



Gimme Shelter

Global Discourses in Aesthetics

edited by **Jos de Mul** and **Renée van de Vall**

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR AESTHETICS
ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE D'ESTHÉTIQUE

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International Yearbook of Aesthetics

Volume 15 | 2011

Edited by

Jos de Mul and Renée van de Vall

International Association of Aesthetics
Association Internationale d'Esthétique

Cover illustration: Mural on Navvab Highway, Tehran. Photograph by Susan Habib

Cover design: Jos Hendrix, Groningen

Layout: TrendsCo, Goes

ISBN	978 90 8964 598 2
e-ISBN	978 90 4852 217 0 (pdf)
e-ISBN	978 90 4852 218 7 (e-Pub)
NUR	651

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Acknowledgments

This 2011 Yearbook of the International Association of Aesthetics originated in the 2009 conference *Gimme shelter – Global Discourses in Aesthetics*, organised by the Dutch Aesthetics Federation, the Dutch Association for Aesthetics (NGE) and the University of Amsterdam. We would like to thank in particular Joseph Früchtel, Cornée Jacobs and Sybrand van Keulen as co-authors of the call for papers, which served as a basis for the introduction of this Yearbook. Joseph Früchtel also was the author of the title of the conference, which we gratefully continued for this volume. The Yearbook's publication has been made possible by the support of the IAA, the Vereniging Trustfonds Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam and Maastricht University. Kitija Vasiljeva has assisted with the preparation of the texts, and Julien Kloeg with the correction of the proofs.

Introduction

Jos de Mul and Renée van de Vall

*Oh, a storm is threat'ning
My very life today
If I don't get some shelter
Oh yeah, I'm gonna fade away
Mick Jagger & Keith Richards*

Intercultural dissemination

Although most frequently used to indicate the current worldwide circulation of capital, information and commodities, globalization is far more than an economic process, as it affects the social and cultural dimensions of life as well. Not only money and goods, but also people wander around and so do images, sounds and texts. Of course globalization – the intercultural dissemination of people, ideas, languages, cultural habits and artefacts – is not an altogether new phenomenon. When we take a look at world (pre)history we see that these processes of dissemination characterize human history from the very beginning. From the very moment hominids appeared on the stage, some five to seven million years ago in East-Africa, they spread all over the earth in a relatively short time. Well-known later examples are the trade links that existed between Sumer and Indus Valley civilization in the third millennium BC and the Silk Road that started to connect the economies and cultures of the Roman Empire, the Parthian Empire, and the Han Dynasty some millennia later.

When we study history, we soon realize that cultures never have been homogeneous, self-contained and unchanging wholes. All cultural traditions are artificial in the sense that they are never have 'a pure origin' but have always been derived from other cultural contexts. This basic factum of human culture is linked to human finitude, not only the finitude of individuals but also the finitude of cultures. That this derivation from other cultures often is forgotten is linked to our finitude too. For example, when the tulip is presented as a traditional Dutch flower, it is often 'actively forgotten' that this icon of The Netherlands came – via Turkey and Persia – from Afghanistan and other Central Asian regions to the Western world. And when pasta is regarded worldwide as typical Italian food, we should remember that several centuries ago it was brought from China to Italy by Marco Polo. When elements are transferred from one culture to another, these elements are grafted into a new cultural context and acquire new meaning. For those who quote the

inherently citable elements of other cultures, these foreign elements soon become their own. Italians certainly regard pasta as part of their cultural identity, but we have to keep in mind that pasta thanks its Italianness to the very differences that exist between the place it occupies in the Chinese and the Italian cuisine and culture respectively.

Putting this in general terms, one could say that every culture is intercultural in a fundamental way. The 'origin' of our culture always lies elsewhere. The play of identity and difference is not possible without the dimension of the in-between. In this sense the world has always been entangled in a process of globalization.

Globalization 2.0

However, although intercultural dissemination is as old as human culture, its scope and pace have not always been the same in the course of human history. In the twentieth century we have witnessed a constant expansion and acceleration of the process of globalization, which increasingly has become intertwined with the rapid development of new forms of transport (trains, cars and airplanes) and communication (telegraph, telephone, mass media and, especially in the last decades, the Internet). As a result of the rapid growth of these new means of transport and telecommunication, globalization has become a decisive phenomenon in the life of almost every world citizen.

The history of the International Association of Aesthetics (IAA) forms an eloquent example of the rapid process of globalization. Until the end of the last century, the IAA (and its forerunner, the Comité International d'Esthétique) was mainly a European affair. Starting with the Berlin conference in 1913, all IAA congresses in the twentieth century were held in Europe. Increasing encounters between cultures, also in the domain of arts and aesthetics, and a greater concern for international communication and association, led the IAA to enlarge the geographical scope of the congresses. This resulted in conferences in Tokyo (2001), Rio de Janeiro (2004), Ankara (2007), and Beijing (2010).

Globalization processes seem to undermine the very notion of 'national culture'. In the past, the slow pace of change often made us forget the intercultural exchanges (as the example of the tulip illustrates). However, through contemporary media, the geographical boundaries between cultures and cultural identities seem to dissolve rapidly in favour of other, less clear-cut ones defined by religious, political or life-style preferences. Internet, in particular, has enabled dissemination of professional and amateur cultural production and consumption on an unprecedented scale, providing new venues of cultural exchange but also fostering new types of cultural conflict. Local cultures are increasingly being affected by global processes, but the global might acquire different meanings in different localities.

Gimme Shelter

The title of this conference offers an apt illustration of this development. Many readers, coming from different regions from the world, will have recognized “Gimme Shelter” as the name of a song by the world-famous rock’n roll group The Rolling Stones. It first appeared as the opening track on the band’s 1969 album *Let It Bleed*. Moreover, *Gimme Shelter* is also the name of the 1970 documentary film directed by Albert and David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin, chronicling The Rolling Stones’ 1969 US tour. Although The Rolling Stones are an English pop group, the rock’n’roll music they play originated in the US, but has its deeper roots in the traditions of jazz and blues, black music that, brought to America together with the slaves, has its roots in Africa. The dissemination of rock’n’roll was not restricted to the Western world, however, but was a world phenomenon, that, for example, also deeply affected the music and youth culture in Japan and other Asian countries. It goes without saying that these phenomena are closely connected with the aforementioned development of new forms of transport, that enabled rock’n’roll bands such as The Stones to tour around the world, but also with mass media such as the gramophones, radio and television, CD’s, DVD’s and music and film distribution via the Internet.

And of course, the Stones are just one example. If we look at popular music alone, the world has become a database of styles and genres: people from all over the world listen to the reggae music of Bob Marley and the songs from the popular Bollywood movies from India or dance on the Cuban salsa or the songs of the Senegalese griots. We enjoy the cuisines all over the world – from Italian pizza’s to Chinese food and from Thai cuisine to Argentinean steaks – and we combine, recombine and decombine them in ever new ways.

Without doubt intercultural dissemination is often enjoyable and advantageous for cultures. It can be compared with the introduction of fresh genes into the gene pool of an organism. Often it enhances the creativity and adaptability of cultures and helps them to keep developing themselves. However, we should not idealize intercultural dissemination as such. The fact that the Stones songs have part of their roots in human slavery already shows one of the darker sides of intercultural dissemination.

Moreover, when we look at the text of the song, we discover another layer of impact of the mass media on popular art and youth culture. The song text evidently is about the Vietnam War. In the words of Mick Jagger, in a 1995 interview with *Rolling Stone*: “Well, it’s a very rough, very violent era. The Vietnam War. Violence on the screens, pillage and burning. And Vietnam was not war as we knew it in the conventional sense ...”. On the song itself, he concluded, “That’s a kind of end-of-the-world song, really. It’s apocalypse; the whole record’s like that”. The song *Gimme Shelter* makes us realize that colonialism, cultural imperialism and destructive wars are manifestations of intercultural encounters and intercultural dissemination too! The violence was not only in Vietnam, however, as the *Gimme Shelter* documentary shows, but is part of everyday intercultural dissemination. The documentary culminates in the disastrous Altamont Free Concert, where a

member of the audience was killed by a Hell's Angel who was part of the security guards and several others died in the panic that resulted.

Perhaps December 6, 1969 was not the day that music died, as it has been claimed, but certainly it marked the definitive end of the Summer of Love. On multiple levels *Gimme Shelter* shows that when differences between cultures are substantial, intercultural dissemination easily leads to a clash of cultures instead of a melting pot or a peaceful coexistence. Moreover, even when intentional violence is absent, we should also realize that the benefits and costs of intercultural exchange are often far from being in balance.

In need of a cultural shelter

However, apart from the literal references to violence the apocalyptic text of the song *Gimme Shelter* can also be interpreted in a more abstract way, as a critical reflection on the violence of globalization and cultural dissemination as such and the longing for the shelter of a local culture.

It is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance of cultural traditions. It is almost impossible to conceive of human life without the cultural heritage, customs, practices and habits passed on orally or by other means from person to person and from generation to generation. Especially in a rapidly changing world, local traditions may help us orient ourselves when we are confronted with the processes of globalization; they give direction to our thoughts and to our actions. The inevitability of traditions is linked to the radical finitude of our existence. Our lifetime is too short for us to acquire all the guidance necessary to live our lives. Therefore we are always more our traditions than our choices. Cultural traditions are necessary compensations for our finitude. Although traditions are contingent and finite too, we cannot do without them.

Perhaps the only way to deal with globalization is to open ourselves to the cultures of others without giving up our cultural roots, but to use them as means of interpreting the rapid changes that our world and lives undergo. These finite roots and traditions offer a shelter from the storm of globalization that sweeps across our planet. But not in the sense that they should cut us off of the process of globalization ("Get out of my shelter"), but rather they offer us an entrance to the multiverse and polylogue of cultures. In such a multiverse the only real universal and unifying given is human fragility. Art at its best is able to express this experience of fragility and to transfer it from one shelter to the other. And global discourses in aesthetics should aim at helping us to understand that only in this experience of fragility, love indeed is "just a kiss away".

Global Discourses in Aesthetics

From 8-10 October 2009, about 80 aestheticians from all over the world gathered together in Amsterdam at the conference *Gimme Shelter. Global Discourses in Aes-*

thetics, in order to exchange views about the impact of globalization on the arts and the aesthetic reflection on the arts. They discussed a variety of aesthetic questions brought forth by the aforementioned process of globalization. How do artistic practices and aesthetic experiences change in response to these developments? How should these changes be articulated on the theoretical level? When reflections on the significance of art and aesthetic experiences can no longer pretend to be universal, is it still possible to lay claim to a wider validity than merely that of one's own particular culture? What type of vocabulary allows for mutual – dialogical or even polylogical – exchanges and understandings when different traditions meet, without obliterating local differences? Is there a possibility for a creative re-description of globalization? And is there a meaning of 'the global' that cannot be reduced to universalism and unification? Can we seek shelter in a legitimate way?

