.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 176–8. More unfortunately, he went bankrupt and had to offload stock to other outlets.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 154.
- ⁴⁶ *alternative: Zeitschrift für Literatur und Diskussion*, p. 96.
- ⁴⁷ Reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 83.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 86.

- ⁴⁹ Kambas, *Die Werkstatt als Utopie*, op. cit., p. 157. As a self-supporting intellectual typical of the Weimar period, she worked on international labour archives in Berlin.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 173.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² *Die Aktion*, reprinted in *alternative: Zeitschrift für Literatur und Diskussion*, p. 54. She had reviewed Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* the previous year and found his distillation of the cultural through historical materialism less than clear.
- ⁵³ Ibid., p. 55.
- ⁵⁴ The question has been raised as to whether Märten may have got to know of Boris Arvatov's work in the Soviet Union: apparently it was only published in German translation a year later, in 1926.
- ⁵⁵ Wittfogel, *Zur Frage*, op. cit., p. 34.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 39.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 43.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 50.
- ⁶⁰ Kambas, *Die Werkstatt als Utopie*, op. cit., p. 180.
- ⁶¹ This is stated in a co-authored pamphlet with Wieland Herzfelde, *Die Kunst ist in Gefahr* (*Art is in Danger*), in which Dada is strenuously defended and the false objectivism of Neue Sachlichkeit strongly attacked.

EXPERIMENT AND PROPAGANDA

ART IN THE MONTHLY *NEW MASSES*

Rachel Sanders

New Masses, the American magazine of ‘arts and letters’, was first published in May 1926 and ran as a monthly until October 1933, when it transformed into an overtly political weekly (1934–48). Although never an official organ of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA), it was a principal disseminator of policy and sought to be the authoritative voice on the culture of the revolutionary left. History has painted a picture of an affiliation that dutifully marched to the tune of the Soviet piper.¹ *New Masses* has been dismissed as ‘a vehicle for party dogma’ teeming with ‘pedestrian proletarian art and prose’, its ‘mindless crudity ... a direct consequence of the international Stalinist line on cultural matters’.² Its illustrations and cartoons have been described as systematically evolving from ‘formally innovative, often abstract, art’ to ‘art of explicit social and political content’ in a manner that ‘paralleled the comparable shift from abstract constructivism to socialist realist art in Soviet Russia during the same years’.³ However, pictorial evidence does not corroborate this assertion. As a monthly, *New Masses* fielded complex concepts, tactics and influences, including Leninist theory, Proletkult and the model of proletarian culture developed by the Russian

Association of Revolutionary Writers (RAPP) that became the root of Stalin's 'method' of Socialist Realism, as well as modernist developments prevalent in capitalist art markets and realisms that had emerged through its periodical predecessors.⁴ The result was a remarkable eclecticism. This essay will analyse its diversity through emphasis on stylistic idiom, its relationship to image content, and the perceptions of artists, theorists and national and international critics of its aesthetic and utilitarian worth.

New Masses was founded with the support of an abundance of artists and intellectuals and a grant from the American Fund for Public Service. The prospectus submitted for funding laid out a non-partisan programme, but the continuation of the strain of national radicalism that had emerged through the *Masses* (1911-17) and the *Liberator* (1918-24) was affirmed when those involved declared 'allegiance unqualifiably with the international labor movement'.⁵ Many contributors to the early numbers had been involved with these magazines, including editor Michael Gold, who stressed, in the second issue, that *New Masses* was an American experiment, 'not a magazine of Communism or Moscow'. Nonetheless, he designated Russia and its revolutionary culture the 'spiritual core' around which thousands of artists were 'building their creative lives'.⁶ Indeed, before the year was out paeans to the 'great artist-nation, great scientist-nation, great worker-nation' filled the magazine's columns and Lenin's portrait adorned its cover [1].⁷



1 Hugo Gellert, cover of *New Masses*, November 1926. Courtesy of the author.

Russia may have been a cultural beacon, but *New Masses* was consistently out of step with Soviet theory and practice, although this fact did not become apparent until it gained sustained contact with Soviet art and literary groups starting with the Second Conference of Revolutionary and Proletarian Writers, held at Kharkov in November 1930. Even so, it remained non-doctrinaire. As Andrew Hemingway states, '*New Masses*

articulated the Party's position on political issues (with which there could be no public disagreement), but continued to reflect the wide differences of opinion among communists and fellow-travellers on cultural matters.⁸ The magazine exhibits neither uniform approach to content nor dominant stylistic idiom. Its artists transgressed directives and models of practice set in place by the Communist International (Comintern). This permissive attitude demands attention because, unlike earlier left-wing movements, communists endlessly deliberated upon formulating a programme for the production of effective revolutionary art to which they could adhere.

Between May 1926 and April 1928, the spectrum of political opinion of the editorial and executive boards shaped *New Masses*. These disappeared in June and Gold became sole editor until he was pressured into a three-man board in July 1931, which grew to six before the magazine became a weekly.⁹ With each new editorial grouping, adjustments in format and appearance occurred, but patterns of artistic activity, of stylistic transformation or favoured subject matter, do not neatly coincide with such changes, and it is a mistake to view modernist activity as determining the early issues, proletarian realism defining Gold's periodical, or an emulation of Russian realism dictating the eighteen months that followed. The magazine's artistic history is nuanced, and oversimplification distorts our comprehension and limits our appreciation of the images. *New Masses'* life can be usefully divided into phases; the risk in prioritizing these is interpreting the artistic narrative as falling into step behind the political story.

The Phases of *New Masses*

The monthly *New Masses* coincided with a period of bitter factional fighting within the CPUSA, which was utilized by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) for its own power struggles.¹⁰ The magazine, which supported party policy from the outset, never became embroiled in these quarrels. Its incipient latitudinarian politics are apparent from the contributing socialists, independent Marxists and adversaries of the left; in particular, the publication of material by Leon Trotsky after he had lost his Politburo seat, and by his supporter and biographer Max Eastman, who had been chief editor of the *Masses* and the *Liberator*, exemplifies partial knowledge of, or partial allegiance to, the Soviet government.¹¹

The bold format and the variety and volume of graphics featured in the first six months testify to the vision for *New Masses* outlined in its prospectus, which promised

'at least half the pages will consist of pictures'. These would be political cartoons, drawings of American life and 'pictures that have no "journalistic" value but are based on the emotions of art'.¹² Printed inside and out in varying single colours under black on quality paper, it was initially several square inches larger than the roughly A4-sized magazine it shrank to in June 1928 and was visually striking with many full-page images. It claimed, in November 1926, that the switch to black and white, and a smaller size was made so 'brave readers can hide their copies on subways from reactionary eyes', although publishing costs were undoubtedly a concern.¹³ Printed on cheaper paper, the magazine was robbed of its vibrancy, yet variety

endured. This was amplified in the early magazine by the number of individual contributions from unknown artists, such as Ernest Fiene's soft-toned, naturalistic rural idyll *Barns* (June 1927) or the heavy marks, condensed space and flattened forms of Fred Gardner's *The Art Season Opens in Woodstock* (June 1927). These 'one-offs' dwindled in later issues, but they continued to appear until early 1933.

William Gropper and Louis Lozowick were the predominant artists of Gold's magazine, an interesting combination as in many ways their oeuvres embody the stylistic dichotomy of realism and modernist abstraction that Gold associated with opposing classes. During this phase, illustrations decreased in number and size, although full-page pictures still appeared – mainly works by Lozowick, who published in thirty-five of the thirty-eight issues that Gold edited, including numerous industrial vistas built of flat or tonal geometric forms in the vein of *American Geometry* (September 1928). Gold's first editorial as chief welcomed 'unorthodox subjects in unorthodox techniques'.¹⁴ He accepted experimentation, but formal play for its own sake was not compatible with his cultural agenda. His editorship began just weeks before the Comintern ushered in the 'Third Period', an ultra-sectarian phase when all reformists were regarded as counter-revolutionary. This policy kept the CPUSA on the margins of American political life, even as the flailing economy plunged the nation into depression, leaving millions unemployed, homeless, hungry and notionally ripe for revolution. The tenor of Gold's magazine frequently complemented rigid Third Period rhetoric. It propagated the class-against-class Party line and asserted

proletarian realism as appropriate communist culture, its single-minded, robust, virility that was guilty of ‘crudities, puerilities and so-called crimes against good-taste’ lauded above sickly, emasculated, aimless modernism, the product of a decaying society.¹⁵ Gold’s *New Masses* has been continually associated with ‘leftism’, a criticism that denoted the unsatisfactory practices of prioritizing propaganda value, rejecting bourgeois culture, undervaluing form and technique and insisting on worker authorship, although recent scholarship has persuasively disputed this charge.¹⁶ Certainly there is no indication of ‘leftist’ attitudes in the art featured, which was idiomatically diverse and never solely propagandistic or partisan.

Gold’s dedication to proletarian culture predated *New Masses* and he expressed belief in its organic growth in his earliest writings, yet his concept lacked fixed form or identity.¹⁷ Gellert’s indomitable, muscle-bound labourers that regularly adorned the magazine’s pages – for example, the Russian peasant and proletarian holding aloft the hammer and sickle behind Lenin on the November 1926 cover – could be seen as graphic manifestations of Gold’s theory. Proletarianism frequently heroized workers when recreating their lives in art, and privileged them through requests to make their own voices heard. Gold implored workers to write of their lives ‘in mine, mill and farm’.¹⁸ His ambition to form a ‘staff of industrial correspondents’ is reminiscent of Russia’s Left Front of Art (LEF) and earned him considerable criticism on the communist world stage – at the Kharkov conference, in the international journal *Literature of the World Revolution* and in the German *Die Linkskurve*, as well as from fellow

Americans concerned that the results would be ‘reportorial’ rather than ‘creative and cultural’.¹⁹

Proletarianism was never a sanctioned strain of communist cultural theory, being opposed by Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin, and at Kharkov the International Union of Revolutionary Writers (IURW) sought to halt its dominance in America. *New Masses* was accused of neglecting important theoretical developments, prompting a ten-point ‘program of action’ that committed it to strengthening its knowledge.²⁰ Six American delegates representing the magazine and its offshoot cultural organization the John Reed Club (JRC) were among more than one hundred representatives from twenty-three different countries invited to participate in the conference. They included Gold, Gropper, A. B. Magil, Joshua Kunitz, Fred Ellis and Harry Alan Potamkin - the former three were elected to the executive council of the IURW, cementing a keenly pursued affiliation.²¹

Despite improved channels of communication and availability of theoretical materials, *New Masses* remained wanting for one Russian reviewer whose harsh critique of the 1931 issues ran in *International Literature* (the journal of the IURW). Twenty-year-old Anne Elistratova concluded that ‘insufficient politization [sic]’, ‘rotten liberalism’ and ‘theoretical backwardness’ were the root causes of the magazine’s deficiencies. She berated its style and the overall paucity of revolutionary content, and particularly reproved artists who fixated ‘on isolated phenomena of the capitalist system without showing their connection to the system as a whole’. *New Masses* stalwarts Gellert, Gropper, Jacob Burck and Otto Soglow were all

deemed guilty of ‘an advocacy of passiveness and non-resistance’, their works denounced as mere registers of degradation in danger of fulfilling ‘a demobilising function’.²² Although her zealous appraisal was based on an essentially one-dimensional view of what communist art should be – naturalistic, militant social criticism – her article demonstrated understanding of initiatives propounded at Kharkov and highlighted that these had been either misunderstood or ignored.

In September 1932, *New Masses* published an IURW-formulated resolution determining the need for an artistic strategy founded on ‘Marxism-Leninism’ to address its ‘grave shortcomings’.²³ The impact of Soviet criticism on its art was negative, although not immediate. Throughout 1932 a range of idiosyncratic styles received ample space. But the 1933 issues became much drier visually; many even lacked a cover image, and most of the interior graphics were smaller, filling either a half-page or half-column. Humour maintained a foothold, but there were few non-political works. Stylistically, experimentation was undeniably reined in, yet the expressive cartoon line was still favoured over the naturalism characteristic of Russian realism, evident, for example, in Gropper’s comic attack on Roosevelt’s New Deal *So What?* (July 1933), with its blue eagle defecating for the unemployed.

The Dominant Idioms of *New Masses*

A political aesthetic that flourished in the fine art of the American left during the 1930s was consolidated in *New Masses*. Its genealogy can be traced to two principal sources: the emotive,

rough-hewn realism of Honoré Daumier that had been forged into the emblematic style of socialism by the artists of the *Masses*; and the vitriolic, scratchy linear expressionism of George Grosz that had been absorbed into the *Liberator* via the illustrations of Gropper and Adolf Dehn and had become quickly representative of the fledgling communist movement. These styles were well represented in *New Masses*, affirming its artistic lineage, but it also featured something unseen in the pages of its predecessors: experimentation with modernist idioms derived primarily from Cubism, including abstract pieces.

The use of modern techniques appealed to those who wished to see the publication of a sophisticated, non-doctrinaire journal. A 1928 review declared great revolutionary art to be 'revolutionary both in theme and method'.²⁴ When Gold proclaimed the newly launched periodical 'a magazine of American experiment', it was with the proviso 'let's not experiment in the minor esthetic cults'.²⁵ The following year, however, he championed 'the new free technique' of the Russian futurists and decried 'stodgy tradition[al] propaganda that had "bored so many persons, including revolutionists".²⁶ Enthusiasm for the practices of the post-revolution Russian avantgarde, in so far as they were understood - for Constructivism, Proletkult and the LEF - permeated the left, despite acknowledged conflict between innovation and communication. As one play review noted, 'from the standpoint of winning new converts ... stale language and stale form' would be most effective, while that which excites artists 'would be absolutely valueless'.²⁷

TERRIBLE NEWS

By ALEXANDER NEVEROV

Translated by MAX EASTMAN

Old man Emeliov got a letter from his son Serega. His son wrote in a crooked, illegible hand.

"Dear parents. Dad and Mama, and you, my wife, Lukeria Emediova."

The prejudices according to

which you live in ignorance must

not force you to remain,

therefore I inform you that I have

come to you from a widow,

an old widow, a widow of a

man who had a full right to cohabit with

any woman he chose,

according to the dictates of your heart.

I myself do not recognize any

marriage, and I do not want to

return to the country."

He was silent after. Her

eyes closed, her hands trembled.

The old woman sat silent.

When the reading ended, he

tenderly smoothing it out with his

grayed fingers. The old woman

was silent with tears.

It was pleasant to hear the sound

of the German language spoken by Serega. Little children

are good, she thought.

Dark dry cheeks.

Dark eyes, understanding.

"Well, we'll let him come home," said Lukeria.

"What is there to understand?"

"They won't let him come home. God! They won't let him come home!"

After a silence she added:

"I'm afraid he'll come back again. It

means more blood. If we miss him

too much, we'll go to see him."

"In German language?"

Emeliov spoke again.

"Two-year-old Masha, wrapped in

a shawl, sat on his lap, crying.

"Don't howl! Don't howl!"

"What's the matter with her?"

Emeliov had sensed a smile

in his son's voice.

He took Serega's hands and

smooched them.

"Heavy little sheet."

He took Serega's hands and

smooched them.

"Well, you won't live with

us now, we'll take care of you."

Old man Emeliov turned his head and

shook his head.

The old people exchanged a

glance.

"What's the matter with her?"

Emeliov had sensed a smile

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French art, especially Cubism, and of contemporary trends in advertising, specifically Art Deco graphics. Like the majority of *New Masses*' artists, Gellert tempered experimentation with figuration. David Burliuk, Morris Pass, Jan Matulka and Theodor Scheel were among those who drew heavily on post-Cubist modernism, reducing urban and industrial scenes and images of labour to stylized forms and flat, angular blocks of solid monochrome, as in Matulka's *Fishing Boats* (December 1927), with its fractured picture space and multiple perspectives. It was not the dominant practice, but the early magazine featured a wealth of such art, which maintained a presence under Gold's editorship, including Lozowick's abstract *Decorations* [2] that dotted the columns.

Lozowick was the most consistent practitioner of modernist abstraction publishing in *New Masses* and the only contemporary American communist to write in a sustained manner on the subject of art.²⁹ Despite his non-figurative propensities, he warned, 'The great danger of extreme preoccupation with formalism is that it is likely to degenerate into decoration and ornamentation' when disconnected from life.³⁰ Lozowick advocated a synthesis of realism and formal experimentation, praising Russian art that inhabited a middle ground between the two and being blatantly derogatory about conservative practices that took 'advantage of the fact that the tastes of the masses are unsusceptible to the formal appeal of the modernist'.³¹ As a Russian immigrant to the United States aged twelve, who had twice visited his birth country during the 1920s, Lozowick's knowledge of Soviet culture no doubt gave him clout among his peers. In *Voices of October* (1930), he wrote 'though

revolutionary themes in service of the state are not in themselves objectionable, they cannot alone constitute art, unless treated with technical competence'. He championed artists who applied their knowledge of 'radical tendencies, Cubism, Futurism, Constructivism, and Expressionism ... to the solution of modern artistic problems', even though the Comintern's preference for naturalism, and the subsequent abandonment of abstraction by Russian artists, must have been apparent to him during his second visit (1927–8).³²

Art's utilitarian purpose was integral to Lozowick's aesthetic. His characteristic iconography of industry and cityscapes, captured in lithographs such as *New York*, a celebratory vision of Manhattan's towering skyscrapers against the majestic curve of the Brooklyn Bridge, which was selected for the cover of the *New Masses* prospectus (c. 1925), demonstrated his faith in 'the paramount importance of machinery and technique in the achievement of the revolution and in the functioning of the new society'.³³ His enthusiasm for technological power and precision was entirely consonant with his politics at a time when Lenin declared that communism equalled 'soviet plus electrification' and the 'scientific management' of labour was being wholly embraced by the CPSU.³⁴ In a 1931 article in *Literature of the World Revolution*, Lozowick divided proletarian art into negative and positive themes. Negative subjects made 'an annihilating attack on the capitalist regime in all its aspects', whereas positive subjects, such as his images of industrial progress, should be understood 'as a product of that rationalisation and economy which must prove allies of the working class in the building of socialism'.³⁵ His distinction

validates his activity, but his objective was thematic diversity.

Lozowick's 'fetishization of capitalist technique' was singled out for criticism by Elistratova who described his work as 'devoid of personality' and politically inadequate.³⁶

She was not alone in this opinion; one disapproving *New Masses* reader attacked his lithographs for their 'neutral, static quality' that lacked the 'incentive to struggle'.³⁷ Another likened Lozowick and his drawings of 'pretty machines' to jazz musicians who compose 'for a bastard capitalistic generation'.³⁸ Lozowick was not an aestheticist, but it seems that members of his audience identified him as such.



3 Theodor Scheel, *Camera Eye*,
from *New Masses*, April 1930.
Courtesy of the author.

Analysis of modernist characteristics in the monthly *New Masses* exposes how asynchronous America and Russia were; for example, the April 1930 issue featured Scheel's *Camera Eye* [3], an exuberant, if chaotic, synthesis of mechanical forms and symbols of mental and physical labour reminiscent of the photomontage produced a decade earlier by Constructivist Aleksandr Rodchenko. Elistratova admonished

'a resurrection' of processes wherein 'the revolutionary content of the work was subordinated to experiments of a formal nature'.³⁹ The use of modernist forms had become a question of the value of bourgeois culture (or culture the CPSU perceived to be bourgeois), but the problem was never addressed with specific instruction, even inside Russia where excessive criticism of modernist trends and support of traditional practitioners and teaching methods at institutions such as the reopened, renamed All Russian Academy of Arts made clear the government's conservative tastes.

Marx's and Engels's admiration for the likes of Balzac and Dickens confirmed a preference for realism and the utility of bourgeois culture. Of course their letters on literature and propaganda predate the birth of modernist art, and so Lenin became the last word on this issue: art had to communicate with the masses. His views were largely drawn from those of Georgi Plekhanov, who was not opposed to stylistic innovation per se, but believed modernist tendencies were the upshot of artists 'in hopeless disaccord with the social

environment'.⁴⁰ Realism linked use-value to artistic-value; it assumed accessibility and was the crux of the content debate; revolutionary art was to represent the social reality of continuous class struggle by finding a midway between factual detail and abstract concepts, presenting the viewer with the 'typical'. But in Stalinist Russia, realism was mutating into 'truth to the essence of communism', with celebratory and romantic aspects inapplicable outside the country.

The IURW argued that although communist culture could not be produced in capitalist nations, the Soviet Union's cultural forms could be appropriated to inspire the struggling foreign proletariat. However, the models of practice available to Americans were sparse. Two exhibitions of Russian paintings and graphics were held in New York during the 1920s but received little attention from the communist press. The second of these included modernist works, but the foreword to the catalogue commended minimal 'Cezannism' [sic] and 'the blighting abstractions of Cubism'.⁴¹ *New Masses* proffered 'Stalin's formulation: "proletarian culture - national in form, proletarian in content"' as vague description of artistic activity realized inside the Soviet Union.⁴² It printed the occasional Russian image, crude *lubok* or broadside-style propaganda pieces that were equally unininformative about contemporary methods.⁴³ *Literature of the World Revolution* featured very few pictures. Its successor, *International Literature*, printed graphics by international artists; the majority of this undoubtedly approved art can best be described as naturalistic, if inclined heavily towards an aggressive, 'blocky' or angular technique (sensual, undulating lines are not a common feature).

Of the *New Masses* artists, Gellert's and William Siegel's later illustrations sit most comfortably within the favoured Soviet idiom. Siegel was the only one whose works underwent substantial transition from modernist experimentation (*Fifth Avenue Bus*, October 1927) in the early magazines. Late 1932-3 brought a profusion of maladroit statements, for example Siegel's *Eviction* (July 1933), with its weeping mother and stoic father who glares at his uniformed portrait propped against the family's possessions piled in the street before the turned back of a policeman. Stylistically, the clumsy composition and inelegant naturalistic outline have little in common with the ubiquitous and distinctive Daumier-esque *Masses* idiom that thrived in the *Liberator* and progressed to *New Masses*, identifying these periodicals as inheritors of a mode associated with the nation's left.



Subway Construction

Drawing by Harry Sternberg

MINE DARK

Since earth's beginnings darkness rested here,
Queen of silent empires of crackling coal—
Reigned in her thick, wet silence, in fear
Of the living blood, the high-daring soul.

Thick wet gobs of blackness, slimy, wet—
One's hands tear out huge chunks of dripping dark . . .
No pit, nor mere night's shadows can begot
Such vast heavy blackness, musty stink . . .

Red curses pierce its veil with spurts of sound;
Brown-crusted timber in grim labor squeaks;
Gold films of light seep through these darks profound,
(Old timber of dim forest memory speaks).

While miners crouch beneath loose rock, and will
Their shot-holes drive with angry, hot-tip drill. . . .

No star-lamps ever drift cool points of fire
Into these gangways cool and dark and vast;
Nor threat did utter the suppressed desire
Of dark to drink its cups of light at last!

Timbers weak and stand not in patient muck;
Gray mice with lively capers dance their round;
Jagged rocks through bulging lagging grimly smirk,
While veterans miners pause to catch the warning sound.

Or great and terrible darkness, thicker than
Dim mists that clot the world from blind men's eyes—
Ever dream of twirly sunlit worlds of Man?
Ever stretch your dreams to reach blue-widening skies?

Timbers, rocks, miners, mules—all silently
Dream of undark'd day—loods of sunlight free!

ED FALKOWSKI

4 Harry Sternberg, *Subway Construction*, from *New Masses*, December 1927. Courtesy of the author.

With *Masses* contributors such as Maurice Becker, Boardman Robinson and Art Young featuring heavily in the early numbers of *New Masses*, coarse, grainy artless strokes of lithographic crayon had a healthy existence from the beginning, and remained significant in later years by engaging younger artists; Burck, Soglow, Reginald Marsh, Don Brown and Harry Sternberg all explored the aesthetic, some emulating it closely, others pushing

its boundaries. With its urban iconography and types, its one-line joke, and a manner that adopts the assured, wobbling ink squiggles and cross-hatch lines favoured by Young, Soglow's interior bar scene *When Beer was Lawful Instead of Awful* (May 1927) is clearly rooted in *The Masses* tradition; so too is the unrefined style and compositional format of Sternberg's *Subway Construction* [4], although scenes of heavy labour were uncommon in the earlier periodical. The means of representation that dominated *The Masses* and its blend of irreverent humour and

social commentary continued to be relevant into the 1930s, inspiring such works as William Hernandez's scene of urban entertainment '*Let's Go. I Didn't Come to the Theatre to See the Depression*' (February 1933).



5 William Gropper, *The Dishwasher*, from *New Masses*, February 1930. Courtesy of the author.

The strain of realism pervading *New Masses* did not result from Russian influence but from home-grown practice. An approach redolent of its eponym had taken shape in its prospectus. It heralded the pursuit of slang, crudeness and vitality, 'moving picture [sic], radio, vaudeville, strikes, machinery or any other raw American facts'.⁴⁴ It became intimately combined with the principles of proletarian realism - 'swift action, clear form, the

direct line, cinema in words' – manifested visually in works such as Gropper's beautiful illustration *East Side* (August 1929) or *The Dishwasher* [5], one of his many images that displays deep understanding of the New York immigrant, working-class experience, accomplished through the representation of the typical.⁴⁵ By rooting his practice in biographic experience, Gropper produced pictorial counterparts to Gold's novel *Jews Without Money* (1930).

The pre-Kharkov magazine was rife with contradiction concerning idiom, partly because Gold insisted there was 'no conscious straining after proletarian art'; it was instinctual, 'the natural flower of [the worker's] environment'.⁴⁶ By stating 'there is no 'style' – there is only clarity', he created something of a guidance void.⁴⁷ In fact, as late as September 1933, he wrote, acknowledging his own weaknesses, 'No proletarian critic that I know has paid much attention to the difficult problem of style.'⁴⁸ American artists may have construed their work as broadly conforming to Comintern ideals as no criticism was levelled at the style employed for these native themes, although the subject matter did come under attack. Elistratova expected images that served 'as a militant banner'; instead, she found 'satirical drawings and cartoons ... so mild and harmless that they might be reprinted in any bourgeois humorous journal'. She deemed *New Masses* realism 'the manifestation of direct political indifference' and even panned overtly political statements such as Gropper's *Hunger March* (February 1931), which was faulted for suggesting 'spontaneous resentment' with no hint of organized communist activity.⁴⁹

There were also American critics who desired blatantly political art. John Kwait (a pseudonym for Meyer Schapiro) reprimanded artists who treated social elements 'abstractly and picturesquely'. He called for art that 're-enact[ed] in a vivid, forceful manner the most important revolutionary situations'.⁵⁰ Burck, staff artist for the *Daily Worker* (the CPUSA's English-language newspaper), castigated him for suggesting that 'the *only* art suitable to the working class is agitational', but Kwait was not alone in his concern that American social realism was too timid.⁵¹ As critic Jerome Klein stated, 'If the artist is to be effective he can hardly be too concrete and specific.... There is no virtue in the cryptic.'⁵² Even so, opinion was divided on the best means to make effectual statements. While Kwait called for 'a simple plastic language', Klein

shared fellow *Art Front* (magazine of the Artists' Union) columnist Jacob Kainen's viewpoint that 'the old, literal naturalism is failing to register esthetically in the face of vast social passions and portents of doom'.⁵³

A 1931 resolution by the International Bureau of Revolutionary Artists (IBRA), signed by Ellis and Gropper, asserted that the goals of revolutionary art would be realized 'using the accumulated artistic experience and achievements of past centuries'. Goya, Courbet and Daumier were unsurprisingly named as appropriate references, but the comparatively modernist van Gogh and Gauguin were also cited.⁵⁴ Lunacharsky's 'Marxism and Art', published in *New Masses* the following year, argued, 'It is possible to find in a degenerate work of art something which is very useful from a technical point of view'.⁵⁵ A year later, Soviet

dramatist Vsevolod Vishnevsky advised readers of *International Literature* to 'look at Grosz, look at Proust, look at Picasso ... we should be able to see that behind them, beside them, a tremendous new seed is already sprouting. One must understand where it is and grasp it, taking culture as a whole under investigation.'⁵⁶ Such theoretic sources indicated openness to experimentation that was embraced by Americans seeking paradigms fitting to their lived experience, which they found in German political imagery, particularly that of Grosz.

Grosz's art raised questions about content in the early *New Masses*. Reflecting on why it did not 'glorify the workers' or 'the nobility of the revolutionary spirit', a laudatory 1927 article tendered Grosz's belief that 'during a period of struggle the revolutionary artist has no choice but to criticize the masters of society, and to shock people out of their faith in the superiority of the ruling class'.⁵⁷ Grosz's '*Prost Noske! The Young Revolution is Dead*', published alongside the article, delivers just such a slap, with its representations of sword-impaled babies and castrated and disembowelled males. Grosz's expressive subject and style was closely emulated, principally by Dehn and Gropper. His influence on Dehn is apparent in the sinewy lines and distorted forms of comic grotesques of the bourgeoisie. Dehn made scathing physiognomic statements on occasion, as in *O Lord, Our Shepherd* (September 1927), although generally his work lacked Grosz's virulence.

Gropper's constant presence and prolific output meant that his work, probably more than that of any other contributing artist, denoted a communist aesthetic for the *New Masses* readership. He

published a total of 163 cartoons between 1926 and 1933. He was among those artists, including Siegel and Isidore Klein, who grabbed the opportunity of regular publication to explore a variety of styles. These included smooth, rounded, cartoon strokes influenced by Young (*Ladies, It Gives Me Great Pleasure*, July 1926) and an occasional foray into heightened naturalism (*Toward a Classless Society*, November 1932), but the illustrative style immediately identifiable as his is indebted to Grosz. This is most apparent in scratchy, abrasive drawings such as *Join the Maroons* (April 1927), in which the mutilated bodies of army veterans also pay homage to the

German artist's postwar invective. Gropper's use of Grosz's narrative symbols and distorted or condensed spatial arrangements added a modern flavour to his work. *Dishwasher* employs the latter; this image successfully blends proletarian realism with expressionist line and form that flirts with the grotesque. Comparatively, Gropper's delivery is often softened by crayon line and touches of shading, along with comic text, but the idiom he developed was no less expressive and was interpreted as a 'felt' comment on the reality of his world, which prevented censure of staid passivism from left-wing American critics. Lozowick argued that as a result of his experimentation Gropper's 'best cartoons carry power, vitality, and conviction which a mere recording of actual events could never achieve'.⁵⁸ For Lewis Mumford, Gropper had earned 'a pre-eminent place as an interpreter of the mangled reality that people confront today', making him 'one of the most accomplished' artists of his generation.⁵⁹



6 Herb Kruckman, '*After All, It is a Case of the Survival of the Fittest*', from *New Masses*, June 1932. Courtesy of Marx Memorial Library, London.

Critical response is crucial to establishing why American leftist art transgressed Soviet example. Writing in *Art Front*, Harold Rosenberg praised Gropper's 'coherent purposefulness', but he also felt moved to defend his 'unworried eclecticism' and so simultaneously drew attention to it, implying Gropper's manner was too tame, for while he was producing quality art influenced by such varied sources as Breughel, Forain and Cubism, he was 'load[ing] revolutionary material into the old apple-carts of art-technique'.⁶⁰ Anita Brenner spelt out her hope for stylistic progression in her review of the 1933 John Reed Club exhibition, which included work by several

New Masses illustrators. She asserted that propaganda was hampered by conventional political idioms (she cited Daumier and Goya), arguing that artists 'cannot adequately and movingly paint or carve their time and place in the technical and emotional terms of another age'.⁶¹

Many American critics believed the 'contemporary artist must ... develop plastic methods which are suited to his needs'.⁶² This was Lozowick's opinion, but his figurative post-Cubist abstractions introduced a level of challenging sophistication that was negatively received, whereas expressionism appears to have been valued, praised by critics as 'the direction par excellence for social disillusion' and pursued by numerous artists.⁶³ Emotive content is, arguably, a salient feature of *New Masses* imagery throughout its run as a monthly. Naturalistic representation presented a problem for American artists: how did one create in a manner aligned with the social and political struggle, that critiqued the dominant order and its cultural preferences, in a style so deeply rooted in traditional skills it was entirely inoffensive? Expressionist tendencies - aggressive line, twisted forms and warped spatial arrangements - offered a solution. They were a means to grab the viewer's attention and a vent for political frustrations. They also allowed artists to make comprehensive statements while being in the stylistic vanguard. Overwhelmingly, stylistic experimentation meant incorporating the grotesque as an appropriate response to the experience of a society in crisis. Herb Kruckman's '*After All, It is a Case of the Survival of the Fittest*' [6] is exemplary of an abundance of works contributed by Scheel, Soglow,

Phil Bard, Philip Reisman and Anton Refregier, among others.

Conclusion

Lack of comprehensive theoretical material and poor lines of communication contributed to, but do not wholly account for, the apparent fact that American artists did not adhere to Soviet pictorial example. When the Bolsheviks seized upon realism as the aesthetic to convey their politics, they bled out the critical element so fundamental to its nature, creating art transparently didactic or fantastical in sentimentality, and redundant in non-communist countries. Nonetheless, the model had impact beyond Russian borders as the process of Stalinization absorbed cultural agencies, such as *New Masses*, keenly seeking direction from the foremost representatives of the proletariat. Presumably conscious of the limitations and specificity of Soviet practices, the theoretical advice extended by the CPSU was never a rigid universal cultural mould into which international activity was expected to fit, but rather an aesthetic of flexible parameters necessary to the creation of an effective political tool.

Ostensibly no visual sources were to be disregarded, yet *International Literature* printed commentary encouraging the artist to 'hate, not by request, but by himself ... pure work, technical armor' and 'formal innovation'.⁶⁴ The gap between Soviet theory and practice and criticism such as Elistratova's against 'the might of technique' must have caused confusion.⁶⁵ Certainly her critique was detrimental to the presence of cubistic modernism in *New Masses*, with Lozowick all but disappearing

from its pages from 1932-3, possibly suggesting resistance to accommodating her demands. Americans repeatedly employed modernist styles and even when condemned by foreign or national critics these were not summarily rejected. Clearly they held appeal, prompting the question, did artistic quality take precedent over political utility? The means of representation were never far from the artist's mind, as Lozowick informed one critical reader: 'Art has its own specific problems of importance to the artist and the worker. People who make flying excursions into sociology and aesthetics would do well to remember this.'⁶⁶ Of course the magazine's artists were not preoccupied with experimentation that pandered to the art market's obsession with originality, though that is not to say that vocational success was not a concern, but rather they held a belief, one that took root in predecessor periodicals, that freedom of expression was the reward of political revolt, and this was routinely on display in *New Masses*.⁶⁷

Alongside the dominant idioms discussed, which had established left-wing associations that may explain their assumed acceptability, the diverse styles of *New Masses* ranged from the scratchy, needle-thin etched lines of Reisman (*The Working Class Mother*, August 1928) to the dense cross-hatching, fluid outline and bulbous shapes of Mitchell Siporin (*The Father, the Sons and the Holy Guns*, October 1931), the soft-textured naturalism of Marsh (*Pneumatic Drill*, January 1928) to the raw-edged woodblock prints of Gan Kolski (cover, May 1929). The subject matter was similarly diverse. Humour was a potent tool, with capitalist bosses and the upper classes habitually mocked. Empathetic depictions of people's lives, attacks on

political powers, lynching and working-class demonstrations were all common content. Current affairs occupied artists; inevitably these changed over time with Depression conditions unsurprisingly becoming a priority, alongside the growing threat of Nazism. There are, however, no obvious trends linking style and subject. Examples can be found of jokes, explicit propaganda and non-political graphics in every idiom and all classes, races and genders were depicted in all styles.

The rationale for experimentation seems to have been the production of apposite art forms for artist and audience. In part, this involved *New Masses* appropriating the practices of its predecessors, which were the result of years of seeking popular appeal.

By maintaining established idioms and embracing new techniques, artists were able to draw images that made sense to its readership, that communicated emotional investment, and that were suitably progressive within the cultural framework of a capitalist society. They were encouraged in this by the nation's left-wing critics, who implied Russian art did not live up to the task, arguing that work 'couched in classic and archaic terms ... obscure[d] the subject' and made 'the emotional impact of the picture an abstract one'.⁶⁸ Lozowick believed that if the artist could 'apply the force of technical equipment to the wealth of new themes, no prospect for what he might accomplish would be too hopeful'.⁶⁹ There was a demand for thematic and idiomatic diversity and quality – but art had to strike the right balance between innovation and utility. As Gold wrote, 'I think a new content often demands new form, but when the new form gets so

far ahead of us all that we can't understand its content it is time to write letters to the press.'⁷⁰

That some Russian critics found this approach problematic is palpable in Boris Ternovetz's review of a John Reed Club exhibition held in Moscow in 1933, which included pieces by Gropper, Bard, Burck and Lozowick. His underlying critical tone – his emphasis on the need for vigilance against bourgeois 'abstract schematism on the one hand, and sickly expressionist hysterics on the other' – belies his assessment that 'the general impression was extremely favourable'. Ternovetz noted that other Soviet critics shared his concerns and proposed that a major benefit of the exhibition was a 'stock-taking for the foreign artists themselves', submitting their work to 'fraternal criticism' exposed 'their diseases of growth'.⁷¹ Improved channels of exchange had not transformed *New Masses'* imagery, which maintained an identity independent of Soviet influence. By 1935 international military aggression prompted the adoption of the Popular Front policy (a drive to form an anti-fascist coalition) and previous cultural directives were overshadowed by the conciliatory strategies that afforded communist sympathizers aesthetic autonomy. But the visual evidence indicates that cartoonist Russell Limbach was voicing the long-held opinion of many when he told readers that year, 'The American artist has nothing to learn from his comrades in the USSR in the field of graphic art.' *New Masses* featured 'much better material for a study of what revolutionary art can or should not be in this country'.⁷²

¹ See Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (Harcourt: New York, 1961); James Gilbert, *Writers and*

Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America (John Wiley & Sons: New York, 1968); and Eric Homberger, *American Writers and Radical Politics, 1900–1939* (St Martin's Press: New York, 1986).

- 2 Leslie Fishbein, *Rebels in Bohemia: The Radicals of The Masses, 1911–17* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1982), p. 207. Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party: A Critical History* (Viking Press: New York, 1957), p. 278.
- 3 Virginia Hagelstein Marquardt, 'New Masses and the John Reed Club, 1926–1936: Evolution of Ideology, Subject Matter and Style', *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, no. 12 (Spring 1989), pp. 57–8. The length of Marquardt's text necessarily limits the detail of her argument, which redresses previous appraisals of *New Masses*, but her preoccupation with modernist trends results in a distorted account of the magazine's artistic development. Her viewpoint stems from her study 'Louis Lozowick: Development from Machine Aesthetic to Social Realism', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Maryland, 1983), which describes a shift from 1929 onwards, indicative of overt politicization, when labourers were introduced into the artist's monumentalized urban scenes. This is not discernable in the pages of *New Masses* – peopled prints predate Gold's editorship, while Lozowick's unpopulated landscapes continued to feature into the 1930s. Similarly, Patricia Phagan 'William Gropper and *Freiheit*: A Study of his Political Cartoons, 1924–35', unpublished PhD thesis (City University of New York, 2000), argues that following a trip to the USSR in 1927 Gropper's work became more naturalistic. In fact, Gropper's *New Masses* work is stylistically changeable. There is evidence that Russian art made an impression, but this was an addition to his oeuvre, not a change of direction.
- 4 Andrei Zhdanov announced the 'artistic method' of Socialist Realism at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in August 1934. See C. Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism* (Macmillan: London, 1973).
- 5 Quoted in Marquardt, 'New Masses and the John Reed Club, 1926–1936', op. cit., p. 58–9.
- 6 Michael Gold, 'Let it be Really New', *New Masses*, vol. 2, no. 2 (June 1926), p. 20–6.
- 7 Michael Gold, 'The Ninth Year', *New Masses*, vol. 2, no. 1 (November 1926), p. 5.
- 8 Andrew Hemingway, *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926–1956* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2002), p. 29.

- ⁹ New Masses had six initial editors: Michael Gold, Joseph Freeman, Hugo Gellert (art editor until August 1928), John Sloan, Egmont Arens and James Rorty. Freeman and Rorty dropped to the 'Executive Board' in December 1926 and Sloan left the magazine. William Gropper replaced him as art editor. In July 1931, the editorial board consisted of Gold, Robert Evans and Louis Lozowick. In February 1932, Gellert and Moissaye J. Olgin joined, followed by Whittaker Chambers in May 1932. Allen Weinstein, *Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case* (Random House: New York, 1978), pp. 94–6, describes the addition of Chambers as a result of Party involvement.
- ¹⁰ Political division complicates the historiography of the CPUSA. Theodore Draper's *The Roots of American Communism* (Viking Press: New York, 1957) and *American Communism and the Soviet Union* (Viking Press: New York, 1960) are the determining texts of the Cold War perspective. See also, Howe and Coser, *The American Communist Party*, op. cit., and Harvey Klehr and John Haynes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself* (Twayne Publishers: New York, 1992) for 'traditionalist' views. Fraser Ottanelli's revisionist interpretation *The Communist Party of the United States* (Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, 1991) argues that the CPUSA was not a servile appendage of Moscow, but 'was shaped by a homespun search for policies which would make it an integral part of the country's society' (p. 4). My study of the visual culture has led to similar conclusions.
- ¹¹ Eastman published *Leon Trotsky: Portrait of a Youth* in 1926. He became a political pariah as a result of his support for Trotsky, who made his last speech at the Eighth Comintern Plenum in May 1927 before being expelled from the Party.
- ¹² Quoted in Marquardt, 'New Masses and the John Reed Club, 1926–1936', op. cit., p. 58–9.
- ¹³ New Masses, vol. 2, no. 1 (November 1926), p. 5. New Masses frequently printed requests for financial support.
- ¹⁴ Michael Gold, 'Editorial Notes', *New Masses*, vol. 4, no. 1 (June 1928), p. 17.
- ¹⁵ Michael Gold, 'A Letter from a Clam Digger', *New Masses*, vol. 5, no. 6 (November 1929), p. 11.
- ¹⁶ James Murphy, *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy over Leftism in Literature* (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 1991) demonstrates that Gold's association with extreme leftism arose from sweeping statements and contradictions in his writing. Murphy's introduction

identifies numerous texts that have asserted *New Masses*, and Gold particularly, as proponents of leftism. Marquardt uncritically accepts this, claiming ‘Gold narrowed the formal and thematic range of “workers art” during 1929 and 1930.’ Marquardt, ‘*New Masses* and the John Reed Club’, op. cit., p. 67.

- 17 Irwin Granich (Michael Gold), ‘Towards Proletarian Art’, *Liberator*, vol. 4, no. 2 (February 1921), pp. 20–4.
- 18 Michael Gold, ‘Go Left, Young Writers!’ *New Masses*, vol. 4, no. 8 (January 1929), pp. 3–4.
- 19 Michael Gold, ‘A New Program for Writers’, *New Masses*, vol. 5, no. 8 (January 1930), p. 21. Ralph Cheney, ‘On New Program for Writers’, *New Masses*, vol. 5, no. 9 (February 1930), p. 21. On the LEF, see Brandon Taylor, *Art and Literature Under the Bolsheviks*, vol. 1 (Pluto Press: London, 1992), pp. 175–83.
- 20 Fred Ellis et al., ‘The Charkov Conference of Revolutionary Writers’, *New Masses*, vol. 6, no. 9 (February 1931), p. 7.
- 21 The IURW was a Soviet-based coordinating body for the exchange of theoretical material. *Literature of the World Revolution*, which was published in four languages – German, French, English and Russian – thoroughly covered the Kharkov conference in a ‘Special Number’.
- 22 A. Elistratova, ‘New Masses’, *International Literature*, no. 1 (1932), p. 109–11.
- 23 ‘Resolution on the Work of *New Masses* for 1931’, *New Masses*, vol. 8, no. 3 (September 1932), p. 21.
- 24 Bernard Smith, ‘Machines and Mobs’, *New Masses*, vol. 3, no. 11 (March 1928), p. 32.
- 25 Gold, ‘Let it be Really New’, op. cit., p. 26.
- 26 Michael Gold, ‘A New Masses Theatre’, *New Masses*, vol. 3, no. 7 (November 1927), p. 23.
- 27 Kenneth Fearing, ‘Hoboken Blues’, *New Masses*, vol. 3, no. 12 (April 1928), p. 27.
- 28 Hugo Gellert, ‘O+I. = Brancusi’, *New Masses*, vol. 2, no. 3 (January 1927), p. 25. See also ‘Pound vs. Gellert’, *New Masses*, vol. 2, no. 5 (March 1927), p. 25.

- 29** Lozowick published his opinions in articles, reviews and books, such as *Modern Russian Art* (1925) and *Voices of October* (1930). His papers include numerous essays on modern artists including Cézanne and Kandinsky, and he wrote at length on Marx and art.
- 30** Louis Lozowick, 'Lithography: Abstraction and Realism', *Space*, March 1930, Lozowick papers, AAA, 5895.
- 31** Louis Lozowick, 'A Decade of Soviet Art', *Menorah Journal*, vol. 16, no. 3 (March 1929), p. 245.
- 32** Joseph Freeman et al., *Voices of October: Art and Literature in the Soviet Union* (Vanguard Press: New York, 1930), pp. 273–81.
- 33** Louis Lozowick, 'Machine Art is Bourgeois', *New Masses*, vol. 4, no. 9 (February 1929), p. 31.
- 34** On Russia's relationship with Taylorism, see Taylor, *Art and Literature Under the Bolsheviks*, op. cit., pp. 120–9.
- 35** Louis Lozowick, 'Art in the Service of the Proletariat', *Literature of the World Revolution*, no. 4 (1931), p. 126–7. Lozowick put forward a similar argument in 'What Should Revolutionary Artists Do Now?', *New Masses*, vol. 6, no. 7 (December 1930), p. 21.
- 36** Elistratova, 'New Masses', op. cit., p. 110.
- 37** Vern Jessup, 'And Now, the Artists ...', *New Masses*, vol. 6, no. 5 (October 1930), p. 22. Interestingly, Jessup also accused Gellert of producing ineffective, 'arty' illustrations on occasion.
- 38** Pauline Zuttringer, 'Machine Art is Bourgeois', *New Masses*, vol. 4, no. 9 (February 1929), p. 31.
- 39** Elistratova, 'New Masses', op. cit., p. 109.
- 40** Georgi Plekhanov, *Art and Social Life* (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1953), pp. 177–224.
- 41** Quoted in Hemingway, *Artists on the Left*, op. cit., p. 26. The second show, entitled 'Exhibition of Contemporary Art of Soviet Russia: Paintings, Graphics, Sculpture', was held in a gallery at Grand Central Station, New York in 1929; see Hemingway, pp. 26, 289.
- 42** 'Art is a Weapon: Program of the Worker's Cultural Federation', *New Masses*, vol. 7, no. 3 (August 1931), p. 12.
- 43** See examples in the January and November 1927 issues.

- 44** Quoted in Marquardt, ‘New Masses and the John Reed Club’, op. cit., p. 59.
- 45** Michael Gold, ‘Notes of the Month’, *New Masses*, vol. 6, no. 4 (September 1930), p. 5.
- 46** Gold, ‘Go Left, Young Writers!’, op. cit., pp. 3–4.
- 47** Michael Gold, ‘Note’, *New Masses*, vol. 6, no. 1 (June 1930), p. 22.
- 48** Quoted from *Daily Worker*, 1933, in Murphy, *The Proletarian Moment*, op. cit., p. 122.
- 49** Elistratova, ‘New Masses’, op. cit., pp. 109–11. See also Ternovetz’s criticism of the ‘sentimental lachrymose treatment of proletarian themes’, Boris Ternovetz, ‘John Reed Club Art in Moscow’, trans. Louis Lozowick, *New Masses*, vol. 8, no. 8 (April 1933), p. 25.
- 50** John Kwait, ‘John Reed Club Art Exhibition’, *New Masses*, vol. 8, no. 7 (February 1933), p. 23. On Schapiro, see Andrew Hemingway, ‘Meyer Schapiro and Marxism in the 1930s’, *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1 (1994).
- 51** Jacob Burck, ‘Sectarianism in Art’, *New Masses*, vol. 8, no. 8 (April 1933), p. 26.
- 52** Jerome Klein, ‘Twenty-One Gun Salute’, *Art Front*, vol. 1, no. 5 (May 1935), p. 6.
- 53** Jacob Kainen, ‘Our Expressionists’, *Art Front*, vol. 3, no. 1 (February 1937), pp. 14–15.
- 54** ‘To All Revolutionary Artists of the World’, *Literature of World Revolution*: Special Number on the Second International Conference of Revolutionary Writers, 1931, pp. 10–11.
- 55** Anatoly Lunacharsky, ‘Marxism and Art’, *New Masses*, vol. 8, no. 4 (November 1932), p. 14. Lunacharsky had resigned from the Commissariat of Enlightenment in 1929, but he was not politically discredited until after his death in 1933, and was still cited in *New Masses* as a cultural authority.
- 56** Quoted in Murphy *The Proletarian Moment*, op. cit., p. 98.
- 57** Julian Gumperz, ‘George Grosz – Up Out of Dada’, *New Masses*, vol. 2, no. 6 (April 1927), pp. 17–18. Gumperz was the editor of the German communist newspaper *Die Rote Fahne* (The red flag) and cofounder of

Der Gegner (The opponent), a periodical aimed at the working class that published Grosz's art.

- 58 Quoted in Marquardt, 'Louis Lozowick', op. cit., pp. 135–6.
- 59 Lewis Mumford, 'Satirist into Painter', *New Yorker*, 27 March 1937, reprinted in David Shapiro (ed.), *Social Realism: Art as a Weapon* (Frederick Ungar Publishing Co: New York, 1973), pp. 203–5.
- 60 Harold Rosenberg, 'The Wit of William Gropper', *Art Front*, vol. 2, no. 4 (March 1936), pp. 7–8.
- 61 Anita Brenner, 'Revolution in Art', *The Nation*, vol. 136, no. 3531 (8 March 1933), pp. 267–9. Brenner was an independent left-wing writer who contributed to *New Masses*.
- 62 Kainen, 'Brook and his Tradition', *Art Front*, vol. 2, no. 3 (February 1936), pp. 6–7.
- 63 Kainen, 'Our Expressionists', op. cit., pp. 14–15.
- 64 I. Kataev, 'Art on the Threshold of Socialism', *International Literature*, no.1 (April 1934), pp. 83–91.
- 65 Elistratova, 'New Masses', op. cit., p. 110.
- 66 Lozowick, 'Machine Art is Bourgeois', op. cit., p. 31.
- 67 See Gellert, 'I Meet an Individualist', *New Masses*, vol. 3, no. 5 (September 1927), p. 25. Also Lozowick, 'What Should Revolutionary Artists Do Now?', op. cit., p. 21.
- 68 Jacob Kainen, 'Revolutionary Art at the John Reed Club', *Art Front*, vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1935), p. 6.
- 69 Lozowick papers, AAA, 5895.
- 70 Quoted from *Daily Worker*, 1934, in Murphy, *The Proletarian Moment*, op. cit., p. 140.
- 71 Ternovetz, 'John Reed Club Art in Moscow', op. cit., p. 25.
- 72 Russell T. Limbach, 'Soviet Art', *New Masses*, vol. 17, no. 9 (26 November 1935), p. 25.

STUART DAVIS AND LEFT MODERNISM ON THE NEW YORK WATERFRONT IN THE 1930S

Jody Patterson

'If the historical process is forcing the artist to relinquish his individualist isolation and come into the arena of life problems, it may be the abstract artist who is best equipped to give vital artistic expression to such problems – because he has already learned to abandon the ivory tower in his objective approach to his materials.'

Stuart Davis, 1936¹

The relations between abstract painting and leftist politics during the 1930s remain problematic and understudied aspects of the development of modern art in the United States. The reasons for this neglect are both aesthetic and ideological, with postwar critical and commercial support for what was perceived as a distinctive American style of gestural abstraction paramount among them. By the late 1940s the hegemony of a putatively apolitical formalism was accompanied by widespread rejection of the socially engaged art of the previous decade as a technically and politically misguided cultural anomaly. Conventional accounts of abstraction that insist on its opposition to figuration by stressing its purity, universalism and non-objectivity continue to bedevil an understanding of the ways in which modernist technical strategies were aligned with the

expression of contemporary social and political concerns.

While the dominant visual mode in the United States in the 1930s was realist, with those on the left favouring either an illustrational naturalism or a propagandistic social realism, there were some artists who were convinced that giving form to their political vision required a modernist idiom. This desire to achieve a rapprochement between modernist art and politics is perhaps most clearly and ably demonstrated by the example of Stuart Davis. Long acknowledged as one of America's most accomplished abstract painters, he was also one of the left's most ardent artist-activists during the years of the Great Depression. Serving as president of the Artists' Union, an editor of its journal *Art Front*, and national chairman of the American Artists' Congress Against War and Fascism, he was a tireless supporter of the economic and political rights of artists.² But while he adhered to communist political theory throughout the 1930s and was insistent that Marxism was 'the only scientific social viewpoint', he did not subscribe to orthodox social-realist aesthetics of the period.³ He was unwilling to relinquish the techniques of painting developed by the School of Paris (seen by some

leftist critics as 'bourgeois') and effectively denied that the Communist Party provided any insight on artistic matters. His refusal of communist prescriptions for cultural production as both vulgar and naive - despite his political fellow-travelling until the end of the decade when, like many leftists, he became disillusioned with Stalinism - was underpinned by the belief that both art and politics were dynamic processes that needed to respond to

changes in the material world. For Davis, just as Marxism was the most progressive social and economic force within the political realm, modernism represented a historically necessary break with earlier artistic strategies. Unlike figuration, which was tied to what he regarded as a moribund world view, abstract form and colour were the most advanced tools at the artist's disposal and thereby offered the necessary resources for engaging contemporary reality.

Davis's approach to art and politics has proven something of a tripping point for scholars. For example, Karen Wilkin suggests that Davis 'scrupulously separated his painting and his social activism'.⁴ Although, as Wilkin observes, Davis insisted that 'good art ... could not and should not serve the needs of propaganda', the distinction she posits between his painting and his politics misses the sophistication of his thinking during the 1930s.⁵ One of the central issues here is that while Davis's artistic output demonstrates a nuanced understanding of European formal developments and a commitment to a decidedly modernist visual language, he was adamant that his work be understood as 'realist', a position that had important political resonances and which Davis scholars have yet to take seriously.

Both 'realism' and 'modernism' are particularly unwieldy concepts and a considerable degree of terminological imprecision is commonplace. But while discussions around realism had ossified in the Soviet Union by 1934 and the influence of the Comintern ensured that it was the Soviet model of Socialist Realism that served as a benchmark for consideration, there was nevertheless opposition to

the narrowness of what amounted to Moscow criteria. As Raymond Williams puts it, the category of realism remained 'highly variable and inherently complex', with other alternatives enunciated across the leftist cultural field.⁶ For Davis, an artist was not merely an observer, nor was realism simply premised upon mirroring the world. This approach reduced art to its content and ignored the significance of form and its specific basis in material reality.⁷ He was insistent that while 'class consciousness must ... be the guide to the value of a work of art, it is not sufficient to evaluate a painting in terms of its social ideology'; 'its technical ideology is also involved and must be rated'.⁸ The art-historical habit of contrasting realism with modernism is thus especially unhelpful with respect to Davis.⁹ He consistently denied that the deployment of modernist devices was tantamount to an idealist art-for-art's sake position and ardently defended his approach to painting as a species of realism grounded in the shapes, forms, spaces and colours of the observable material world. As a result, while much of his work of the 1930s exists at a considerable distance from conventional realist aesthetics (especially as formulated by communist ideologues), formalist evaluations of his art that focus solely on his savvy incorporation of modernist pictorial devices render it next to impossible to reconcile his painting with his politics and ignore his stated ambitions.



1 Stuart Davis, *Composition*, 1935, oil on canvas.
56.4 × 76.5 cm. Smithsonian American Art
Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.
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During the 1930s many left-wing critics were sceptical of the capacity of modernism to carry socially relevant content and condemned the use of modernistic techniques as symptomatic of an irresponsible and escapist evasion of social reality aligned with individualism and apathy. Davis, however, claimed that an adherence to the formal techniques developed by artists dependent on the bourgeois art market did not compromise allegiance with the working class. As he explained, 'A class' culture may develop at a different rate than the society and be at [its] best as the class is decaying.'¹⁰ Modernist forms, which were tied to a

more dynamic view of contemporary experience than the static and hierarchical world view epitomized by naturalist aesthetics, constituted 'the highest product of the preceding epoch'¹¹ and thereby needed to be preserved and extended in the creation of new social and economic relations.



2 La Corona cigar box label. Source image for *Composition*, 1935.

That Davis saw a direct connection between the concerns of artists and those of other workers is evident in his *Composition* [1], an oil on canvas painted after he was enrolled on the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (FAP), one of several cultural initiatives established by President Roosevelt's New Deal administration and under whose auspices Davis was employed from 1935 to 1939. The format of the painting suggests a modernist variation on the still-life genre. It features a collage of overlapping elements clustered around the middle of the canvas and set within a shallow pictorial space. Attesting to Davis's abiding interest in mass culture, the compositional arrangement is based on a La Corona cigar box

label, which pictures a classical female figure with flowing locks and robe seated in an idyllic landscape surrounded by symbols of culture, industry and agriculture [2]. While the overall layout of *Composition* is inspired by the La Corona label, the painting demonstrates the way in which Davis adeptly engaged the lessons of Cubism and montage to transform source materials. Central to his working method was the practice of abstracting pre-existing images and motifs and then subjecting them to processes of fragmentation, recombination and variation in placement and size. The top centre of *Composition* is dominated by the silhouette of a female head in three-quarter profile rendered in thick black outline. The bust, which is set against a watery blue ground and positioned beside the fluke of an anchor, recalls the figurehead of a ship. A bright-orange artist's palette accompanied by paint brushes is situated in the middle of the canvas and is flanked by a draughtsman's compass and square on the left; to the right is a spade, sledgehammer, ladder and oversized gear or cog resting against a schematized building, whose prominent smoke stack suggests a factory or power station. The iconography thus brings together the tools of the artist with those of industry. As Mariea Caudill Dennison has noted, this particular constellation of elements could be 'interpreted as an assertion of the equality of all workers' - a parity that was pivotal to Davis's political perspective throughout the decade and was confirmed by his experiences as a WPA employee.¹² For Davis, artists were skilled labourers like any other whose contributions to society were as valuable and indispensable as those of other workers.



3 Stuart Davis, *Art to the people - get pink slips*, 1937, gouache, traces of pencil and collage on paper, 45.4 × 60.6 cm. Private collection, Houston. Copyright © 2013 Estate of Stuart Davis / DACS, London / VAGA, New York.

While elsewhere I argue for the political import of the abstract public murals that Davis created under the FAP, during the 1930s he also executed a number of easel paintings that acknowledge contemporary politics in a less opaque fashion.¹³ The paintings under consideration here are unusual instances of his employing an explicitly political iconography, but it should be borne in mind that his political claims for modernist form nevertheless extended to works where such motifs do not appear and which for him were just as political. That said, his *Art to the people - get pink slips* of 1937 is a gouache

and collage on paper that incorporates a pointed reference to the New Deal arts projects within the context of a familiar seascape [3]. The harbour and dockside paraphernalia were recurring themes for Davis, who often retreated to the New England coastal town of Gloucester, Massachusetts, during the summer months. Gloucester was both a historic colonial port on Cape Ann with a thriving fishing industry and also home to one of the oldest artists' colonies in the US, attracting nineteenth-century landscape artists such Winslow Homer, along with numerous members of the Ashcan School, with whom Davis had trained as a student at the Robert Henri School of Art in New York from 1909 to 1913. Davis frequently reworked his Gloucester sketches, and in this instance the title of the 1937 gouache is derived from a newspaper headline that he cut out and affixed directly onto the lower right-hand corner of the composition.

The newspaper clipping stuck to the surface of *Art to the people* references the American practice of including a pink slip of paper in a worker's pay envelope as notification of immediate termination or suspension of employment. Given that government funding for the arts was a temporary relief whose future was far from guaranteed and that artists on its rolls were continually under threat of layoff, Davis was acutely aware that New Deal cultural programmes had been plagued by fluctuations in funding since their inauguration. The already tentative and uncertain nature of the FAP was exacerbated in 1937 – the year *Art to the people* was executed – when the much-vaunted 'New Deal recovery' suddenly gave way to what became known as the 'Roosevelt recession'.¹⁴ In the face of another financial downturn, it was clear to Davis that

increasing pressure to reduce the level of state interventionism in the economic sphere would have direct and unwelcome ramifications in the cultural realm. As a result, not only did Davis and the Artists' Union fiercely lobby for the continuation of the cultural projects, they also supported two liberal bills introduced to Congress in 1938 that sought to secure federal funding for the arts on a permanent basis through the establishment of a Bureau of Fine Arts. The first bill (introduced by Representative John Coffee of Washington and Senator Claude Pepper of Florida) never made it past the committee stage, while the second (introduced by Representative William Sirovich of New York) was overwhelmingly rejected in June by a vote of 195 to 35.¹⁵

That Davis tackled contemporary political issues in the language of artistic modernism is also evident in a gouache on paper entitled *Daily Tribune and CIO* [4]. The predominantly abstract arrangement of shapes, patterns and textures includes a reference to the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, an emphatically Republican paper whose conservatism would have made it sceptical of arts projects as a New Deal boondoggle. The gouache also includes the acronym 'CIO' inscribed across the lower central portion of the composition. The CIO - Committee for Industrial Organization (later to become the Congress of Industrial Organizations) - was formed in November 1935 and comprised a federation of unions that advanced the principle of industrial unionism over craft

unionism and competed against the corrupt and rabidly anti-communist American Federation of Labor (AFL) to organize semi- and unskilled workers on an industrial basis.¹⁶ As suggested at

the outset, Davis staunchly supported the unionization of artistic workers and believed in the solidarity of all labourers. Operating under the assumption that leverage for expanding and stabilizing federal patronage would be strengthened by connecting with a broader working-class base, the Artists' Union (with Davis as president) began courting the AFL as early as the spring of 1935, later becoming affiliated with the more progressive CIO in January 1938. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* was not only doggedly anti-CIO, it was also vehemently anti-communist and harshly critical of the New Deal. On 17 April 1937, the front page of the paper announced that the CIO was a 'Red stepping stone to a Soviet U.S.', later claiming in a headline on 10 February 1938 that a Senate Inquiry in Washington 'Links CIO, Reds, and Roosevelt administration'.



4 Stuart Davis, *Daily Tribune and CIO*, c. 1936, gouache and traces of pencil on paper, 24 × 22.5 cm.
Private collection. Copyright © 2013 Estate of Stuart Davis / DACS, London / VAGA, New York.

The recently published Davis catalogue raisonné dates *Daily Tribune and CIO* to c. 1931 on stylistic grounds, but this is impossible as the CIO was not founded until four years later. The 1967 stock list of the Downtown Gallery, which represented Davis for much of the 1930s, dates the work to c. 1936, but the explicit and unprecedented references to Chicago and the CIO make it tempting to suggest a slightly later date, namely 1937. While the painting may well have been executed earlier in the decade, Davis frequently returned to previous works to make adjustments and it is conceivable that the scrawling of 'CIO' and 'Daily Trib' on the otherwise abstract composition was linked to the Memorial Day Massacre at the South Chicago plant of Republic Steel. The incident arose as a result of Republic Steel's efforts to break the strike called by the Steel Workers Organizing Committee of the CIO. The several thousand strikers and their supporters who gathered on 30 May 1937 to protest against restrictions on picketing were greeted with tear-gas grenades, and ten unarmed demonstrators were killed by the Chicago Police Department.¹⁷ Taking the side of industrial corporate power and the police commissioner, who denounced the episode as a communist-led provocation, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* supported calling in National Guard troops to reopen the mills, with the paper's headline three weeks after the massacre

victoriously stating that 'CIO Grip on Steel Smashed'. That *Daily Tribune and CIO* evokes the Memorial Day Massacre is conjecture on my part, but while Davis ardently rejected the Soviet instrumentalization of art as illustrative propaganda, he nevertheless executed paintings that included tendentious references, albeit often enigmatic and oblique, to the contemporary political scene.



5 Stuart Davis, *Waterfront Demonstration*, 1936, gouache and traces of pencil on paper, 29.5 × 39.4 cm. Faye Sarofim, Houston.
Copyright © 2013 Estate of Stuart Davis / DACS, London / VAGA, New York.

A decidedly more clear-cut instance in which Davis engaged political issues in his work (and particularly those of labour's rank-and-file) is *Waterfront Demonstration* [5], a surprisingly brutal gouache on paper that was exhibited at the 'Waterfront Art Show' in February 1937. The

exhibition was sponsored by the communist-dominated An American Group, Inc. in association with the Marine Workers' Committee. This was the second co-sponsored undertaking following the success of the first 'Waterfront Art Show' in December 1935, to which Davis also contributed a painting. The first show was mounted at the Italian Workers' Club in Greenwich Village and included a handful of paintings and watercolours alongside a series of photographic studies by Margaret Bourke-White documenting working conditions on the New York docks. According to the communist magazine *New Masses*, the exhibition resulted from the revolt of a group of artists against 'the pitying attitude of many radical intellectuals toward workers', with many of the artists included in the show having been trained in 'the tough three-mornings-a-week schedule of the waterfront units of the Communist Party'.¹⁸ The second exhibition in 1937 was a much a larger event that filled three floors of the New School for Social Research and was comprised of 126 works in various media by 107 artists, with a portion of the proceeds from sales going to the Marine Workers' Committee.

During the 1930s, the New York waterfront was a focus for leftist activity, with communists exercising a considerable degree of influence by taking the lead in developing maritime unions.¹⁹ Although, as leftist author Louis Adamic pointed out in 1938, many waterfront unions already existed, most, including the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA), were 'out and out rackets' run by the corrupt AFL.²⁰ However, in contradistinction to the pronounced development of radical unionism among longshoremen on the West Coast under

Harry Bridges (who was closely associated with the Party and whose rank-and-file group functioned as a branch of the ILA), the same period that culminated in the 'Big Strike' in San Francisco in 1934 was marked by the persistence of conservative unionism in the East.²¹ Collective bargaining in the longshore industry in New York had long since received institutional accommodation.²² As a result, in the midst of the increased labour militancy that marked the 1930s, strike action to gain recognition was not as pressing on the East Coast as it was in the longshore industry in Pacific ports.

Although the ILA did not require the new guarantees provided for under the National Industrial Recovery Act and the Wagner Act (passed in 1933 and 1935, respectively), this alone does not explain the relative inactivity of New York maritime workers during a period when radical unionism was gaining momentum throughout the rest of the nation. More to the point was the fact that on the Atlantic coast ILA president Joseph P. Ryan was a fanatical anti-communist. By mid-decade, Ryan was sharing his convention platforms with some of America's staunchest supporters of Hitler and Mussolini and he maintained order on the docks by employing notorious

gangsters and ex-convicts as 'union organizers' to police the waterfront. Beginning in 1927, when he was elected to the presidency of the ILA, and continuing until 1942, when his position was ceremonially extended for life, 'King Joe' ensured that there was not a single union-authorized strike in the Port of New York.²³ With Ryan at the helm, the early 1930s were years of extreme quiescence among maritime workers on the East Coast, and even the onset of the Depression did not trigger a

significant wave of protest activity. The initiative for the formation of a new union came not from the waterfront's rank-and-file but from the Communist Party.²⁴ Although there already existed nuclei of communist activists on some docks, a 1936 report on 'Problems of Party Growth in New York' flagged up the fact that 'more attention has to be paid by us to concentration in this industry' and the Party was particularly keen to actively build a new union under more radical leadership.²⁵

By mid-decade, the East Coast ILA had, according to many members, degenerated into little more than 'a dues collection agency' whose extensive underworld connections and corrupt collaborations with ship-owners led to the formation of 'action committees' throughout the port.²⁶ By the end of 1936 two important locals had elected 'anti-Ryan progressives', and that autumn Bridges was invited to New York by striking East Coast seamen. Hours before he addressed a capacity crowd of 17,000 maritime workers at Madison Square Gardens, he was called to ILA headquarters, where Ryan dismissed him as the West Coast union organizer. With Ryan on the defensive, Bridges repeatedly stressed the importance of inter-coastal unity and pledged his full support to New York longshoremen if they decided to join the fight with their comrades on the Pacific'.²⁷ When Bridges returned to the East Coast for a second time in the autumn of 1937, this time as president of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemens' Union and affiliated with the CIO, the situation on the New York waterfront looked more promising. Representatives from eleven locals had formally endorsed the organizational principles of the CIO and the dock's rank-and-file were now leading the

anti-Ryan movement, finding themselves described by one field organizer as 'wild and rarin' to go'.²⁸ Such optimism was, however, to prove short-lived. Ryan's gunmen went to work in 1939 and physical violence (threatened and actual) effectively silenced the chorus of voices calling for reform and enforced the authority of an utterly corrupt, conservative and racketeering leadership.

During the mid-1930s, the activities of the maritime unions were well-publicized, and a number of cultural events were organized in support of their efforts, with the 'Waterfront Art Show' one instance in which artists were in the service of their comrades' struggle. As Ernst Brace noted in the *Magazine of Art*, 'the seaman's strike was focusing public interest upon this aspect of city life' and members of An American Group, Inc. wanted to take some form of 'united action in order to demonstrate their solidarity'.²⁹ As one might imagine, the show was lionized in the communist press,

with the *Sunday Worker* heralding it as an event of 'tremendous educational and social significance' in that it was 'the first important mass art exhibition in this country with the definite aim of supporting the rank and file of labor'.³⁰ Leonard Sparks, the art critic for *New Masses*, welcomed the 'industrial exhibition' for enabling 'increased contact with a broader audience' and for endeavouring to 'define in concrete terms the relations between art and work'.³¹ The *Daily Worker* lauded the show for demolishing 'the old belief that artists were individuals who had no relationship to the struggles of the workers'.³² In the words of Jacob Kainen (himself a modernist painter and communist fellow-traveller with whom Davis was friendly), the

exhibition unequivocally demonstrated the ‘unity between artist and worker’ by giving longshoremen an opportunity to purchase ‘art that has a real relationship to their jobs and daily life’.³³

Long mistitled *Artists Against War and Fascism*, Davis’s contribution to the ‘Waterfront Art Show’ depicts what leftist art critic Jerome Klein described in the *New York Post* as ‘robot figures in police uniforms cracking down on a lone demonstrator’.³⁴ Central to the image is a wounded protestor with a bloodied head being apprehended by two menacing figures dressed in officer’s caps and dark uniforms, one of whom wields a club or baton. Although it has been suggested that *Waterfront Demonstration* is ‘entirely compatible with the esthetics of social realism in that it emphasizes political message over formal experimentation’, the unusual degree of narrative coherence and pictorial transparency hardly adheres to the more legible naturalistic conventions adopted by painters within the Party’s orbit, as was noted with disappointment by communist critics at the time.³⁵ The critic at *New Masses* lamented the ‘unsubstantial nature’ of Davis’s painting and seemed to find it no more useful than works that depicted longshoremen as ‘lounging bums’ or ‘beaten derelicts’, never mind the inappropriateness of images picturing ‘beautiful marine blues’ or ‘chugging tug boats’.³⁶ Klein, who also wrote for *Art Front* and was a champion of social realism during the 1930s, lumped Davis in with those artists who continued to demonstrate ‘lingering tendencies toward esthetic preoccupation’. Klein disparagingly described Davis’s approach to *Waterfront Demonstration* as both ‘esoteric’ and ‘highly specialized,’ ultimately dismissing the gouache as ‘cryptic’.³⁷

Waterfront Demonstration is more overtly polemical than one might expect from Davis at this juncture, which is not to say that his more abstract paintings of the 1930s were apolitical or constituted anything like a retreat into the ivory tower. Still, the gouache does not fit neatly into the category of social realism and remains more typical of his Cubist-inspired collages of the decade. A number of the elements incorporated into the composition are indecipherable, but surrounding the officers one can identify a tangle of black barbed wire; a dark cylindrical form replete with a plume of smoke that can be read as both a smoking gun barrel or a steam ship's funnel; and an overhead wharf lamp that conjures a police interrogation room. The factory building

with prominent chimney pictured in *Composition* reappears in the centre ground, this time with a second chimney and accompanied by a large piece of industrial machinery. The building is borrowed from Davis's catalogue of Gloucester imagery, and while it no longer exists, historical maps suggest that it was Gloucester Electric.³⁸ If so, the machine in front could be a rotary excavator that would have been used to move coal into the factory to generate steam power. The painting also includes a fallen placard with the word 'LIBRE' and a square rendered in white, yellow, red and blue that was the house flag of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O), a British shipping company that began operating out of New York harbour in the nineteenth century. The very fact that the painting has passed for so long under the title *Artists Against War and Fascism* surely suggests that the overall scene and the specifics of its iconography maintain a degree of awkwardness

and interpretive indeterminacy characteristic of modernist rather than social-realist practice.

Davis's participation in the 'Waterfront Art Show' should be understood as a means by which he was able to support the emergent rank-and-file movement on the New York docks. Although *New Masses* suggests that Davis's contribution was not immediately appreciated by the longshoremen, this would have come as no surprise to the artist.³⁹ Prior to the advent of the arts projects, modernism had been confined to the rarefied high-art spaces of galleries and museums, places workers rarely, if ever, visited. Their lack of leisure time and limited access to art education meant that they were unfamiliar with the most recent developments in contemporary art. However, this did not mean that workers would not take pleasure from modern art or that they should be fed on a diet of popular culture and images that merely reflected their lives and experiences back to them. Subscribing to the philosophy set out by John Dewey in his influential *Art as Experience* of 1934 (and adopted by key figures in the New Deal Administration, including Holger Cahill, Director of the FAP), Davis maintained that what was needed was a greater democratization of culture. He was insistent that if workers were given greater exposure to modernism – something that was being achieved through federal funding for public art – they would quickly realize that they were already familiar with modernist forms. As Davis explained, these forms were directly culled from the design of contemporary objects, including 'the shape and color of clothes, autos, cameras, airplanes, trains, cooking utensils, etc', things that workers already knew and which in many instances they had

fashioned with their own hands.⁴⁰ As such, while the question of access to culture could not be separated from the larger political and economic issues of creating a more equal society, current efforts towards the democratization of art would at least enable increased access to modernism and perhaps foster increasing interest in its forms, spaces and colours.