The following collection of chapters certainly does not offer final answers to these questions. However, we hope that they enable the reader to find shelter in the lively polylogue of cultures that constitutes the fabric of which our present world is built. The first part of the volume focuses on the universality versus the particularity of aesthetic judgment and the possibility of an intercultural understanding of art. This part opens with *Stefan Deines'* reflection on the cultural limits to the understanding, experience and evaluation of works of art from cultures other than one's own. Starting from the contextualist approach within the analytical tradition in aesthetics, and in contrast to empiricist, formalist and naturalistic theories, Deines argues that appropriate interpretation and evaluation of art requires a pertinent knowledge of its historic and cultural context. Moreover, a particular 'knowing how' is required for being able to register, discriminate and appropriately react to the determining aesthetic and artistic properties of the work in question. Whereas the first cultural limit can be overcome relatively easily, because knowledge about a specific culture can be acquired through scholarly publications or the explanations of a museum guide, the second limit is more difficult to counter, because the required knowing how can only be learned by training and familiarization with a specific practice of art reception from within the culture that generated the work. We do not need to revert to a strong cultural relativism, according to Deines, yet even in contemporary examples of culturally eclectic works like those of Takeshi Murakami, understanding of their various cultural references remains asked for.

Focusing on scenic beauty rather than art, *Arnold Berleant* raises the question whether we actually need universality in aesthetic judgment. Universality is neither necessary nor desirable, he claims, and the requirement of universality unduly constrains the value and usefulness of aesthetic judgment. Basic to this norm of universality are the assumptions that the object of judgment is both stable and independent from the position or dispositions of the equally stable judging subject; neither is true. Rather than centering aesthetic events around subjective feelings on the one hand or on properties of works of art or other objects on the other, Berleant proposes to consider both sides as mutually interacting constituents in

a complex situational, aesthetic field. Aesthetic judgments like those on beauty or the sublime then become positive designations of a specific aesthetic field – and as each individual perceptual situation is different, aesthetic judgments will be highly variable. Rather than considering this as a weakness, Berleant proposes to take this variability as a starting point to rethink the task of philosophical criticism and investigate the endlessly varied and complex domains of human experience through the comparative analysis of diverse cultural, Western and non-Western traditions.

Lilaina Coutinho, however, still sees a valuable mission for the notion of the universality of the judgment of taste. In the present context of globalization, the concept of the universal as it is used by Kant, in an ‘as if’ construction underlying the judgment of taste, can be a useful tool. Because of its autonomy from the determinacy and interest present in classical logic, the judgment of taste is valuable in the political domain of action and in the consideration of different points of view, so necessary to intercultural exchange. In a discussion of the work of Hannah Arendt and François Jullien, Coutinho proposes to consider the universal as a fictional image, a scenario guiding the action of abstracting ourselves from our subjective experience. The picture of someone who climbs a cliff in order to have an overview of the sea below – the global – is one such image; the walker who aims for the ever-reclining horizon another.

Annelies Monseré examines in detail how Arthur Danto and Jerrold Levinson account for the relevance of art-historical context in their philosophical definitions of art and what this means for the categorization of non-Western art. Both developed theories of art which try to identify and understand art within its historical context without denying the possibility of a transhistorical and transcultural concept of art. Against Levinson Monseré argues that his historical definition of art excludes non-Western art, as it cannot account for artifacts that seem to be a candidate for arthood, but that do not consciously refer to a collection of preceding uncontested artworks as Western post-Renaissance artworks do. Arthur Danto, who defined art not in terms of its reference to a history of art but in terms of its specific way of embodying meaning, does not fall into this trap, but his theory is nevertheless problematic, according to Monseré. As he maintains that the transhistorical essence of art only discloses itself through history, fulfilling its historical mission of answering the question what art is, only those artworks that fall within this correct line of historical development are deemed to be historically significant. In spite of the fact that he ascribes non-Western artworks the full status of being art, he still denies them historical significance.

In her contribution, *Krystina Wilkozevska* continues the discussion about the encounter between Western and non-Western arts and aesthetics. She argues that the birth of the discipline of aesthetics in eighteenth century Europe reflects the autonomization and aesthetization of the arts that starts in the same period. As a consequence Western aesthetics is strongly associated with a limited idea of fine arts and (a Kantian) concept of disinterestness of aesthetic experience. The consequence of these developments not only was a separation of works of fine arts from

ordinary life (by putting them in museums), but also depreciation of what now becomes known as ‘applied arts’, which were considered to serve the non-aesthetic purpose of utility. Wilkożewska explores the possibilities of an alternative approach of non-Western art in the ongoing process of globalization. She distinguishes three stages in this encounter. Whereas non-European art works were at first considered from a cultural-anthropological perspective as mere cultural artefacts, from the beginning of the twentieth century on they attracted attention of European artists and aestheticians. However, in this second stage non-Western art was conceptually colonized by the idea of ‘pure art’ and put in museums. Only in the third, post-colonial stage, in which we are now, a more open attitude towards non-Western art has become possible. According to Wilkożewska, this is the task of transcultural aesthetics. Connecting to the work of Wolfgang Iser and postmodern French thinkers, she sharply demarcates the transcultural approach, which emphasizes relational networks rather than binary oppositions, from multicultural and intercultural¹ forms of aesthetics, which in her view still are based on a modern conception of culture as a whole. In the last part of her essay she discusses some of the difficulties and obstacles that haunts transcultural aesthetics.

In his attempt to conceptualize the encounter between different artistic traditions in our globalizing world, *Kees Vuyk* returns to Heidegger, one of the fathers of postmodern philosophy and aesthetics. He takes the distinction Heidegger makes between ‘world’ and ‘earth’ as his starting point. Whereas ‘world’ refers to the closely connected network of significance where man can live and work, earth is defined by Heidegger as “native ground”, which “occurs essentially as the sheltering agent”. According to Vuyk these concepts constitute a fruitful starting point for thinking about the role art plays in the globalizing world. However, Vuyk argues that Heidegger in bringing earth into play, goes one step too far. According to Heidegger every genuine work of art “opens up a world”. Especially in a globalizing world such an artistic recognition of, and introduction to, a plurality of worlds is valuable. However, Heidegger is of the opinion that a work of art also “sets this world back again on earth”. In the secondary literature on Heidegger, ‘earth’ is often understood as a condition of possibility of the work of art, as a permanent ontological reserve of meanings, which makes so that the work of art cannot be exhausted by interpretation. Against this interpretation, referring to a similar movement in *Sein und Zeit*, Vuyk demonstrates that ‘earth’ does not function so much as a transcendental condition, but rather as a particular historical condition. For the early Heidegger, the ‘earthly dimension’ of the work of art invites us to take up our historical heritage and destiny. Following a suggestion of Gianni Vattimo and Slavoj Žižek, Vuyk argues that the later Heidegger tried to get rid of this last step. ‘Earth’ should no longer be understood as a condition of possibility, but rather as a “condition of im-

1 Wilkożewska uses the word ‘intercultural’ in a different way than we did earlier in this Introduction, when we, just like Wilkożewska, argued that cultures are “no homogeneous, self-contained and unchanging wholes”. In fact our concept of the intercultural, which is also used in this volume by Kimmerle, is close to Wilkożewska’s concept ‘transcultural’.

possibility”, a moment of “unfounding”. In the context of globalization this means that works of art that open alternative worlds have the effect that our own ordinary world loses its obviousness and no longer appears as an unquestioned native ground. At the same time the work may show us that the earth offers many other places that can offer shelter.

Erik Vogt continues the discussion of Heidegger from a somewhat different angle. The author aims at a deepening of sociological and political-economic accounts of globalization by interpreting the latter from the perspective of Heidegger’s analysis of the transformation of (the meaning of) Being. In Heidegger’s account, the modern era appears as a *Ge-stell*, in which all beings are reduced to the raw material of a standing-reserve for technological control and manipulation. Whereas for Heidegger, a different disclosure of Being can only be found outside technology, in a fundamentally different realm such as art, Vogt follows Gianni Vattimo in arguing that this saving power might be located in the *Ge-stell* itself. In the postmodern age, in which information and communication technologies globally distribute a multiplicity of images, interpretations and reconstructions, reality increasingly becomes softer and more fluid. Under these postmodern technological conditions, aesthetic experience pluralizes too, both in intra- and inter-cultural terms, leading to the acknowledgment of the historicity, contingency and finiteness of the plural voices that weaving the web of the global world. Such art no longer is authentic (Heidegger) or auratic (Benjamin), but rather decorative. Such a weak, unfounding art is accompanied by an equally weak, post-tourist subjectivity, which is characterized by “the technologically generated aesthetic experience of mobile dwelling”.

The second part of this volume presents an East-West tour through the immense database of global arts and aesthetics. *Peng Feng* takes the first steps with a discussion of the work of the Chinese contemporary artist Xu Bing. The three works described in the chapter exemplify the transition of Chinese art from a focus on Chinese identity to a crossing of cultural borders, which took place in the period between the later 1990s and the first decade of the third millennium. Whereas *Book from the Sky* shows pseudo Chinese characters which cannot be read by anybody, *New English Calligraphy* is a fusion of written English and written Chinese, requiring some familiarity with both languages to be understood. *Book from the Ground*, a work containing a computer program that can translate Chinese and English into a language of visual icons, can be read by everyone, regardless of their cultural or educational backgrounds. This work is an example of what Peng Feng identifies as a ‘New International Style’, a truly international perspective that does not recognize any cultural or social divides.

Curtis Carter explores the historical roots of Chinese avant-garde art. He questions the assumption that only Western Modernism would have produced an artistic avant-garde. Not only has twentieth century Chinese avant-garde art become the focus of several important books by Chinese scholars during the past ten years; moreover, indications of artistic avant-gardism can be found throughout the history of Chinese art. The core of avant-gardism, Carter argues, is improvisation, an

openness to new forms and ideas, which challenges and seeks to replace existing hierarchal systems of artistic creation. Defined as such, avant-gardism embraces both the aesthetics of innovation and experimentation, and the role as an agent of radical social change which are usually associated with the Western Modernist avant-garde, but does not limit itself to a specific historical period or geographical location. It can also be discerned, for instance, in the Individualist art of seventeenth century China.

The next two chapters, heading westwards in the global database, discuss two examples of recent Indian arts. In her contribution, *Parul Dave Mukherji* interviews Raqs Media Collective, a Delhi based group of three documentary makers, curators and media artists that has been active in the international art scene since the 2002 Documenta. Although RMC is addressing actual political and social issues, their activism does not pretend to be able to change the world; what art can do, however, is “to deepen and sharpen our intellectual and emotional responses to our time, our lives and our world”. Rather than speaking out for others, the members of RMC cherish silence; they define themselves as ‘activist listeners’ rather than speakers. The global scale of capitalism has been a theme in their work from early on. An example is their video *Capital of Accumulation*, which connects the histories of cities as diverse as Berlin, Mumbai and Warsaw. However, although they consider nationalism or national identity to be a ‘ruin’, they neither try to restore nor pass by this ruin, but look for “the life forms that are generated by the very abandonment of the ruin”, as signposts to the future. They see being based in a specific place, such as Delhi, not as opposed to being global; rather, their participation in a global discourse is enabled by the “intense conversation with the city where we happen to live”.

Listening to silence – the silence of nature in particular – may describe the work of Indian artist Nasreen Mohamedi (1937-90). Nasreen actively engaged with various artistic styles, from modern Western painting to Japanese calligraphy. *Renée van de Vall* tries to unravel the subtle ways in which her drawings stage the gaze of the spectator, and doing so produce specific spatio-temporal experiences that have their roots in Indian as well as other pictorial traditions. Drawing on the aesthetics of Alexander Nehamas, Van de Vall proposes to turn around the logic of inter- or transcultural understanding and judgment of art. Rather than searching for the proper conditions for an a-temporal aesthetic judgment, regardless of whether these are supposed to be universal or particular, we might choose for an open-ended dynamics of engagement, triggered and sustained by mutual fascination and curiosity. A dialogical and performative approach to aesthetics opens the theoretical possibility that participants of one culture learn about modes of experience cultivated in another culture through a sustained engagement with its art.

The next two contributions bring us more westwards to Turkey and Iran. With Istanbul as her primary example, *Jale Erzen* addresses one of the main symptoms of capitalist globalization processes, the rapid growth of urban areas and the destruction of old peripheral settlements with their social relations and shared memories

that gave their inhabitants a sense of belonging and autonomy. As the new housing projects that replace the old settlements do not provide a substitute for the sociality and cultural identity embodied in the architecture of the latter, present day cities become the site of a global and placeless culture of penury. In a discussion of various philosophical approaches that relate the human body and its memory to the urban environment and vice versa, Erzen criticizes the massive erasure of urban memory that takes place on a global scale and pleads for an urban aesthetics that restores a bodily and emotional relationship to the built environment.

Although the urban environment of Tehran might not have been as directly affected by the forces of capitalist economic globalization as Istanbul, *Susan Habib* argues that its cultural development is certainly 'global' in a wider sense – in terms of the perception and comprehension of the global heritage and the acceptance and absorption of other cultures. Iranian painting has always been very dynamic and open to influences from both Eastern and Western art as early as the sixteenth century, converting those influences into a distinctive Iranian style. Since the revolution of 1979 Tehran has grown into the largest city in the Middle East. Habib sketches three successive stages in Tehran mural painting since the Islamic revolution, and relates them to the history of Iranian art. The first group, appearing directly after the revolution, carried political messages from the religious leaders to the public. The second group, mostly painted in the 1990s, consists of abstract, two-dimensional, and mostly decorative paintings with or without political and religious messages. The most recent group of paintings is three-dimensional and relates closely to the built environment, adding playful elements and trompe-l'oeuil vistas to the urban scenery. Although they provide points of relaxation for urban life in an over-crowded capital, at the same time they remind of the absence of other forms of public arts and user-friendly urban spaces.

The last chapter of this volume brings us southwards, as it focuses on African art. *Heinz Kimmerle* traces how since the late nineteenth century Eurocentric conceptions of art, most clearly exemplified by Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, have changed towards an intercultural aesthetics. Hegel famously held that art came to its full potential in the classical arts of ancient Greece, in particular its sculpture, in which the absolute spirit would have found its adequate outward appearance. All other artistic epochs and regions fell short of this ideal. The Eurocentric attitude started to change gradually from the last decade of the nineteenth century onwards. Since the 1990s there are more and more examples of equal cooperation between European and non-European artists. Kimmerle describes a series of exhibitions featuring African artists and collaborations between Western and African artists in order to demonstrate that although profound differences continue to exist, an intercultural aesthetics that concentrates on the dialogues between the art of different cultures can make these differences a source of mutual inspiration and enrichment. Concluding our journey from East to West, we hope that this volume has contributed to this aim, enabling the reader to travel from shelter to shelter and finding hospitality along the way.

PART 1

On the universality/particularity of
aesthetic judgment and the intercultural
understanding of art

1 Art in context

On cultural limits to the understanding, experience and evaluation of works of art¹

Stefan Deines

Today, cultures are coming more and more together. Due to the processes of globalization, to worldwide trade relations, modern communications media and cheaper air fares, intercontinental mobility, whether of people, commodities or ideas, has increased rapidly. This is also true for works of art. For several years now German cinemagoers, for example, have been flocking not only to traditional European or American movies but also to the products of Bollywood and horror films from Japan and Korea. Ever since the world-music wave of the 1980s people have been listening not only to Jamaican Reggae but also to traditional African and Asian folk-music. And in high as well as pop-art intercultural exchange has been intensifying: a pertinent example is the exhibition on *Primitivism in twentieth Century Art* hosted by the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1984, which brought together traditional African works and pieces by Picasso and Gauguin.² The last two Documenta exhibitions presented an increasing number of artists from Africa and Asia; and China, India, Korea and the Arab World have counted among the special focuses of recent Frankfurt Book Fairs. This intensified international and intercultural orientation has resulted among other things from the impact of poststructuralist and postmodern theory reflecting on the hegemonic and ethnocentric structures of Western art canons, and from the underlying understanding of what qualifies as art. It can be stated that in recent years the Western world has broadened its perspective on art and culture and become more open-minded and curious.

With this development, one limit of art reception has already been overcome: the basal limit of simple unawareness of the 'foreign'.³ In order to address and appreciate other cultural traditions, I have to know that they exist in the first place,

1 I want to thank Katharina Bahlmann, Sandra Heinen, Hans Maes and Martin Seel for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper and Joseph Swann for stylistic advice.

2 Cf. Arthur Danto's remarks on this exhibition in: Arthur C. Danto, "Art and Artifact in Africa," in *Beyond the Brillo Box* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 93f.

3 In this text I use 'foreign' in a very broad sense: it just refers to something unfamiliar coming from another cultural context than that of the recipient. In this sense the punk-rock song may be foreign music for the opera buff.

and I have to have the opportunity to see, hear, or read their products. The aim of the following considerations, however, is to show that this limit of unawareness is not the only relevant cultural limit to art reception. There are other parameters that affect the interpretation, experience and evaluation of works from distant cultural traditions. I will argue that these processes all depend on a number of culture-related factors, and that an appropriate reception has to take such factors into account.

These considerations continue the perspective of aesthetic (or art-philosophical) contextualism developed prominently by Kendall Walton, Arthur Danto and others.⁴ Thus the status of a work of art, as well as its theme, content, and aesthetic or artistic properties – its inherent identity as an artwork, so to speak – depends on its particular historic and cultural context.⁵ An appropriate interpretation of the work therefore demands some pertinent knowledge of this context.⁶ Furthermore, an adequate appreciation demands a particular *knowing how*, that can be learned by training and familiarization with a specific practice of art reception. This is often a prerequisite for being able to register, discriminate and appropriately react to the determining aesthetic and artistic properties of the work in question.

This approach stands in opposition to theories for which the cultural context does not play a role in the interpretation, experience and evaluation of art. For such theories the reception of works from foreign cultures is no more problematic than dealing with those from one's own culture. In so-called empiricist or formalistic theories of art we find the typical counter-position to contextualism. They claim that the aesthetically relevant properties of an object – like being shaped beautifully – are immediately manifest and unrelated to the cultural context; they are directly exhibited and can be registered with the senses at any time, anywhere, by any observer. More recently theories of this kind have been flanked by naturalistic aesthetic approaches which have tended to show that some aesthetic attributes (e.g.

4 Cf. for example Kendall Walton, "Categories of Art," *The Philosophical Review* 79 (1970): 334-367; and Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1981).

5 I think one cannot describe this position more briefly and precisely than Jerrold Levinson in his text "Aesthetic Contextualism," *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics* 4 (2007): "Contextualism is the thesis that a work of art is an artifact of a particular sort, an object or structure that is the product of human invention at a particular time and place, by a particular individual or individuals, and that that fact has consequences for how one properly experiences, understands, and evaluates works of art. For contextualism, artworks are essentially historically embedded objects, ones that have neither art status, nor determinate identity, nor clear aesthetic properties, nor definite aesthetic meanings, outside or apart from the generative contexts in which they arise and in which they are proffered."

6 This position of an aesthetic or art-philosophical contextualism exists not only in analytic or post-analytic philosophy. It is also found in the tradition of continental philosophy of art since Hegel. Adorno for example stresses the required knowledge when he states: "Not knowing what one sees or hears bestows no privileged direct relation to works but instead makes their perception impossible." Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Athlone, 1997), 338. An early proponent of a contextualist view, who claims that objects can only be fully understood with respect to the cultural context they originate from, and who pointed out the relevance of the limits between different cultures is Herder. Cf. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Another Philosophy of History for the Education of Mankind* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004).

symmetry) can be seen as universal, because they are appreciated cross-culturally. Proper perception and appreciation of these attributes, it is argued, requires no culture-specific training, because all humans are, due to their evolutionary history, equipped with the same disposition to respond to such aspects. In a brief critical discussion of these naturalistic approaches I will argue that they might be able to explain some of our basic natural reactions to objects, but they fail to provide a satisfactory explanation of our practices in approaching works of art.

Some empiricist, formalist and naturalistic theories hold that there are no relevant cultural limits to art reception, and that our processes of interpretation, experience and evaluation of works from other traditions are no different from those we apply to works from our own tradition. But this view disregards what art really is: its specific character and functions. When we seek to address works that are inherently foreign to us in a manner that does justice to their identity, their characteristic features and their functions – or, to put it another way, when we take them as seriously as we take the major works of our own culture – then we find ourselves confronted with specific cultural limits that make intercultural art reception more difficult than such universalist theories would care to admit.

Universalist theories of art reception

Universalist theories of art reception, for which the cultural context plays no crucial role, are based on the assumption that the practice of art consists in the production of objects with manifest properties that can be registered by human beings by virtue of their natural perceptual abilities, and enjoyed and appreciated by virtue of the innate human disposition to react to these properties in a certain manner.

Pan-cultural approaches of this sort have two premises. So far as the work of art is concerned, they accept the empiricist or formalist thesis that objects are appreciated for their physical properties as perceived by the senses. So far as the recipient is concerned, they take the universalist line that the natural equipment of human beings inclines them to react in a similar way to similar aesthetic properties, whatever their cultural background: people are regarded as beautiful or attractive because of their visual features and proportions, rotten food is perceived as repellent because of its looks and smell, and some formal properties – such as symmetry – are registered cross-culturally with pleasure.

Some naturalistic aesthetic approaches appeal, for example, to evolutionary psychology for scientific evidence in favour of these assumptions. By means of cross-cultural studies they seek to obtain empirical evidence for the thesis that human beings are prone to react similarly to the same properties irrespective of their cultural background. An evolutionary explanation answers the question why a specific feature, disposition or ability, may have been adaptive – in the sense of advantageous for reproductive fitness – in the historical environment in which it developed. Hence the evolutionary aesthetician will investigate why the disposi-

tion to react in a certain manner to specific formal properties of objects may have increased human reproductive fitness.⁷

Finding rotten food repellent in this sense protects us from eating something harmful; features that make people attractive or erotic are indicators of sound genetic material and good reproductive functioning, as well as of the ability to feed and bring up a family and protect it against aggressors etc. Even the preference for symmetry can be explained in this manner, for according to some theorists symmetrical human faces are also a sign of good genetic material. After all, infestation by parasites can result in (slight) facial asymmetry. Having a symmetrical face thus indicates that one has not been infested and therefore has good body defences and genetic constitution.⁸

For the evolutionary aesthetician it is sufficient to tell a genealogical story that explains why the features in question have developed and been adaptive. It is not a problem for theories of this kind that the dispositions and abilities in question may in many concrete instances have no impact on reproductive fitness at all – for example in my appreciation of symmetrically designed houses or pictures. What is crucial is the demonstration of the evolutionary reason for the development of the feature itself. That a specific feature may not in every case be biologically advantageous for the being that possesses it does not detract from the theory, which would only face a problem if the feature proved positively maladaptive. If frequently and over a long period of time that feature had negative effects on reproductive fitness, it might be hard to explain why it (still) exists.