6 Stuart Davis, *The Terminal*, 1937, oil on canvas, 76.4 × 101.6 cm. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Copyright © 2013 Estate of Stuart Davis / DACS, London / VAGA, New York.

Davis's commitment to cultivating links between artists and other workers is further demonstrated by *The Terminal* [6], another oil on canvas that takes the

New York docks as its subject. The painting, which pictures longshoremen loading cargo, was exhibited on at least four occasions during the 1930s (including in the Whitney Museum of American Art's 'Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting' in 1937), thereby bringing heightened attention to activities on the waterfront. Such support for his fellow labourers was not only a crucial component of class solidarity, but also necessary if workers were to be brought on side in lobbying for permanent federal funding for the arts. As the independent leftist art historian Meyer Schapiro advised in a lecture delivered to a convention of unions from the eastern states in May 1936, although New Deal patronage constituted 'an immense step toward a public art and the security of the artist's profession', the impermanence of government support meant that artists needed to make contact with a broader public if they were to secure such patronage for the future.⁴¹ According to Schapiro, whose lecture was published under the title 'Public Use of Art' in the autumn issue of *Art Front*, 'It is necessary that the artists show their solidarity with the workers both in their support of the workers' demands and in their art'.⁴² However, while Davis agreed with Schapiro on the issue of worker solidarity, their positions were marked by differences of opinion over the usefulness of the New Deal projects, and the painter did not approve of the historian's position on aesthetics. Davis mistakenly believed Schapiro's views on art were underpinned by a crude 'mechanical materialism' and criticized him as an 'idealist' in relation to modernism. By 1938, Davis had dismissed Schapiro as a Trotskyist, seemingly not understanding his position on modernism,

which was far more refined and accommodating than Davis gave him credit for.⁴³

The desire to form a united front between artists and other members of the working class was not only essential to establishing a more inclusive base from which to fight for the extension of federal patronage, but also central to the Popular Front position adopted by the Communist Party at mid-decade in the fight against war and fascism. Davis was actively engaged in Popular Front activities, serving as national chairman of the New York Artists' Congress, and his paintings of the docks coincide with the Party's recognition that 'more attention has to be paid by us to concentration in this industry'.⁴⁴ Returning to *Waterfront Demonstration*, I want to argue that this painting might be understood to register differing levels of political significance simultaneously. Viewed under the title *Waterfront Demonstration*, and within the context of the 'Waterfront Art Show', it spoke to the specific experiences of marine workers and their struggle to form a new union independent of the anti-communist AFL. But the image also works with respect to a broader set of increasingly tense international issues, as is suggested by the fact that the title *Artists Against War and Fascism* only recently raised any eyebrows. While the iconography may be read as directly engaged with events on the docks, its date and subject matter - namely fascist goons beating a demonstrator - equally fit with the concerns of the Party and its Popular Front line. On the one hand, the multivalency of the image's meaning is attributable to the degree of abstraction and departures from naturalism that characterizes Davis's formal repertoire; but, on the other, the

painting also points to the interconnectedness of the violent struggles of longshoremen against the fascistic leadership of Joseph Ryan and the AFL and the fighting of Popular Front soldiers abroad in the Spanish Civil War.

By 1936, the year in which *Waterfront Demonstration* was executed, American communists and fellow-travellers were not just battling fascism at home but also abroad. While in July, at the outbreak of war, Roosevelt declared that the US would remain neutral, events in Spain symbolized the fight against fascism worldwide, and the Comintern responded in September by launching a campaign for the formation of the International Brigades to support the Republican forces. The first group of American volunteers set sail from New York on Christmas Day. Of the more than three thousand US troops who fought in the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, a high percentage were communists, and it is estimated that more than a third were industrial workers, including steel workers, miners and a considerable contingent of longshoremen.⁴⁵ With this in mind, the placard emblazoned with the Spanish word 'LIBRE' (free) that has been thrown to the ground could suggest that liberty has fallen, with both marine workers and the Republican army united by their struggle to overcome injustice and to overthrow a repressive regime.

Interestingly, Davis's second gouache picturing labour struggles on the waterfront (which is known only through a contact-sheet photograph and which has been titled *Waterfront Demonstration No. 2* due to its pronounced similarities to the extant painting) also prominently features a placard. While difficult

to decipher, the script appears to read 'STOP MUNITION SHIPMENTS'.⁴⁶ This reading of the slogan would seem to be confirmed by a work exhibited by the Chicago-based artist Mitchell Siporin on the occasion of the New York John Reed Club's exhibition 'Revolutionary Front - 1934' in the autumn of 1934. Siporin was an active member of the Club (an organization that developed out of the *New Masses* group in 1929 and which served as the primary institutional base for communist and fellow-travelling artists until 1935), and he was a contributor to *New Masses*. The work in question, which was illustrated in Kainen's review of the 'Revolutionary Front' exhibition in *Art Front*, is entitled *Stop Munition Shipments* and includes an almost identical placard to the one Davis pictures in *Waterfront Demonstration No. 2*. While I can only speculate, such a slogan, combined with the inclusion of the flag of the P&O Shipping Co. (whose fleet not only carried passengers and mail, but since the First World War had also been involved in the transport of troops, munitions and raw materials) almost certainly refers to the sham of the non-interventionist policies in Spain enunciated by the US and other Western democracies. By 1936, the American Communist Party, its fellow-travellers – as well as many liberals and progressives – were demanding that the US cease exporting weapons and supplies to fascist aggressors, namely Germany and Japan. As such, Davis could be seen to be linking up the specific cause of the dockworkers with the Popular Front more generally. Just as his formal motifs involve a kind of condensation of elements from different aspects of contemporary experience, so too does his

work manifest a condensation of distinct but interrelated political concerns.

To conclude, I also want to suggest that Davis's inclusion of the Spanish word 'LIBRE' could be interpreted to have significance beyond connecting the struggles of waterfront workers with the international context of the Popular Front. While both versions of the artist's *Waterfront Demonstration* are more explicitly propagandistic than much of his production in the 1930s, they are nonetheless indebted to formal techniques developed mainly by artists in Europe, and especially those associated with the School of Paris. For Davis, the deployment of such formal strategies had important political implications and he insisted they were radical in and of themselves. Moreover, in opposition to those leftists who prescribed social realism as

the only art capable of engaging social and political issues in a meaningful way, he defended the artist's right to freedom of expression ('LIBRE') and maintained that modernist forms were the most advanced tools at the artist's disposal. As he stated:

The arguments used to promote 'social content' in art entirely fail to specify that social content expression is to be made specifically in terms of art. They stress the subject matter and state that the art form will follow from such subject matter. Such a view is misleading in that it leaves out the essential element in the process of art. In this argument, the individual does not exist, it is regimentation. It is Fascism.⁴⁷

While Davis scholars usually posit a 'striking disjunction between his paintings and his Marxist political views', thereby leading them to assess the political and artistic aspects of his career

separately, such a distinction misconstrues the sophisticated nature of his thinking on both matters.⁴⁸ Despite the degree of abstraction that Davis incorporated into his painting practice during the 1930s, he conceived of his work as playing a vital and active role in the sociopolitical sphere. He was not alone in adopting this position among American artists, and serious and sustained analyses of the political character of US modernism in the interwar period would help bring the historiography of American art in line with the most advanced scholarship on European modernism.⁴⁹

I would like to thank the *Burlington Magazine* and *Art History* for providing an opportunity to develop my initial thinking on Stuart Davis's waterfront imagery. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Andrew Hemingway and Warren Carter for their thoughtful contributions to this text, and to Sarah Dunlap at the Gloucester Archives and Thomas Gordon for their generous help with identifying aspects of Davis's iconography.

¹ Stuart Davis, 'A Medium of Two Dimensions, *Art Front*, vol. 1, no. 5 (May 1935), p. 6.

² On the Artists' Union and *Art Front*, see Gerald Monroe, 'The Artists' Union of New York', unpublished PhD thesis (New York University, 1977). Research for Monroe's thesis led to the publication of a number of highly useful articles on the topic, including 'Artists as militant trade union workers during the Great Depression', *Archives of American Art Journal* vol. 14 (1974), pp. 7–10; and 'Artists on the barricades: the militant Artists' Union treats with the New Deal', *Archives of American Art Journal*, vol. 18 (1978), pp. 20–3. On the Artists' Congress, see Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams (eds.), *Artists Against War and Fascism: Papers of the First American Artists' Congress* (Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, 1986); and Andrew Hemingway, *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926–1956* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2002), pp. 123–30.

³ Stuart Davis Papers, Reel 1, 1 October 1935. Harvard Art Museum, gift of Mrs Stuart Davis. All rights reserved by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

- ⁴ Karen Wilkin, in Ani Boyajian and Mark Rutkoski (eds.), *Stuart Davis: A Catalogue Raisonné – The Complete Works of Stuart Davis*, vol. 1 (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2007), p. 79.
- ⁵ Wilkin, in Boyajian and Rutkoski (eds.), *Stuart Davis*, op. cit., p. 79.
- ⁶ Raymond Williams, 'A Lecture on Realism', *Screen*, vol. 18, no. 1 (1977), p. 61. See also Williams, 'Realism,' *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Fontana: London, 1983), p. 259; and *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. Tony Pinkney (Verso: London, 1989).
- ⁷ Davis, 'Abstract Painting Today', in Francis V. O'Connor (ed.), *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project* (New York Graphic Society: Greenwich, Connecticut, 1973), pp. 121–7.
- ⁸ Davis papers, 31 March 1937.
- ⁹ This simplistic polarity has not gone entirely uncontested and a handful of scholars have made much the same point; see, for example, Esther Leslie, 'Interrupted Dialogues of Realism and Modernism: "The Fact of New Forms of Life, Already Born and Active"', Matthew Beaumont (ed.), *A Concise Companion to Realism* (Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester, 2010) pp. 143–59.
- ¹⁰ Davis papers, 10 January 1938.
- ¹¹ Davis papers, 18 December 1937.
- ¹² Mariea Caudill Dennison, 'Stuart Davis, artists' rights and cigars: La Corona as the source for *Composition* (1935)', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 150 (June 2008), pp. 472–3.
- ¹³ See Jody Patterson, 'The Art of Swinging Left in the 1930s: Modernism, Realism, and the Politics of the Left in the Murals of Stuart Davis,' *Art History*, vol. 33, no. 1 (February 2010), pp. 98–123.
- ¹⁴ Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (Vintage Books: New York, 1995), p. 23.
- ¹⁵ On the bills, see Richard D. McKinzie, *The New Deal for Artists* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1973), pp. 151–5.
- ¹⁶ Boyajian and Rutkoski (eds.), *Stuart Davis*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 581, n. 3.
- ¹⁷ George Robbins, 'Chicago's Memorial Day Massacre,' *New Masses*, no. 23 (15 June 1937), pp. 11–12. See also David Milton, *The Politics*

of U.S. Labor: From the Great Depression to the New Deal (Monthly Review: New York, 1982), p. 108.

¹⁸ Leonard Sparks, 'Waterfront Art Show', *New Masses*, no. 22 (16 February 1937), p. 17.

¹⁹ For a general history of waterfront activities during this period, albeit with a pronounced emphasis on the Pacific coast, see Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1988); and Howard Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets? The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1988), especially pp. 120–5 for activities in New York. For a more colourful and amusing account of the leading persona narrated by a deeply anti-communist liberal journalist, see Murray Kempton, *Part of Our Time: Some Ruins and Monuments of the Thirties* (1955) (New York Review of Books: New York, 1998), pp. 83–104.

²⁰ Louis Adamic, *My America* (Harper: New York, 1938), p. 368.

²¹ On Harry Bridges, see Adamic, *My America*, op. cit., pp. 367–78; and Charles Larrowe, *Harry Bridges: The Rise and Fall of Radical Labor in the United States* (L. Hill: Westport, 1977). On the 'Big Strike', see Sam Darcy, 'The San Francisco General Strike', *The Communist*, vol. 13, no. 10 (October 1934), pp. 985–1004; Mike Quin, *The Big Strike* (Olema Publishing Company: Olema, 1949); and Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, op. cit., pp. 127–55. See also Anthony W. Lee, *Painting on the Left: Diego Rivera, Radical Politics, and San Francisco's Public Murals* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999), pp. 136–59.

²² For an overview of waterfront activities in the East during the 1930s, see the introduction to Vernon Jensen, *Strife on the Waterfront: The Port of New York Since 1945* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1974), pp. 13–35.

²³ Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets?*, op. cit., p. 15.

²⁴ See Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, op. cit., p. 79.

²⁵ Max Steinberg, 'Problems of Party Growth in the New York District', *The Communist*, vol. 15, no. 7 (July 1936), p. 649.

²⁶ Kimeldorf, *Red or Rackets?*, op. cit., p. 122.

²⁷ Bridges in ibid., p. 123.

²⁸ Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets?*, op. cit., p. 124.

- ²⁹ Ernst Brace 'An American Group, Inc.', *Magazine of Art*, vol. 31 (May 1938), pp. 271, 274.
- ³⁰ 'Marine Art', *Sunday Worker*, 28 February 1937. On An American Group, Inc. and the 'Waterfront Art Show', see Hemingway, *Artists on the Left*, op. cit., p. 134.
- ³¹ Sparks, 'Waterfront Art Show', op. cit., p. 17.
- ³² Jacob Kainen, 'Longshoremen are critics at waterfront art exhibit', *Daily Worker*, 16 February 1937.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ J. Klein, 'Artists Cover the Waterfront with New Spirit', *New York Post*, 20 February 1937, p. 24. While Davis gave the title *Waterfront Demonstration* in the exhibition, it has only recently been identified as the painting known as *Artists Against War and Fascism*. Stuart's son Earl Davis titled this work many years after its completion.
- ³⁵ Cécile Whiting, *Antifascism in American Art* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1989), p. 71.
- ³⁶ Sparks, 'Waterfront Art Show,' op. cit., p. 17.
- ³⁷ Klein, 'Artists Cover Waterfront,' op. cit., p. 24.
- ³⁸ I am grateful to Sarah Dunlap at the Gloucester Archives for her efforts to identify the building; on a 1917 Sanborn map of the area the chimney is adjacent to the words 'Gloucester Electric.'
- ³⁹ Sparks, 'Waterfront Art Show', op. cit. Although Sparks refers to Davis's streetscape *Coffee Pot* (1931; private collection) when recounting the longshoremen's response, Hemingway is almost certainly correct to speculate that Sparks was talking about Davis's contribution to the 1935 'Waterfront Art Show'; see Hemingway, *Artists on the Left*, op. cit., p. 307, n. 55. For a review of the first exhibition, see Jacob Kainen, 'Waterfront Art Show', *Daily Worker*, 19 December 1935.
- ⁴⁰ Davis papers, October 1937.
- ⁴¹ Meyer Schapiro, 'The Public Use of Art', *Art Front*, no. 2, November 1936, pp. 4–6, reprinted in *Worldview in Painting: Art and Society* (George Braziller: New York, 1999), p. 173.
- ⁴² Ibid., p. 175.

- 43** Davis dismissed Schapiro as a Trotskyist in his notes on 9 March 1938. He labelled Schapiro a 'mechanical materialist' on several occasions; see, for example, Davis papers, 27 August 1937.
- 44** Max Steinberg, 'Problems of Party Growth in the New York District', op. cit., p. 649.
- 45** Fraser M. Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States from the Depression to World War II* (Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, 1991), p. 175.
- 46** See Jacob Kainen, 'Revolutionary Art at the John Reed Club', *Art Front*, vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1935), p. 6.
- 47** Davis papers, 26 June 1936.
- 48** Whiting, *Antifascism in American Art*, op. cit., p. 67, n. 12. An important exception is Patricia Hills, *Stuart Davis* (Harry N. Abrams in association with the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution: New York, 1996).
- 49** An example of this kind of scholarship is offered by David Cottington, *Cubism in the Shadow of War: The Avant-Garde and Politics in Paris 1905–1914* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1998); and *Cubism and Its Histories* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2004).

ACTION, REVOLUTION AND PAINTING

RESUMED

Fred Orton

'It is a psychological law that the theoretical mind, having become free in itself, turns into practical energy. Emerging as *will* from Amenthes' shadow-world, it turns against worldly actuality which exists outside it.' Karl Marx, *The Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*, Notes, Part One (1841)

'Almost fifteen years ago Harold Rosenberg challenged me to explain what one of my paintings could possibly mean to the world. My answer was that if he and 267 others could read it properly it would mean the end of all state capitalism and totalitarianism. That answer still goes.' Barnett Newman (1962)

There was a time, in the 1950s and early 1960s, when explainers of Abstract Expressionism valued Harold Rosenberg's writings and took them into account. After that, he was increasingly marginalized, unreferenced or ignored, misunderstood, or knowingly or unknowingly misrepresented. One reason for this misunderstanding, misrepresentation and marginalization might be that his writing on art uses a specialized language that is bound up with the terminology of modern culture, with experience and poetry, and history and politics, especially, of course, the history and politics associated with Marx and Marxism, terminology not specifically

related to painting except in so far as painting is a creative, imaginative activity. Bluntly, the criticism levelled at Rosenberg that he does not understand or look at pictures in 'visual terms', and that his writing is 'ideological', is joint stock in rhetorical trade of any critic who is frightened by any writing on art that is informed by a commitment to Marx and Marxism. Another not unrelated reason was the increasing – and what came to be almost exclusive – admiring attention that was paid to the much-easier-to-read essays of Clement Greenberg. This is not to say that that attention was misdirected, for Greenberg is a necessary, if insufficient, text. Critical art history needs him, but if it is not to rehearse its histories of Abstract Expressionism exclusively with reference to his ideas about the triumph of a depoliticized art practice, apolitical painting and art for art's sake, then Greenberg's should not be taken as the only story. This is precisely where Rosenberg takes on importance. His writings on art and culture give us another necessary but insufficient corpus enabling a knowledge of Abstract Expressionism. Many of the Abstract Expressionists – most of the Irascibles and others – regarded their work as having a social and political content that Rosenberg, as close as anyone to the studio talk and closer than more or less anyone to its politics, was committed to explaining. This he did consistently and more vividly than any other explainer of Abstract Expressionism, not as an apologist, opponent or aesthete, but as someone keeping his preoccupations up to date and well oiled.

This essay brings Rosenberg in from the margins and begins writing against the grain of those bits of conventional wisdom that represent his ideas as

naive, romantic, pseudo-philosophical, theatrical and as reconciling an avant-garde ideology with the ideology of postwar liberalism. It situates Rosenberg in relation to the changes in New York leftism in the 1930s and 1940s and uses his writing on the proletariat and on what he refers to as 'the drama of history' to explain what he meant by 'Action Painting' in his essay 'The American Action Painters' in the December 1952 issue of *ARTnews*, one of the first published attempts to endow Abstract Expressionism with meaning. 'Drama': the term, as Rosenberg uses it, is heavily resonant of its origin in the classical Greek word *δρᾶμα* (*drama*), meaning 'action', which is itself derived from *δράω* (*drao*), meaning 'to do' or 'to act'; 'history' comes from the Greek *ἱστορία* (*historia*), meaning 'inquiry, knowledge acquired by investigation', but now, according to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, signifies 'a relation of incidents (in later use, only those professedly true); a narrative, tale, story'. History holds within it two meanings: the study of events or occurrences that have happened in the world, in real life, perhaps to oneself and the people around us; and any narrative of events or occurrences, real or imagined. There are two main parts to the structure of *drama* and of the drama of *history*: the sequence of events or plot will be marked by conflict, hardship, difficulty and pain; and the way that sequence of events or plot unfolds and is resolved will move one to pathos, will touch one in some emotional way. This essay stays with the *drama* and offers a politicized *history* of 'The American Action Painters' in place of those lazy conventional dismissals mentioned in passing a moment ago and sits alongside some recent serious commentary that either takes an

existentialist-humanist tack or would explain Rosenberg's essay as evidencing a turn away from Marxist politics.¹

You will see from what follows that the significance of 'The American Action Painters' has, in part, to be located in the way that Rosenberg shows that the political impasse, which many commentators on the left in the 1990s regarded, and still regard, as uniquely 'postmodern', was already inscribed within the modernism that emerged in the United States around 1940, and that this sense of impasse was international and not solely an American phenomenon. As far as Rosenberg was concerned, Action Painting was painting about the possibility of radical change that had not happened in the 1930s and 1940s - far from it - and could not happen in the 1950s. It was a possibility that neither he nor the 'American Action Painters' could afford to abandon. No more can we, now.

The politics of Action Painting were determined by the demise of the proletarian revolution and its continuing regeneration within capitalism as a mode of production, acting out the possibility of radically transforming the situation, while continually failing to do so. As this essay proceeds, it will become clear that the negation of negation played out in Action Painting could never effect the redefinition of identity that would negate the negative identity given to the proletariat in capitalism. The Action Painter could not succeed in art where the proletariat had failed in politics. Action Painting could not compensate at the symbolic level for the fact that, at that moment, the political action that would redefine the proletariat did not seem available to it as a class. Action

Painting was caught up in the failure of the proletariat. Nevertheless, the Action Painter glimpsed that that failure was not – or need not be – total.

In this reading of Rosenberg's 'The American Action Painters', the Action Painter was no middle-class artist playing with symbolic or surrogate revolutionary gestures, merely 'acting out', in art, the 'drama' of political agency and identity that no social class was able to do at the time. Action Painting was not revolutionary posturing. It was painting concerned with the dialectical possibility of a revolution whose outlines could neither be defined nor denied.

I

who thrust his fist into cities
arriving by many ways
watching the pavements, the factory yards,
the cops on the beat
walked out on the platform
raised his right arm, showing the fist clenched
'comrades, I bring news'
came back then skies and silhouettes,
facing the bay, of sailors
who no longer take the sea
because of strikes, pay-cuts and class-unity
'comrades, I bring news'

of the resistance of farmers
in Oneida county on a road
near a small white cottage
looking like a Xmas card,
4 shot, the road was blocked
glass to blow their tires
there was one guy we grabbed
some bastard of a business man
learning to play State Trooper
one of the boys tackled him neat as he ran
Behold my American images get it straight
a montage of old residences bridges shops freights
Xmas, the millions walking up and down
the tables where applications are received
the arguments that will yet get down to something
in the center of this a union-hall
and on the platform he
with right arm crooked, fist clenched
'comrades, I bring news'

That poem by Rosenberg was published in the January/February issue of *Partisan Review*.² Entitled 'The Front', it refers to the life circumstances of millions of Americans around Christmas 1934, some five months into the sixth year of what is euphemistically called the 'Great

Depression', and to capitalism in the prolonged crisis that affected every part of the United States: mass unemployment and applications for benefit; strikes; organized labour; and the class struggle in town and country. At the centre is a union hall; and out onto its platform walks someone who raises his right arm, fist clenched, and addresses the assembly: 'comrades, I bring news'. I cannot describe the specific circumstances of the poem's making or limit the excess of meaning available for its references to strikes, pay cuts and so on, nor extend the particularity of that event in Oneida County, New York State. What can be said - leaving aside a discussion of its structure and the momentum of its syntax - is that Rosenberg's poem, dedicated by its title to the United Front, was meant to participate in winning the workers' support for revolutionary organizations and for an agreement on action of some kind: resistance and insurrection, if not revolution.

Aged twenty-eight when he wrote 'The Front', Rosenberg had already earned himself something of a reputation as a poet and intellectual. *The Symposium*, edited by James Burnham and Philip Wainwright and described as a journal of philosophical discussion, had published several of his essays, including, in 1932, the seminal 'Character Change and the Drama', which will be considered in a moment.³ He had also edited with H. R. Hays an 'experimental quarterly' called *The New Act*.⁴ Harriet Moore's *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, which published all kinds of poetry, conventional, unconventional and innovative, had regularly included his poems and commissioned book reviews from him, and would continue to do so throughout the 1930s and 1940s.⁵ In 1936, William

Phillips and Philip Rahv reckoned Rosenberg as one of those who had achieved 'the much desired integration of the poet's conception with the leading ideas of the time' - a 'desired integration' that was achieved by way of his awareness that the necessary revolt was aesthetic as well as social and that, as such, it was 'a revolt within the tradition of poetry rather than against it'.⁶

If 'The Front', as the editors of *Partisan Review* were keen to point out, was the first of Rosenberg's poems to be published in a 'proletarian magazine', 'The Men on the Wall', one of four poems by him that were published in *Poetry* magazine in April 1934, some eight months before, may be the first or, if not the first, one of first of his poems to make reference to the historically specific social circumstances of its writing. It is wholly different from the other poems by Rosenberg that were published along with it. Does 'The Men on the Wall' evidence the 'integration' required by Williams and Rahv? As this extract shows, the appropriate stereotypical metaphors are certainly all there:

A raised arm has many meanings.

Convictions falter with desire; the arm remains.

You have seen a sword

in the hand of the arm

flower from a sleeve of gold brocade;

you have seen in the pearl of dawn the arm

ascend from sleeping oyster-vagues,

rising to ripple the silent threats

of your old interior myth of arms.

And the future myth of avenues
is also yours; and that arm's fist,
whose khaki cuff is stained with grease,
is yours, and clasps the hammer of your resolve.

And whose contending tendons flex with threat
Against the background factories and glass?

Pace quietly on the walls
while the wind still affirms
the faces of ruminants with folded arms,
the men below, divining peace before their doors;
the azure casings of whose blood are torn
by no quick hemorrhage of indissoluble event;
whose ecstasy, despair and rage
are hidden escapades that lift no arms.

Unlike 'The Front', 'The Men on the Wall' seems more symptomatic than critical of the context that inscribes it, while textually its language is not yet positively the language of unrest, still less of revolution. It is a poem with a social conscience but one that has a tendency to leave some of its characters thinking that taking action is not or will not be necessary, while others amble half-asleep up and down deliberating about it. Only one of them, the one bearing the clinching metaphor of the hand clasping the hammer, seems about to act or is threatening to act. By the end of 1934, when

Rosenberg wrote 'The Front', that tendency had changed, or had been clarified: the workers recognize their alienation for what it is; they are unemployed and angry, awake, politicized ... and taking action.

Unlike 'The Men on the Wall', which seems uncommitted and full of suppressed action, 'The Front' is clearly a committed poem full of exactly the kind of action that would appeal to the editors of *Partisan Review*, the then year-old journal of the John Reed Club of New York. The Club was founded in 1929, the year the Great Depression began and the year Stalin's first Five Year Plan was adopted. Initiated by and affiliated to the International Union of Revolutionary Writers, it was, from the outset, influenced by the Proletkult movement, led by members of the Communist Party (CPUSA), and dedicated to the idea of art as a weapon for informing, educating and radicalizing the worker. It had branches in most large cities in the United States and many of them, like the New York branch, published their own periodical of literature and art.⁸

The 'Harold Rosenberg' of 'The Front' is a Marxist and probably a fellow-traveller of the CPUSA, a poet and critic committed to the artist's capacity to participate in the class struggle.⁹ But this 'Harold Rosenberg' was short-lived. The authorial 'I' that 'The Front' had introduced in *Partisan Review* was put in the position of having to change tack when, in July-August 1935, the Seventh Congress of the Third International, the Communist International or Comintern, turned away from the United Front to promote the 'the establishment of a unity front with social and democratic reformist organisations ... with mass liberation, religious-democratic and

pacifist organisations, and their adherents [...] for the struggle against war and its fascist instigators'.¹⁰ Unlike the United Front that it replaced, this 'Popular Front' was not a strategy of class struggle but of class cooperation. And one immediate effect of that cooperation was that the Proletkult movement was abandoned.

Coming events cast their shadows before. The idea of the Popular Front was there, for example, at the moment *Partisan Review* published 'The Front' in January 1935, when, under instructions from the CPUSA, the National Committee of the John Reed Clubs called for an American Writers' Congress to undertake an 'exposition of all phases of a writers' participation in the struggle against war, the preservation of civil liberties, and the destruction of fascist tendencies every where'.¹¹

The American Writers' Congress met at the end of April, and Rosenberg reported on its proceedings in the July issue of *Poetry*.¹² He was obviously impressed by the representative of a group of Pennsylvania miners who were prepared to print and circulate ten thousand copies of any poem that they could recite or sing together and by an appeal on behalf of three hundred workers' theatres for material to perform.¹³ Here 'it became possible to see how poetry might step forth from the little magazines [...] and walk once more upon the stage and the street'.¹⁴ How, in other words, art might achieve a valid constituency and a valid agency. Nevertheless, it was clear to him that, faced with the dangers presented by fascism and war, the writer was forced to play his part not by revolution but in the effort to protect peace, freedom and progress.¹⁵ The questions were: what was the role

of the writer in the social movement, and what was the best mode of performance?¹⁶ The answers were provided by Earl Browder, national spokesman and general secretary of the CPUSA, in his opening address: one could not be converted automatically into a literary genius merely by calling oneself a 'Marxist'; revolutionary art could succeed 'only through achieving superiority as art, not through politics'; 'the socially conscious writer need not engage in organisational activity at the expense of his writing'. The attitude of the Party was: 'better a good writer than a bad organiser'.¹⁷ After quoting Browder, Rosenberg made a point of mentioning Waldo Frank, who also attacked 'leftism' and those who would 'capitulate easily to dogma, outside control'.¹⁸ Frank, one of the editors of *New Masses*, the cultural magazine of the CPUSA, would go on to represent the League of American Writers, the organization that came out of the Congress at the Popular Frontist First International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture that met two months later in Paris. Rosenberg, writing in the liberaldemocratic *Poetry*, pointed out, reassuringly, and following Browder's line, that though the American Writers' Congress 'turned its face left it donned no red uniform'.¹⁹

Later that year, Rosenberg became active in Popular Front politics through his involvement with *Art Front*, the official publication of the Artists' Union, the militant trade union that had emerged from the Unemployed Artists Group set up by the John Reed Club of New York in 1933 and which, in 1935, came to represent the interests of artists employed on the Federal Art Project. This was a moment in the history of American art and culture when artists were classed as, and classed

themselves as, wage-labourers. *Art Front*'s political orientation was, of course, never in doubt. Dominated by the Communist Party, it was committed to art as propaganda, and to guiding its members in their role as revolutionary artists. Even so, it was always prepared to debate whether the art they were to produce should be social realist or modernist, realist, expressionist, surrealist, abstractionist, etc., for, at that time, there was no Party line on art, not even in the Soviet Union. In a sense, *Art Front* was the New York communist- and left-art community's public conversation. Moreover, it was, at that time, the only periodical in the United States that was primarily concerned with art and politics. At the end of 1935, the editors of *Art Front* signified the journal's sympathetic attitude to modernist art by bringing onto the board Joseph Solman and Max Spivak, along with the assistant who had been assigned to Spivak, working in the Mural Division of the Federal Art Project - Harold Rosenberg.²⁰

Rosenberg's first efforts as a practising critic were published in *Art Front*:²¹ a translation of a lecture entitled 'The New Realism' that Fernand Léger gave at the Museum of Modern Art;²² reviews of MoMA's 'Van Gogh' and 'Cubism and Abstract Art' shows;²³ several book reviews, including one of Salvador Dalí's *Conquest of the Irrational*;²⁴ and a review of William Gropper's painting at the ACA gallery in which he stated that 'the revolutionary painter, far from being a grim specialist of a world seen in concentrated focus, is precisely the major discoverer of new pictorial possibilities as well as new uses for the old [...] by his easy and graceful mastery of the materials of social struggle, by his presentation of it, as it were, from the inside,

without strain, [the revolutionary painter] carried forward the possibility of technical discovery in revolutionary art'.²⁵

The history of American art has produced several accounts of how artists on the left were affected by the Russian-French Non-Aggression Pact of 1935 and the end of the United Front, by the three show trials of prominent intellectuals, Party leaders and activists in Moscow during August 1936, January 1937 and March 1938, by the signing of the Russian-German Non-Aggression Pact, and by the Soviet invasion of Finland in 1939.²⁶ Large numbers of intellectuals who began the decade in support of the Communist Party lost faith in it at some point, abruptly, reluctantly and with such disillusion that they could not be reconciled to it. As we have seen, Rosenberg's support for the Party survived the shift from the United Front to the Popular Front. It also survived the Moscow Trials of 1936 and 1937, but it was abandoned sometime before the events of 1939, probably early in 1938.²⁷ The moment of one's move away from the Party, early or late, and in Rosenberg's quite late, is an important indicator of the intensity - as a fellow-traveller or otherwise - of one's commitment to and subsequent disillusionment with it and with the model of Soviet communism as dictated by Stalin. It is to the point that Rosenberg did not publish in *New Masses* after July 1937 and did not put his name to 'The Moscow Trials: A Statement by American Progressives' endorsing the trials in the May 1938 issue of *New Masses*.²⁸

For Marxists like Rosenberg, who were disillusioned with the Party but who remained committed to

Marxist politics and to the revolutionary function of the artist

and intellectual, it must have seemed inevitable that they should be attracted by the character and writings of Leon Trotsky – not to the Trotsky of the Civil War and Red Army but to the outlawed, hunted and peripatetic Trotsky of the 1930s, moving from Turkey to France to Norway and then to Mexico, analysing fascism and Stalinism and still committed to keeping the radical Marxist project going.

Trotsky held that revolution and art were, in certain respects, alike as forms of human activity. This was clearly stated in his letter of 1 June 1938, to the founding conference on the Fourth International, which was called on his initiative in opposition to the Comintern:

I have always forced myself to depict the sufferings, the hopes and struggles of the working classes because that is how I approach life, and therefore art, which is an inseparable part of it. The present unresolved crisis of capitalism carries with it a crisis of all human culture, including art. [...]

Only a new upsurge of the revolutionary movement can enrich art with new perspectives and possibilities. The Fourth International obviously cannot take on the task of directing art [...] give orders or prescribe methods. Such an attitude towards art could only enter the skulls of Moscow bureaucrats drunk with omnipotence. Art and science do not find their fundamental nature through patrons; art, by its very existence, rejects them; [...] Poets, artists, sculptors, musicians will themselves find their paths and methods, if the revolutionary movement of the masses dissipates the clouds of skepticism and pessimism which darken humanity's horizon today.²⁹

Two weeks later, Trotsky expanded on what he had written to the Fourth International in a letter to the

editors of the still Marxist but, by then, anti-Stalinist *Partisan Review*. This letter was subsequently published in the August/September issue of the journal under the title 'Art and Politics'.³⁰ In the fall, *Partisan Review* made its relations with Trotsky more secure by publishing the manifesto of his International Federation of Revolutionary Writers.³¹

It was at this juncture that Rosenberg reconnected with *Partisan Review*, just at the moment when it was courting Trotsky and identifying itself with Trotskyism. He re-entered it in the winter issue with a long critical discussion of Thomas Mann's idealistic, anti-radical anti-fascism, which he titled 'Myth and History'.³² To the summer issue, he contributed replies to a questionnaire-symposium on 'The Situation in American Writing',³³ and a commentary on Arthur Rosenberg's *Democracy and Socialism*: 'By his sly shifts in historical meanings', this author converted Trotsky's 'principle of "permanent revolution" into that of the coalition governments of the Popular Front'.³⁴ Rosenberg also signed the statement issued by the Trotskyist League of Cultural Freedom and Socialism with its demand: 'COMPLETE FREEDOM FOR ART AND SCIENCE. NO DICTATION BY PARTY OR GOVERNMENT.'³⁵ The next year, *Partisan Review* published Rosenberg's 'The Fall of Paris': this essay, which is thoroughly Trotskyist in its art and politics, will be considered directly.³⁶

The foregoing describes part of the historical matrix that produced 'Harold Rosenberg'. It enables a reading of 'The American Action Painters' as a text situated in and inscribed by a particular Marxist tradition, by the mutation and modification of New

York Marxism with regard to the CPUSA, by the setbacks of the 1930s, and by the espousal of Trotsky's ideas about agency and the freedom of art. Rosenberg's Marxist beginnings were in the early and mid-1930s, in the art and politics of the Great Depression and the New Deal, the union movement, strikes and resistance against repressive state authorities, the move from the United Front to the Popular Front, and from the Third International to the Fourth International. The encounter with Marxism and Marxist politics was significantly different for him and for many of his comrades than it was for those persons who began with Marx around 1939, never having embraced but already disenchanted with Soviet communism and the Communist Party. This 'Harold Rosenberg' was not the kind of commentator on art and culture who, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, would quote Marx word for word to get noticed by New York's left intelligentsia only to jettison that Marxism once it had served its purpose. In the 1950s, this 'Harold Rosenberg' was scathing about those persons of what he called the 'turning generation', 'couch liberals' with regard to their 'guilty past'.³⁷

II

Another clenched fist begins 'The Fall of Paris', which was published in *Partisan Review* in December 1940. This time it is the 'rapping of the soldier's fist' that announces the German army's unopposed entry into the city on 14 June 1940. Rosenberg's focus, however, is not on the demise of Paris as the capital of France but as 'the laboratory of the twentieth century' or the 'Paris "International"', the place that had attracted artists

from all over the continents of Europe and America and had become the site of their collective practice, producing new ways of seeing, showing and telling. Rosenberg, like Trotsky, thought that the continuity of culture mattered, even through revolutions and periods of social upheaval. As far as he was concerned, the Paris International had not been working very effectively for ten years or so, but it is the German occupation of Paris that had effectively closed it down for good and all (TN, 209).

Rosenberg thought that twentieth-century Paris was to the intellectual what the United States had been in the nineteenth century to the immigrant and pioneer. It was a place where no one class was able to impose its purpose and its representations on artistic creation, where individual nationalities and cultures were blended, and yet where what was alive in various national cultures might be discerned or discovered. Paris stood for the opposite of individualism and nationalism in art because in it and through it the art of every individual and nation was increased.

At the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s, with Europe at war with itself, and when cultural production was being directed by state bureaucracies in the United States and the Soviet Union, what had been achieved in Paris provided evidence for Rosenberg that artistic and cultural internationalism was possible as a creative communion that could sweep across national boundaries (TN, 209–10). In effect, the Paris International was a ‘No-Place’ (TN, 214).

Rosenberg’s Paris was a material place with a particular physiognomy and a lot of ideology. It was the French capital at a particular moment, say

1907–29, and the artists who gathered there. It was also the style that was produced there: ‘Modernism’ or ‘the Modern’, ‘the Paris style’ or ‘the Paris Modern’: a style that was based on the ‘assumption that history could be entirely controlled by the mind’; and, inasmuch as it was that, the Paris Modern was as far as humankind had ‘gone toward freeing itself from its past’ (TN, 214). The Paris Modern had produced a ‘No-Time’ (TN, 214).

Rosenberg, of course, realized that the Paris International was not entirely ‘the actual getting together of peoples of different countries’. And he also realized that the Modern ‘was an inverted mental image ... with all the transitoriness and freedom from necessity of imagined things. A dream living-in-the-present and a dream of world citizenship – resting not upon a real triumph, but upon a willingness to go as far as was necessary into nothingness in order to shake off what was dead in the real. A negation of the negative’ (TN, 212–13). Leaving aside any discussion of the intended Zen connotations that attach to that use of ‘nothingness’ – which also attach to the references to ‘No-Place’ and ‘No-Time’, designations that seem informed by what he knew of the Zen state of ‘no-mindedness’ and which will be redeployed in ‘The American Action Painters’³⁸ – it is important to notice that, in this instance, Rosenberg is following Marx and Engels following Hegel with regard to the negation of the negation as a dialectical process of development effecting a positive change.³⁹

Rosenberg saw the Modern as ‘the style and tempo of our consciousness’, of ‘the contemporary as beginning in 1789’ (TN, 214), and by referring to it as ‘a negation of the negative’ he pointed to its

critical, resistive and emancipatory potential in the development of an advanced, liberating, revolutionary consciousness. Paris had been central to the Modern as the site of the International of culture but not to the modern as a temporality because 'the social, economic and cultural workings which define the modern epoch are active everywhere' (TN, 215). And just as the International of culture had a capital, Paris, so in the 1920s the political international, the Third International, had a capital: Moscow. 'It is a tragic irony', writes Rosenberg, 'that these world centers were not brought together until the signing of the Franco-Soviet pact [in 1935] when both were already dead. Then the two cadavers of hope embraced farcically, with mutual suspicion and under the mutually exclusive provincial slogans: DEFENSE OF THE USSR and FRANCE FOR FRENCHMEN' (TN, 215).

And what happened to the formulae perfected by Moscow and Paris that were discarded after the Russian-French Non-Aggression Pact and the inauguration of the Popular Front? They were taken over by Germany and adapted to its particular aims. 'In that country politics became a "pure (i.e., inhuman)" art, independent of everything but the laws of its medium.... Against this advanced technique, which in itself has nothing to do with revolutionary change, the Paris of the Popular Front compromise was helpless' (TN, 218). The demise of the Paris Modern and the Paris International was inseparable from revolutionary defeat and the defeat of the idea of revolution, that is, from the rise of Stalinism and fascism, the re-hegemonization of nationalism and individualism, and the working

class' loss of political independence. The German occupation of Paris merely made it definitive.

Despite this double defeat, Rosenberg managed to bring his essay on the fall of Paris to an optimistic end. Against 'Fascism's modernist mysticism, dreaming of an absolute power to rearrange life to any pattern of its choice', he glimpsed the possibility of 'other forms of contemporary consciousness, another Modernism' (TN, 220). But he could not predict where or when this new Modernism might come into being.

III

By the late 1940s and early 1950s, it had become possible for Rosenberg to identify the new International of culture - though not the International of politics - and to discuss the significance of the style associated with it. This he does in 'The American Action Painters'. Like 'The Front' and 'The Fall of Paris', this essay begins with a gesture or, more accurately, several gestures, set epigraphically as a line taken from Apollinaire's poem 'Merlin et la Vieille Femme' (*Alcools*, 1913): '*J'ai fait des gestes blancs parmi les solitudes*'; gestures - '*tournoiements*' - that express '*les beatitudes qui toutes ne sont rien qu'un pur effet de l'Art*'. That quotation was set above another, this time a sentence, slightly modified, taken from Wallace Stevens' 1942 essay 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words': 'The American will is easily satisfied in its efforts to realize itself in knowing itself.' Or, as it is in Stevens' essay, with the elision reinstated: 'It is obvious that the American will as a principle of the mind's being is easily satisfied in its efforts to realize itself in knowing itself.'⁴⁰

One thing that needs to be established immediately is what Rosenberg thought was ‘American’ about ‘American Action Painting’. He was certainly trying to write something about a kind of collective identity, but there is not anything nationalistic, patriotic or chauvinistic about it or about his idea of what kind of ‘American’ the ‘American’ Action Painter might be. In this context, ‘American’ has to be understood as meaning a kind ethnic diversity and cosmopolitanism.⁴¹ You only have to read his 1959 essay ‘Tenth Street: A Geography of Modern Art’ to see how clearly, in his scheme of things, the material and ideological space of the American Action Painters was related to the International of culture that he had described nineteen years before in ‘The Fall of Paris’.⁴² In this essay, ‘the new American “abstract” art’ is the kind of painting made around Tenth Street, New York, by displaced persons, immigrants, the sons and daughters of immigrants, and by Americans who have ‘moved’ there (DP, 102), maybe for reasons similar to those of the artists, writers, etc., who travelled from all over the world to Paris and who, once there, made works that presented or represented the Modern.

In ‘The American Action Painters’, the artist is figuratively and literally a pioneer and an immigrant. And just as the earlier International of culture was determined partly by the physical character of Paris and by the qualifying and blending of nationalities and class positions that was possible there, so ‘Tenth Street’ was determined not only by its physical geography – Rosenberg writes that it ‘has not even the picturesqueness of a slum (DP, 103), it is ‘devoid of local color’ (DP, 104) – but also by the unfixing and

mixing of nationalities, races, classes and ideologies that occurred there (DP, 106). I have already mentioned that in 1940 Rosenberg had recourse to the Zen state of 'nothingness' and, drawing on the Zen of 'no-mindedness', had described the Paris International as a 'No-Place' and the Paris Modern as a 'No-Time'. In 1959 he described the area around Tenth Street, New York, as a 'no environment' (DP, 104): it was a location or situation that was, as it were, everywhere because it was nowhere attached to any particular situation or location.⁴³ More than that, as the new site of cultural internationalism, 'Tenth Street' transcended the Paris International in terms not only of its unfixity of nationality, race, class, ideology and age (DP, 106), but also of its modernism, which went beyond 'the bellicose verbal internationalism of the thirties' (DP, 104). I will consider this double 'going beyond' later. For the moment, I want to stay with Rosenberg's idea of 'American' and 'Americanness' and how it relates to his thinking about identity and action.

One of Rosenberg's most interesting considerations of 'Americanness' occurs in his 1949 essay 'The Pathos of the Proletariat'.⁴⁴ This was the second of two essays on class and class struggle that he wrote at a time when he was concerned with 'the drama of modern history as conceived by Marx - a drama in which individual identity and action are replaced by collective actors formed out of historical processes and myths' (AA, 206). The first of these two essays was 'The Resurrected Romans' of 1948, an extended engagement with Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.⁴⁵ Together, they provided the core of a book of essays that Rosenberg offered to several publishers between

1949 and 1951, under the title *Marx's Drama of History*, none of whom would take it on.⁴⁶ Both essays, but particularly 'The Pathos of the Proletariat', are significantly inscribed by ideas that Rosenberg had first published in that 1932 essay.⁴⁷ We need to look at 'Character Change and the Drama', which also had its place in the book on Marx, before we consider how 'Americanness' is represented.

'The Pathos of the Proletariat' for it is in this early essay that Rosenberg develops the ideas on 'identity' and 'action' that become so central to his politics and his writing about art and culture in the 1940s and 1950s.

It is germane that what Rosenberg wrote in 'Character Change and the Drama' with reference to *Hamlet* and Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, to name two of his case-study examples, was informed as much by his studies at the Brooklyn Law School between 1924 and 1927 as by his interest in the poetics of drama.⁴⁸ Legal definitions were important for his argument. The law defines an individual by his 'overt actions', by what an individual did in a particular circumstance or particular set of circumstances. The law does not recognize 'personality', a person with a history and psychology. It is interested only in a person's actions, as an 'identity' to which its judgments are applied (TN, 138).⁴⁹ Rosenberg goes on to argue that, in *Hamlet*, the Prince is transformed from a 'personality' (a thoroughly naturalistic, self-analytical, non-active psycho-biographical character) into a dramatic 'identity' (a character relevant to and able to perform the role required by the interrelationship of the main events in the play) (TN, 146–9).

Hamlet has all the qualities required for action but lacks the identity structure necessary to his character in the drama, a oneness with the role originating in and responding to the dramatic laws of his diegetic world. The change occurs when, on his return from England after having escaped death at the hands of the pirates, he acquires a certainty with regard to his feelings and a capacity for action that is no longer an expression of his 'personality' but is in accord with the dramatic rules of the situation in which he finds himself. Regenerated, he breaks with one character and transforms himself into another: 'This is I, Hamlet the Dane' (*Hamlet*, Act 5, Scene 1, 242). From that moment - from the moment he jumps into Ophelia's grave (AA, 143) - when, as Wallace Stevens might have put it, his mind, having become free of itself, emerges as *will*, and turns against the worldly reality, 'his action hustles the play to its tragic close and the apparently accidental character of his revenge serves to emphasize that he is controlled at the end not by the conflicting intentions of a self but by the impulsions of the plot' (AA, 149). Transformed, 'all at once, in a leap' (AA, 143), from the image of a 'personality' to that of an 'identity', Hamlet 'has found at last his place in the play' and, having vacillated for so long, performs the actions required of him by the plot (TN, 149).

Here, in Rosenberg's legalistic thinking about how dramatic thought required that Hamlet had to be changed from 'personality' to 'identity' for the play to become a tragedy and to excite a pathos (TN, 148), we find a key for understanding his reading not only of Marx on class and class struggle but also of the American Action Painters and Action

Painting. This paragraph near the end of 'Character Change and the Drama' is crucial:

Individuals are conceived as identities in systems whose subject matter is action and judgment of actions. In this realm the multiple incidents in the life of an individual may be synthesized, by the choice of the individual himself

or by the decision of others, into a scheme that pivots on a single fact central to the individual's existence and which, controlling his behavior and deciding his fate, becomes his visible definition. Here unity of the 'plot' becomes one with unity of being and through the fixity of identity change becomes synonymous with revolution. (TN, 152)

There can be no doubt that here, in 1932, Rosenberg has in mind that bit of Marx's third thesis on Feuerbach that goes: 'The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*'.⁵⁰

Fifteen years later, in 'The Pathos of the Proletariat', the change from 'personality' to 'identity' that becomes synonymous with revolution is the crucial change required of 'the hero of Marx's drama of history' whose 'action is to resolve the tragic conflict and introduce the quiet order of desired happenings' (AA, 14). This hero is not to be an individual but a particular kind of collective identity, a social class: the proletariat (AA, 15). But for an American radical like Rosenberg, four or five years after the Second World War, the social revolution seemed unlikely: though crisis-ridden, capitalism seemed in good health; its internationalism was well advanced; the revolutionary processes within it had not genuinely

illuminated the worker about himself or united him with other workers (AA, 43). Existence had not effected a revolutionary consciousness. In Germany and Italy, the proletariat had been 'driven off the stage of history by the defeat of the Communist Party - in Russia it was driven off by its victory' (AA, 56), leaving the Party 'absolute with regard to class' and 'history' (AA, 55). In 'The Pathos of the Proletariat', the problem of the agency of revolutionary change that Rosenberg had previously theorized in terms of individual character change is now theorized in terms of class. Knowing full well that the drama of history is discontinuous with 'long intermissions in which the proletariat vanishes from the stage' (AA, 50), Rosenberg was concerned in 'The Pathos of the Proletariat' with the question of how, at that historical moment, in 1949, the proletariat, which had neither chosen nor been compelled to change itself (AA, 56), might alter its character and gain its revolutionary 'identity'.

The proletariat had been brought into existence by the Industrial Revolution. It is an 'invention of modern time' (AA, 24). It is of 'the Modern' (AA, 25). As a social class, the proletariat is 'a materialist connection of men with one another' formed 'to carry on a common battle with another class' (AA, 15) - so, from the moment of its birth it 'begins its struggle with the bourgeoisie' (AA, 21). The proletarian, having no means of production of his own, lives entirely and solely from the sale of his labour-power and not from the profit derived from any capital. But, if the individual capitalist and proletarian as 'the principal agents' of the capitalist mode of production, writes Rosenberg quoting the 'Preface' to *Capital*, are 'individuals ... only in so far as they are personifications of economic categories,

embodiments of particular class-relations and class-interests' (AA, 17),⁵¹ individuals whose definite social characters are assigned to them by the process of social production, then what did it mean to speak of the proletariat as revolutionary? (AA, 17–18). Rosenberg finds answers, or partial answers, to this question in Marx's *The Class Struggles in France*, *The Civil War in France* and especially in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. In these 'historical-literary' writings, class transcends its economic form and given function and 'expresses its collective personality and acts with an intelligence and spirit peculiar to itself' (AA, 19). It is clear to Rosenberg that, in these texts, 'the essence of class definition consisted for Marx in this active character-shaping spirit' (AA, 19). In 'Character Change and the Drama', Hamlet stopped being a 'personality' described by his psychobiography and gained an 'identity' defined 'by the coherence of his acts and with a fact in which they ... terminated' (TN, 136). Without effecting a like change of character and transforming itself from a 'personification' to an 'identity', the proletariat will not be able to act with an intelligence and spirit peculiar to itself (AA, 19) and so become 'the future hero' (AA, 21) who will 'resolve the tragic conflict and introduce the quiet order of desired happenings into the drama of history' (AA, 14). Since Rosenberg, following Marx, believes that the proletariat is destined to alter completely the conditions that created it, the proletariat must undergo that character change from 'personification' to 'identity' (AA, 19). Since its very existence presupposes a revolutionary consciousness and its own decision to act (and not decisions or acts taken on its behalf) must be taken

as the basis of any change that might be considered to be socialist, Rosenberg argues that the self-consciousness that converts the proletariat from 'personification' to 'identity' must be an aspect of revolution and revolutionary practice (AA, 22). The proletariat must come to realize itself through its own self-understanding and its own action, its own mindful active response to the structural contradictions of capitalism. Its collective consciousness must become free, issue as action to overthrow all existing social conditions. 'Both class awareness and class identity arise out of class action' (AA, 22).

Rosenberg finds an answer to how the proletariat's social character might be transformed in that part of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* where Marx writes that the proletarian revolution will be effected by its total abandonment of the past:

The social revolution cannot draw its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped off all superstitions in regard to the past. Earlier revolutions required world-historical recollections in order to drug themselves concerning their own content; the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury the dead. There the phrase went beyond the content; here content goes beyond the phrase. (AA, 23)

Whereas the bourgeois revolutions had been performed in costumes borrowed from the past with ghosts presiding over events - like the ghost of Hamlet's father - the proletariat revolution has to be without recourse to myth and must be clear with regard to its content. The proletariat, called into existence by modern industry against

the bourgeoisie, is without a past. Its revolution 'is to owe nothing to that repertory of heroic forms out of which history had supplied earlier revolutions with the subjective means for meeting their situation' (AA, 23). Pastless, the proletariat must begin its revolution by becoming at one with the dramatic narrative of history, and, with a profound asceticization of mind, understand itself for what it is - not anything more nor less than, as Marx put it - but the aforementioned 'wretched personification of wage labour' (AA, 20, 23), the 'personification of exploitation and misery' (AA, 53). In other words, there will come a moment when the proletariat will abandon its given character and function under capitalism. In the words of the 1848 *Manifesto*, 'The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains.' The proletariat will understand itself for what it is and initiate the action necessary to fulfill its historical role.

The pastlessness of the proletariat is key to its character and its revolutionary role. Likewise, the 'American'. It was in 'The Pathos of the Proletariat' that Rosenberg developed the idea that the proletariat and the American - a citizen of the United States of America, that is - are alike with regard to their pastlessness and their capacity for action. As an immigrant or a descendent of immigrants, the American is detached or estranged from his origins - the culture, traditions, places, things, even human relations of Europe or wherever - and this constitutes a kind of pastlessness: the 'American' exists 'without the time dimension' (AA, 27). Moreover, 'the American does not meditate, he acts' (AA, 28). And what 'self-consciousness' he has is effected through 'practical movement' (AA, 28), an action or series of actions that 'For the American

... is a natural response to need or desire (whether his action can satisfy that need is another question)' (AA, 31).

That Rosenberg sees the proletarian and the American as similar might strike one now as a bit flimflam, but the resemblance would have seemed less forced in the 1940s when Lenin's and Trotsky's views on US agriculture and industry were better known than they are today.⁵² That is to say that, in the context of use in which that assimilation was effected, the qualities that, in 1949, make the 'American' similar to the proletarian, and vice versa, would have been effective: 'Many of the attributes of the proletarian as the potential embodiment of the spirit of the modern are, inescapably, attributes of the American,⁵³ unquestionably the best available model of the new-fangled; from Marx to Lenin and Trotsky, American practices have been cited to illustrate qualities needed under socialism' (AA, 29).⁵⁴ However, though he is 'a natural representative of the modern', the American, immigrant or descendant of immigrants, is no revolutionary (AA, 29). He is pastless, in so far as the American has a history that 'history has been one of setting limits to his revolutionising' (AA, 30). Nevertheless, speaking 'half-figuratively',⁵⁵ to become a human being the proletarian must '*Americanize*' himself by overcoming the void that is his past and making a new self through his actions (AA, 32). 'Yet all the relations of capitalist society forbid the working class to act except as a tool. Hence its free act must be a revolutionary act, one that must subdue "all existing conditions" and can set itself no limits' (AA, 32). It

must ‘continue to create itself in revolutionary action’ for ‘at rest it has no identity’ (AA, 37).

At which juncture it is worth recalling what Wallace Stevens said about how ‘obvious’ it is that ‘the American will as a principle of the mind’s being is easily satisfied in its efforts to realize itself in knowing itself’, easily satisfied which Rosenberg set as one of two epigrams above his essay on the kind of painting being made by the artists who gathered around Tenth Street, New York, in the late 1940s and 1950s. What, at that time, was impossible for the proletariat became possible for the American Action Painters, artists who were less easily satisfied in their efforts to realize themselves in knowing themselves than was Stevens’ generalized ‘American’.

IV

It should be clear from the foregoing that the writings of Marx were the major resource for Rosenberg’s thinking about ‘action’, about action as a necessary way of coming to a proper awareness of one’s self, one’s identity, one’s role in the drama of history, and about what was special about the kind of painting he called ‘American Action Painting’. But they would not have been his only resource. According to Robert Motherwell, for example, Rosenberg was taken by something he read in the proofs of an essay by Richard Huelsenbeck that Motherwell included in his 1951 anthology *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*.⁵⁶ Rosenberg lighted on the passage, in what was eventually set under the title ‘En Avant Dada’, where ‘Huelsenbeck violently attacks literary esthetes, and says that literature should be action,

should be made with a gun in the hand, etc.'⁵⁷ In Berlin, in 1918-20, this is revolutionary art. No wonder the passage caught Rosenberg's eye. The appropriation of Marx as a resource aside, it is certainly possible that Rosenberg also paid attention to Huelsenbeck's essay, which he and Motherwell had known since at least 1947, when, as editors along with John Cage and Pierre Chareau, they included some fragments from it in the one and only issue of *Possibilities* that came out in the winter of 1947-8.⁵⁸ In one of those fragments you can read: 'The Dadaist should be a man who has fully understood that one is entitled to have ideas only through action, because it holds the possibility of achieving knowledge.'⁵⁹ That seems compatible with what he took from his reading of Marx.

It has to be said, with regard to Action Painting, that I doubt that Rosenberg found much that was useful in what he knew about Jackson Pollock's way of painting, either at first hand or by what he could have seen in Hans Namuth's photographs of Pollock painting, which appeared in *ARTnews* in May 1951 - which is not to say that he did not find something.⁶⁰ Some commentators have claimed that Rosenberg was thinking of Pollock when he wrote 'The American Action Painters', but this seems unlikely,⁶¹ and,

anyway, he did not need to see - or see photographs of - Pollock or any of the artists he might have had in mind actually painting to write what he saw the paintings as *of*. He did not think of himself 'as a critic writing about specific painters or sculptors' or about 'problems that are distinctly - or let's say, exclusively - restricted to painting'; rather, he saw himself as 'dealing with the condition of some creative act on the part of an individual or a group,

even ... a pervasive spirit'.⁶² If Rosenberg had the work of anyone in particular in mind as evidencing the kind of action he associated with Action Painting, it was probably the work of Barnett Newman: specifically, perhaps, *Onement I*.⁶³ This was the painting that Newman made on 29 January 1948, his birthday, by fixing a piece of tape down the vertical centre of a canvas that he had painted cadmium red dark and, after that, smearing some cadmium red light over it to test the colour. Newman then studied what he had produced for some eight or nine months, figuring out what precisely he had done - 'What was it?' - and what he might do, before definitively abandoning it as complete⁶⁴ and, having 'affirmed himself ... freed himself' and moved on with a 'totally new vision'.⁶⁵

We can now start reading 'The American Action Painters' and answer the question posed about Action Painting in the first section of the essay: 'Modern Art? Or an Art of the Modern?' For Rosenberg, writing in 1952, Modern Art is painting that has caught up with, or is catching up with, what was produced by the 'School of Paris'. The academic, moribund Modernism of the late 1920s and 1930s. Modern Art is painting that is secure in the knowledge of what it is, practising its immediate past, enabled and supported by a stable structure. As Wallace Stevens might have phrased it: it puts things together by choice, not of the will; it selects from among objects already supplied by association; it is a selection made for purposes that are not then and therein being shaped because they have already been fixed.⁶⁶ Modern Art has to be negated: an Art of the Modern will be the negation of that negative (TN, 23-4).

But Modern Art is not only painting. As Rosenberg points out, the category could also include architecture, furniture, household appliances, advertising ‘mobiles’, a three-thousand-year-old mask from the South Pacific, and even a piece of wood found on a park bench (TN, 35). Modern Art has little or nothing to do with style or with when or why something was produced, by whom it was produced or for whom it was produced, etc., and more or less everything to do with those persons who are socially and pedagogically empowered to designate it as ‘psychologically, esthetically or ideologically relevant to our epoch’ (TN, 36). It is part of a ‘revolution of taste’ conducted by those persons who value it and contested by those who do not. Responses to it represent ‘claims to social leadership’ (TN, 36). In other words, he recognized that what was being done with art was but an aspect of the struggle for leadership within the US ruling class that, during the ‘Cold War’, was contested with opposing claims about the value of Modern Art. On one side, there was that fraction made up

of internationalist-multinationalist business liberals who valued it, collected it and made it available to the public in those bits of what C. Wright Mills would call ‘the cultural apparatus’ that they owned and controlled – the Museum of Modern Art, New York, which Rosenberg has in his sights in ‘The American Action Painters’, was a prime site in this regard – and for whom Modern Art had ‘a supreme Value [...] the Value of the NEW’ (TN, 37). On the other side, there was that fraction made up of isolationist-nationalist ‘practical conservatives’ that regarded Modern Art as un-American, subversive, ‘snobbish, Red, immoral, etc.’ (TN, 36) and whose

views were represented by the likes of Congressman George A. Dondero.⁶⁷ Rosenberg, who understood how modernism – or those aspects of Modern Art that were synonymous with the Art of the Modern – put the cultural politics of both fractions at risk, regarded this struggle, restricted to ‘weapons of taste’, and at the same time addressed to the masses, as a ‘comedy of revolution’ (TN, 36). In other words, it was a farce.

The professional enlighteners of Modern Art use Action Painting in their political struggle with those who oppose their view of the world not only for ideological purposes but also as a way of making money (TN, 37). But they do not understand it. Their value judgments are based in identifying ‘resemblances of surface’ and of perpetuating beliefs about what is ‘modish’ (TN, 38). Which is why they have failed to grasp ‘the new creative principle’ that sets Action Painting apart from twentieth-century picture-making (TN, 39). Action Painting has nothing to do with taste or with ‘the mode of production of modern masterpieces’, which ‘has been all too clearly rationalized’ (TN, 24). It is a very different kind of practice from that of the earlier abstractionists of the Paris Modern or, as it is called in ‘The American Action Painters’, the ‘Great Vanguard’ (TN, 24). The Modern or the Great Vanguard was historically and culturally specific to the Paris International of 1907–29. Action Painting was historically and culturally specific to the community associated with Tenth Street, New York, in the period 1945 to 1952. It was that community’s response to the unevenness and discontinuity of history and to what Rosenberg regarded as a break in and with the Modern. Not surprisingly – or illogically according to what Rosenberg had written

in 'The Fall of Paris' – the Action Painters regarded the style of the Great Vanguard as dead or as something that had to be transcended. Though it is possible to see a cutaneous similarity between their work and previous abstract painting, the two kinds of painting are crucially different with regard to their intention and function. Because of this, the work of the American Action Painters had to be seen as different and separate from the painting of the Great Vanguard and from what the taste bureaucracies and formalist critics had designated as Modern Art (TN, 24). Rosenberg's use of 'the Modern' had remained consistent since 'The Fall of Paris' and continued to mean – as it did in 'The Pathos of the Proletariat', where he talked about 'the spirit of the modern' (AA, 29) – the style of an epoch's progressive consciousness. Action Painting is not 'Modern Art'. It is an 'Art of the Modern'.

Rosenberg points out that most of the artists he's writing about were more than forty years old when they became Action Painters. Before then, many of them had been "Marxists" (W.P.A. unions, artists' congresses) [...] trying to paint Society. Others had been trying to paint Art (Cubism, Post-Impressionism)' (TN, 30). It amounted to the same thing. They had been trying to paint the Modern. By 1940, both Art and Society – the art of the Paris International and the aspirational politics of the Communist International – as the necessary form and dynamic principle of the immediate future were dead. It is in this double demise, not in 'the war and the decline of radicalism in America', that Rosenberg locates the beginnings of Action Painting (TN, 30). 'At its centre the movement was away from, rather than towards. The Great Works of the

Past and the Good Life of the Future became equally nil' (TN, 30).

Stevens, thinking about the period from the French Revolution to 1942, a moment in the war when the defeat or triumph of Hitler was still undecided, wrote about 'the pressure of reality, a pressure great enough and prolonged enough to bring about the end of one era in the history of the imagination and, if so, then great enough to bring about the beginning of another'.⁶⁸ In a sense, that is the moment of Rosenberg's 'grand crisis' (TN, 30), the moment when the two Moderns became 'nil': the moment when it became possible to make an Art of the Modern again. But with what? The ideas, beliefs, theories, practices, materials and methods of Art and Society that survived were deemed useless as resources for those artists who were compelled to deal with the crisis and work it out in practice. 'Value - political, aesthetic, moral' had to be rejected.⁶⁹ But this rejection did not take the form of condemnation or defiance, as it had done with Dada and Surrealism after the First World War. This time, owing no political, aesthetic or moral obligation to a past-dominated present but trying presently to paint the Modern, the artist's reaction was one of diffidence (TN, 30): the artist was not so much excessively modest and reticent as distrustful and uncertain about what constituted and might yet constitute 'art', 'creation', 'creativity', 'individuality' and the 'identity' of the artist.

In becoming 'nil', the two Moderns had provided artists with a major resource for any vanguard practice: 'nothingness'. In a state of nothingness or with the experience of nothingness, the Action Painter 'decided to paint ... just TO PAINT' (TN, 30).

There was no intention ‘to reproduce, re-design, analyse or “express” an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event. The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him’ (TN, 25). The image that was produced by ‘staining’ the canvas or by ‘spontaneously putting forms into motion upon it’ (TN, 25) was the indexical – and occasionally iconic – mark or trace of those actions.⁷⁰ Initially that was all there was to it. But subsequently the painter began to take stock of the way that the surface was marked, started to attend to the ‘act of painting’, to what might be learned about painting and art ... and about himself: ‘what matters always is the revelation contained in the act’ (TN, 26–7).

Action Painting, as Rosenberg sees it, is painting at the point of formation, when everything has to be redone. It is Ur-painting at the point of thematization; but it is not yet, and may never become, painting as an art.⁷¹ *As if.* In redoing everything from scratch the Action Painter relies on an *‘as if’*. In our life circumstances, we behave *as if* our world is as know it, we live our lives often according to ideas and models that we know to be untrue but take for granted *as if* they are true. The *as if* is a fiction that we find useful for going on, for achieving or maintaining what we want to achieve or maintain. An *as if* is a useful fiction. Action Paintings are ‘DRAMAS OF AS IF’ (AA, 27): ‘With traditional esthetic references discarded as irrelevant, what gives the canvas its meaning is not psychological data but role, the way the artist organizes his emotional and intellectual energy *as if*

[emphasis added] he were in a living situation' (TN, 29).⁷² Although 'the interest lies in the kind of act taking place in the four sided arena [that is the canvas], a dramatic interest' (TN, 29), the artist makes or takes those actions *as if* he were intervening in his actual life circumstances, *as if* his actions were actual interventions in the existing social and political order of things.

We are now close to understanding this new painting that Rosenberg regards 'as an act that is inseparable from the biography of the artist', that is 'a "moment" in the adulterated mixture of his life', that is 'of the same metaphysical substance as the artist's existence', and that has 'broken down every distinction between art and life (TN, 27-8). But we will not understand it if we see it as Modern Art, if we see it in relation 'to the works of the past, rightness of colour, texture, balance, etc.', or as expressing or representing some aspect of the artist's existence, for example, his 'sexual preferences or debilities' (TN, 29). Taking the hint from the reference to 'the critic who goes on judging' (TN, 28), and recalling what he had written previously in 'Character Change and the Drama' about the way the law defines a person by his overt acts and its judgment being the resolution of those acts, it seems clear that Rosenberg saw an Action Painting as a sequence of lucid and comprehensible actions that enabled a judgment by the painter and the critic, a judgment that is an inseparable part of recognizing the painter's identity.⁷³

With the American, heir of the pioneer and the immigrant, the foundering of Art and Society was not experienced as a loss. On the contrary, the end of Art marked the beginning ... of an optimism regarding himself as an artist.... On the one hand, a

desperate recognition of moral and intellectual exhaustion; on the other, the exhilaration of an adventure over depths in which he might find the true image of his identity.... Guided by visual and somatic memories of paintings he had seen or made – memories which he did his best to keep intruding into his consciousness – he gesticulated upon the canvas and watched for what each novelty would declare him and his art to be. (TN, 31)

Aware that their ideological and material conditions were thoroughly immiserated and freed from – or wanting to be free from – past ideas and beliefs, the Action Painters, their imagination responding to the pressure of reality, acted according to their historical circumstances and entirely in their own interests. The ‘saving moment’ came ‘when the painter first felt himself released from Value – myth of past self-recognition’ and ‘attempted to initiate a new moment’ in which he would ‘realize his total personality – myth of future self-recognition’ (TN, 31). It was at that point that the painter’s character change became synonymous with revolution. This is Rosenberg on revolutionary action in ‘The Pathos of the Proletariat’:

For the worker action is but a possibility, the anguishing possibility of transforming himself into an individual. Hemmed in on the bare, functional stage of industrial production, altogether *there*, without past or vision of paradise, he is, except for this possibility of acting, a mere prop, a thing that personifies. Speaking half-figuratively, to become a human being the proletarian must ‘Americanize’ himself, that is, overcome the void of his past by making a new self through his actions.

Yet all the relations of capitalist society forbid the working class to act except as a tool. Hence its free act must be a revolutionary act, one that must subdue ‘all existing conditions’ and can set itself no

limits. The proletarian victim of the modern cannot enter the historical drama as an actor without becoming its hero. In ‘the indefinite prodigiousness of their aims’, as Marx described them in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, the workers signify that with them revolution is a need of the spirit, a means of redemption. Before Marx’s internal pioneer opens a frontier without end. (AA, 31–2)

This is what he wrote, or rewrote, in ‘The American Action Painters’:

The revolution against the given, in the self and the world, which since Hegel has provided European vanguard art with theories of a New Reality, has re-entered America in the form of personal revolts. Art as action rests on the enormous assumption that the artist accepts as real only that which he is in the process of creating. ‘Except the soul has divested itself of the love of created things ...’ The artist works in a condition of open possibility, risking, to follow Kierkegaard, the anguish of the esthetic, which accompanies possibility lacking in reality. To maintain the force to refrain from settling anything, he must exercise in himself a constant No (TN, 32).

In other words, the artist must base his work in the practice of the negation of the negative. The ‘constant No’ here is not merely the mental act of saying ‘No’, which like many of the so-called practices of negation that characterize ‘Modern Art’ are but arbitrary and gratuitous signs of caprice. It refers, rather, to the objective ground of such negations and is the vital element of the process of cognition: negation defined as a dialectical moment of objective development, becoming, mediation, and transition. No simple negation of a given negativity can produce a self-sustaining positivity. That’s why Rosenberg gave this section of his essay the inter-title: ‘It’s Not That, It’s Not That, It’s Not That’ (TN, 29).

The Action Painter can produce effectively only if he is in a relation to the dominant culture as a proletarian. Action is the prerequisite of the proletariat's identity. For the proletariat, which is held in an exploited fixed relation to capitalism, the free act, any action made spontaneously and without recourse to myths of the past or the myth of a utopian future, will be, by definition, revolutionary and will inaugurate the revolution in permanence. Likewise, action is the wilful prerequisite for the vanguard painter's striving to effect his 'identity'. In the crisis period of 1940 and after, an uncertain malignant warlike whole, a world at war and then at cold war, the painter could either remain a 'personality' or 'personification' and continue putting things together on the canvas by selecting from among what remained of Art and Society; or, he could accept that there was nothing, that he had nothing to secure or strengthen, and had to resist or evade the pressure of that no-thing, evade or negate it, and rid himself of all considerations not demanded by the reality of the historical situation and act appropriately and accordingly. And PAINT. He could either carry on producing Modern Art or he could produce an Art of the Modern, make art or - if it were not art - make 'original work demonstrating what art is about to become' (TN, 24).

As I read them, 'The Pathos of the Proletariat' and 'The American Action Painters' were written by a Marxist who refused to succumb to a pessimism that would have been quite alien to the tradition of Marxism. The 'Harold Rosenberg' who wrote 'The Front' at the end of 1934 is still there in these and other essays written in the 1940s and 1950s. So is the proletariat. The proletariat, of course, always

has the potential for revolution: '*So long as the category exists*, the possibility cannot be excluded that it will recognize itself as a separate human community and revolutionize everything by asserting its needs and its traditionless interests' (AA, 56–7). And the American Action Painters provided evidence that there was still a space and some potential for personal revolt and insurrection. For Rosenberg, 'good' Action Painting left 'no doubt concerning its reality as an action and its relation to a transforming process in the artist' (TN, 33). Weak or 'easy' Action Painting lacked 'the dialectical tension of a genuine act, associated with risk and will' (TN, 34). Action Painting was optimistic painting for it enabled the artist to realize an 'identity' that the proletariat, at that moment, could not.

Maybe the Action Painters' action was always, at some level, a failure – unless we think of it as part of a 'revolution' whose outlines were not perceptible in political terms but the potential of which could be denied only at the cost of an entire loss of self. Rosenberg was able to remain optimistic because his analyses incorporated the dialectic: that, as Marx summarized it, 'affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up'.⁷⁴ When it appeared, the dialectical method, which combines the negativity of man's social experience with the need for change, introduced an essential, confident movement into Rosenberg's writing. Remember: the Paris Modern represented 'a dream of living-in-the-present and a dream of world citizenship – resting not upon a real triumph, but upon a willingness to go as far as was necessary

into nothingness in order to shake off what was dead in the real. A negation of the negative.' That was how Rosenberg saw the work of the American Action Painters. One could say that Rosenberg's Action Painter, like the proletariat will be when it changes character and becomes one with the drama of history, is someone who is aware that he is nothing and acts to become everything, whose mind, having become free, is externalized as will and acts against the pressure of reality. He tried to let nothing impose upon the act-painting, a purposive productive act that was in its essence critical of Art and Society. Those dramas of *as if* had a kind of revolutionary boldness. When Barnett Newman, in 1948, in response to Rosenberg's question about what *one* of his 'paintings could possibly mean to the world', said that if 'read properly it would mean the end of all state capitalism and totalitarianism', he was surely reminding Rosenberg of *Onement I*. Not that Rosenberg would have needed reminding, of course. His question was thoroughly rhetorical. If the work of the American Action Painters had any meaning, it was about revolutionary political agency arising from the contradictions of capitalism, the reality of which could not be totally excluded if the prospect of radical change was to be kept open ... sometime ... somewhere. American Action Painting was the sign that the historical inevitability of revolution was still there ... is still there ... immanent. It was that, or it is not anything.