All evolutionary and naturalistic approaches to aesthetics have a clear tendency to universalism, because they examine the features, dispositions and abilities of the human species as such. Nevertheless, not every evolutionary approach to aesthetics automatically leads to a universalist theory of art reception, which is what interests us here. Some theories contend that because we find artistic objects and practices in every human culture we are allowed to claim that the creation and appreciation of art belongs to human nature as such. They then refer to the adaptive function of art for individuals and collectives, consisting e.g. in the ability to strengthen solidarity among the members of a group by enabling a shared experience, the development of a collective identity and so on.⁹ But universalist theories of this sort can also lead to a culture-relative understanding of art in its concrete realization. That art exists in every human culture does not mean that it is always produced in a way that can be understood or appreciated by everyone, regardless of their cultural background. On the contrary, art may very well tie in with specific cultural traditions, attitudes and conventions, and therefore require a familiarity with these contextual

7 Cf. John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, "Does Beauty Build Adapted Minds? Toward an Evolutionary Theory of Aesthetics, Fiction and the Arts," *SubStance* 30 (2001): 6–27.

8 Cf. Randy Thornhill and Steven Gangestad, "Human Facial Beauty: Averageness, Symmetry and Parasite Resistance," *Human Nature* 4 (1994): 237–269.

9 Cf. Noël Carroll, "Art and Human Nature," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62 (2004): 95–107; and Ellen Diissanayake, "Art in Global Context. An Evolutionary/Functionalist Perspective for the 21st Century," *International Journal of Anthropology* 18 (2003): 245–258.

features for its understanding and appreciation. Thus a universalist, evolutionary-functional theory of art may also come to the conclusion that the general function ascribed to art can be realized differently in different cultural settings.¹⁰

So it is important to draw the demarcation-line in the right place between the contextualist approach defended in this paper and universalist and naturalistic approaches. The contextualist approach does not in principle stand in opposition to theories according to which art is a universal phenomenon of human nature, as long as they allow for the possibility of concrete, contextually relative realizations of art. Nor does the contextualist approach have to deny in principle the possibility of anthropologically rooted dispositions for the preference of certain formal features of objects and revulsion at others. There may well be a basic level of aesthetic assessment in our perception of people, landscapes and food that is little influenced by cultural settings. On the other hand, a position that viewed our positive and negative reactions as culture all the way down, and held that even reactions like disgust, sexual attraction or fear are learnt through upbringing would certainly be too radical (although one should concede that our reactions are channelled and altered by culture). The difference between these approaches and the contextualist view lies in the assumption that it is not possible to explain the reception of art merely in terms of basic anthropological dispositions. Art practices are complex practices for which many different features of the cultural context are relevant.

Interpretation and *knowing that*

In his book *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* Arthur Danto prominently pointed out that there is far more involved in the reception of art than just sense perception and immediate reactions based on our natural dispositions. In the fourth chapter of this book he introduces us to a fictitious group of people described as 'barbarians', a story that graphically illustrates a view of art similar to the one discussed above. These people are able to look at things with respect to their aesthetic properties, they have the disposition to react to appealingly formed objects with pleasure. To certain things, "to fields of daffodils, to minerals, to peacocks", they respond with the expression "How beautiful!"¹¹ Yet these sensitive aesthetes are called barbarians by Danto because they have no concept of art: they approach creative art in the same way that they approach nature or everyday artefacts, responding positively to its products, but only in cases where these are formed and shaped in a beautiful and appealing way. Undoubtedly there have been many works through-

10 This relation can be grasped with the distinction between two kinds of universalism suggested by Michael Walzer with respect to the sphere of moral and social philosophy. While "covering-law" universalism is opposed to particularism altogether by assuming that the same values and standards apply everywhere at any time, "reiterative" universalism is able to integrate aspects of particularism by assuming that shared values can also be realized and interpreted differently in different cultural contexts. See especially the chapter "Two Kinds of Universalism," in Michael Walzer, *Nation and Universe. The Tanner Lectures on Human Value 1990* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 1990), 513

11 Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 105.

out history that fulfil this condition, but there have also been many that cannot be described as beautiful: one need only think of the sombre, disturbing paintings of Francis Bacon, or the ‘Black Squares’ of Malevich and his successors, which provide little in terms of immediate optical impression. From his story-construct Danto draws a well-known conclusion: he maintains not only that there is a special class of works that cannot be appreciated for their beauty and appearance to the senses but, going a step further, that art reception in general cannot be conceived merely in terms of sense perception and beauty. The reception of art, and also of beautiful objects of art, differs fundamentally from the appreciation of beautiful landscapes and everyday objects. So, Danto argues, however sensitive those fictive barbarians may have been, their positive reactions to works of art cannot be seen as acts of art reception because they altogether fail to take these works *as artworks*.

Works of art belong, according to Danto, to a different ontological sphere than e.g. objects of nature. They are intentionally produced artefacts that have a certain meaning and content, they can claim, comment, or thematize certain things – artworks are *about* something, they belong in the class of signs and representations. As objects belonging to that ontological sphere, they have properties that may very well not lie on the surface or be perceptible by the senses. On the other hand they may lack certain properties of the material they are made of. The property of possessing this or that weight clearly belongs to the canvas that I can see hanging in the Louvre, but this is hardly a property of *The Raft of the Medusa*, the work realized in and on that material. Because the barbarians lack the concept of art, they always and only see the material object with its perceptible properties; they have no access to the artwork *as* artwork with its specific constellation of properties.

To appreciate the work of art for what it is, we have to recognize its specific determining properties. Perceiving it merely as a material object cannot be sufficient, because some of its determining properties are relational, and hence not directly exhibited. Such properties may consist in the work’s relation to the producer’s intentions, or to the time in which it was produced, or they may consist in the art form or genre to which it belongs.¹² Only with reference to its relational properties can we decide which of the immediately perceptible properties of a work are relevant for perception and appreciation of it as an artwork and which are not. What is decisive for the identity of a work of art is, therefore, not only – and maybe not even in the first place – its characteristics as a material object, but rather the historical and cultural context in which it was made. To illustrate this fact Danto gives a series of examples of objects which, for the senses, are indistinguishable from each other, arguing that two objects that look, sound or feel exactly the same may, due

12 Cf. for this influential distinction between manifest and relational properties in art theory Maurice Mandelbaum’s paper “Family Resemblances and Generalization Concerning the Arts,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 2 (1965): 222.

to the different contexts in which they arose, possess utterly different semantic and aesthetic properties.¹³

This becomes clear when we think of an original painting and a forgery – the two being to the naked eye indistinguishable. While we may say of the original that it is inventive, that it breaks with the conventions of its genre, and that it develops new means of expression, none of this is true of the forgery. The forgery does not develop new means of expression but minutely copies those evidenced in the original; it is not, therefore, creative but at most imitative.¹⁴ It follows that in order to identify the kind of object and the kind of properties we are faced with, we have to have a certain knowledge of the historical, intentional and cultural context of the object in question.

The example of the forgery shows that for our evaluation of a work of art not only physically perceptible, but also relational properties are relevant – all the properties, in fact, that play a role in the critical interpretation of a work, all the properties we mention when we describe it to others, when we explain why we like or dislike it, why we consider it successful or unsuccessful, important or just interesting. Physically perceptible features like elegance or brightness may play a role in this, but relational features are at least as important. If I dislike a work because I think it deals with important social problems in too simple a manner, if I find it boring because the artist repeats himself or herself for the umpteenth time, if I find it witty because it thematizes the art scene ironically, all these properties, crucial for my interpretation and evaluation of the work, depend on my knowledge of its context, of the time of production, of the artist and her or his previous work, or of the state of play in the art world.¹⁵

Kendall Walton has pointed out that knowledge of art forms and genres is of particular importance for an object's reception. Only if we know the formal category or genre to which a work belongs, and the conventions by which this is characterized, can we decide what the important properties of the work are. Walton illustrated this very vividly with the example of a fictitious art genre called 'Guernicas'.¹⁶ He confronts Guernicas with Picasso's *Guernica*, which certainly belongs to the art form we call 'painting'. Guernicas are objects that display the same colours and forms as Picasso's *Guernica*, these colours and shapes constitute, one might say, the medium of a Guernica. The different objects of this art form differ

13 We can find this fundamental contextualist idea already in Heidegger's analysis of equipment in *Being and Time*. What an object is cannot be decided with regard to its intrinsic features alone, but is determined through a context of a so-called 'equipmental totality'. The being of a hammer e.g. is determined by its relations to nails, planks and huts. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), § 15. Cf. also Danto, "Art and Artifact in Africa," 106.

14 See on forgeries Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 41–44; and Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art. An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), Chapter III.

15 Danto states, that "interpretation must be relativized to a culture [...]: its cultural locus is among the factors that enter into a work's identity". Arthur C. Danto, "Language, Art, Culture, Text," in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 69.

16 See Walton, "Categories of Art", 347f.

from each other with respect to the third dimension, because they possess, like reliefs, the dimension of depth. In some Guernicas the shapes stand out in high relief, in others in bas relief; some Guernicas have sharply pointed forms, others have gently rounded ones. Given this contextual preamble, we can now conceive of a completely flat Guernica that would look exactly like Picasso's *Guernica*, but which nevertheless would have very different properties. Because this Guernica-object would be *flat* in a radical and unprecedented way. The art critics of this fictitious world could discuss whether this flatness stood for a new and original style, whether it broke disgracefully with old traditions of Guernica-making, or whether it was simply boring. Whatever the case, the Guernica-object would be flat in a way Picasso's *Guernica* is not; because this object is in the light of the conventions and rules of its art form extraordinarily flat, while we cannot sensibly describe Picasso's *Guernica* as flat at all, because its flatness belongs not to the work but only to the canvas it is painted on. It belongs to the medium, not to the work realized in that medium. Due to these different contexts, people may react to the property of flatness in different ways. It is clearly imaginable that an art lover might find the flatness of the flat Guernica surprising, shocking or amusing, but we cannot imagine these as sensible reactions to the simple fact that Picasso's painting *Guernica* is flat. Flatness, therefore, plays a very different role in the interpretation and evaluation on the one hand of the Guernica-object and on the other of Picasso's *Guernica*.

Not all of an object's properties are aesthetically relevant – i.e. important for our interpretation and evaluation. We would not seek to justify our value-judgments by referring to the defining attributes of an art form or the constitutive properties of a medium, but by appealing to the properties the work possesses because of an aesthetic decision of the artist.¹⁷ The medium is just a frame that opens up a space of possibilities within which the artist is free to decide which way to go. With respect to paintings, we are interested in the specific constellations of colour, shape and motif, but normally not in features like flatness or rectangularity. In an interpretation of the movie *The Artist* (2011), to look at another example, it makes perfect sense to mention that the film is black and white and that it is (almost completely) a silent movie, because the makers of this movie decided against the alternatives of colour and sound. But these same features are not relevant in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) because they were normal for film at that stage of technical development, before sound and colour came along. To sum up: only on the basis of knowledge of cultural contexts, intentions, genres, categories and conventions can we decide what properties belong to the identity of an artwork, and what role these might play in the interpretation of that work.

This means that lack of knowledge of the original context of a work constitutes a limit to its reception. This limit can be called cultural inasmuch as the knowledge in question is knowledge about specific cultural circumstances. But this cultural

17 Cf. Berys Gaut, *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 34–42. It is not crucial that there actually has been a decision like that in every case. But even if the work has a certain feature because of an accident, it is a kind of feature that could have resulted from a decision.

limit can be overcome relatively easily, because it lies in lack of knowledge *about* a specific culture, not in knowledge we can only have *within* a specific culture. We can acquire from art history publications or from the remarks of a museum guide whatever background information is necessary for a better understanding and a more adequate interpretation of the work we are dealing with.

Perception and *knowing how*

But there is another limit to art reception that cannot be overcome so easily, because it requires training and familiarization with specific approaches to art. This limit concerns the dimension of experience – the concrete sensory and affective reaction to a work of art. Overcoming the first limit requires that we *know that* – in other words that we learn facts; overcoming the second limit requires that we *know how* – in other words that we learn practical behaviour. I may have learnt a lot about, say, the Peking Opera from experts and books but I am nevertheless not in a position to react to a Peking Opera in a proper way. Despite my newly acquired knowledge of patterns, techniques and themes, I may still be unable to discriminate the opera's formal structures, and because the music is strange to my Western ears, I may be incapable of experiencing its expressive and emotional features in the envisaged manner. A lot of our immediate reactions to works of art are dependent on the cultural context. I would like to illustrate this briefly with respect to three aspects: the physical perception of artworks, the perception of non-physical aesthetic features, and the emotional reaction to such works.

It has often been maintained that the idea of something like the 'innocent eye' is a myth. Our eyes – or our senses in general – do not just passively, neutrally and objectively register what the objects of the world offer them; on the contrary, seeing and perceiving are active operations. Nelson Goodman states in this sense: "Not only how but what [the eye] sees is regulated by need and prejudice. It selects, rejects, organizes, discriminates, associates, classifies, analyzes, constructs. It does not so much mirror as take and make."¹⁸ This perceptual activity depends on the historical and cultural context: on the specific interests, understandings, vocabularies and practices by which perceivers are influenced.¹⁹ Perception and observation can be seen as culture-relative practices, and it is therefore conceivable that people

¹⁸ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 7.

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin also notes the relation between cultural circumstances and the mode of perception: "During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well." Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 222. On this topic see also the chapter "Revolutions as Changes of World View" in Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, in: *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science* 2 (1970). The phenomenon described by Kuhn is discussed under the heading "theory-ladenness of observation/perception" in the philosophy of science.

from different cultural backgrounds may perceive the same object differently under exactly the same circumstances.²⁰

Familiarity with the cultural context of an artwork is also important for the perception of those aesthetic properties that are not directly exhibited and cannot, therefore, be perceived with the five senses. James Shelley has convincingly argued that artworks possess non-physical aesthetic qualities that we can nevertheless perceive and react to in a direct and immediate way. Shelley takes Duchamp's famous *Fountain* as an example and ascribes the following attributes to it: "daring, impudence, irreverence, wit and cleverness", which according to him we can perceive directly in a non-inferential way that depends neither on factual learning nor on inference from empirical evidence.²¹ But this is only possible if we are familiar with the appropriate vocabulary and are experienced and practised enough in approaching the kind of art in question. Someone from another cultural tradition confronted by *Fountain* for the first time might not see through to the aesthetic qualities mentioned by Shelley, but would probably have to learn from a museum guide or similar that the work is considered daring, clever etc. Without culture-specific *knowing how*, the person in question can know *about* these qualities only in the way a colour-blind person has knowledge of colours: by information from others or by inference, but not by direct perception.

Familiarity with the cultural context of an artwork is also a prerequisite for an emotional reaction to the work. For such reactions, too, are guided by expectations, norms and conventions, and are based on familiarity with specific means of expression and representation. For example, we find films thrilling or funny, feel sympathy with the protagonist, or react indignantly at the representation of immoral actions. Such direct emotional and affective reactions may be different, however, when we approach works from an unfamiliar cultural tradition. Our reactions may not then be in accordance with the conventions, functions and intentions of the work in question; or the envisaged reactions may altogether fail to appear. I may know from my studies that the scene of the Peking Opera I am attending right now is very moving, yet I do not react emotionally because I am not adapted to the type of expression it employs. Or a sad or dramatic scene in a Bollywood movie makes me laugh because its means of expression appear exaggerated and even parodistic to my differently conditioned mind.

In many cases we can also overcome this practical limit to art reception. We can learn to perceive objects and qualities in a specific way, and we can learn to react to the properties of a work in an appropriate manner. The dimension of *knowing that*

20 This can concern the reception of works from all art forms and genres. The perception of pictures is also dependent on cultural circumstances: although it seems clear that we have to learn less to perceive a picture from another culture than to read a novel written in a foreign language, the perception of pictures is far from immediate and without presuppositions. The perception of pictures is also based on conventions one has to be familiar with. Pictures are 'read' in a certain way and we can therefore talk of 'foreign pictures'. See for this debate Oliver Scholz, *Bild, Darstellung, Zeichen* (Frankfurt/M.: Klostermann, 2004), 40-42.

21 James Shelley, "The Problem of Non-Perceptual Art," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 43 (2003): 370.

is important, but we cannot overcome the cultural limits of art reception by acquiring information alone, just as we cannot become wine experts simply by studying books and learning about grape varieties and cellar technology. There has to be a practical component and we have to get used to particular modes of perception and reaction. This can come about through wide experience with other works of the same kind, with the cultural background of the work or with other art forms of the same culture. By training one's perceptions and comparing different objects one can learn to discern and discriminate the relevant qualities.²²

But it is not always possible to acquire the *knowing how* relevant to an artwork. Works address specific audiences, which they assume to possess specific dispositions, knowledge, attitudes, and habits in interpreting and assessing art. They presuppose – to use a term from the school of reader-response criticism – a “horizon of expectations” with reference to which they can calculate specific effects and reactions.²³ What an audience judges to be transgressive, obscene or provocative is relative to its expectations and habits, which may be purposefully frustrated or exceeded. That is why there are cases in which we can no longer learn to react to a work in the same way as the contemporary audience did. Where moral ideas and standards have changed, it might be impossible for us to be shocked, embarrassed or disturbed by an artwork anymore. Ideas and attitudes that were radical in the past may be normal today. We can then only adopt an intellectualized perspective, making clear to ourselves that the audience for historical reasons reacted in such

22 Martin Seel pointed out the prerequisite of a “trained capacity for perception” for a rich and adequate art reception. Martin Seel, “On the Scope of Aesthetic Experience,” in *Aesthetic Experience*, ed. Richard Shusterman and Adele Tomlin (New York: Routledge, 2008), 104. Walton also stresses the importance of practical exercise: “Perceiving a work in a certain category or set of categories is a skill that must be acquired by training, and exposure to a great many other works of the category or categories in question is [...] an essential part of this training. [...] This has important consequences concerning how best to approach works of art of kinds that are new to us – contemporary works in new idioms, works from foreign cultures, or newly resurrected works from the ancient past. It is no use just immersing ourselves in a particular work, even with the knowledge of what categories it is correctly perceived in, for that alone will not enable us to perceive it in those categories. We must become familiar with a considerable variety of works of similar sorts.” Walton, “Categories of Art,” 366.

23 Hans Robert Jauss, “Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft,” in *Texte zur Literaturtheorie der Gegenwart*, ed. Dorothee Kimmich, Bernd Stiegler and Rolf G. Renner (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1996), 46f.: “Ein literarisches Werk, auch wenn es neu erscheint, präsentiert sich nicht als absolute Neuheit in einem informatorischen Vakuum, sondern prädisponiert sein Publikum durch Ankündigung, offene und versteckte Signale, vertraute Merkmale und implizite Hinweise für eine ganz bestimmte Weise der Rezeption. Es weckt Erinnerungen an schon Gelesenes, bringt den Leser in eine bestimmte emotionale Einstellung und stiftet schon mit seinem Anfang Erwartungen für ‚Mitte und Ende‘, die im Fortgang der Lektüre nach bestimmten Spielregeln der Gattung oder Textart aufrechterhalten oder abgewandelt, umorientiert oder auch ironisch aufgelöst werden können. [...] Die interpretierende Rezeption eines Textes setzt den Erfahrungskontext der ästhetischen Wahrnehmung immer schon voraus.”

and such a way.²⁴ The affective reactions themselves are no longer accessible to us, so we simply cannot receive the work in the manner envisaged by its maker. In these cases we encounter cultural limits of art reception that cannot be overcome at all, either by epistemic or practical learning.²⁵

Evaluation

If context affects understanding and experience in the described ways, then it is clear that it must also play an important role in the appreciation and evaluation of art. It is a prerequisite for a judgment about art to know what *kind* of object one is dealing with in the first place, and to know that one has to place this object in a context of historical circumstances, cultural practices, genres and so on. If I do not want to judge a work always and only with respect to its physical appearance and beauty, as Danto's barbarians do, but with respect to its meaning, originality or historical influence I must take its context into account.

The difficulty of evaluating works of art without taking their context into account can be illustrated by means of an example. In his paper *Foreign Art and Asante Aesthetics* the anthropologist Harry R. Silver discusses the relation between cultural contexts and the measures of aesthetic evaluation. He pursues the question to what extent the aesthetic appreciation of a people (in this case the Asante of Ghana) is applicable to artistic objects from other cultural traditions. To that end he showed a group of Asante several photographs of carved objects, figures and masks, some of them from their own culture but most of them from other African cultural contexts. He then asked his respondents "to rate them in order of preference".²⁶ Without any knowledge of the origins of the objects presented, or of the function they serve in their original cultural context, Silver's respondents evaluated them in an 'ethnocentric' manner, assessing them according to the measures and values of their own cultural tradition. Consequently (and unsurprisingly) they gave high marks to objects from their own culture, and low ones to those with unfamiliar themes and means of expression. However, a form of evaluation that ignores the specifically determining techniques, conventions and functions of the context in which a work of art originates cannot do justice to the inherent identity

24 When Hegel states: "No matter how excellent we find the statues of the Greek gods, no matter how we see God the Father, Christ, and Mary so estimably and perfectly portrayed: it is no help; we bow the knee no longer [before these artistic portrayals]," he refers in this sense to a historically changed situation which makes it impossible for us to react to some artworks in the same way as the original audience did. Georg W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 103.

25 "Many artworks of the past, and among them the most renowned, are no longer to be experienced in any immediate fashion." Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 248f.