The following abbreviations have been used throughout this essay.

AA = Harold Rosenberg, *Act and the Actor: Making the Self* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1970; University of Chicago: Chicago, 1983)

DP = Harold Rosenberg, *Discovering the Present: Three Decades in Art, Culture and Politics* (University of Chicago: Chicago, 1973; Phoenix

Edition, 1976)

TN = Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New* (Horizon Press: New York, 1959; University of Chicago; Chicago, 1982)

- 1** Harold Rosenberg, 'The American Action Painters', *ARTnews*, vol. 51, no. 8 (December 1952), pp. 22–3, 48–50, reprinted in *The Tradition of the New* (Horizon Press: New York, 1959; University of Chicago; Chicago, 1982), pp. 23–39. Rosenberg's essay was discussed at the Club on 16 January 1953, more or less immediately after its publication – see Gary Comenay, <<http://warholstars.org/abstractexpressionism/timeline/abstractexpressionism53.html>>, accessed 4 September 2013.

The first version of 'Action, Revolution and Painting' was published in the *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1 (1992), pp. 3–17, some seven years before Rosenberg's papers were released by the Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities in 1999. At the time, I was unaware of their existence. I am pleased that they confirm what was then achieved by an attentive reading of texts that had long been in the public domain. This version of that essay has been rewritten for its inclusion in this collection, hopefully improving it by making certain passages less opaque and by adding some new material.

Mention needs to be made of three studies that either use or abuse the *Oxford Art Journal* essay, each of them, in whole or in part, offering a serious scholarly account of Rosenberg's writing, especially his art criticism and, in particular, 'The American Action Painters': Elaine Owens O'Brien, 'The Art Criticism of Harold Rosenberg: Theaters of Love and Combat', unpublished PhD thesis (City University of New York, 1997) – O'Brien had privileged access to Rosenberg's papers while researching and writing her thesis; Nancy Jachec, *The Philosophy and Politics of Abstract Expressionism* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2000); and Annika Marie, 'The Most Radical Act: Harold Rosenberg, Barnett Newman and Ad Reinhardt', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Texas at Austin, 2006). Marie's dissertation, which relates Rosenberg's idea of 'action' to Marx's notion of 'praxis' – free creative and self-creative activity through which man makes and changes the world and himself – more directly than did I, is the only one to keep faith with the revolutionary politics that writes 'The American Action Painters'. For a more recent, briefer contribution to the way that Rosenberg read Marx and how that reading informed his idea of action and Action Painting, see Christa Noel Robbins, 'Harold Rosenberg on the Character of Action', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2012), pp. 195–214.

- 2** Harold Rosenberg, 'The Front', *Partisan Review*, vol. 2, no. 6 (January/February 1935), p. 74.

- 3 Harold Rosenberg, 'Character Change and the Drama', *The Symposium*, vol. 3, no. 3 (July 1932), pp. 348–69, reprinted in *The Tradition of the New*, op. cit., pp. 135–53. See also his other work for *The Symposium*: 'Myth and Poem', vol. 2, no. 2 (April 1931), pp. 179–91; a review of William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, vol. 2, no. 3 (July 1931), pp. 412–18; a review of Kenneth Burke's *Counter Statement* and Montgomery Beligion's *The Human Parrot and Other Essays*, vol. 3, no. 1 (January 1932), pp. 116–18; and a review of Jules Romaine's *Men of Good Will*, vol. 4, no. 4 (October 1933), pp. 511–14.
- 4 Rosenberg and Hays published three issues of *The New Act* – in January 1933, June 1933 and April 1934. It was referred to as an 'experimental quarterly' by *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, vol. 45, no. 6 (March 1935), p. 357. *The New Act* published articles by René Daumal, Paul van Otayen, Henry Bamford Parkes, George Plekhanov, Ezra Pound, Samuel Putman and Parker Tyler. For Rosenberg's contributions, see 'Note on Class Conflict and Literature', *The New Act*, no. 1 (January 1933), pp. 3–10, and 'Sanity, Individuality and Poetry', *The New Act*, no. 2 (June 1933), pp. 59–75, two essays in which he developed ideas that he had first published the previous year in 'Character Change and the Drama'.
- 5 Rosenberg's contributions are indexed in *Thirty Years of Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, Volumes 1–60, October 1912–September 1942* and *Fifty Years of Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, Volumes 1–100, 1912–1962* (AMS Reprint Company: New York, 1963).
- 6 William Phillips and Philip Rahv, 'Private Experience and Public Philosophy', *Poetry*, vol. 48, no. 2 (May 1936), p. 104.
- 7 'Contributors', *Partisan Review*, vol. 2, no. 6 (January–February 1935), p. 2.
- 8 For still recommended reading on the John Reed Club and *Partisan Review*, see James Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America* (Wiley & Sons: New York, 1968); Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (Wesleyan University Press: Middletown, 1973); Alan Wald, 'Revolutionary Intellectuals: *Partisan Review* in the 1930s', *Occident*, no. 8 (Spring 1974), pp. 118–33; Eric Homberger, *American Writers and Radical Politics, 1900–1939: Equivocal Commitments* (St Martin's Press: New York, 1986).
- 9 Considering the secrecy that continues to surround membership of the Communist Party, and which was deliberately fostered by the CP, it is very difficult to know who was and who was not a member of the

CPUSA. It seems that being a member demanded a kind of discipline that most writers and artists could not accept. One has to remember that the CPUSA was partly committed to a form of democratic centralism and to the strategic use of writers and artists. Because it could not tolerate any criticism from its members at local levels of organization, it would not accept into its ranks any really independent figures, and they, in turn, could not accept its dictates. It is my guess that Rosenberg was a fellow-traveller, not a member of the CPUSA.

¹⁰ Jane (Tabrisky) Degas, *The Communist International 1919–1943: Documents, Volume 3* (Oxford University Press: London and New York, 1965), p. 375, quoted in Duncan Halas, *The Comintern* (Bookmarks: London, 1985), p. 143, which provides an excellent discussion of the Comintern's revolutionary period.

¹¹ See 'The Coming Writers' Congress', *Partisan Review*, vol. 2, no. 6 (January/February 1935), pp. 94–6. The Congress, it was announced, would also 'develop the possibilities for wider distribution of revolutionary books and the improvement of the revolutionary press, as well as relations between revolutionary writers and bourgeois publishers and editors'. It was clear from this that when the Congress met at the end of April it would not be concerned with revolution but with establishing good relations with the literary bourgeoisie and with fighting fascism.

¹² Harold Rosenberg, 'The American Writers' Congress', *Poetry*, vol. 46, no. 4 (July 1935), p. 222–7.

¹³ Ibid., p. 226.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 226–7.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 225.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Presumably Browder's mention of 'uniforms' would have been taken as a clear reference to Max Eastman's *Artists in Uniform* (New York, 1934).

²⁰ Here I have relied on Gerald M. Monroe's essay 'Art Front' in *Archives of American Art Journal*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1973), pp. 13–19. The editorial board's shift towards modernism was made partly as a result of pressure that had been brought to bear by some modernist members of

the Union – Solman, Ilya Bolotowsky, Balcomb Greene, Mark Rothkowitz [Mark Rothko], Byron Browne, George McNeil, and others – and partly because the Popular Front made it necessary to open the editorial board to modernism. The move did not go uncontested. Rosenberg's place was secured only on the advice of a visiting official of the French Communist Party who sat in on a crucial board meeting. In *Poetry*, vol. 5, no. 4 (January 1938), Rosenberg is referred to as a 'poet, critic, and painter of murals'.

- ²¹ Rosenberg's first piece for *Art Front* was a report of an Artists' Union demonstration outside the CAA on 15 August 1935, at which eighty-three WPA artists and art teachers were arrested, see 'Artists Increase their Understanding of Public Buildings', *Art Front*, November 1935, pp. 3, 6.
- ²² Fernand Léger, 'The New Realism', trans. Harold Rosenberg, *Art Front*, December 1935, p. 10.
- ²³ Harold Rosenberg, 'Peasants and Pure Art', *Art Front*, January 1936, pp. 5–6, and 'Cubism and Abstract Art', *Art Front*, June 1936, p. 15.
- ²⁴ Harold Rosenberg, 'Book Reviews', *Art Front*, March 1936, p. 14.
- ²⁵ Harold Rosenberg, 'The Wit of William Gropper', *Art Front*, March 1936, pp. 7–8.
- ²⁶ See, for example, Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1983). Chapter One, 'New York, 1935–1941: The De-Marxization of the Intelligentsia', pp. 17–47.
- ²⁷ In 1937 Rosenberg published several things in the CPUSA magazine *New Masses*, which affirmed the validity of the Moscow Trials and the Party line. 'Portrait of a Predicament', his very hostile review – in the context of *New Masses* it could not have been anything but hostile – of William Saroyan's *3 Times 3* appeared in the same issue as 'The Moscow Trials: An Editorial', *New Masses*, 9 February 1937, see p. 24. See also: 'What We May demand', *New Masses*, 23 March 1937, pp. 17–18, an article on literature and major political writing (that is, 'But the least we may demand from literature is that it equal the best political and historical writings of our time in the consciousness of its own subject matter. Only thus can it probe the wound of humanity which the act of thinking and of political combination is part of the effort to cure [...] no poem or novel of the past few years can equal as a literary expression of modern human consciousness the Communist Manifesto or Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire'); 'Aesthetic Assault', a review of Jules Romains' *The Boys in*

the Back Room, *New Masses*, 30 March 1937, p. 25; and a poem, 'The Melancholy Railings', *New Masses*, 20 July 1937, p. 20. Rosenberg's contributions to *New Masses* indicate that he was not yet sympathetic to Trotsky.

- ²⁸ 'The Moscow Trials: A Statement by American Progressives', *New Masses*, 3 May 1938, p. 19.
- ²⁹ Leon Trotsky, *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1937–8)* (Pathfinder Press: New York, 1970), pp. 351–2.
- ³⁰ Leon Trotsky, 'Art and Politics', *Partisan Review*, vol. 5, no. 3, August/September 1938, pp. 3–10.
- ³¹ See André Breton and Leon Trotsky, 'Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art', *Partisan Review*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Fall 1938), pp. 49–53 – it is generally agreed that this text is substantially Trotsky's but that he asked that his name be left off the by-line.
- ³² Harold Rosenberg, 'Myth and History', *Partisan Review*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Winter 1939), pp. 19–39.
- ³³ 'The Situation in American Writing', *Partisan Review*, vol. 6, no. 4 (Summer 1939), see pp. 47–9.
- ³⁴ Harold Rosenberg, 'Marx and "The People"', *Partisan Review*, vol. 6, no. 4 (Summer 1939), pp. 121–5, see p. 124.
- ³⁵ 'Statement of the LCFS', *Partisan Review*, vol. 6, no. 4 (Summer 1939), pp. 125–7, see p. 127. Rosenberg also signed the League's manifesto 'War Is the Issue!', see *Partisan Review*, vol. 6, no. 5 (Fall 1939), pp. 125–7. See also Rosenberg on the LCFS in 'Couch Liberalism and the Guilty Past', *Dissent: A Quarterly Review of Socialist Opinion*, vol. 2 (Autumn 1955), pp. 317ff, reprinted in *The Tradition of the New*, op. cit., pp. 238–9.
- ³⁶ Harold Rosenberg, 'On the Fall of Paris', *Partisan Review*, vol. 7, no. 6 (December 1940), pp. 440–8, reprinted under the title 'The Fall of Paris', in *The Tradition of the New*, op. cit., pp. 209–20.
- ³⁷ See Harold Rosenberg, 'Couch Liberalism and the Guilty Past', in *The Tradition of the New*, op. cit., pp. 221–40.
- ³⁸ Rosenberg derives the idea of 'no-place' and 'no-time' from 'no-mindedness', a state of mind essential to Zen Buddhism. 'No-mindedness' is a state of mind that is present everywhere because it is nowhere attached to any particular object. In so far as the Paris International was a 'no-place', it grasped nothing of Paris as the capital

of France yet refused nothing from any other place. In so far as the Paris Modern was a ‘no-time’, it was an emptying or a negation of history and so was completely open to the future. In a state of ‘no-mindedness’, an individual holds to no preconceptions: he just acts. Nothingness is the negation of all qualities as a vital part of the process of cognition. It is likely that Rosenberg derived his knowledge of Zen ‘nothingness’ and ‘no-mindedness’ from reading either D. T. Suzuki’s *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (Eastern Buddhist Society: Kyoto, 1934) or Alan Watts’ *The Spirit of Zen: A Way of Life, Work, and Art in the Far East* (John Murray: London, 1936), which were the first books to introduce Zen Buddhism to English-speaking readers, or both. Rosenberg’s appropriation of Zen in 1940 seems unusual, for recourse to Zen did not become common around Tenth Street until 1949, when the Philosophical Library republished Suzuki’s *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, with a preface by Carl Jung, and Suzuki himself began teaching at Columbia University. See also n. 43 below.

- 39 For the exemplary formulation of the negation of the negation, see Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (1867), trans. Ben Fowkes (Penguin/New Left Review: Harmondsworth and London, 1976), p. 929: ‘The capitalist mode of appropriation, the result of the capitalist mode of production, produces capitalist private property. This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labour of the proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is the negation of the negation. This does not re-establish private property for the producer, but gives him individual property based on co-operation and the possession in common of the land and the means of production.’
- 40 Wallace Stevens, ‘The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words’ (1942), in *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (Vintage Books: New York, 1951), pp. 3–36 at p. 11. Rosenberg was very taken with this essay and with ‘The Figure of the Youth as a Virile Poet’ (1944), which was also included in *The Necessary Angel* and from where he came by Stevens’ notion of poetry as a ‘process of the personality of the poet’ (see TN, 29). Stevens means by this that what keeps ‘poetry a living thing, the modernizing and ever-modern influence’ is ‘not the poet as subject’ or ego but a series of actions that are of the poet’s distinctive character.
- 41 See David A. Hollinger, ‘Ethnic Diversity, Cosmopolitanism and the Emergence of the American Liberal Intelligentsia’, *American Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 2 (May 1975), pp. 133–51, especially with reference to Rosenberg pp. 146–7.

- 42** Harold Rosenberg, 'Tenth Street: A Geography of Modern Art', *ARTnews Annual*, vol. 28 (1959), pp. 120–37, 184, 186, 190, 192, reprinted with slight modifications in *Discovering the Present: Three Decades of Art, Culture and Politics* (1973), op. cit., pp. 100–9.
- 43** See Rosenberg, 'Tenth Street: A Geography of Modern Art', *Discovering the Present*, op. cit., p. 104: 'Identical with rotting streets in Chicago, Detroit, and Boston, Tenth Street is differentiated only by its encampment of artist. Here de Kooning's conception of "no environment" for the figures of his Women has been realized to the maximum with regard to himself.' According to Thomas B. Hess, *Willem de Kooning* (Museum of Modern Art: New York, 1968), pp. 78–9, de Kooning came up with the idea of 'no-environment' while he worked on *Woman I* (1950–2) to refer to 'the American urban scene and its lack of specificity ... Everything has its own character, but its character has nothing to do with any particular place.' Rosenberg, in *Willem de Kooning* (Harry N. Abrams: New York, 1973), p. 15, refers to de Kooning coming up with the idea 'no-style' as an aspect of 'the act of painting': 'transient and imperfect as an episode in daily life, the act of painting achieves its form outside the patterning of style. It cuts across the history of art modes and appropriates to painting whatever images it attracts into its orbit. "No Style" painting is neither dependent upon forms of the past nor indifferent to them. It is transformal.' See n. 38 above for something on Rosenberg's early awareness and use of Zen by 1940.
- 44** Harold Rosenberg, 'The Pathos of the Proletariat', *Kenyon Review*, vol. 11, no. 4 (Autumn 1949), pp. 595–629, reprinted in *Act and Actor*, op. cit., pp. 2–57.
- 45** Harold Rosenberg, 'The Resurrected Romans', *Kenyon Review*, vol. 10, no. 4 (Autumn 1948), pp. 602–20, reprinted in *The Tradition of the New*, op. cit., pp. 154–77.
- 46** Proposed under the title *Marx's Drama of History*, the book was rejected by Alfred A. Knopf (1949), Pantheon Books (1950) and Beacon Press (1951) – see Marie, 'The Most Radical Act', op. cit., pp. 68, 324, ns 166, 171–3. Paul de Man, with whom Rosenberg was acquainted during 1949–51, while de Man was teaching at Bard College, knew of this project, see Marie, 'The Most Radical Act', op. cit., p. 324, n. 176, quoting a letter to Rosenberg from de Man, 5 November 1949: 'This book of yours on Marxism is an event of the first importance and let no publisher tell you otherwise. I mean it.' For something on de Man's acquaintance with Rosenberg (and Mary McCarthy), see the disparaging and misleading essay on de Man's time at Bard by David Lehman, 'Paul de

Man: The Plot Thickens', *New York Times*, 24 May 1992, p. 9, available at <<http://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/24/books/paul-de-man-the-plot-thickens.html>>, accessed 4 September 2013.

- 47 Harold Rosenberg, 'Character Change and the Drama', *The Symposium*, vol. 3, no. 3 (July 1932), pp. 348–69, reprinted in *The Tradition of the New*, op. cit., pp. 135–53, 154–77. This issue of the journal also contained a lengthy review by Jack Burnham of the first volume of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* (1930).
- 48 Born in New York in 1906, Rosenberg attended College of the City of New York (City College) in 1923–4, and then Brooklyn Law School, from which he graduated in 1927 with a degree conferred under St Lawrence University's state charter to educate attorneys. On the partnership between Brooklyn Law School and St Lawrence University at this time, see Lawrence Baron, 'A Menorah in the Wilderness: The Jewish Presence at St Lawrence University. An Address for the Siegel Memorial Lecture at St Lawrence University, October 30, 2006', p. 4, at <<http://www.stlawu.edu/tradition/siegel%20baron.doc>>.
- 49 For a tangential gloss on Rosenberg's point of law, see this from Hilary Mantel's story of the circumstances surrounding the fall of Anne Boleyn, *Bring Up the Bodies* (Fourth Estate: London, 2012), p. 369: 'Gregory [Cromwell] nods. He seems to understand, but perhaps seeming is as far as it goes. When Gregory says, "Are they guilty?" he means, "Did they do it?" But when he [Thomas Cromwell] says, "Are they guilty?" he means, "Did the court find them so?" The lawyer's world is entire unto itself, the human pared away.'
- 50 Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach' (1845) in Marx, *Early Writings* (Penguin Books/New Left Review: Harmondsworth and London, 1975), pp. 420–3 at p. 422.
- 51 Karl Marx, 'Preface', *Capital*, vol. 1 (1867), op. cit., p. 92.
- 52 On the place that the United States of America had in Lenin's thinking, see Laimir, *Lenin on the United States: Selected Writings* (International Publishers: New York, 1970). Trotsky's most extended discussion of the economy – and politics – of US monopoly capitalism is to be found in the introduction to his book *The Living Thoughts of Karl Marx* (Philadelphia, 1939), which was published separately as *Marxism in the United States* (Workers Party Publications: New York, 1947).
- 53 Rosenberg has a note here: 'In comparing the American and the proletariat we are thinking of them, of course, not as categories, where they overlap (since many Americans are wage workers), but as collective entities or types – the first actual, the second hypothetical.'

- ⁵⁴ See, for example, this fragment from Trotsky's 'Europe and America' (1926), here taken from James P. Cannon, 'Trotsky on the United States', *International Socialist Review*, vol. 21, no. 4 (Fall 1960), reprinted in *Leon Trotsky: The Man and His Work* (Merit Publishers: New York, 1969), pp. 87–8: 'We do not at all mean thereby to condemn Americanism, lock, stock, and barrel. We do not mean that we abjure to learn from Americans and Americanisms whatever one can and should learn from them. We lack the technique of the Americans and their labour proficiency ... to have Bolshevism shod in the American way – there is our task!... If we get shod with mathematics, technology, if we Americanise our frail socialist industry, then we can with tenfold confidence say that the future is completely and decisively working in our favour. Americanised Bolshevism will crush and conquer imperialist Americanism.'
- ⁵⁵ Rosenberg has a note here: 'Only "half" figuratively, since becoming Americans has been the actual salvation chosen by millions of workingmen from older nations. With the proletariat there is more to the impulse to become an American than their desire for economic opportunity, flight from oppression, etc. Primarily, it is a will to enter a world where the past no longer dominates, and where therefore that creature of the present, the workingman, can merge himself into the human whole. Thus proletarians immigrate to America in a different spirit from middle-class people or peasants, who from the moment they enter "American time" experience it as something disconcerting or even immoral, and whose nostalgia for their homelands and customs is often communicated from one generation to the next. But America's thin time crust, that seems so desolate to immigrants from other classes, is precisely what satisfies the proletariat and has provided so many workers with the energy to become leaders of industry. Becoming an American is a kind of revolution for foreign proletarians, though it is a magical revolution rather than a revolutionary act. It alters the workingman's consciousness of himself; like a religious conversion it supplies him with a new identity. But this change does not extinguish his previous situation as a character in the capitalist drama; he is still in the realm of economic personifications. As an American, too, a social-economic role will be assigned to him: worker, farmer, capitalist. The elimination of these abstract types continues to call for a transformation of the historical "plot".'
- ⁵⁶ Robert Motherwell (ed.), *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (Wittenborn, Schulz, Inc.: New York, 1951).
- ⁵⁷ 'An Interview with Robert Motherwell', *Artforum*, vol. 4 (September 1965), p. 37 – see Richard Huelsenbeck, 'En Avant Dada' (1920) in Motherwell (ed.), *The Dada Painters and Poets*, op. cit., pp. 22–48.

- ⁵⁸ *Possibilities*, no. 1 (Winter 1947–8), pp. 41–3.
- ⁵⁹ Huelsenbeck, ‘En Avant Dada’, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, op. cit., p. 28.
- ⁶⁰ Robert Goodnough, ‘Pollock Paints a picture’, photographs by Hans Namuth, *ARTnews*, vol. 50, no. 3, May 1951, pp. 38–41, 60–1.
- ⁶¹ See Harold Rosenberg, ‘The Search for Jackson Pollock’, *ARTnews*, vol. 59, no. 10 (February 1961), pp. 59–60, his review of Bryan Robertson’s *Jackson Pollock* (Harry N. Abrams: New York, 1961). Evidently Rosenberg went so far as to tell ‘Pollock, in the presence of a witness’, that ‘The American Action painters’ ‘was not about “him”, even if he had played a part in it.’ See also the letters exchanged between Rosenberg and William Rubin in *Artforum*, April 1967, pp. 6–7 and especially that of May 1967, p. 4, concerning Rubin’s ‘Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition’, *Artforum*, February 1967, pp. 14–22. For some more examples, not involving Rosenberg, see: Barbara Rose, ‘Hans Namuth’s Photographs and the Jackson Pollock Myth: Part One: Media Impact and the Failure of Criticism’, *Arts Magazine*, vol. 53, no. 7 (March 1979), pp. 112–13; Deborah Solomon, *Jackson Pollock: A Biography* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1987), p. 210; Ellen G. Landau, *Jackson Pollock* (Harry N. Abrams: New York, 1989), pp. 85–6; Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (Clarkson N. Potter: New York, 1989), pp. 703–7.
- ⁶² See John Gruen, *The Party’s Over: Reminiscences of the Fifties – New York’s Artists, Writers, Musicians, and their Friends* (Viking Press: New York, 1972), pp. 172–8, at p. 173.
- ⁶³ Thomas B. Hess, for one, thought that this was the case; see Thomas B. Hess, *Barnett Newman* (Tate Gallery: London, 1972), p. 30.
- ⁶⁴ Barnett Newman, interviewed by Emile de Antonio, in Emile de Antonio and Mitch Tuchman, *Painters Painting* (Abbeville Press: New York, 1984), p. 306.
- ⁶⁵ Hess, *Barnett Newman*, op. cit., p. 30.
- ⁶⁶ Stevens, ‘The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words’, op. cit., pp. 10–11.
- ⁶⁷ On the internationalist ‘business-liberal’ and the old-guard, ‘America First’ isolationists as fractions of the US ruling class, see the books of G. William Domhoff, for example, *Who Rules America?* (Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, 1967) and *The Powers That Be: Processes of Ruling Class Domination in America* (Random House: New York, 1978).

In 'Revolution and the Idea of Beauty', *Encounter*, vol. 1, no. 3 (December 1953), pp. 65–8, revised and reprinted as 'Revolution and the Concept of Beauty' in *The Tradition of the New*, op. cit., pp. 74–83, Rosenberg discusses how Alfred H. Barr Jr., Director of Collections at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, responded to Dondero's attacks on Modern Art in his belated 'Is Modern Art Communistic?', *New York Times Magazine*, 14 December 1952, pp. 22–3, 28–30. No doubt Rosenberg would have chuckled when it came out in the *New York Times*, 27 April 1966, that *Encounter* had been funded by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

On the Abstract Expressionists' relation to the struggle between the business-liberals and isolationists, see Fred Orton, 'Footnote One: The Idea of the Cold War', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1991), pp. 3–17.

68 Stevens, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words', op. cit., pp. 21–2.

69 See the note that Rosenberg added in *The Tradition of the New* (McGraw Hill paperback, 1965, and subsequent reprints), pp. 33–4: 'As other art movements of our time have extracted from painting the element of structure or the element of tone and elevated into their essence, Action Painting has extracted the element of decision inherent in all art in that the work is not finished at its beginning but has to be carried forward by an accumulation of "right" gestures. In a word Action Painting is the abstraction of the *moral* element in art; its mark is moral tension in detachment from moral or esthetic certainties; and it judges itself morally in declaring that picture to be worthless which is not the incorporation of a genuine struggle, one which could at any point have been lost.'

70 For an interesting discussion of the indexical and iconical in Abstract Expressionism, see Richard Shiff, 'Performing an Appearance: On the Surface of Abstract Expressionism', in Michael Auping, *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments* (Harry N. Abrams in association with Albright-Knox Art Gallery: New York, 1978), pp. 94–123.

71 See Richard Wollheim's account of Ur-painting in *Painting as an Art* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1987), pp. 19–25, p. 359, n. 9.

72 The significance of 'Dramas Of As If', the inter-title that Rosenberg gave to this section of 'The American Action Painters', has gone unnoticed. The 'as if' at this point in the essay is almost certainly derived from Hans Vaihinger's *Philosophie des Als Ob* (1911), which Rosenberg probably knew in C. K. Ogden's translation, *The Philosophy of 'As If': A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions*

of Mankind (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.: London, 1924). In this section of the essay, Rosenberg is pointing to two dramas of *as if*. First (TN, 28), there is a negative *as if*, which is that of 'The critic who goes on judging [the new painting] in terms of schools, styles, form – as if the painter were still concerned with producing a certain kind of object (a work of art), instead of living on the canvas – is bound to seem a stranger [to the painter and his act of painting]'. Second (TN, 29), there's the positive *as if* that the Action Painter uses for going on, making paintings and realizing himself in the act of making a painting.

- 73** In 'Character Change and the Drama' Rosenberg pointed out that 'The Law is not a recognizer of persons; its judgments are applied at the end of a series of acts' (TN, 136). The judgment is the resolution of these acts (TN, 136). That is why, for example, 'Razkolnikov ... in *Crime and Punishment* sought judgment so that his act would be completed and he could take on a new existence' (TN, 136).
- 74** Marx, *Capital*, quoted by Rosenberg in 'The Pathos of the Proletariat', *Act and the Actor*, op. cit., p. 35.

ERASURE AND JEWISHNESS IN OTTO DIX'S *PORTRAIT OF THE LAWYER* HUGO SIMONS

James A. van Dyke

'What Marxism stands for, broadly speaking, is an emphatically historical, materialist, and totalizing approach to the study of societies – an approach that insists on the importance of material constraints on human activities and the effects of the material embodiments of discursive structures.'

Andrew Hemingway, 'Marxism and Art History after the Fall of Communism'¹

The story of Otto Dix, one of the most prominent artists to work in interwar Germany, is not that of a Marxist, socialist or communist painter, despite the frequently transgressive and sometimes scandalous nature of his work of the 1920s and 1930s, his friendship with left-wing artists and the inclusion of his pictures in their exhibitions and satirical publications between 1919 and 1926, the militant praise of a radicalized Carl Einstein in 1923, and the political affiliations of a number of his students in Dresden between 1927 and 1933. Far more important to him than the thinking of Marxist intellectuals was the vitalist philosophy of Nietzsche, whose books he began to read around 1911 and continued to read at least sporadically throughout the 1920s, with increased intensity once

again in the early 1930s. Among the results of this intellectual disposition - which aligned Dix with a significant element within imperial Germany's dissident middle-class, avant-garde culture - were an affirmative, vitalistic relationship to lived experience and a self-centred conception of artistic practice rooted in the painter's understanding of Nietzsche's ideas of the 'will to power' and the extraordinary, singular '*Übermensch*'. Dix kept his distance from political commitment and the production of the tendentious visual imagery required by the working-class movement, and his career trajectory is marked by a dynamic that one observes in every avant-garde formation in the visual arts: brief, initial moments of group identity and solidarity brought to an end by the establishment of an individual reputation and the pursuit of self-interest within the institutions of the art market and state.² Conversely, the Nietzschean Dix's 'tragic art' of 'sweet cruelty' - grotesque yet exquisite images of sex, violence and the urban margins - not only challenged and repulsed bourgeois art collectors and some modernist art dealers.³ Though they often claimed Dix as one of their own from 1921 until 1926, critics for the KPD's *Die Rote Fahne* were increasingly disappointed by the ambiguity in or development of his

work.⁴ A not unsympathetic critic, writing for the communist newspaper in Dresden in 1928, characterized the painter not as a class-conscious artist, despite being raised in a (relatively affluent) working-class family, but rather merely as a 'rebel'.⁵

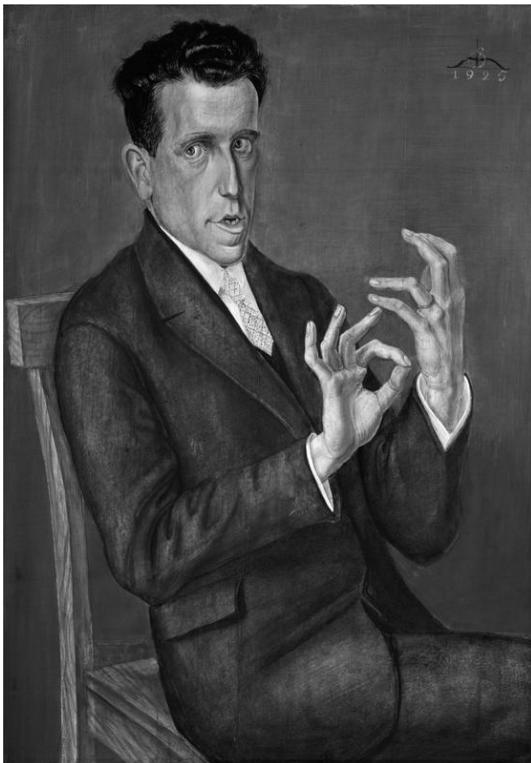
Dix is thus not an artist who fits well into a counter-art history that challenges the hegemonic,

more-or-less modernist canon by testifying to the vitality - or mere survival - of a leftist artistic culture in inhospitable circumstances. An anti-bourgeois social critic and extraordinary provocative painter to be sure, he cannot simply be characterized as an artist on the left, despite his reception by much of the German right since the beginning of his public, professional life in 1919, and despite his professional tribulations in and after 1933. Nonetheless, Dix's work and career, which were the products of political upheaval, socioeconomic crisis and technological modernization, certainly offer plentiful material for a Marxist history of art. His characteristic tendency to depict unpleasant subject matter with exquisite technical refinement produces an aesthetic ambivalence or dissonance - beauty is misshapen, the horrible materialized richly - that might be considered in terms of Adorno's thinking about the critical potential of art's promise of happiness, even if Dix's painting certainly does not take the form of modernist abstraction. Above all, however, Dix's professional ambitions, successful negotiation of the institutions of modern artistic culture, and changing social position beg for a ruthlessly critical account written in the spirit of *The German Ideology*. As is well known, Marx insisted there on the demystification of the ideology of transcendent artistic genius and of the fetishism of art by 'deriving all the functional, aesthetic and representative aspects of visual culture, including art, from the historical conditions of its production and reception'.⁶

The effects of historical conditions in Germany in the 1920s are indeed vividly apparent in Dix's work. For instance, the young, increasingly well-known,

yet still precariously situated avant-garde painter's production of prints and works on paper rose explosively during the years of accelerated inflation and hyperinflation after the First World War. Much as in earlier centuries, Dix made prints of many of his major Dadaist paintings in order to maximize the money he could make from them. He also quickly and inexpensively churned out hundreds of wilfully and exquisitely trashy, more often than not frankly erotic 'wares' in watercolour and gouache that were easy for his dealer, Karl Nierendorf, to present - whether in his gallery or out of a suitcase - to prospective buyers looking to find affordable yet potentially profitable investments for their rapidly depreciating currency.⁷ This mode of artistic production came to a quick end, however, with the end of the inflation and the establishment of a new, reformed currency in early 1924, which by all accounts exacerbated the already destabilized, depressed market for contemporary art of late 1923. The *War* portfolio was one of the last efforts along these lines, made not only to challenge affirmative commemorations of the tenth anniversary of the war's beginning but also to capitalize on the controversy prompted by the public display of his monumental painting *Trench* in Cologne and Berlin in 1923–4, which cemented Dix's celebrity as a scandalously critical rather than merely obscene artist with a national profile. Upon his appointment to the state art academy in Dresden in late 1926, Dix shifted gears. The newly established, salaried professor withdrew as far as possible from the art market, immediately ending the exclusive contractual relationship with Nierendorf into which he had only reluctantly entered shortly before. At the same time, he

focused increasingly on unusually large, time- and labour-intensive, virtually unmarketable paintings that reprised his defining avant-garde themes by using formats, techniques and motifs derived from the canonical Old Masters. In 1925, the painter Heinrich Campendonk had written to Paul Klee that artists such as themselves could survive professionally only if they obtained a salaried position.⁸ This may have been somewhat exaggerated, but Dix's programmatic works of the years 1927 to 1933 are not only major statements of critical visual thinking, but also the material traces of an extraordinary degree of security, freedom and privilege at a time when economic uncertainty, technological modernization and social transformation presented severe challenges for artists working in traditional media.

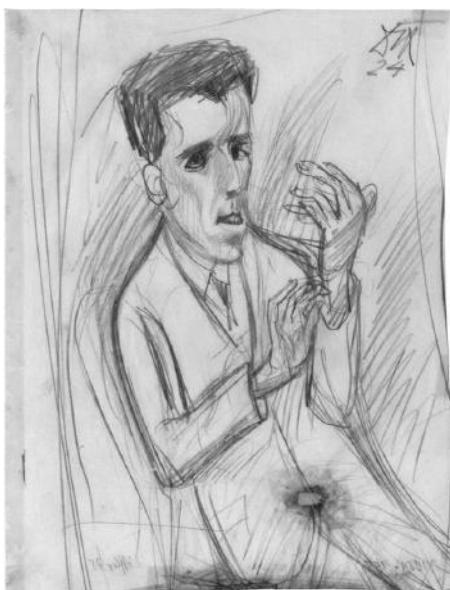


1 Otto Dix, *Portrait of the Lawyer Hugo Simons*, 1925, tempera and oil on wood, 100.3 × 70.3 cm.
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts,
purchase, grant from the
Government of Canada under the
terms of the Cultural Property
Export and Import Act, gifts of the
Succession J. A. DeSève, Mr and
Mrs Charles and Andrea Bronfman,
Mr Nahum Gelber and Dr Sheila
Gelber, Mrs Phyllis Lambert, the
Volunteer Association and the

Junior Associates of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Mrs Louise L. Lamarre, Mr Pierre Théberge, the Museum's acquisition fund, and the Horsley and Annie Townsend Bequest. Photo: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Brian Merrett.
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Dix's *Portrait of the Lawyer Hugo Simons* [1], which the painter completed in 1925, is neither as shockingly garish as the works on paper of the hyperinflationary years nor as ambitiously authoritative as the complex, self-conscious triptychs of the last years of the Weimar Republic. Although it was included in the important one-man retrospective exhibition that Nierendorf staged in his Berlin gallery in 1926, this picture was reproduced only once at that time and is still not as well known now as Dix's most flamboyant, iconic portraits of the mid-1920s, such as those of the journalist Sylvia von Harden, of the art dealer Alfred Flechtheim [11], or the dancer Anita Berber. Nonetheless, Dix's rendering of Simons, a lawyer with whom the painter did business in Düsseldorf, has a significant role to play in a study that critically reexamines the painter's work by taking the things he made seriously not only iconographically but also materially. It attests to the need for scholars to register hitherto overlooked patterns and procedures, details and marks in Dix's work – double-sided pictures, incised lines, carefully positioned signatures and the like – and then to show them to be indices of the causal,

determinative social forces, ideological discourses and professional institutions that shaped the artist's thoughts, decisions and deeds. To look at Dix's pictures so closely and at such length is not to make claims about the politics of intense, immersive aesthetic reflection as a practice of resistance, though there may be much death to see in them. My approach is rooted instead in the original, core concerns of the social history of art founded on Marxist thought, namely the way in which art objects materialize ideology, how they are produced and function socially.



2 Otto Dix, *Dr Simons in Half-Figure*, 1924, graphite on tracing paper, 30 × 23 cm.
Kupferstichkabinett,

Staatliche Kunstsammlungen
Dresden. Photo: Herbert
Boswank. Copyright © 2013
Artist Rights Society (ARS),
New York / VG Bild-Kunst,
Bonn.

My argument begins with three drawings that Dix made as he prepared to paint the portrait of Simons. Two are bust-length portrait studies in which the painter worked up to varying degrees of finish his understanding of Simons' facial features.⁹ The third is a small compositional sketch in pencil on thin tracing paper, now in the collection of the Kupferstichkabinett in Dresden [2]. This drawing establishes the general disposition of the figure in the painting and indicates the portrait's most distinctive features in a preliminary way, but several significant differences are visible. For instance, Dix exaggerated Simons' features even more than he subsequently did in the painting, making the lawyer's eyes seem particularly dark and even crossed, accentuating the curve of his forehead and the hook of his nose, emphasizing an underbite, and drawing attention to the lawyer's facial musculature. Most notable, however, is the lower part of Simons' slight torso, which slopes on a chair rather than sitting erectly. Where the figure's groin should be, the viewer sees a dark blotch of graphite surrounded by traces of erasure. The dark area is pierced by a hole. The smudge, erasure and damage, taken together, constitute an act of simultaneous demarcation and obliteration.

This feature is not mentioned in the sole scholarly commentary on the drawing, presumably because it was seen as nothing more than a meaningless index

either of the artist's working process on the delicate support or of some random event.¹⁰ Yet the concentration of different kind of marks and the real damage to the paper at this particular point in the depiction of a man's body does not seem coincidental, or insignificant. It suggests instead either that the painter had something in mind or that he had some kind of trouble there, to the point that he tore or wore through the paper. In either case, the treatment of the paper, though apparently unique in the corpus of Dix's drawings, certainly can be seen as part of a larger pattern in his work. Several of his pictures of 1920 in particular went beyond the incorporation of paper collage elements characteristic of ironic or sociocritical Dadaist narrative, suggesting a pronounced understanding of the support as a potentially meaningful, manipulable element in its own right rather than as a merely neutral surface for the picture made upon it. *The Matchseller I*, for instance, is a large picture assembled out of numerous small pieces of fabric, which is not unsurprising given that Dix was a young, not-yet-established artist working at a time of relative material scarcity. However, the visibility of the seams of the cloth fragments, and the use of especially rough materials within the contours of the amputee's body suggest that the painter proposed an analogy between the nature of the picture as object and the maimed body and impoverished circumstances that the painter depicted. The *Altar for Cavaliers* used doors to reveal things that were generally hidden behind decorous surfaces: the bodies of prostitutes in a brothel, the ignoble thoughts of a gentleman, or the abject corporeal reality of an aging yet fashionably attired woman. Most appositely, in *The Barricade*

Dix is reported to have represented a bullet wound in the body of the dead rebel at lower left quite literally, by punching a hole through the canvas.¹¹ Moreover, the association of Dix's transgressive work with violent impulses and actions was by no means uncommon in the early 1920s.¹²

If it is thus plausible to conclude that the hole in this drawing was not simply the result of an accident or chance occurrence, but rather the product of an intentional and meaningful gesture, then it becomes necessary to ask what Dix meant to communicate. The answer that seems most likely, given the sitter's identity, is that the painter sought to point out Simons' Jewishness. It may well be overambitious to associate Dix's pronounced rendering of Simons' facial features with the ideas of late-nineteenth-century anthropologists who claimed that the differences between Gentile speech and Jewish speech - the latter was called '*mauscheln*' - were caused by anatomical differences in the nose and chin, as well as by differences in the use of muscles for laughing and speaking.¹³ However, there can be no doubt, if one believes that the hole was made or left to make a point, that the damage done to the lower part of the drawing functions as a quite literal sign of the ritual of male circumcision which, as Sander Gilman has noted, was considered to be the most unequivocal sign of Jewish difference and pathology in much late-nineteenth-century medical discourse and popular imagery, marking the male Jew even when he was otherwise entirely assimilated and indistinguishable from Gentile contemporaries.¹⁴



Joseph und die Potiphar
Radierung von Meisek. 1913
(Verlag J. Gurlitt, Berlin)

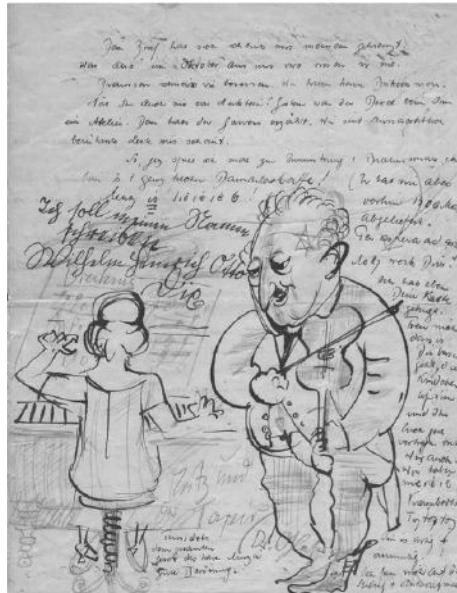
Bild: © Eduard Fuchs, „Die Juden in der Karikatur“

Allert Langen, München

3 Felix Meseck, *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife*, 1913, etching, as reproduced in Eduard Fuchs, *Die Juden in der Karikatur* (Langen: Munich, 1921). Photo: Visual Resource Center, Department of Art History & Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia.

Given the visceral, and often intensely sexual nature of Dix's work, his preoccupation with masculinity, and the ghoulish fascination with dismemberment and disembowelment suggested by his harrowing depictions of sex murder between 1920 and 1922, it seems tenable to speculate that this aspect of

Jewish masculinity would have been of interest to him. It certainly had been of great importance in European discourse about Jews and Jewishness. Along with the kosher slaughtering of animals, circumcision had been a point of considerable concern in Germany since the early nineteenth century (as it remains to this day).¹⁵ Furthermore, the circumcised penis, conceived as a damaged or incomplete organ, had often been linked to weakness and disease, and at the same time contributed to the assertion of the femininity of Jewish masculinity in both popular and intellectual, scientific discourse. The clitoris was called the 'Jew' in vulgar Viennese slang, Gilman reports, and to masturbate was 'to play with the Jew'. Carl Jung believed Jewish men were effeminate. Otto Weininger equated the Jew and Woman. In a footnote added to his essay on Leonardo in 1919, as violence against Jews spread and intensified throughout central Europe, Freud asserted that one of the roots of aggressive anti-Semitism was the unconscious equation of circumcision with castration.¹⁶ It was perhaps this equation, and its implication that Jewish men were emasculated, that Dix may have meant to imply in his drawing of Simons, just as it was suggested in Felix Meseck's etching of Joseph and Potiphar's wife of 1913, which was reproduced in 1921 in Eduard Fuchs's book on the Jews in caricature [3]. That image gives no indication that Joseph possesses male genitals, while making him seem slight and passive in comparison to the voluptuous figure of the woman who aggressively tries to seduce him despite his defensive hand gesture.



4 Otto Dix, *Dr Fritz Glaser and Martha Dix playing music*, c. 1922, graphite and ink. Otto Dix Stiftung, Vaduz. Photo: courtesy of Otto Dix Stiftung, Vaduz. Copyright © 2013 Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

In the painted portrait of Simons, however, Dix reduced the hook of the sitter's nose and the degree of his underbite, and widened his upper torso to bring his body and head into a less caricaturesque proportion. If we assume that he had made the hole in the drawing before he completed the painting, then he also effaced the eye-catching obliteration of the lawyer's pubic area, though the shadow in the

opening of the lawyer's jacket is quite dark as it crosses the contour of his thigh. In a word, he erased the most pronounced signs of Simons' Jewishness, just as he did when painting another Jewish man who had supported his work, the Dresden lawyer and art collector Fritz Glaser. In a private drawing of c. 1922, included in a letter, Dix made Glaser's ethnicity unmistakably clear not only by caricaturing his features but also by inscribing a tattoo-like Star of David on his temple [4]. But in a painting of 1921, the

physiognomic and iconographic signs of his Jewishness - the placement of Glaser's figure is usually thought to be a reference to the homeless, wandering Jew - were integrated relatively subtly into the portrait, masked by the picture's verisimilitude [5].¹⁷ A second portrait, completed in 1925 despite Glaser's reported dislike of the first, possibly referred to the process of Jewish assimilation into German society, showing the lawyer with his fair-haired and blue-eyed, Gentile wife and their children [6]. Like the Star of David in the drawing of Glaser, the hole in the drawing of Simons seems to have remained nothing more than a private, ribald ethnic joke, a typical, perhaps symptomatic product of and contribution to Dix's usual process of self-definition as a potent German artist and man by negation. Art for him was always an expression of ego, vitality and sexual energy, and he defined himself in the 1920s by contrasting his own virility, impenetrability and mastery with the inadequacy of other men: traumatized soldiers, artists with congenital conditions, and perhaps emasculated Jewish professionals. The act of obliteration incorporated into this drawing thus appears to have been part of the incessant,

vehement, even desperate performance of an anxious subject, a man eager to assert himself against occasional doubts about his work's quality, physical ailments and tortuous sexual impulses.¹⁸



5 Otto Dix, *Portrait of the Lawyer Dr Fritz Glaser*, 1921, oil on canvas, 105.9 × 78.75 cm. Private collection. Copyright © 2013 Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.



6 Otto Dix, *The Lawyer Dr Fritz Glaser and his Family*, 1925,
tempera and oil on fibreboard, 100
× 79 cm. Galerie Neue Meister,
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen
Dresden. Photo: Jürgen Karpinski,
Dresden. Copyright © 2013 Artist
Rights Society (ARS), New York /
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

★★★★★

Even without the hole, Simons' body remained the most important sign in the final, painted state of the portrait. The lawyer's attire and haircut, the wedding ring visible on his left hand, and the simple

wooden chair upon which he sits casually all reveal something about the man's class and character; he is represented as a respectable middle-class professional of some kind - no specific attributes are visible - with no trace of ostentatiousness, excess or decadence. However, all of these motifs are

overshadowed by the elaborate yet ambiguous gesture of his hands, which immediately attracts the viewer's attention and has been the focus of most interpretive commentary. Several recent writers have proposed that the gesture, in the absence of other attributes, refers to the sitter's profession. It may do so with straightforward naturalism, if Dix is deemed to have captured Simons in the midst of his work, 'emphasizing a point of law'.¹⁹ The position of the hands may be emblematic, resembling the *Dharmachakra-mudra*, that is, the Buddhist symbol for an enlightened person and teacher who 'turns the wheel of the law'. Dix apparently owned several books on Buddhist art that had been published in the years before he painted this picture.²⁰



7 Albrecht Dürer, *Circumcision of Christ*, 1503-5, woodcut, 29.3 × 20.9 cm, British Museum, London.
Photo: courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

However speculative, even surprising these interpretative ideas are, they either fit the situation well enough or can be supported with sufficient circumstantial evidence to seem plausible. Yet it is nonetheless unlikely that Dix's picture was simply descriptive

- his portraits never were - or that his primary iconographic resource for the hands would have

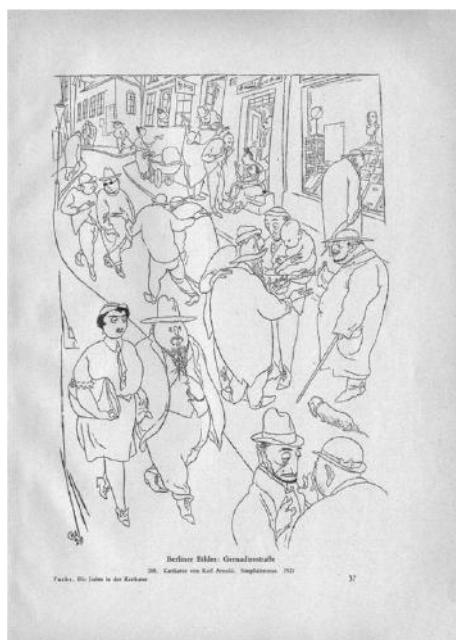
been Far Eastern art. The most important materials for his characteristic historicism were found much closer to home. Dix painted this portrait as he was responding to postwar cultural trends and economic conditions by fashioning a new professional image for himself as an artist deeply informed by the values of the canonical German tradition in painting and committed to its development in a contemporary idiom. Hence, one suspects that models for the hand gestures in the portrait of Simons might be found there, and even a quick survey of the work of Albrecht Dürer, the most popular, revered Old Master of them all in Weimar Germany, reveals at least three possibilities. Several of Dürer's early studies of hands show elegantly curved index fingers touching the thumb, and the same gesture appears near the centre of the woodcut of the circumcision of Christ [7]. An intricate arrangement of hands also occupies the centre of Dürer's remarkable and distinctive depiction of the dispute between the twelve-year-old Christ and the scholarly doctors in the Temple [8].²¹



8 Albrecht Dürer, *Jesus Among the Doctors*, 1506,
oil on panel, 64.3 × 80.3 cm. Museo
Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, Spain. Photo: Museo
Thyssen-Bornemisza / Scala / Art Resource, NY.

The position of the hands thus seems potentially to have connoted several things, beyond Dix's own sense of his place in German art history. The elegant gesture of the right hand must have signified in terms not only of the sitter's profession but also of his class, communicating the noble refinement of saintly women and wealthy men holding fragile and precious objects. It was also associated with the finely honed skills needed for delicate, precise work, the kind performed in the Jewish community by a *mohel*, for instance. At the same time, the hands may have also signified ethnically or racially. The virtual hole produced by

the circle of index finger and thumb over the contour of an arm and in vertical alignment with the groin, a detail that was not yet apparent in the compositional sketch, could have referred to what Dix had done to that drawing in order to indicate the Jewishness of Simons' body; the development of the hand gesture in the final state of the portrait could have led some viewers to recall Dürer's depiction of Christ's circumcision. As speculative as that is, there can be no doubt about the similarities that exist between Dix's portrait and Dürer's painting of the Disputation. The position of Simons' fingers and the interplay of his hands evoke those visible in the earlier painting by the German Old Master, though they are not simply copies. Above all, in both pictures Jewish men argue with their hands.²²



9 Karl Arnold, 'Berliner Bilder: Grenadierstrasse', in *Simplicissimus*, 1921, here as reproduced in Eduard Fuchs, *Die Juden in der Karikatur* (Langen: Munich, 1921). Photo: Visual Resource Center, Department of Art History & Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia. Copyright © 2013 Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.



10 Werner Hahmann, 'Weihnachten bei Familie "Schieber" oder Die geschenkte Kindereisenbahn', in *Kladderadatsch*, vol. 72, no. 50 (14 December 1919), here as reproduced in Eduard Fuchs, *Die Juden in der Karikatur* (Langen: Munich, 1921). Photo: Visual Resource Center, Department of Art History & Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia.

Dürer's painting is an early example of a trope that became widespread in discourse about Jews in twentieth-century Germany (and elsewhere), namely that they - no matter how thoroughly assimilated in other respects - engaged in pronounced gesticulation while talking or arguing. References to this trait appear in a wide variety of

written sources, ranging from anecdotes about men such as the modernist composer Gustav Mahler, who sought to suppress such ostensibly telltale signs, to dissertations in anthropology on Jewish body language and pseudo-scientific treatises on Jewish racial characteristics.²³ Moreover, the association of Jews with expressive hand movements was also common in German artistic discourse and visual culture during the Weimar Republic. For instance, a number of commentators during the early years of the Weimar Republic saw in the dramatic gestures of the figures drawn and painted by Ludwig Meidner and Jakob Steinhardt a crucial component of a specifically Jewish kind of expressionism. In 1919, one critic praised the 'fervent gesture' and 'ecstatic movements' in Steinhardt's depictions of Eastern Jews; and in 1924, a second, writing about contemporary Jewish art in general, stated that 'gesture is pure expression'.²⁴

Related ideas took less exalted form in the illustrated satirical press in the early 1920s, as a powerful wave of anti-Semitic agitation, pogroms, assassinations and policy was sweeping across Germany.²⁵ In 1921, for example, the liberal *Simplicissimus* published the depiction of a street in the central Berlin neighbourhood where unassimilated Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe had congregated particularly densely since 1914. The artist, the well-known illustrator and caricaturist Karl Arnold, drew a lively scene filled with Jewish men and women talking excitedly with their hands [9]. Another drawing, published two years earlier in the nationalist *Kladderadatsch*, shows a Jewish black-marketeer - one of the dubious occupations closely associated with the

popular image of the immoral, greedy, materialistic Jew – with stereotypically soft facial features, a fur collar and oval wire-rimmed glasses, and hands [10].²⁶ Those were the attributes that made the figure potentially legible to a German reader, even when the putatively fundamental truth of the emasculated male Jewish body was hidden discreetly from view.



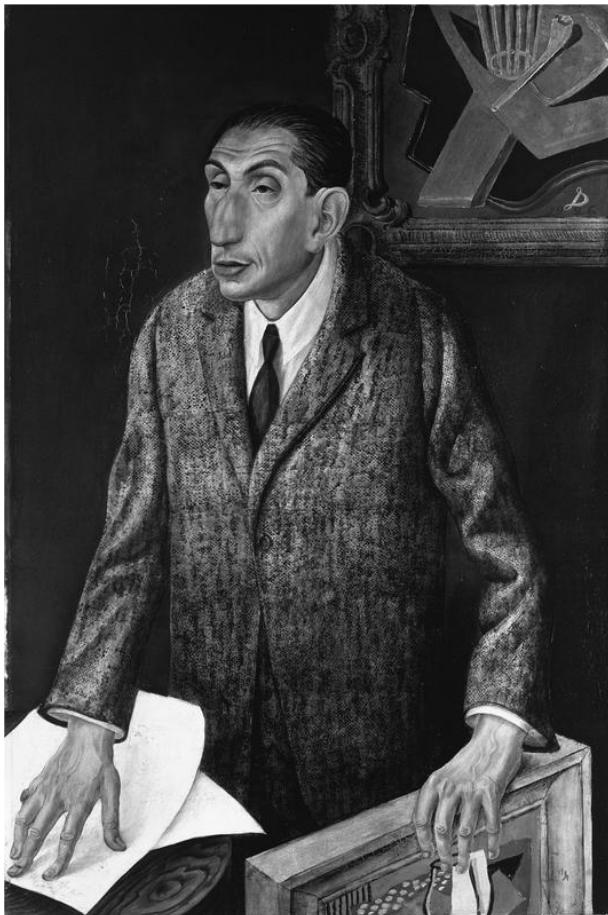
Dix's portrait of Simons is a 'material embodiment of a discursive structure', namely that of the Jew in German society. Though it shares certain elements with anti-Semitic discourse and visual culture, this should not be taken to mean that a revisionist history of Dix's career ought to construe strong, direct links between the modernist painter and the right-wing politics that were most closely aligned with anti-Semitism in interwar Germany.²⁷ Reality was clearly far more complicated than that in this case. At times of heightened anti-Semitic agitation, violence and state policy, Dix painted pictures that either unequivocally ridiculed the adherents of virulent anti-Semitic ideology in the present or reflected critically on the historical consequences of the marginalization of the Jewish community: *Altar for Cavaliers* (1920), *Prager Strasse* (1920) and *Jewish Cemetery in Randegg in the Winter* (1935).²⁸ He also took note of Nietzsche's denunciation of the racist, nationalist philistinism of Wilhelmine society.²⁹ Yet a number of letters written and portraits rendered between the years 1921 and 1926 support the view that Dix's thought was nonetheless structured by ethnic and racial stereotypes, as one might expect in a painter whose work communicated by using the conventions of

physiognomy and caricature. He harshly described the emancipated women and ‘soft’ Jewish ‘peenters [*Möler*]’ whom he encountered at a ‘Sturm Ball’ hosted by Herwarth Walden in Berlin in 1923, then dismissed them as a ‘horrible society. Decadent to the bone.’³⁰ In 1922 and 1924, he sought to fix the identity of Jewish men such as Glaser and Simons in the drawings reproduced earlier in this essay, and was shocked in 1926 when a client in Erfurt, who could pass as an ‘evangelical pastor’, turned out to be a Zionist Jew. The man’s blonde hair, blue eyes and lack of a ‘proper’ Jewish nose, the caricature of which Dix drew into the letter, had reportedly been the cause of awkward social encounters.³¹ Finally, Dix painted his portrait of the influential Jewish art dealer Alfred Flechtheim in 1926 [11], which requires a few words.

On at least two occasions between 1923 and 1926, Dix met or tried to meet with Flechtheim.³² At the same time, he was often unsatisfied or angry with Nierendorf, whose diaries and ledgers show him to have been a dedicated but chaotic businessman.³³ He would have known that his friend George Grosz, alienated from communist politics, had been represented by the francophile, modernist dealer since 1923. It is possible that Dix painted the picture in order to ingratiate himself with Flechtheim by adding him to a contemporary pantheon of German cultural celebrities; on one occasion he noted to his wife that the picture was turning out well, though he did not say by what standards.³⁴ On the other hand, Flechtheim had been involved in a bitter polemic with the artists of the *Junges Rheinland* in 1921, the avant-garde circle with which Dix was involved during his years in Düsseldorf.³⁵ Moreover, between October 1922

and December 1924 Nierendorf repeatedly – and no doubt self-interestedly alleged that his competitor was openly, crudely dismissing the painter’s work in Düsseldorf and Berlin, and so the common interpretation of the portrait as a bitter retort seems plausible.³⁶ If the picture was meant as an unsympathetic rendering of a prominent antagonist, then its punchline is found not so much in Dix’s depiction of Flechtheim’s facial features, which was nothing unusual among portraits of the dealer made in the 1920s, but rather more in his extended right hand.³⁷ This gesture, which has usually been associated with the image of a grasping, greedy ‘Shylock’, might also tie Flechtheim to the widespread associations of Jews with excessive sexuality and crime. The motif – of the dealer’s foppishly bejewelled fingers pressed to the chastely classicizing female nudes evocative of some of Picasso’s recent work – recalls Renoir’s portrait of Ambroise Vollard holding the figurine of a woman; but it is at the same time a gesture that comes uncomfortably close to echoing the accusation, frequently voiced on the extreme right, that urbane, rich, degenerate Jewish predators threatened the nation with their taste for and defilement of young, pure, innocent Gentile (or Aryan) women.³⁸ Furthermore, in so far as Flechtheim might screen the drawings from the view of an interlocutor who can be imagined to be facing him off to the left, the position of the dealer’s right hand evokes the common association of Jews with the illicit production and distribution of pornography, as well as with other parts of the sex industry.³⁹ It is thus perhaps not coincidental that Dix painted this uncommissioned portrait the same year as the campaign by conservative morality associations

against ‘trash and dirt’ (*Schund und Schmutz*), which at least occasionally resorted to anti-Semitic assertions and culminated in the passage of a censorious law.⁴⁰



11 Otto Dix, *Portrait of the Art Dealer Alfred Flechtheim*, 1926, oil on canvas, 120 × 80 cm. INV. NG 46/61 Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preußischer

Kulturbesitz, Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin. Photo: bpk, Berlin / Neue Nationalgalerie / Joerg P. Anders / Art Resource, NY. Copyright © 2013 Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

In any case, Dix's relationship to Simons developed into something clearly much more cordial and remunerative. The earliest evidence of contact between the two men dates from October 1924.⁴¹ Their ties were quite close by October 1926, when the lawyer won a civil lawsuit on Dix's behalf, which the painter had brought against a dissatisfied client who had refused to pay for a portrait of his daughter on grounds of insufficient resemblance. In one letter, Dix even referred approvingly to one of the lawyer's jokes about the defendant and his daughter.⁴² In late 1926, Dix employed Simons once again when he threatened legal action against Jankel Adler, the painter's former peer in the Düsseldorf avant-garde, over a minor business matter.⁴³ For about one year, Simons also emerged as one of Dix's strongest patrons and promoters. Aside from his own portrait and a family portrait that was never painted, Simons was involved in the commission of two portraits of close relatives in 1926.⁴⁴ Furthermore, he sought to facilitate contacts between his professional and social circles and the painter. One letter, written by Dix in late 1925 as he was varnishing Simons' portrait, suggests that the portrait of the industrialist Dr Julius Hesse (1926) was a result of this effort.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, recent assertions that the portrait of Simons expressed Dix's warmth and respect for the lawyer after the aforementioned lawsuit had been

won or was made in payment for services rendered appear to be mistaken, as it was completed ten months before the decision.⁴⁶

On the basis of available evidence, the portrait of Simons thus cannot simply be characterized as a token of admiration and friendship. It must instead be regarded, at least to a significant degree, as a representative product of the material constraints faced by its maker. The years between 1924 and 1929 are generally regarded as a period of relative calm and affluence between the crises at the Weimar Republic's outset and end. However, the currency reform of 1924 that ended the hyperinflation of 1923 appears, according to Nierendorf's correspondence with Dix, to have done nothing immediately to ameliorate the collapse of the German market for contemporary art that had begun in late 1923, especially when the art was as challenging as Dix's often was. Buyers, who had been relatively plentiful as they sought good investments for their money during the inflation, grew scarce. Dealers responded with desperation or resignation, and even Flechtheim hinted that he might close up shop in Berlin.⁴⁷ 'Today', Nierendorf wrote in March 1924, 'one can only do business through personal connections.'⁴⁸ Under such circumstances, the solicitation of portrait commissions and the cultivation of clients became an increasingly important part of Dix's professional practice, as the focus on the genre - including the portrait of Simons - of his mid-career retrospective at Nierendorf's gallery in Berlin in 1926 attests.⁴⁹ In the drawing of Simons now in Dresden, Dix gave typically aggressive visual form to his preoccupations with sexuality, gender and ethnic or racial identity. In the painting, however, he avoided

the most pronounced sign of the otherness of Jewish masculinity in order to produce a visually striking yet decorously restrained, even deferential portrait of a potentially unusually valuable client, one who was prepared to mobilize his social connections for the artist. Having made a misstep with Fritz Glaser a few years earlier, it seems likely that Dix would have wanted to take no chances in the difficult economic circumstances of 1925, and produced a picture that would give the sitter no reason to be unhappy. (That Simons decided to take the picture into exile, and then resumed the correspondence after 1945, indicates his success.) Seen this way, the portrait of the lawyer Hugo Simons is an appealing image that incorporates an erasure, an act of repressive sublimation in the interest of economic rationality.

- 1 Andrew Hemingway, 'Marxism and Art History after the Fall of Communism', *Art Journal*, vol. 55, no. 2 (1996), p. 20.
- 2 Thomas Crow, 'Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts', in *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1996), pp. 3–37.
- 3 For this characterization of Dix's Nietzschean art, see James A. van Dyke, 'Otto Dix's Philosophical Metropolis', in Olaf Peters (ed.), *Otto Dix*, exh. cat., Neue Galerie, New York (Prestel: Munich, 2010), pp. 179–97, esp. p. 184. On the repulsiveness of Dix's painting to certain groups and individuals, such as the Munich art dealer Hans Goltz, see Nierendorf to Dix, n.d., Nachlass Dix, I, C-524a; Nierendorf to Dix, n.d. (c. 1924), Nachlass Dix, I, C-524f; Nierendorf to Dix, n.d. (c. September 1924), Nachlass Dix, I, C-524f; Nierendorf to Dix, 10 April 1925, Nachlass Dix, I, C-524g; Nierendorf to Dix, 10 June 1925, Nachlass Dix, I, C-524g, Deutsches Künstlerarchiv, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg (hereafter cited as NL Dix, DKA, GNM); Andreas Strobl, *Otto Dix: Eine Malerkarriere der zwanziger Jahre* (Reimer: Berlin, 1996), pp. 50–4. Flechtheim's well-known aversion to Dix's painting is mentioned below.
- 4 Strobl, *Otto Dix*, op. cit., p. 137. On the critique of mass culture by Social Democratic intellectuals and critics, see Geoff Eley, 'Cultural Socialism,

the Public Sphere, and the Mass Form: Popular Culture and the Democratic Project, 1900 to 1934', in David E. Barclay and Eric D. Weitz (eds.), *Between Reform and Revolution: German Socialism and Communism from 1840 to 1990* (Berghahn: New York, 1998), pp. 315, 333–4.

⁵ di., 'Otto-Dix-Ausstellung', *Arbeiterstimme* (Dresden), no. 230 (1 October 1928).

⁶ Otto Karl Werckmeister, 'Radikale Kunstgeschichte 2006', in Jens Schröter, Gregor Schwering and Urs Stäheli (eds.), *Media Marx: Ein Handbuch* (transcript: Bielefeld, 2006), p. 108 (my translation).

⁷ See Suse Pfäffle, *Otto Dix: Werkverzeichnis der Aquarelle und Gouachen* (Hatje: Stuttgart, 1991). On the designation of Dix's work as 'wares', see Nierendorf to Dix, 19 July 1923, NL Dix, I, C-524c, DKA, GNM.

⁸ Heinrich Campendonk to Paul Klee, 27 November 1925, Stiftung Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

⁹ The earlier, smaller and sketchier of the two is in the collection of the Kupferstichkabinett in Dresden; the later, larger and more polished drawing, which closely corresponds to the painted portrait, is in a private collection. The drawings are reproduced in Hans-Ulrich Lehmann, *Otto Dix: Die Zeichnungen im Dresdner Kupferstich-Kabinett: Katalog des Bestandes* (Kupferstich-Kabinett der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen: Dresden, 1991), pp. 104–5, and Olaf Peters (ed.), *Otto Dix*, op. cit., p. 216.

¹⁰ Lehmann, *Die Zeichnungen*, op. cit., p. 106.

¹¹ *Der Streichholzhändler I*, 1920, oil and collage on canvas, 144 × 166 cm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart; *Altar für Cavaliere*, 1920, oil and montage on wood, dimensions unknown, private collection, Berlin; *Die Barrikade*, 1920, oil and collage on canvas, dimensions unknown, lost. On the hole in *Barricade*, see Paul Fechter, 'Die nachexpressionistische Situation', *Das Kunstblatt* 7, no. 11 (1923), p. 324.

¹² See, for instance, Hugo Zehder, 'Otto Dix', *Neue Blätter für Kunst und Dichtung*, no. 6 (1919) and Ilse Fischer, 'Der Dadaist (Otto Dix)', *Das Junge Rheinland*, no. 9/10 (1922), both reprinted in Ulrike Lorenz (ed.), *Otto Dix: Welt & Sinnlichkeit*, exh. cat., Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie Regensburg (Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie: Regensburg, 2005), pp. 45, 52–3.

- ¹³ Sander L. Gilman, *Freud, Race, and Gender* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1993), p. 13.
- ¹⁴ Gilman, *Freud, Race, and Gender*, op. cit., p. 51.
- ¹⁵ Robin Judd, *Contested Rituals: Circumcision, Kosher Butchering, and Jewish Political Life in Germany, 1843–1933* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 2007).
- ¹⁶ Gilman, *Freud, Race, and Gender*, op. cit., pp. 31–42, 49–83.
- ¹⁷ See Sabine Rewald, *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s*, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2006), pp. 104–9, 162–4.
- ¹⁸ References to self-doubt, stomach ailments and insomnia are found in Dix's letters to his wife, Martha. See, for instance, Dix to Martha Dix, 3 July 1926, Otto-Dix-Archiv, Bevaix, Switzerland (hereafter cited as ODA). In 1926, Max Scheler reported that Dix 'suffered unspeakably' from his sexual impulses. Quoted in Rainer Beck, *Otto Dix: Die kosmischen Bilder. Zwischen Sehnsucht und Schwangerem Weib* (Verlag der Kunst: Dresden, 2003), p. 182.
- ¹⁹ Anne Grace, 'Portrait of the Lawyer Hugo Simons', in Olaf Peters (ed.), *Otto Dix*, op. cit., p. 217.
- ²⁰ Darlene Cousins, 'Otto Dix's Portrait of the Lawyer Hugo Simons: German Art for a Canadian Museum', unpublished MA thesis (Concordia University, 2002), pp. 26–7.
- ²¹ I would like to thank Alison Wright, of the Department of History of Art at University College London, for drawing this painting to my attention.
- ²² It may even be the case that Simons is shown signing, using his fingers to shape Hebrew letters phonetically related to his name: Shin, Samech or Mem. This idea was suggested to me by a member of the audience during the discussion of my presentation of this material at the invitation of the Department of History of Art, University College London, in September 2012.
- ²³ See Hans F. K. Günther, *Rassenkunde des jüdischen Volkes, zweite, unveränderte Auflage* (J. F. Lehmann Verlag: Munich, 1931), pp. 248–53; David Efron, *Gesture and Environment: A Tentative Study of Some of the Spatio-Temporal and 'Linguistic' Aspects of the Gestural Behavior of Eastern Jews and Southern Italians in New York City, Living under Similar as well as Different Environmental Conditions* (King's Crown Press: New York, 1941); and Sander L. Gilman, 'Straus, the Pervert, and Avant-Garde Opera of the Fin de Siecle', *New German*

Critique, no. 43 (Winter 1988), pp. 35–68, esp. p. 66. For further discussions in the primary and secondary literature, see H. B. Wells, ‘Notes on Yiddish’, *American Speech*, vol. 4, no. 1 (October 1928), pp. 58–66; Frank Thone, ‘Do You Talk with Your Hands?’ *Science News-Letter*, vol. 30, no. 804 (5 September 1936), pp. 154–6; and Leonid Livak, *The Jewish Persona in the European Imagination: A Case of Russian Literature* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2010), p. 99.

- ²⁴ MaryCelka K. Straughn, ‘Jewish Expressionism: The Making of Modern Jewish Art in Berlin’, unpublished PhD thesis (University of Chicago, 2007), pp. 268–70, 284.
- ²⁵ Donald Niewyk, *The Jews in Weimar Germany* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1980); Trude Maurer, *Ostjuden in Deutschland 1918–1933* (Hans Christians Verlag: Hamburg, 1986); and Cornelia Hecht, *Deutsche Juden und Antisemitismus in der Weimarer Republik* (Dietz: Bonn, 2003).
- ²⁶ Steven E. Aschheim, “The Jew Within”: The Myth of “Judaization” in Germany’, in *Culture and Catastrophe: German and Jewish Confrontations with National Socialism and Other Crises* (New York University Press: New York, 1996), pp. 45–68; and Bernd Widdig, *Culture and Inflation in Weimar Germany* (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2001), pp. 9, 75, 86–7, 225.
- ²⁷ For an overview of this material that registers the appearance of anti-Semitic stereotypes in the work of Dix and Grosz, ties it to the tendency of the left to amalgamate anti-capitalism with the figure of the Jewish ‘plutocrat’ or ‘finance capitalist’, and then seeks to characterize the painters as men whose work exemplifies the insidiousness of racial stereotypes without ‘blaming them’ for the Holocaust, see Rose-Carol Washton Long, ‘George Grosz, Otto Dix, and the Philistines: The German-Jewish Question in the Weimar Republic’, in Natasha Kuchanova (ed.), *Experiment: Festschrift for Vivian Endicott Barnett* (Charles Schlicks, Jr., Publisher: Los Angeles, 2003), pp. 177–201.
- ²⁸ *Prager Straße*, 1920, oil and collage on canvas, 101 × 81 cm, Kunstmuseum Stuttgart; *Judenfriedhof in Randegg im Winter mit Hohenstoffeln*, 1935, mixed media on Masonite, 60 × 80 cm, Saarland-Museum, Saarbrücken. The last of these paintings has been the object of much commentary pertaining to Dix’s politics in the 1930s. I have recently contributed to this literature in my essay ‘Otto Dix’s Folk Culture’, in *Otto Dix and the New Objectivity*, exh. cat., Kunstmuseum Stuttgart (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2013), pp. 84–97. (This is the English translation of ‘Otto Dix’

Volkstümlichkeit', in *Das Auge der Welt: Otto Dix und die Neue Sachlichkeit*, exh. cat., Kunstmuseum Stuttgart [Hatje Cantz: Ostfildern, 2012], pp. 84–97.)

29 Van Dyke, 'Otto Dix's Folk Culture', op. cit., p. 88.

30 Dix to Martha Dix, n.d. (circa 1923), ODA. My translation.

31 Dix to Martha Dix, 10 July 1926, ODA.

32 On the possible attraction of Flechtheim to Dix, and on meetings between the painter and dealer, see Nierendorf to Dix, n.d., NL Dix, Bestand I, C-524a, DKA, GNM. See also Dix to Martha Dix, 2 October 1923 and 5 July 1926, ODA.