26 Harry R. Silver, "Foreign Art and Asante Aesthetics," *African Arts* 16 (1983): 66.

of that work. The degree to which the Asante may appreciate an object from a different tradition – or, conversely, the degree to which it lives up to their aesthetic and artistic standards – seems to be a merely external, accidental factor.²⁷

The difficulty of evaluating works of art without taking the context into account becomes even clearer if I, as someone who is not familiar with African traditions of wood-carving, set myself the task of rating the photographs reprinted in Silver's paper according to my own preferences. I am forced to admit that I am a bit helpless; I do not know how to proceed. I can certainly distinguish some qualities and features of these objects: I can see (in some cases) what they depict, I can describe their appearance and construction, and register similarities with other objects I have seen. I can also respond to some of these objects: some I find elegant, even beautiful, others ugly; some look funny, some menacing. But what does that mean with respect to their evaluation? With what scale should I value them? Should I refer to what I find most decorative or most interesting, to what tells me most about human existence, to what impresses me as virtuoso workmanship, to what I find most realistic, or most extraordinary, or most imaginative?

One can evaluate an artwork only with respect to measures of value, and these measures depend on cultural contexts. Some are connected to the categories Kendall Walton described. Thus an artwork can be judged good or successful with respect to the conventions and demands of art forms and genres. The same properties may be evaluated differently in two works that belong to different genres. I might enjoy an unlikely and unrealistic situation described in a novel in the tradition of magical realism, while I would find that same situation annoying and disappointing if I found it in a crime novel. The evaluation of the same properties can also differ with respect to the historical context: some means of representation and expression that were once original and exciting may now be worn and epigonic.²⁸

But above all the question of the value and functions of art in general cannot be answered in a universal or univocal manner: it is also bound up with cultural contexts. This is already evident if one looks at the development and discourse of art history in the Western tradition. The explanations offered for the value and meaning of art have always been controversial, disputed and transitory. At one moment we find a view that explains the value of art in terms of disinterested pleasure and the experience of the beautiful, at another a view that sees that value in the particular forms of knowledge art makes accessible to us. At one moment art is praised for its ability to imitate nature and reality, and at another for its inventive power in bringing about new forms and perspectives, disturbing traditional norms

27 This is similar to a case where I do not evaluate a shoe with respect to how well I can walk in it or how dry it keeps my feet but with respect to how well I can drive nails into the wall with its heel. Richard Rorty would however call into question if we can really sensibly distinguish appropriate and inappropriate ways of evaluation in this case. See Richard Rorty, "The Pragmatist's Progress," in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 103.

28 Cf. William E. Kennick, "Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?" *Mind* 67 (1958): 331.

and habits and transforming the cultural world.²⁹ Beyond that, art can be affiliated in different ways to social, religious or political practices.³⁰ We should, therefore, evaluate a work with respect to the understanding (or understandings) of art in its original cultural context and with respect to the expectations and demands that go along with that understanding.³¹

Contextualism: between universalism and subjectivism

If the contextualist approach is right, what exactly do we have to do when dealing with works from other cultural contexts? I think there can be no simple answer that is valid for every occasion, because artworks from different traditions, epochs and cultures demand different things from us. The general lesson we can learn from contextualism is perhaps that there *are* standards of appropriateness in art reception. Certain interpretations, reactions and evaluations do the work more justice than others. One can understand a work well or less well, one can evaluate it in a fair or unfair manner. We cannot understand the source of this normative criterion of appropriateness without taking into account the cultural context of the work in question, because only with reference to this context can we decide what an object really is, what it is about and what it is up to.

Although the contextualist approach is opposed to a universalistic perspective on art reception (as we have seen in the discussion of some naturalistic positions) it does not support a subjectivist story either. For an appropriate reception of a work of art is precisely not one that is guided by subjective or idiosyncratic understandings, preferences, and standards. On the contrary, appropriate interpretations and

29 "[T]here is no one use which we make of all works of art, nor is there any one demand or set of demands which we make on them. This is important, and serves to explain, at least in part, the actual relativity of aesthetic criteria. What one age looks for in painting or in literature, another age may neglect. What one group demands, another forbids. [...] We can be interested in works of art for many reasons, and some of these reasons may be more decisive at one time or in one set of circumstances than they are at another time or in another set of circumstances. This affects the very logic of critical appraisal by determining the relevance and merit of the reasons we offer for our judgements. [...] Different reasons are persuasive at different times and in different contexts." Kennick, "Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?" 333f.

30 I think that one should keep these cultural differences in the understanding of art in mind. We lose sight of important and meaningful differences if we simply apply a wide concept of 'art' that refers to Western high art as well as to African carvings and Italian sports cars. See for this proposition Stephen Davies, "Non-Western Art and Art's Definition," in *Theories of Art Today*, ed. Noël Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 208; and in the same volume see also Dennis Dutton, "But They Don't Have Our Concept of Art," 217-238.

31 Certainly I do not want to claim that there has always been only one agreed understanding of art in every cultural context. On the contrary, the value and functions of art has often been, and still is, a matter of controversy. But we can allow for that in our notion of cultural context. Such a context can be described as a constellation of different understandings debated with different arguments and reasons. See in this regard Alasdair MacIntyre's dynamic notion of 'tradition' which includes difference and conflict. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science," *The Monist* 60 (1977): 460f.

evaluations of art are those that can be justified to others. And the measure according to which we assess the appropriateness of interpretations and evaluations is one that draws on certain aspects of the original context of the work.³² In this sense the view maintained here could be described as a contextually grounded objectivism.

The relevant cultural context in which we should place a work is not always easy to determine. This is partly due to the fact that it is not easy to determine what exactly constitutes a culture and where its borders lie. For our purposes it is initially sufficient to establish that there are different cultural constellations equipped with understandings, norms and practices that are binding only within their local framework. In this broad sense we find cultures of different extents on different levels and with borderlines that overlap and are in many cases in motion. There are cultural limits with respect to art reception not only between the different continents, epochs or religious traditions, but also – as Pierre Bourdieu made impressively clear – between classes and social groups.³³ Furthermore we can find limits of that sort between different generations, between high art and pop-culture, between the traditions of representational and abstract art, between the different art forms of painting, film, music and so on. Within this wide understanding of culture we can also place the diverse sub-cultures with their specific frames of reference.³⁴

It is important at this point not to misconceive the consequences of this normative perspective on the reception of art. It cannot be the upshot of these considerations that we should declare some kinds of interpretation and evaluation permitted and others forbidden or anathema. A mode of reception that takes no account of a work's context may nevertheless be satisfying, intensive, inspiring and instructive – in some cases more so than one that does take the context into account. But it is important to keep the distinction between these kinds of reception in view: only the context-sensitive practice seeks to take the work for what it actually is and to meet its demands, while the other kind is not so much interested in the actual identity of the work as in its impact and results, or what Eco calls its “use”.³⁵ Only the former type of reception is really in touch with the work, while the latter

32 We can also put it as follows: not only the context of the recipient is important for the interpretation and evaluation of art but also the context of the work.

33 Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, “Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception,” in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

34 This means in effect that a (Western) opera fan may face similar cultural challenges when confronted with a Peking Opera or with a punk-song.

35 Cf. Umberto Eco's distinction between ‘interpretation’ and ‘use’: “I can certainly use [a] text for parody, for showing how a text can be read in relation to different cultural frameworks, or for strictly personal ends [...]; but if I want to *interpret* a text I must respect its cultural and linguistic background.” Umberto Eco, “Between Author and Text”, in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 68f.

kind takes it as an occasion for an experience that may not correspond closely at all with the structures, themes and aims of the work itself.³⁶

The distinction between 'use' and 'interpretation' is relevant here, even though we know that we often have to go beyond the boundaries of the original context of the work in the course of our reception. In most cases when we face artworks from foreign contexts we will not be in a position to understand and experience the object in the way the work's proper audience would have done; we will approach the work with different knowledge, dispositions and standards. For example we have sufficient knowledge of the historical context to regard Van Gogh as a forerunner of Expressionism and Expressionism as a step towards Abstractionism. From our historical position we see more relational properties of his work than a contemporary viewer could have done, and therefore understand and evaluate it differently.³⁷ Beyond that we may well perceive different qualities in an artwork than the original audience did, because we are familiar with different art forms and genres and have developed a vocabulary that enables us to perceive and describe works in the light of these, registering their various patterns and properties.³⁸

This observation accords with a fundamental insight of the newer hermeneutic philosophy, namely that it is neither possible nor desirable that interpretation should ignore one's own standpoint and to seek to put one fully in the situation of the original audience. Instead the interpretation and appreciation of art has to proceed from one's own horizon, and we have seen that this horizon consists not only of insights and information but also of habits and practices.³⁹ This should be taken into account if the understanding of art reception is not to become overly static and restrictive. We should not say that only the original reception was appropriate, or that it represents a standard all other reception has to meet. What we need is a more dynamic and context-sensitive understanding of the meaning and scope of art reception. Appropriate art reception in this sense takes into account the cultural context of a work even if it goes beyond this context in some respects. It first asks about the cultural context of a work, in order to determine the work's identity with respect to its historical circumstances, genre, intentions and so on. Only in this way can we assess what knowledge and what kind of practice would be required to ap-

36 For the debate about aims and standards of interpretation see Robert Stecker, *Interpretation and Construction. Art, Speech, and the Law* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 4ff; and Noël Carroll, "Art, Intention and Conversation," in *Beyond Aesthetics. Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

37 Cf. concerning this epistemological asymmetry in the perspective on historical objects Arthur C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

38 Arthur C. Danto described this 'retroactive' view of art in "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy* 61 (1964): 583. Cf. on this topic Daniel Feige, "Wandel in der Kunst. Überlegungen zum Verhältnis der Künste," in *Formen kulturellen Wandels*, eds. Stefan Deines, Daniel Feige and Martin Seel (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012).

39 Because art reception always begins at a different starting point Gadamer claims, "daß man anders versteht wenn man überhaupt versteht". It is not possible to understand an object in exactly the same way as someone from another historical and cultural context. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986), 302.

proach it as the original audience would have done, and, conversely, estimate the degree to which our responses differ from those of the that audience. Appropriate art reception thus involves reflection on the context of the work, reflection on one's own context and reflection on the relation and differences between them.

Aspects that go beyond the cultural context of an artwork can, therefore, play a role in its interpretation and evaluation. A work may be appreciated for qualities only describable in the light of another genre, for its historical influence, or because it teaches one a lot about the culture from which it comes. None of this is part of the envisaged effect, for the simple reason that the initial audience is normally all too familiar with what for a foreign observer is interesting and new. As long as these aspects are related to the context of the work, they can play a role in an appropriate interpretation and evaluation. Only when the standards of art reception are uncoupled from this context – when, for example, a work is approached in an ‘ethnocentric’ manner – can one speak of its being ‘used’, because it is then being taken as a simple occasion for interpretations and experiences that in the strict sense are no longer interpretations and experiences of the artwork in question.

Conclusion: cultural contexts and globalization

In the view advocated here, the cultural context must be taken into account if we are to understand, experience and evaluate a work of art in an appropriate manner. This goes hand in hand with an awareness of the cultural limits of art reception – which does not, however, automatically lead to a strong cultural relativism in which the limits between different cultures are taken to be insurmountable. If this was true it would mean that we could interact appropriately only with works from our own cultural context. But we have seen that cultural limits can be overcome, at times very easily, by acquiring specific knowledge – both knowing *how* and knowing *that*. Only in some cases and in some regards are the differences between the horizons of the work and those of the recipient so large that the latter is incapable of perceiving the object as its proper audience would do or have done.⁴⁰

Under the conditions of globalization, art reception today faces a particular challenge. This lies not (alone) in the fact that more works are circulating and being presented in various contexts, but above all in the contemporary dynamics of, and between, cultural contexts. Cultural contexts are not framed and clearly separated, but are involved in a steady and increasing process of interchange and mutual influence⁴¹ – a development that makes it increasingly difficult to determine what norms, understandings and practices belong to the inventory of a particular cul-

40 The contextualist approach in art theory does not necessarily go along with an “incommensurability thesis”. I think however that we sometimes learn in the attempt to deal with a foreign object that the differences are too great and that we are actually confronted with incommensurable contexts. Cf. Dennis Dutton, “But They Don’t Have Our Concept of Art”, 227.

41 Cf. Wolfgang Welsch, “Transculturality: the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today,” in *Spaces of Culture*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1999).

tural context at a particular time. It may even be difficult to ascribe an artwork to a specific context at all, and to determine the audience it addresses. An example for this is the work of Takeshi Murakami, whose references to Far Eastern traditions, to Western art history, to pop culture and to the global market invoke very diverse contexts. What audience with what knowledge and skills does this work address? Does the audience have to be familiar with Japanese mythology, or with the aesthetics of Manga comics, or with the Western art tradition? Does the work address one specific audience, or does it work for different groups on different levels, or does it approach an ideally globalized person familiar with a vast range of cultural contexts? That these questions cannot be answered easily should not prompt the assumption that cultural contexts no longer play a crucial role for this work, because it has left all particular contexts behind.⁴² Even in such complex cases as Murakami's, knowledge of the different contexts, and reflection on their relations and relevance, is undoubtedly necessary for appropriate interpretation, experience and evaluation of the work.

42 The art historian Hans Belting has recently cast doubt on the possibility of a so-called "global art" that can transgress all historical and cultural boundaries. Hans Belting, "Was bitte heißt 'contemporary'? Modern oder zeitgenössisch: Die Globalisierung führt zu einer Verwirrung des Kunstbegriffs," *Die Zeit*, May 20, 2010, 56.

2 Scenic beauty in a global context

Arnold Berleant

The problem

Judging scenic beauty raises problems that aestheticians have long faced nobly, but by which they have been ignobly defeated.¹ Such judgment can, in fact, stand as a representative case for problems concerning judgments of taste *en tout*. It is often assumed that judgments of taste rest on the objectivity of aesthetic value, and that ideally these judgments should exhibit universal agreement. The fact that such agreement has never been reached seems not to have deterred philosophers from claiming that universality is necessary in order for any such judgment to be valid. I want to propose that, on the contrary, judgments of taste are not only not universal but that universality is neither necessary nor desirable, and that such a requirement unduly constrains the value and usefulness of aesthetic judgment.

Scenic beauty offers an attractive entrée into this problem, for the appreciation of scenery is widespread. Delight in the beauty of landscape cuts across educational, cultural, and intellectual differences and at the same time exhibits a high degree of sympathetic agreement. Granted that there have been historical differences in the appreciation of natural scenery, especially in the case of mountains and forests, which were once considered ominous and threatening but now majestic and noble.² And the same transformation of taste seems now to be happening in the appreciation of swamp, marsh, and desert landscapes. Although at various times common agreement has been widespread, universality remains elusive.

The attempt to justify the objectivity and universality of judgments of scenic beauty rests on the conviction that such judgments of taste require universal agree-

1 This essay is one of a pair of variations on aesthetic judgment that use similar arguments and materials. The other, "Judging Architecture", appears together with this essay in my *Aesthetics beyond the Arts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012).

2 Nicholson quotes John Evelyn's *Diary* from 1644 in which he writes about the Alps "which now rise as it were suddenly, after some hundred miles of the most even Country in the World, and where there is hardly a stone to be found, as if nature had swept up the rubbish of the Earth in the Alps, to forme and cleare the Plaines of Lombardy". Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory; The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (New York, W.W. Norton: 1963). Compare this to Thoreau: "What is a horizon without a mountain?" *Journal*, 2:57.

ment to have validity. This desideratum has not been borne out by empirical studies of landscape preference but it nevertheless remains the normative ideal. I would like to examine this issue afresh, not by appealing to empirical research on landscapes preference, which has its own methodological difficulties and requires its own appraisal, but by reconsidering the philosophical issue.³ I want to propose that the requirement of universality is ungrounded and that it engenders a philosophical problem that is false and therefore insoluble. What remains for philosophic consideration are matters of a different kind that may be more tractable and lead to a different kind of resolution.

The question at issue concerns the range of normative judgments that different individuals make of natural beauty or of art. The object of appreciation is presumably the same for everyone, yet the value placed on it is never unanimous but varies for different individuals and may even change for the same individual on different occasions. Regardless of where the locus of beauty is considered to lie, whether in a property of the object or a sentiment in the subject, conventional logic carries the presumptions of objectivity and universality, and insists that judgments of the same object should agree. The reasons for this insistence vary. Sometimes they rely on the claim that value is objective and that, if we recognize and identify it properly, our judgments would concur. Often they rest on the belief that humans are basically similar and have similar capacities for aesthetic appreciation, and since our appreciation is directed toward the same object, our judgments may be expected to agree.

The expectation, then, is of common agreement, yet the facts are otherwise and the problem lies in this disparity. Both Hume and Kant faced this issue and their answers, though different, show remarkable similarities. Let me start by recalling these classic accounts, not to critique them as representative models, but because they are useful in locating the salient features of the issue.

Hume's discussion of the judgment of taste is widely regarded as definitive. Briefly stated, Hume distinguished between judgment and sentiment. Sentiment, he recognized, is never wrong since it refers only to itself. If viewing a landscape from a hilltop gives us a thrill of pleasure, the pleasure is real and incontrovertible. If our companion is bored and would rather return to the tour bus and view the landscape on the TV monitor, that feeling is equally genuine. As Hume put it, "All sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always real, wherever a man is conscious of it."⁴ It is different, however, if we ascribe beauty to the landscape, for then we are referring not to our feelings but to something beyond, and our judgment must conform to that object. "Among a

3 See Allen Carlson, "On the Possibility of Quantifying Scenic Beauty," in *Landscape Planning*. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1977). Carlson argues that "quantifying scenic beauty may be, even if possible, neither as useful nor as straightforward as much of the current work in environmental aesthetics would lead us to believe". (Carlson, *Landscape*, 131). Although the terms and frame of Carlson's discussion differ from those of this paper, our conclusions are compatible.

4 David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," in *Of the Standard of Taste and Other Essays* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1961), 6.

thousand different opinions which different men may entertain of the same subject, there is one, and but one that is just and true: the only difficulty is to fix and ascertain it. On the contrary, a thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right; because no sentiment represents what is really in the object.”⁵ By opinion Hume meant statements of fact, which cannot vary. But for him, beauty is different; it does not lie in the object but rests only on our sentiment. However, there are qualities in objects that excite that sentiment, and the competent critic is able to identify and evaluate those qualities.

It may be sufficient to say that the judgment of a critic who has keen sensibilities, wide aesthetic experience, and relevant knowledge is the most trustworthy, and that the judgments of such critics are likely to agree.⁶ Nonetheless, according to Hume, differences will result from “the different humors of particular men” and “the particular manners and opinions of our age and country”. However, “[t]he general principles of taste are uniform in human nature.”⁷ Hume thus leaves us with the possibility of widespread agreement but at the same time with the recognition that residual differences are unavoidable but explainable.

Kant’s dissatisfaction with Hume is well known, and he offered an alternative that provided a more affirmative answer to the challenge of establishing agreement in aesthetic judgment. For Kant the judgment of taste is not cognitive but aesthetic, and this means that it cannot avoid being subjective.⁸ Like Hume, he believed that such judgments may refer to an object but that they rest on pleasure or pain, which signifies nothing in the object but only the feeling that the object evokes in the subject.

Kant nevertheless attempted to justify judgments that, though subjective, must be universal, and he did this mainly by appealing to a common sensibility, a *sensus communis*. While such judgments cannot be cognitive, their universality may nevertheless be claimed on the basis of the *sensus communis*. This, he thought, allows for what he called a “subjective universal”. But while there may be some feelings and responses toward the same object felt by most people, the extent to which that is so in individual cases is an empirical question and true universality is impossible to attain. What Kant was left with, then, and all that would be possible under these conditions, was the *claim* of universality of a sort: “subjective universality”.

Despite their radical differences, both Hume and Kant shared some key ideas. Neither claimed cognitive universality for judgments of taste. Hume seemed to think that universality was theoretically possible since judgments are of the same object, but that the conditions for attaining it could not be met since we can never overcome the subjectivity of taste. Such judgments are unavoidably variable, and

5 Hume, *Taste*, 6.

6 Hume’s characterization of a “true judge” is a person who possesses “strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice...” Hume, *Taste*, 17.

7 Hume, *Taste*, 17.

8 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (New York, Hafner, 1951) §1.

variability is a condition of the situation. The challenge is to identify the causes of residual disagreement. Kant introduced that guarantor of what cannot be proved, the *deus ex machina*, by appealing to a *sensus communis*, which is a pure construction, to establish a basis for human universality. Whether the condition of indeterminacy can be overcome rests on how far one is willing to travel on an article of faith beyond the experience of beauty: Hume not at all; Kant gingerly but very far.

Hume and Kant exhibited common features in the ways we often understand the problem of taste, and their proposals illustrate traditional ways of adjudicating that problem. To reconsider the issue we need to question certain presumptions pervasive in the philosophical tradition. This will make it possible to consider alternatives that will dramatically re-shape our understanding of such judgments.

Presumptions of taste

Let us approach this issue differently by questioning an assumption common to such discussions as this. It is an idea that Hume and Kant undoubtedly took for granted, as many still do today, and it appears in the very structure of the problem. For them the problem of taste is that the difference in our judgments rests on the disparity between the experience of beauty, and hence the subjectivity of appreciation, and the independence of the normative object toward which our judgment is presumably directed. This division structures the issue in such a way that the difference cannot be reconciled: it is difficult for feeling to conform to logic. More than this, disappointment at not succeeding is unavoidable because the underlying presumption is that an objective judgment of beauty must be both possible and desirable, since there is an independent object of appreciation.

Such reasoning is, however, fatally circular because it is doubly assumptive and, consequently, doubly false: judgments must concur because knowledge must be universal; people are similar, and so is the object of their appraisal. But such universality cannot merely be assumed or claimed: it is precisely what needs to be proved. People's perceptual acuity varies, their capacity for focused attention is different, and even more variable are their experience and education. In the light of such facts, the extent of actual agreement, surprisingly enough, is often considerable, but it is not universal. Variable, too, is the object; here, the scenic object. A scenic view changes constantly with every breath of breeze, every cloud movement, as well as the continuous changes of light and shadow caused by the steady movement of the sun along its trajectory. Less noticeable, perhaps, but even more significant is the transitory position of the observer, where mood, disposition, and slight shifts in stance and location cause alterations in the scene, compounding its variability. As there is no stable object, there is no stable viewer.