33 Evidence of Dix's unhappiness with Nierendorf pervades the correspondence in the NL Dix. Nierendorf's ledgers are found in the archive of the Galerie Nierendorf in Berlin, and transcriptions of the diaries are located in the archive of the Berlinische Galerie.

34 Dix to Martha Dix, 4 July 1926, ODA.

35 Hans Albert Peters, Stephan von Wiese, Monika Flacke-Knoch and Gerhard Leistner (eds.), *Alfred Flechtheim: Sammler, Kunsthändler, Verleger*, exh. cat., Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf (Kunstmuseum: Düsseldorf, 1987), pp. 168–71.

36 Nierendorf to Dix, n.d. (in pencil dated December 1923), NL Dix, I, C-524a; Nierendorf to Dix, 8 September 1922, NL Dix I, C-524b; Nierendorf to Dix, 19 March 1924, NL Dix, I, C-524f; Nierendorf to Dix, 3 April 1924, NL Dix, I, C-524f; Nierendorf to Dix, 13 December 1924, NL Dix, I, C-524f, DKA, GNM. See also Flechtheim's letter to I. B. Neumann of 23 May 1924, in which he describes Dix, with apparent irony, as 'the big guy, today's [Franz von] Stuck [*der große Mann, der Stuck von heute*]', reprinted in Peters, *Flechtheim*, p. 174. For the most recent such interpretation, see Rewald, *Glitter and Doom*, op. cit., pp. 116–20.

37 For reproductions of other portraits of Flechtheim, see Peters, *Flechtheim*, op. cit., pp. 182–5, 228, 256–7, 264.

38 Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard*, 1908, oil on canvas, 82 × 65 cm, Courtauld Institute Galleries, London. On the radical rightwing representation of the Jew as rapacious seducer of German Gentile women, see Dennis E. Showalter, *Little Man, What Now? Der Stürmer in the Weimar Republic* (Archon Books: Hamden, 1982), pp. 86–108.

- ³⁹ Erich Wulffen, *Der Sexualverbrecher*, 6th edn (P. Langenscheidt: Berlin, 1910), pp. 301–4; Edward J. Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight against White Slavery, 1870–1939* (Schocken: New York, 1982); Maurer, *Ostjuden*, op. cit., pp. 111–18.
- ⁴⁰ Margaret F. Stieg, ‘The 1926 German Law to Protect Youth against Trash and Dirt: Moral Protectionism in a Democracy’, *Central European History*, vol. 23, no. 1 (1990), pp. 22–56; Klaus Petersen, ‘The Harmful Publications (Young Persons) Act of 1926. Literary Censorship and the Politics of Morality in the Weimar Republic’, *German Studies Review*, vol. 15, no. 3 (October 1992), pp. 505–23; Luke Springman, ‘Poisoned Hearts, Diseased Minds, and American Pimps: The Language of Censorship in the *Schund und Schmutz* Debates’, *German Quarterly*, vol. 68, no. 4 (1995), pp. 408–29.
- ⁴¹ After enquiring whether Dix was making a portrait of Simons and suggesting how good it would be for one of the painter’s ‘real portraits’ to be displayed publicly in Berlin, Nierendorf mentioned the impending opening of the exhibition of Dix’s watercolours at the Kronprinzenpalais in Berlin on 1 November 1924. Nierendorf to Dix, n.d., Nachlass Dix, Bestand IC 295, Deutsches Kunstarchiv, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg. The initial acquaintance may have been the result of a mutual connection to the Düsseldorf avant-garde. Anne Grace states, without giving her source for her information, that Simons was a patron of Johanna Ey’s gallery. Nathalie Bondil describes him in general as a ‘knowledgeable connoisseur’ who collected Expressionist art and admired artists associated with the New Objectivity. See Nathalie Bondil, *Otto Dix’s Portrait of the Lawyer Hugo Simons. Düsseldorf 1925 – Montreal 1993: From Easel to Museum, a Cautionary Tale*, exh. cat., Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (Museum of Fine Arts: Montreal, 2010), accessed via <http://www.mbam.qc.ca/ottodix/pdf/en/M_article.pdf>; Grace, ‘Portrait’, op. cit., p. 217.
- ⁴² See the correspondence between Dix and Simons, NL Dix, I, B-303, DKA, GNM. See also Dix to Martha Dix, 4 July 1926, ODA.
- ⁴³ See documents in NL Dix, I, B-304, DKA, GNM; and Dix to Hugo Simons, n.d., copy in ODA.
- ⁴⁴ *Portrait of Anna Grünebaum-Wahl*, 1926, tempera on wood, 77.5 × 58.5 cm, McMaster Museum of Art, Hamilton, Ontario; *Portrait of Josef May*, 1926, oil, tempera and other media on board, 84 × 68.8 cm, Cleveland Museum of Art.
- ⁴⁵ See a letter from Dix to Simons (undated, c. December 1925), in which the painter noted that he had written and posted a letter to Dr Hesse

and hoped that a commission would result. Copy in ODA. For further evidence of Simons' activity, namely in securing the commission to portray a 'grain merchant on the Hindenburgwall [an important commercial artery in Düsseldorf]', see Dix to Martha Dix, 2 June 1926, ODA. One wonders if this could be a reference to Flechtheim, whose father had been an important grain merchant and who himself had worked in the family business before becoming an art dealer. However, his Düsseldorf gallery was located on the Königsallee (in the building of the bank B. Simons & Co.), not the Hindenburgwall, and he had moved his primary residence from Düsseldorf to Berlin in late 1923. See Peters, *Flechtheim*, pp.162, 174.

46 Grace, 'Portrait', op. cit., p. 217. For similar conclusions, see also Cousins, 'Otto Dix's Portrait', op. cit., pp. 19–21; and Bondil, *The Portrait of the Lawyer Hugo Simons*.

47 Nierendorf to Dix, 11 August 1923 and 3/5 September 1923, NL Dix, I, C-524c; Nierendorf to Dix, 19 January 1924, NL Dix, I, C-524f; Nierendorf to Dix, 30 March 1924, NL Dix, I, C-524f; Nierendorf to Dix, n.d. (c. March 1924), I, C-524f; Nierendorf to Dix, 3 April 1924, NL Dix, I, C-524f; Nierendorf to Dix, n.d. (after Easter 1924), NL Dix, I, C-524f; Nierendorf to Dix, n.d. (c. late 1924–early 1925), NL Dix, I, C-524h, DKA, GNM.

48 Nierendorf to Dix, 19 March 1924, NL Dix, I, C-524f, DKA, GNM.

49 Six of the ten oil paintings reproduced in the brochure of the Dix retrospective staged by Nierendorf in 1926 were portraits, not including a self-portrait and a portrait of the painter's daughter, Nelly. Extant photos of the installation suggest that an even higher percentage of the paintings in the show were portraits. In any case, according to Löffler's catalogue raisonné, Dix painted between two and six portraits per year between the years 1920 and 1924 (not counting self-portraits, portraits of his family, or pictures of generic social types). In 1925, the number rose to eight, and then to eleven in 1926. The number then fell to between zero and four per year during Dix's years at the state art academy in Dresden from 1927 to 1933. See Fritz Löffler, *Otto Dix, 1891–1969: Oeuvre der Gemälde* (Verlag Aurel Bongers: Recklinghausen, 1981).

THE NAZI PARTY'S STRATEGIC USE OF THE BAUHAUS

MARXIST ART HISTORY AND THE POLITICAL
CONDITIONS OF ARTISTIC PRODUCTION

Paul B. Jaskot

In the popular imagination, the Bauhaus and National Socialism are still opposed terms, the former representing individuality, artistic freedom and modernist creativity, while the latter stands for kitsch, cruelty and humanity at its worst. Such a duality is indicated in the dramatic conclusion of a *New York Times* article that accompanied the most recent blockbuster exhibition on the Bauhaus at the Museum of Modern Art (2009). In this article, Nicholas Fox Weber indicated some of the many ways in which Bauhaus artists participated in the National Socialist agenda. In the last sentence, he neatly summarized the duality between the school's scholarly and popular reception in relation to the Nazi past: 'The thought that anyone connected to the Bauhaus could have helped promote Hitler's regime or design its camps is distinctly painful to people who study and care about this extraordinary school, which may have something to do with why, more than 70 years later, it comes as news to many of us.'¹ Certainly, his implicit assumption is dubious, that art is usually morally good and, in contrast, the scholar is 'pained' when she discovers any participation of artists in human degradation.

Even without Benjamin's dictum that 'There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism', we have more than enough examples in human history of art's role as the handmaiden to power and oppression to argue the exact opposite of Weber's moralizing. But still, Weber did effectively point to the split in the academic and popular reception of the famous design school. On the one hand, the scholarly community has been studying the relationship of the Bauhaus to the Nazi past for some time; on the other, the public (and by extension the market) seems to be stubbornly unaware of and 'surprised' by these findings.

Indeed, while perhaps still an attention-grabbing headline for the public of the *Times*, scholars have for decades made the connection between the Bauhaus and Nazi Germany a major point of study and interest. Perhaps no other modernist subject in twentieth-century art history has been so consistently explored in terms of its relation to the Nazi state, with the possible exception of those artists pilloried at the so-called 'Degenerate Art' show that opened in Munich in 1937. Three now canonical positions can be exemplified by the important work of Barbara Miller Lane, Werner Durth and Winfried Nerding. Nerding showed in his 1993 essay on 'Bauhaus Architecture in the Third Reich' that many Bauhaus architects were actively involved in architecture during the Nazi period, and even Gropius expressed an equivocal attitude towards working with the state.² Parallel to this biographical focus, Durth studied the architectural careers of key figures in Albert Speer's staff for rebuilding German cities during the war. In his 1986 book, he pointed to some

notable patterns of experience among mid-century architects. A sizable number were trained in the Weimar years (including at the Bauhaus), embraced Speer and Nazi practices through the war, and then continued their trade with seemingly untarnished reputations as suddenly ‘modernist’ architects in the Cold War context of postwar German cities.³ And, crucially, Miller Lane was the first to show in her 1968 text that, while we think of Nazi architecture as all monumental, neoclassical and of stone, actually a wide variety of styles were used by specific leaders and institutions in the period including the steel, glass and concrete functionalism popularized at the Bauhaus.⁴ To my mind, her work on the political function of German architecture is still the gold standard and is surprisingly undercited in the literature.

But whether we are talking about biographies of key figures or the continuity between Weimar and Nazi careers, scholars such as Durth and Nerdingen share a position that has been naturalized in art history: the history of the Bauhaus and National Socialism is written from the perspective of the architects and designers, not from that of the right-wing politicians and bureaucrats. Even Miller Lane’s dynamic account of the political function of architecture tends to focus on individual figures within the Party or useful formal and national trends in the architecture of the period. That is to say, we know how the Bauhaus was suppressed by the Nazi state, how some of its members worked under fascism, and how specific Nazi politicians targeted its architecture and design or modernism in general. What we do not know enough about, though, is why the Nazi leadership took a *political* interest in the school. How did the Party itself

actually see the Bauhaus politically? What was its use, especially in the local struggles so necessary for its rise to power? Why did they care about this example in particular and, more importantly, *when* did they care? The Bauhaus was not a constant cipher for cultural debates within the Nazi state, in spite of the popular idea that it was a consistent focus of critique. Rather, it was a cluster of particular artists, stylistic gestures and institutional formations that could be referenced tactically and sporadically as the occasion demanded. The Nazi Party's strategic use of the Bauhaus is more complex than scholars have assumed, and analysing this complexity helps us to gain a better understanding of why the relationship between architecture and politics became a central component of Hitler's Germany.

In particular, this essay insists on the historicity of a political history of art. Such a project has been modelled as well as theoretically discussed in numerous venues by Andrew Hemingway. The following argument attempts to take up two related strands of Hemingway's project. On the one hand, it forwards the model of the sober and hard-core insistence on a materialist political history, grounded in institutions, that rejects the abstraction of a murky projection of political ideology onto art.⁵ And on the other, it insists on a theoretically informed scholarship that situates itself in relation to a Marxist tradition in order to promote a collective social critique. Most notably, my work here and elsewhere demands that we as scholars take up the challenge of Marxist art history in Germany that arose from a confrontation with fascism beginning in the late 1960s. This moment of German art history formed one of the

most active, productive and still critical strands of our shared project. Hemingway, particularly in the last decade, has frequently invoked this tradition and individuals such as Jutta Held, Berthold Hinz and Otto Karl Werckmeister, among others, as scholars who have focused on the crucial Marxist concepts of struggle.⁶ This historiographic approach arose in the late 1960s in tandem with a political challenge to postwar German institutions, educational and otherwise. While building for some years, an important public shot across the bow occurred in 1970 when Martin Warnke organized a session at the Cologne meeting of German art historians, pointing out all too clearly how establishment scholars masked their clear debt to and use of sources from the Nazi period.⁷ Political debate about the recent past weighed heavily and hotly in postwar Germany, in art history as elsewhere, and the question of fascism exploded in new ways across disciplines with the political rise of the left in the late 1960s.⁸ As a result, to this day, the question of the Nazi past maintains for some scholars a point of both art-historical interest but also, and more importantly, institutional and ideological critique that lays claim to the fact that art history still has work to do, especially in exposing its unrelenting role in affirming cultures of domination.⁹ Hemingway's insistence on a historicist and scientific Marxism acknowledges and deepens that agenda. This article is indebted to and attempts to give further weight to that project.

In the following pages, I will focus on one key and fateful moment in which the relationship of the Nazi Party (NSDAP) to the Bauhaus shifted, the crucial electoral year of 1930. Between the state elections in Thuringia in December 1929 and the national

Reichstag elections in September 1930, the NSDAP became a much more prominent part of Weimar politics, after several years in which they attempted strenuously to attract electoral coalitions to support their candidates and their ideology. The rough and tumble of electoral politics have too often been flattened out in art history, so here the subtle dynamics of even monthly shifts in events and tactics form an important component of the argument. Perhaps such dynamics were of little interest to Mies van der Rohe, who led the Bauhaus after 1930, but they were central to the Nazi strategy to gain power. In this sense, analysing the Bauhaus from the perspective of electoral struggles highlights surprising ways in which the institution became of use (or not) to the most extreme right-wing parties. This will require some attention to the particularities of Nazi politics and Hitler's priorities, not often

a topic of much study in art history. But taking us into the weeds of some of the most brutal moments of this rise to power will give us a more sober assessment of the political function of art. In this sense, I am arguing for a kind of historicity at the centre of the most critical strands of Marxist art-historical analysis.¹⁰

★★★★★

The Bauhaus and the Nazi Party came to the fateful year of 1930 from two very different political trajectories. As is well known and best documented by Miller Lane, the Bauhaus as a state-sponsored institution was often subject to the vicissitudes of local or national political battles between the ever-competing factions of Weimar democracy. Already by the public 1923 Bauhaus exhibition in

the city of Weimar, the school was having problems maintaining an apolitical identity, as the local Social Democratic Party (SPD) proclaimed its products and innovative pedagogy as an accomplishment of socialist cultural policy in the Thuringian state. Given the occasional grudging praise of aspects of the school by the local Communist Party (KPD), as well as its anti-traditional academic focus, these associations soon meant that the Bauhaus was an easy right-wing target as a leftist institution of ill repute. This position became evident in the state elections of February 1924, which ushered in a conservative coalition led by the German People's Party (DVP). Considerable pressure was then put on the new government to close the school. By December, Gropius began dialogues with officials in the city of Dessau within the small state to the north, Anhalt, and in April 1925 he moved the school to its new home, name intact. The school's political support remained relatively stable from this time on, through Gropius's resignation in 1928 and Hannes Meyer's initial year as the new director. In spite of the latter's clear interest in a more leftist and proactive agenda for the school - exemplified in the commission to build the Bundesschule des Allgemeinen Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes (Federal School of the German Trade Union Federation) - Meyer's ideological convictions and general political conflicts were avoided until the pressures of the Great Depression and his communist sympathies became a more overt presence in 1930. Notably, even after his resignation, Meyer, in a public letter to Mayor Fritz Hesse of 16 August 1930, denied like Gropius before him any politicization of the Bauhaus, especially communist, during his

leadership.¹¹ Of note, here, is the absence of any interest by the Bauhaus leadership in the Nazi Party, or fear of the propaganda against the school coming from that source.

But why should they have been concerned? The NSDAP had made relatively few inroads into the state of Anhalt by this time, and after all, educational institutions were state concerns. Even during the Bauhaus's pre-1925 years in Weimar, where there were many *völkisch* and some Nazi-affiliated politicians, the Party was not as yet seriously focused on institutional politics. Instead, its followers were committed to violent

overthrow of the government, such as had been attempted by Hitler on 9 November 1923 in the Beer-Hall Putsch in Munich (Bavaria). In these early years, the Party agitated against the very notion of a Weimar Republic democracy, so members had little need for elections other than as moments to undermine the system. For most of 1924, Hitler was in prison writing *Mein Kampf*, and in the December national elections the Nazi Party garnered a mere three per cent of the vote. Hence, while in his book Hitler could generally discuss his belief that powerful political regimes produce good architecture (as in the Rome of the Emperors) and rail against Jewish department store buildings in Berlin, the particularities of the Bauhaus or most cultural matters were of no concern. Notably, in the thousands of pages from the Nazi agitator Joseph Goebbels's diary covering the entire Weimar years, the Bauhaus does not show up, perhaps surprisingly given his acute attention to culture. Particularly in the mid-1920s, Nazi leaders had other priorities.¹²

This situation would dramatically change beginning with the refounding of the Party on 27 February 1925 after Hitler's release from prison. He began at this point to push the Party to engage more tactically in electoral politics, albeit initially with little success (as late as the May 1928 Reichstag elections, the Party achieved only 2.6 per cent of the vote). Following this change in its approach to the national elections came the Party's first interest in developing cultural goals, including a gradual but growing interest in criticizing the Bauhaus, particularly after the 1929 electoral victories in Thuringia and the installation in January 1930 of a Party member, Wilhelm Frick, as that state's minister of the interior and education.¹³ We can chart these changing positions in the major voice of the Nazi Party, its official newspaper the *Völkischer Beobachter* (People's observer [VB]), a source that has been of surprisingly little interest to art historians.

Under the editorship of Alfred Rosenberg, Party demagogue and close associate of Hitler, the VB in general adapted its profile to the developing tactics and demographic variability of the Party. So, certainly, its early focus on virulent racist attacks against German Jews and communists continued; however, added to this after 1927 were sections on contemporary literature, sports, women's issues and even a monthly horoscope. Cultural policy was part of this general trend to create a broader base for the Party beyond the hard-core believers. While earlier scholars often characterized the Party as a lower-middle-class entity, more recent research has confirmed that it was more accurately a *Volkspartei*, that is, a people's party that strove for a broad constituency of supporters across class,

geographic, age and gender lines.¹⁴ The Party's cultural agenda was thus calculated to deepen its influence with one component of this more expansive electoral strategy, the urban middle- and upper-middle-class constituencies. The panache of literary discussions, music reviews and art criticism legitimated the Party and balanced its more virulent racist and anti-communist agenda.¹⁵



1 *Völkischer Beobachter* (Munich supplement), 22/3 September 1929.
Photo: courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

All of these manoeuvres were part of a broader field of electoral politics in the Weimar Republic, for the NSDAP was not the only party that took engaging with culture seriously as a means of increasing its appeal. At the same time that Hitler was calling for an expansion of Nazi Party efforts in cultural politics in order to extend his influence beyond the base of Party membership, the KPD was retreating from exactly this tactic. Its leadership favoured instead the establishment of left-wing artistic organizations independent of other Weimar-era constituencies. Previously, and since 1924 in particular, the KPD had attempted to place communists in Weimar cultural institutions as a way of consolidating its influence. Reviews in the KPD daily *Die Rote Fahne* (The red flag) and Party politics had affirmed an alignment with art, such as the promotion of George Grosz's cause in his state trials and the establishment of an artist society within the Party in 1924, the Red Group. At this moment when the KPD was expanding its influence in German society, it embraced a cultural policy meant to appeal both to Party members and workers as well as the general artistic public. With Stalin's ascension to the leadership of the International, however, attitudes began to change in the late 1920s. In particular, in 1928, the year Hitler overtly called for a cultural policy of the Nazi Party, the KPD followed Moscow's command and reversed its interest in using cultural agents to link to existing German institutions to form a broader coalition, corresponding to the defensive but militant mode of Stalin's Moscow bureaucracy. For the German KPD and its cultural reporting in the pages of the *Die Rote Fahne*, this meant a withdrawal from a more proactive interest in using

art as part of a coalition politics in favour of an assertion of a clearer hard-line communist position that could be critical of such seemingly cross-over artists as Grosz. This sharpening of position would have some success with drawing supporters, especially as the economic crash set in and the stark choices drove more voters to the KPD. At the same time, though, the NSDAP would take up the slack in the electoral dynamics by attempting to represent itself as a Party of broad interest to the German public.¹⁶

Important to emphasize here is the fact that the Nazi Party did not have a coherent cultural ideology, but it did have a consistent agenda that addressed culture within the tactical context of electoral politics. So, for example, in the summer of 1928, the VB could run a scathing set of reviews of El Lissitzky's installation at the Pressa exhibition in Cologne that emphasized the internationalist agenda of the show as well as the prominence of the Soviet exhibition, mocking its particularly innovative design. This, however, could be followed by surprisingly positive reviews of functionalist housing in Ernst May's Frankfurt, the importance to Germany of industrial materials in architecture, or even mass-production techniques promoted by the Bauhaus [1]. As Miller Lane has argued, when the Party reached out for national legitimacy, the Bauhaus could be occasionally incorporated as part of the agenda, while only Jewish artists like Max Liebermann or those associated with the Communist Party, like Grosz, came in for consistently negative critical assessments.¹⁷

A dramatic shift occurred in the Party press and cultural policy with the success of the Nazi Party in

the December 1929 state elections in Thuringia. Thuringia was not a random place for an important NSDAP victory. Unlike Anhalt, the state had long been a stronghold of *völkisch* groups, and, while there were important pockets of industrialization, it remained an area mostly of small towns where such groups prospered. Hitler thought it important enough to make his first visit in March 1925, and the city of Weimar was the only location other than Nuremberg (Bavaria) to host one of the all-important annual Party rallies (in July 1926). Through the 1920s, Hitler consolidated both the organization of the NSDAP in Thuringia as well as his own leadership role over the other *völkisch* groups. The results of these efforts were at first minimal;

for example, in the January 1927 Landtag elections, the Nazi Party achieved only 3.4 per cent of the vote. At this point, Hitler was still manoeuvring to gain leadership of the right. With the economic crisis and the rise in unemployment in 1929, however, the time came for a stronger role for the Party. In the new elections for 29 December, the Nazi Party received 11.3 per cent of the vote, the first time over 10 per cent anywhere, which allowed them 6 out of 53 seats. This was just enough to make them a swing Party that could ask concessions from the conservative-right coalition.¹⁸

With six seats in the state parliament, they were able to name one cabinet minister in the conservative coalition government. Hitler did not select one of the more high-profile positions such as minister of economics but instead chose the minister of the interior and education. He demanded this position for a non-Thuringian, his loyal Bavarian follower, Wilhelm Frick, who was

named to the post on 23 January. Crucial for explaining this choice was the fact that the ministries of the interior and education had the least interaction with and interference from federal agencies and also controlled the state police. Hence, more could be accomplished to highlight the Nazi agenda, and the compromises necessary with federal agendas in the other ministries could be avoided. Frick set about immediately consolidating control over educational and policing institutions, including the Weimar Academy of Art. Here he put in as head the noted racist architect, Paul Schultze-Naumburg, who had long argued against the new architecture in Frankfurt, Berlin and, of course, Dessau. The critique of the Bauhaus could be easily linked with the Nazi success story of Schultze-Naumburg, who was also by that time a major player in the Party's cultural wing, the Fighting League of German Culture (Kampfbund für Deutsche Kultur). With the success in Thuringia, cultural policy could take an important position on the central stage of the Party platform, legitimating its aspirational interests, broadening its base and consolidating its attacks on its perceived enemies.¹⁹

What is most revealing, however, is how attacks on the Bauhaus were focused less on the stylistic or pedagogic goals of the organization and increasingly on its leadership. Of even more interest in the regular articles on the topic that showed up in the Party press in 1930 was the constant drumbeat against Gropius. The current director Mies van der Rohe and the left-wing former director Hannes Meyer were rarely mentioned, all the more surprising for the latter, who in the fall of 1930 had moved to the Soviet Union with several Bauhaus students, providing a seemingly obvious target.

Instead, Gropius became the main symbol of the institution, its drift into internationalism, and its connection to a vast communist and Jewish conspiracy. For example, the most sustained analysis of modernist architecture including the Bauhaus came with three articles in the VB from October and November 1930, authored by Alexander von Senger, a Swiss architect who joined the Rosenberg and Schultze-Naumburg circle.²⁰ In the first article on 'Der Bolschewismus im Bauwesen' ('Bolshevism in the building industry'), Senger argued from the opening lines that architecture was not merely a luxury or an expression of the spirit, but also a means of instantiating political power. For Senger, Bolshevism was well aware of this and used the seemingly harmless sobriquet of 'Neues Bauen' to pursue its agenda by collapsing art and propaganda, all the more reason for the Nazi Party to defend the 'political and biological significance of art' to the people.²¹ Gropius was the first architect identified in the argument, initially named for working with the 'communist propaganda journal' *L'Esprit Nouveau*. Senger warned of the communist plot to destroy or ban all-important works of the past, from Michelangelo to Kant, and 'already villages and cities have been torn down to be rebuilt with the formula of the Bauhaus in Dessau'.²² In the midst of further racist interpretations of the fall of culture under a communist agenda, Gropius was variously figured and connected to the Bauhaus, 'Weimar-Dessau'. Well into the article, Senger also briefly mentioned Meyer's ouster from the school, only to be replaced by Mies; he reminded readers that the latter created the Berlin monument to Liebknecht and Luxemburg. Having covered these

figures in two short paragraphs, he turned back to Gropius and discussed the Sarraz declaration of the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM) signed in 1928. The point of the article, naturally, was not the stylistic or philosophical commitments of the artists, but their international connections, their favourable reception to the radical politics of the Soviet Union, and their implicit agenda of destroying a racially strong German art and people. He ended the article warning that the Bauhaus itself had this agenda at the core of its interests.

The second and third article were, on the whole, less specific in naming names except for the appearance of Le Corbusier. Part two in the series focused on Neues Bauen's ostensible intensive propaganda efforts in the last six years to influence public opinion through the press and other venues. Here, Le Corbusier and Senger's fellow Swiss were the primary enemies, and he cited various quotations from Le Corbusier from the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. He argued that the new building attempted to rid architecture of spirit in order to promote the industrialization of human society. Against this, Senger asserted that real architecture will survive as 'Architecture is building brought to life.'²³ The Bauhaus once again threatened this supposedly natural order by turning the building from a spiritual expression of humanity to a profit centre of capital, as its building methods of mass production were literally dehumanizing. People and construction would be poorer, but the Neues Bauen architects would be richer with all the state-sponsored work. In the concluding article of the series, the 'communist' Le Corbusier again played the lead role, for he served the role of

mammon, the collection of profit that was the ultimate goal of Bolshevism. To further emphasize the international agenda, Senger briefly brought in building in the Soviet Union, especially by architects associated with the ABC group, including Hans Schmidt and Ernst May. For him, this was additional evidence of the link between capitalist patrons (for

instance, in Frankfurt) and communist plots in the Soviet Union. The series ended with a reassertion of the human and cultural bankruptcy of the nefarious link between Marxism and Neues Bauen, in general.²⁴

It is clear that, on the whole, Senger's main professional and aesthetic targets were fellow Swiss architects, especially Le Corbusier. But why so much prominence to Gropius particularly in leading the series off?²⁵ Certainly he was well known and well connected, but so were other members of the Bauhaus such as Hannes Meyer who was after all a founding member of CIAM, unlike Gropius. Given the scandal of 1930 around Meyer, it is surprising that he was thrown off with so little emphasis, here or in other articles in the *VB*. However, seen from the context of the strategic interests of the Nazi Party at this moment and in this geography, the focus on Gropius and *not* on the aesthetic innovations of the Bauhaus or the politics of Meyer made perfect sense. After all, the school continued to survive but in the state of Anhalt, not in the state of Thuringia. Mayor Hesse in Dessau led a broad centre-left coalition, including members of the German Democratic Party (DDP). The DDP, like the SPD and the Centre Party, was one of the three parties of the Weimar Republic most strongly committed to defending democracy.²⁶ Thuringia, on

the other hand, was the main symbol of success for the Party, and its history and politics needed to be highlighted in the Party newspaper. In this moment, the local political need was to create controversy and scandal around institutions known by these voters, to secure and expand their electoral support. In addition, while Frick and the Party could build local constituencies, at the same time they could use this very local process to attract national attention, especially through the inflamed but broad propaganda of the Party newspaper. While the Dessau school could be mentioned, its earlier incarnation in Weimar as well as the 1923 political struggle that drove it out of that state and ultimately secured Hitler's leadership of the *völkisch* right were a much more important political touchstone, more convenient for building the base in Thuringia while legitimizing the Party's national cultural agenda. Tactical references to Gropius and the 'Weimar-Dessau' Bauhaus (glued as he was by Nazi authors to a communist agenda that he never espoused) would serve this purpose much better than a discussion of flat roofs or even the current director, Mies van der Rohe.

My example here of the dynamic between the local consolidation of the Nazi Party and its national aspirations draws attention to how its variable use of the Bauhaus can help us explain aspects of the Party's political character. In this sense, the VB articles on modernist architecture do not come together as a coherent late-Weimar cultural policy, as Miller Lane rightly observed; but they *do* coalesce as a coherent *strategy* for targeting specific electoral geographies in need of shoring up as well as reflecting the constant tactical changes of a Party seeking national influence. That is to say,

these articles tell us less about how the Bauhaus was subject to Nazi slander, a pattern that we already knew. But they do show how focusing on the Bauhaus unmasks something about the political dynamics of the Party. The art-historical question is directed outwards to the political struggle of which culture was a part.

Such a strategic need for the Bauhaus evaporated as Hitler's electoral successes mounted and there were other targets and interests. In October 1931, the NSDAP received 39 per cent of the popular vote in state elections in Anhalt, and it strengthened its hold with the April 1932 election, after which it formed a conservative-right coalition led by the first Nazi minister president, Alfred Freyberg. By 1932, the Dessau city council was made up of a fractious mix of forty members including representatives from the DDP, NSDAP, SPD, KPD, and five others from small right-wing groups. Hesse was still the mayor, but his hold was slim in the face of the fifteen seats of the NSDAP along with the five other right-wing party members. By August 1932, the NSDAP had succeeded in passing a resolution to close the school the following October with a vote of twenty to five (the SPD abstained, while the mayor and four other councilmen voted against). For the Nazi Party, the point here seemed again to be strengthening its local authority, not coordinating with a national ideological campaign against modernism.²⁷

The subsequent history is well known. Mies moved the school to Berlin, where it survived for less than a year. The fact that the Nazi leadership saw the school in strategic terms also explains the almost complete disappearance of the Bauhaus from Nazi

propaganda and state policy after Hitler was named chancellor in January 1933. The National Socialist agenda shifted immediately from electoral politics to consolidating total power in the state. Notably, when the school finally closed in July 1933, the Gestapo letter that sealed its fate emphasized the dismissal of unreliable faculty like Kandinsky and Hilbersheimer. By then, Mies and the faculty had already voted to close.²⁸ This moment, though, reveals again the perspective of the Nazi leadership as it changed over time. In 1933, they focused on getting rid of the political parties or dissident unions that had plagued them in the Weimar Republic; but at the state level of institutions like the Bauhaus, there was not a significant need to dissolve the institution, only to purge unreliable members. Such a move was consolidated in the April 1933 Law to Restore the Civil Service, which allowed for the removal of any state official deemed suspect, a tool the Party could use also to replace them with its own members. For the Party, this law proved helpful to deprive Bauhaus professors and former professors of key positions or commissions. Hence, for example, Paul Klee was ousted from his professorship at the Düsseldorf Academy and replaced with Party member Franz Radziwill.²⁹ The infamous 1937 'Degenerate Art' show further exemplified this emphasis on individuals designated as ideological enemies. Of the hundreds of works on display, Schlemmer, Klee and Kandinsky among others connected with the Bauhaus were particularly well represented. Nevertheless, in all the wall texts and in the exhibition catalogue, the Bauhaus is mentioned only once, on a single label for a Kandinsky work that associated him with

the ‘communist Bauhaus in Dessau’.³⁰ Post-1933 political attitudes towards the Bauhaus focused on individuals and their ostensible status as ‘Jew’ or ‘communist’, not on the institution as a whole. With the war years and with a few exceptions of the most prominent representatives of the school, one’s prior connection to the institution proved to be a relatively irrelevant feature of an artist or architect’s biography in the face of the fanatic demands of the military and genocidal agenda.³¹

Too often, the literature on the Bauhaus characterizes the historical relationship between the school and National Socialism in parallel and symmetric terms. That is to say, one reads regularly of ‘the Bauhaus’ *and* ‘National Socialist Germany’ as though the two were equivalents. But culture was always a strategic chip in the Nazi game that, while absolutely central and of great importance, never set the rules of the Party’s leadership to the same degree that the political agenda did. Certainly at crucial times and in specific ways, the role of culture should never be underestimated in its importance to the racist and oppressive goals of the state. But, we need to see the cultural role of the Bauhaus as a variable factor whose strategic use could be of immense value at the particular moment when the Party focused on its drive to power, especially in Thuringia. In this sense, the Bauhaus was of much less concern in general to the Nazi elite at other moments of their domination than it perhaps retrospectively appears.

For Hitler, the Bauhaus was one part of the general cultural problem, and he was not interested so much in the specific enemy as he was in the larger ideological divisions that he kept firmly in his

sights. This became murderously clear to any Jew, communist, gay man, Jehovah Witness, and the many other categories of large groups of people that the state rendered 'enemies' following Hitler's world view. When push came to brutal shove and with the war as a driving force, he approved of his underlings developing the legal, institutional and practical means to put these general goals into action. By 1939, the particularities of the Bauhaus (long dissolved) or its artists (either in exile, consolidated or imprisoned) need not bother him or other Party leaders. Many of the ideas that these artists worked on could be easily used to further the war effort and genocidal project. Giving up on our heroic and, indeed, Romantic notion that the Bauhaus and its artists were a cultural bulwark of equal authority or of equal interest to the powerful within the Nazi Party perhaps diminishes their role in one of the great ideological battles of the twentieth century. But it most certainly makes their political function and instrumentalization much clearer.



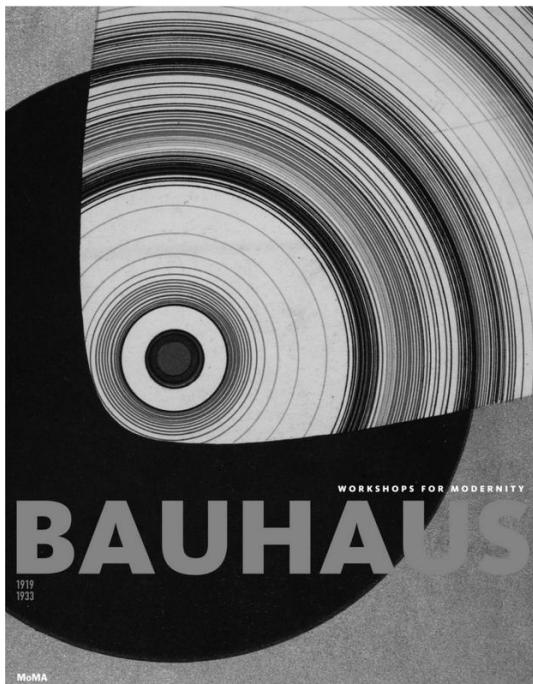
I have argued that, while the outlines of the national relationship of the Bauhaus to the Nazi Party have long been known, the specific character of that relationship at the local level reveals a central dynamic of the Party during its electoral struggles previously

outside of the cultural historical literature. In spite of this argument that goes back to fundamental German Marxist critiques of fascism from the late 1960s, the Bauhaus as a victim of the Nazi Party has had a tenacious hold on the popular and museological imagination. Let us revisit the Weber

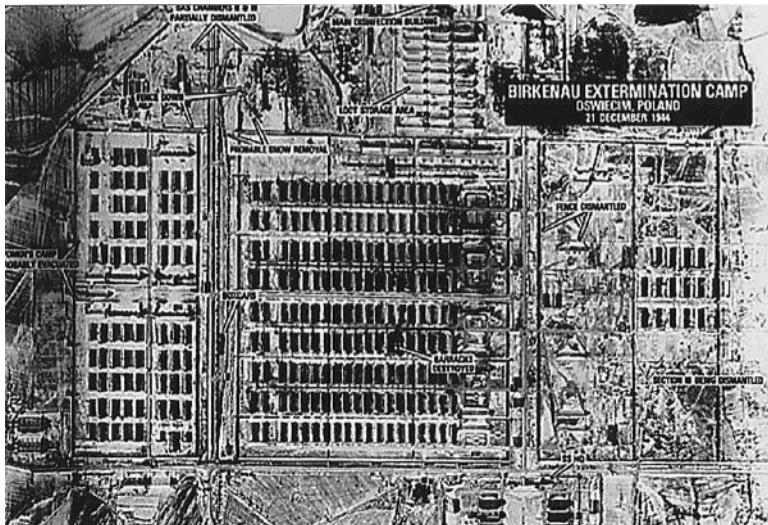
article in the *Times* with which I started and the Museum of Modern Art exhibition that it highlighted [2]. A version of my article was first given as a talk at a symposium to go along with MoMA's show. I was asked to speak on a topic related to the Bauhaus and the Nazi Party. Apparently, though, the talk I gave was not the talk that was wanted. At the beginning of the question-and-answer period that came after our morning session, another scholar was asked to give an impromptu

ten-minute lecture on the 1932-3 history of the Bauhaus, emphasizing for example the persecution the school faced at the hands of the growing faction of Nazi Party members in the Dessau city council. Now one could imagine that, for a general audience, the curators Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman could very well have wanted the more traditional part of the narrative also to be told, however unusual and singular it was to have another impromptu lecture added to a conference. As my article makes clear, I, too, find the historical circumstances of Nazi oppressive tactics, cultural and otherwise, important. But recentring the narrative only around the suffering and ultimate cultural triumph of the Bauhaus is the mythologizing work of ideology, and does no service to the historicity of a materialist analysis. Complicating the relationship of the Bauhaus to the Nazi Party means critiquing its continued isolation from the complex political history of which it was a part. It means showing in major exhibitions and their catalogues not only the work of Klee and Moholy-Nagy, but also of Fritz Ertl, the well-known Bauhaus graduate and architect of the plan of Auschwitz-Birkenau [3]. MoMA continues to insist

only on the history of the former, not the latter, a position that of course follows its 'civilizing' role in affirming the values assigned to art but also the market, the political economy and thus the systems of domination in which we currently operate.³²



2 Exhibition catalogue cover,
*Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for
Modernity* (Museum of Modern Art:
New York, 2009). Photo: copyright
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New York.



3 Fritz Ertl, Plan of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp (aerial reconnaissance view), 21 December 1944. Photo: courtesy of US National Archives (RG 263: Auschwitz, fldr. 19, CIA Ann. Negs., #15).

The art history of our time continues the centuries-old cultural work of commenting on the present without threatening to change it. As Hemingway and others have pointed out, this can include the Marxist 'perspective', which has been reduced at times to another -ism within a department, a museum or a discipline.³³ MoMA can invite a Marxist art historian who emphasizes in his talk questions of minimal institutional interest without worrying that a revolution will break out any time soon. But then, if cultural institutions can be so expansive and, indeed, so seemingly inured to materialist analyses that question grand artistic values, why is there a continued need to reassert

the heroic narrative of the Bauhaus?³⁴ One of Marx's great contributions was to show that the goal of changing the world was also still predicated on a rigorously materialist understanding of that world. The millions of small and seemingly harmless ideological assertions that surround us in our cultural institutions and in art history create a veneer of normalcy in constant need of critique to reveal that supposedly 'invisible hands' represent actually real institutional, classed and political economic interests. The hammer of historicity puts the critique of political economic power at the centre of its inquiry, not as one historical condition among many but as a fundamental concern. With the ongoing and obvious use of art to prop up elite systems and values, that critique also remains a necessary and constant process. Putting the Nazi Party in the middle of a story of the Bauhaus continues that vital collective goal that extends a Marxist art-historical project.

My thanks to Frederic J. Schwartz for his critical editorial comments.

¹ Nicholas Fox Weber, 'Deadly Style: Bauhaus's Nazi Connection,' *New York Times*, Arts Section, 27 December 2009, p. 24.

² Winfried Nerdinger, 'Bauhaus Architecture in the Third Reich,' in Kathleen James-Chakraborty (ed.), *Bauhaus Culture: From Weimar to the Cold War* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2006), pp. 139–51. Note that, while the original German was written in 1993, Nerdinger's text ignores important earlier work in the English-speaking world, such as the compelling essay by Richard Pommer, 'Mies van der Rohe and the Political Ideology of the Modern Movement,' in Franz Schulze (ed.), *Mies van der Rohe: Critical Essays* (Museum of Modern Art: New York City, 1989), pp. 96–145. While I disagree with key aspects of Pommer's argument (above all, his refusal to deal with class struggle so apparent in the Weimar period), he has given by far the most nuanced account of the variable relationship of Modernist architects to Nazi politics.

- ³ Werner Durth, *Deutsche Architekten: Biographische Verflechtungen, 1900–1970* (Vieweg: Wiesbaden, 1987).
- ⁴ Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918–1945* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1968).
- ⁵ Perhaps the most extended version of this critical project is clear from Andrew Hemingway, *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926–1956* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2002).
- ⁶ See, for example, both his introduction and his analysis of the New Left in Andrew Hemingway (ed.), *Marxism and the History of Art: From William Morris to the New Left* (Pluto Press: London, 2006).
- ⁷ Martin Warnke (ed.), *Das Kunstwerk zwischen Wissenschaft und Weltanschauung* (Bertelsmann: Gütersloh, 1970). For the broader context of this moment in German Marxist art history, see Jutta Held, ‘New Left Art History and Fascism in Germany,’ in Hemingway (ed.), *Marxism and the History of Art*, op. cit., pp. 196–212; and Otto Karl Werckmeister, ‘Radical Art History’, *Art Journal*, vol. 42, no. 4 (1982), pp. 284–91.
- ⁸ See my discussion of the shifting interpretations of the Nazi past in Paul B. Jaskot, *The Nazi Perpetrator: Postwar German Art and the Politics of the Right* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2012).
- ⁹ A post-1968 generation of scholars has done significant work on exposing the institutional relationship of art history to the politics of the Nazi era, as well as its postwar impact on the discipline. While these are not always Marxist in their critical import, most continue to cite and extend that earlier work. See, for instance, the exemplary volume, Nikola Doll, Christian Fuhrmeister and Michael H. Sprenger (eds.), *Kunstgeschichte im Nationalsozialismus: Beiträge zur Geschichte einer Wissenschaft zwischen 1930 und 1950* (VDG: Weimar, 2005).
- ¹⁰ Note I first developed the argument about the Nazi Party’s strategic use of culture in Jaskot, *The Nazi Perpetrator*, op. cit., esp. pp. 16–37. This article draws from that analysis but focuses here and expands on the particular case of the Bauhaus.
- ¹¹ See the institutional analysis of this period in Éva Forgács, *The Bauhaus Idea and Bauhaus Politics* (Central European University Press: Budapest, 1995), pp. 118–81. Notably, in the substantive essays in MoMA’s Bauhaus catalogue, there is little discussion of the move from Weimar to Dessau, and none of the political context for this move

or other moments in the Bauhaus' history. Adrian Sudhalter's chronology in the back of the book,

however, does give better texture to these events. Adrian Sudhalter, '14 Years Bauhaus: A Chronicle', in Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman (eds.), *Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity* (Museum of Modern Art: New York, 2009), pp. 327–9. There are many documentary collections and histories of the Bauhaus to consult. In particular, see the now classic Hans M. Wingler, *Bauhaus: Weimar Dessau Berlin Chicago* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1969). For Meyer's letter, published in *Das Tagebuch*, see the translation in Wingler, pp. 163–5.

- 12 The diaries of Goebbels are now available in a digital format as a searchable resource in key depositories such as the library of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. More generally, see the multiple edited volumes in Elke Fröhlich (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels: Sämtliche Fragmente*, 19 vols (Institut für Zeitgeschichte: Munich, 1987–2008). For the early years of the Party, see the summation in Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936: Hubris* (Penguin: London, 1998).
- 13 Kershaw, *Hitler*, pp. 257–9, 318–20; Donald R. Tracey, 'The Development of the National Socialist Party in Thuringia, 1924–30,' *Central European History*, vol. 8, no. 1 (March 1975), p. 30. Notably, Hitler's move away from revolutionary politics began to put him in conflict with the left wing of the Party influenced by Gregor and Otto Strasser, in particular.
- 14 See the excellent overview of the developing scholarly understanding of the demographic character of the NSDAP in Paul Madden and Detlef Mühlberger, *The Nazi Party: The Anatomy of a People's Party, 1919–1933* (Peter Lang: Oxford, 2007), pp. 23–51.
- 15 Surprisingly, the only systematic study of the *Völkischer Beobachter* remains the relatively recently published Detlef Mühlberger, *Hitler's Voice: The Völkischer Beobachter, 1920–1933* (Peter Lang: Oxford, 2004). Miller Lane showed early on what use it could be, in her analysis of how the newspaper dealt variably with modernism. My own account extends Miller Lane's, but from the local perspective of Party tactics and their significance.
- 16 For the KPD shifts in art policy in these years, see Barbara McCloskey, *George Grosz and the Communist Party: Art and Radicalism in Crisis, 1918 to 1936* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1997), pp. 104–47.

- ¹⁷ See for exemplary articles Jaromir, ‘Fahrt zur “Pressa”, *Völkischer Beobachter*, 10 July 1928, p. 3, or the coverage of the Grosz trial for blasphemy (and the second time he was sentenced) in (Anonymous), “Maulhalten, weiterdienen!”, *Völkischer Beobachter*, 6 December 1930, p. 1. The first major article on culture to appear on the front page of the newspaper that I found was (Anonymous) ‘Nationalsozialismus und Kunspolitik’, *Völkischer Beobachter*, 28 January 1928, pp. 1–2. See, also, Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics*, op. cit., p. 148, in which she states it was Rosenberg not Hitler who played the key role to use the VB in a ‘conscious effort to broaden appeal’.
- ¹⁸ For an extraordinary microhistory of the development of the Nazi Party in Thuringia to which my essay is indebted, see Tracey, ‘The National Socialist Party in Thuringia’, pp. 23–50.
- ¹⁹ Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics*, op. cit., pp. 148–58.
- ²⁰ Senger was a confirmed racist, as evidenced by his publications such as Alexander von Senger, ‘Rasse und Baukunst’ (Gässler: Munich, 1935). He would become a professor at the Technische Hochschule in Munich during the Nazi period. See, also, Miller Lane’s discussion of Senger’s anti-Bolshevist stance that complemented Schultze-Naumburg in Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics*, op. cit., pp. 140–5.
- ²¹ Alexander von Senger, ‘Der Bolschewismus im Bauwesen,’ *Völkischer Beobachter*, part 1, 22 October 1930, Beiblatt, p. 1.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Alexander von Senger, ‘Der Bolschewismus im Bauwesen’, part 2, 5 November 1930, Beiblatt p. 1.
- ²⁴ Alexander von Senger, ‘Der Bolschewismus im Bauwesen,’ part 3, 7 November 1930, Beiblatt p. 1. See, also, Jean-Louis Cohen, *Le Corbusier and the Mystique of the USSR: Theories and Projects for Moscow, 1928–1936* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1991); and Sima Ingberman, *ABC: International Constructivist Architecture 1922–1939* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1994).
- ²⁵ Note as well that other Gropius-era professors were cited, including Moholy-Nagy, in Senger, ‘Bolschewismus,’ part 1, 22 October 1930, p. 1.
- ²⁶ See Pommer’s subtle parsing of the relationship of modernist architects to a variety of different political strains and, especially, his discussion of

Mies's relationship to the DDP in Pommer, 'Mies van der Rohe,' pp. 108–9.

²⁷ Wingler, *Bauhaus*, op. cit., pp. 175–7.

²⁸ Sudhalter, '14 Years Bauhaus', pp. 236–7. See, also, Kershaw, *Hitler*, op. cit., pp. 379–495.

²⁹ James van Dyke has captured how artists weathered and negotiated this systemic Nazi focus on individuals; see James A. van Dyke, *Franz Radziwill and the Contradictions of German Art History, 1919–45* (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 2011), esp. pp. 70–114.

³⁰ Stephanie Barron (ed.), '*Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*' (Harry N. Abrams: New York, 1991), p. 61.

³¹ See, for example, the discussion of former Bauhaus students as designers on both sides of the brutal Nazi war and genocide in Jean-Louis Cohen, *Architects in Uniform: Designing and Building for the Second World War* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2011), esp. pp. 290–9.

³² I follow here the classic argument in Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (Routledge: New York, 1995). See, in particular, her analysis of MoMA. For Ertl, see Cohen, *Architects in Uniform*, op. cit., pp. 291–3.

³³ Andrew Hemingway, 'New Left Art History's International,' in Hemingway (ed.), *Marxism and the History of Art*, op. cit., p. 194.

³⁴ While this article was being completed, the MoMA held a monumental show on 'Inventing Abstraction, 1910–1925', which surveyed a wide variety of examples of abstraction from many different countries. The narrative ends triumphantly in the last room with examples of artists from, of course, the Bauhaus, and a few others.

MARXIST THEORY IN PRACTICE
LANDSCAPE, CLASS AND IDEOLOGY
MARXISM AND THE SHAPING OF MODERNISM

MARXISM IN A NEW WORLD ORDER

REALISM AND MATERIALISM IN POSTWAR EUROPEAN ART

Alex Potts

Andrew Hemingway's analysis of the role played by the communist movement in American social-realist art in his book *Artists on the Left* draws attention to a marked retrenchment in the postwar period of the commitments that had sustained such practice in the 1930s. With the onset of the Cold War, the US government's campaign against leftist artists and intellectuals on the one hand and the increasing ideological rigidity of the American Communist Party on the other created circumstances that were not favourable, to say the least, for artists with ambitions to fashion art that was visibly engaged politically. Hemingway, however, does not leave the story there. He concludes with a chapter 'Social Art in the Cold War' in which he argues for the persistence in the postwar US art world of a figurative realism informed by politicized critical awareness – in many cases radical liberal rather than Marxist.¹ He also shows how an artist such as Philip Evergood, who remained loyal to his left political convictions, continued to produce vital works that were, if largely indirectly, informed by these earlier convictions, even if he no longer enjoyed as before the support network of a political movement with whose anti-capitalist principles he could identify.²

In this essay, I build on Hemingway's insights into the ongoing importance in the postwar period of artists' commitment to engage with the political and social realities of the times by bringing into play the rather different situation in the European art world. In Europe, a broader diversity of politically engaged art was able to make its mark. A significant group of high-profile artists of left-leaning or Marxist persuasion espoused a figurative mode of painting, and thought of themselves as working within an ongoing realist tradition, including such figures as the Italian communist painter Renato Guttuso and the French communist and socialist-realist André Fougeron. Complementing and contesting this tendency were the politically engaged artists who took a vanguardist stance, and who held to the view that it was only through experimenting with radical alternatives to conventional representation that their art could properly respond to the material realities of the modern world. For them, these realities did not enter into an art work by way of consciously motivated processes of depiction but through the artist's immersion in the materiality of artistic process. Artists of more conventional realist persuasion generally took the view that such a focus on process meant giving up on the possibility of art's conveying anything of substance about reality, and attributed to its proponents a formalistic commitment to the autonomy and non-representational nature of art to which many did not in fact adhere. In the case of an artist such as the Danish COBRA painter Asger Jorn, it was in part the compulsion actively to respond to the political realities of his times that led him to explore the representational potential of an *informel* painterly abstraction, a compulsion he shared with

a number of anti-formalist painters working in a similar radically non-naturalistic mode.³ These included, among others, northern European artists in the COBRA group, *informel* abstract painters working in Italy such as Emilio Vedova, and artists associated with the Situationist International, such as the Gruppe Spur in Germany. It was in a European context, where the political climate was not so hysterically anti-communist as in the United States, and where the art world was less in the grip of the idea that modern art had to refuse direct evocation or representation (or 'illustration' as radical formalists would have it) of non-artistic realities, let alone any evident projection of political conviction, that the diverse nature of a politically engaged realist-inclined art in the postwar period emerged most clearly.

This chapter will concentrate on two of these figures, Guttuso and Jorn, partly because of the inherent interest of their art, but also because both were eloquent writers whose thinking brings into focus questions about artistic realism, representation and the commitment to painting as a material practice widely current in the postwar period. The first section, 'The Two Realisms', considers the different understandings of artistic realism and of artistic process espoused by the figurative realists on the one hand and the artists committed to a more abstracting painterly experimentation on the other. Guttuso plays a leading role here because of the breadth of his critical writing, which engages both with his own commitments to realism and with the informal abstraction that he was contesting but which he nevertheless saw as a tendency that at its best had a certain value and integrity. The second section,

'The Materiality of the World and the Materiality of Art', examines Jorn's wide-ranging thinking about art and the aesthetic as material phenomena with a view to illuminating the materialist mindset informing his work as a radical practitioner of a formal painterly abstraction. The chapter concludes with brief reflections on how the figurative realists and the more politicized exponents of painterly abstraction shared certain convictions about the material basis of their art, suggesting through the configuring of their painting the complex imbrication of human agency in the impersonal forces and processes of the material world.

The Two Realisms

Renato Guttuso was a key figure for postwar realism, not only in Italy but also in Russia and elsewhere in Eastern and Western Europe. His work spoke both to those on the communist left who believed that a viable, politically engaged art needed to be based on recognizable figurative representation, and to those in the postwar artistic community who were not motivated by a left political agenda, but who like Richard Wollheim saw in Guttuso's work a confirmation that depiction continued to be a viable option for the modern painter, against the growing critical consensus that a serious modern art should be divested of all trace of naturalistic depiction.⁴ More so than Fougeron, who in the immediate postwar period held a similar position in France as a politically committed communist working in a realist mode, and who made his name in the late 1940s and early 1950s as the champion of a

somewhat rigid socialist realism, Guttuso played a particularly central role within contemporary European culture both as an artist and a writer on art. In his capacity as critic, he offered some of the more thoughtful reflections of the period on the political necessity of a committed realism,⁵ while in his art he tested the possibilities and limits of a modern, politically engaged realism that ranged from high-narrative history painting to more informal painting of modern life.

The painting that more than any other established Guttuso's reputation as the proponent of a politically engaged realism was *Occupation of Uncultivated Lands in Sicily* [1], which made a considerable stir when it was exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1950. With its strong figurative presences and ambitious scale – it is close to three and a half metres wide – it clearly offers itself up as a history painting. It was ambitious politically, as well as artistically. Popular occupation and cultivation of neglected land on the huge private estates of Sicily, contesting both the corrupt hold of the Mafia as well as that of semi-feudal landed interests on the island, was a live issue at the time over which the Italian communists and the conservative southern Christian Democrats had strongly divided.⁶ With its somewhat abstracting (as well as symbolic) colouring – the enlivening of the empty landscape with passages of red, green and white, echoing the tricolore of the Italian flag, as well as areas of red picking up on the colour of the communist banner raised at the head of the troop – and the formalized effect of the friezelike array of figures in the foreground, it clearly distances itself from the naturalistic norms of Zhdanovist Socialist Realism. At the same time, the individualizing of the

figures and their unheroic, everyday gestures and clothing also make it very different from the classicizing Italian novecento realism of the fascist years - which incidentally is in evidence in Guttuso's work of the earlier 1930s.

This moment represented a high point of Guttuso's politically engaged social realism, during which he produced two other large-scale large narrative paintings concerned with the land occupation movement in Sicily and its violent suppression,⁷ as well as a more conventional dramatic history painting of Garibaldi and his thousand storming a bridge on their way to Palermo during his famous Sicilian campaign of 1860, which caused controversy when it was shown at the Venice Biennale in 1952.⁸ Guttuso himself was from Sicily and, by way of scenes situated in the south, took to depicting national political issues having to do with the Communist Party's struggle to represent the interests of the urban and rural poor and to liberate Italy from its conservative (and fascist) past. Generally speaking, from the mid-1950s onwards, this kind of overtly political painting in a public rhetorical mode gave way to more socially orientated painting of aspects of everyday life, initially often but not exclusively proletarian⁹ and then in the later phase of Guttuso's career becoming more 'bourgeois' and symbolic, more about his own social milieu. At the same time, he continued to produce the occasional large-scale painting addressing the public politics of the day, particularly in the politicized later 1960s and early 1970s, with, for example, *Newspaper Mural - May '68* (1968), featuring police violence against demonstrators that echoed US military violence in Vietnam, and *Togliatti's Funeral* (1972), a massive

allegorical work recalling the funeral of the Italian Communist Party leader Palmiro Togliatti, who had died in 1964. In the latter, Guttuso may have been claiming Lenin (featured in multiple depictions, together with a striking image of Gramsci) for an Italian Communist Party that in the early 1970s was increasingly distancing

itself from the Russian Soviet party line of post-1968 retrenchment and stagnation. Then again, one needs to bear in mind that Guttuso was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize by the Soviet Union in the year he completed the painting.¹⁰



1 Renato Guttuso, *Occupation of Uncultivated Lands in Sicily*, 1949-50, oil on canvas, 265 × 344 cm. Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste-Kunstsammlung, Berlin.

Guttuso's more ambitious showings at the 1954 and 1956 Venice biennales were symptomatic of a shift away from the evidently political social realism of his work of the previous few years. These new works included a large-scale multi-figure representation of urban youth, *Boogie-Woogie*¹¹ and one of ordinary people disporting themselves on a public beach, *The Beach* [2]. These two paintings could be seen as contrasting the alienated collectivities of modern urban mass entertainment with more free-and-easy forms of everyday sociality that were not subject in the same way to the forces of capitalist consumerism – with the beach scene possibly representing not just an actual reality, but something of a projected new proletarian society that would flourish under communism. The conception of *The Beach*, together with its broader political connotations, makes for an interesting comparison with the work of the American Philip Evergood, an artist very much of the left, who in the 1930s had been closely involved with Communist Party cultural initiatives, and who in the postwar period remained committed to figurative realism as the most effective basis on which to engage with the lived realities of the contemporary world.¹²



2 Renato Guttuso, *The Beach*, 1955–6, oil on canvas, 301 × 452 cm. Galleria Nazionale di Parma.



3 Philip Evergood, *Music*, 1933–59, oil on canvas, 170.2 × 303.5 cm. Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia.

Evergood's mural-scale painting *Music* [3] - conceived in 1933 for the Pierre Degeyter Club in New York, a branch of the Workers Music League, and then somewhat reworked by him in the 1950s¹³ - is, if anything, a more evidently social-realist picturing of non-bourgeois sociality than Guttuso's *The Beach*. It shows an energetic, non-hierarchical gathering of diverse types, come together to make music in a way that contrasts strikingly with the bourgeois formalities of a conventional orchestra performance. The two figures in the foreground are shown to be part of the group, the trombonist momentarily stepping forwards to make his solo contribution, and the fiddle player about to take up from the trombonist's intervention, with neither singled out as lead figures any more than, for example, the equally vigorous lady in the centre background about to strike her triangle. This is an image both very real but also at some level utopian, more convincingly so because of its slightly ribald Hogarthian humour. The affinities suggested here between Guttuso and Evergood are not just retrospective projections. Evergood came to know Guttuso and admire his work when the latter had an exhibition at the ACA gallery in New York in 1963, and Guttuso took up an invitation from Evergood to write the introduction to the catalogue of Evergood's show at Gallery 63 in Rome in 1963. Evergood responded enthusiastically to Guttuso's essay, feeling it showed that they had a real 'bond of understanding' and thanking Guttuso for his appreciative insights into 'what I have tried to say in the language of paint'.¹⁴

When Guttuso in 1949–50 emerged as a champion of realist painting with communist convictions, he did so from an immediate postwar context where a

clear divide between a Marxist-inspired painterly realism and a more radical-seeming aformal abstraction was not yet firmly in place. He was associated with various anti-fascist artistic groupings that formed after the collapse of the fascist government, most notably the Fronte Nuovo, which included artists such as Vedova who later were to become leading practitioners of *informel* abstract painting. In 1948, Guttuso was signatory to a letter defending modern trends in contemporary art against an attack on these by Togliatti (writing under a pseudonym), who called for a socialist-realist aesthetic as the only viable form for a truly communist art and who denounced what he saw as the anarchy and the horrors, monstrosities and imbecilities of the work in the National Exhibition of Contemporary Art held in Bologna that year. Concurrently, however, a split had begun to open up between Guttuso and his realist associates in the Fronte Nuovo and the abstractionists, which led to Fronte Nuovo's dissolution in 1950 when the two groups showed their work separately at the Venice Biennale. Guttuso's emerging reputation as a champion of artistic realism at this point coincided with his developing closer relations with the leadership of the Italian Communist Party - he was made a member of its Central Committee in 1951.¹⁵ Still, he continued to argue as he had throughout the later 1940s for an artistic realism not bound by established convention, and distanced himself, not just from non-representational abstraction, but also from doctrinal socialist realism and traditional forms of naturalism.

An underlying commitment to a broadly realist approach to painting, and a scepticism about the more radically experimental postwar avant-gardism

and the modernist ethos associated with it, combined with a certain openness and generosity, remained characteristic of Guttuso's approach to the art of his time through much of his career. Such an outlook is consistent with the intellectual milieu in which he moved - among his close associates were figures such as Pier Paolo Pasolini, Alberto Moravia, Carlo Levi and Else Morante. When he reflected on the developments that had taken place in the Italian art world of the immediate postwar period, he took care to note the affinities between the practitioners of painterly realism and the more radical currents in early *informel* abstraction. Both, he felt, shared a compulsion to start afresh after the collapse of fascism, and both were dissatisfied with existing forms of modernist abstraction and Surrealist vanguardism.¹⁶

In his view, it was the group of so-called neo-realists who were the first to respond, before the practitioners of *informel* abstraction, to the imperative 'to immerse themselves in the "world"', an imperative he saw as reshaping postwar art and taking it beyond the formalistic orthodoxies of established modernism. This was, he explained, a moment of deep crisis when it became imperative for artists to 'disavow their own gods, and have the courage [to take on] a new barbarism if they truly wanted to get at the

roots of evil' (namely the evil of both fascism and modern capitalism).¹⁷ While strongly critical of the self-referential, formalistic tendencies of later *informel* abstraction, and of its critical packaging as symptomatic of existentialist anxiety and pessimism, he saw the radical departure from the geometric norms of pre-war abstraction and the opening out to an expressionist disorder found in its

earliest manifestations as driven by a revolutionary impulse broadly shared with the realists.¹⁸ *Informel* abstraction in his view had two currents, one characterized by an essentially conservative and anti-socialist rejection of politics, and one that in its striving for a qualitative transformation of painting's expressive potential had its roots in revolutionary ideology. Among the Italian artists who espoused an aformal, radically non-figurative abstraction were those like Vedova who envisioned their art as enacting a passionate engagement with the conflicted and disturbing realities of the times.¹⁹

Guttuso saw Pollock as a very considerable painter, publishing an extended tribute to him in 1962 in which he argued that full appreciation of his work had properly to take on board its representational aspects and get away from a fetishizing of the purely abstract drip paintings of the years 1947-50 that dominated current critical presentations of the artist. His summing up of the contradictory tendencies in Pollock's practice and of the conditions 'of permanent catastrophe within which [this] artist of genius was formed' is pretty astute. He saw Pollock as torn between a dramatic-epic 'Mexican-Picassian' symbolic impulse and a lyrical aspiration to naturalistic imagining, 'a need for action and repose, intense collective life and solitude', 'a sense of the "modern" and need for the antique spectacle of "nature"', with the former tendency taking on the character of 'massacre' and the latter that of 'the American landscape' - all played out in the context of the 'turbulence and lacerations of contemporary society'.²⁰ It bears mentioning here that Evergood, despite his polemic against the formalistic doctrines of pure abstraction

that gained such ascendancy in the US, found it possible to say in a late interview that, while he had wanted to avoid the pitfalls of becoming either an ‘academician’ or a ‘Pollock-type painter’, he nevertheless also ‘wanted to be as free and daring as Pollock, or as disciplined as an Albert Ryder or a Giotto if I could’.²¹

Asger Jorn, who in Guttuso’s terms would have been a practitioner of *informel* abstraction,²² came to prominence in a postwar context in which he too saw himself as reacting against the formalistic orthodoxies of modernist geometric abstraction as well as the conservatism of academic naturalism. He believed that a truly radical, politically committed art, one that engaged in any compelling way with the realities of life in the modern world, could do so only by jettisoning traditional processes of pictorial depiction and representation and by working in the first instance with the physical immediacy of painting’s materiality. For him, it was not a matter of setting abstraction against figuration. He was, as he saw it, committed to the ‘value of pictorial figuration’, but one radically antithetical to naturalistic depiction.²³ Like a number of his contemporaries, he wanted to hold onto an idea of realism, but not in its conventional sense. He saw the ‘materialist realism’²⁴ that he championed as bringing to life a reality that was ‘in contradiction with existing reality’ and rather than merely depicting existing phenomena gave rise to its own powerfully striking²⁵ and materially substantive pictorial configurations.

What divided the politically engaged materialist realists and equally politically engaged artists

experimenting with new forms of painterly abstraction, then, was not some formal dichotomy between figuration and abstraction. Ideologically, the difference between them had to do with different attitudes to avant-garde radicalism, with the *informel* abstractionists' adherence to a systematic, avant-garde-like negation of inherited artistic forms separating them from the realists, even if both took the view that being a modern artist involved developing new ways of working. Politically speaking, a somewhat anarchistic Marxist radicalism was being pitted against a Marxism more in tune with that of the culturally liberal wing of the Communist Party. What mattered for both was the commitment brought to bear in the artist's engagement with both reality and art. As Guttuso put it, the critical disputes over the priority of figurative and non-figurative tendencies in art represented 'the degeneration to the lowest level of the fundamental debate between reality and alienation'. The real issue was not a greater or lesser degree of figuration, but the inherent quality of the drive motivating the artist, the direction in which it was going and its moral roots.²⁶

At issue too was a fundamental divide over the artistic process that would enable a vital and compelling engagement with a larger reality to enter into the art work. For the figurative realists like Guttuso and Evergood, the basic model was a version of the one that had informed conceptions of realism and naturalism since the later nineteenth century. It runs roughly as follows. The artist's lived sense of reality is registered in the artist's mind as he/she apprehends and experiences something in the world, and this mental and psychic response is in turn directly transmitted into the work of art and

re-embodied as physical phenomenon by way of the artist's activity of depicting what he/she has sensed and felt. It is in this way that an artist's human apprehension of something in the external world enters into the fabric of a painterly representation, bringing the representation alive in ways that a merely mechanical delineation of something observed would not.²⁷

In the essay 'Concrete communication and concrete images' published in 1965, Guttuso explained his commitment to figurative realism and his relinquishing of non-figurative procedures as follows: 'Art is above all a moral problem - I think that I gain certainty and doubt from the irrepressible presence of things - but a doubt and certainty that would make no sense, if it did not take account of "the World". Therefore I consider figurative art not a convention but a necessity.' For him, the artist's active viewing and apprehension of things is registered 'as an experience that is constantly being put to the test. In experiences, that fly by on our eyes, that in the end flow directly into our blood through our direct actions or the pages of newspapers', and that in turn flow into a painting through the artist's handling and shaping of the medium.²⁸ In an essay on de Chirico published in 1970, he expanded on how the latter part of the process, particularly in so far as it engaged the viewer, played out: 'To take account of the value of a painting with respect to its realism, this involves being led by the hand of the artist and forcefully apprehending the visible ... this being led to see and penetrate things, to seize things, this is the philosophy of the painter.'²⁹

A similar, if more down-to-earth view of painterly depiction as registering a directly felt engagement with things is to be found in statement published by Evergood in 1946:

What an artist puts into his work comes back to him. If he feels deeply about trees, he will observe them keenly and in his canvases they will stand firm, and sway, and shimmer, and grow old, and rot and die, and the young ones will sprout out of the ground again. He will make the trees live and others who have loved and observed trees will feel them live in his canvases.... He has experienced something important and he has made others conscious of how important his conviction is – even about trees.³⁰

Interestingly, Evergood, like Guttuso, found he would often get the kind of stimulus needed to sustain his realist practice from magazine and newspaper illustrations, a point that suggests that certain aspects of the Pop New Realism of the later 1950s and early 1960s was closer to the figurative realism of the postwar period than it was to the more radical-seeming painting of the *informel* abstractionists and Abstract Expressionists. Both artists insisted on the importance of the humanist dimension to a figurative way of working with its registering of an artist's directly felt engagement with people and things that distinguished it from non-objective abstraction. As Evergood put it in his characteristically crisp uncompromising way, in the dispute between radical abstractionist and realist tendencies, 'the issue is no longer between representation and non-representation; it is between humanism and formalism',³¹ with formalism here meaning abandonment of the representational and expressive potential of art.

For the figurative realism of artists such as Evergood and Guttuso, the materiality of what was being depicted mattered more than the materiality of the art work and of the painterly processes that went into its making. Still, they did see the latter as having a significant bearing on the capacity of a work to evoke in a compelling way the phenomena it was picturing, even if such concerns did not play a particularly central role in their declarations of artistic principle. For them, the materiality of things in general was important. Guttuso insisted that 'man and thing are the sole theme that belong to a painter' and that a painter, while having ideas, does not depict ideas only things: 'only in the way and manner in which he paints can ideas emerge'.³²

Both

Guttuso and Evergood adhered to the view that painting did not just represent things but had to do with the nexus of things in the world at large. As Guttuso put it:

An apple, a bottle, a face, people at war or in peace, angels in heaven, ecstasies of saints, massacres, the damned in hell, crucifixions or concerts, newspapers, cinemas, museums, streets, landscapes, palaces and closed-up rooms, messed-up beds, discarded and dusty things, painting is the form of our coexistence in each of the elements or in all of them together.³³

Evergood, in a statement published in the *Daily Worker* in 1942, similarly explained how his art was closely bound up with a conception of 'life, people, buildings, objects, nature, as the complex product of interacting social and natural forces'.³⁴

In the art of these modern realists, the materiality of the paint and drawing, while not foregrounded as the generative basis of their art as it was by

artists working in an *informel*, more radically abstract mode such as Jorn and Vedova, is still very much in evidence. Different elements and areas of the picture canvas are rendered with different kinds of painterly mark-making, and the materiality of the latter intrudes to the point of interrupting illusionistic transparency, in effect giving a material grittiness to what is being represented. In a work such as Guttuso's *The Beach* [2], the bodies are rendered in quite different ways, some smooth and others hard and dry, and fashioned with a broken patchwork of painterly marks in varied colours (such distinctions mostly play out between the female and male figures, but not consistently so). Also striking is the way that Guttuso for the most part refused to give his canvases an overall lushly painterly feel, which would integrate the variegated depictive processes. A somewhat rebarbative materiality often makes itself felt, particularly in the intriguing works he produced in the late 1950s and earlier 1960s, many of them still lifes, where things tend to be resistant and untactile rather than sensuously textured, the arrangement of items awkwardly fractured, and the concatenations of forms messy rather than suggestively dense.³⁵

A certain refusal of illusionistic or painterly richness, an at times uneasily dry or flat materiality, and an absence of sensuously saturated integration of the pictorial field are apparent in Evergood's work too. He made the point that 'the rawness of a violent piece of color against a dull, dead piece of color excites the eye very often much more than an all-over rainbow beauty quality.' He also expressed an aversion to the refined sensuous touch and rich painterliness associated with good painting, stressing how he liked to put 'things down flat' in a

no-nonsense way: 'This is painting: it takes greater strength to do this than to brush and stroke, and when I find myself brushing and stroking I hate myself for it.'³⁶ There may be more displays of brushwork in Guttuso, but a conventional sense of overall painterly richness is usually blocked by the presence of areas that are either slightly discordant or empty or casually messy and by the accented linearity and angularity of the black drawn marks.³⁷ The refusal of a conventional aestheticizing of the paint and the depictive drawing is integral to the realist claims of such work.

For experimental materialists such as Jorn, conveying a sense of one's immediate engagement with lived reality was realized by immersing oneself in the process of painting, in the give and take between the artist's impulse and action and the material substance of the emerging painterly configurations. A consciously imposed depictive intent, compelling these configurations to conform to shapes remembered or observed, only interrupted the process and prevented the motifs being formed from taking on a life of their own.³⁸ Even for artists who were committed to a figurative realism, this immersion in process would sometimes loom large in their understanding of how the art they were making would become resonant with their apprehension of and responses to the world in which they lived.³⁹ Significantly, Evergood featured in the series of articles in *ARTnews* in the early 1950s on artists' approaches to painting, among which is the famous description of Pollock's drip process with photographs by Hans Namuth.⁴⁰

The Materiality of the World and the Materiality of Art

For most abstractly inclined artists who had a radical political agenda, something rather different was at stake in their intensive involvement with the materiality of paint than a commitment to the internal parameters of art and the self-defining processes of making it. Such a high-formalist, Greenbergian mindset came to dominate only later on. Instead, what one finds in the comments made by critics and artists at the time are intriguing, often confused ruminations about how the material processes of fashioning a work had affinities not just with processes going on in the mind, but also with those taking place more broadly in the physical world. This was a materialist outlook that refused conventional categorical distinctions between mind and matter, between inner and outer worlds, between the materiality of painting and the materiality of the larger world of which it was part and which in some way it was evoking. As the painter Jean Dubuffet, an artist who was hardly on the left in politics, but who was a close friend and admirer of Jorn, put it: 'The movements of the mind, if one undertakes to give them body by means of painting - have something in common - are close relatives perhaps - with physical concretions of all sorts.'⁴¹

Jorn's reflections on aesthetics and on the broader material constitution of things offer particularly valuable insights into the outlook informing such a materialist conception of painting, partly because he was so actively involved with a number of radical artistic initiatives that took shape in postwar Europe, and partly too because of his political commitments that make him a radical vanguardist

counterpart to the Italian communist Guttuso. He was an irrepressible activist, who brought to bear in his reflections on aesthetics a political perspective informed by, if also to some degree critically sceptical of, Marxist dialectical materialism.⁴² He was a founder member of the Situationist International, and a close friend of Guy Debord's.⁴³

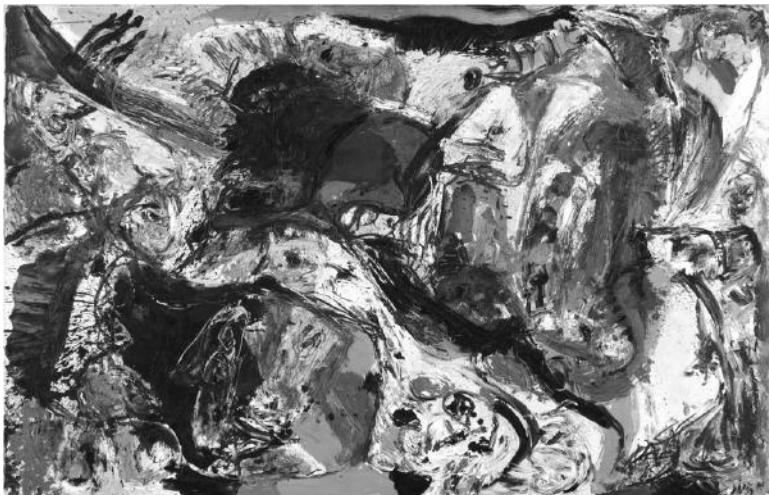
Jorn's painting is characterized by a free intermingling of often discordant agglomerations of stridently bright and also murkily coloured paint [4]. Like Dubuffet, he was committed to the view that the artist should be guided by an immersion in painterly process, and that the configuring of forms and motifs would be compelling only if pursued in the first instance without conscious representational intent,⁴⁴ not because such a process made the resulting work expressive of the artist's state of mind but because it was true to the underlying formation of things.⁴⁵ The way Jorn's reflections on aesthetics and the 'natural order' do away with categorical distinctions between human impulse and agency and the material environment of which they are part has certain affinities with currents of thinking in the materialist phenomenology of the period.⁴⁶ His broader conceptualizing of materiality, however, has less to do with such philosophical trends than with recent scientific thinking about the nature of matter and underlying physical processes, and with Marxist, dialectical materialist theorizing of processes of social change and political revolution.

Jorn's errant and intriguing meditations on the materialist basis of the aesthetic took shape in a book published in 1952, entitled *Luck and Chance*.⁴⁷ Particularly striking is his

characterization of the spontaneous, activating disruption he saw played out in aesthetic experience as a physical, material phenomenon like other natural processes. The aesthetic event's breaking with a known, habitual and ongoing patterning of things, was as Jorn formulated it, 'a self-contradictory capacity of matter'.⁴⁸ Subjectivity, and hence too the subjective impulses which set in train an aesthetic phenomenon, were not to be thought of as immaterial or spiritual, as having to do with soul or mind existing independently of the material world. The subject, while 'normally defined as the "conscious ego", the observing, thinking feeling, active individual', was in the final analysis '*any exclusive or limited sphere of interest in matter*, any system of action, any individuality ... *Every cell in the human body is an object and at the same time an area of interest, a subject or acting individual.*'⁴⁹ In other words, 'we do not perceive the subject as "the conscious ego", as is generally the case, but simply as a sphere of interest or a *viewpoint in matter, and thus not as something outside this world but as something both of and in it*'.⁵⁰

Jorn's conception of matter was shaped by recent scientific thinking in several ways. He was an avid reader of his fellow Dane Niels Bohr's essays that were published in a book titled *Atomic Theory and the Description of Nature*.⁵¹ Most notably he picked up on quantum mechanical thinking about the behaviour of matter that challenged determinist Newtonian conceptions of causality - scientists were finding that particle behaviour at the atomic level was describable only in terms of statistical aggregates of events that on an individual basis occurred randomly and by way of discontinuous

quantum leaps. He was also drawn to discussions deriving from Heisenberg's uncertainty principle about how observation could not pin down atomic particle behaviour because the process of observation was itself a material event that disrupted what it was observing and was part of the phenomenon it was seeking to describe. This for Jorn offered an understanding of materiality in which the non-normative, disruptive aesthetic event could be seen as integral to the basic constitution of matter and changes taking place in the material world. For Jorn, because the 'experimental evolution of the manifoldness of the universe and nature is of such a kind that we could well say that *matter in all its regularity is an incurable gambler*', the aesthetic event, the sudden, unpredictable appearance of something unknown, was simply one of many accidental occurrences taking place in the physical world. Given that accident, 'an event that occurs without demonstrable or calculable reason or purpose, or from causes that lie outside the immediately observed area and are not predetermined through insight or experience in those who experience it', is so pervasive, 'the function of chance is normal and ordinary'.⁵² Its deployment in art was certainly not to be seen as distinctive to art movements such as Dada or Surrealism.



4 Asger Jorn, *Dead Drunk Danes*, 1960, oil on canvas, 120 × 200.5 cm. Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark.

In thinking of the real change that he saw being realized momentarily in a vital aesthetic phenomenon, in contrast to the more constant, relatively stable

metamorphoses ordinarily taking place in the material world,⁵³ Jorn was also taking into account post-Darwinian understandings of the unpredictable changes and mutations basic to processes of evolution. 'Real evolution', in his view, occurred by way of disharmonious breaks, eruptions of something unpredictable and unpredetermined.⁵⁴

For him, then, the interplay between a relatively stable, ongoing constitution of things he identified with the ethical in the realm of culture, and the unpredictable, gratuitous eruption of excess he associated with the aesthetic, was 'a natural

phenomenon, the condition for all differentiation and elaboration of matter'.⁵⁵

Jorn's thinking of aesthetics in material terms clearly fed into his vanguardist conception of painting as a process that gave rise to something new, unintended and unpredictable that broke radically with accepted forms of picturing. It was also bound up with his anarcho-Marxist politics and his conviction that real social and political change could be realized only through a revolution that destroyed the existing system.⁵⁶ The model he had in mind owes a lot to classical Marxist understandings of how a fundamental transformation of class relations could never be realized by way of incremental change but only through the violent revolutionary upheaval that occurred once an existing social order was no longer able to accommodate the new forces emerging within it and began to break down. At the same time, he took the basic form of this Marxist, sociopolitical model of historical process and radical change as operating more generally in the material world, whether inorganic, biological or human: '*On the strength of its construction, every system, every sphere of interest, mental as well as physical, has an absolute limit of evolution, which it is unable under any circumstances to transgress in time or space except by dissolution in favour of the formation of a new and richer structure.*'⁵⁷

Jorn's ontology posed two very basic problems for his radical libertarian political and artistic convictions, the implications of which are possibly played out more in his painting than in his writing. The aesthetic or revolutionary impulse to realize something radically new, on his understanding, was

impelled by a subjective goal basic to all organisms' strivings, consisting 'of power, of expansion, of the most unlimited control of matter'.⁵⁸ There was nothing, however, in the sudden eruptions of impulsive energy he associated with the aesthetic to guarantee that their effect would be an opening out to new liberating possibilities rather than a release of destructive force or a meaningless play of blind impulse. That was a risk that had to be taken - it was in the end, to quote the title of his book, a matter of 'luck and chance'. In a painting such as *Dead Drunk Danes* [4], one is being presented, it seems, with a less-than-meaningful orgy of blind impulse - at least if one looks to the title, which refers to the Danish custom of taking a ferry to Sweden to get blind drunk on duty-free alcohol. The painting itself however is quite ambiguous; it seems not to form into the promise of a truly democratic interplay of impulse between freely acting agents any more than it necessarily

conjures up a scenario of a blindly aimless alcohol riot - the visages that emerge from and engulf themselves in the paint work are monstrous but also intriguingly vital.

The second basic problem posed by Jorn's conceptions of materiality has to do with how, in material circumstances such as those of modern capitalism that were antithetical to and threatened by the realization of a revolutionary impulse that would bring about radical change, the aesthetic event could take shape as anything greater than a temporary ripple that ended up being little more than a hopeless play of wishful thinking. Jorn in effect posed the problem while leaving its implications dangling in one of his more telling

characterizations of what he saw as the underlying subjective impulses of the aesthetic:

the deeper ego-perspective [which] occurs in the individual as wishes, dream, fantasies or ideas, which are the gradual consciousness of one's own unreleased possibilities. Tied to feelings of dread about the elements that could threaten and hinder their realization, these form images which are straightforwardly ascribable to our physique in the mental atmosphere of imaginings. These sheer illusions are certainly built up of matter from the actual experienced world, but in their structure have nothing to do with it, as they are fantasies and self-delusions.⁵⁹

When the impulse remained at the level of wishful thinking, which in Jorn's reckoning would have been the case for most art being made at the time, it was in danger of becoming a reified ideal appropriated by the world from which it sought liberation: '*All ideal or subjective thought is wishful thinking, invoked by capabilities or inner and organic sensory influences. The latent unsatisfied wish becomes a fixed idea or an ideal.*'⁶⁰ Certainly as time went on, Jorn became increasingly pessimistic about the potential for art to activate revolutionary impulses that would bring about real change. This was particularly so after his separation from the Situationist International as it became apparent to him that the group was beginning to see art as a hindrance to revolutionary activism, and even more so when the outburst of political radicalism in the events of 1968, in which Jorn participated, was suppressed and had to go into retreat. He felt that the claims to be made for the liberatory potential of art, given the social and economic conditions operating against any immediate possibility of revolutionary change, were very precarious:

The artist can create true art only in the most intense opposition to this so-called 'real' life. But at the same time this unnatural but vital opposition makes his own art unnatural and his aim, the perfect masterpiece, unattainable; for the more he opposes society, the more he opposes himself, and if he denies society he denies himself, reality being the only foundation on which he can build anything at all.

But if 'Defeat is assured in advance', it is not a matter of giving up: 'it is dependent on the intelligence and drive of the individual artist how far he will go'.⁶¹

There is a way in which his painting can be seen as resisting a recuperation of libertarian impulse as fixed ideal or marginal play, in that it is suggestive of a gratuitous, potentially destructive vitality and a dissolution of fixed bearings. Jorn took issue with the ex-fascist Hans Sedlmayr's pessimistically conservative diagnosis of the negative effects on art of a loss of centre (*Verlust der Mitte*) in the modern world.⁶² In his painting of that name,⁶³ though, the ludicrousness, the monstrosity of what emerges in such circumstances of a radical loss of centre seems more in evidence than any intimation of a creative development of human capacities. Among the more negative effects seems to be the production of truly aberrant apparitions such as Sedlmayr himself. If other paintings seem less violently conflicted [4], one hardly sees in them a celebration of the liberatory potential of art-making. They testify to an oddly compelling but also disturbing envisioning of things that could realistically be materialized in the late capitalist world Jorn inhabited. The projection of imaginative possibility seems to be producing disorientating monsters, with this imagined world inevitably being mired in the world as it is, rather as

the looming images are materialized in a flux of resistant if somewhat malleable paint.⁶⁴



5 Asger Jorn, *Stalingrad, le non lieu ou le fou rire du courage*, 1956, 1957–60, 1967, 1972, oil on canvas, 296 × 492 cm. Silkeborg Kunstmuseum, Denmark.

The general tenor of the later works to which Jorn gave politically or ideologically loaded titles would seem to be decidedly ironic about the generative possibilities that might emerge from the aesthetic gesturing of his painting. *Ausverkauf einer Seele*, 'clearance sale for a soul', presents a pretty bleak prospect at first sight, even if tempered by a certain humour.⁶⁵ At the same time, the paint work, which really mattered for Jorn, while suggesting a chaos more of dissolution than of potentially regenerative energy, is strikingly alive and powerful. Not much promise, but not a closure on promise either, which would after all be at odds with Jorn's irrepressibly activist outlook. This is to some extent true of his

most ambitious history painting, on which he worked off and on between 1956 and his death in 1973: *Stalingrad, le non lieu ou le fou rire du courage* (the non place or the mad laughter of courage) [5]. This work was devised as an attempt to figure in paint the unprecedented destructive violence of the battle of Stalingrad and its status as a world-changing event marking the beginning of the defeat of Nazism, and what was after all a communist victory. At first sight, it seems as if the work is little more than a slightly impure abstract field of paint, in which the faint traces of motifs evoking figures and buildings are largely obliterated. But in this white field of snowlike paint there is something more than devastation. The whiteness has a curiously impure beauty, not quite alive but not quite inert either, while on closer inspection faintly configured beings emerge here and there, suggestive perhaps of the ‘mad laughter of courage’ evoked in Jorn’s title. Again, the effectiveness of the painting is inherent in its materiality, both as paint work and as evocation of the material residues of an undeniably epoch-making and unimaginably violent event.⁶⁶

The difference from Guttuso’s large-scale realist political history paintings, or his and Evergood’s more ambitious social-realist renderings of everyday life, could, it might seem, hardly be more radical, but only if one takes a conventional formalistic view of the situation and discounts these artists’ larger political and culture investment in their practice. It would be easy to set the latter’s explicit figuring of the human in contrast to what seems to be the almost total obliteration of any distinction between the human and the inhuman in the painterly materiality of Jorn’s work. Taking

Jorn's oeuvre as whole, however, there is usually a figuring of some kind of human presence, often indistinguishable from the monstrous and the animal, in the visages that emerge from the turbulent paint. Such suggestion is largely obliterated, but not completely cancelled out in the painting *Stalingrad*. Where, for all the differences, an affinity may be found between the two very different realisms discussed in this article - in addition to a painter such as Jorn holding onto ideas of animate and at times human presence - this may be a shared understanding of a less than clear-cut boundary between consciously motivated action and the blind workings of inhuman forces and impulses. In so much as both politically engaged realisms were shaped by Marxist materialism, both envisioned conscious human agency as immersed in a nexus of forces, human and animal, social and environmental, that largely lay beyond the purview of individual human agency.

- 1 Andrew Hemingway, *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926–1956* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2002). Other recent publications that address the persistence of figurative realism in the postwar period include Brendan Prendeville, *Realism in 20th Century Painting* (Thames & Hudson: London and New York, 2000) and James Hyman, *The Battle for Realism: Figurative Art in Britain during the Cold War 1945–1960* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2001).
- 2 On Evergood, see Hemingway, *Artists on the Left*, op. cit., pp. 140–4, 227–33.
- 3 On the importance of realism as an imperative in the non-figurative, more abstract work of the postwar period, see Alex Potts, *Experiments in Modern Realism: Worldmaking in Postwar European and American Art* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2013), pp. 24–153. See also the discussion there of Jorn, pp. 383–98.
- 4 Richard Wollheim, 'Guttuso', in *Guttuso* (McRoberts and Tunnard: London, 1960). The British critics drawn to Guttuso's work came from a

wide spectrum, ranging from the more formalist Douglas Cooper to the left champion of social realism, John Berger.

- 5 Renato Guttuso, *Mestiere di Pittore: Scritti sull'arte de la società* (De Donato: Bari, 1972). A number of key essays are translated into German in *Renato Guttuso: Gemälde und Zeichnungen* (Museen der Stadt Köln: Cologne, 1977).
- 6 Lara Pucci, "Terra Italia": The Peasant Subject as Site of National and Socialist Identities in the Work of Renato Guttuso and Giuseppe De Santis', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 71 (2008), pp. 315–44.
- 7 The two paintings by Guttuso are *Occupazione di terre in Sicilia*, 1953, 200 × 278 cm. destroyed, and *Portella della Ginestra*, 105 × 200 cm, Private Collection; illustrated in Pucci, "Terra Italia", op. cit., figs. 7 and 12.
- 8 Guttuso, *La battaglia del ponte dell'ammiraglio*, 1952, 500 × 300 cm, Uffizi; a second version dated 1955 is in the Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea. The conventional dramatic rhetoric was not much liked by some of his closest admirers – John Berger, *Catalogue of an Exhibition of the Recent Works of Renato Guttuso* (Ernest Brown and Phillips: London, 1955).
- 9 Many of these paintings had topical political overtones, such as the very fine *Calabrian Worker's Sunday in Rome (Rocco with a gramophone)* dating from 1960–1 in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow.
- 10 Guttuso, *Giornale murale-Maggio '68*, 280 × 480 cm, Ludwig Forum, Aachen, and *I funerali di Togliatti*, 1972, 340 × 440 cm, Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna; illustrated in *Renato Guttuso 1912–2012* (Skira: Geneva and Milan, 2012), pp. 75, 152–3.
- 11 Guttuso, *Boogie-Woogie*, 1953, 165 × 205 cm, Museo de Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, illustrated in *Renato Guttuso 1912–2012*, op. cit., p. 74.
- 12 See note 2.
- 13 Kendall Taylor, *Philip Evergood: Never Separate from the Heart* (Associated University Presses: London and Toronto, 1987), p. 87. Though Evergood did not make any significant changes to the painting, he invested enough in his retouchings to redate it 'LIII-LIX'.
- 14 Taylor, *Evergood*, op. cit., pp. 130–1. In 1963, Guttuso gave Evergood one of his drawings, which Evergood presented as a gift four years

later to his friends Ann and Bill Feinberg (drawing sold at Swann Auction Galleries in 2002).

¹⁵ There is a very informative analysis of the trajectory of Guttuso's artistic career in the entry by Raffaele De Grada on Guttuso in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 61 (2004); available online.

¹⁶ Guttuso, *Mestiere*, op. cit., pp. 111–2.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 116, from an essay 'Informale' published in 1965.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 103–5.

¹⁹ See the essays by Vedova 'It's not so easy to paint a nose' (1948) and 'Everything should be re-implicated (1954) in *Emilio Vedova* (Milan: Charta, 2006), pp. 126–7.

²⁰ Guttuso, *Mestiere*, op. cit., pp. 239–40.

²¹ Taylor, *Evergood*, op. cit., p. 176.

²² There seems to be no record of contact between the two artists, which would have been unlikely given their very different political and artistic affiliations.

²³ Asger Jorn, *Pour La Forme* (Editions Alilia: Paris, 2001), p. 11 (first published by the Internationale Situationniste in 1957); and *Discours aux Pingouins et Autres Écrits* (École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts: Paris, 2001), p. 72–3.

²⁴ Jorn, *Discours*, op. cit., p. 98 (1949).

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 46, 137.

²⁶ Guttuso, *Mestiere*, op. cit., p. 238

²⁷ This process is evoked very eloquently by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *Oeil et Esprit* (Gallimard: Paris, 1964), pp. 86–7.

²⁸ Renato Guttuso (1977), op. cit., pp. 30–1.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 50.

³⁰ Herman Baron, *Philip Evergood* (ACA Gallery: New York, 1946), p. 27. See also the statement quoted in Hemingway, *Artists on the Left*, op. cit., p. 228.

³¹ Baron, *Evergood*, op. cit. p. 16.

³² Renato Guttuso (1977), op. cit., pp. 43, 48.

³³ Ibid., p. 27, first published in 1942.

³⁴ Taylor, *Evergood*, op. cit., p. 176.

³⁵ See, for example, Guttuso, *Interno con Accessori di Studio (damigiana, cesto e sedia)*, 1960, oil and gouache on joined sheets of paper laid down on canvas, 156 × 205 cm, Private Collection.

³⁶ Taylor, *Evergood*, op. cit., p. 179

³⁷ See, for example, *La Discussione*, 1959–60, oil and collaged newspaper on canvas, 220 × 249 cm, Tate, London; image on museum website and in Guttuso 1912–2012, op. cit., pp. 138–9.

³⁸ This was a widely shared view at the time – see Potts, *Experiments*, op. cit., pp. 70–2.

³⁹ See, for example, the comments by the American figurative realist Ben Shahn about how the painter needs to establish ‘a complete rapport with his medium ... paint has a power itself and in itself’. At the same time he was deeply critical of the formalist denial of depiction by artists ‘who only manipulate materials’. John D. Morse (ed.), *Ben Shahn* (Praeger: New York and Washington, 1972), pp. 85, 83.

⁴⁰ Fairfield Porter, ‘Evergood Paints a Picture’, *Art News*, vol. 50 (January 1952), pp. 30–3, 55–6.

⁴¹ Peter Selz (ed.), *The Work of Jean Dubuffet* (Museum of Modern Art: New York, 1962), p. 72; see also Potts, *Experiments*, op. cit., pp. 138–45.

⁴² He offered an extended critique of mainstream Marxist understandings of value in the book *Value and Economy* published in 1963; translated by Peter Shields in Asger Jorn, *The Natural Order and Other Texts* (Ashgate: Aldershot and Burlington, 2002).

⁴³ On Jorn and Situationist International, see Karen Kurczynski, ‘Expression as Vandalism: Asger Jorn’s “Modifications”’, *Res*, vol. 53/54 (Spring/Autumn 2008), pp. 293–313; and ‘Asger Jorn and the Avant-Garde: From Helhesten to the Situationist International’, *Rutgers Art Review*, vol. 21 (2005), pp. 57–76.

⁴⁴ Jorn, *Discours*, op. cit., pp. 143, 145 (1953).

⁴⁵ Jorn, *Forme*, op. cit., p. 135.

⁴⁶ The phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty is a good case in point, though the measured temper of his writing could hardly be more different from

Jorn's. For a somewhat different take on Jorn's blurring of distinctions between human subjectivity and the non-human material world see Hal Foster, 'Creaturely Cobra', *October*, no. 141 (Summer 2012), pp. 5–12.

47 It was reissued with some additions in 1963; the later edition is translated in Jorn, *The Natural Order*, pp. 231–355.

48 Ibid., p. 256.

49 Ibid., pp. 243–5.

50 Ibid., p. 281.

51 Niels Bohr, *Atomic Theory and the Description of Nature* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1934); first published in Danish in 1929.

52 Jorn, *Natural Order*, op. cit., p. 267

53 Jorn held to a decidedly non-static view of the basic nature of matter, ibid., pp. 271, 320.

54 Ibid., p. 278; this he likened to the splitting which occurs when a new organism comes into being (p. 284).

55 Ibid., p. 278.

56 Ibid., p. 331.

57 Ibid., p. 321.

58 Ibid., p. 322; see also his comment about how such impulses were at root 'an *aggression or conquest*, a reaching out beyond the static ego', ibid., p. 263.

59 Ibid., p. 301

60 Ibid., p. 301

61 Erik Steffensen, *Asger Jorn: Animator of Painting* (Edition Blondal: Hellerup), 1995, pp. 157–8, from an essay Jorn wrote in 1971.

62 He argued to the contrary that 'modern man can from now on retain his faculties, indeed even develop them in these conditions', Jorn, *Discours*, op. cit., p. 310.

63 Jorn, *Verlust der Mitte*, 1958, oil on canvas, 146 × 114 cm, Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent.

64 In a painting such as Jorn's *Letter to My Son* (1956–7, oil on canvas, 130 × 195.5 cm, Tate, London; image on museum website), given its

title, one might be prompted to see in it an array of vital, possibly reassuring, or comic apparitions of various kinds, at the same time that it is not impossible to see in some of them a certain monstrosity and potentially aggressive power. Perhaps they are no more reassuring than the figures in fairy tales, or the monsters and humanoid figures on early medieval churches that Jorn admired.

65 Jorn, *Ausverkauf einer Seele*, 1958–9, oil with sand on canvas, 200 × 250 cm, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; image on museum website.

66 On Jorn's *Stalingrad*, see Karen Kucunski, 'No Man's Land', *October*, no. 141 (Summer 2012), pp. 23–52 and Potts, *Experiments*, op. cit., pp. 383–4.

THE SITUATION OF WOMEN

Frances Stracey

'There is dissimulation everywhere under a coercive regime.'
Charles Fourier

'All oppression creates a state of war.' Simone de Beauvoir¹

Scattered throughout the first issue of the Situationist International's (SI) journal *Internationale situationniste* (1958) is a seemingly random selection of six images of women, an ad-hoc mixture of bathing beauties smiling, beguiling, crouching, posing, playing in water and reclining on horseback [1–6]. With no obvious alterations and no explicit recordings via captions or speech bubbles, these images obey the principle of 'minor détournements' (*détournements mineurs*). A 'minor' détournement was defined by the SI as an appropriated element that had no importance in itself and so drew its altered meaning(s) from the new context or location in which it was placed.² Typically this consisted of press clippings, a neutral phrase or a commonplace photograph. In this instance, everyday commercial images were shifted from their original home in women's magazines or pornographic magazines and relocated in the SI's revolutionary journal. But to what critical effect? There seems to be no clear relation between these images and the anonymous mixture of articles in which they appear, including the following: 'Le

Bruit et la fureur' (Anon.); '*La Lutte pour le contrôle des nouvelles techniques de conditionnement*' (Anon.); '*Problèmes préliminaires à la construction d'une situation*' (Anon.); '*Les Situationnistes et l'automation*' (Jorn); '*Pas d'indulgences inutiles*' (Bernstein); '*Action en Belgique contre l'assemblée des critiques d'art internationaux*' (Anon.).³

Undoubtedly, this process of determinate misplacement or disjunctive conjuncture worked to challenge the conventional meaning or role of these images. No longer circulating in their intended home, these bikini babes cease to serve as the props to the goods they were meant to sell, such as holidays in the sun, beachwear, leisure lifestyles, etc. The vacuousness of their posing is exaggerated by the absence of a suitable or expected context. Instead, they bump and grind against their new situation. Juxtaposing the material to absurd effect, the SI succeeds in exposing the gendered, consumerist fiction that conflates images of woman with desire and glamour, as seductive traits to be projected onto the goods they support and promote. The function of these images is rendered ridiculous by the commodity's absence in their new context. Yet, at the same time, their ornamental and seductive allure is presupposed and to some extent maintained. Any jarring effect of their détourned misplacement relies on their perceived erotic and superficial appeal, which clashes against the intellectual critique offered in the texts that they supplement. The members of the SI are in danger of replaying a decidedly feminized version of what Wolfgang Haug defines as the 'sexual semblance' of 'commodity aesthetics'.⁴ That is to say, they are reliant on using the sex appeal of these types of eye-candy as a lure, either to enliven the dull

rhetoric of the texts or to capture the interest of a potential buyer flicking through the journal, tempting them into reading the group's critique of the society of the spectacle. In such a case, a limited transformation has occurred at the level of the reader, since the images are no longer directed at a presupposed female audience - the anticipated consumers of women's magazines from where these images were sourced. Indeed, the same-sex audience for these images complicates heterosexist readings of them. And it should be noted that the SI's ideal reader was not male or of a fixed sex or gender. These examples of minor détournements set up an ambiguous and fraught oscillation: on the one hand, they replay the fetishized character of the commodity-image or spectacle; on the other, they transform its workings by relocating it to a new, out-of-place, avant-garde context that exposes the ludicrously reductive function and fiction of the sign-woman as the stand-in for sexual semblance as such.



1 From
Internationale situationniste, no. 1
(June 1958), p. 5.



2 From
Internationale situationniste,
no. 1 (June
1958), p. 7.

This analysis works in so far as the images are treated somewhat generically, as incidences of refunctioned or détourned spectacles. A more substantive and complex reading of the same images emerges, however, if the particularity of their historical context is taken into account, such as the specific types of postwar 'women's' magazines in which they appeared. In an interview with Michèle Bernstein in 1999, I asked why these bikini-babe images were selected. Significantly, she began her answer by admitting that she was responsible for putting images into the SI's journal. Her reason for including images in general was

prompted by Lewis Carroll, who apparently said, ‘what is the use of a story without pictures’. This allusion may appear to deflate their significance. But I think it suggests that a particular use was at stake in the détournement of images from the world of popular, commercial-press culture, especially when it is considered that they were directed at a particular class of female consumers who bought magazines such as *Elle* (founded in 1945) and *Marie Claire* (founded in 1937 and running until 1944, and revived in 1954), which Bernstein acknowledged were the sources for the images. By the late 1950s, both *Elle* and *Marie Claire* had undergone a profound shift in the ideal of femininity promoted in their pages. During the 1940s, the focus had been on the '*femme au foyer*', whose duty it was to keep a good home even in

times of adversity (there was still rationing at this time). Many articles concentrated on ideas of domestic efficiency and on women's contribution to rebuilding the French economy by giving birth. Despite women's role in the Resistance, which had helped to secure their right to vote in 1944, the postwar role expected of women was still limited to being a good mother and housekeeper.⁵ Interestingly, there were no advertisements in these magazines during the 1940s, so selling goods (which were scarce after the war) was not the priority. The first advertisement for a washing machine appeared in *Elle* in November 1949.⁶ But selling a particular feminine role model certainly was a priority.

By the late 1950s, however, advertising à l'*Américain* was in full swing, with both magazines displaying glossy images of modern 'must have' household machines and gadgets, even if they were

well beyond the average worker's budget. Promoted alongside such supposedly labour-saving devices was a new ideal of the 'superwoman', targeting and challenging its young female audience, typically teachers or secretaries, to live up to the changing roles of women in the labour markets of the late 1950s and early 1960s, when more than the reproduction of children was necessary to rebuild the French economy. Surveys carried out by these magazines revealed that for these new women a life at home was no longer sufficient or desired.⁷ Women's increasing financial contribution to the home was also reflected in surveys that showed the changing attitudes and expectations of men, who reportedly considered intelligence and common sense at the top of the list of qualities of an ideal wife, with domestic skills dropping to the bottom.⁸ Women were of course still expected to do the 'double

shift', however, earning a wage on top of cleaning, cooking and bringing up baby. In fact, magazines such as *Elle* were promoting a very limited emancipation for women via gadgets, running advertisements such as 'Moulinex liberates women'. In the 1950s, women still had few legal rights over their bodies, parental home or bank accounts, and these were not instituted until the late 1960s. But during this time, the image of woman was in flux, with an older ideal waning and a newer one yet to be fully formed. For the young, upwardly mobile audience of *Elle* or *Marie Claire* the '*femme au foyer*' may not have been for them, but the roles on offer were still experienced as artificial, be it worker, citizen, mother or a glamourous 'do-it-all, have-it-all' superwoman.



3 From *Internationale situationniste*, no. 1 (June 1958), p. 11.

The reality of everyday life for most women was more banal and tedious, and certainly at odds with the shiny 'alien settings of chrome and Formica' advertised in magazines and forming the ideal domestic settings of American movies that inundated France after the war.⁹ A census in 1946 revealed that 20 per cent of dwellings in Paris had no running water, 77 per cent had no bathroom and 54 per cent had no inside lavatory.¹⁰ Even those who managed to move out of the inner-city slums to the new low-rent '*grands ensembles*' - the suburban housing projects located on the outskirts of Paris - could not afford luxury items such as fridges and washing machines. Indeed, a survey in 1956 showed that 60 per cent of housewives questioned wanted such labour-saving devices but none could afford

the substantial initial outlay.¹¹ This proves that the burgeoning consumer or affluent society was socially selective, forcing an economic division between the haves and the have-nots, as well as a gender division between working men who were expected to provide these goods and their non-working wives who wanted them.



4 From *Internationale situationniste*, no. 1 (June 1958), p. 26.



5 From
Internationale situationniste, no. 1
(June 1958), p. 24.

For the SI, everyone - male or female - was subjected to the alienating conditions of the society of the spectacle. As they put it in 1953: 'A mental disease has swept the planet: banalization. Everyone is hypnotized by production and conveniences - sewage system, elevator, bathroom, washing machine.¹² Yet, the effects of this banalization were not symmetrical or gender-neutral, but rather uneven and biased. As Kristin Ross aptly describes it: 'Women undergo the

everyday – its humiliations and tediums as well as its pleasures – more than men. The housewife, that newly renovated post-war creation, is mired in the quotidian; she cannot escape it.¹³ In the 1950s, it was the category of ‘woman’ that the society of the spectacle subjected to the coercive and dissimulating drives of everyday life more heavily than any other, constantly projecting fantasy images of the proper way to look, act, cook, etc. Images of women became the central site for the alienating machinations of the spectacle.

So as representatives of the spectacle’s technique of everyday control and regimentation, the images of women in the SI’s journal are more illustrative of the content of the texts in which they appear than it first seems. For example, the article ‘The Situationists and Automation’ concerns the deadening effects of standardization on our desires that results in ‘a total degradation of human life or the possibility of continually discovering new desires’; it is accompanied by a stereotypical bathing

beauty.¹⁴ ‘The Battle for the Control of New Techniques of Conditioning’ talks of a race between free artists and the police in experimenting with, and developing the use of, new techniques of conditioning, such as advertising; a battle, that is, to find a non-repressive use that contests the spectacle’s controlled policing. This text is accompanied by an image of a semi-naked woman ‘flashing’, which condenses the criminalized act of indecent exposure with the titillating allure of the striptease.

From Bernstein’s perspective, however, these ‘bikini babes’ had two specific meanings to be

played with. First up, they were '*charmant*' and 'splendid demonstrations of the natural look', in the sense that they no longer bore what she called 'secondary sexual attractions', such as make-up, high heels, lacquered hairdos, all attributes of high-maintenance screen idols like Betty Grable and Marilyn Monroe.¹⁵ Such a 'natural look' at that time symbolized liberation from an artificially contained and concealed body, exemplified by the heavily corseted 'New Look' created in 1947 by Christian Dior. This restrictive garment can be understood as part of France's postwar 'return to order', when women who worked in the war were expected to free up their jobs for the returning soldiers and suture themselves back into the role of housewife or glamorous superwomen. There are, of course, problems with Bernstein's definition of the natural look. It tends to reinforce a rather essentialist reading of these images, as signs of the category of 'natural woman', at home in her essential element of water or playing with animals. What is glossed over is the obvious fact that the bikini-clad body is not natural, but a historically (un)dressed body, disciplined by a particular regime of zoned eroticization. It may even be seen as representative of a certain 'body fascism' with regards to the proper or socially acceptable type of body, namely youthful and of a certain weight, permitted to be displayed in this garment and in magazines such as *Elle*. The bikini is a peep-show garment, structured to draw attention to the very parts it barely covers, fragmenting the female body into erotic zones. Its shocking and provocative appeal can be gleaned from the fact that it took its name from the US atomic-weapons testing in the Pacific Ocean near Bikini Atoll. In the wake of the devastation wrought

by such bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, things considered intense or shocking were referred to as 'atomic', and seductive or provocative women were often referred to as 'bombshells'. Therefore, it is perhaps not a surprise that when two Frenchmen independently designed skimpy alternatives to the one-piece swimsuit in the summer of 1946, both acquired nuclear nicknames. Jacques Heim created a tiny two-piece called the '*atome*'; Louis Reard introduced his design on 5 July, only four days after the United States had begun testing in the Bikini Atoll. In a bold marketing ploy, Reard named his creation '*le bikini*', implying that it was as explosive an invention as the bomb. It is hard not to think that it was precisely the provocative frisson of these images that Bernstein (anonymously, on behalf of the SI) was importing into the SI's texts.



6 From *Internationale situationniste*, no. 1 (June 1958), p. 30.

Bernstein's second interest in using these images of bikini babes presents a very different model of the body at stake. This is what she called their 'paraplegic' aspect. Most of the women on display were, in a certain sense, deformed in some way,

disabled through the cropping of limbs. Their legs, feet and arms were effectively amputated by the photographic frame. In psychoanalytical terms, rather than a narcissistic desire represented by a whole body image, here circulates a desire for a pre-symbolic, pre-Oedipal body, represented by these sadistic 'part objects', bodies that are fragmented or castrated at the level of the visible. As photographic images, they are guillotined by the shutter and cut up by the processes of framing and cropping.¹⁶ No photograph is ever whole. Its frame is porous to what is located outside of it, and its meanings are supplemented by interaction with what comes up against its borders: other images and texts from different spaces and times.

Such an unstable web of signification is inherent to the montage aesthetic of détournement itself. But what needs to be resisted is a tendency to claim a general or transhistorical reading of the SI's détourned images. The SI did not endorse the technique of appropriation *per se*. They insisted that to critically reuse existing images required an understanding of the targeted audience and the dominant meanings or codes in order to recode them. The SI was emphatic in defining détournement as a targeted tactic, reliant on established meanings in order to see and comprehend their undoing. I would argue that it is in the gap opened up by the slippage of meaning *between* a given signified (code) and signifier (material support) - which takes place through the ruination of the contingent or arbitrary, yet historical, linkage between the two terms of the sign - that a transformation emerges. Yet, the risk of misrecognition haunts the replaying of given images. This can be seen in the SI's risk of

repeating, rather than undoing, the sexist codification of these pictures. In order to deconstruct this code and to reconstruct their subversive potential, it is necessary to locate the specific postwar context of these images, even if this is something that the SI themselves failed to do.

For example, what Bernstein forgot to mention was that one of these ‘amputees’, reclining on horseback, was a culturally significant icon from the 1950s, namely Brigitte Bardot [6]. But I think such naming is crucial when considering détournement as a targeted assault. It exposes how images have particular, material affects, such as contributing to forms of socialization and processes of identification and dis/mis-identifications. In the late 1950s, Bardot stood for a new ideal of ‘woman’. Claire Laubier remarks that for the younger cinema-going generation of the time, the 1956 release of Roger Vadim’s film *Et Dieu créa la Femme* (*And God Created Woman*), starring Bardot as the adolescent heroine Juliette, represented a transformed portrayal of femininity. Instead of romantic, vulnerable women who like to please men, such as Monroe, or the distant, unobtainable screen star, such as the icy princess Grace Kelly, here was a more ‘earthy’, ‘identifiable’ female character that defied received morality. In her bare feet and blue jeans, she represented a sexually emancipated ‘*femme-enfant*’, a ‘Lolita with attitude’, a sort of female James Dean, as was noted at the time.¹⁷ The latter comparison presents a somewhat ambiguous figure of a female, as a man in drag, conferring on Bardot a masculine aura of independence and rebelliousness, whose predatory sexual encounters were undertaken without guilt or remorse. One critic even remarked that from the back she looked

like a man, a reference to her athletic and sinuous frame. Whatever the gender ambiguity (or perhaps because of it), she symbolized a more instinctive (hence still naturalistic) subject, for whom men became '*l'homme object*' - a feminine reversal that mirrors the conventional masculine, heterosexist desire that subjugates and objectifies its others. Nevertheless, she was a sign of sexual liberation, a reversal of the sex roles figured in the image of female revolt. No longer passive, she was an autonomous agent pursuing her own intense experiences. And unlike the equally aggressive and predatory cinematic figure of the *femme fatale*, she did not have to die for her indiscretions. Perhaps this sign of rebellion or of the return of the repressed explains why the SI appropriated the particular image of Bardot into their texts.

Of course, Bardot also represented a home-grown - that is, French - rebel with a cause. This nationalized heroine could be read as a critique of what the SI described as France's postwar colonization by American culture. The Marshall Plan of 1948 did indeed set up an unequal trading, a sort of one-way street whereby all things American could flow in, but all things French stayed at home.¹⁸ This Americanization was also read in terms of a feminization or effeminization and emasculation of French culture. While such terms suggest a heterosexist orientation, they nevertheless expose consumer culture as feminized, grasping something of the dominant symbolic codings of advertising at that time in which the reified image of woman was predominant. It also recognizes a particular gendered process of deceit or disavowal, in which the image of woman veils or dissembles what all of us, men included, are

subjected to within the alienating logic of the commodity-form.

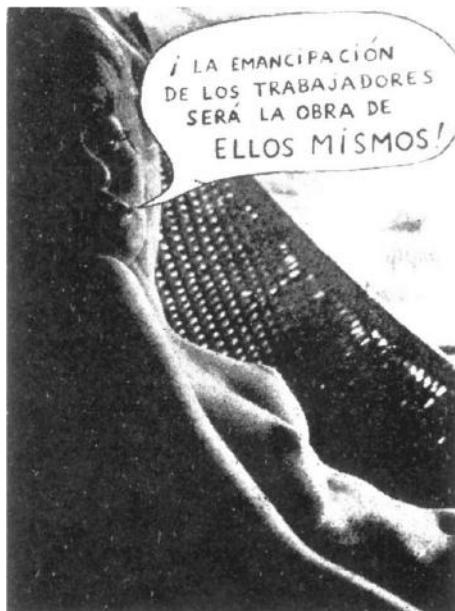


7 From *Internationale situationniste*, no. 9 (August 1964), p. 21.

Abusif images

In issue 9 of *Internationale situationniste* (August 1964), three images of women appeared that may seem similar to the previous ones but present significant differences. They are different partly in so far as two of the images were sourced not from women's magazines but from porn mags such as *Playboy* (first published in 1953), thereby presupposing an exclusively male audience. Also, unlike the bikini-babe images, all three can be considered as examples of 'exorbitant' or 'excessive' détournements (*détournements abusifs*). In contrast to a minor détournement, an exorbitant détournement was defined as the recontextualization of an intrinsically significant

element, which derives a different scope from the new context, for example, a slogan by Saint-Just or a sequence from a Sergei Eisenstein film. This *abusif* form involves some alteration to the pillaged element, such as the addition of a speech-bubble or a new caption, as well as a new situation. Despite not being significant images by the likes of Eisenstein, these soft-porn images fit the *abusif* bill in being spatially relocated and significantly altered or damaged by the inclusion of an additional element. I will refer to them as 'pop-porn' images – my neologism to indicate the commercial massification of sexuality or pornography at stake within them.



8 From *Internationale situationniste*, no. 9 (August 1964), p. 36.

Let us consider the first [7]: naked on a boat, with a sailor hat at a jaunty angle, removed bikini strewn in the background, glass in hand, the girl's bubbled utterance

reads: 'I know of nothing better than to sleep with an Asturien miner. They're real men!' And the second [8]: reclining in a hammock, glancing over her shoulder from her shadowy space, the girl bubbles the words, 'The emancipation of the proletariat will be the work of the proletariat itself!' These acts of excessive détournement are paradoxically both transformative and complicit in their effects. They are transforming in that the usually silent porn star of the magazine tableau not only looks directly at the viewer, but is also permitted to talk back. By breaking the auratic or distanced silence of her typically mute visual appeal, the images trouble the voyeuristic construction of most pornographic pictures. The private male gaze solicited by conventional porn mags is also abandoned by their new setting within the *Internationale situationniste*, which is (at least intended to be) public and ungendered. However, these images remain complicit with the sexual regime from which they are drawn in numerous ways. Consider what these women are permitted to voice and whose desire they speak of. In the first, the reduction of the woman's desire to the task of pleasing and serving men reinscribes the fantasmatic presupposition of conventional heterosexist pornography. The desires ventriloquized here are, of course, those of the SI, and this act could be considered as a gesture of empowerment in that the empty image-spectacle is given a concrete, political consciousness. The reference to the Asturien miners was to a

contemporary Spanish crisis, namely one of the longest-running miners' strikes, virtually continuous since 1962. To speak openly in favour of it was to risk state censure and police arrest, hence any supportive images or literature, such as the SI's, had to be smuggled into Spain clandestinely. This very censure is itself parodied by the use of a censored image.

A label was in fact given to porn images in the 1960s: 'the sulphur of liberation'.¹⁹ This invokes a poisonous act of desublimation, in so far as pornography freed up sexual taboos in the form of exposed bodies, but only to convert them into sexualized commodities for the porn industry. This may be an example of what Marcuse termed 'repressive desublimation', whereby a loosening of social repressions served a process of redisciplining, in this case the control of the body for monetary purposes. Yet, disciplined or otherwise, these images were socially provocative, and it is perhaps this aspect that the SI intended to incorporate into their revolutionary texts. Despite the fact that even the détourned proletarianization of the second image does not necessarily challenge the conventional erotics deployed here, it is still the female body that acts as the ground for subversive or transgressive tactics. The sexual allure of the commodified female figure gets conflated with the sign for liberation as such. Sexual difference continues to drive the economy of the SI's selected pop-porn images, in that the woman-as-sign or spectacle is the metonymic substitution of political revolution (the miners' strike) for sexual revolution. The SI are decidedly of their time in this respect. But by presenting the sign-woman as an ideal figure for all rebels to identify with, in the sense of being

privileged as the most appropriate visual form for the SI's desire for revolution, an ambiguous process of cross-gendered projection is staged.

These pop-porn images also interact with the texts with which they are juxtaposed. The Asturian miner example is collaged among a medley of newspaper clippings sourced from French papers such as *Le Monde* and *Paris-Presse*, the British *Observer* and the Japanese *Zenshin*. What these clippings share is their insurgent content. References are made to various terrorist activities and armed insurrections carried out by students in Barcelona and Madrid. Support is given to various strikes, such as that of dockers in Denmark and sailors in Rio de Janeiro. Praise is given to the violent student protests against the presence of American Polaris submarines in Japan. All the events alluded to dated from 1963-4 and so are contemporaneous with the publication of the SI's journal. The images of women are therefore moored against international acts of rebellion or terrorist insurgency against governments and the sociopolitical status quo. As with the ready-made texts, these ready-made, but altered, pop-porn images act as examples of what Greil Marcus describes as the SI's practice of 'intellectual terrorism'.²⁰ This term refers to their détournement, theft and thus refusal of the intellectual property rights of published images. In this way, Marcus argues, the journal - itself copyright free - becomes a laboratory for experiments in 'counter-language' (and I would add 'counter-spectacles'), whereby détournement becomes an act of 'aesthetic occupation of enemy territory, a raid launched to seize the familiar and turn it into the other, a war waged on a field of action without boundaries and without rules'.²¹ This

is an apt description of the anarchic tendency of détournement, or what Marcus defines as, ‘a politics of subversive quotation, of cutting the vocal cords of every empowered speaker’.²² In the case of the pop-porn images, I would argue it is also a case of metaphorically giving the disempowered a voice. As the Situationist Gil Wolman said of détournement: ‘Any sign – any street, advertisement, painting, text, any representation of a society’s idea of happiness – is susceptible to conversion into something else, even its opposite.’²³ The outcomes of such reversals of perspective, however, depend on the contingency of the act of détournement, the concrete historical moment and context in which it is put into operation. When this situation changes, the reversal changes too or is even lost altogether.

In the case of the proletarianized porn star [8], she circulates amidst commentaries on the anarchist tendency of the SI group itself. The longest collaged snippet makes reference to a recent edition of the English magazine *Tamesis* (March 1964), which published an English translation (by David Arnott) of the SI’s text ‘All the King’s Men’, first published in issue 8 of *Internationale situationniste* (January 1963). The content of this text concerned the insubordination of words. Even if words are made to work on behalf of the dominant organization of life (the spectacle), they are not therefore completely automated: ‘Unfortunately for the theoreticians of information, words are not in themselves “informationist”; they embody forces that can upset the most careful calculation.’²⁴ Therefore, the SI concluded that the so-called ‘newspeak’ of the spectacle (we can add here news images), its militarization of communication into information,

was by no means inevitable. For the SI, this opened up the possibility for a new, immanently forged, anti-spectaculist poetry of life.

If these two pop-porn images were anonymously produced, the third and final one [9] was attributed to the Scandinavian Situationist J. V. Martin, who along with Bernstein, as well as Jan Strijbosch and Raoul Vaneigem, was an editor of this issue of the journal. The image, as with Bernstein's Bardot, was appropriated from the popular commercial press. But unlike Bardot, this women has a speech bubble added, as well as an atypical, lengthy, explanatory, supporting caption that translates as follows:

Echoing the Spanish 'comics', which in a single blow received political censure as well as moral censure from priests, the SI distributed this photograph in Denmark on the occasion of the engagement of the daughter of the Danish, social-democratic king with the Greek sovereign, following polite protestations from the left. Christine Keeler, in the famous photo attributed to Tony Armstrong-Jones, here declares: 'As the SI says, it is more honourable to be a prostitute like me than the wife of the fascist Constantin.'²⁵

J. V. Martin produced a thousand copies of this image. The year before, Christine Keeler had become famous for having simultaneous sexual affairs with both a Soviet naval officer, Eugene Ivanov, and the British secretary of state for defence, John Profumo. Profumo lied about the affair and was later forced to resign. It was during this scandal that the celebrated photograph of Keeler naked, astride a copy of the Danish designer Arne Jacobsen's 'ant chair', appeared. The image itself was apparently produced to promote a motion picture that was never realized. So Martin's

détournement of this image drew on its incendiary context.



9 From *Internationale situationniste*, no. 9 (August 1964), p. 37.

The other textual supports to this image include a quotation from Guy Atkins' book *Asger Jorn*, published in 1964. It sets out the differences between Jorn's involvement with the COBRA group and the SI. COBRA is described as a gregarious movement, with little discipline, which accounted for its purported growing out of control. The SI was, on the contrary, a closed and tight-knit group, less susceptible to breaks because of its disciplined and

coherent character. Yet, the relation of text to image contradicts this premise by being far from coherent or disciplined in the outcome of its meaning. The SI's practice turns on itself. It must be emphasized that its détournements could, in general, be subjected to retranslations and alternative slippages of meaning.

Situationist women

Susan Rubin Suleiman has written that, '[unlike the Surrealists,] the Situationists seem to have ignored women altogether, except perhaps as sex objects in the most banal sense'.²⁶ This comment is, as I hope I have shown, characteristic of the neglected consideration of the SI by feminist readings. It reveals a certain reconstruction and acceptance of Surrealism by branches of a feminist, psychoanalytically informed cultural criticism, for which (typically) man-made images of women have been successfully mined for their sociopsychic revelations of masculinist fantasies of femininity. This derives, in part, from the image culture of the 1920s and 1930s, especially its comparatively closeted representations of sexuality, which enabled any exposure of the body (Surrealist or otherwise) to assume a scandalous or titillating allure. In contrast, the SI confronted the media culture of the late 1950s and 1960s, when images of sexuality are less coy, 'letting it all hang out'. In this culture of openness, feminist-psychanalytical readings derived from methods of desublimation are hard-pressed to deal with the blatant or conscious (not unconscious) exposure of desires and fantasies that are exploited to sell goods in the pages of magazines. I have argued that the SI's

appropriation of such conscious fantasies of femininity can also be critically mined to explain how and why such avowed (not disavowed) images, strategically expose the dissimulating or *spectacliste* character of the reigning image economy of the 1950s and 1960s, which obviously persists today in numerous ways.²⁷ However, although I hope to have punctured the sense that the Situationists 'ignored women altogether', I concede that the situation of women in the SI is muted. But the question is how and why?

In important respects the reasons only confirm the suspicions of feminist commentators. In the first place there simply were not many women involved. Of the seventy members of the SI listed, only seven were women during the period 1957-67 (one of whom, Kata Lindell, subsequently became a man), and there were none between 1967 and the SI's dissolution in 1972.²⁸ And of these seven, only two can be described as active contributors in the sense of having a substantive role in producing and taking part in the construction of situations that utilized a variety of tactical formats including painting, sculptural tableaux, journal articles and books: Bernstein and Jacqueline De Jong.²⁹ Such a small contingency of women seems to have encouraged a misrepresentation of the SI as a men's club. But not only does this overshadow the fact that even this small contingency compares favourably with the female participants in other avant-garde artistic groups, it also downplays the contributions of Bernstein and De Jong.

Bernstein is perhaps not the best witness to her contributions to the SI, claiming that she 'only took notes for the SI'. This may be recognized as a form

of feminine self-effacement perhaps induced by male self-assertion. But it is mischievously modest. Before becoming editor of *Internationale situationniste*, Bernstein had been an active contributor to the Lettrist International group (a member from 1952 to its integration with the SI in 1957) and an editor, not just mimeographer/typist, of their freely distributed journal *Potlatch*.³⁰ As a member of the SI from its inception, she not only took notes during their conferences but also contributed articles to their journal and was a member of its editorial team, along with five or six others (men), from 1963 to 1966.³¹ In the first issue of *Internationale situationniste*, Bernstein produced one of the

more hard-core SI texts called '*Pas d'indulgences inutiles*' (No useless leniency), which justified acts of absolute exclusion from the group so as to maintain its kernel of truth, intercut with a détourned image of a bikini babe - undoubtedly selected by Bernstein herself.³² Another important contribution was her article 'Sunset Boulevard', in praise of the cinematic technique of Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959) and against the new novel exemplified by the likes of Alain Robbe-Grillet and films such as *The Last Year at Marienbad*.³³ Among Bernstein's activities outside the SI, she wrote a 'eulogy' to Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio's model of 'Industrial Painting', in praise of its machinic, anti-authorial, collective, mass production.³⁴ She also created anti-art works for the first and last so-called Situationist exhibition called 'Destruktion Af RSG 6'. This consisted of a series of 'Alternative Victories'; coincidentally an image and description of the latter was reproduced in issue 9 of *Internationale situationniste*, the same issue in

which the bikini babes and pop-porn images appeared.³⁵

As a former - or rather, dropped-out - Sorbonne student, Bernstein was considered one of the best writers in the group, and one of the few adept in English, which landed her the task of writing an article introducing the SI to the anglophone world for the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1964.³⁶ She also wrote two novels, the first of which was called *Tous les chevaux du roi* (All the king's men - a reference to Lewis Carroll again), published in 1960 by the prestigious house Buchet-Chastel. It depicted the everyday lives and loves of a young, modern couple called Genevieve and Gilles - versions of herself and her then husband Guy Debord (they were married from 1954 to 1971). There are psychogeographical wanderings through Paris; sexual intrigue as the two share a female lover called Carol; and in one scene where Gilles is asked what he is so busy with all the time, he replies 'reification'. 'It must be a lot of work', his young lover says, 'with lots of books and papers on a big table.' 'No', replies Gilles, 'mostly I just drift around.'³⁷ This same dialogue would reappear as the speech-bubbles of two wandering cowboys on the cover of 'The Return of the Durutti Column', a tract distributed as a preamble to the 'On the Poverty of Student Life' pamphlet that appeared in 1966 during the student uprisings in Strasbourg. Bernstein's second novel, *La Nuit* (The night), was also published by Buchet-Chastel in 1961. Here she retells the same story as in the first novel, but in the style of the 'new novel', replacing a linear narrative with a multiplicity of perspectives. As a consequence, the story appears in the form of a series of disconnected scenarios centred around

night-time *dérives* about Paris. Both books' themes of adultery and polymorphous sexuality mirrored the sexual ambiguity of Bernstein herself: 'I don't know if I was bisexual then, even though I looked like a boy and was thought to be a dyke. Later I became more one way.'³⁸ The SI invented the term 'marsupial' to describe such a sexually ambiguous woman or androgynous 'anti-woman'.³⁹ This freedom of sexuality within the group contradicts the heterosexual perspective typically attributed to its détourned images of women.

Bernstein contributed to the SI in crucial indirect ways too. For example, it was through her contacts at Buchet-Chastel that Debord was able to publish *The Society of the Spectacle*. More importantly still, perhaps, her waged labour provided necessary funds both to live and to produce the glossy pages and shiny metallic covers of their journal, as well as backing other projects such as the short-lived attempt to open a bar called Le Methode, in homage to Descartes. She was the hidden motor running the SI, its economic secret. The various jobs she has been credited with include a race-track prognosticator, a horoscopist, a publisher's assistant, a secretary at Éditions de Navarre, a journalist for the newspaper *Libération* and, surprisingly perhaps, a successful advertising director. With regards to the latter, Bernstein claimed, 'To us, you understand, it was *all* spectacle; advertising was not worse than anything else. We took our money where we could find it.'⁴⁰ It is worth mentioning that a year after she divorced Debord in 1971 – that is, also after she no longer provided money to him or the SI, or what was left of it by then – the group dissolved.

De Jong's encounter with the SI was briefer; she was a member from the late 1950s to her expulsion in March 1962. She first became aware of the SI through an artist called Renee Nele (herself excluded from the SI in February 1962) and Nele's contact with the German avant-garde group Gruppe Spur.⁴¹ When De Jong first met Jorn and Debord it was in Amsterdam while she was working at the Stedelijk Museum. The story goes that Jorn fell in love with her at first sight and it was through him that she joined the SI, allegedly to help organize revolutionary adventures in Amsterdam.⁴² With regards to the status of women in the group at that time, De Jong admits that there were always young girls hanging around Michèle and Guy, and that she was one of them. But, according to Bernstein, who was and remains a good friend of De Jong's, her position, 'as a very young, single-minded and unattached person was different'.⁴³

One of De Jong's first collaborations with the SI was what she describes as a '*gesamt*' (that is, collaborative) work, produced during the fifth SI conference held in Gothenburg in 1961. It comprised a détourned painting with the heads of the contributors collaged onto the bodies of frolicking peasant-folk types: from left to right, the participants are named as, J. V. Martin, De Jong, Nash, Kunzelmann and Debord. De Jong in fact mentions an earlier collaboration when she visited Pinot-Gallizio's experimental laboratory in Alba, Italy, in 1960. There she participated in the collective and anonymous production of rolls of Industrial Painting, examples of which had already been exhibited in Turin (1958) and Paris (1959). At the Gothenburg conference, De Jong proposed publishing an English-language journal to be called

the *Situationist Times*. Ironically, it was produced only after her expulsion in 1962. This resulted from her solidarity with the Gruppe Spur, which was excluded in February 1962 on the pretext of its being too artistic. The expulsion took the form of a pamphlet published without commentary through the SI's central committee and undersigned by Debord, Kotanyi,

Vaneigem and Uwe Lausen, the latter a former member of the Gruppe Spur. Problems about the role of artists had already arisen at the conference, much to the displeasure of practising artists such as Heimrad Prem and Jorn's brother, Jorgen Nash. But, for De Jong the 1962 pamphlet was more about petty jealousies and backstabbing.

While Nash and the other Spurists set up a Second Situationist International, a so-called 'New Imaginist Bauhaus' at Nash's farm refuge, Drakabygett, in Sweden, De Jong finally got round to producing her journal, somewhat out of rage she admits. Through Jorn (who had resigned from the SI in April 1961), she managed to get Noel Arnaud to edit the first two issues. He was already an experienced editor of avant-garde journals such as *La Révolution surréaliste*.⁴⁴ These first two editions were Rotaprint productions printed in East Holland on a rotary press and distributed in Paris. When De Jong better understood the process of journal production and distribution, she took over as the principal editor and publisher. Through the publisher P. V. Glob, another friend of Jorn's, the *Situationist Times* expanded its distribution to other European countries until it got into financial trouble. After the sixth issue, the journal folded in 1967. Apparently, issue no. 7 was ready to go to press but there was no money to print it up; its

theme was the ‘wheel’ – following earlier issues themed around ‘the ring’, ‘the spiral’ and ‘the labyrinth’. In stark contrast to *Internationale situationniste*, the *Situationist Times* was printed in bold colour and could be described as more artistic in that images and its visual appearance were a central aspect, and these outweighed more politically rigorous, theoretical texts.

On closer scrutiny, it is clear that both Bernstein and De Jong had considerable influence and effectiveness within the SI, despite the dominance of certain male members, notably Debord. And it is evident that their contributions were tied, if not literally married, to leading male lights. In an interview, De Jong endorsed a remark by Bernstein that, ‘I, myself and others were wives with an absolute uncritical solidarity towards Debord and obviously the SI in general’; De Jong went on to claim that it was because of this that ‘the expressions of the few women present left behind no traces’.⁴⁵ These comments indicate the decisive ambiguity that pervades the situation of women in the group. In one sense, they may be read as a declaration of subordination, of both these individual women and women’s issues as a whole. In another, they declare a solidarity between women and men, between women and the SI, and between the SI and women. This solidarity should be subjected to scrutiny by feminist criticism, but such scrutiny should not blind itself to the political emancipation of women through revolutionary politics that are not dedicated to women exclusively. The fact is that, when faced with questions about the impoverished role of women in the SI, both Bernstein and De Jong appeal not to feminism but to a revolutionary identity that

transcends sex, sexuality or gender. It is to these considerations of revolutionary identity and organization that the situation of women in the SI leads us.

The SI's politics and mode of revolutionary organization was based on a critique of all forms of separation or division, such as that between workers and non-workers, young and old, blacks and whites, men and women. The danger of what the SI understood as separatist or micro-politics, such as anti-racism or anti-sexism, was its distraction from a critique of the totality of the spectacle. As the SI neatly put it, any singular or micro-revolt against the society of the spectacle 'reassures the society because it supposedly remains partial, pigeonholed in the *apartheid* of "youth problems" (analogous to "women's issues" or the "black question") and is soon outgrown'.⁴⁶ For the SI, only a total transformation of the socioeconomic conditions of spectacle - for example, its conversion into a form of non-authoritarian communism based on the model of workers' councils - would or could bring about an end to a society based on alienated divisions. This is not say that the SI failed to recognize actually existing discrepancies between different social groups - see, for instance, their 1965 essay on the Los Angeles Watts riots, or their support of the battle for an independent Algeria, which includes a critique of the lack of freedom for women in this context.⁴⁷

The broader question for the SI was how to eradicate such prejudicial marginalizations and hierarchical exploitations. The answer was always at the level of totality, of a total war on the

spectacle, typically expressed in terms of a class war between those in control, the so-called directors of the spectacle, and those who were dominated by it, the so-called executants. Or to use the SI's exact terminology, borrowed from Debord's contact with Cornelius Castoriadis's analysis in the group *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, a class war between 'order-givers' and 'order-takers'. These terms entailed an expansion of the Marxian definition of the proletarian class in that the order-takers now included not only the workers, but also their managers and various technocrats - that is, those who did not own the factories - those out of work, or who refused to work, thieves and vagabonds, abject figures dismissed by Marx as the 'lumpen'.

Just as the SI had a diverse yet particular range of cultural avant-gardist precursors - Dada, Constructivism, Surrealism, COBRA, Lettrism - so too they had specific political influences, from anarchism to non-authoritarian socialism, or what Richard Gombin calls the 'radical tradition' comprised of a non-aligned, non-Party-based leftism.⁴⁸ The principal model of revolutionary organization appropriated by the SI was that of workers' councils: but not before subjecting it to a sustained critique that exposed its historical failures. In other words, the SI's support of this model was contingent upon an updated appraisal of its continuing use-value within the present moment. In two key texts from 1969, 'Preliminaries on the Councils and Councilist Organization' (Riesel) and 'Notice to the Civilized Concerning Generalized Self-Management' (Vaneigem), criticisms were laid out concerning 'councilist ideology', especially the tendency of 'separation' that had plagued existent councilist movements.⁴⁹ Not only did many workers'

councils maintain a division of labour, but in practice (if not in theory) there was often a separation between the elected spokesperson and those doing the electing - this despite their avowed principles of direct democracy, under which the status of elected representatives is revocable at any moment. It was found, in fact, that those elected often operated independently of its constitutive body of voters, and not always on their behalf or for their benefit. For Riesel, such disjunctions can be surmounted only by 'making the local general assemblies of all the proletarians in revolution the council itself, from which any delegation must derive its power at every moment'.⁵⁰

On the plus side, however, council communism and workers' councils (in a form based on the SI's appropriation of the ideas of Anton Pannekoek) were founded on the principle of individual autonomy, in the guise of a self-creating species-being, without the need of an 'other' stepping in to represent oneself, with the attendant risk of reducing the difference of individual singularity to the class of the same: of some 'other' representative becoming one's substitute. This explains the SI's disdain of Leninism and Stalinism, where the head or leader ruled over the body of a subjugated proletariat - that is, the order-givers ruled its order-takers, forming a dictatorship *of* and not *by* the proletariat. In theory, the idea of leadership and disciples was anathema to the SI even if such an organizational ideal was not apparent in its practice of constant exclusions and realignments of their associative body/group.⁵¹ Nevertheless, autonomy and equality were the minimum requirements for the group's model of

revolutionary agency as indicated in the text 'The Class Struggle in Algeria': 'Radical self-management, the only kind that can endure and conquer, refuses hierarchy within or outside itself; it also rejects in practice any hierarchical separation of women (an oppressive separation openly accepted by Proudhon's theory as well as by the backward reality of Islamic Algeria).'⁵²

It was this focus on creative autonomy, or what De Jong describes as their 'elixir of creativity', that drew her into the SI's orbit. And it was/is this potential of the SI - its stress on transforming given situations oneself (with the help of like-minded others), without relying on the Party, unions, organizers or any other representative stand-ins - that also attracted later admirers such as anarchist-leaning Carol Ehrlich in her 1977 article 'Women and the Spectacle' (*Spectacular Times*, no. 7). As she wrote: 'We must smash all forms of domination.... We have to see through the spectacle ... but that work must be without leaders as we know them, and without delegating any control over what we do and what we want to build.' When it comes to actions, she continues, 'concede nothing to them, or to anyone else.... We make history or it makes us.'⁵³ No doubt the SI would have fully endorsed such a Marxian commitment to self-making history. The obvious difference here, of course, is that Ehrlich gives a specifically gendered twist to women's oppression by that 'tormentor called culture', with the spectacle operating as the root cause of a dominant and dominating patriarchal society. The SI never made such a clear-cut gender divide, since for its members all order-takers are exploited by the alienating

conditions of spectacle whatever their age, sex or race.

Nevertheless, the SI was not afraid to champion the influence of specifically female role models. For example, they openly praised and cited Rosa Luxemburg; they rallied behind the actions of the infamous '*pétroleuses*' of the Paris Commune; and they enthusiastically acknowledged the significance of women's active participation in the Parisian 'Events' of May 1968, of which the SI wrote: 'The extensive participation of women in all aspects of the struggle was an unmistakable sign of its revolutionary depth.'⁵⁴ Also, with regards to May 1968, the SI, in its own book about the events, singled out and paid tribute to a female protestor who died fighting at the barricades.⁵⁵ Such open support for the work and acts of women by no means signals a 'feminist' agenda. Indeed, it is safe to say that the SI members were not feminists. But I contend that this fact should be understood in a similar sense to Simone de Beauvoir's contemporaneous assertion that she, too, was 'not a feminist'.

Such an anti-feminist, or more accurately 'anti-feminine' stance, emerged in response to what de Beauvoir conceived of as the decidedly bourgeois and reformist outlook of many so-called 'women's groups' existing at that time. As Claire Duchen explains in her book *Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France 1944-1968*, during this period the word 'feminist' was rejected by many women's groups as evoking a pre-war, specifically pre-suffrage moment, before, that is, the securing of the right for women to vote, finally realized in 1945.⁵⁶ The word feminist was considered the

opposite of ‘feminine’, it conjured up an aggressive woman trying to be like a man. Most organizations, according to Duchen, preferred the label ‘féminin’, such as the Mouvement Démocratique Féminin (a non-communist, leftist women’s political club). Other groups such as the Union Féminine Civique et Sociale (a Catholic, conservative women’s organization) and the Union des Femmes Françaises (a communist-dominated women’s organization) also rejected the term feminist as old fashioned, out of step with new law reforms and legal rights for women (beyond suffrage) beginning to emerge at that time. Though, as Duchen notes, the actual changes in the situation of women at that time were very limited, with no real advances. Real changes in the Civil Code that would finally give women some rights over her home, bank accounts, family and own body – in the form of access to contraception – would not be implemented until the late 1960s and early 1970s. Instead, the common focus of many of these mainly bourgeois women’s groups was on limited legal reforms, usually for the benefit of a very selective and specialized female contingency.⁵⁷

The beginnings of a broader challenge to patriarchy had in fact appeared in 1949, with the publication of de Beauvoir’s book *The Second Sex*. It immediately proved to be a bestseller. Its critical reception was, however, very mixed and predominantly negative. For example, *Marie Claire* was anxious that such a libertarian woman as de Beauvoir, whose desire for freedom rendered her ‘not real a woman’, should be allowed to teach children.⁵⁸ The communist journal *Les Jeunes Femmes* was more

positive about the breadth of issues covered, if still a little wary.⁵⁹ The range and ambition of *The Second Sex* were hard to digest. It was not concerned with trying to achieve limited legal reforms for particular classes of women, but placed all women at the centre of a broader sociopolitical analysis, in particular challenging the social restrictions to women's full autonomy. Unfortunately, the publication of *The Second Sex* was somewhat untimely. The breadth of its critique of the political situation of women was not fully appreciated or even recognized at its time. Yet, it would become an important source and literary tool for women's emancipation post-1968, which involved attacks on the totality of 'women's situation', including the ways in which the very idea of what it means to be a woman was socially contrived and mediated.

This attack aimed at the 'total situation' resonates with a Situationist position. As de Beauvoir wrote, 'all oppression creates a war', but the means to extricate oneself from this situation was not as her then partner Jean-Paul Sartre had imagined it. For Sartre, freedom lay in the possibility of transcending or escaping the given situation, and for him there was always the possibility of asserting one's freedom. But, as de Beauvoir acknowledged, in light of her own experiences, in some situations the ideal of 'freedom of choice' for all was not always permissible, or possible, or else rendered free choice a delusion. Her example was that women (or rather the category 'woman') were trapped in their situation like rats, because they were not assigned any autonomy (or the faculty of reason) in the then current societal structure. To overcome such coerced limitations to their total

situation, women had to abolish the social consequences and determinations assigned to sexual difference. For de Beauvoir, as for the later Situationists, freedom did not involve merely overcoming the ‘givenness’ or ‘facticity’ of a situation – this, in some sense, would be to accept a historical (and thus changeable) condition as if it were permanently fixed. Instead, freedom would emerge only through the radical negation and transformation of the concept of the already ‘given’ situation as such. It is the very coordinates of what is accepted as the given situation that needs to be revolutionized; at stake was the creative construction of a totally new situation and, ideally, new form of free, autonomous agency. As de Beauvoir writes at the end of the section ‘Women’s Situation and Character’, women must ‘reject the limitations of their situation and seek to open the road of the future. Resignedness is only abdication and flight, there is no other way out for women than to work for her liberation.’⁶⁰ And if the members of the SI would not agree with limiting such a liberation to women only – since it opposed their more inclusive model of a new proletariat, the so-called order-takers – they would surely have concurred with de Beauvoir’s insistence that to succeed ‘this liberation must be collective’.⁶¹

By way of a brief conclusion, it could be argued that the SI, despite its opposition to single-issue politics, risked operating at a limited, micro-level by attacking the realm of cultural images. It needs to be remembered, however, that for the members of the group the spectacle, in the guise of capital become image, was a global phenomenon. Nothing remained outside its colonizing ways, just as

nothing escaped the logic of the commodity-form. And if their critique of the spectacle at the level of images is in danger of reproducing women-as-spectacle, this is not so much a result of their being anti-feminist but rather as a consequence of the spectacle's feminization of useful appearance, of a gendered asymmetry in capitalist uses of 'sexual semblance' to sell commodities. Spectacle commodity aesthetics uses women as the privileged sign of desire, or rather commodity aesthetics in the late 1950s and early 1960s was hegemonically coded as feminine. It was precisely the counterfeit character of such 'sexist' representations that the SI's methods of détournement set out to perturb. Here, habituated responses, or what seems natural, were denaturalized, via a sort of Brechtian process of estrangement, which jolts and decouples commonplace encounters with certain types of images, such as the bikini babes and pop-porn. Through the SI's processes of mimetic restaging and out-of-place resituating, a counter-hegemonic recoding is put into play. In 1957 the bikini babes were made homeless; disjointed and out of context, they questioned their role as superficial ornaments to the texts they supplemented. Such images were emptied out or revealed as empty signifiers, able to be filled-up with different connotations, thus succeeding in troubling the image of woman as 'the' sign of desire by making absurd their sexy veil or conceit. With the pop-porn images, the expected mute body of pornography is undone with their speech-bubble addresses to the viewer. This may be an act of ventriloquism on behalf of the SI, but by metaphorically speaking a political consciousness or an act of scandal-mongering, an unstable but

generative space of engagement is opened up between the silent voyeur and the image that talks back.

At stake in the SI's image war was a social or class war, and taking part was not, as I hope the above account of the role of Situationist women proves, limited to only the male contingent of the group. Their collective, egalitarian programme was to search out and invent a revolutionary inclusive, non-apartheid social situation, constructed by new types of radical agencies emerging from the prism of an altered or détourned spectacle. The task was not simply to cause the ruin of the spectacle at the level of images, which suggests an isolated project, but rather to see such détournements as part of an already global, decomposition of the spectacle evidenced, for the SI, by the battles in Cuba, Congo, Algiers and Saint Domingo. From a contemporary feminist perspective (as multiple as that can be), however, the group perhaps did not go far enough, by not taking into account how we are differently subjugated to, or terrorized by, the culture of the spectacle along the lines of race, sexuality or gender. We might all be saturated by the spectacle, but surely to different degrees of acceptance and resistance? In this light, it is fair to say that the members of the SI were a symptom of the situation and time that produced them, the late 1950s and early 1960s, when, as Bernstein said to me, it was not expected that a man could boil an egg.

Yet, as the SI diagnosed, even if you cannot step outside of the spectacle, you can refunction it from within, by speaking its language differently or by picturing a differenced world. Détournement was one strategy they used to defamiliarize and subvert

the commonplace assumptions about the meanings and uses of certain images of women. It recodified the spectacle's ready-made image banks, conferring on them what Valentin Voloshinov calls a different 'accent'. In the case of the bikini babes and pop-porn images, the SI confronts the spectacle's unseen and falsely naturalized sexism and so sets in motion a critique of commodity aesthetics that feminizes semblance itself. Its détournements expose this sexism as a particular, sociohistorical formation, not immutable or eternal, and therefore transformable. It does not resolve such gendered discriminations, but it does expose them to analysis. It questions the inevitable conquest of the social by its consumer images by revealing the work of dissemblance involved in those images' production – namely, how the social relations that produced these images remain hidden. The spectacle tries to deny that its representations are the products of a particular (alienated) form of social labour determined by capitalist modes of production and consumption. To attack the spectacle is to attack capital – but who does this attacking? Who/what emerges from it? For the SI in the 1950s and 1960s, it was the task of anyone who felt alienated and wanted to change, or rather revolutionize, the total situation. Nevertheless, as a former Situationist claimed, what the SI lacked was a more nuanced model of the agents of revolution, and perhaps its 'new revolutionary critique of the social' would have benefited from 'a sex revolutionary critique of culture'.⁶² A sense of differentiation, as being significant to the struggle against spectacular conditions, was acknowledged, somewhat belatedly, at the end of the SI's life in 1972, when it declared that: 'Everywhere the respect for alienation has

been lost. Young people, workers, coloured people, homosexuals, women and children, take it into their heads to want everything that was forbidden them.⁶³ This is an untimely opening up of the new proletariat along a ‘differenced’ axis at the moment of the group’s own demise.

Too little and too late for some feminists perhaps, but in the cultural climate of the late 1950s and 1960s, the SI did deconstruct the sexing of commodity-images. Not, however, in the name of a pro-feminist agenda, but in the name of an autonomous, all-inclusive and hence unpredictable new proletariat; an emergent but not yet instituted figure constituted in part via new representational strategies such as the SI’s collective and anonymous détournements, intended to solicit and picture a different way to live within, but against, the machinations of the spectacle.

¹ Both quotes from Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (Picador: London, 1988), p. 627 and p. 726, respectively.

² See Guy-Ernest Debord and Gil Wolman, ‘Mode d’emploi du détournement’, in the Belgian revolutionary surrealist journal *Les Lèvres Nues*, no. 8 (1956), p. 40. Here, they defined ‘minor détournements’ (*détournements mineurs*) and ‘excessive or exorbitant détournements’ (*détournements abusifs*), and noted that any extended process of détournement would usually be composed of one or more sequences of exorbitant and minor types. This was a Lettrist text, but the basic principles of this method was continued by the SI, as evident in their essay ‘Le Détournement comme négation and comme prélude’ in *Internationale situationniste*, no. 3 (1959), pp. 10–11. See also the definition of this and other SI concepts in ‘Définitions’ in *Internationale situationniste*, no. 1 (1958), pp. 13–14. A later third model called ‘ultra-détournement’ was developed to describe actions of appropriation that took place in the street, such as reterritorializing public space with graffiti.

³ Articles in *Internationale situationniste*, no. 1 (1958), respective page numbers pp. 4–6; pp. 6–8; pp. 11–13; pp. 22–5; pp. 25–6; pp. 29–30.

- ⁴ See Wolfgang Fritz Haug, 'Towards a Critique of Commodity Aesthetics' and 'The Ambiguity of Commodity Aesthetics as Exemplified in the use of Sexual Semblance', in his *Commodity Aesthetics: Ideology and Culture* (International General: New York, 1987), pp. 103–20 and pp. 119–20, respectively.
- ⁵ The right to vote was secured in 1944, but not exercised until 29 April 1945. See Claire Duchen, *Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France 1945–1968* (Routledge: London, 1994), p. 35. See also Claire Laubier (ed.), *The Condition of Women in France 1945 to the Present: A Documentary Anthology* (Routledge: London, 1990), esp. chapters 2 and 3.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ⁷ As one journalist put it, 'they don't want that life, restricted to domestic tasks; housework, housekeeping, children and nothing else'; see Duchen, *Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France 1945–1968*, op. cit., p. 92.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- ⁹ Kristin Ross, 'French Quotidian', in Lynn Gumpert (ed.), *The Art of the Everyday: The Quotidian in Postwar French Culture* (New York University Press: New York, 1997), pp. 19–28 (p. 24).
- ¹⁰ Duchen, *Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France 1945–1968*, op. cit., p. 76.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.
- ¹² See 'Formulary for a New Urbanism' attributed to Ivan Chtcheglov published in *Internationale situationniste*, no. 1 (1958), pp. 15–20. Abridged version in Ken Knabb (ed. and trans.), *Situationist International Anthology* (Bureau of Public Secrets: Berkeley, 1995), pp. 1–4 (p. 2).
- ¹³ Ross, 'French Quotidian', op. cit., p. 24.
- ¹⁴ Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*, op. cit., p. 47.
- ¹⁵ All quotes from my interview with Bernstein at her home in 1999.
- ¹⁶ See Frances Stracey, 'Situationist Photo-Graffiti', in David Cunningham, Andrew Fisher, Sas Mays (eds), *Photography and Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge Scholars Press: Cambridge, 2005), pp. 123–44.

- ¹⁷ For these different interpretations of Bardot, see Laubier, *The Condition of Women in France 1945 to the Present*, op. cit., pp. 34–41. The ‘Lolita with attitude’ reading was by Simone de Beauvoir.
- ¹⁸ On the biases of postwar US aid in Europe, see Brian Holmes, ‘Invisible States: Europe in the Age of Capital Failure’, in Simon Sheikh (ed.), *Capital (It Fails Us Now)* (B_Books: Berlin, 2006), pp. 29–57.
- ¹⁹ See Laurence Bestrand Dorléac, ‘The Art Scene in France, 1960–73’, in David Alan Mellor and Laurent Gervereau (eds.), *The Sixties: Britain and France 1960–1973 – The Utopian Years* (Philip Wilson: London, 1997), pp. 30–55 (p. 43).
- ²⁰ Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Picador: London, 1997), p. 178.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Ibid., pp. 178–9.
- ²³ Quoted in ibid., p. 179.
- ²⁴ Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*, op. cit., p. 114.
- ²⁵ *Internationale situationniste*, no. 9 (1964), p. 37.
- ²⁶ Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990), p. 214, n. 44.
- ²⁷ Guy Debord uses the term ‘spectacliste’ in *La Société du Spectacle* (Gallimard: Paris, 1992), thesis 14, p. 21.
- ²⁸ See *The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International*, trans. and ed. Christopher Gray (Free Fall Publications: London, 1974), pp. 162–3.
- ²⁹ As De Jong clarified in an important interview in 1998, at the time of a revived Situationist exhibition, other than Bernstein and herself, ‘there were no other active women involved or rather who were members. Gretel Stadler and Kata Lindell (who later became a man) were present at Göteborg but no more than the women of ... (no names given) ... however without other activities than being listeners in the audience’. See Jacqueline De Jong interview with Dieter Schrage, published in the exhibition catalogue, *Situationistische Internationale 1957–1972* (Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig: Vienna, 1988), p. 69 (my translation).

- ³⁰ Bernstein's contributions to the Lettrist International include her participation in the first screening of Debord's film *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* (1952), where she emitted a piercing scream and hurled bags of flour at the audience; she was an editor of *Potlatch* (1954–9), the title and concept of which, referring to forms of North American gift-exchanges, was also attributed to Bernstein; she published articles on the concept of the *dérive*, see her 'Dérive au kilomètre' in *Potlatch*, nos. 9–11 (1954), p. 64; also on the use of psychogeography, see 'Le Square des missions étrangères', *Potlatch*, no. 16 (1955); see also her important contribution to 'Le project d'embellissement rationnels de la ville de Paris', *Potlatch*, no. 23 (1955).
- ³¹ She was an editor on issues 8 (1963), 9 (1964) and 10 (1966).
- ³² See *Internationale situationniste*, no. 1 (1958), pp. 25–6.
- ³³ *Internationale situationniste*, no. 7 (1962), pp. 42–6.
- ³⁴ See 'Éloge de Pinot-Gallizio', in *Pinot-Gallizio* (Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie: Paris, 1960), n.p. See also Frances Stracey, 'Pinto-Gallizio's Industrial Painting: Towards a Surplus of Life', in *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2005), pp. 391–405, esp. p. 395.
- ³⁵ *Internationale situationniste*, no. 9 (1964), pp. 43–4.
- ³⁶ In *Internationale situationniste*, no. 10 (1966), p. 83.
- ³⁷ For more on the background of these novels, see Andrew Hussey, *The Game of War* (Jonathan Cape: London, 2001), p. 183.
- ³⁸ Ibid., p. 182. And in an interview with me in 1999, Bernstein made it clear that any sexuality was permissible among the SI; that they were young, carefree and experimental.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 184.
- ⁴⁰ Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, op. cit., pp. 377–8.
- ⁴¹ It was at the third international conference of the SI in Munich, April 1959, that the Gruppe Spur registered its affiliation to the group. In their manifesto, the Gruppe Spur championed a new aesthetic against the 'decomposed ideal beauty of the old world' and against 'the tired generation, the angry generation, everything is buried. Now it is the turn of the kitsch generation. WE DEMAND KITSCH, FILTH, ORIGINAL MUD, CHAOS. Art is the shitheap where kitsch is staking its claim.' See Hussey, *The Game of War*, op. cit., p. 135. When De Jong met Prem, she was impressed by his charisma and energy, and as an experimental painter in her own right was drawn to Gruppe Spur's

radical, expressionist ideas since, as she stated in a 1998 interview ‘they appeared to be more attuned to my of thinking than the *informelles* or Mack, Piene, even more than the Zero-Gruppe’. From ‘Jacqueline De Jong: Eine Frau in Der Situationistischen Internationale’, an interview with Dieter Schrage in *Situationistische Internationale 1957–1972*, op. cit., pp. 68–71, (p. 68) (my translation).

42 On Jorn’s meeting with De Jong, see Hussey, *The Game of War*, op. cit., p. 149.

43 Schrage interview in *Situationistische Internationale 1957–1972*, op. cit., p. 69.

44 Ibid., p. 71.

45 Ibid., p. 69 (my translation).

46 From ‘On the Poverty of Student Life’ (1966), republished in Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*, op. cit., pp. 319–37, (p. 326).

47 See ‘The Decline and the Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy’, in ibid., pp. 153–60; and ‘The Class Struggle in Algeria’, in ibid., pp. 160–8.

48 Richard Gombin, *The Radical Tradition: A Study in Modern Revolutionary Thought*, trans. Rupert Swyer (Methuen & Co. Ltd: London, 1978). On ‘Socialisme ou Barbarie’, see Cornelius Castoriadis [Pierre Chaulieu], *La Société bureaucratique* (Union Générale d’Éditions: Paris, 1973). For Debord’s relation to ‘SouB’, see Shigenobu Gonzalvez, *Guy Debord ou la beauté du négatif* (Éditions Mille et une Nuits: Paris, 1988), pp. 31–6.

49 See ‘Preliminaries on the Councils and Councilist Organization’ (René Riesel) and ‘Notice to the Civilized Concerning Generalized Self-Management’ (Raoul Vaneigem), republished in Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*, op. cit., pp. 270–82 and pp. 283–9, respectively. For example, Riesel castigates the one-sidedness of the practices of the KAPD (German Communist Workers Party) ‘who adopted councils as its program but by assigning itself[,] as its only essential tasks[,] propaganda and theoretical discussion – ‘the political education of the masses’ – it left the role of federating the revolutionary factory organization to the AAUD (General Workers’ Union of Germany), ibid., pp. 277–8.

50 Ibid., p. 271.

51 See the SI’s ‘manifeste’ (17 May 1960) in *Internationale situationniste*, no. 4 (1960), pp. 36–8.

- ⁵² 'The Class Struggle in Algeria' (1965), in Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*, op. cit., pp. 160–8 (p. 167). In reference to Proudhon, it is worth noting that despite the SI's links to certain anarchist tendencies, such as the Anarchist Federation, represented by Guy Bodson, and brief exchanges with the review *Informations et correspondances ouvrières* (formerly *Informations liaisons ouvrières*, born in 1958 from a scission with *Socialisme ou Barbarie*) and with L'Union des groupes anarchistes-communistes, the SI never joined another political group; although links with the group Libertaire de Ménilmontant in Paris did have some practical consequences when member Gérard Joannès produced a détourned comic illustration for a text by Vaneigem which appeared in *Internationale situationniste*, no. 11 (1967). See Gonzalvez, *Guy Debord ou la beauté du négatif*, op. cit., pp. 34–5. For illustration, see *Internationale situationniste*, no. 11 (1967), p. 35. In general, anarchism was too nihilistic for the SI, whose project was fundamentally reconstructive, namely to build on the ruins of the spectacle. And as to why the SI never joined another group, this can perhaps be deduced from their explicit desire to 'perform revolutionary tasks', rather than be a revolutionary organization per se. On the SI's model of revolutionary organization in general, see Guy Debord and Gianfranco Sanguinetti, *The Veritable Split in the International* (Chronos Publications: London, 1972).
- ⁵³ Carol Ehrlich, 'Women and the Spectacle', *Spectacular Times*, no. 7 (1977), p. 16.
- ⁵⁴ See Anonymous, 'The Beginning of an Era', *Internationale situationniste*, no. 12 (1969) translated in Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*, op. cit., pp. 225–6 (p. 226).
- ⁵⁵ See *Enragés et Situationnistes dans le Mouvement des Occupations* (1968), republished in its original format (Gallimard: Paris, 1998).
- ⁵⁶ Duchen, *Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France 1945–1968*, op. cit., p. 170.
- ⁵⁷ For example, the Union Professionnelle Féminine (Union of Professional Women) sought better working conditions for professional women only, as too the Association Françaises Diplômées des Universités (the Association of French Women University Graduates), which only represented female, graduate interests. See *ibid.*, p. 167. Even umbrella groups for various socialist and communist parties sought rights for specific groups of working woman, seeking better pay conditions, but seemingly unconcerned with expanding such benefits and opportunities to 'all' women in general. This is even true of the likes of the broader sounding Le Conseil National des Femmes (National

Women's Council), which did indeed focus on equal rights for women, but only those who were married. Whether liberal, socialist or bourgeois, the majority of then existing women's groups supported limited legal reforms, in local areas, rather than campaigning for a more universal improvement of the situation of women in total: that is, there was no united, mass women's movement wanting to challenge the patriarchal state per se.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 188.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 176. On the mixed reception of *The Second Sex*, see also Laubier, *The Condition of Women in France 1945 to the Present*, op. cit., esp. chapter 2, 'Le Déuxième Sexe', pp. 17–27.

⁶⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, op. cit., p. 639.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² See 'The Revolution of Modern Art and the Modern Art of Revolution' (1967), a pamphlet by the English section of the SI (T. J. Clark, Charles Radcliffe, Donald Nicholson-Smith), republished as *The Boomerang* series, no. 3 (Chronos Publications: London, 1994): 'From now on the possibility of a new revolutionary critique of society depends on the possibility of a sex revolutionary critique of culture and vice versa', p. 8.

⁶³ *The Veritable Split in the International* (1972), op. cit., p. 19.

PHOTOGRAPHY, LANGUAGE AND THE PICTORIAL TURN

Peter Smith

Privileging either the picture or the written text, post-conceptual photography has reinforced the view that all signs are interchangeable semantic units that signify in ways that transcend disciplinary and media boundaries. The principle of the democratic equivalence of signs that is implied in such a view has not only provided theoretical legitimacy for various forms of artistic hybridization – including the recent dominance of mixed-media models of photographic practices and the hybrid form of the image-text – but also offered a conceptual base to theorists who are guided by the idea of a common discourse that ignores traditional boundaries in art. Proponents of semiotics, for example, have long resisted the historical separation of language and pictures, and have challenged the rhetoric of purity in the visual arts that in the past sought earnestly to avoid the contamination of language. In the pages that follow, I do not seek to quarrel with these theorists' political task of opposing cultural stratification and privilege in the conventional hierarchy of genres; I do, however, wish to question the assumed ontological equivalence of words and images implied by such an approach.

To do so, I draw on some key ideas on these issues from Roland Barthes and W. J. T. Mitchell, both of whom have insisted that photographs have properties that make them resistant to language and other coded systems of meaning production. Following this line of thought, I would argue that the photo-essay is a radical hybrid medium in which words and photographs interact in ways that exploit their differences, the linguistic part of the message being forced into a critical relationship with what Mitchell calls the roots of the photograph. In this way, the 'reader' is made aware of the tension between the two levels of meaning, which allows reflection on the formal object itself, as well as the prospect of critical engagement with what it stands for.

I would like to identify at the outset two distinct approaches to the hybrid photo-essay. One involves instituting and maintaining a clear separation between words and pictures – the example I offer is the work of Jeff Wall; the other effaces the disciplinary and institutional boundaries between image and text, as demonstrated in the work of Allan Sekula. Wall's avant-garde naturalism has a traditional look about it. It usually consists of large photographic pictures with separate titles, and the subject matter is often explicitly inscribed in the discourse of art history – *The Storyteller* of 1986, for

example [1], recalls Manet's painting *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. His works are commonly seen in print (or on screen), but their primary site is the art gallery. Wall thus secures an identity firmly in the realm of 'art'. Sekula's work, by contrast, seems a bit more 'in the world'. Typically located in the street or in a book, it might be described as a

'scripto-visual discourse'¹ of the kind that challenges the institutional sites of art. Recent commentary has suggested that Wall is the conservative and Sekula the radical in this comparison.² According to this view, the pictorialism of Wall is nostalgic revivalism (a reactionary turn); Sekula, on the other hand, openly confronts the historical separation of word and image and appears to challenge the institutional framework that sustains this distinction. He foregrounds and conceptualizes themes (maritime labour, for example) in a way that requires the viewer to think about the work's mode of presentation as well as its subject matter. For Benjamin Buchloh, this is a reflexive practice that hovers between discourse and content.³



1 Jeff Wall, *The Storyteller*, 1986, transparency in lightbox, 229 × 437 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

What I have just described is a straightforward 'argument' between two contemporary artists, the key differences of which rest on the injunction against medium-specificity in late-twentieth-century

art and criticism. Defenders of interdisciplinarity such as Sekula and Victor Burgin adopted ‘scripto-visualist’ practices that challenged traditional forms of naturalism on the one hand and the modernist privileging of ‘opticality’ as the basis for abstract art on the other. Instead, these and other postmodernists favoured a use of language and a form of hybridity that had roots in the first wave of conceptual art, proponents of which challenged the isolation of pictures from other systems of communication and argued that images are always constrained by words. An example of this linguistic turn is present in the work of Art and Language – a group that emerged in Britain in the 1960s – which represented a sharp reaction against the anti-intellectualism of the postwar art world and a repudiation of the hegemonic role of art criticism. According to Art and Language, the task for art was to ‘supplant “experience” with a “reading”’.⁴

By the mid-1970s, photography was increasingly being used as a means of documenting performance and temporary installations, a strategy that sometimes juxtaposed writing, images and other artistic forms. After a period of exclusive commitment to ‘writing as art’, conceptualists no longer saw language as the master code. Many recognized that pictures might form the anchorage for words, even in the most language-centred modes of conceptual art. Photography thus came to provide an intermediary position between art (meaning pictures) and language. This shift in medium preference among one-time conceptualists marks the beginnings of a pictorial turn that increasingly came to be dominated by photography, even if its use in the work of artists such as Burgin,

Sekula, early Wall and Hans Haacke was self-consciously ‘unaesthetic’. Photography had a certain appeal because of its currency as a functional and popular mode of communication; and the fact that photographs (like words) are constituent parts of complex sign systems undermines the difference between ‘visual’ and ‘non-visual’ forms. As Burgin put it, ‘Simply because a message is, in substance, visual, it does not follow that all codes are visual. Visual and non-visual codes interpenetrate each other in very extensive and complex ways.’⁵ In a critical reflection on this kind of revelation, W. J. T. Mitchell has noted how art historians (in the Anglo-American world at least) suddenly woke up to the idea ‘that paintings, photographs, sculptural objects, and architectural monuments are fraught with “textuality” and “discourse”’.⁶ This belated ‘discovery’ for exponents of semiotic-influenced methods in post-conceptual and art photography was to become an article of faith. Opposing approaches that admitted ‘medium-specificity’ as an ontological pretender or any attempt to claim that photographs might contain essential differences in comparison with other types of signs were out of the question since the conventionalist argument was now accepted as gospel truth. The authority of French film theorist Christian Metz was called upon to finally dissolve the difference between word and image:

In truth, the notion of ‘visual’, in the totalitarian and monolithic sense that it has taken on in certain recent discussions, is a fantasy or ideology, and the *image* (at least in this sense) is something that does not exist.⁷

The irrational cult of the visual, for Burgin and for Metz, is thus negated since it belongs to a plurality

of codes that are connected in ways that define it. From this perspective, the empirical view that visual images are influenced by language (or vice versa) is aligned with a more slippery, philosophical belief that visual messages are somehow structured from within by the non-visual influence of language. From his early work,

Burgin thus engaged with mixed configurations of signs (images, words and sounds) that constituted 'language systems', such as 'the visual arts' or 'cinema'. Increasingly, this focus on semiotics neutralized the word/image opposition. For many, it was motivated by a desire to break out of the academy and to make use of language-based models in the deconstruction of media culture. The imported New York School of modernism that filled the English-speaking art journals of the period seemed to have little connection with social existence. As John Roberts has noted: 'Greenbergian Modernism was vanquished through the theoretical return of the artwork as sign.'⁸

The blurring of boundaries between word and image in the 1960s and 1970s represented a middling position between the linguistic and the pictorial turning points in cultural politics. If the rupturing of disciplinary boundaries caused a major upheaval at this time – and there is evidence that it did⁹ – it is nevertheless also true that these changes provided the background and inspiration for much of what was to follow. Among the many effects of interdisciplinarity (including pedagogic crossovers at university level), the coalescence of theory and practice was the most important. It spawned a mixing of practices and an increasing heterogeneity in art, including a wide and varied use of new media. This in turn led to a massive increase in

political engagement among a generation of young artists influenced by identity politics and the semiotic guerrilla warfare of the earlier generation of conceptualists. Indeed, this shift in intellectual and artistic fashion produced a new generation of non-specialist critics and multi-media practitioners and a spate of new university courses devoted to 'interartistic' and cross-curricular studies.

This moment also produced the anomaly of a self-styled counter-hegemonic trend in art that quickly became fashionable and highly marketable. Artists such as Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger and Richard Prince in the United States – all working in the now dominant medium of photography – represented a new generation whose consciousness-raising projects fitted in well with the glamour and exclusivity of the art/business world that supported it during the boom of the 1980s and beyond. Kruger's word play of 1987 signals the skill of the copywriter and graphic artist in the philosophic pun 'I shop therefore I am' [2]. The rhetorical forms of wit and irony in this kind of art established a bridge between theoretical discourse and popular culture. Kruger's work in particular belongs to the honourable lineage of agitational graphic design. Despite its being for the most part restricted as a practice to the art world and its institutions (unlike the 'agitprop' it quotes), Kruger's genre-hybridity represented an attractive extension to the more specialist discourse of political writing.

The interventionist and counter-hegemonic use of photography as a tool by second-generation conceptualists such as Kruger signalled a gradual shift to a mixed art practice. As I have argued

elsewhere, the motivation in this work was often political. The full-blown return to pictures was, however, driven only partly by that motive.

In the case of Wall, the ‘turn’ to a pictorial paradigm was in fact a ‘re-turn’ driven by a rejection of pluralism and of the hybrid forms of conceptual and post-conceptual art.¹⁰ Wall defended the embrace of pictorialism as a reaction against a recuperated vanguardism. (It is worth noting, however, that the upsurge in commercial and public support for progressive art in this period coincided with the return of the image as a key factor in postmodernist aesthetics.) In so far as the linguistic sign and the visual sign were deemed to serve similar functions, the intellectual and political functions of photography and the image-text were ideologically consistent with the original turn to the written word as an alternative artistic strategy. The return of the image in the late 1970s and early 1980s represents therefore not so much a self-conscious rejection of the language-based model (there was no sudden change of direction), but a desire to extend the self-reflexive critique of art towards an expanded field that increasingly encompassed a critical assault on commercial culture. The work of Burgin in particular remained strongly rooted in a language-centred epistemology.



2 Barbara Kruger, *Untitled: 'I Shop Therefore I Am'*, 1987. Photo: copyright © 1987 Barbara Kruger; courtesy of Mary Boone Gallery, New York.

For a more nuanced account of the pictorial turn we might look to older philosophical debates about pictures and words. The underlying thematic in this debate centres on medium-specificity or, more broadly, what Mitchell calls 'the immanent vernaculars of representation'.¹¹ Let us note how Burgin has struggled to position his own transdisciplinary practice in opposition to 'specificity' and the 'traditional' divide between words

and pictures.¹² From early in his career as a photographer, Burgin has sought to distance himself from the 'single-image aesthetic'.¹³ Nonetheless, the 'phantasmic' element in his

mature work clearly demonstrates an awareness of the image as something that elevates sensory experience as a basis for knowledge. In this sense, his photographs prioritize the world as foundation for the production of consciousness, and his work is reflexively concerned with this process. In some ways, this may look like a realist epistemology. Most of Burgin's writing, however, rejects such a position; he seems always to doubt the specific status of pictures even while he exploits their 'natural' effects. 'I want to stress the image not as illusion but as text [his emphasis]', he says, and 'mental processes exchange images for words and words for images. *It's not a matter of translation* [my emphasis].'¹⁴ Which is to say, the ontological sameness of verbal and visual signs is underlined. Photography for Burgin thus became a pragmatic extension of his theoretical work as he was increasingly drawn to popular culture as a site for critical sabotage and deconstruction. In 1976, he designed and fly-posted a street poster that read 'What does possession mean to you?' The juxtaposition of image and text demonstrates a cut-and-paste technique symptomatic of the trend in the postmodern avant-garde for the use of 'quotation' and intertextuality. The poster uses an actual quotation ('7% of our population own 84% of our wealth' was a statement taken from the *Economist*), but it also 'quotes' a type of visual rhetoric in advertising in the image of a young couple as symbols of intersecting gender and wealth mythologies. More importantly, it shows Burgin's interest in mediation itself. The work is explicitly political in its choice of material, but a deeper meaning attaches to the deconstructive politics of representation. As with Burgin's later

work, this poster typifies a kind of ‘knowing’ critique of the sign, a strategy in which the simulation of images becomes routine. It is a reflexive methodology in which the attempt to find a neutral meta-language of representation is always in danger of losing its connection with what Jessica Evans has called ‘external “societal” logic’. ¹⁵ Alex Potts is another sceptic on this matter when he describes the dangers of infinite regression in the ‘wanton chase from sign to signs’ and ‘endless semiosis’. ¹⁶ The concern here is about a polysemic world of spectacle that no longer connects with the ‘outside, a referent or a general public’. ¹⁷ The determined opposition to ‘naïve realism’ relies on a kind of quotation aesthetics in which all images are coded versions of other images. When the belief in the indexicality of the photographic message is held in suspension, or denied, ¹⁸ it is treated like all other signs – that is, as a constituent part of a purely symbolic order in which meaning is for ever deferred. Meaning is thus always in doubt, and when a sign carries an ideological value it is ‘not the reflection of real social relations but the reflection of the social imaginary of its subject. The image of an image, it is deprived of all real denotation.’ ¹⁹ It is important to recognize how mediation sets off a procession of signals that seem to transcend objective reality. There is, nevertheless, a sense in which we can say that photographs

have a complex and negotiable relation with *conventional* readings and are always a relay for something outside signification. The contrast with language is instructive in this regard since the photograph is ineluctably connected to its referent in a way that language is not. At the very least, we

can say that the insistence on the importance of the process of signification as an exclusive realm of connotation seems to leave out something that never really goes away, even in the most dogmatic anti-realist theory.

Mitchell sets his sights on what he describes as the overconfident denouncement of the 'natural' and 'non-conventional' status of the photograph,²⁰ in comments that relate to Burgin's rigid conventionalism. Although Mitchell accepts that "language" in some form usually enters the experience of viewing photography,²¹ the suggestion that photographs are (as Burgin expressed it) 'invaded by language' seems to Mitchell to be not only overstretching the metaphor, but tantamount to suggesting an affinity between photography and language. To say that in certain ways, in particular circumstances, a photograph might be 'invaded' by language is one thing. Who would deny it? The anchorage of a picture's meaning in language (and vice versa) is well known. 'Invaded by' is not, however, the same as 'identical with'.²² For Mitchell, the metaphor should certainly be more carefully gauged to the problematic of the word/image opposition. What we are bound to say (following Mitchell) is that the 'invasion' - rather than dissolving difference - might in fact produce opposition and resistance. In other words, there might be 'some value at stake in such a resistance, some real motive', as Mitchell describes it, 'for a defence of the non-linguistic character of the photograph'.²³

The critical framework for a re-evaluation of the 'non-linguistic' status of photography (pace Mitchell) derives from Barthes's *Camera Lucida*.

The post-semiotic Barthes revisits an early provocation: the photographic image as '*a message without a code*',²⁴ a way of thinking that points towards the need for a reconsideration of the photographic image. As Mitchell notes, there is 'one connotation always present in the photograph ... it is a pure denotation; that is what it is to recognize it as a photograph rather than some other sort of image'.²⁵ Mitchell describes a hypothetical wedding snap:

Conversely the denotation of a photograph, what we take it to represent, is never free from what we take it to mean.... Connotation goes all the way down to the roots of the photograph, to the motives for its production, to the selection of its subject matter, to the choice of angles and lighting. Similarly, 'pure denotation' reaches all the way up to the most 'readable' features of the photograph: the photograph is 'read' as if it were the trace of an event, 'relic' of an occasion as laden with aura and mystery as the bride's garter or her fading bouquet.²⁶

What is at stake here has importance for the way photographs are seen. In so far as there is such a thing as medium-specificity, we might consider how documentary photography, in some of its forms, connects the photographer and audience with what Roberts has called the 'dialogic and communicative functions of photography'.²⁷

Renewed interest in medium-specificity and the question of an ontology of the photographic image establishes a new connection between the earlier modernist engagement with the reportorial and sociocultural functions of photography.²⁸ It marks a return to an engagement with the peculiarity of the photograph and its unique capacity to mediate between the experience of modernity and the

perceived need to act as witness to that experience. The denotative power of the photograph is key to understanding this. Barthes's emphasis on the paradoxical nature of the photograph serves to remind us that it always has two messages: one without a code (the analogical) and one that performs a rhetorical function. The first is denotative and the second is connotative. For Mitchell, this poses a significant sense of difference between the two modes of being. One must be 'neutral' and 'objective' and the other is invested with meaning. There exists a sense of resistance between the two. The existence of these two levels suggests something like the distinction between photography and language. Barthes argued that the denoted and the connoted message are not in collusion (they are actually resistant to each other), but the latter (the coded message of connotation) 'develops on the basis of a *message without a code*'.²⁹ The parasitical relation of the coded message in this case (an example of photo-text) suggests that the value of photography lies in its apparent freedom from values - that is, in the suspended 'reality' of its pro-filmic moment. Mitchell has shown how this paradox of coded versus uncoded message production suggests a way of thinking about the imbrication of photography and language. There is an argument that it is precisely this sense of difference between the writing and photography that gives substance to the photo-essay.

Mitchell recognizes a certain power in the abrasive urban and regional subject matter of documentary photographers in late-nineteenth-century and Depression-era America. He refers specifically to the pioneering 1890 photo-essay by Jacob Riis, *How*

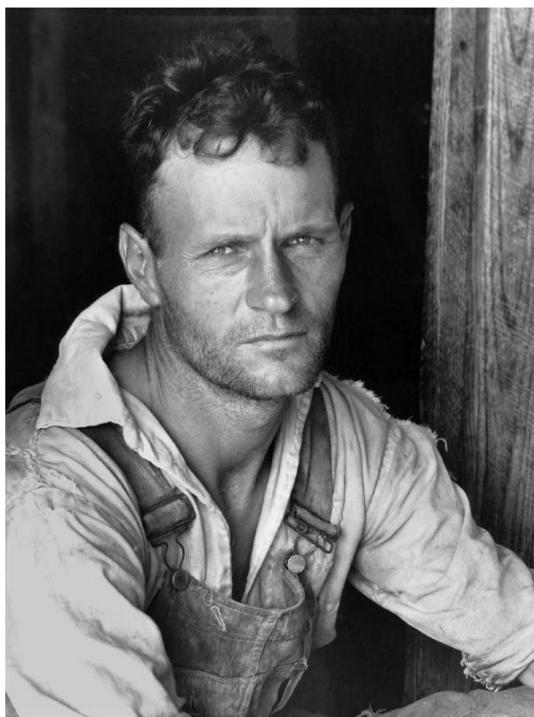
the Other Half Lives, and the collaborative work of the photographer Walker Evans and the writer James Agee in the book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* of 1941 [3]. According to Mitchell, the power of these images derives in part from their shock value. But there is something else – something more than shock – that is to be found in the sense of resistance between image and text. Mitchell notes how the shift from reading to seeing is perhaps awkward. It is, nevertheless, this awkwardness that can be used in a reflexive and self-critical way:

to make the instrumentality of both writing and photography and their interactions serve the highest interests of ‘the cause’ [the left-wing idealism of the project] by subjecting it to criticism while advancing its banner.³⁰

Mitchell’s point is that separation of image and text – as two distinct narratives – in Evans and Agee’s book establishes a tension between the two things. The refusal to anchor the images with a self-explanatory or rationalizing text allowed the two

discourses to meet tangentially in a way that allows a partial but deliberately incomplete attempt to document its subject. The design of the publication leaves gaps in the narrative, inserts false names, and is resistant to journalistic closure and objectification of the subject matter. But despite sensitivity to formal considerations, it is rooted in something that keeps the reader’s attention. You might say the procession of signifiers has an end point, a basis in fact that conspires with the illusionistic trappings of the imagery. The meaning is elusive, but it retains a level of epistemological power that is arguably missing in postmodernist obsessions with the ‘shifting networks of symbolic

forms'.³¹ Mitchell shows that *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is an attempt at a truthful statement that draws attention to its own instrumentality as much as it does to the subject matter. The images are not merely illustrative; indeed, as Agee claimed, the images and the text are 'co-equal, mutually independent, and collaborative'.³² Mitchell is keen to dispel the danger of the sentimentalizing narrativity of the photo-essay; he notes that some of the best examples do not merely raise consciousness, but disrupt the passage from reading to seeing and make the text interactive and challenging.



3 Walker Evans, *Floyd Burroughs*,
1936, from *Let Us Now Praise
Famous Men* by Walker Evans and
James Agee, 1941.

The historical examples analysed by Mitchell, especially *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, invite comparison with Sekula's attempts to breathe life into the formerly demonized genre of documentary, and in particular his use of the photo-essay in series such as *Fish Story* of 1995 and the slightly later *Shipwreck and Workers* [4]. What connects Sekula with earlier humanist documentary photography is his respect for the 'naive realism' of the photograph and his willingness to explore the theme of work. In some of the key examples within this tradition, the celebration of labour rather than consumption has important connections with democratic and idealist struggles for social and political change. But Sekula's practice also represented an attempt to pursue a method that addresses the separation of the artist's labour from that of the critic. In a statement that echoes Agee's thinking in the 1930s, he proposed a type of mixed-media practice that, in the words of Hilde Van Gelder, 'aspires to abolish the discursive schism between the critical essay and the artwork'.³³ Sekula observes:

As soon as you create a relay between text and image, you undermine any purist claims for either text or image. Neither element is foundational. The image is no longer the truth upon which the text is a commentary or subjective gloss, nor is the text a pinning down of a truth that is otherwise elusive in the image.³⁴



4 Allan Sekula, *Shipwreck and Workers: Part of Titanic's Wake*, 1998/2000. Photo: courtesy of Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica, California.

In Sekula's work we thus see a contemporary attempt to demonstrate the dialectical nature of the photo-essay in which language and photography interact as they might do in the many other hybrid forms that we take for granted in our daily lives. Burgin's insistence that pictures almost never are seen on their own – that is, without the intervention of words – is correct. But that does not mean that pictures are the same as writing; moreover, the case for medium-hybridity may undermine important differences between media. What is more, Sekula's projects also intermingle empirical research and critical comment with a certain resistance to curatorship and the aesthetic appropriation of the photograph. A work such as *Fish Story*, for example, seems to show a respect for

lineages that reach back to the demotic traditions of earlier photographic exhibitions in which sequentially organized, archival projects formed a basis for engagement with class oppression, social fracture and the regimes of industrialized labour. The revival of the photo-essay and the rehabilitated practices of the photo-document may in some limited way halt the trafficking of popular culture as art. The photo-essay surely provides an important precedent and object lesson for current practice in the visual arts, in an era when new technology digitally blends all signs. It offers an approach that combines the radical interventionist strategies of two quite disparate artistic formations: the humanist projects of early twentieth-century documentary photography with the anti-aesthetic imperatives of conceptualism. It is significant that Sekula was scornful of the return to pictorialism in the work of Wall,³⁵ whose failure, from Sekula's perspective, is that it negates the critical aspirations of conceptual art and returns to the aesthetically conservative ideology of the 'single-image aesthetic'.

Both Sekula and Mitchell have in their different ways argued for the value of the image-text as a means of sustaining a popular hybrid format that extends beyond the museum and art gallery and continues to exploit the critical interaction of writing and pictures. Sekula was following the legacy of the 1930s to find a dynamic role for photography and to retain a link with the social world. It is also significant, however, that Sekula, like Evans and Agee, avoided the conventions of captions and narrative structure so that, as Mitchell observes in his assessment of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, the separation of image and text is

not ‘simply a formal characteristic but an ethical strategy, a way of preventing easy access to the world they represent’.³⁶ As with Evans and Agee’s book, there is no obvious way to read Sekula’s installations. There is an avoidance of sequential narrative forms where image and text are more simply juxtaposed. In Sekula’s work, the conventional ordering of images and text that audiences expect is challenged in a way that negates the production of fixed meanings, which in series such as *Shipwreck* and *Fish Story* prevents any objectifying or sentimentalized view of the worker. There is, nevertheless, a profound relation between the two levels of meaning as the ‘reader’ is invited to see the artist’s work as intervention rather than expression of objective truth. When Mitchell says that ‘our labor as beholders is as divided

as that of Agee and Evans’,³⁷ the same could be said of our response to Sekula’s work. The linguistic message is a foil that reminds us to see the picture as a different thing – it is an emanation of a ‘past reality’ that makes us think more deeply about the photograph’s resistance to language. Despite the challenging nature of these projects, we may note also an important shift in emphasis away from the politics of representation to a greater recognition of values that attach to the objects and experiences represented.

¹ The phrase is used by Victor Burgin in Tony Godfrey, ‘Sex, Text, Politics: An Interview with Victor Burgin’ in *Block*, vol. 7 (1982), p. 9.

² See comment by Sekula cited in Hilde Van Gelder, ‘A Matter of Cleaning Up: Treating History in the Work of Allan Sekula and Jeff Wall’, *History of Photography*, vol. 31, no. 1 (Spring 2007), *passim*.

- ³ See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Photography Between Discourse and Document', in Allan Sekula, *Fish Story* (Richter Verlag: Rotterdam and Düsseldorf, 1995), pp. 189–200.
- ⁴ Cited in Simon Morley, *Writing on the Wall: Word and Image in Modern Art* (Thames & Hudson: London, 2003), p. 146.
- ⁵ Victor Burgin, 'Photographic Practice and Art Theory', in Victor Burgin (ed.), *Thinking Photography* (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 1982), p. 83.
- ⁶ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1994), p. 14.
- ⁷ The quotation is cited approvingly by Burgin in 'Photographic Practice and Art Theory', op. cit., p. 83.
- ⁸ John Roberts, *The Art of Interruption* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1998), p. 147.
- ⁹ The editorial comment in *Block*, vol. 7 (1982) makes this point: 'More than most other practitioners in the visual arts, he [Burgin] has indicated the relevance of textual analysis to the still image and the possibilities for a genuinely subversive art practice. Problems of gallery space and the lack of serious critical interest have led Burgin, like a number of other British artists, to exhibit primarily in Europe and America.'
- ¹⁰ Wall has observed: 'My work has been criticised for lacking interruption [...] but, already by the middle of the 1970s, I felt that the "Godardian" look of this art had become so formulaic and institutionalized.' See 'Interview: Arielle Pelenc in Dialogue with Jeff Wall', in Thierry de Duve et al., *Jeff Wall* (Phaidon: London, 1996), p. 11.
- ¹¹ Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, op. cit., p. 14, n. 10.
- ¹² Medium-specificity is condemned by Burgin as (among other things) a symptom of patriarchal authority. See his *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke and London, 1986), p. 47.
- ¹³ The phrase is cited by Van Gelder, 'A Matter of Cleaning Up', op. cit., p. 73.
- ¹⁴ Godfrey, 'Sex, Text, Politics', op. cit., p. 8.

- ¹⁵ Jessica Evans, 'Victor Burgin's Polysemic Dreamcoat', in John Roberts (ed.), *Art Has No History: The Making and Unmaking of Modern Art* (Verso: London and New York, 1994), p. 208.
- ¹⁶ Alex Potts, 'Sign', in Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (eds.), *Critical Terms for Art History* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1996), p. 19.
- ¹⁷ Evans, 'Victor Burgin's Polysemic Dreamcoat', op. cit., p. 219.
- ¹⁸ See Joel Snyder's scepticism on indexicality in James Elkins (ed.), *Photographic Theory* (Routledge: New York and London, 2007), pp. 369–400.
- ¹⁹ Alain Badiou and François Balmès, *De l'Idéologie* (Maspéro: Paris, 1976), p. 30. Cited in Kevin McDonnell and Kevin Robins, 'Marxist Cultural Theory', in Simon Clarke, Terry Lovell, Kevin McDonnell, Kevin Robins, and Victor Jeleniewski Seidler (eds.), *One-Dimensional Marxism: Althusser and the Politics of Culture* (Allison and Busby: London, 1980), p. 166.
- ²⁰ Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, op. cit., p. 282.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² See Burgin, *The End of Art Theory*, op. cit., p. 51. The military metaphor of photographs being 'invaded' by language signals his connection with the tradition that has produced a pervasive 'denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought'. For a discussion of these issues, see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1994).
- ²³ Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, op. cit., p. 283.
- ²⁴ The well-known phrase is from 'The Photographic Message', in Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (Fontana: London, 1977).
- ²⁵ Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, op. cit., p. 284.
- ²⁶ Ibid., pp. 284–5.
- ²⁷ Roberts, *The Art of Interruption*, op. cit., p. 4.
- ²⁸ See Jan Baetens and Hilde Van Gelder, 'Editorial', in *History of Photography*, vol. 31, no. 1 (Spring 2007), pp. 1–2.
- ²⁹ Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, op. cit., p. 284.

- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 288.
- ³¹ Burgin uses the phrase in 'Perverse Space', in Beatriz Colomina (ed.), *Sexuality and Space* (Princeton Architectural Press: New York, 1992), p. 236.
- ³² Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, op. cit., p. 290.
- ³³ Van Gelder, 'A Matter of Cleaning Up', op. cit., p. 73.
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 73.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 74.
- ³⁶ Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, op. cit., p. 295.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p. 300.

SCARS ON THE LANDSCAPE

DORIS SALCEDO BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Chin-tao Wu

As they might do in any public square in a Western European city on a sunny day, people gather and casually stroll among the pigeons that flock around the Plaza de Bolívar, the central square of Colombia's capital city, Bogotá. The imposing facade of the grandiose colonial buildings that flank the square adds to the monumentality and the tranquility of the place. One could easily mistake it, with its sun and strollers, for St Mark's Square in Venice. But the Plaza de Bolívar is no European urban idyll. Pedestrian and public it may be, but the tranquility of the place is under constant surveillance and policed by an alarming number of soldiers menacingly armed with submachine guns. In keeping with the brutal history that afflicts the country, the square, the location of important government buildings such as the National Congress, has had its role to play in civic bloodshed.

The Palace of Justice on its northern side was witness, in 1985, to one of the most notorious confrontations between Colombia's guerrillas and its government - a confrontation that resulted in many of the country's judges, as well as a large number of fighters and civilians, being killed. Unlike the siege of the Opera House in Moscow in 2002

that received substantial worldwide coverage in the media, brutal events in a 'Third World' country such as Colombia have very little global news value. The Colombian artist Doris Salcedo has, over the last decades, been persistently attempting to keep alive in the public consciousness events such as these, events that the West would be happier to ignore, if not to forget. As an artist whose work since the 1990s is rarely exhibited in her home country, her representation of the victims of Colombia's warring communities is destined, whether intentionally or not, for Western consumption. Its consumers include not only public art museums and spaces that exhibit and support her work, but also the commercial markets that trade in, and on, her art. Although it is not usual for criticism to engage with the market side of artistic output, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge that art and commerce are in an intricate, and often opaque, symbiotic relationship. The friction generated by this conflict of interest is particularly acute for an artist whose work is politically orientated and engaged, and which articulates violence and the depth of human suffering. Can the artistic expression of anguish be given a price within capitalism and traded for profit by the world's most powerful gallery owners? If not a contradiction in itself, this sort of artistic collaboration with market forces must be, at the very least, problematic.

The bipartite nature of this essay is intended to highlight not only the contradictory nature of today's art industry, but also the sorts of dilemma that a politically engaged artist living in both the creative and commercial worlds might have to face in order to function within these different realms. This approach entails a somewhat wider critical

perspective than is usual, since without distinguishing clearly between the different contexts in which a particular art work is seen and/or traded, it is all too easy to lose sight of the crucial role played by the politics of location and their dynamics.¹ Taking as examples those of Salcedo's works inspired directly by the 1985 siege of the Palace of Justice, my paper aims, in the first place, to investigate how the reception of her art in the West might be typical of the way in which the Western art world habitually consumes and appropriates works from the 'Third World'. It is my hope also to shed light on how women artists, or indeed any female cultural workers, from politically troubled countries can make successful careers for themselves within mainstream Western art institutions. The high point of Salcedo's artistic output so far, *Shibboleth*, shown at Tate Modern in 2007, further illuminates the ways in which 'Third World' artists can be accommodated and consumed within a predominantly Western cultural discourse.

This is not, of course, to suggest that Salcedo is a typical artist whose professional record can be taken as any sort of exemplar of a 'Third World' woman trying to make her way in the Western art world. Salcedo's career is in fact anything but typical. No Latin American artist has managed what she has achieved in such a short amount of time in high-powered Western art establishments, both public and commercial. Nevertheless, her political interaction with Western institutions provides an illuminating example of how it is possible for an artist operating between two worlds to successfully negotiate, and secure for herself, a position of cultural prominence. Needless to add, it is never easy for any independent researcher outside the

closed circle of cognoscenti to map clearly the intricate networking and social-relation mechanisms within the contemporary art world, especially as these often require insider knowledge and special access. The best that can be done is to sketch out some significant historical junctures at which certain key players and institutions have helped to shape and impact on an artist's development.

In common with many 'Third World' artists who go to the Western centres of contemporary art for training, Salcedo completed her postgraduate studies in New York – an experience that not only provides graduates with opportunities for further professional development, but also frequently facilitates personal networking and access to art institutions in general. Having finished her masters degree (in sculpture) at New York University in 1984, Salcedo took a further eight years to make her institutional debut in the West, namely the group show 'Currents 92: The Absent Body' at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston in 1992.² The following year she appeared in a group show at a leading New York commercial art gallery, Brooke Alexander.³ Before 1993, her exhibition record was exclusively in Bogotá; after that point, she exhibited almost uniquely at Western institutions. The year 1993 also saw her feature in the special section of the 45th Venice Biennale, 'Aperto 93: Emergence/Emergenza'.⁴ Given that the biennale represents the largest gathering of art specialists anywhere, appearing there placed her work for the first time on the world stage.

It did not take Salcedo long to be awarded her first solo show, 'La Casa Viuda', at Brooke Alexander in 1994, followed by another at White Cube in London

in 1995. Successive exhibitions in both New York and London, the two most important centres of contemporary art of the time, indicate that she had secured a solid bridgehead in the commercial market. In terms of her large furniture works, the curators of biennial exhibitions such as the Carnegie International 1995, curated by Richard Armstrong, were particularly supportive of Salcedo's work, providing her with the space she needed to show the work to its best advantage. A new group of furniture pieces, all from 1998, were then shown at the São Paulo Biennial of that year, and were seen by Anthony Bond, who would curate the first Liverpool Biennial the following year and who asked that all of the pieces be exhibited in Liverpool.⁵ The international nature of these biennials earned for Salcedo an exposure as extensive as a string of solo exhibitions would have achieved.

By the end of the 1990s, Salcedo's work had entered the circuit of Western public institutions, winning the support of respected curators such as Dan Cameron and Charles Merewether, who consistently drew attention to her output. The late 1990s witnessed a series of exhibitions of her *Unland* works at the world's most prominent art museums: 'Unland/Doris Salcedo' at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York and SITE Santa Fe in New Mexico in 1998 and then at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1999, and 'Art Now 18: Doris Salcedo' at the then Tate Gallery in the same year. By the end of the decade, Salcedo was well established in both the commercial market and the public sector, and moving at ease back and forth between the two. It was the Tate exhibition, however, that

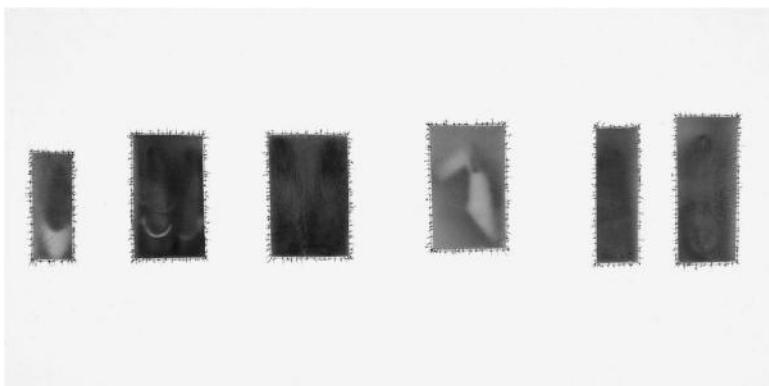
foreshadowed and facilitated her Turbine Hall commission at Tate Modern in 2007. Despite occupying a small area within the gallery, the Art Now series at the Tate, devoted exclusively to younger and emerging artists, represents an important venue to showcase new talent. It is a much coveted space and a golden opportunity for any aspiring artist to acquire the kudos that automatically goes with having been exhibited at the Tate. Entering the Tate collection must have been a turning point in Salcedo's career, especially given the strong support of its director, Sir Nicholas Serota. What is remarkable, in such circumstances, is that within a few years, she was to be selected for a high-profile project of such magnitude as the Turbine Hall commission.⁶ The new millennium saw a significant change in Salcedo's working methods. Unlike her previous pieces, which had been closely related to the political and social situations in Colombia, her works during the period before she took up the Tate commission were primarily site-specific projects, where art and architecture were well integrated into the specificity of the locality in question.⁷ These included the much acclaimed installation of 1,550 wooden chairs at the 2003 Istanbul Biennial, *Neither* at the White Cube in 2004 and *Abyss* at the Castello di Rivoli in Turin in 2005.

Despite shuttling back and forth between Bogotá and the West, Salcedo has not interrupted her output over the last two decades, overcoming both the inconvenience and the discrimination involved in leading this sort of double life, and she has, above all, chosen to continue living in her home city.⁸ This is in stark contrast to a substantial number of other contemporary artists not born in

Western Europe or North America who have chosen to move to one of these areas in order to pursue a better career.⁹ It is in this sense that Salcedo's career is untypical as far as 'Third World' artists are concerned. The fact that she had started out very early in her career under the aegis of a New York-based dealer must, one supposes, have provided her with the art-world networking and access links necessary to ensure future success, which an artist based solely in Bogotá could not possibly have been able to take advantage of.

Salcedo also is unique in the way in which she has so far chosen to work. In comparison with the majority of artists of her generation, she has produced very little in terms of quantity.¹⁰ Each of her works is a unique piece, and it is not her habit to work in editions. During the 1990s, the worn shoes of the *Atrabiliarios* series and the cemented furniture series hardly amounted to a very voluminous output, while in the millennium decade she did mostly public projects that were not particularly saleable. Two exceptions were the 2004 installation *Neither*, exhibited in the London commercial gallery White Cube, which was sold to a Brazilian collector, and the reinstalled piece known as *Abyss* at the Castello di Rivoli. Though it is customary for artists in such circumstances to put their working drawings or sketches on the market, Salcedo has so far made none available for sale.¹¹ Given that a large number of her works from the 1990s have entered public collections, there are very few pieces left to circulate round in the market, which leaves demand for her work high and constantly unsatisfied. How this situation is likely to develop is something to which we shall return later in this paper. Having briefly contextualized

Salcedo's production in relation to the Western art establishment, both public and commercial, over the last two decades, it is time for us now to take a closer and more detailed look at her output, with the aim of better understanding why her work is so sought after, and what makes her specific contribution to contemporary art so original.



1 Doris Salcedo, *Atrabilarios*, 1992-3, wall installation with sheetrock, wood, shoes, animal fibre and surgical thread in ten niches with 11 animal fibre boxes sewn with surgical thread.
Photo: Robert Pettus, courtesy Alexander and Bonin, New York.

Since the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, Salcedo based all of her work on the first-hand evidence she collected during her many field trips into the countryside of her native land, places of deadly civil conflict such as abandoned villages and sites of mass graves and wholesale slaughter. Although civil war has never been officially declared as such, the civilian population of Colombia has been constantly subjected to indiscriminate violence occurring as a result of the internal conflicts

between different political parties and factions, paramilitaries, guerrillas and drug dealers. Employing, indeed recycling, personal domestic objects used by the victims themselves, Salcedo makes these scraps and fragments from everyday life speak for the absent body and the missing person and the pain and sorrow that their absence brings.¹² In one of her most famous installations, *Atrabiliarios* [1], worn shoes, mostly from female victims, are placed in boxlike niches inserted directly into walls. The niches' fronts are sealed with translucent animal fibre, stretched taut with surgical thread. The used shoes, which stand in a relationship of synecdoche with their absent owners, are the sewed and sealed memory and mourning that the survivors have to carry around with them together with their emotional wounds.

In another installation, *La Casa Viuda*, a series of five works made between 1992 and 1995, used doors and other domestic furniture such as bed frames and stools have bones, zippers and fragments of clothes inserted into them. The title of the work - in English 'the widowed house' - already evokes the image and association of a bereaved woman alone with her loneliness and her grief. The delicate insertion of human traces

into the furniture further works to strengthen its visual complexity; the intimacy of the zippers and fragments of personal clothing, being interwoven with the domesticity of used objects, inevitably invites association with their absent users. But in Salcedo's work, such emotional associations of loss and memory are always very subdued and carefully controlled. Even in *La Casa Viuda VI* [2] where a child's metal bicycle seat is blocked by one door and fixed to another, the reference to a child's suffering

and bereavement is understated and only indirectly referenced. The potency of this work lies in the ambiguity and understatement of the representation, while Salcedo's use of everyday objects is charged with strong emotional associations.



2 Doris Salcedo, *La Casa Viuda VI*, 1995, wood, bone, metal in three parts: (1) 190.2 × 99.1 × 47 cm; (2) 159.7 × 119.3 × 55.8 cm; (3) 158.7 × 96.5 × 46.9cm. Photo: D. James Dee, courtesy Alexander and Bonin, New York.

But for her two major works related to the events in the Palace of Justice in 1985, Salcedo was forced to abandon her previous practice of employing objects actually owned and used by the victims. Forced, that is, in the context of her urgent need to ensure

the survival of the collective memory of the tragic events that had traumatized an already damaged country – at a time when the government had been going out of its way to erase all possible traces of the events by destroying each and every object left in the burned-out building.¹³ The two works, in their use of chairs as both images and objects, represent therefore a significant departure for the artist, both emotionally and artistically. In her previous work, Salcedo set out to identify with, and substitute herself for, the victims. As she herself stated:

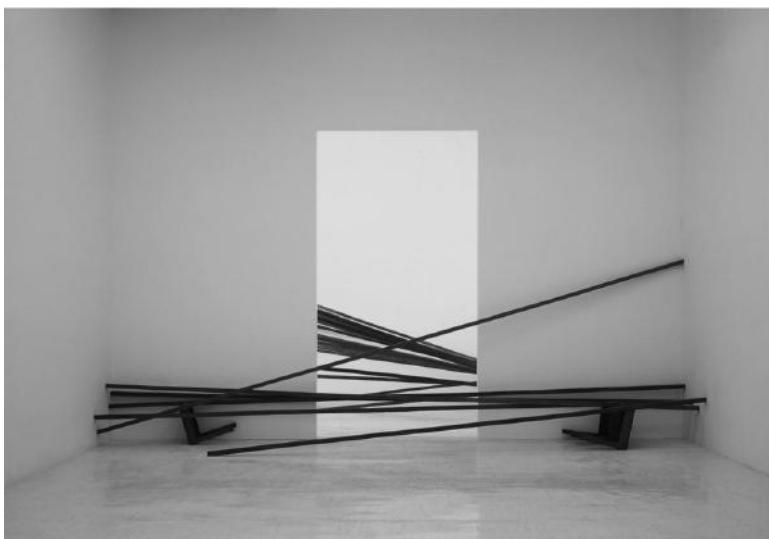
I try to learn absolutely everything about their lives, their trajectories, as if I were a detective piecing together the scene of a crime. I become aware of all the details in their lives. I can't really describe what happens to me because it's not rational: in a way, I become that person; there is a process of substitution.¹⁴

In cases where objects are, as it were, imprinted with their previous owners, the metonymic substitution might be easier to imagine and to sustain. What, then, is the role that the artist plays, or more precisely that Doris Salcedo plays, in a work of art created from her own resources rather than from other people's objects, and claiming to make specific reference to contemporary historical events? In her own eloquent essay commenting on and explaining the work in question, Salcedo talks of the role of the artist as interlocutor, using what she calls 'active memory' to build a bridge between the solitary remembering of individual victims and the collective memory of a community.¹⁵ For Salcedo, 'active memory' presupposes two basic actions, that is, remembering (or recording) and narrating:

To remember is to make a deliberate effort of memory. But the act of recalling past facts without the capacity to narrate them condemns memory to oblivion. Active remembering is, therefore, above all a narration. If we limit memory to the act of remembering, we convert it into a solitary memory: the traumatised victim remembers in solitude. As a narrative act, [however,] memory seeks an interlocutor and in that way transforms itself into social or collective memory.¹⁶

The events of the siege of the Palace of Justice in 1985 gave Salcedo the impetus to produce two major works. The first, *Tenebrae, Noviembre 7, 1985* [3], was exhibited at the Camden Arts Centre in London in 2001, and then in Documenta 11 at Kassel in 2002. The second, more of a conceptual intervention than an art object, took place at the very location of the event it commemorates. In both cases, chairs supply the central metaphor. In *Tenebrae* (literally 'shadows'), an entire room is blocked off with elongated rods and upturned chairs made of metal. A closer inspection reveals that what appear to be metal studs preventing visitors from approaching actually are chair legs. The ambiguity of the relationship between the chairs, their legs and/or the blocking rods, and the space thus defined and blocked off, is a function of the (post-) minimal sculptural language that Salcedo chooses to use for her work. The chairs are of a uniform shape and size, as are the standard two-foot-by-two-foot blocking studs. Abstract though the work is, some sense of violence emanates from it, but to what extent can minimal abstraction give expression to the specific realism and 'content' that the artist implies by the specifically dated title? Can the horrific violence of lived experience be conceived of, or dealt with,

effectively in abstract terms? The sense of violence that the space evokes is confirmed, or perhaps strengthened, by a number of pieces of crushed chairs placed outside the room (called *Noviembre 6*), an installation that is further expanded in the Documenta exhibition [4]. Like the chairs and the studs in the room, these are made of stainless steel, lead, wood and resin, but they have been violently crushed together by some unspecified force. Some are, like a battered body, heavily disfigured and barely recognizable as chairs. Others, again like a battered body, retain the scars of the brutality that has been inflicted on them.



3 Doris Salcedo, *Tenebrae, Noviembre 7, 1985*, 1999–2000, lead and steel in thirty-nine parts, dimensions variable. Photo: Stephen White, courtesy Alexander and Bonin, New York.

Although the violence undergone by the crushed chairs is clear in Salcedo's work, the question that remains is how far these objects can be made to relate to the experience of the suffering of the Colombian people, especially in the eyes of a Western European audience? It would be less problematic if we could see the chairs simply as a representation of violence in general, but the artist somehow hints at a more specific reading of them by giving the composition the definite title she does.¹⁷ The question is therefore made more complex than it appears to be at first sight. Over the past decades, despite her growing international reputation, Salcedo has seldom exhibited inside Colombia. Her works, even if they are not deliberately designed for exhibition and consumption in the West, have so far mostly been seen only outside the social context that actually inspired them.¹⁸ It is ironic, given this decontextualization, that the interpretation of Salcedo's work in the West, critical or otherwise, is always coloured by an emphasis on the fact that the artist is from Colombia and that her work deals with the living situation of that particular country - an emphasis, it must be said, that is partly of Salcedo's own making and of which she herself is very much aware.¹⁹ This Western orientation, perhaps even appropriation, of her work, as well as an awareness of the political situation in Colombia are, in other words, two important background factors that need to be taken into account in any interpretation of these chairs.



4 Doris Salcedo, installation view of exhibition at Documenta 11, Kassel, 2002. Photo: courtesy Alexander and Bonin, New York.

Viewing these works in a Western art space in the specific way the artist's titles and the gallery information seem to want us to see them, raises, therefore, some particular problems. Encountering the works without knowing anything of either the artist or her past compositions is an entirely different experience from that of seeing them with knowledge of her background and particular biographical details. When, for example, the British

art critic Adrian Searle asserts that, 'It is hard to look at Salcedo's work and not think of real disappearances and kidnapping in her native Colombia',²⁰ he is clearly taking prior knowledge for granted.

What complicates matters even further are differences in the actual viewing contexts. One need only, for instance, compare the visitor responses that the different conditions at the Camden Arts Centre and at Kassel elicited. At Camden, a typical 'white cube' gallery from which the outside world is completely excluded, the works occupied the whole space, which has the effect of giving the visitor a more concentrated, if not controlled, and unified atmosphere to contemplate. In contrast, at the Fridericianum Museum at Kassel, Salcedo's work was shown in a huge room that it shared with the works of Leon Golub. The enormity of the space made *Tenebrae* and its accompanying installation of chairs look quite lost. The nature of Documenta as an art spectacle showing a multiplicity of works by a huge number of different artists, with the constant flow of hundreds, if not thousands, of visitors crowding in to the exhibition space, made any specifically Colombian reading of Salcedo's work quite impossible (something incidentally that appalled the artist herself). It is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine that visitors could have the time for reflection necessary to relate these works to their specific sociohistorical context, as a proper appreciation of the pieces requires.

If the political context of Salcedo's work might thus be sometimes lost on its Western European audience, quite the opposite is true in contexts where the audience happens to be exclusively

Colombian. In *Noviembre 6 y 7* [5], the second of two works commemorating the tragic events of 6 and 7 November 1985 with which we are concerned here, Salcedo chose the precise time and the actual location of the event to make her commemorative act of remembrance. At 11:45am on 6 November 2002, seventeen years after the siege of the Palace of Justice, empty used chairs suddenly started to appear, descending slowly from the roof down the stone facade of the south and east walls of the palace, an act that ended at 2:30pm on 7 November, at precisely the same time as the original siege was brought to a brutal conclusion by the building being set on fire and many innocent lives being lost. These wooden chairs, 280 in total, were intended to cover the entire facade of the palace; some of them were broken, others aged with the imprint of the passing years.²¹

Chairs are everyday objects, banal and ordinary yet intimate. Most of us spend a large proportion of our waking lives on them. Empty chairs provide us with no helpful definition of, or clue to, the social relationships between them and their absent sitters, but what they do effectively is evoke the people no longer sitting on them, or rather the people who should still be sitting on them. In *Tenebrae*, the distortion of the chairs, upturned and with their grossly extended limbs, seems to serve as an additional reminder of the physical violence - and torture - undergone by those who formerly sat on them. The chairs chosen by Salcedo for her conceptual installation are individual domestic objects belonging to interiors. Several chairs set in groups evoke people gathering together, a family eating, for example, or staff assembling for an office

meeting. A large number of chairs – several hundred – bring to mind an audience, a theatre or cinema audience, perhaps, and a public spectacle. Chairs can therefore be seen as objects of transition between the individual, the private and the domestic, on the one hand, and the collective, the public and the spectacular on the other. To hang chairs from an outside wall is to put outside what belongs inside – in other words to turn the inside out. The image thus created is not only one of a cascade or waterfall of chairs, but also one that evokes a large number of people trying to escape to safety from the impending disaster inside. The tragedy consists in the fact that what has actually been saved are the chairs themselves rather than the people sitting on them.

Like Ionesco's more celebrated chairs, Salcedo's pieces are potent symbols of dehumanization. This ephemeral art event marks out the palace as a place of permanent memory, providing a public spectacle of empty seats that is intended to prompt passers-by to relive their own memories of the tragic events, as well as to show solidarity with the victims' families and survivors in the loss and emptiness they have ever since had to endure. No less important is the fact that the Palace of Justice is located in the Plaza de Bolívar, Colombia's principal 'space of public appearance', as Hannah Arendt once called 'the symbolic realm of social representation'.²² The very publicness of the Plaza de Bolívar gives any private act committed on it an immediate political significance that is inevitably collective. By appropriating the walls of the most public square in her country's capital, Salcedo staged a silent protest in full public view, silently echoing the then government's own complicit silence and that of the

previous authorities, whose bungling inhumanity brought about the initial tragedy.



5 Doris Salcedo, *Noviembre 6 y 7*, 2002, installation, Bogotá. Photo: Oscar Monsalve, courtesy Alexander and Bonin, New York.

'To live', as Benjamin famously said, 'means to leave traces'.²³ For those, however, whose traces are deliberately erased by illegitimate or indiscriminate force, their very existence is in danger of being

forgotten unless they find a voice with which to express their violation and disempowerment. It is in such cases that the artist can fulfil the role of interlocutor, and can lend (rather than give) a voice to those whose suffering has made them mute, and whose complicitous fear paralyses their capacity to act for themselves. In this way, private grief imposes itself on public consciousness, the invisible is made visible, the absent is made present, and the forgotten is remembered. The domestic becomes national, and the national, international. To view Salcedo's work outside its national boundaries, however, poses a number of problems and dilemmas for Western eyes: to what extent does our gaze make us complicit onlookers, content to nod in sympathy at abuses committed by the Other on the opposite side of the world? And how far – dare one ask? – is Salcedo's critical success in the West a function of our need to salve our own liberal consciences?

This question has become even more relevant since she was commissioned to produce the eighth Unilever Series installation in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern in 2007. She was the first artist from Latin America to be invited to fill such a prestigious space, and only the third female artist to be so honoured. Tate Modern is, arguably, one of the two most prestigious modern and contemporary art museums spaces in the world, on a par with the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Salcedo's presence in such a high-profile commission in a space of high visibility has undoubtedly brought her to a position of considerable prominence.

Salcedo's work at Tate Modern, *Shibboleth*, consisted of a 167-metre-long crack that ran the

length of the vast Turbine Hall. To those entering the museum, the fissure was barely visible. But as it zigzagged across the floor, it grew progressively more visible, wider and deeper until finally, when it reached the centre of the space, it had the proportions of a forklike trench. Gradually thereafter, the cut again became less and less visible, until it finally disappeared at the far end of the hall. Along the length of what looked like an earthquake fault line, a tunnel effect was created by its sub-surface interior being covered with plastered wire mesh, the structure of which was reminiscent of containing fences around, for examples, prisons or concentration camps. The biblical reference in the title *Shibboleth* does, in fact, refer to a process of separation, to the password that serves to separate the sheep from the goats - to distinguish the supposedly superior Gileadites from the supposedly inferior Ephraimites.²⁴ The work was, however, popularly known as the 'crack', or 'the Tate crack'.²⁵ To create a crack of these proportions was, of course, no easy task. Leaving aside the technical difficulties involved and the inevitable health-and-safety concerns, *Shibboleth* was a direct intervention into the structure of the architectural space of Tate Modern - one might even say an attack on its very structural integrity.

Shibboleth thus not only literally tears open the floor of Tate Modern, but also symbolically undermines the value system and structure of all that this celebrated institution embodies. Salcedo has not been reticent about telling her public exactly what she considers the meaning of the work to be: 'If I as a Third World artist am invited to build one of my works in this space, I must bring them what I am, and the perspective of

what I am. I think the space defined by the work is negative space, the space that, ultimately, Third World persons occupy in the First World.²⁶ Salcedo specified what this perspective might be in her proposal statement for the commission: '*Shibboleth* ... addresses the w(hole) in history that marks the bottomless difference that separates whites from nonwhites. The w(hole) in history that I am referring to is the history of racism, which runs parallel to the history of modernity, and is its untold dark side.'²⁷ She further stated that:

This piece is inopportune.... Its appearance disturbs the Turbine Hall in the same way the appearance of immigrants disturbs the consensus and homogeneity of European societies. In high Western tradition the inopportune that interrupts development, progress, is the immigrant, the one who does not share the identity of the identical and has nothing in common with the community.²⁸

The crack in *Shibboleth* clearly represents a separation and a fault-line running through the foundations on which our sociopolitical life and artistic culture are constructed. What appears to be solid is undermined by a basic and structural fault. Whether or not it represents racism, as defined by Salcedo, is, however, open to question, since no racial interpretation is inherent in the crack. As with any effective art work, it is open ended so that any one of a wide range of schisms can be read into it.

For all its ambiguity, one thing that is crystal clear is the work's relationship to its host institution. The physical violence that the crack imposes on the very fabric of this high-profile building is unprecedented. No other art work has so completely broken open an art museum, so forcibly obliged its visitors to

look downwards instead of sideways or upwards, and left such a permanent physical scar on its floor space as *Shibboleth* has done. As British journalist Rachel Campbell-Johnston put it: 'Tate Modern, a triumphalist monument to our modern Western culture, is quite literally riven in two by an artwork that provokes us to question the very foundations of our ways of thought.'²⁹ Campbell-Johnston's reflection is not untypical of studies on Salcedo's art. As with all of her public projects, Salcedo has provided, for *Shibboleth*, a clear statement analysing exactly what she had in mind at the start of the project. In this way, she is able, from the outset, to direct, to a certain extent, the critical discourse to which her work is to give rise. The racism discourse is no exception. In today's climate of political correctness, the racial interpretation of the work is not only to be tolerated but even actively, and willingly, embraced. As Sir Nicholas Serota declared at the press conference inaugurating the work: 'There is a crack. There is a line and eventually there will be a scar. That is something that we and other artists will have to live with.'³⁰ In contrast to those missing Colombians whose trace, erased by illegitimate and indiscriminate force, but restored by Salcedo in her early works, the scar that the artist has been able to leave at

Tate Modern is well nigh impossible to erase. Not only that, but it is actually welcomed by the powers-that-be in the Western art establishment.

Indeed, the way in which Tate Modern went out of its way to accommodate the artist was little short of extraordinary. It is clear in retrospect that the actual politics of the production of *Shibboleth* were embargoed as confidential and completely sealed

off from any public scrutiny.³¹ It might be understandable – though not necessarily acceptable – if details of the actual financing of the commission were kept secret. But even straightforward technical questions such as how the piece was constructed, and how deep the crack actually was, remained resolutely unanswered. At the commission press conference, the director of the museum, the curator and the artist pointedly avoided responding to such questions from increasingly frustrated journalists. On-site staff were apparently also instructed not to disclose any details of the construction of the work itself, even though some felt proud enough to confide: ‘Of course, I know how it was made.’ This intriguing lack of transparency turns out, on investigation, to be a condition imposed by the artist herself. Even though talking about methods of production and how art is actually created has been an integral and ubiquitous part of artistic discourse throughout the centuries, Tate Modern felt able to turn a blind eye to its own remit as a public educator and complied. One would have thought that Tate’s worldwide reputation would enable it to impose its own conditions rather than accept those of the artists it commissions. That it was willing to go to such lengths to accede to Salcedo’s requests is an eloquent testimony to the power relationship between the self-proclaimed ‘Third World’ artist and her ‘First World’ art institution. Even Salcedo herself expressed surprise at Tate Modern’s willingness to grant her and her work their unqualified approval, and went on record as saying – not without gratitude, one suspects – that ‘It’s quite extraordinary that the Tate would accept this

work – there are not many museums in the world that would dare.'³²

However true this may be, it is undeniable that the Tate commission launched Salcedo into a stage of her career when she could command the same sort of global attention that any comparable Western artist would have enjoyed. Despite this, and although she had long benefited from the support of a circle of art-world insiders (museum directors, critics and curators included), the media coverage of her work and the critical writing it inspired had remained surprisingly limited. This had nothing directly to do with the quality of her work, but more with the hegemonics, economic and cultural, of the Western art world. The art support systems in the West, the scope and scale of the art market, the number and standing of the curators and critics, the importance of art magazines, journals and books are far more developed than any other 'Third World' country could possibly sustain. British artists such as, for example, Rachel Whiteread, an approximate contemporary of Salcedo's, fare much better in the sense that their work immediately generates scores of notices

and reviews, both locally and internationally.³³ With the Turbine Hall commission, however, Salcedo suddenly became a household name in the West, and this success reverberated throughout the 'Third World'.

Salcedo's new-found popularity in the Western press and art establishment has brought with it a new style of critical writing that raises certain general methodological problems concerning the accessibility of works of art. Given, for example, the ephemeral nature of Salcedo's *Noviembre 6 y 7*

performance work that took place in Bogotá, far away from any contemporary art centre or location, few Western curators or critics could actually have seen the performance themselves.³⁴ The need, however, among some critics to produce a critical narrative of this sort of performance means that they often work from secondary material and at second hand. The same photos and the same performative details - both, one assumes, supplied ultimately by the artist - are produced over and over again by critics who have no means of properly investigating the political and cultural contexts of the actual site where the event took place. Just how essential such considerations are when articulating critical responses to art is well illustrated by the case of Whiteread's *Holocaust Memorial* in Vienna, which no self-respecting critic would dream of writing about without having been to Austria and seeing the work first hand *in situ*.

The Western art establishment that extended such a warm welcome to Salcedo is not of course exclusively composed of public art institutions. In anticipation of the high-profile exhibition of *Shibboleth*, her agent in London, White Cube, opened a solo show of her work on 15 September 2007, three weeks ahead of the opening of the Tate Modern commission.³⁵ The timing could not have been more strategically chosen or more commercially orientated. Given the upcoming exposure, it was only reasonable to assume that Salcedo's reputation in the art world would rise significantly and so, naturally, would her market value.

The White Cube show must have posed a particular problem for an artist whose political commitment

has always been part and parcel of her work. How comfortable she is in a relationship with the high priest of art capitalism that White Cube represents must remain a matter for conjecture. Nonetheless, eight medium-to-large furniture pieces, not to mention a number of smaller cemented chairs, were crowded into the modestly sized Hoxton Square space. Rarely had the gallery displayed works in such a crowded situation. In terms of quantity and quality, what could easily have been a museum exhibition in fact turned out to be a sales opportunity, given the fact that the supply of Salcedo's earlier furniture pieces was so limited and demand for it consequently so high. The five older pieces that had been bought back from private collectors by White Cube could therefore be seen as a marketing strategy designed to secure a market monopoly. As one critic anonymously remarked of the gallery owner Jay Jopling: 'He's now the one who owns everything; he can give you any price for any piece.'³⁶ Equally problematic were the three new furniture pieces presumably produced specifically for the sale. Although Salcedo has never drawn any sort of line under the 1990s furniture pieces,³⁷ it was something of a surprise to see these pieces resurrected, as it were, and reappearing on the market after a break of ten or so years. With each one being potentially worth half a million pounds, if not more, it is easy to see what was at stake. To quote one critic, again anonymously: 'Of course, artists can do whatever they want to; they could produce 100 more pieces, but in a way, nobody would respect that. It was a little unexpected seeing again new pieces of the same series that had already been concluded.'

³⁸

The issues (political and otherwise) raised by Salcedo's shows at Tate Modern and White Cube can perhaps most usefully be viewed in the context of the problematic relationship between public and commercial enterprise under neoliberal capitalism, a force unleashed under Britain's Thatcherite government when public institutions could no longer function properly without being heavily reliant on private (including commercial) money.³⁹ Although Salcedo's commission came under the banner of the Unilever Series, the sponsorship money, which amounts to some quarter of a million pounds each year, is unlikely alone to have met the full production costs.⁴⁰ To quote Achim Borchardt-Hume, the Tate curator who coordinated the commission: 'It's not that sponsorship is the same thing as the project budget; it's not the sponsor who pays for a project, nor did Unilever pay for the whole Turbine Hall commission. It's rather that Unilever made the commitment to pay a certain amount of money in support of the project, but then the project budget is something else.... Obviously Doris's work has super-high production costs. It's not a low-budget production from the outset. There can only be certain galleries, and certain mechanisms of production, that could make that possible.'⁴¹ Precisely what the 'certain mechanisms of production' were that actually made Salcedo's commission possible is, however, destined to remain a mystery. Who contributed, and how much, towards the cost of producing Salcedo's work? Despite being a model of helpfulness and frankness in other respects, Borchardt-Hume resolutely declined to reveal any figures concerning the actual cost of Salcedo's commission or any sponsorship deals involved in it. Nor was my question on the

same topic filed with the Freedom of Information Office Group in the Director's Office at Tate Modern any more revealing. Not only did the Tate refuse to disclose the total budget, they also declined to give any detail of other additional funding. It stated:

Tate cannot disclose the amount of budget for individual installations.... The amount of the budget for *Shibboleth* has been withheld under section 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act,... as we believe it would prejudice Tate's commercial interests to release this.... The additional support: the FoI group considers that to supply this information would prejudice the commercial interests of Tate in relation to those sources, and that the public interest in releasing this is outweighed by the public interest of Tate's continued ability to work with these sources.⁴²

The Tate's non-reply is a model of non-information, if not intellectual dishonesty, and surely makes a mockery of the so-called Freedom of Information Act.

It is not impossible to imagine the *Shibboleth* commission, having been first produced and fabricated in Bogotá and involving many staff over several months, and then being shipped to London to be installed on site, over a matter of six or so weeks, by Salcedo and a Colombian and local crew consisting of scores of people working in teams,⁴³ incurring costs that would easily overshoot the million-pound mark. Since no private collector could be expected to support a project so obviously designed for the exclusive glory of Tate Modern,⁴⁴ Salcedo's commercial agents in New York and London seem likely to have provided the only mechanism whereby the commission could secure the extra finance it needed. If this were the case, it would come as no surprise to see these galleries

taking a direct and vested interest in enhancing the reputation and market price of such an artist. It is, moreover, no secret in the art world that commercial dealers often have a financial role to play in funding the appearance of their artists at international biennials.

The intricate symbiotic relationship between the Tate, a public institution, and commercial enterprise in the shape of the superstar gallery White Cube reveals a great deal about the dynamics of today's art world and its often opaque market mechanisms. In particular, the lack of transparency surrounding the politics of the production of Salcedo's *Shibboleth* commission brings to the fore the problematic nature of public and commercial 'cooperation'. Is it a happy marriage based on the common interest of producing a landmark work of art that serves the best interests of the Tate's wide public? Or is it perhaps a different sort of partnership, one that, while ostensibly serving the so-called 'public interest', is actually more like private enterprise in disguise, advancing the commercial interests of White Cube and - dare one speculate? - those of the artist herself?

The politics of the production of Salcedo's *Shibboleth* commission are no doubt closely bound up with those of the artist and those of Western art institutions, public as well as commercial - a topic rarely broached in the critical literature. While as a 'Third World' artist, Salcedo has produced work, and *Shibboleth* above all, that carries with it a critical political agenda vis-à-vis the power structures of Western art institutions, this does not apparently prevent her, at a personal level, from being deeply involved and implicated in the very

power structures that she is criticizing. This paradox is perhaps inevitable as long as the status quo remains unchanged, with the current power hierarchy in the contemporary art world still dominated by Western institutions. After all, Salcedo's universal visibility in terms of global reach can be achieved only if she works and exhibits with powerful Western galleries, and her critique of existing structures is possible only in so far as it continues to be sanctioned by institutions such as Tate. Even if the critique is somewhat muted, Salcedo's

work itself has certainly secured for her a prominent place in the contemporary art world. Few artists have so relentlessly devoted themselves to the problematics of human violence as she has. With her newly branded status as a Tate-commissioned artist, her voice can now be heard loud and clear.

★★★★★

In negotiating her way between the two worlds of Colombia and America / Western Europe, Doris Salcedo has certainly made her mark and changed the artistic landscape for the better. She has forged for herself a rewarding career both in terms of aesthetic achievement and worldly success. Not all works of art and practices, however, can be accommodated to capitalist market interests to the same degree or with equal legitimacy. Some, in particular those who exploit the suffering of fellow human beings - and the more so if these are innocent women - are inevitably drawn into the byways of the moral maze. They acquire a privileged status that makes them special and at the same time vulnerable. If, for whatever

well-intentioned reasons, this sort of work becomes the victim of financial manipulation, then not only the art and the artist who creates it, but also the public for whose consumption it is intended, are all thereby compromised. Only the future will reveal how far Salcedo will have been able to reconcile political belief with commercial expediency.

I would have liked to express here my gratitude to all those who were kind and cooperative enough to speak to me as I prepared this essay, but unfortunately the requirements of anonymity prevent me from acknowledging their contribution more explicitly. An earlier and shorter version was published under the title of 'Scars and Faultlines: The Art of Doris Salcedo' in *New Left Review*, vol. 69 (May/June 2011), pp. 61–77.

- 1 Elizabeth Adan, for example, treats the spaces of White Cube and Tate's Turbine Hall as if they were exactly the same thing, calling both 'quintessentially "First World" art institutions based in London'; see 'An "Imperative to Interrupt": Radical Aesthetics, Global Contexts and Site-Specificity in the Recent Work of Doris Salcedo', *Third Text*, vol. 24, no. 5 (September 2010), pp. 591–2.
- 2 The biographical data are derived from the Phaidon monograph, Carlos Basualdo et al., *Doris Salcedo* (Phaidon: London, 2000). This publication contains the most comprehensive account available of Salcedo's exhibiting history up to the time it was published in 2000.
- 3 Salcedo started to work with Brooke Alexander gallery in 1992, and then moved to Alexander and Bonin in 1995 when Carolyn Alexander, a partner in Brooke Alexander, left to form her own gallery with Ted Bonin (former gallery director at Brooke Alexander) in 1995; email correspondence with Carolyn Alexander, 20 July 2010.
- 4 Although there were a hundred or so artists from many different countries in 'Aperto 93', Salcedo came to notice by securing a half page of press coverage in the established art magazine *Flash Art*: 'Doris Salcedo', *Flash Art*, vol. 26, no. 171 (Summer 1993), p. 97.
- 5 Telephone interview with Carolyn Alexander, Salcedo's New York agent, 18 October 2010.
- 6 Although the commission was officially inaugurated in October 2007, the actual process started as far back as April 2006; interview with Achim Borchardt-Hume, then curator at Tate Modern, 28 November 2007.

- ⁷ For her work, Salcedo used to travel to areas of high violence outside Bogotá, but when the security conditions in Colombia deteriorated, she was forced to change her working habits; interview with Salcedo, 20 September 2003.
- ⁸ It was reported in 1995 that when her work was in transit from Colombia to the United States, the suspicion was that it was in some way related to drug trafficking, and it was accordingly destroyed by the customs; see 'Artwork Destroyed', *Los Angeles Times*, 4 November 1995, Part F, p. 2.
- ⁹ Chin-tao Wu, 'Biennials sans frontières', *New Left Review*, vol. 57 (May/June 2009), pp. 107–15.
- ¹⁰ Hans-Michael Herzog made similar comments in his interview with the artist, 'Conversation between Doris Salcedo and Hans-Michael Herzog', trans. Camilla Flecha, *Cantos Cuentos Colombians: Arte Colombiano/Contemporary Colombian Art* (Darsos-America AG: Zurich, 2004), p. 143.
- ¹¹ When asked if Salcedo would sell her working drawings, Carolyn Alexander replied: 'Actually she doesn't do drawings. She sketches in some notebooks, but she doesn't do drawings. She said she's not a drawing person, it's just not part of her work'; interview with Carolyn Alexander, 18 October 2010.
- ¹² Salcedo has said that she used 20 to 30 per cent of the objects she collected from the victims in her work; interview with Salcedo, 20 September 2003.
- ¹³ Salcedo reports how, despite her repeated requests, the government refused to give her any object from the building in commemoration of the events of 1985; interview with Salcedo, 18 February 2003.
- ¹⁴ 'Carlos Basualdo in conversation with Doris Salcedo', in Basualdo et al., *Doris Salcedo*, op. cit., p. 14.
- ¹⁵ Doris Salcedo, 'Un Acto de Memoria', *D.C.*, no. 9 (December 2002), n.p. Translated by Tim Girven, to whom I am grateful for his kind help.
- ¹⁶ Doris Salcedo, 'Un Acto de Memoria', *D.C.*, no. 9 (December 2002), n.p.
- ¹⁷ While not specifying where the event took place, Salcedo commented: 'The only piece in that sense is that November has a date, a month and a year. Wherever there's a complete date with a year, that means it refers to specific date.... That was the only exception, and that's

something I very much need'; interview with Salcedo, 20 September 2003.

18 This apparent exclusivity is in all probability linked to the security situation in present-day Bogotá.

19 Interview with Salcedo, 18 February 2003.

20 Adrian Searle, 'World of Interiors', *Guardian*, 12 March 2002, p. 10.

21 According to Salcedo, she had intended to use 400 chairs, but had finally to settle for 280 because of lack of finance; interview with Salcedo, 18 February 2003. The number of chairs reported in the catalogue *Cantos Cuentos Colombians* was 190; Herzog, 'Conversation between Doris Salcedo and Hans-Michael Herzog', op. cit., p. 155.

22 Susana Torre, 'Claiming the Public Space: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo', in Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway and Leslie Kanes Weisman (eds.), *The Sex of Architecture* (Harry N. Abrams: New York, 1996), pp. 241–50.

23 Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century', in Peter Demetz (ed.) & Edmund Jephcott (trans.), *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (Schocken Books: New York, 1978), p. 155.

24 'Therefore Jephthah gathered all the males from Gilead, and warred against Ephraim, and the Gileadites defeated Ephraim ... and occupied the margins of the Jordan, through where Ephraim's people would have to pass on their return. And as some of them arrived there and prayed to be let through, they asked him, Aren't you from Ephraim? And as he answered, No, I am not, they replied: Then, say "Shibboleth", as they were unable to pronounce the same letters ... and were beheaded ... so that forty thousand men from Ephraim died in that war', *Judges* 12: 4–6.

25 Given the inevitable sexual overtones of the word 'crack', it is interesting to speculate whether the work of a male artist would have attracted the same nickname in popular usage.

26 Manuel Toledo, 'Doris Salcedo contra el racismo', *BBC Mundo*, 9 October 2007.

27 Doris Salcedo, 'Proposal for a project for the Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London, 2007', in Achim Borchardt-Hume, Paul Gilroy et al., *Doris Salcedo: Shibboleth* (Tate: London, 2007), p. 65.

- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Rachel Campbell-Johnston, 'The Jagged Edge of Art', *The Times*, 9 October 2007, p. 33.
- ³⁰ 'Latest Tate modern installation is a yawning chasm', *Epoch Times*, 10–16 October 2007, p. 11.
- ³¹ The Turbine Hall was sealed off for six weeks when the construction of *Shibboleth* was carried out. This was not the case, for example, with Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project* in 2003.
- ³² Ossian Ward, 'Into the Breach', *Time Out London* supplement, 'Going to Tate Modern', October 2007, p. 5.
- ³³ A search, for example, of the ArtBibliographieModern database in early 2003 revealed 156 entries for Whiteread but only 24 for Salcedo.
- ³⁴ Salcedo mentions in her interview with Hans-Michael Herzog that she did not give the local press any advanced notice of the performance; see Herzog, 'Conversation between Doris Salcedo and Hans-Michael Herzog', op. cit., p. 158.
- ³⁵ The exhibition at White Cube took place between 15 September and 20 October 2007, while the Tate commission opened on 9 October.
- ³⁶ Interview with the author, 05 December 2007.
- ³⁷ Salcedo did, however, declare: 'Originally I planned to do many more pieces. I had planned to make a group of cement furniture after finishing one piece and before beginning another, but it demanded too much energy, and I felt I had already achieved what I was looking for'; see Herzog, 'Conversation between Doris Salcedo and Hans-Michael Herzog', op. cit., p. 152.
- ³⁸ Interview with the author, 05 December 2007. Salcedo also produced two more new pieces in 2008 for her New York gallery, Alexander and Bonin.
- ³⁹ See Chin-tao Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980s* (Verso: London, 2002).
- ⁴⁰ The Unilever Series, inaugurated in 2000, was a sponsorship deal between Unilever and Tate Modern worth £1.25 million for commissioning works in the Turbine Hall over five years. It was renewed in 2005 for a further three years for £1 million (Salcedo's commission falls under this tranche), and again in 2008, this time to the tune of £2.1 million for the next five years; see the Tate's press

releases, 'Unilever to pour £1.25m into Tate Gallery', 13 May 1999; 'Doris Salcedo to undertake the next commission in The Unilever Series', 6 April 2007; and 'Unilever extend sponsorship of The Unilever Series for a further five years', 18 July 2007.

41 Interview with Achim Borchardt-Hume, 30 November 2010.

42 Email correspondence with Ruth Findlay, Senior Press Officer at Tate, 11 February 2011.

43 Salcedo stated in an interview: 'There are around 100 people working in teams'; see Ossian Ward, 'Into the Breach', *Time Out London* supplement, p. 5.

44 Salcedo's large furniture pieces are in any case mostly in public, not private, collections. What is more, as the commission already had a commercial sponsor in Unilever, and the title of the Unilever Series, any additional donor would inevitably have had to remain more or less anonymous. In some press reports, *Shibboleth* was described as 'a new £300,000 work of art'; see Nigel Reynolds, 'Tate Modern reveals giant crack in civilization', *Daily Telegraph*, 8 October 2007. Informed sources, however, do not endorse this figure. According to the popular press, shipping the work from Colombia to London cost £23,410, and a £3,000 commission fee was paid to the artist; see 'Revealed: How the Tate Modern's "crack in the ground" cost the taxpayers £23,000', *Daily Mail*, 24 February 2008. It is far from clear how reliable this information may actually be.

REALISM, TOTALITY AND THE MILITANT CITOYEN

OR, WHAT DOES LUKÁCS HAVE TO DO WITH CONTEMPORARY ART?

Gail Day

The theme of this essay - Georg Lukács and contemporary art - is not the most obvious of subjects, its conjoined terms being deeply incongruous, their contiguity seemingly precluded by his harsh criticisms of aesthetic modernism. Lukács seemed barely able to consider the new literature of his own period; I am merely thinking of the montage practices of the interwar period, not imagining his likely response to the type of art work produced towards the end of his life, let alone subsequently. Moreover, Lukács's interest in the 'visual' arts is limited; when he does address modern art, he often struggles to comprehend it, comparing the paintings of Paul Cézanne unfavourably with those of, for example, Rembrandt.¹ Such problems do not apply to Lukács's most famous interlocutor and critic: we feel we can readily speak of 'Brecht and contemporary art', as did the curators of the 2009 Istanbul Biennial, who made Bertolt Brecht, Elizabeth Hauptmann and Kurt Weill's 'What Keeps Mankind Alive?' from *The Threepenny Opera* the thread of their selection.² The problem extends further than questions of Lukács's aesthetic

judgments. There is something of his strong sense of historical evolution and decay, his commitment to ‘the general line of development’, and his untroubled rhetoric of ‘nation’, ‘people’ and ‘masses’ that seems of another time and place. Then there is the humanism of his intellectual universe – albeit one appended to a hard selflessness of one placing himself in the service of the revolution – and his (sometimes quite aggressive) *modus operandi* in debates. One of the main tasks of this essay is to overcome the (warranted) scepticism prompted by its premise: that Lukács might have something to offer for the critical consideration of art today. Doing so requires looking beyond many received ideas, and, to a degree, demands that we not approach the undertaking by drawing up checklists of where art does or does not match up to Lukács’s strictures. To be clear from the outset: I do not think Lukács would approve of the art I will discuss. The mission is not to establish some notion of ‘Lukácsian art’, nor do I claim that, having been long overlooked by art writers, Lukács actually represents the way forwards for considering contemporary aesthetic practices. My aim is both more modest and perverse. I will suggest that the points of contact between Lukács and visual art today can be found in some unexpected places, often emerging from precisely the type of features that Lukács famously criticized (description, reportage, montage or ‘Brechtian’ modes). In the process, some of the dichotomies for which Lukács is usually known will start to unravel or reverse; another will come to the fore, although this one names a historico-political obstruction that Lukács seeks to dislodge.

In discussions of ‘contemporary art’, the category itself has come under increasing scrutiny.³ Is it not, as a number of commentators have suggested, little more than a marketing category devised by the major auction houses? For some time there has been a significant strand of left criticism that has seen in art – and visual art especially – nothing but the marks of ‘the commodity’. This line of critique has become rather too undifferentiated, with all aspects of (non-amateur) artistic production – from open celebrations of conspicuous wealth through to work genuinely seeking radical democratic effect – tarred by the same brush. As one of the theorists known for extending homologies between the commodity-form and cultural forms, Lukács might be understood as a progenitor for such criticism, ‘reification’ having become a dominant motif for the critical common sense of today’s cultural theory (albeit largely by way of simplified versions of ‘the spectacle’, ‘the colonization of everyday life’ or ‘the culture industry’). But over the course of the twentieth century, the sense that came to prevail increasingly lacked commitment to, or faith in, the power and effectivity of agency (whether collective or individual) – influenced by the series of political setbacks and defeats, the compromising of the socialist vision, the collapse of the revolutionary ideal and the associated developments in postwar social and cultural theory. In crucial, if highly attenuated, ways this commitment fundamentally shaped Lukács’s account. For him, criticism *of* the object is displaced by a notion of criticism *in* or *through* human action; this recognition of the dynamic imbrication of subject and object (through

a praxis of mutual transformation) underpins his outlook and – despite experiencing some of the setbacks just mentioned – this political philosophy provides resistance to the extending reificatory powers of capital. With this conception, Lukács's work often meditates upon the gap between *Sein* (what is) and *Sollen* (what 'ought' to be), the gap between the existing state of things under capitalism and the desired transformation of human social relations. Deriving from his early engagement with Kierkegaard, and inflected by Hegel's distinction between the real and the rational, this contrast of *Sein und Sollen* – or, more precisely, the question of how to pass from the former to the latter – was translated into the politicized terms of Marxism, becoming a vital strand in his aesthetic writings on realism. I want to argue that this critical problem returns – in ways caught between subliminal registration and conscious deliberation – for a number of key artists working today.

Prompted by a series of translations in the 1960s and 1970s, the anglophone reception of Lukács was simultaneously a site of his appearance and disappearance. Attention to Lukács epitomized the moment of the New Left, and, as a result, his work also became a central focus of criticism. In the 1970s, radical discourses in art were much influenced by the 'critique of representation' that emerged through 'neo-Brechtian' film theory (associated in *Screen* with the films of Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, or Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet), and also through approaches to photography and video developed through second-wave conceptual art. This approach was complemented, in subsequent years, by the development of a specifically postmodern

interpretation of Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory.⁴ Lukács was generally presented as the point of polemical contrast. A critique of Lukácsian realism - along with his suspicion of modernist fragmentation and the methods of reportage - was prominent to these developments (although Lukács's critics were often prone to conflating his account of bourgeois realism simplistically with Zhdanovist Socialist Realism). These debates still linger and continue to impinge upon the discursive parameters of today's critical practices.

Yet, since the 1990s, something akin to a realist impulse has re-emerged in artists formed through or informed by these arguments. What has often been referred to as the social or political 'turn' in art invites reconsideration of the substance of Lukács's approach to realism. Even if most artists still prefer to avoid any talk of 'totality', the efforts of many practitioners today can be said to aspire to 'portray' contemporary social totality. There is no space here to take on debates over 'relational' or 'post-relational' practices, many of which reject the task of 'representation' altogether (let alone that of 'portrayal'), seeing it as inherently dated and problematic.⁵ Suffice it to say that whatever the specific line of art-politics preferred, there has emerged, in response to the post-1989 reordering of the world and the extensions of the neoliberal economic sphere, a felt urgency not only to describe, witness or give testimony to the new phase of capital accumulation, but also to account for, analyse, respond to and intervene in it, and to imagine how we might even exceed capital's social relations. Indeed, even 'descriptive' methods of documentary reportage are now being deployed by

visual artists towards what we could characterize as explicitly ‘narrative’ ends.

II



1 Allan Sekula, *Volunteer Watching, Volunteer Smiling (Isla de Ons, 12/19/02)*, 2002–3, horizontal diptych, colour photographs, from *Black Tide/Marea negra*. Photo: courtesy of the artist.

Above all it has been Allan Sekula’s work that has been framed as an example of revived ‘critical realism’. The use of the term by the artist himself, and by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, who first applied it to Sekula’s practice, is not without a certain irony, one provoked by the need to navigate the legacy of the Brecht-Lukács conjunction – and specifically, to avoid forsaking Brecht’s critique of Lukács in making the critical-realist claim.⁶ Nevertheless, the ironic distancing goes only so far: Sekula remains notable for taking seriously the Lukácsian contribution, refusing to duck the concept that leaves so many others uneasy: that of social totality. Especially well versed in debates concerning politicized aesthetics, Sekula seeks to go beyond the historical dichotomy abbreviated by the names ‘Lukács’ and ‘Brecht’, preferring to focus on their common

cognitive-aesthetic, or realist, commitment. Already, in the early 1980s, we find Sekula describing his approach as a realism 'against the grain' or as 'a realism not of appearances or social facts but of everyday experience in and against the grip of advanced capitalism'.⁷ The emphasis here on a 'realism not of appearances or social facts' touches on his engagement with Lukács's critique of immediacy, although photography - as Sekula knows - was fundamentally problematized by this very attribute, figuring in Lukács's essays adjectivally as a byword for naturalism. (Interestingly, despite their differences, we can find photography serving much the same essential role for Brecht and Adorno.) Sekula's point, then, is also - and here Benjamin proves important - to challenge the widespread denigration of the photograph and to rescue its critical potentials from a triple problem: the downplaying of photography by the dominant aesthetic discourse; photography's 'art-ification' (prominent from the 1960s and 1970s); and the 'postmodern' reaction to these developments. As Sekula argues, photography attracts him, first, because of its 'unavoidable social referentiality' - albeit one that needed to be handled with care - and, secondly, by the way the life-world interpellates the photographer as 'already a social actor'.⁸ Seeking out a form of 'extended documentary', he criticizes the lack of reflexivity to be found in much traditional social documentary.⁹ However, Sekula also steps back from artistic fascinations with the 'fatalistic play of quotations and "appropriations" of already existing images' then current, as well as from approaches that posit the 'idealist isolation of the "image-world" from its material conditions'.¹⁰ With his later projects, such

as *Fish Story* - a large work comprising photographs, diagrams, captions and essays, and around which the claims to 'critical realism' congregated - Sekula uses the literal and metaphoric capacities of seafaring to delineate a picture of the modern maritime economy, to reflect on the history of its representations, and to challenge late twentieth-century theoretical preoccupations with digital speed, flows and 'de-materiality'. *Black Tide* (2002/3) developed these themes [1].

Similar challenges to an art of (uncritical) appropriation - to the reduction of the 'image-world' to something divorced from materiality (or of the world itself to image), and the complacent tendencies within aesthetic self-reflexivity - can be found voiced by a few other artists and film-makers, such as Harun Farocki and Martha Rosler. It has also been picked up, in widely varying ways, by younger practitioners, such as Ursula Biemann, Hito Steyerl and Oliver Ressler. Crucial to this mode of realism is a certain reflexivity about reflexivity, a willingness to subject basic counter-intuitive lessons familiar from modern art or film theory to a more sustained consideration, and a determination to avoid the dangers of aesthetic internalization. In the hands of a number of artists, the distinction between the representation of politics and the politics of representation does not simply lead to the assumed critical superiority of the constructed image, nor does it conclude with a prohibition on representing politics, as it did for so many first-wave neo-Brechtians. Rather, it is taken as an imperative to explore the dialectics of the materiality of the image *qua* image, of materiality *in* the image, and

the materialism of representation's own social embeddedness (which would acknowledge the image's veiling, and the roles of the fetish and 'real abstraction' in representation).¹¹

Sekula is especially interested in how photography has a 'way of suppressing in a static moment its often dialogical social origins'.¹² His combinations of texts and images with picture-story formats or slide sequences, then, can be seen not only as efforts to provoke Eisensteinian 'third meanings'. Nor, following Brecht's well-known comments that photographs of the AEG or Krupp factories failed to show anything of the social reality of these sites, should we see his work simply as the montagist's attempt to rectify this problem by constructing something artificial.¹³ More exactly, Sekula's strategies should be understood as attempts to release social distillates from their reified suspension, to reactivate something of social process evacuated by the stilling of life (a 'stilling' that is not restricted to photography, the time-based work of film or video being equally susceptible to the forces of social hypostasis). We will return to this theme.

III

While generally displaying hostility towards the idea of 'totality', contemporary cultural theory has nevertheless translated Lukács's concept of reification into what might be called (in its derogatory sense) a 'totalizing' account in which capital's power is posited as near universal. This flattened-out account of capitalist reification is the type of argument to which the Russian-based workgroup

Chto Delat objects when, in ‘Declarations on Politics, Knowledge and Art’ (and with echoes of Brecht and Leon Trotsky), its members assert that ‘capitalism is *not* a totality’. ¹⁴ Naturally, much turns here on how ‘totality’ is conceived. It is certainly possible to accept the idea that capitalism *is* a totality – that is, to disagree with the statement offered by Chto Delat – while still sharing the intended challenge to its widespread conceptualization as closed and undifferentiated, and – crucially – as a seamless unity beyond contestation.

In ‘Realism in the Balance’ (1938), Lukács argues that the world market of capitalism presents us with the most totalized social form to date. ¹⁵ It was a point he had been making since the early 1920s, and it did not mean that he conceived capitalism as all-powerful or as non-contradictory. Rather, he saw himself as reiterating Marx and Engels in describing capitalism’s unique integration of political, economic and social aspects of life, and also, as he puts it, the way capital is a force that ‘permeates the spatiotemporal character of phenomena’. ¹⁶ An additional dynamic to the 1938 discussion was introduced by Ernst Bloch, who accused Lukács of adhering to an outdated classical idealist conception of reality as cohesive and unified. ¹⁷ In response, Lukács distinguishes the harmonious totality of classical idealism from the unified-and-fragmentary totality (contradictory unity) of the globalized market economy. But as Lukács emphasizes, their dispute did not essentially concern the analysis of socioeconomic or historical features, but was philosophical in character; that is, their difference was over the way thought – and

specifically, dialectical thought – engages with the surrounding reality.¹⁸

We can glimpse here some of the complexity to Lukács's conceptualization of totality. It is customary to distinguish neo-Kantian, Hegelian and Marxist phases to Lukács's thought, and, further, to demarcate within the latter the more 'political' essays of the 1920s from the 'aesthetic' work that dominated subsequent years. While there are some important changes to the way he contextualizes totality and weights it, there is nevertheless a remarkable consistency to his approach from *The Theory of the Novel* onwards.¹⁹ Totality is characterized most succinctly by Lukács himself as 'a structured and historically determined overall complex', albeit one that needs to be grasped dynamically (as concrete unity, and as both systematic and historically relative).²⁰ At different moments, totality is used to refer to the external world, to thought's hold on that world, to the subject's action upon the world, to artistic representation as such or to the ways art relates to the world (structurally, or in terms of its representational relation to the world, as both form and content). In *The Theory of the Novel* – where the concept of capitalism is still only implicit – we find allusions to the lost 'spontaneous totality of being',²¹ the 'spontaneously rounded, sensuously present totality'²² or the epic's 'extensive totality of life',²³ as well as the limitless 'real totality' of our world,²⁴ which is contrasted to, and contained by, the 'created' or 'constructed totality' of the novel.²⁵ In his political essays – 'What is Orthodox Marxism?' (1919), 'The Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg' (1921) and 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat' (1923) – Lukács

alludes to the ‘totality of the process’ to which political action must relate (the larger historical perspective he demands of the proletarian movement);²⁶ the knowable totality and the totality to be known;²⁷ totality of the object and the totality of the subject.²⁸ Different classes are also understood to constitute totalities.²⁹ Totality is a point of view;³⁰ it is both a ‘conceptual reproduction of reality’³¹ and an *act* of knowledge formation, a necessary presupposition for understanding reality;³² it features as the historical process³³ or the social process.³⁴ Moreover, as Lukács later insists in ‘Realism in the Balance’, the ways in which totality appears to us are contradictory: when capitalism is relatively stable, it is experienced partially and yet people assume it to be ‘total’; conversely, in the midst of crises, when the totality asserts itself, it seems as if the whole had disintegrated.³⁵ Totality appears simultaneously as fragment and whole, but does so disjointedly and unevenly.

Totality is not to be taken as something ‘out there’ bearing down upon us and yet beyond our ken.³⁶ Despite its considerable weightiness in Lukács’s writing, the concept is surprisingly modest in what it performs; it simply demands that we consider the interrelations and interactions between different phenomena, that we relate the parts to the whole – and that we conceive these parts – the whole and all their relations – as mutable, as both materially constraining and subject to human actions. For Lukács, the category of totality is the crux of dialectical methodology and central to Marx’s own analysis. The late-twentieth-century anxiety that has come to be associated with the impossibility of understanding or representing totality (a view

disseminated especially by Fredric Jameson) is absent in Lukács's writings. It is not that the question of totality's unreachableness is unacknowledged, but rather that this impossibility of grasping its entirety is treated by Lukács as little more than a banal truism, or, worse, as a weak way to think. Essentially, Lukács's sense of the modern world is one of a permanently open totality, yet one that is not conceived as some free-flowing vitalistic flux, but as subject to specific determinations, resistances, concretizations and actions. Already in *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács outlines how our access to totality has lost the self-sufficient immanence that characterized the world of the ancients (where the 'totality of being' is described as symbiotic and seamlessly connected with the epic form);³⁷ thenceforth humanity faces an 'endless path of an approximation that is never fully accomplished' and will 'always be incomplete'.³⁸ This characterization translates in his early Marxist essays into the 'aspiration towards totality', where our task is not to attempt to grasp the 'plenitude of the totality' but rather to think from totality's point of view (that is, to conceive ourselves as a vector in, and as subject and object of, the historical process).³⁹ This attitude is echoed yet again in his later essays on critical realism in art, where he is fairly scornful about literary efforts 'to portray the totality

of a society in', as he puts it, 'the crude sense of the word'.⁴⁰ Advanced artists, he argues, are committed to 'the ambition to portray the social whole', but since the object before them is an ever-changing 'infinite reality' that they 'cannot exhaust', the exploration of totality's substance has to be 'active, unceasing', the results only ever an

approximation.⁴¹ The ‘ideal of totality’ in art should not be understood as a fixed sight or yardstick, but grasped as a fluid ‘guiding principle’.⁴² In any case, he suggests, art best approaches the question of totality through *intensive* rather than extensive means; by, for example, addressing ‘a particular segment of life’.⁴³ What he calls the ‘*mere* extensive totality’ is taken to be typical of that ‘crude’ understanding to which he objects.⁴⁴ Thus, the *partial* perspectives prevalent in many recent art works are no reason *per se* to see them as inherently antipathetic to Lukács’s arguments. Rather, the question to consider is whether their limited scope provides a positive focus for reflection, or whether they fail by dissolving into mere partiality. The outlook here can be compared to a point made in his 1921 essay on Rosa Luxemburg (his immediate topic here being political, rather than aesthetic, praxis). Attention to the isolated parts of a phenomenon is not the problem; ‘what is decisive’, Lukács argues, is whether those parts are conceived as interconnected with one another and integrated within a totality, whether addressing them in isolation serves to understand the whole (or, on the contrary, if it remains an ‘autonomous’ end in itself).⁴⁵ We can observe that in recent art works the facets of current reality explored rarely rest solely in their particularities – certainly not for any intelligent viewer; instead, they escalate their scale of bearing, serving as ‘aspects’.

IV

Insufficient attention has been paid to the fact that Lukács takes Socialist Realism to be only a *potential*

aesthetic.⁴⁶ Given that Socialist Realism had already held official status for some twenty years when Lukács made this remark in 1956, his perspective should give us pause.⁴⁷ At one level, he was marking his distance from the legacy of Zhdanovism, but the allegoresis of Lukács's essays – as veiled critique of the narrowing horizons of Soviet Socialist Realism and of Stalinist politics and culture – is just a part of what is going on. Centrally at stake is the question of social transitivity, a topic that is often lodged under terms such as ‘the inner poetry of life’ or ‘the poetry of things’, by which Lukács seems to mean the activities and struggles of human relations.⁴⁸ His contrasting figure is that of ‘still lives’, an expression encompassing both the rigidities of reified forms and the failure of social agents to act within and upon the world (the paralysis of social life itself, akin to Sartre’s dead totalities, or to Marx’s account of the power of dead over living labour). We find ‘still lives’ at various levels: there are, of course, the ‘still lives’ of individual characters; but we also find the ‘still lives’ of a plot-as-plot or the stilling of the genre of the *Bildungsroman*. (Cézanne’s portraits – specifically his paintings of people, rather than his paintings of *nature morte* – are also seen as ‘still lives’.) Ultimately, the category of ‘still lives’ even comes to characterize the approach he supports, insinuating itself into the very modality of bourgeois critical realism. Increasingly, Lukács identifies a stilling of lives in his most favoured art works. Nineteenth-century naturalism comes to be understood not so much as the external ‘other’ to realism – ‘the conflict between realism and naturalism’ described by Lukács in 1948⁴⁹ – but as realism’s own immanent reduction. Most

interestingly, by 1956, the problem of ‘still lives’ is used to characterize a situation between, on the one hand, a critical realism that Lukács finds to be ever more stalled, and on the other, the socialist realism that is yet to be actualized.



2 Allan Sekula, *Waiting for Tear Gas [white globe to black]*, 1999–2000, single slide from 14-minute continuous sequence. Photo: courtesy of the artist.

Thomas Mann’s work was taken to be exemplary of critical realism (and of its internal limits), forming the subject of one of Lukács’s most admired essays – ‘In Search of Bourgeois Man’ – prepared in the mid-1940s.⁵⁰ Mann’s work, Lukács believes, had drawn progressively closer to socialism, but because German culture lacked traditions comparable to the militant *citoyen* or to the Russian *grazhdanin*, Mann’s ‘search for bourgeois man’ – that is, his efforts to grasp bourgeois social totality – remained unrealized; the ability to understand the world more fully required a commitment to practical action within it. The militant invoked in Lukács’s discussion of Mann, then, might be

understood simply as a literary protagonist, or as the problem of Mann the artist, but it is important to recognize how the militant *citoyen* acquires a more extended role in Lukács's argument, featuring as a moment of social process and as the condition for transitivity. Indeed, we find Lukács making the essential point already in the early 1920s: 'The totality of an *object*', he argues, 'can only be posited if the positing *subject* is itself a totality.'⁵¹ While it may come as little surprise to encounter this argument in *History and Class Consciousness*, it might be less expected of his later writings on realism; yet the subject that posits itself as a totality is here being reworked through the idea of the militant *citoyen*. Returning to contemporary anxieties over the unattainability of totality, we can note that the central problem resides, not, as so often assumed, with the unprecedented complexity of today's world or with the reification of life; nor does it really concern the difficulties of depicting or representing that totality. Rather, our confrontation with the question of totality - even our efforts to delineate its mere outlines descriptively - is inseparable from, dependent on, the subject's claim upon, and to, totality. What we find surfacing in Lukács's study of Mann, then, is no simple defence and celebration of critical realism, but rather a probing of its connection to, and limitations for, social transitivity.



3 Radek Community, still from *Manifestations*, 2001, video of Moscow action. Photo: courtesy of Petr Bystrov on behalf of the artists.

V

A significant stream of art today explicitly commits itself to the figure of the militant (as often *militants sans papiers* as *citoyens*). The protestors and syndicalists who feature in Sekula's photo sequence of the anti-WTO protests in Seattle, *Waiting for Tear Gas* [2] and in his video essay *Lottery of the Sea* (2006) would be obvious examples (not just by way of representation – the figurative inclusion of the militant in the work – but also through embodiment in the rejection of the techniques and subjectpositioning of professional photojournalism).⁵² In videos such as *Venezuela from Below* (2004), *Five Factories* (2006) or *Comuna under Construction* (2010), Oliver Ressler and Dario Azzellini explore the role of workers' councils or

community-based organizers building participatory democracy through the Bolivarian revolution. Taking a different approach, the now-disbanded Radek Community [3] staged demonstrations at a Moscow junction, bearing red flags and banners with slogans such as the World Social Forum's 'Another World is Possible' and appropriating the rush-hour crowds assembling to cross the road. As the lights change, the insignia of protest unfurl. Resonant with the history of representations of revolutionary masses (from early Soviet newsreels to Sergei Eisenstein's restaging of 1917), the work is laden with a Dada-Situationist humour and pathos. Such resonances highlight the historical absence of the *grazhdanin*, and yet the work resists full melancholic immersion (although this, in turn, forces further reflection on avant-gardism-as-vanguardism or -as-voluntarism, and on art's relations with social transformation – indeed, it is this oscillation that is interesting).



4 Chto Delat, still from
*Partisan Songspiel: A
Belgrade Story*, 2009, video.
Photo: courtesy of the artists.

The Radeks are named after the left councilist Karl Radek;⁵³ similarly, the words *Chto Delat?* – What is to be done? – recall both the nineteenth-century novel by Nikolay

Chernyshevsky and Lenin's famous 1902 pamphlet on the tasks of political organization. Both groups have produced works that take us to the point where we must consider not just their open political contents, but the very links between aesthetics and politics. *Chronicles of Perestroika* (2008) by Dmitry Vilensky, a member of Chto Delat, assembles

documentary footage of mass gatherings in Saint Petersburg between 1987 and 1991. Accompanied by Mikhail Krutik's score, reminiscent of the music of silent cinema, this short film draws forth a triple historical comparison and complex set of hopes, disappointments - and reminders. In *Partisan Songspiel: A Belgrade Story* [4], a scripted video performance operates as a morality play in which a monument to the Yugoslav partisans comes to life as chorus and serves as counterpoint to the four main characters (the Worker, the Lesbian, a Romany Woman and an Injured War Veteran). Despite suffering similarly at the hands of neoliberal repression (personified by a business leader, a city politician, a war profiteer and their bodyguards), and despite expressing some partial empathy for one another's plight (each taking turn to tell us the life story of another), the oppressed types are unable to overcome their local interests and social prejudices to achieve solidarity. The statue-chorus is both classic meta-commentary and political conscience, pointing to what has been forgotten and what, in our aspirations for a better future, is being politically overlooked. In *Builders* [5] - a video work composed primarily of a sequence of stills in which members of Chto Delat appear together in various affable interactions on a low wall - the voice-over dialogue reflects on their varying attitudes towards the late Socialist Realist painting *The Builders of Bratsk* (1960-1) - sometimes known as *They Built Bratsk Hydro-Electric Power Station* or *Constructors of the Bratsk Hydropower Station* - by Viktor E. Popkov, and offers further observations on unity and organization in the present.⁵⁴ Eventually acquiring the collective form and postures of Popkov's

assembly, Chto Delat constructs a *tableau vivant* (a quintessential allegorical form); however, this animation of Popkov is paradoxically frozen (and stilled photographically). An aesthetic-political aporia (both a circumscription by 'art' and an injunction to exceed its limits) unfolds through a number of tensions: the painting and its restaging; the world built by Popkov's figures and the future being invoked by Chto Delat; worker-builders represented in art, artist-constructors taking their places; the initial appearance of some casual flash-lit snapshots of friends larking about at night contrasting with a deliberately managed set echoing the devices of the canvas (the wall, the darkened background, the sharp lighting of the figures); jumps in the sequence of fixed shots contrasting with the continuity of dialogue. Mimesis is not here a passive reflection but a conscious act of making (as if to reclaim or recoup the originary magic).



5 Chto Delat, still from *Builders*, 2004,
video. Photo: courtesy of the artists.



6 Freee, *Protest is Beautiful*, 2007, billboard poster.
Photo: courtesy of the artists.

This intransitive circling - with its aesthetic and political dimensions - dramatizes a dominant problematic of recent art, which might be understood as the difficulties of direct commensuration, and the troubles of relaying, between aesthetics and politics as such. The problem is at once internalized by the work and resisted. It is registered in, for example, the knowing efforts of Chto Delat to stage occupations of the role of the militant *citoyen* or Radek Community's attempt to 'force' its representation. Sometimes it is embedded in tropes, as in Sekula's *Lottery of the Sea*, where the accumulation of the metaphors 'from below' and 'linking', on one hand, and the unleashing of 'linking' as metonyms and associative chains, on the other, begin to imply models of social transformation: ways of emerging, anticipating, organizing and breaking through political and social impasse. And what is mourned in Freee's *Protest is Beautiful* [6]?

Political dissent, the aestheticization and commodification of rebellion (Freee's works often take the form of billboards, advertising slogans, posters or shop signs), or the way the aesthetic repeatedly circumscribes the political aspirations in art - what has been called its 'Midas touch'⁵⁵? It would be fatuous to hold artists to account for the intransitive situation. That their work addresses these problems - absorbing them as themes (explicitly and implicitly), or registering them more structurally, while pushing the issues to their limits, even if voluntaristically - seems significant enough.⁵⁶

VI

While much recent art has dispensed with the experiencing humanist self as its subject, and would therefore seem light years from Lukács, its own 'predicaments' and 'dilemmas' turn on this same pursuit of the functional role of the militant *citoyen/sans papiers*. As noted earlier, in Lukács's account, 'still life' finally comes to characterize the hiatus reached by *bourgeois* critical realism, its inability - as he sees in Mann's work - to progress beyond a certain point, and to pass from advanced forms of bourgeois to a fully socialist realism (the latter understood as something more complex than the phenomenon claiming the designation). However, it is vital to recognize the extent to which this impasse was also pressured from the other side, by the difficulty of connecting to the conditions for this socialist-realism-still-to-come, a socialist form of realism that could ward off the contingent pressures of the Zhdanovist legacy and inherit instead those qualities Lukács valued in critical

realism. There was thus a gap between the present state of things and the desired future: the incapacity of the present to deliver the socialist future, of course, but, more critically, a lack of tangible 'feelers' that might connect *Sein* to *Sollen*, and that might endow *Sollen* with more than just an abstract disposition. The problem of intransitivity was there for Lukács too: his withdrawal from political debate after 1930 should be seen not merely as a retreat into aesthetic issues, but as an intensification of political questions within his reflections on art - as nothing less than the politicization of narrative and aesthetic quandaries.⁵⁷ Unlike Mann, the artists briefly considered here are explicitly committed to the projects of social emancipation, although they find themselves in circumstances where the prospects for realization seem far more uncertain. And so we find much recent art living out a problem noted by Lukács in *The Theory of the Novel*: the need to navigate the gap between the intelligible 'I' of the novel's protagonist and the empirical 'I' - roughly, between 'art' and 'life'.⁵⁸ Lukács understands this difficulty as emerging not simply from the distance between *Sein* and *Sollen*, but from their hypostatization - a reification of difference into opposition, a reified stilling of both historical time and dialectical temporality. The bifurcation of these two 'I's is attributed to the introduction of this hypostatization within *Sollen* itself.⁵⁹ An inflection on this subject resurfaces in his disagreements with Adorno - for example, in 'The Ideology of Modernism', one of Lukács's least propitious essays from the 1950s - where he raises the problem of the fissure between concrete and abstract possibility.⁶⁰ And we can see its force working through the art

works considered. Through their efforts to make raids on the structural function of the ‘militant’, to seize hold of its fantasized forms, to reanimate its legacies afresh, or to embed its motive forces in tropic meditations, the frequent summoning of the figure of social agency by some of the most compelling artists working today vividly presents the critical dilemma that Lukács’s writing confronted: the problem of *Sollen* becoming an abstract claim; the imperative to make it over into a dynamic force for praxis, a desire seeking to create the possibilities for its realization; the urgency to retrieve *Sollen* from its reduction to no more than a utopic placeholder or protected space for critical thought. Whatever Lukács’s drawbacks, his reflections offer important delineations of challenges now facing us even more acutely, and an example of how emancipatory ambitions refract through aesthetic-political mediations.

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¹ Georg Lukács, *Writer and Critic*, trans. A. D. Kahn (Merlin Press: London, 1973), p. 138.

² See What, How, Whom, *What Keeps Mankind Alive? The Texts* (İstanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı: İstanbul, 2009). Brecht’s relation to modern art was complex, and was certainly not as straightforwardly affirmative as is often suggested by debates that pit him against Lukács.

³ See, for example, the special edition of *October* entitled ‘Questionnaire on “The Contemporary”’ (*October*, vol. 130 [Fall 2009], pp. 3–124).

⁴ I address the problems with the postmodern interpretation of Benjamin in ‘Allegory: Between Deconstruction and Dialectics’, *Oxford Art*

Journal, vol. 22, no. 1 (1999) and *Dialectical Passions: Negation and Postwar Art Theory* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2010).

- 5 Interestingly, the relational emphasis on 'experience' and 'involvement' comes close to Lukács's category of 'portrayal' through 'narrative' (as opposed to 'description' and spectatorial distance).
- 6 See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Allan Sekula: Photography between Discourse and Document', in Allan Sekula, *Fish Story* (Richter Verlag: Rotterdam and Düsseldorf, 1995); also Hilde Van Gelder (ed.), *Constantin Meunier: A Dialogue with Allan Sekula* (Leuven University Press: Leuven, 2005) and Jan Baetens and Hilde Van Gelder (eds.), *Critical Realism in Contemporary Art: Around Allan Sekula's Photography* (Leuven University Press: Leuven, 2006).
- 7 Allan Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973–1983* (The Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design: Halifax, 1984), p. x.
- 8 Ibid., p. ix.
- 9 Ibid., p. x.
- 10 Ibid., p. xii.
- 11 Approaches vary considerably. If Steyerl holds to the politics of representation (and for her, the 'politics' in this phrase remains vital), Ressler is prepared to argue for the dissolution of highly reflexive practice into an approach that reclaims the powers of the document: Oliver Ressler, 'Approaches to Future Alternative Societies', interview by Zanny Begg, <<http://www.ressler.at/approaches-to-future-alternative-societies/>>, accessed 29 September 2013. Nevertheless, their difference needs to be grasped not as dichotomous, but as a tensile distinction.
- 12 Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain*, op. cit., p. x.
- 13 Bertolt Brecht, 'The Threepenny Lawsuit', in Marc Silberman (ed. and trans.), *Bertolt Brecht on Film and Radio* (Methuen: London, 2000), p. 165. The comments are mostly encountered in Walter Benjamin's quotation of Brecht: Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999), p. 526. In a manuscript entitled 'No Insight through Photography', Brecht attributes the argument to Fritz Sternberg, but this time the reference is to a photograph of the Ford factory (Brecht, 'No Insight through Photography [c. 1930], in *Bertolt Brecht on Film and Radio*, p. 144).

See also David Cunningham, 'Capitalist and Bourgeois Epic: Lukács, Abstraction and the Novel', in Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall (eds.), *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence – Aesthetics, Politics, Literature* (Continuum: New York and London, 2011).

- ¹⁴ Chto Delat, 'Declaration on Knowledge, Politics and Art', in *Chto Delat?* special issue, 'When Artists Struggle Together' (2008). <http://www.chtodelat.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=494&Itemid=233&lang=en>, accessed 26 September 2013.
- ¹⁵ Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics* (New Left Books: London, 1977), p. 21.
- ¹⁶ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Merlin Press: London, 1971), p. 23.
- ¹⁷ Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, op. cit., pp. 16–27. Bloch, of course, was defending Expressionism. In the cultural field more generally, however, his characterization of Lukács has stuck firm.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 31.
- ¹⁹ The 'Hegelianism' of *The Theory of the Novel* has to be understood carefully: its account of the modern period, and of the novel as its form, is reminiscent of the dynamics described by Hegel's unhappy consciousness (but it is not Hegelian in failing to progress beyond this aporetic stage). Unlike Hegel's, Lukács's account of alienation is historical and distinguished from objectification.
- ²⁰ Cited in István Mészáros, 'Totality', in Tom Bottomore (ed.), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Blackwell: London, 1983), p. 479. Mészáros's reference is to Lukács, *A marxista filosófia feladatai az új demokráciában* (The tasks of Marxist philosophy in the new democracy) (Székesfővárosi Irodalmi Intézet: Budapest, 1948).
- ²¹ Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971), p. 38.
- ²² Ibid., p. 46.
- ²³ Ibid., p. 56.
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 54.

25 Ibid., pp. 38, 54.

26 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, op. cit., p. 198.

27 Ibid., p. 39.

28 Ibid., p. 28.

29 Ibid., p. 28–9.

30 Ibid., pp. 20, 27, 29.

31 Ibid., p. 10.

32 Ibid., p. 21–2.

33 Ibid., p. 24.

34 Ibid., p. 22.

35 Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, op. cit., p. 32.

36 Note Lukács's insistence in 'What is Orthodox Marxism?': 'We repeat: the category of totality does not reduce its various elements to an undifferentiated uniformity, to identity. The apparent independence and autonomy which they possess in the capitalist system of production is an illusion only in so far as they are involved in a dynamic dialectical relationship with one another and can be thought of as the dynamic dialectical aspects of an equally dynamic and dialectical whole.' Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, op. cit., pp. 12–13.

37 Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, op. cit., pp. 34–9.

38 Ibid., p. 34.

39 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, op. cit., p. 198.

40 Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. J. and N. Mander (Merlin Press: London, 1963), p. 99.

41 Ibid., pp. 97–8, 99, 100.

42 Ibid., p. 100.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, op. cit., p. 28. Lukács's outlook might be compared and contrasted with that of Adorno, who

argued in his 1931 lecture that ‘the mind is indeed not capable of producing or grasping the totality of the real, but it may be possible to penetrate the detail, to explode in miniature the mass of merely existing reality’. Theodor W. Adorno, ‘The Actuality of Philosophy’, *Telos*, no. 31 (Spring 1977), p. 133.

- 46 Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, op. cit., pp. 96, 115. This found an interesting reprise in the 1980s with Jameson’s project of ‘cognitive mapping’: it too was a hypothesis awaiting – without any guarantee – its realization. See Fredric Jameson, ‘Cognitive Mapping’, in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1988).
- 47 Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, op. cit., p. 96.
- 48 Lukács, *Writer and Critic*, op. cit., pp. 126, 136.
- 49 Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki and others*, trans. E. Bone (Merlin Press: London, 2002), p. 5.
- 50 Georg Lukács, *Essays on Thomas Mann* (Merlin Press: London, 1964), pp. 13–46.
- 51 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, op. cit., p. 28.
- 52 For an extended discussion of photographic representations of protest, see Steve Edwards, ‘Commons and Crowds: Figuring Photography from Above and Below’, *Third Text*, vol. 23, no. 4 (2009), pp. 447–64.
- 53 Karl Radek was secretary for the executive of the Communist International, supported the Left Opposition from 1924 to 1929, and died in a Russian camp in 1939.
- 54 Popkov’s painting (oil on canvas, 183 × 300 cm, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow) is associated with the period of the Krushchev ‘thaw’, and, in the artist’s career, as an example of Popkov’s ‘severe style’.
- 55 Peter Bürger, ‘Aporias of Modern Aesthetics’, in Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (eds.), *Thinking Art: Beyond Traditional Aesthetics* (ICA: London, 1991), p. 14.
- 56 As Sekula noted in an essay from 1976–8, a ‘didactic and critical representation’ is a necessary part of, but will not be sufficient for, social transformation: for that, a ‘larger, encompassing praxis is necessary’. Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain*, op. cit., 75.

57 Mészáros is particularly attuned to this continuity; see István Mészáros, Lukács's *Concept of Dialectic* (Merlin Press: London, 1972). See also Jameson's comment that Lukács's political theories were essentially aesthetic or narrative: Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1971), pp. 163, 190.

58 Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, op. cit., p. 48.

59 Ibid.

60 Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, op. cit., p. 21ff. This is discussed in more detail in Day, *Dialectical Passions*, op. cit. The 'feelers' mentioned earlier in the paragraph derive from Adorno's intervention.

DEARTIFICATION THIS SIDE OF ART

IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE, AUTONOMY AND
REPRODUCTION

Kerstin Stakemeier

'It is concrete, however, to analyze the deaesthetization of art as a praxis that, devoid of reflection and on this side of art's own dialectic, progressively delivers art over to the extra-aesthetic dialectic.' Theodor W. Adorno¹

In *Aesthetic Theory*,² Theodor W. Adorno points to an irresolvable problem that he calls 'deartification' (*Entkunstung*):³ the encroachment of the outside world into art's autonomy, led by 'those who have been duped by the culture industry and are eager for its commodities', those who are 'this side of art'.⁴ The roles seem to be clearly distributed. The assault of the twentieth century on the nineteenth, that of mass culture on the modern culture of emancipation, seems as fateful as it was inevitable: the mission of the modernist advocates of autonomy against the victims of its replacement by disposable actualities, who are caught up in the cultural-industrial present - all this seems unmistakably clear. And yet, salvation does not seem to come. 'The deartification of art is not only a stage of art's liquidation but also the direction of its development',⁵ and those who have been duped find themselves 'this side of art' as much as deartification finds itself 'this side of art's own dialectic'. There is not a 'beyond' in sight. Rather,

deartification is an assault by art in general, as part of social reality, on the singular art work, seen as an individuated protest against this social reality. The institutionalized autonomy of art in the nineteenth century that Adorno is addressing falls apart in the twentieth century, when the artistic meaning of this autonomy is detached from its economic meaning.

And precariously, autonomy lost the material power of its artistic meaning precisely where Adorno and others had, since the 1950s, been defending the modern against its decline by instituting it as modernism, demonizing its economic meaning. Whereas autonomy characterizes the modern status of art as a socially separate field of unproductive labour and aesthetic individuation, deartification, with Adorno, characterizes the mass-cultural identification of its individuations, and counter to him, the becoming-productive of artistic labour in contemporary art. In the present text, deartification is therefore not only a transitional figure that makes it possible to see the disintegration of modernity as the losing deal that Adorno recognized, but also the mechanism that opens up concrete social perspectives within art, its production and circulation, in which art achieves a kind of presentness that was still inconceivable in the modernist understanding. This is a shift that Marxist art historians such as Otto Karl Werckmeister or Peter Gorsen already registered in their discussions of Adorno's posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* in the early 1970s. In contrast to Peter Bürger's immanent attempt to expand the 'Theory of the Avant-Garde'⁶ towards a 'neo-avant-garde', both insisted on Adorno's insufficient historicization of the category of art itself, demanding an understanding that exceeded

its identification as inherently bourgeois. Werckmeister saw a simultaneity of artistic production, distribution and reception after the Second World War, which fundamentally puts into question the relevance of any contemporary aesthetic theory in the face of contemporary art,⁷ and Gorsen proposed an 'operative' understanding of art that takes into account its material terms of production.⁸ Both account for the fact that, as Andrew Hemingway has put it, 'Marxism as a totalizing theory of society necessarily throws disciplinary boundaries into question as obfuscations of bourgeois thought.'⁹ It necessitates a contemporary understanding of art as a sphere of (re)production, distribution and reception in which the bourgeois antinomy of art and life can no longer be presupposed.

But for Adorno, the separation of art and life is the necessary basis of artistic autonomy, and its deartification is a two-sided perforation. On the one hand is the decline of the historical 'self-understanding ... [of art] in relation to the living contexts in which it previously had been embedded'¹⁰ - the loss of its institutionalized autonomy, obtained in modernity as a special social status, and thus also art itself as an independent, ideological figure.¹¹ Deartification brings these two aspects together: ideology and reality, in Adorno's words, are moving towards one another.¹² What remains is a modernist autonomy of 'pure' art as ideology, *in the middle of society*, with the simultaneous loss of the special status that socially belonged to it. Deartification designates the embedding of autonomous art as an integrated social reality. In deartification, the autonomy in art is not ruled out, but it has ceased to be modern. It

is, as I shall demonstrate, no longer the autonomy of art, but autonomy *in* art.

On the other hand, deartification in Adorno is aimed at the self-understanding 'of alterity. Art needs something heterogeneous in order to become art.¹³ Alterity, which is to say the material level of the special social status of art *within* the work, increasingly develops a life of its own as the world surrounding the art work becomes reorganized according to the capitalist principle of exchange.¹⁴ The heterogeneous can no longer be integrated without a trace; instead, an order is situated in the work that increasingly lies outside its late feudal means of production. Ultimately, the form of the work becomes heterogeneous in itself due to these changed elements. For 'whatever tears down the boundary markers is motivated by historical forces that sprang into life inside the existing boundaries and then ended up overwhelming them'.¹⁵

Deartification takes art outside the work, and it is, I believe, through these heterogeneities that the contemporary art that emerged from this can be the equal of its time.

For this contemporary art, Herbert Marcuse's dictum from 1973 (based on Adorno) that 'art, as "ideology", overrides the reigning ideology' is no longer sustainable.¹⁶ The fact that 'each artwork could be charged with false consciousness and chalked up to ideology' is not something that emerges, for Adorno, *from the artwork itself*, but from its special economic status *as* art. For 'in formal terms, independent of what they [that is, the works] say, they are ideology in that a priori they posit something spiritual as being independent from the conditions of its material production and

therefore as being intrinsically superior and beyond the primordial guilt of the separation of spiritual and physical labour'.¹⁷ In modernism as Adorno describes it, the relationship between art and labour is a categorical one. Art's capacities cannot be distinguished *by* it; on the contrary, only the rejection of general social labour as culpable makes it possible for an individual art work to have the 'power of its internal unity'.¹⁸ Breaking through this separation out of the space of art itself, for Adorno, is a defect of the deartification of modern art, and at the same time it became an individualizing point of departure for contemporary art. In Adorno's understanding, the end of the categorical divorce of art from quantifiable, productive physical labour does indeed mean a deartification of modernity and thus a loss of its autonomy, but at the same time it produced a new social type of art, contemporary art, that could no longer be sufficiently explained through an art-historical understanding of epochs. Consider writings that draw their understanding of art specifically from an understanding of its production, as has been done in several publications dedicated to artistic productions of the 1960s, most recently in Julia Bryan-Wilson's *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (2009),¹⁹ but also Helen Molesworth's catalogue *Work Ethic* (2003)²⁰ and Justin Hoffmann's brilliant *Destruktionskunst: Der Mythos der Zerstörung in der Kunst der frühen sechziger Jahre* (1995).²¹ The question of the (un)productivity of artistic labour turns into a characteristic of the art works and accounts for the self-understanding of the artists as producers. Here, art-historical periodization is challenged by turning from an understanding of the work to one of labour. Andrew Hemingway's

seminal account *Artists on the Left*²² in many ways opens up an even more fundamental a-epochal understanding, in tracing the convergence of those questions of labour and work with the origin of their possible anti-capitalist meaning: the communist movement in the United States between 1920 and 1950s. It is no coincidence, however, that these accounts of (un)productive labour in art all begin where Hemingway ends. His is a discussion of radical politics *and* art, whereas the others are accounts of radical politics *in* art. The rise of contemporary art, and thus of productive labour in the arts, coincided with the disintegration of internationalist communist politics, a correlation to which I shall return later.

Adorno's attempt to deal with the becoming 'contemporary' of art in the 1960s concentrated, conversely, solely on the level of its reception. When he was claiming that 'the most recent deartification of art covertly exploits the element of play at the cost of all others'²³ his reference point for this, as it was for Marcuse during the same period, was Friedrich Schiller's letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1801), a perspective that cannot recognize any form of activity within art as labour because its rejection is precisely what constitutes this historical moment. Schiller, however, was describing late feudal relations of dependence; Adorno, as he himself writes, was describing 'high capitalism'. What he attacks as the play of deartification is not least an actualization of the historically changing forms of labour in art. 'A contradiction of all autonomous art is the concealment of the labour that went into it, but in high capitalism, with the complete hegemony of exchange-value and with the contradictions arising

out of that hegemony, autonomous art becomes both problematic and programmatic at the same time.' 'The work of art', continues Adorno in his *In Search of Wagner* (1952), which deals with the banishment of labour (*Arbeit*) from the work (*Werk*), 'endorses the sentiment normally denied by ideology: labour is degrading.'²⁴ And the fact that it does so seems incontrovertible to him. Autonomy can be formed only beyond labour; both are socially negative. And this is why he cannot recognize labour in art despite practical ideology critique, and why he classifies the appearance of any activity as an element of play, in which spiritual and physical labour are joined once again.

But what disturbs Adorno as the play of deartification and contradicts his tactical projection of autonomy as a presence of labour in the work (*Arbeit im Werk*) develops into scenarios of artistic disruption outside the constriction of the space of the work. Labour and work thus become terms that facilitate what Hemingway calls 'a totalizing theory' in that they enable an art history that identifies artistic approaches by their homology to non-artistic forms of labour and work. This is because artistic forms of labour begin beyond modernist forms of compositional work and are orientated to the international forms of industrial mass culture. In 1952 the Independent Group (IG) was established in London. Richard Hamilton, Eduardo Paolozzi, Reyner Banham, Alison and Peter Smithson, Nigel Henderson, Toni del Renzio and others examined the primacy of everyday culture, which had become obvious from American magazines and the adverts in them, and its priority over aesthetic construction, something that, in the ruins of Europe, could no longer be denied. They

suspended the work, or rather they inserted it into exhibitions, lectures and series, where their artistic and scholarly labour extended over photography, architecture, painting, collage and art history, at the same time as they incorporated their mass-cultural repetitions and extrapolations.²⁵

The developments by Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg or Jim Dine from painting to a practice of happenings and performance in the second half of the 1950s in New York, like many other artistic expansions of the working

field at this time, could be discussed from a similar perspective. These artists acted out ordinary events, whether banal, as in Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1958), or traumatic, as in Oldenburg's *Snapshots from the City* (1960). They acted out events with artistic means, making their production public, codifying it rather than segregating it. This can be seen precisely in relation to the expansive changes in Fordist labour rules occurring at the same time due to the increasing importance of the service sector,²⁶ which caused a shift in how work was understood both inside and outside art. With the professionalization of previously unpaid, private or individually remunerated activities - especially in the areas of health, education and production services - the postwar years saw a great change in the education of artists, the structures of supply and the means of production. Simultaneously, artists became part of the social changes outside their genre: in healthcare, finance and real estate. This situation applied in particular to the changes in forms of practice in the North American art scene, for here the economic upheavals had clearly accelerated,

even in the 1950s. David Harvey, in his analysis of the introduction of ‘flexible accumulation’, has emphasized another aspect: that of, in Adorno’s words, ‘atomization’²⁷ – that is to say, a short-lived pattern of consumer behaviour in relation to new products. Harvey, on the basis of the growth of the service sector in all areas of production, describes a shift from the production of goods to that of events.²⁸ Even if, in my opinion, this opposition is difficult to maintain, the transition it denotes is extremely significant, especially with regard to Kaprow’s assemblages, environments and happenings, for example.²⁹ And it is also significant because the comparison of the commodity character of the works in the sphere of distribution and their seemingly pre-capitalist existence outside exchange, which would enjoy great popularity a decade later in conceptual art,³⁰ is criticized here in terms of practice. The becoming-event of art is demonstrated by Kaprow, Oldenburg and others as a step into public (production) practice. Even Adorno, as cited above, reduced the reorganization of the world in advanced capitalism to the identification of its parts within exchange. He thus emphasized, not least, the Fordist separation of physical and mental labour. It is only from this hierarchization that an area of mental labour emerged that was seemingly prior to the sphere of distribution, a potentially autonomous area of activity. But with the social expansion and professionalization of the service industries, which characterized the end of the Fordist order of production, this strict separation could no longer be maintained.

For its part, the London IG turned out to be such a timely artistic response to the upheavals of its day

because their common interests developed from the opposition between the American mass culture and the explosion of ordinary design that they examined and the postwar situation in Britain. Their practice found its structure in this opposition. They did not stop being artists – all of them continued to produce outside the IG – but they abstained from producing art works in their collective projects. In their exhibitions, they reconfigured the aesthetic gaze above all beyond the modern hierarchy of art and mass culture.³¹ Here the shift of artistic activities intersects with another tendency, which Harvey, considering the same period, traces as an updated capitalist form of labour. Fordist mass production becomes specialized in drastically expanded but reduced numbers of segments of goods produced. In art, even with the IG, and subsequently in the product range of Pop art, one can observe a drastic expansion of commodity segments. But here, this means an absolute increase in the quantity of production, precisely because the artistic had previously been diametrically opposed to Fordist production norms (individuated single pieces as opposed to standardized mass commodities). Artistic and other forms of labour converged increasingly after the Second World War, just as artistic and other forms of commodities had.

From Adorno's perspective, as already mentioned, the irreconcilable opposition between industrial and artistic production characterized the centrality of the ideological position of modern art itself, its autonomy as a socially given exclusion from a process in which, as Hans-Georg Bensch has summarized, the 'goal of production is not to sustain people. But the goal of production is to

sustain capital, which ... can only be sustained through accretion.³² The position of modern art as a sphere of production is systematically irrelevant to capital, for 'luxury goods', as Frank Kuhne adds, 'are meant for individual consumption, without, as is the case of food, being necessary to reproduce the use value of the commodity of labour. The production of luxury is thus opposed to the understanding of capital as an end in itself.'³³ Quite in keeping with Adorno, the autonomy of art, viewed socially, is a continuing negative process of unproductive labour, which is, however, dissolved from its boundaries by the changes outlined here, involving the disintegration of Fordism up to the point of flexible accumulation. Through the sustained intensification of the division of labour and the progressive integration of service labour in the luxury sector as well as in the mass sector, art production too can no longer strictly be distinguished from the general goal of capital. Art begins 'to produce for production's sake',³⁴ becoming a productive part of capitalist postwar society. Not because it now produced consumer goods - although this also developed into an area of its own within the upper segments of the gallery market, where artists create lamps, architecture, chairs, tables and rugs as a luxury sideline to their art production, which are then distributed in series by galleries - but because their ways and types of production, their forms of distribution and margins of productivity, become increasingly tightly interwoven with the adjacent supply industry. An industry arises.

This also concerns the status of art as an ideological figure, for 'one can speak of ideology', as Adorno writes in 1954, 'in a meaningful way only to the

extent that something spiritual emerges from the social process as something independent, substantial, and with its own proper claims'.³⁵ In a devastated modernity, forms of permeability appear, which Louis Althusser summarized eleven years later in the productive supposition that 'men *live* their actions, usually attributed to freedom of "consciousness" by the classical tradition, in ideology, *by and through ideology*; in short, that the "lived" relation between men and the world, including History ... *is ideology itself*'.³⁶ The reverse projection onto art as counter-ideological ideology, which Adorno strategically confronted with its present, is in part itself a past ideological phenomenon of a no longer current division of the various social areas of production from one another. Only in the modernist vision of things does a postmodernity take the place of modernity, whereas, for instance from structuralist perspectives such as Althusser's, new autonomies and antagonisms can be recognized from the increased mediation of an ideological social life - autonomies and antagonisms that are built up on a present and constantly changing ideological practice, momentarily coming detached from them instead of being built up on historical independencies of social functions in relation to the concrete circumstances of living. For Adorno, what happens to autonomous modern art in deartification (its ideological role as the ideal of mental labour) became an inherent artistic process with the capitalist realization of art after the Second World War through the interconnection of society by expanding the service industry (as autonomization of the ideology of a solely mental labour). This reversal in the meaning of modernity on the one

hand and the emergence of the contemporary (art) on the other can be briefly situated, with the full manifestation of these tendencies in the late 1960s and 1970s, in the connection of two fundamental economic and social changes in perspective, two political battles over autonomy. I shall outline them here in conclusion:

1. The transition from Fordism to so-called post-Fordism – or to use Harvey’s words, ‘flexible accumulation’, as he described it in the United States of the late 1980s – in the period starting around 1950 was described by theorists of ‘Workerism’ (*operaismo*) in Italy during the 1960s and early 1970s, such as Raniero Panzieri or Mario Tronti, from a concrete political practice. One could say that where Hemingway outlined the collapse of the Russia-orientated communist party model by way of the necessarily disaligned practice of its affiliated artists, Workerism began to offer a model in which this form of organization was rethought from the actual conditions of labour at the time. The altered significance of service labour in capitalist production thus also plays a central role in Workerist theory, which first appeared publicly in Antonio Negri’s ‘Proletarians and the State’ (1976)³⁷ in the figure of the ‘socialized worker’ and of organizing *outside* the factory.³⁸ In contrast to Harvey, the emphasis here is not so much on the changed constitution of capital, but rather on the changed role of labour and labourers. At the end of the 1960s, Tronti argued that the working class needed to liberate itself from its status as wage labourers in order to become politically autonomous, and thus to be more than a mere economic category. ‘He

emphasizes their “autonomy” and “subjectivity” to the point of defining them as the propulsive element in capitalist development, and capital as a function of the working class.³⁹ In Tronti’s words: ‘Distribution, exchange, consumption must be seen from the standpoint of production.’⁴⁰ The starting point of subjectification thus remains the factory, but now as the image of total capitalist organization, not merely as a geographical site. Autonomy in the workers’ struggle is socially repositioned, within and outside the walls of the factory: ‘the working class must see itself materially as *part of capital*’.⁴¹

Tronti’s discussion of political autonomy within the framework of a disintegrating modernist concept of capitalist antagonism is interesting here primarily because autonomy is not defined as a development beyond the mere economic function of its own social role, but as a development from this.⁴² This concept of autonomy materializes the fulfilment of a Fordist role against the goal immanent to its system, for instance in the claims and battles about a feminist art (history) in 1970s Germany, in which there was a struggle for the autonomy of a ‘feminine aesthetic’ (Silvia Bovenschen), not least precisely because this could not be aligned with the modernist understanding of autonomy in art and thus set up an explosion within the modernist view of autonomy. The ideological concept of modern autonomy in art functions here as an authoritarian citation, the authority of which is updated through an artistic practice that is turned against it. In ‘Workerism’, Tronti introduced a realization of the social meaning of autonomy, in which the modernist belief in an autonomy *from* economic production came to be seen as a mere projection that was

immanent to capital. What distinguishes both Althusser's structuralist theories and Tronti's workerist theories of the 1960s and 1970s, in comparison to many of the ideas that follow them and take up the same object, is their insistence on the ongoing materiality of modern categories in their present, their effectiveness far beyond their own timeliness. In many respects, the public life of art remains modernist to this day, but the possible strategies for undermining modernist hierarchies and ideological figures dramatically changed with the paradigm of the fundamental dehierarchization of 'distribution, exchange, consumption'. Speaking with Tronti, one could say that artists have to be liberated from their merely economic role (that of unproductive and immeasurable labour) in order to be able to become politically autonomous (from a self-conception as service providers).

2. Feminist efforts in the same period - as advocated, for example, by participants in the Wages for Housework campaign, founded in 1972 by Selma James with Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Silvia Federici and others - were aimed at exactly this point. These theorists, with Marxist and, in the case of Dalla Costa and Federici, Workerist backgrounds, emphasize the role of reproductive labour, already undermined in the context of Fordism, in the constitution of capital, demanding that it be incorporated

into the analysis and political confrontation of the capitalist present. What is deemed to be 'unproductive' labour should be made visible as in fact productive, and an end should be put to its privatization. If it was not entirely unjustifiable that art production fell out of the Marxist analysis of capital in modern times because its order of

production does not stand in any systematic connection to that of the value it generates, this was not so easy to claim for reproductive labour. As Dalla Costa argued in 1971, the contrary is the case; the unpaid labour of reproduction, mostly performed by women, produces exactly that commodity on which the production of all other commodities is dependent: 'the workforce'.⁴³ But the labour of women, seen as unpaid and therefore socially as unproductive, 'appears to be a personal service outside of capital'.⁴⁴ Also the 'Politicization of Private Life',⁴⁵ which Helke Sander called for in 1968 at the Socialist German Student Union, marks exactly this point as the basis of a newly modified definition of autonomy against capital, where capital's innermost driving principle, 'to produce for production's sake', its advanced, expanded reproduction, finally materializes. Making unproductive labour public as a service to capital encounters the residues of modern societies that still exist in the present, here those of women's housework, by becoming autonomized, in Tronti's sense, against the system of capitalist reproduction instead of being identified as part of the business of the capitalist present.

What artistic production shares with reproductive labour - aside from the fact that both are stigmatized as unproductive in the modern image of society - is, on the one hand, the myth of their immeasurability in the Fordist schema; and, on the other, their capitalization as a service arm over the course of the increasing flexibility of accumulation after the Second World War. Both areas of production were characterized in the Fordist schema of capital by their exclusion from direct industrialization, by the advanced archaism of their

labouring means, and by the limitation of their social existence to public forms of representation based on negating the work carried out in them. But where the projection onto art was that onto a seemingly purely mental labour, the epitome of disembodied autonomy, reproductive labour was reduced to the stereotype of an ostensibly merely physical effort, the essence of bodily heteronomy. The feminist battle that continues to this day over establishing autonomy from the perspective of reproduction within capital is therefore, in my view, seminal for an artistic redefinition of what could be designated as autonomies in art today. This is reflected not only in those works of the 1960s and 1970s that explicitly used these relations as the starting point of their productions, works for example by Margaret Harrison, Mary Kelly, Helke Sander or Mierle Laderman Ukeles. There has also been a return to making the private 'public' and visible in current artistic efforts, which represents a breaking down of the boundaries of one's own existence within globalized capital in aesthetic reconstructions, and does not allow for any strict separation of work (artistically individualized production) and life (capitalistically individualized reproduction).

The question of how much an artistic practice, which in a certain sense autonomizes phenomena that are otherwise socialized, can be made more timely could be discussed in relation to the works and methods of artists such as Discoteca Flaming Star, Emma Hedditch, Karolin Meunier, Ulrike Müller, Anja Kirschner and David Panos, Johannes Paul Raether and Ian White, to name but a few. A more thorough answer to this question, however, remains to be developed. For against the backdrop

of a generative understanding of ideology critique, autonomy and reproduction, this effort would be less concerned with a continued self-reflection of artistic orders of production, distribution and consumption than with their homologies with other social sites, phenomena and narratives, in relation to which it would be necessary to register one's own ideological role as much as its oppositional autonomization. Again, this leads back to the need for, in Hemingway's words, a 'totalizing theory of society' in which art history marks one specific thread, one that, since the rise of contemporary art, has been forced even more to help shape an understanding of artistic autonomy as a process of autonomization that confronts modernist nostalgias and enables a solidly united understanding and possibly an organization of contemporary (artistic) labour.

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- ¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1998), p. 182.
- ² Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, originally published in 1970, is a posthumous collection of systematic fragments on a critical theory of aesthetics. Adorno himself had planned for the book to be completed in the same year.
- ³ The English translations of Adorno's texts tend to translate the term with 'deaesthetization', which I think entails a misunderstanding, as it wrongly identifies art with aesthetics. As the difference between art as a practice of manual as much as of intellectual labour and aesthetics as its philosophical dignification lies at the core of my attempt to actualize Adorno's idiosyncratic term, I will translate *Entkunstung* as 'deartification' in this text.
- ⁴ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p. 16.

- ⁵ Ibid., p. 79.
- ⁶ Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1974); *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1984).
- ⁷ Otto Karl Werckmeister, 'Das Kunstwerk als Negation: Zur geschichtlichen Bestimmung der Kunsththeorie Theodor W. Adornos', in *Ende der Ästhetik: Essays über Adorno, Bloch, Das gelbe Unterseeboot und Der eindimensionale Mensch* (Fischer: Frankfurt am Main, 1971).
- ⁸ Peter Gorsen, 'Transformierte Alltäglichkeit oder Transzendenz der Kunst?', in Peter Brückner, Gisela Dischner, Peter Gorsen, Alfred Krovoza, Gabriele Ricke, Alfred Sohn-Rethel (eds.), *Das Unvermögen der Realität: Beiträge zu einer anderen materialistischen Ästhetik* (Wagenbach: Berlin and Frankfurt am Main, 1974).
- ⁹ Introduction to Andrew Hemingway (ed.), *Marxism and the History of Art: From William Morris to the New Left* (Pluto Press: London, 2006), p. 3.
- ¹⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Theorie der Halbbildung', *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 8: *Soziologische Schriften I* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1997), p. 97. Adorno writes about education here, but in a structure that can be extended to art and philosophy, as Adorno himself argues; see p. 112f.
- ¹¹ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Contribution to the Theory of Ideology', in Frankfurt Institute for Social Research (ed.), *Aspects of Sociology* (Heinemann: London, 1973), p. 189.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 193.
- ¹³ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Art and the Arts', in *Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2003), p. 375.
- ¹⁴ Adorno's critique of capitalism as a social form of reproduction is essentially based on a critique of exchange made absolute. A problem that I will return to in the next part of this text.
- ¹⁵ Adorno, 'Art and the Arts', op. cit., p. 370.
- ¹⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1972); see Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p. 232ff.
- ¹⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p. 227.

- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 77.
- ¹⁹ Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2009).
- ²⁰ Helen Molesworth (ed.), *Work Ethics* (Baltimore Museum of Art: Baltimore, 2003).
- ²¹ Justin Hoffmann, *Destruktionskunst: Der Mythos der Zerstörung in der Kunst der frühen sechziger Jahre* (Silke Schreiber: Munich, 1995).
- ²² Andrew Hemingway, *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926–1956* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2002).
- ²³ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p. 317.
- ²⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner* (Verso: London, 2005), p. 72.
- ²⁵ See Anne Massey, *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945–1959* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1995).
- ²⁶ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Blackwell: Cambridge, 1990), pp. 152–3, 156–7.
- ²⁷ See Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Schöne Stellen’, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 18: *Musikalische Schriften IV* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1997), p. 695.
- ²⁸ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, op. cit., p. 157.
- ²⁹ See Allan Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (Harry N. Abrams: New York, 1966).
- ³⁰ See Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Praeger: New York 1973, ‘Escape Attempts’, p. viiff, and ‘Postface’, p. 263ff.
- ³¹ See Thomas Schregenberger and Claude Lichtenstein (eds.), *As Found: The Discovery of The Ordinary* (Lars Müller: Zurich, 2001).
- ³² Hans-Georg Bensch, ‘Zum “Automatischen Subjekt”’, <<http://www.trend.infopartisan.net/trd0705/t180705.html>>, accessed 27 September 2013.

- ³³ Frank Kuhne, ‘Marx’ Ideologiebegriff im Kapital’, in Hans-Georg Bensch and Frank Kuhne (eds.), *Das Automatische Subjekt bei Marx* (Zu Klampen: Lüneberg, 1998), p. 85.
- ³⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (1867) (International Publishers: New York, 1967), p. 592.
- ³⁵ Adorno, ‘Contributions to the Theory of Ideology’, op. cit., p. 199.
- ³⁶ Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (Verso: London, 2005), p. 233.
- ³⁷ An English translation appears in Antonio Negri, *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy* (Verso: London, 2005).
- ³⁸ See Dario Gentili, ‘The Autonomy of the Political in the Italian Tradition (Tronti, Negri, Cacciari)’, in Nathaniel Boyd, Michele Filippini and Luisa Lorenza Corna (eds.), *The Autonomy of the Political: Concept, Theory, Form* (Jan van Eyck Academie: Maastricht, 2012), p. 12.
- ³⁹ Gisela Bock, ‘Zur deutschen Ausgabe’, in Mario Tronti, *Extremismus und Reformismus* (Merve: Berlin, 1971), p. 10.
- ⁴⁰ Mario Tronti, ‘La fabbrica e la società’, *Quaderni Rossi*, no. 2 (1962). No English translation has yet been published. German translation in Mario Tronti, *Arbeiter und Kapital* (Verlag Neue Kritik: Frankfurt am Main, 1974), pp. 17–40. A French translation also exists: <<http://multitudes.samizdat.net/L-usine-et-la-societe>>, accessed 27 September 2013.
- ⁴¹ Tronti, *Arbeiter und Kapital*, op. cit.
- ⁴² Post-Workerist theories have seen the changes in concrete working conditions since the 1970s in an essentially more contemporary way, even if their optimistic outlooks on new classes, new movements and new forms of labour are faced with economic, social and cultural hegemonies that effectively reinitiate social structures that continue to be built up on the basis of modernist models of society. See Thomas Atzert (ed.), *Toni Negri, Maurizio Lazzarato, Paolo Virno: Umherschweifende Produzenten* (ID Verlag: Berlin, 1998).
- ⁴³ <http://libcom.org/library/power-women-subversion-community-della-costa-selma-james>, accessed 27 September 2013.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.

45 <http://www.1000dokumente.de/pdf/dok_0022_san_de.pdf>, accessed 27 September 2013.

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INDEX

Numerals in *italics* refer to illustrations.

- Abstract Expressionism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8;
see also Action Painting
abstract painting 1, 2, 3, 4, 5;
see also abstraction in art; Action Painting; geometric abstraction; *informel* painting; painterly abstraction
abstraction (philosophical) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
abstraction in art 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19;
see also abstract painting; geometric abstraction; *informel* painting; painterly abstraction
ACA gallery, New York 1, 2
Action Painting 1;
see also Rosenberg, Harold
Adamic, Louis 1
Adams, Ansel 1
Adirondack Club 1
Adler, Jankel 1
Adornian theory 1, 2, 3, 4, 5;
see also Adorno, Theodor W.; post-Adornian theory
Adorno, Theodor W. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16;
aesthetics 1;
concept of autonomy 1;
Aesthetic Theory 1, 2, 3, 4;
Dialectic of Enlightenment 1, 2;
Entkunstung 1, 2;
In Search of Wagner 1;
Minima Moralia 1;
'Was Spengler Right?' 1

Aesthetic Movement 1;
 see also aestheticism; art for art's sake
aesthetic subjectivity 1;
 see also subjecthood, subjectivity
aestheticism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7;
 see also Aesthetic Movement; art for art's sake
aesthetics 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,
 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29,
 30;
 critique of 1;
 Marx's concept of 1, 2
Agassiz, Louis 1
Agree, James 1;
 Let Us Now Praise Famous Men 1, 2;
 see also Evans, Walker
agency 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16,
 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23;
 see also social agency
agitprop 1, 2;
 see also propaganda
Alberti, Leon Battista 1
Aldine: The Art Journal of America 1
Alexander, Gertrud 1, 2
Ali, Muhammad 1, 2
alienation 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,
 16, 17, 18, 19, 20
All Russian Academy of Arts 1
Allen, Grant 1
Allgemeinen Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes (Federal
 School of the German Trade Union Federation) 1
Alma-Tadema, Lawrence 1
Altdorfer, Albrecht *The Battle of Alexander* 1
alterity 1;
 see also Other, the
Althusser, Louis 1, 2, 3, 4;
 see also Althusserian theory; post-Althusserian theory
Althusserian theory 1, 2;
 see also Althusser, Louis; post-Althusserian theory
American Artists' Congress 1, 2, 3, 4
American Artists' Congress Against War and Fascism 1, 2

American Civil War 1, 2, 3, 4
American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky 1
American Federation of Labor (AFL) 1, 2, 3
American Fund for Public Service 1
American Labor Party 1
American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences 1
American Writers' Congress 1
An American Group, Inc. 1
anarchism, anarchists 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Anderson, Perry 1, 2
Anderson, Sherwood 1
Annan, Thomas 1
Antal, Frederick 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
anti-aesthetic mode in art 1, 2
anti-capitalism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13
anti-communism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
anti-dialecticalism 1
anti-fascism, anti-fascist 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
anti-feminism 1, 2
anti-Hegelianism 1
anti-historicism 1, 2
anti-Marxism, anti-Marxist 1, 2
anti-Semitism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
anti-socialism 1
anti-Stalinism 1, 2, 3, 4
Apollinaire, Guillaume 1;
 ‘Merlin et la Vieille Femme’ 1
applied arts 1, 2
appropriation art 1, 2
architecture 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14
Arendt, Hannah 1
Armory Show, New York 1
Arnaud, Noel 1
Arnold, Karl 1;
 ‘Berliner Bilder: Grenadierstrasse’ 1
Arnott, David 1
Art and Language 1
art as commodity 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Art Association of Montreal 1
Art Bulletin 1

Art Deco 1
art for art's sake 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
 see also aestheticism; Aesthetic Movement
Art Front 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Art History 1, 2
art market 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,
 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24
Artforum 1, 2
Artist's Fund Society 1
artists' groups 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14,
 15
Artists' League of America 1
Artists' Union 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
ARTnews 1, 2, 3
ARTnews Annual 1
Arts Magazine 1
Ashcan School 1
ASSO *see* Assoziation revolutionärer bildender Künstler
 Deutschlands (ARBKD)
Association of Art Historians (AAH) 1
Association of German Revolutionary Artists *see*
 Assoziation revolutionärer bildender Künstler
 Deutschlands (ARBKD)
Assoziation revolutionärer bildender Künstler
 Deutschlands (ARBKD) 1, 2
Atget, Eugène 1
Atkins, Guy 1
Atkinson, Terry 1
Atlantic Monthly 1
Atwood, Margaret 1, 2
Ault, George 1
aura (of the work of art) 1, 2, 3;
 see also Benjamin, Walter
autonomy, individual 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
autonomy of art 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11;
 see also deartification
autonomy of labour 1;
 see also labour

avant-garde, the [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#), [9](#), [10](#), [11](#), [12](#), [13](#), [14](#),
[15](#), [16](#), [17](#), [18](#), [19](#), [20](#), [21](#), [22](#), [23](#), [24](#), [25](#), [26](#), [27](#), [28](#),
[29](#), [30](#);

see also neo-avant-garde, the; Russian avant-garde;

Soviet avant-garde; vanguard, vanguardism

Azzellini, Dario [1](#)

Badiou, Alain 1
Bain, Alexander 1
Balázs, Béla 1
Ball, Hugo 1
Balzac, Honoré de 1, 2, 3, 4
Bancroft, George 1
Banham, Reyner 1
Barbizon school 1, 2
Bardot, Brigitte 1, 2, 3
Bard, Phil 1, 2
Baroque, the 1
Barr, Alfred H. 1
Barrell, John 1
Barthes, Roland 1, 2, 3, 4;
Camera Lucida 1, 2
Basmachi (Tajik) 1, 2, 3, 4
Bastien-Lepage, Jules 1
Baudelaire, Charles 1, 2, 3
Bauhaus 1, 2, 3, 4
Baur, John 1
Baxandall, Lee 1
Becker, Maurice 1
Beckert, Sven 1
Beckmann, Max 1
Bedford, Hilkiah 1
Bek, Ibrahim 1, 2
Bell, Clive 1
Bellows, Henry W. 1
Benjamin, Walter 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,
14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19;
Illuminations 1;
'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical
Reproduction' 1, 2, 3, 4;
Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiel 1, 2
Bensch, Hans-Georg 1
Berber, Anita 1
Berenson, Bernard 1
Bergdoll, Barry 1
Berger, John 1

Berliner Post 1
Bernstein, Eduard 1, 2
Bernstein, Michèle 1;
 La Nuit 1;
 Tous les chevaux du roi 1
Biemann, Ursula 1
Bierstadt, Albert 1, 2, 3, 4;
 Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak 1, 2
Bird, Jon 1
Bishop, Raymond 1
Blackaby, Jem 1
Blake, William 1, 2, 3
Bloch, Ernst 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7;
 Thomas Münzer as Theologian of the Revolution 1, 2
Block 1, 2
Blunt, Anthony 1
Bohr, Niels 1
Boime, Albert 1, 2, 3
Bolsheviks, Bolshevism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Bonapartism 1
Bond, Anthony 1
Borchardt-Hume, Achim 1
Borzello, Frances 1
Botticelli, Sandro 1, 2;
 Flora 1;
 Primavera 1
Bourdieu, Pierre 1, 2, 3
bourgeois art 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
bourgeois art history 1, 2
bourgeois culture 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9;
 see also Erbe
bourgeois humanism 1
Bourgeois Public Sphere 1
bourgeoisie 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,
 16
Bourke-White, Margaret 1
Bovenschen, Silvia 1
Bovey, W. T. 1, 2
Brace, Ernst 1
Brancusi, Constantin 1

Brandes, Stanley 1
Braque, Georges 1
Brecht, Bertolt 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12;
The Threepenny Opera 1;
'What Keeps Mankind Alive?' 1
Brechtian modes and theory 1, 2, 3
Bredenkamp, Horst 1
Brenner, Anita 1
Brenner, Robert 1, 2
Breton, André 1, 2
Breughel, Pieter the Elder 1
Bridges, Harry 1, 2
British Journal of Photography 1
Brody, David 1
Brooke, S. R. 1
Brooke Alexander, New York 1
Brooklyn Law School 1
Brooks, Van Wyck 1
Browder, Earl 1
Brown, Don 1
Brown, Norman O. 1
Bryant, William Cullen 1
Bryan-Wilson, Julia 1
Buchloh, Benjamin H. D. 1, 2, 3
Bunce, O. B. 1
Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller (BPRS) 1,
2
Burck, Jacob 1, 2, 3
Bürger, Peter 1, 2, 3, 4;
Theory of the Avant-Garde 1, 2
Burgin, Victor 1, 2
Burliuk, David 1
Burnham, James 1

Cacciari, Massimo 1
Cage, John 1
Cahill, Holger 1
'California Group' 1
California Institute of the Arts 1
Calvinism 1, 2, 3;
 see also Protestantism
Camden Arts Centre, London 1, 2, 3
Cameron, Dan 1
Cameron, Julia Margaret 1
Campbell-Johnston, Rachel 1
Campendonk, Heinrich 1
Canadian Academy of Arts, Toronto 1, 2
Canadian Spectator 1
canon in art 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13;
 critique of *see* counter-canon, leftist canon
capital 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16,
 17;
 see also capitalism
capitalism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,
 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21,
 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35,
 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49,
 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58;
 see also capital; capitalist modes of production;
 consumer capitalism; industrial capitalism
capitalist modes of production 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Carlyle, Thomas 1
Carnegie International, Pittsburgh 1
Carroll, Lewis 1, 2
Carter, Jimmy 1, 2
Casilear, John 1
Castello di Rivoli, Turin 1
Castoriadis, Cornelius 1
Catholic, Catholicism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7;
 see also Catholic Church
Catholic Church 1;
 see also Catholic, Catholicism
Caucus for Marxism and Art 1

Caucus for Marxism and Art History *see* Caucus for Marxism and Art

Cavalcaselle, G. B. [1](#)

Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham (CCCS) [1, 2](#)

Centre Party (Germany) [1](#)

Century Association, New York [1](#)

Cervantes, Miguel de [1](#)

Cézanne, Paul [1, 2, 3](#)

Champfleury (Jules François Félix Fleury-Husson) [1](#)

Chareau, Pierre [1](#)

Charles II, King of England [1, 2](#)

Charles, Matthew [1](#)

Chase, William Merritt [1](#)

Chaucer, Geoffrey [1](#)

Chellis, Mary Dwinell [1](#)

Chernyshevsky, Nikolai [1, 2](#)

Cherrill, N. K. [1](#)

Chicago Daily Tribune [1](#)

Christian Democracy party (Italy) [1, 2](#)

Christianity [1, 2](#);
see also Calvinism; Catholic, Catholicism; Catholic Church; Protestantism

Chto Delat [1, 2, 3](#);
Builders [1](#);
'Declarations on Politics, Knowledge and Art' [1](#);
Partisan Songspiel: A Belgrade Story [1, 2](#)

Church, Frederic [1, 2, 3](#);
Heart of the Andes [1, 2](#)

Cicero [1](#)

Clark Art Institute, Williamstown [1](#)

Clark, Kenneth [1](#)

Clark, T. J. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42](#)

class consciousness 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
class cooperation 1
class formation 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
class identity 1, 2, 3
class politics 1, 2, 3
class relations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
class solidarity 1
class struggle 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
class war 1, 2, 3, 4
Clausen, George 1
Clayson, Holly 1
Clunas, Craig 1, 2
COBRA 1, 2, 3
Cocking, Edwin 1
Coffee, John 1
Cohen, Phil 1
Cold War 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Coleridge, Samuel Taylor 1, 2, 3
Cole, Thomas 1, 2
collectivism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,
16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29,
30, 31, 32, 33
collectivization 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
College Art Association (CAA) 1
Columbia University, New York 1, 2, 3, 4
Comintern (Communist International) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,
9
Commissariat for Enlightenment (Soviet) 1
Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) 1, 2
commodity aesthetics 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
commodity culture 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
commodity exchange 1
commodity fetishism 1, 2, 3
commodity-form 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
commodity-image 1
commodity, the 1, 2, 3
communism, communists 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11,
12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25,
26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39,
40, 41;

in France 1, 2;
in Germany 1, 2, 3, 4, 5;
in Italy 1, 2, 3, 4;
in the Soviet Union 1, 2, 3, 4, 5;
in the US 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11;
see also Communist Party
communist art, communist aesthetics 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
communist cultural theory 1, 2
communist culture 1, 2, 3
Communist Party 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
see also individual national parties
Communist Party (France) 1
Communist Party (Germany) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
Communist Party (Italy) 1, 2, 3
Communist Party (Soviet Union) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
Communist Party (US) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
communist politics 1, 2, 3, 4
communist propaganda 1, 2
conceptual art, conceptual artists 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
Congress of Industrial Organizations *see* Committee for
Industrial Organization (CIO)
connoisseurship 1, 2, 3
consciousness 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14,
15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28,
29, 30, 31;
abstract consciousness 1, 2;
class consciousness 1, 2, 3;
critique of 1, 2;
'genus-consciousness' 1;
labour of 1, 2;
political consciousness 1, 2;
proletarian consciousness 1, 2, 3;
revolutionary consciousness 1, 2;
self-consciousness 1, 2, 3;
sensuous consciousness 1, 2, 3
Constable, John 1, 2
Constructivism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
consumer culture, consumerism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9;
see also consumption
consumption 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14;

see also consumer culture, consumerism
contemporary art 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
continental philosophy 1, 2, 3
Cook, Clarence 1, 2
Coplans, John 1
Cotman, John Sell 1
Coughtry, Graham 1
counter-canon, leftist canon 1, 2, 3, 4, 5;
 see also canon in art
Courbet, Gustave 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9;
 A Burial at Ornans 1, 2;
 see also Realism
Courtauld Institute of Art, London 1
Couture, Thomas 1;
 Romans of the Decadence 1;
 The Enrolment of the Volunteers of 1792 1, 2
Cozzens, Abraham M. 1
CPSU *see* Communist Party (Soviet Union)
CPUSA *see* Communist Party (US)
Crane, Walter 1
Craven, David 1, 2
Crawford, Isabella Valancy 1
Crawford, Ralston 1
Crayon 1, 2, 3
Crispi, Francesco 1
critical realism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
critical theorists, critical theory 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8;
 see also Frankfurt School
critique of culture 1, 2, 3, 4;
 see also Adorno, Theodor W.
Croughton, George 1
Crowe, J. A. 1
Crow, Thomas 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7;
 ‘Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts’ 1
Cubism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
‘Cubism and Abstract Art’ (MoMA) 1, 2
‘cultural front’ 1;
 see also New Deal
culture industry 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7;
 see also Adorno, Theodor W.

Curtis, George William [1](#)

Dada, Dadaism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
Daily Worker 1, 2, 3
Dal Co, Francesco 1
Dalí, Salvador 1
Dalla Costa, Mariarosa 1
Danto, Arthur 1
Darwin, Charles 1, 2, 3
Daumier, Honoré 1, 2, 3, 4
David, Jacques-Louis 1, 2;
 Oath of the Horatii 1
Davis, Stuart 1, 2;
 Art to the people - get pink slips 1, 2;
 Composition 1, 2;
 Daily Tribune and CIO 1, 2;
 The Terminal 1, 2;
 Waterfront Demonstration 1, 2, 3, 4
Day, Gail 1
Dean, James 1
deartification 1, 2
de Beauvoir, Simone 1
Debord, Guy 1, 2, 3;
 The Society of the Spectacle 1;
 see also Situationism, Situationists; society of the
 spectacle, the; spectacle, the
de Chirico, Giorgio 1
de Gaulle, Charles 1
'Degenerate Art' 1, 2
Dehn, Adolf 1, 2
De Jong, Jacqueline 1, 2, 3
Deleuze, Gilles 1, 2
De Michelis, Marco 1
Denning, Michael 1, 2
Dennison, Mariea Caudill 1
Depression, the Great 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Der Gegner 1, 2
dérives 1;
 see also détournements; Situationism, Situationists
Derrida, Jacques 1
Descartes, René 1, 2

design theory 1
desublimation 1, 2, 3
détournements 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15;
see also dérives; Situationism, Situationists
Dewey, John 1, 2;
Art as Experience 1
dialectical art history 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
dialectical criticism 1, 2, 3, 4
dialectical materialism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
dialectics 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25
Diamond, Dr Hugh 1
Dickens, Charles 1
Dickerman, Leah 1
Dickie, George 1
Die Arbeit 1, 2
Die Gleichheit 1
Die Linkskurve 1, 2, 3
Die Neue Zeit 1, 2
Die Rote Fahne 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Dijkstra, Bram 1
Dine, Jim 1
Dior, Christian 1
Discoteca Flaming Star 1
discourse 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15
Dix, Otto 1, 2;
Altar for Cavaliers 1, 2;
Dr Fritz Glaser and Martha Dix playing music 1;
Dr Simons in Half-Figure 1;
Jewish Cemetery in Randegg in the Winter 1;
Portrait of the Art Dealer Alfred Flechtheim 1, 2;
Portrait of the Lawyer Dr Fritz Glaser 1;
Portrait of the Lawyer Hugo Simons 1, 2;
Prager Strasse 1;
The Barricade 1;
The Lawyer Dr Fritz Glaser and his Family 1, 2;
The Matchseller I 1;
War portfolio 1
Döblin, Alfred 1

Documenta, Kassel 1, 2
documentary photography 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11,
12, 13;
 see also photo-document; photo-essay;
 photojournalism
Dondero, George A. 1
Dostoevsky, Fyodor 1, 2;
 The Brothers Karamazov 1
Downtown Gallery, New York 1
Dresser, Christopher 1
Driscoll, John Paul 1
Dubuffet, Jean 1
Duchen, Claire 1
Duggar, Ben 1
Dumsday, Albert 1
Duncan, Carol 1, 2, 3;
 ‘Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in French Art’ 1;
 Under Wraps (Bust of Lenin) 1, 2;
 ‘Virility and Domination in Twentieth-Century
 Vanguard Painting’ 1
Durand, Asher B. 1, 2, 3
Dürer, Albrecht 1, 2;
 Circumcision of Christ 1;
 Jesus Among the Doctors 1
Durth, Werner 1
Duveneck, Frank 1
Dziga Vertov Group 1

Earl of Hardwicke, Philip Yorke 1
Earl of Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper 1
Eastman, George 1
Eastman, Max 1, 2
Economist 1
Edgar, Adrienne 1
Ehrlich, Carol 1
Einstein, Carl 1
Eisenstein, Sergei 1, 2, 3
El Imparcial 1
Elistratova, Anne 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Elle 1, 2
Ellis, Fred 1, 2
El Lissitzky 1
Emerson, P. H. 1
Emerson, Ralph Waldo 1
Engels, Friedrich 1, 2, 3, 4;
 The German Ideology 1, 2
England, William 1
Enlightenment 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
Entkunstung see deartification
epic modernism (Schapiro) 1;
 see also modern art; modernism; Rivera, Diego
epic realism (Lukács) 1, 2
epic theatre (Brecht) 1, 2;
 see also modernism
Épinal, images d' 1, 2
Erbe 1, 2, 3, 4
Ernst, Jimmy 1
Ertl, Fritz 1;
 Plan of the Auschwitz-Birchenau Concentration Camp
 1
estrangement 1, 2, 3, 4
Etching Revival 1
Evans, Jessica 1
Evans, Walker 1, 2;
 Floyd Burroughs 1;
 Let Us Now Praise Famous Men 1
Evergood, Philip 1, 2, 3, 4, 5;

Music 1

exchange, principle of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

exchange-value 1, 2, 3, 4

existentialism 1, 2

expressionism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Fähnders, Walter 1
false consciousness 1, 2
Farocki, Harun 1
fascism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23
Fauvism 1
Federal Art Project (FAP) 1, 2, 3
Federal Bureau of Investigation 1
Federici, Silvia 1
feminism, feminists 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12;
 see also women's movement, the
feminist art history 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
feminist historical materialism 1
fetish, fetishization 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13
Feuchtwanger, Lion 1
Feuerbach, Ludwig 1, 2, 3, 4, 5;
 Principles of the Philosophy of the Future 1, 2;
 The Essence of Christianity 1
Fichte, Johann Gottlieb 1
Fielding, Henry 1
Fiene, Ernest 1
figuration, figurative art 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
film and film theory 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
First International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture 1
First World War 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Fisher, Mark 1
Fish, Hamilton 1
Fitzgerald, F. Scott 1
Flechtheim, Alfred 1, 2, 3, 4
Foote, G. W. 1
Forain, Jean-Louis 1
Fordism 1, 2, 3
formalism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15;
 see also Russian Formalism
Forster, Kurt 1
Fortnightly Review 1, 2
Foster, Hal 1
Foucault, Michel 1, 2, 3

Fougeron, André 1, 2
Fourier, Charles 1
Fourth International 1
Fox Talbot, William Henry 1
Frankfurt School 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
 see also critical theorists, critical theory
Frankfurter Hefte 1
Frank, Waldo 1
Frascina, Francis 1
Freedberg, Sidney 1
Freee 1, 2;
 Protest is Beautiful 1
French Communist Party *see* Communist Party (France)
French Resistance 1
French Revolution 1, 2
Freud, Sigmund 1, 2, 3
Freudian narrative 1, 2
Freund, Gisèle 1
Freyberg, Alfred 1
Frick, Wilhelm 1, 2, 3
Fridericianum Museum, Kassel 1
Fried, Michael 1, 2, 3
Fronte Nuovo 1
Frost, Robert 1
Frost, Thomas 1
Frye, Northrop 1, 2
Fry, Roger 1
Fuchs, Eduard 1, 2;
 Die Juden in der Karikatur 1, 2, 3
Futurism 1

Gagnier, Regenia 1
Gainsborough, Thomas 1
Gardner, Fred 1
Gattungswesen 1
Gauguin, Paul 1
Gayer, Sir Robert 1
Gazetta Callejera 1
Gellert, Hugo 1, 2, 3
geometric abstraction 1;
 see also abstract painting; abstraction in art
German Communist Party *see* Communist Party
 (Germany)
German Democratic Party (DDP) 1
German Expressionism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
German People's Party (DVP) 1
Gernsheim, Helmut 1, 2
Gerstle, Gary 1
Gestapo 1
gestural painting 1, 2, 3, 4;
 see also informel painting; painterly abstraction
Getty Research Institute 1
Gifford, Sanford Robinson 1
Gilman, Sander 1
Giorgione 1
Giotto 1
Glaser, Fritz 1, 2, 3, 4
Globe (Toronto) 1
Glob, P. V. 1
Godard, Jean-Luc 1, 2
Goebbels, Joseph 1
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von 1, 2, 3
Gogh, Vincent van 1, 2, 3
Gold, Michael 1, 2, 3, 4;
 Jews Without Money 1
Golub, Leon 1
Gombin, Richard 1
Gombrich, Ernst 1, 2
Good Housekeeping 1
Gorin, Jean-Pierre 1, 2

Gorky, Maxim 1
Gorsen, Peter 1
Gosse, Edmund 1
Gothic, the 1, 2
Goupil Gallery, London 1
Goya, Francisco de 1, 2, 3
Grable, Betty 1
Gramsci, Antonio 1, 2, 3
Graphic 1
Greeley, Horace 1
Greenberg, Clement 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
 ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch’ 1;
 Greenbergian criticism 1, 2, 3
Green, David 1
Gropius, Walter 1, 2, 3
Gropper, William 1, 2, 3, 4;
 East Side 1;
 Hunger March 1;
 Join the Maroons 1;
 Ladies, It Gives Me Great Pleasure 1;
 The Dishwasher 1, 2, 3;
 Toward a Classless Society 1
Grosz, George 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7;
 ‘Prost Noske! The Young Revolution is Dead’ 1;
 ‘The Art Scoundrel’ (*Der Kunstmump*) 1, 2
Group of Seven 1
Gruppe Spur 1, 2
Guattari, Félix 1
Guilbaut, Serge 1, 2;
 How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art 1
Guttuso, Renato 1, 2, 3;
 ‘Concrete communication and concrete images’ 1;
 Newspaper Mural - May '68 1;
 Occupation of Uncultivated Lands in Sicily 1, 2;
 The Beach 1, 2, 3;
 Togliatti's Funeral 1
Gyles, Fletcher 1

Haacke, Hans 1
Habermas, Jürgen 1, 2, 3;
public sphere, concept of 1, 2, 3, 4;
 see also Bourgeois Public Sphere
Hadjinicolaou, Nicos 1
Hahmann, Werner 1
Hale, Katherine 1
Hale, Matthew 1
Hall, Stuart 1, 2
Hamilton, George Heard 1, 2
Hamilton, Richard 1
handicraft 1, 2
Handwerk *see* handicraft
happenings 1, 2
Harbin, George 1
Harden, Sylvia von 1
Hardt, Michael 1, 2, 3, 4;
 Empire 1;
 see also Negri, Antonio
Harris, Ann Sutherland 1, 2
Harrison, Margaret 1
Hartley, Marsden 1
Harvard University 1
Harvey, David 1, 2
hashar 1
Haug, Wolfgang 1
Hauptmann, Elizabeth 1
Hauser, Arnold 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8;
 Hauserian art history 1, 2;
 The Philosophy of Art History 1, 2;
 The Social History of Art 1
Hawarden, Clementina 1
Hays, H. R. 1
Heade, Martin Johnson 1, 2
Heartfield, John 1, 2, 3, 4;
 ‘The Art Scoundrel’ (*Der Kunstlump*) 1, 2
Hebdige, Dick 1
Hedditch, Emma 1
Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9;

Elements of the Philosophy of Right 1;
Philosophy of Right 1, 2;
The Phenomenology of Spirit 1, 2
Hegelianism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
Heim, Jacques 1
Held, John 1
Held, Julius 1
Held, Jutta 1, 2
Heller, Joseph 1
Hemingway, Andrew 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,
14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22;
Artists on the Left 1, 2;
Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early
Nineteenth-Century Britain 1;
Marxism and the History of Art 1;
The Mysticism of Money 1
Henderson, Nigel 1
Hennis, Wilhelm 1
Herder, Johann Gottfried von 1
Hernandez, William 1
Herzfelde, Wieland 1, 2
Hesse, Fritz 1
Hesse, Julius 1
Heuss, Theodor 1, 2
Hext, Kate 1
Hilbersheimer, Ludwig 1
Hills, Patricia 1
Hinz, Berthold 1, 2
Histoire et critique des arts 1
historical materialism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Historical Materialism (group) 1
Historical School of Political Economy, German 1, 2
historicism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9;
 see also anti-historicism
Hitler, Adolf 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
 Mein Kampf 1
Hobbes, Thomas 1, 2
Hoe, Robert 1
Hoffmann, Justin 1
Hogarth, William 1, 2

Holocaust, the 1
Homer, Winslow 1, 2;
The Old Mill (The Morning Bell) 1
homosexuality 1, 2, 3
Horkheimer, Max 1, 2, 3, 4, 5;
Dialectic of Enlightenment 1, 2;
see also Adorno, Theodor W.
Howat, John 1
Hudson River School 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Huelsenbeck, Richard 1
Hughes, John 1
Huillet, Danièle 1
Hungarian Soviet Republic 1
hybrid form, hybrid medium (in art) 1, 2, 3, 4

iconography 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14
idealism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
identity politics 1
ideology 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16,
17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30;
aesthetic ideology 1, 2, 3, 4;
anti-Semitic ideology 1;
avant-garde ideology 1;
bourgeois ideology 1;
communist ideology 1;
liberal ideology 1;
Nazi ideology 1, 2;
photographic ideology 1;
political ideology 1, 2;
revolutionary ideology 1, 2
image-text 1, 2
Impressionism 1, 2, 3, 4
Independent Group 1
indexicality 1
individualism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
industrial capitalism 1, 2
industrial production,
industrialization 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14,
15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23
Industrial Revolution 1, 2
Industrial Workers of the World 1
informal abstraction *see informel* painting
informel painting 1, 2, 3
Inness, George 1
Innis, Harold 1, 2
Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton 1
Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston 1
instrumentalization of art 1, 2
interdisciplinarity 1, 2, 3
International Brigades 1
International Bureau of Revolutionary Artists (IBRA) 1
International Bureau of Revolutionary Literature 1
International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM) 1
International Federation of Revolutionary Writers 1

International Literature 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

International Longshoremen and Warehousemens' Union
1

International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) 1, 2

International Union of Revolutionary Writers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5,
6

International Workers Order 1

Internationale Jugend Bibliothek 1, 2

Internationale situationniste 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11,
12, 13;

see also Situationism, Situationists

internationalism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

intertextuality 1

intransitivity 1

Ionesco, Eugène 1

Istanbul Biennial 1, 2

Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia *see*
Venice School of architecture

Italian Communist Party *see* Communist Party (Italy)

Italian Workers' Club 1

Ivanov, Eugene 1

Jacobsen, Arne 1
Jacoby, Russell 1, 2
Jäger, Lorenz 1
James II, King of England 1, 2
James, C. L. R. 1, 2;
 Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways 1, 2
James, Selma 1
James, William 1, 2
Jameson, Fredric 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Jarves, James Jackson 1
Jasieński, Bruno 1
Jay, Martin 1
Jews, Jewishness 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
John Reed Clubs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Jopling, Jay 1
Jorn, Asger 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7;
 Ausverkauf einer Seele 1;
 Dead Drunk Danes 1, 2;
 Luck and Chance 1;
 Stalingrad, le non lieu ou le fou rire du courage 1, 2
Journal of Arts and Sciences 1
Jung, Carl 1

Kainen, Jacob 1, 2, 3
Kalatosov, Mikhail 1
Kampfbund für Deutsche Kultur 1
Kandinsky, Wassily 1
Kant, Immanuel 1, 2, 3
Kaprow, Allan 1
Kassler, Jamie C. 1
Kassymbekova, Botakoz 1
Kautsky, Karl 1, 2
Keeler, Christine 1, 2
Kelly, Grace 1
Kelly, Mary 1
Kemeny, Alfred 1
Kemp, Marianne 1
Kennett, White 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
 A Complete History of England 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Kensett, John F. 1, 2;
 Long Neck Point from Contentment Island, Darien, Connecticut 1, 2
Kent, Rockwell 1, 2;
 Moby Dick 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7;
 N by E 1
Kessler, Count Harry 1
Khodsaiev, Isai 1
Kierkegaard, Søren 1, 2
Kinsman, Robert D. 1, 2
Kirschner, Anja 1
Kisch, Egon Erwin 1, 2, 3
Kissinger, Henry 1
kitsch 1, 2, 3
Kittredge, William 1, 2
Kladderadatsch 1
Klee, Paul 1, 2, 3, 4
Klein, Isidore 1
Klein, Jerome 1, 2
Klingender, Francis 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Kolski, Gan 1
Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD) *see*
 Communist Party (Germany)

Kossuth, Lajos 1
Kozloff, Max 1
Kracauer, Siegfried 1, 2, 3, 4
Kraftwerk 1
Krauss, Rosalind 1
Kritische Berichte 1
Kruckman, Herb 1, 2;
‘After All, It is a Case of the Survival of the Fittest’ 1, 2
Kruger, Barbara 1, 2;
Untitled: ‘I Shop Therefore I Am’ 1, 2
Krutik, Mikhail 1
Kuhne, Frank 1
Kunitz, Joshua 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
Dawn Over Samarkand 1;
‘New Women in Old Asia’ 1, 2, 3;
‘Red Roads in Central Asia’ 1;
‘Soviet Asia Sings’ 1;
‘Soviet Tadjikistan’ 1, 2
Kunstgewerbebewegung see applied arts
Kunstlump controversy (Heartfield and Grosz) 1, 2
Kunstwollen 1
Kunzle, David 1, 2;
The History of the Comic Strip 1
Kwait, John (Meyer Schapiro) 1

labour 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40;
abstract labour 1, 2;
alienated labour 1;
artistic labour 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8;
autonomy of 1;
collective labour 1;
Hegel's theory of 1;
iconography of 1;
images of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7;
industrial labour 1, 2, 3;
intellectual labour 1, 2, 3;
labour of consciousness 1, 2, 3, 4;
labour politics 1, 2;
manual labour 1, 2, 3, 4;
Marx's theory of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
mechanized labour 1;
mental labour 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7;
productive labour 1, 2;
reproductive labour 1;
unproductive labour 1, 2, 3, 4;
wage labour 1, 2
Lacan, Jacques 1, 2
Lacanian psychoanalysis 1, 2
Ladies' Home Journal 1
Lakeside Press 1, 2
landscape art 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17
Lane, Fitz Henry 1, 2
language in art 1;
 see also textuality
La Révolution surréaliste 1
l'art pour l'art *see* art for art's sake
La Thangue, Henry Herbert 1
Laubier, Claire 1
Lavin, Irving 1
Lawrence, D. H. 1
League of American Writers 1

League of Nations 1
Le Clerc, Jean 1, 2
Le Corbusier 1, 2, 3
Lefebvre, Henri 1
Left Front of Art (LEF) 1, 2
leftism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16,
17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25;
leftist art 1, 2;
leftist art history 1, 2, 3;
leftist canon *see* counter-canon counter-canon, leftist
canon; leftist critics 1, 2, 3
Léger, Fernand 1
Lely, Sir Peter 1
Le Monde 1
Le Neve-Foster, Peter 1
Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Leninism 1, 2
Le Nouëne, Patrick 1
Les Jeunes Femmes 1
L'Esprit Nouveau 1, 2
Le Sueur, Meridel 1
Lettrist International 1
Levenson, Michael 1, 2
Levi, Carlo 1
L'Humanité 1
liberalism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13
Libération 1
Liberator 1, 2, 3, 4
Liebermann, Max 1
Lifshitz, Mikhail 1
Limbach, Russell 1
Lindell, Kata 1
Linkman, Audrey 1, 2
Literature of the World Revolution 1, 2, 3, 4
Liuhn, Otto 1
Liverpool Biennial 1
Locke, John 1, 2, 3;
 Treatises on Government 1
Longo, Robert 1
Los Angeles Black Panther Party 1

Losurdo, Dominic 1
Lowenthal, Leo 1
Löwy, Michael 1
Lozowick, Louis 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
 Airport, Tajikistan 1;
 American Geometry 1;
 ‘Art in the Service of the Proletariat’ 1;
 At the Gates of the Pamir 1;
 Border Guards 1, 2;
 Collective Farmer 1, 2;
 Decorations 1, 2;
 ‘Hazardous Sport in Tajikistan’ 1;
 ‘Machine Ornament’ 1;
 Pioneers on Way to School, Tajikistan 1;
 Red Tea House, Tajikistan 1, 2;
 Tanks #2 1;
 Voices of October 1;
 Woman in Veil, Tajikistan 1;
 Woman Unveiled, Tajikistan 1, 2

lubok 1

Lukács, Georg 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15;
 History and Class Consciousness 1, 2, 3;
 ‘In Search of Bourgeois Man’ 1;
 ‘Realism in the Balance’ 1;
 ‘Reification
 and the Consciousness of the Proletariat’ 1;
 ‘The Ideology of Modernism’ 1;
 ‘The Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg’ 1;
 The Theory of the Novel 1, 2, 3;
 ‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’ 1

Lukácsian theory, Lukácsian aesthetics 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Luminism 1, 2

Lunacharsky, Anatoly 1, 2

Luther, Martin 1, 2, 3

Luxemburg, Rosa 1, 2, 3

Mabb, David 1;
Liubov Popova Untitled Textile Design on William Morris Garden Tulip Wallpaper for Historical Materialism 1
Macdonald, Dwight 1
MacDonald, Wilson Pugsley 1
Macherey, Pierre 1
machine art, machine aesthetic 1, 2, 3
Magazine of Art 1
magic realism 1
Magil, A. B. 1
Magoon, Elias 1
Mahler, Gustav 1
Mail (Toronto) 1
Maksum, Fuzail 1, 2
Mandel, Ernest 1
Manet, Édouard 1, 2, 3;
Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe 1;
Olympia 1, 2
Mangravite, Peppino 1
Manilla, Manuel 1, 2, 3
Mannheim, Karl 1
Mann, Thomas 1, 2, 3
Mansell, Gregory J. 1
Marcks, Gerhard 1
Marcuse, Herbert 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
Eros and Civilization 1;
One Dimensional Man 1
Marcus, Greil 1
Marie Claire 1, 2, 3
Marine Workers' Committee (US) 1
market, the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10;
 see also commodity, the; consumer capitalism; art market; market economy
market economy 1
Markulanova, Khoziat 1
Marquand, Henry 1
Marquardt, Virginia Hagelstein 1
Marsh, Reginald 1, 2;

Pneumatic Drill 1

Marshall Plan 1

Märten, Lu 1, 2, 3;

Die wirtschaftliche Lage der Künstler 1;

*Historical Materialism with Regard to the Substance
and Transformation of the Arts* 1;

'Historical Materialism with Regard to the Substance
and Transformation of the Arts: A Pragmatic
Introduction' 1;

'History, Satire, Dada and other things' 1;

'Kunst, Klasse und Sozialismus' 1;

'Kunst und historischer Materialismus' 1;

'Kunst und Proletariat' 1;

'Maschine und Diktatur' 1;

'On the Necessity for a Proletarian Theatre and the
Proletarian Theatre' 1;

'The Revolutionary Press and the Feuilleton' 1;

*Wesen und Veränderung der Formen und Künste:
Resultate historisch-materialistischer
Untersuchungen* 1

Martin, J. V. 1, 2

Marx, Karl 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,
16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24;

A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy 1;
Capital 1;

concept of aesthetics 1, 2;

Critique of Political Economy 1, 2;

'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts' 1, 2, 3, 4;
Grundrisse 1;

'Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy' 1;

theory of alienation 1;

The Civil War in France 1;

The Class Struggles in France 1, 2;

The Communist Manifesto 1, 2, 3, 4;

*The Difference between the Democritean and
Epicurean Philosophy of Nature* 1;

The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte 1, 2, 3, 4,
5;

The German Ideology 1, 2;

theory of labour 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;

"Theses on Feuerbach" 1, 2, 3, 4
Marxism, Marxists 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28;
orthodox Marxism 1, 2;
see also anti-Marxism; neo-Marxism
Marxism and the Visual Arts Now (MAVAN) 1
Marxist aesthetics 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
Marxist art historians 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
Marxist art history 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11;
see also leftism: leftist art history; Marxist art historians; radical art history
Marxist politics 1, 2, 3, 4
Marxist Quarterly 1, 2
Marxistische-Arbeiter-Schule 1
mass culture 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
mass media 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Masses 1, 2, 3, 4;
see also New Masses
material relations 1
materialism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30
materialist aesthetics 1, 2
materialist realism 1
materiality (in art) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
materiality (of the world) 1, 2
Matulka, Jan 1, 2
Maudsley, Henry 1
May, Ernst 1, 2
May 1968, events of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
Mayhew, Henry 1
McCarthy, Joseph 1, 2
McCarthyism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
McLachlan, Alexander 1
means of production *see* production: means of production
medium-specificity 1, 2, 3
Mehring, Franz 1, 2, 3
Meidner, Ludwig 1
Melanchthon, Phillip 1, 2

Melot, Michel 1
Melville, Herman 1, 2;
 Moby Dick 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
Menorah Journal 1
Merewether, Charles 1
Meseck, Felix 1;
 Joseph and Potiphar's Wife 1, 2
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1, 2
Metz, Christian 1
Meunier, Karolin 1
Mexican muralism 1;
 see also Rivera, Diego
Mexican Revolution 1, 2
Meyer, Hannes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
Michelangelo 1
Michelson, Annette 1
middle class, the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
Miéville, China 1
Miller, Angela 1
Miller, J. Hillis 1
Miller Lane, Barbara 1, 2, 3, 4
Millet, François 1
Mills, C. Wright 1, 2
Mitchell, W. J. T. 1
Moby Dick *see* Kent, Rockwell; Melville, Herman
modern art 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15;
 see also modernism
modernism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,
 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29,
 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38,
 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49;
 see also 'epic modernism'; 'epic theatre'; modern
 art
modes of production *see* production: modes of production
Moholy, Lucia 1
Moholy-Nagy, László 1
Molesworth, Helen 1
Monet, Claude 1
Monroe, Marilyn 1, 2
Montagu, Anne 1

Moodie, Susanna 1
Moore, Harriet 1
Moore, Henry 1
Moran, Thomas 1, 2;
 Chasm of the Colorado 1;
 Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone 1, 2
Morandi, Giorgio 1
Morante, Else 1
Moravia, Alberto 1
Morgan, Benjamin 1
Morgan, William de 1
Morning Post 1
Morris, William 1, 2, 3, 4;
 African Marigold 1, 2;
 News from Nowhere 1, 2
Morris and Company 1, 2;
 African Marigold 1, 2
Moscow Trials (1936-7) 1
Mote, George William 1;
 An Adder 1
Motherwell, Robert 1
Mouvement Démocratique Féminin 1
Müller, Ulrike 1
Mumby, Arthur J. 1
Mumford, Lewis 1, 2, 3
Münzer, Thomas 1, 2, 3
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal 1
Museum of Modern Art, New York 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Museum of Natural History, New York 1
Mussolini, Benito 1

Namuth, Hans 1, 2
Nash, Jorgen 1, 2
National Academy of Design, New York 1, 2, 3, 4
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa 1, 2
National Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union 1
National Socialism *see* Nazi Party; Nazism
naturalism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,
16, 17
Naumann, Friedrich 1, 2
Nazi Party 1, 2, 3;
see also Nazism
Nazism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
see also Nazi Party
Nazi-Soviet Pact 1
negation of the negation 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Negri, Antonio 1, 2, 3, 4, 5;
Empire 1;
'Proletarians and the State' 1;
see also Hardt, Michael
Nele, Renee 1
neo-avant-garde, the 1, 2;
see also avant-garde, the; Bürger, Peter; vanguard,
vanguardism
neo-Brechtian modes 1, 2
neo-Kantianism 1, 2, 3
neoliberalism 1, 2, 3, 4
neo-Marxism 1
neo-realism 1, 2
Nerdinger, Winfried 1
Nesbit, Molly 1
Neue Sachlichkeit 1, 2
Neues Bauen architecture 1
Neue Zeit 1, 2, 3
Neue Zürcher Zeitung 1
New Art Association 1
new art history 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
New Deal 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
New Left, the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
New Literary History 1, 2

New Masses 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14
New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York 1
New School for Social Research, New York 1
New York Artists' Congress 1
New York Daily Tribune 1
New Yorker 1
New York Times 1, 2, 3
New York University 1
Newhall, Beaumont 1
Newman, Barnett 1, 2, 3;
 Onement I 1, 2
Nichol, John 1
Nierendorf, Karl 1, 2, 3, 4
Nietzsche, Friedrich 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7;
 ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’ 1;
 The Birth of Tragedy 1, 2;
 Thus Spake Zarathustra 1;
 Untimely Meditations 1
Nixon, Richard 1, 2, 3
Nochlin, Linda 1
non-figurative art 1, 2, 3;
 see also abstract painting; abstraction in art;
 geometric abstraction; painterly abstraction
North, Dudley (father) 1, 2
North, Dudley (son) 1, 2
North, Francis 1, 2
North, John 1
North, Montagu 1, 2, 3, 4
North, Roger 1, 2;
 Arguments & Materials 1, 2;
 Discourses on Trade 1, 2;
 Examen, or an Inquiry into the Credit and Veracity of a pretended Complete History 1, 2, 3;
 Gentleman's Accomptant 1, 2;
 Reflections upon some passages in Mr Le Clerc's Life of Mr John Locke 1;
 The Reflections on our Common Failings 1
Northern Echo 1
Northwestern University, Evanston 1
Novak, Barbara 1, 2

November Revolution (1918) [1](#)

Novotny, Fritz [1](#)

NSDAP *see* Nazi Party

Oates, Titus [1](#)
objectivity [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)
Observer [1](#)
October [1](#), [2](#)
Olcott, Martha B. [1](#)
Oldenburg, Claes [1](#)
Olyphant, Robert [1](#)
Ontario Society of Artists [1](#)
operaismo *see* Workerism, Italian
opticality [1](#)
ornament [1](#), [2](#), [3](#)
Orton, Fred [1](#), [2](#), [3](#)
Osgood, Samuel [1](#)
Osthoff, Hermann [1](#)
Other, the [1](#), [2](#), [3](#);
 see also alterity
Oxford Art Journal [1](#), [2](#)
Ozenfant, Amédée [1](#)

painterly abstraction 1, 2, 3, 4, 5;
 see also abstract painting; abstraction in art; Action Painting; *informel* painting; gestural painting

Palissy, Bernard 1, 2

Pannekoek, Anton 1

Panofsky, Erwin 1

Panos, David 1

Panzieri, Raniero 1

Paolozzi, Eduardo 1

Paris Commune 1, 2, 3

Paris-Presse 1

Partisan Review 1, 2, 3, 4

Pasolini, Pier Paolo 1

Pass, Morris 1

Pater, Walter 1, 2;
 ‘Diaphaneité’ 1, 2, 3;
 Imaginary Portraits 1;
 Marius the Epicurean 1, 2;
 Studies in the History of the Renaissance 1, 2, 3;
 ‘The Bacchanals of Euripides’ 1

patrician class, the 1;
 see also property-owning class, the; ruling class, the;
 upper classes

Pepper, Claude 1

performance art 1

permanent revolution, principle of 1;
 see also revolutionary action; revolutionary consciousness; revolutionary politics; revolutionary practice

phenomenology 1

Phillipps, Sir Thomas 1

Phillips, William 1

photo-document 1, 2, 3;
 see also documentary photography; photo-essay; photojournalism

photo-essay 1, 2, 3;
 see also documentary photography; photojournalism

Photographic News 1, 2

photography 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9;

language and 1
photojournalism 1
photomontage 1
photo-text 1
Picasso, Pablo 1, 2, 3
pictorialism 1, 2, 3
Pictorialism 1, 2, 3
Pierre Degeyter Club 1
Pinot-Gallizio, Giuseppe 1
Piscator, Erwin 1, 2, 3
Plato 1
Playboy 1
Plekhanov, Georgi 1, 2, 3
Pliny the Elder 1
Poetry: A Magazine of Verse 1, 2
political economy 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Pollock, Griselda 1, 2, 3;
 'Vision, Voice, and Power: Feminist Art History and
 Marxism' 1
Pollock, Jackson 1, 2, 3;
 see also Abstract Expressionism
Pop art 1, 2
Pope, Alexander 1;
 The Dunciad 1, 2
Popkov, Viktor E. 1
popular culture 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
Popular Front 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
pornography 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Posada, José Guadalupe 1, 2;
 Asombroso y funesto suceso ... Eleuterio Mirafuentes
 1, 2;
 Calavera chusca, dedicada à las placeras, tortilleras,
 verduleras y toda gente de lucha ... 1, 2;
 Calavera de Cupido 1;
 Calavera de las Artes 1;
 Calavera de los Patinadores 1;
 Calavera de Pascual Orozco 1;
 Calavera Oaxaqueña 1;
 Calavera Revuelta de Federales, Comerciantes y
 Artesanos 1;

Calaveras, saltad de la tierra 1;
Calaveras Zalameras de las Coquetas Meseras 1;
De Este Famosa Hipodroma en la Pista ... 1;
Gran Panteon Amoroso 1;
'horroroso asesinato! Acaecido en la ciudad de Tuxpan
el 10 del presente mes y año' 1, 2;
llorando el hueso 1, 2;
Rebumbio de calveras 1
post-Adornian theory 1, 2, 3, 4
post-Althusserian theory 1, 2
post-conceptual art 1
post-conceptual photography 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Post-Impressionism 1
post-relational art 1;
 see also relational art
postmodernism, postmodernist theory 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,
 9, 10, 11
poststructuralism, poststructuralist theory 1;
 see also structuralism, structuralist theory
Potamkin, Harry Alan 1
Potlatch 1
Potolsky, Matthew 1
Potts, Alex 1
Precisionism 1, 2, 3, 4
Prem, Heimrad 1
Pre-Raphaelites 1
Prince, Richard 1
Princeton University 1
print culture 1, 2, 3
production
 means of production 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
 modes of production 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8;
 relations of 1, 2;
 see also capitalist modes of production; industrial
 production, industrialization
productivism 1, 2
Profumo, John 1
Progress 1

proletarian, proletarianism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26;
 see also proletarianization; proletariat, the; worker, the; working class, the

proletarian art 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Proletarian Revolutionary Writers League 1, 2

proletarianization 1

proletariat, the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36;
 see also proletarian, proletarianism; proletarianization; worker, the; working class, the

Proletarisches Theater 1, 2

Proletkult 1, 2, 3, 4

propaganda 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19;
 see also agitprop; communist propaganda

property-owning class, the 1;
 see also patrician class, the

Protestantism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
 see also Calvinism

Proust, Marcel 1

psychoanalysis 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Putnam, George P. 1

Quarterly Review 1, 2

Radek, Karl 1
Radek Community 1, 2, 3;
 Manifestations 1
radical art history 1, 2, 3;
 see also leftism: leftist art history; Marxist art history
Radkau, Joachim 1
Radziwill, Franz 1
Raether, Johannes Paul 1
Rahv, Philip 1
Rancière, Jacques 1
Rand, Ayn 1
Raphael 1, 2
Raphael, Max 1, 2, 3;
 ‘The Marxist Theory of Art’ 1
Rauschenberg, Robert 1
Read, Herbert 1
Reade, R. C. 1
Reagan, Ronald 1, 2
realism, realists 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14,
 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28,
 29, 30, 31, 32, 33;
 see also critical realism; epic realism; magic realism;
 materialist realism; neo-realism; social realism;
 socialist realism; Socialist Realism (Soviet);
 Realism; realist painting
Realism 1, 2, 3;
 see also Courbet, Gustave
realist painting 1, 2, 3;
 see also realism, realists
Reard, Louis 1
Rector, Martin 1
Red Army, Soviet 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Redon, Odilon 1
Rees, A. L. 1
Reformation, the 1, 2, 3
Refregier, Anton 1
Reichswirtschaftsverband bildender Künstler 1
Reid, George Agnew 1, 2;
 Logging 1;

Staking a Pioneer Farm 1;
The Arrival of the Pioneers 1
reification 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15
Reisman, Philip 1
relational art 1;
 see also post-relational art
Rembrandt van Rijn 1, 2
Renaissance, the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Renoir, Auguste 1, 2
Renzio, Toni del 1
representation, critique of 1
representation, modes of 1, 2
representation, politics of 1, 2, 3
reproductive labour 1;
 see also labour
Resnais, Alain 1
Ressler, Oliver 1, 2
revolutionary action 1, 2, 3, 4
revolutionary art 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
revolutionary consciousness 1, 2, 3
revolutionary politics 1, 2, 3, 4
revolutionary practice 1, 2
Reynolds, Joshua 1
Richter, Hans 1
Riegl, Alois 1, 2
Riesel, René 1
Rifkin, Adrian 1, 2
Riis, Jacob 1
Ritschl, Albrecht 1
Rivera, Diego 1, 2, 3
Robbe-Grillet, Alain 1
Robbins, Daniel 1
Robert Henri School of Art, New York 1
Roberts, John 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Robeson, Paul 1
Robinson, Boardman 1
Robinson, H. P. 1
Rodchenko, Aleksandr 1
Roeck, Bernd 1, 2
Rohe, Mies van der 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

romantic anti-capitalism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
Romanticism 1, 2
Roosevelt, Franklin D. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
 see also New Deal
Rosenberg, Alfred 1, 2
Rosenberg, Arthur 1
Rosenberg, Harold 1, 2, 3;
 ‘Character Change and the Drama’ 1, 2, 3, 4;
 ‘Modern Art? Or an Art of the Modern?’ 1;
 ‘Myth and History’ 1;
 ‘Tenth Street: A Geography of Modern Art’ 1;
 ‘The American Action Painters’ 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
 ‘The Fall of Paris’ 1, 2, 3;
 ‘The Front’ 1, 2, 3;
 ‘The Men on the Wall’ 1;
 ‘The New Realism’ 1;
 ‘The Pathos of the Proletariat’ 1, 2, 3, 4;
 ‘The Resurrected Romans’ 1
Rosetti, Dante Gabriel 1
Rosler, Martha 1, 2, 3
Ross, Kristin 1
Rossiter, Thomas 1
ROSTA, Berlin 1
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 1
Rowlandson, Thomas 1
Royal Academy of Arts (Berlin) 1
ruling class, the 1, 2;
 see also patrician class, the; upper classes
Ruskin, John 1, 2, 3
Russell, Lord (William) 1
Russian art 1, 2, 3, 4;
 see also Russian avant-garde;
 Socialist Realism (Soviet);
 Soviet art, Soviet art theory
Russian Association of Revolutionary Writers (RAPP) 1
Russian avant-garde 1, 2;
 see also Soviet avant-garde
Russian Formalism 1, 2
Russian–French Non-Aggression Pact (1935) 1, 2
Russian–German Non-Aggression Pact (1939) 1

Russian Revolution [1](#), [2](#), [3](#)

Ryan, Joseph P. [1](#), [2](#)

Ryder, Albert Pinkham [1](#), [2](#), [3](#)

Sacchi, Andrea 1
Sacheverell, Henry 1
Saint-Gaudens, Augustus 1
Saint-Just, Louis Antoine de 1
Salcedo, Doris 1, 2;
 Abyss 1;
 Atrabiliarios 1, 2;
 La Casa Viuda 1, 2, 3;
 Neither 1, 2, 3, 4;
 Noviembre 1 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
 Noviembre 6 y 7 1, 2;
 Shibboleth 1, 2;
 Tenebrae, Noviembre 7, 1985 1, 2, 3, 4;
 Unland 1
Salle, David 1
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art 1
Sancroft, Archbishop William 1
Sander, Helke 1
São Paulo Biennial 1
Sartre, Jean-Paul 1, 2
Sassetti, Francesco 1, 2, 3
Saturday Evening Post 1
Sayre, Robert 1
Schapiro, Meyer 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10;
 ‘Courbet and Popular Imagery’ 1;
 ‘Nature of Abstract Art’ 1;
 ‘Public Use of Art’ 1, 2;
 ‘Rebellion in Art’ 1;
 ‘Social Realism and Revolutionary Art’ 1;
 ‘The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art’ 1;
 ‘The Nature of Abstract Art’ 1;
 ‘The Patrons of Revolutionary Art’ 1;
 ‘The Social Bases of Art’ 1
Scheel, Theodor 1, 2, 3;
 Camera Eye 1
Scheler, Max 1
Schiele, Egon 1
Schiller, Friedrich 1, 2
Schmidt, Hans 1

Schnabel, Julian 1
Schneider, Norbert 1
Schoell-Glass, Charlotte 1
Schoenberg, Arnold 1, 2, 3
School of Paris 1, 2, 3
Schultze-Naumburg, Paul 1
Schütz, Erhard H. 1
Scott, Sir Walter 1
Screen 1, 2
Scribner's Magazine 1
Scribner's Monthly 1
Searle, Adrian 1
Second Conference of Revolutionary and Proletarian
Writers 1, 2
Second International 1, 2, 3, 4
Second World War 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Sedlmayr, Hans 1
Sekula, Allan 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8;
 Black Tide 1, 2;
 Fish Story 1, 2, 3;
 Lottery of the Sea 1, 2;
 Shipwreck and Workers: Part of Titanic's Wake 1, 2;
 Volunteer Watching, Volunteer Smiling (Isla de Ons,
 12/19/02) 1;
 Waiting for Tear Gas [white globe to black] 1, 2
Seminar for Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture 1
semiology 1;
 see also semiotics
semiotics 1, 2, 3, 4;
 see also semiology
Semler, Christoph 1;
 Coelum stellatum in quo asterismi 1
Semper, Gottfried 1, 2
Senger, Alexander von 1
Serota, Sir Nicholas 1, 2
Seven Arts 1
Shadwell, Charles Lancelot 1
Shakespeare, William 1, 2, 3;
 Hamlet 1, 2
Shapin, Steven 1

Sheeler, Charles 1
Sherman, Cindy 1
Sholette, Greg 1
Sidney, Algernon 1
Siegel, William 1, 2
signs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Silvy, Camille 1
Simmel, Georg 1, 2;
 Der Konflikt der modernen Kultur 1;
 Philosophische Kultur 1;
 Philosophy of Money 1
Simons, Hugo 1, 2, 3
Simplicissimus 1, 2
simulation 1
Siporin, Mitchell 1, 2
Sirovich, William 1
SITE Santa Fe, New Mexico 1
Situationism, Situationists 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11;
 see also Debord, Guy; *dérives*; détournements;
 Internationale situationniste; Situationist
 International; spectacle, the
Situationist International 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
 see also Debord, Guy; *dérives*; détournements;
 Internationale situationniste; Situationism,
 Situationists; spectacle, the
Situationist Times 1
Smith, Adolphe 1, 2
Smithson, Alison 1
Smithson, Peter 1
social agency 1, 2;
 see also agency
Social Democratic Party (Germany) 1, 2
social history of art 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
social realism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14,
 15, 16, 17
socialism, socialists 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,
 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27;
 see also anti-socialism; Socialist Party (US)
Socialist German Student Union 1
Socialist Party (US) 1

socialist realism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Socialist Realism (Soviet) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
society of the spectacle, the 1, 2, 3;
 see also Debord, Guy; Situationism, Situationists;
 spectacle, the
Soglow, Otto 1, 2, 3
Solman, Joseph 1
Sombart, Werner 1, 2;
 Modern Capitalism 1, 2;
 The Bourgeois 1, 2, 3;
 The Jews and Economic Life 1
Soviet art, Soviet art theory 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
 see also Russian art
Soviet avant-garde 1, 2;
 see also Russian avant-garde
Soviet communism *see* communism, communists: in the
 Soviet Union
Soviet culture 1, 2
Soviet Union 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15
sovietization 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Soyer, Moses 1
Soyer, Raphael 1
Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) 1, 2, 3, 4
Spanish Civil War 1, 2
Sparks, Leonard 1
spectacle, the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10;
 see also Debord, Guy; society of the spectacle, the
Spectacular Times 1;
 see also Situationism, Situationists
Spectator 1
Speer, Albert 1
Spence, Jo 1
Spencer, Herbert 1
Spengler, Oswald 1, 2
Spinoza, Baruch 1
Spivak, Max 1
Stalin, Joseph 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
Stalinism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16,
 17
Stalinization 1, 2

State University of New York 1
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam 1
Stedman Jones, Gareth 1
Steinhardt, Jakob 1
Stendhal (Marie-Henri Beyle) 1, 2, 3
Sternberg, Harry 1;
Subway Construction 1, 2
Stevens, Wallace 1, 2, 3, 4;
“The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words” 1
Steyerl, Hito 1
Stieglitz, Alfred 1, 2
Stillman, William James 1
Straub, Jean-Marie 1
Strijbosch, Jan 1
structuralism, structuralist theory 1, 2, 3, 4;
 see also poststructuralism, poststructuralist theory
Sturges, Frederick 1
subalternity 1, 2
subjecthood, subjectivity 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11,
 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25,
 26, 27;
 see also aesthetic subjectivity
Suleiman, Susan Rubin 1
Sully, James 1
Sunday Worker 1
Suprematism 1
Surrealism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Suydam, James A. 1
Sweezy, Paul 1
Swift, Jonathan 1
Swinburne, A. C. 1
symbolic capital 1
symbolic form 1, 2
Symbolism 1
Symonds, J. A. 1
Symposium 1

Tafuri, Manfredo 1
Tagg, John 1, 2
Tajikistan 1, 2
Tamesis 1
Tate Gallery, London 1
Tate Modern, London 1, 2
Tatler 1
Tatlin, Vladimir 1, 2
Taussig, Michael 1, 2;
 The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America
 1
Taylor, John 1
Teige, Karl 1
Tel Quel 1
Teniers, David the Younger 1
Ternovetz, Boris 1
Teukolsky, Rachel 1
textuality 1, 2
Thatcher, Margaret 1
Theatre Arts Monthly 1
Third International 1, 2
Third Period 1, 2, 3
Thomas, Peter 1
Thompson, John 1, 2;
 Street Life in London 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Thoreau, Henry David 1
Tickner, Lisa 1
Tiller Girls 1
Times, The (London) 1, 2
Times Literary Supplement 1
Togliatti, Palmiro 1, 2
Tolstoy, Lev Nikolayevich 1, 2, 3, 4
Tönnies, Ferdinand 1
Toronto Star Weekly 1
totalitarianism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
totality, concept of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11;
 see also Lukács, Georg
trade unions *see* union movement
Trafton, Melissa 1

Traill, Catherine Parr 1
transitivity 1, 2, 3
Travel 1, 2
Troeltsch, Ernst 1, 2, 3;
Reason and Revelation in Johann Gerhard and Melanchthon 1;
The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches 1, 2, 3
Tronti, Mario 1, 2, 3
Trotsky, Leon 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8;
'Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art' 1
Trotskyism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
Turgenev, Ivan 1
Turin, Viktor 1
Turner, Frederick Jackson 1

Übergangszeit, the 1, 2
UCLA *see* University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
Ukeles, Mierle Laderman 1
Ulmer Verein für Kunst-und Kulturwissenschaften 1
Unemployed Artists Group 1
union movement 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7;
 see also unionism; unionization
Union des Femmes Françaises 1
Union Féminine Civique et Sociale 1
Union League Club 1
unionism 1, 2, 3, 4;
 see also union movement; unionization
unionization 1, 2;
 see also union movement; unionism
United American Artists 1
United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America
 1
United Front 1, 2, 3, 4
United Office and Professional Workers of America 1
University College London 1, 2
University of California, Berkeley 1, 2
University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5,
 6
University of California, San Diego 1, 2
University of Leeds 1, 2, 3
University of London 1
University of Munich 1
University of Toronto 1, 2
unproductive labour 1, 2, 3
upper classes 1;
 see also patrician class, the; ruling class, the
use-value 1, 2, 3, 4
utopianism 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,
 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21

Vadim, Roger [1](#)
Vaillant-Couturier, Paul [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#);
 Free Soviet Tadjikistan [1](#);
 Trains Rouges [1](#)
Vanegas Arroyo, Antonio [1](#)
Vaneigem, Raoul [1](#), [2](#)
Van Gelder, Hilde [1](#)
vanguard, vanguardism [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#), [9](#), [10](#), [11](#), [12](#);
 see also avant-garde, the;
 neo-avant-garde;
 Russian avant-garde;
 Soviet avant-garde
Vasari, Giorgio [1](#)
Vedova, Emilio [1](#), [2](#), [3](#)
Venice Biennale [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#)
Venice School of architecture [1](#), [2](#)
Verband Deutscher Kunsthistoriker [1](#)
Verelst, Simon (Pietersz) [1](#)
video art [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)
Vietnam War [1](#), [2](#), [3](#)
Vilensky, Dmitry [1](#)
Vinci, Leonardo da [1](#), [2](#);
 Mona Lisa [1](#), [2](#)
Vishnevsky, Vsevolod [1](#)
Völkischer Beobachter [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)
Vollard, Ambroise [1](#)
Voloshinov, Valentin [1](#)
Voltaire [1](#)

Wages for Housework 1
Wainwright, Philip 1
Walden, Herwarth 1
Wall, Jeff 1, 2, 3;
The Storyteller 1, 2
Wallach, Alan 1
Wallerstein, Immanuel 1
Warburg, Aby 1, 2, 3;
'Francesco Sassetti's Last Will and Testament' 1;
'Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Image at the
Time of Luther' 1, 2, 3
Warburg, Felix 1
Warburg, Fritz 1
Warburg, Max 1
Warburg, Paul 1
Warhol, Andy 1, 2, 3
Warnke, Martin 1, 2
'Waterfront Art Show' 1, 2
Watson, Homer Ransford 1, 2;
A Coming Storm in the Adirondacks 1;
'A Landscape Painter's Day' 1;
Log-Cutting in the Woods 1;
The Pioneer Mill 1, 2, 3, 4, 5;
'The Village' 1
Weber, Max 1, 2, 3, 4, 5;
'Science as a Vocation' 1, 2;
The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism 1, 2,
3
Weber, Nicholas Fox 1
Week 1
Weill, Kurt 1
Weimar Academy of Art 1
Weimar Republic 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Weininger, Otto 1
Weinstein, Joan 1, 2
Werckmeister, Otto Karl 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11;
'Marx on Ideology and Art' 1
Werkbund 1
Westminster Review 1

White, Ian 1
White Cube, London 1, 2
Whiteread, Rachel 1
Whitman, Walt 1
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 1
Wilcox and Barlow 1
Wilde, Oscar 1, 2, 3, 4;
 ‘The Soul of Man Under Socialism’ 1
Wilkin, Karen 1
Williams, Raymond 1, 2, 3
Williams, William Carlos 1
Willis, Nathaniel Parker 1
Wilmerding, John 1
Winckelmann, Johann Joachim 1, 2
Wittfogel, Karl August 1, 2, 3;
 ‘On the Question of a Marxist Aesthetic’ 1, 2
Wolfe, Bertram 1
Wölfflin, Heinrich 1, 2, 3, 4;
 Classic Art 1
Wollheim, Richard 1
Wolman, Gil 1
woman-as-sign 1
women’s movement, the 1, 2;
 see also feminism, feminists
Woodward, John Douglas 1
Wordsworth, William 1
worker, the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,
 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29,
 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36
workers’ movement, the 1
Workers Music League 1
Workers Party (US) 1
Workerism, Italian 1, 2, 3
working class 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14,
 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25;
 see also proletarian, proletarianism; proletariat, the
Works Progress Administration (WPA) 1, 2
Wouters, Rik 1
Wright, Frank Lloyd 1
Writers Brigade 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Year-book of the Photographic News 1
Young, Art 1, 2

Zabel, Barbara [1](#)

Zeitshrift für Sozialforschung [1](#)

Zenshin [1](#)

Zetkin, Clara [1](#)

Zhdanovism, Zhdanovist Socialist Realism *see* Socialist
Realism (Soviet)

Zigrosser, Carl [1](#), [2](#)

Zorilla, José [1](#)

Zutringer, Pauline [1](#)

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