Whatever reconciliation of the disparity in judgment that thinkers following Hume and Kant can claim actually rests on several articles of faith. For Hume it was the assumption that there is an independent object toward which individual experiences veer and that, if they conform to the traits of that object, the judgments

must concur. That they do not always agree he attributed to differences in sensibility, customs, and experience.⁹ Kant's appeal to a *sensus communis* is to an unsupported assumption, a pure fabrication founded on an assumed cognitive necessity and limited evidence and not on observation.

This situation exemplifies John Dewey's observation that the problems of philosophy are for the most part the problems of philosophers and not the problems of people. This is not the first time that philosophy has tied itself up in knots of its own making, and it is nowhere more evident than in attempts to objectify the world. We persist in following Kant by thinking we can speak to some degree meaningfully of what lies beyond human perception. William James recognized the limitation inherent in the notion of an independent objectivity when he noted "the general law of perception, which is that *whilst part of what we perceive comes through our senses from the object before us, another part* (and it may be the larger part) *always comes out of our own mind*".¹⁰ And even the physicist Werner Heisenberg noted that "When we speak of a picture of nature ... we do not actually mean any longer a picture of nature, but rather a picture of our relation to nature".¹¹ The contemporary Chinese aesthetician Wangheng Chen nicely expressed the extent of the human contribution when he observed that "Fundamentally, beauty, including natural beauty, is a product of the humanization of nature".¹² We might even consider emulating Kant's understanding, which unfortunately he himself did not follow consistently, and recognize that what lies beyond perception utterly eludes human knowledge. The wisdom of the East may express this best of all: "The greatest beauty exists in nature (sky and earth), but at the same time it keeps silence."¹³ When it comes to one's basic grasp of the order of things natural and social, the process of emancipation is even more difficult. The literature *on* ideology is far exceeded by the literature *of* ideology. That is one reason why, in the industrialized West, the separations that divide things are so pervasive and powerful. The world we have constructed is a world of discrete objects separated from one another, objects and events that, like Leibniz's monads, are related only externally. It is a world of discrete individuals, a world of integers. And to call a world of independent, external objects 'realism' is to beg the question, for beneath this monadic order lies the most basic separation of all, our Cartesian inheritance of subjective consciousness insulated from an objective world. This division is comfortable because it is customary. It overlooks the fact that it imposes a vicious template on experience.

Many things lead us to question this claim to adequately reflect the world. A philosophical critique of Cartesianism demands its own inquiry, but it may be worth looking at evidence that suggests an alternative. A body of related data may

9 Hume, *Taste*, 19.

10 William James, *Psychology* (Holt, 1892), 329.

11 Werner Heisenberg (1958). Quoted by David Macauley, "The Place of the Elements and the Elements of Place: Aristotelian Contributions to Environmental Thought." *Ethics, Place and Environment*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (June 2006), 187-206.

12 Wang Heng Chen, "On the Beauty of Nature," (unpublished manuscript, Wuhan University, 1996), 15.

13 Zhuang-zi, the most famous Taoist after Lao-tse.

weigh more heavily than an extended argument. Let me mention several considerations.

An empirically-grounded aesthetics

Theoretical developments in psychology and sociology over the last century have profound significance for aesthetic theory. The accounts of perceptual experience they offer are directly relevant, since aesthetics is itself grounded in experience. And they contribute to a reconsideration of taste. Let me begin with etymology.

The etymological reason is definitive but not conclusive. It is often remarked that the term ‘aesthetics’ is a transliteration of the Greek *aisthēsis*, whose literal meaning is “perception by the senses,” and that the discipline of aesthetics was established by Baumgarten, who defined ‘aesthetics’ as “the science of sensory knowledge directed toward beauty” and ‘art’ as “the perfection of sensory awareness”.¹⁴ The very identity of aesthetics rests on the centrality of sense perception: perceptual experience as the basic constituent of appreciation, perceptual experience as underlying the creative process (*pace* Croce and Collingwood), and perception as central for the practice of art criticism insofar as critical commentary directs appreciation and judgment to the *experience* of art objects. All this suggests that the meanings, concepts, and theoretical structures of aesthetics, many of which originated in speculative epistemology and metaphysics, may be poor guides in a field that is fundamentally experiential. The relevance of this is crucial to problems involving aesthetic judgment, particularly judgments of taste.

Coming at this from other directions, we need to recognize what psychologists of perception have long noted, that humans’ relation to things is not a relation between discrete and self-sufficient entities. On the contrary, just as people impose themselves on things, so, too, do things exercise an influence on people. Among the classic contributions to psychological aesthetics are Lewin’s field theory and his identification of invitational qualities, and J.J. Gibson’s theory of affordances, features in an environment that invite certain behavior. Much has been done by the successors of Lewin and Gibson in developing and elaborating their ideas, and while these views may not as yet have gained universal assent, they are widely influential. Equally germane is the development over the past century of the sociology of knowledge, which has shown convincingly how social and cultural factors underlie the very conceptual structures in which we formulate and organize our knowledge of the world.¹⁵

Sociological analysis also contributes to the empirical study of aesthetic judgment. One of the most forceful recent critics of aesthetic theory is Pierre Bourdieu. His extended study, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, develops at length the thesis that “[s]ocial subjects, classified by their classifications, distin-

14 Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Aesthetica* (Frankfurt a. O., 1750), Vol. I.

15 Arnold Berleant, *Sensibility and Sense: The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World* (Edinburgh: Imprint Academic, 2010).

guish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed”¹⁶ Bourdieu applied this analysis of taste widely but with special effectiveness to Kant: “Kant’s analysis of the judgment of taste finds its real basis in a set of aesthetic principles which are the universalization of the dispositions associated with a particular social and economic condition.”¹⁷ Thus not only is taste variable because of social class differences; its very philosophical consideration is shaped by similar influences. In fact, Bourdieu claims, Kantian disinterestedness, the basis for the discrimination of the pure pleasure afforded by beauty from enjoyment that is interested, indeed the *Critique of Judgment* itself, is based on a sense of distinction that marks an invidious social relation.¹⁸

But there are further empirical data to be considered in addition to psychological and sociological evidence. It is now widely recognized that agreement is heavily grounded on culture, and here the comparative study of aesthetics is important. In one such study, the anthropologist Robert Plant Armstrong describes art as the work of “affecting presence”. He abandons the ethnocentrically identified assumption that all works we call ‘art’ possess the same aesthetic properties and that these underlie our judgments of beauty and virtuosity. The presumption of such a universal aesthetic, he argues, is challenged by non-Western cultures that exhibit how observable aesthetic beliefs and behavior are as variable as institutions and every other social construction. Aesthetic values in these cultures do not rest on beauty but derive from what Armstrong called the embodiment and management of powers. Using African and Upper Paleolithic work, he argued that concepts of beauty, truth, and excellence have little to do with the inherent cultural value of an object, and he developed an aesthetic typology that integrates human consciousness and its reification as art. Art thus becomes the work of “affecting presence” embodying in mythic configurations the mammalian, human, cultural, and autobiographical features of consciousness. The presence that is established is affecting because of the power ascribed to myth, and this presence determines the realm of the aesthetic.¹⁹

It is also important to include here philosophical developments that offer alternative structures for understanding humans’ standing in the world. Among these we can include Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s efforts to identify the continuities that

16 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 6.

17 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 493. Nietzsche may have been making a similar point about Kant: “Kant wanted to prove in a way that would dumbfound the common man that the common man was right: that was the secret joke of this soul. He wrote against the scholars in favor of the popular prejudice, but for scholars and not popularly.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* §193.

18 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, § 335.

19 Robert Plant Armstrong, *The Powers of Presence: Consciousness, Myth, and Affecting Presence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981); *The Affecting Presence: An Essay in Humanistic Anthropology* (University of Illinois Press: Urbana. 1971); *Myth and Affecting Presence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

express the embeddedness of humans in the world. These include such ideas as the flesh of the world, as well as the “chiasm”, which denotes the reciprocity that permeates human relations of self, other living beings, and the features and objects of the natural world. Similar efforts to formulate these connections were made by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari when they wrote of the experience of “becoming” as a desubjectification that precedes the distinction of self and object.

I have found that the concept of an aesthetic field is useful for identifying and explicating the complex, holistic, situational context of aesthetic experience.²⁰ Instead of centering aesthetic events around subjective feelings or on properties of works of art or other objects, the aesthetic field considers these as constituents in a complex situational field. The aesthetic field generally exhibits four principal factors: appreciative, focused, creative, and performative. The appreciative factor is the contribution of perceivers, whose perceptual experience informs and is affected by the other constituents of the aesthetic field. Here the sensory experience is dominant, while informed by knowledge, background, and whatever else influences sensation. The focused factor refers to the object or center of appreciation: the art object, the scene, the musical or theatrical event. These, of course, are never independent but are affected by and responsive to the perceiver and the rest of the contextual field. The creative factor is the constitutive force that brings together the materials and conditions for aesthetic experience. In a conventional appreciative situation, this is usually an artist or other originitive force. In the appreciation of nature, the creative factor lies in the natural processes and forces that underlie all events. Finally, the performative factor is the activating force in an aesthetic situation. Its presence is obvious in the performing arts, when the embodied activity of an actor, dancer, or musician brings the field into perceptual presence. However, a performative factor is equally present in other arts and appreciative situations: the reader, the listener, the viewer, all activate the perceptual field. The appreciator thus has a performative role, adding an individual contribution of education, experience, temperament, and other such personal and cultural influences to the aesthetic field. To complete an account of the field, we need to recognize that every aesthetic situation occupies a temporal location that is affected by historical, technological, and cultural conditions that contribute to and modify the living presence of these factors. It is important to recognize that these factors are not objects or elements but forces distinguishable mainly in reflecting upon what is a coherent, integral experience.

General understanding usually lags generations behind major intellectual and scientific developments, and philosophic theory is no exception. Scholarly consciousness (not to mention popular understanding) is still struggling to accom-

20 What follows here is a summary account first developed in A. Berleant, *The Aesthetic Field: A Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (Springfield, Ill.: C.C. Thomas 1970). Second (electronic) edition with a new Preface (2000), <http://cybereditions.com/spis/runisa/dll?SV:cyTheBooksTmp> I have developed and applied the idea of the aesthetic field in subsequent publications, especially *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

moderate the implications of relativity theory and quantum mechanics, and of the qualifications of scientific knowledge demanded by Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy and other such revolutionary cognitive developments. The implications of conceptual changes like these have powerful consequences for aesthetic conventions and profoundly affect our understanding of the place of humans and the human world.²¹ Nothing is more fundamental and nothing has greater consequences for aesthetic theory, and conventional views of aesthetic experience cannot accommodate such changes. On one side of the ledger, analytic aesthetics focuses on the art object, or sometimes, as Monroe Beardsley did, on the aesthetic object: its qualities, its features, its historical setting, its relations with other objects, its actions and effects and the actions and effects of other things on it, and perhaps centrally, the critical statements – descriptive, interpretative, and evaluative – we make about aesthetic objects.²² Such objects occupy a place in an orderly world, and the task of aesthetics is to demarcate that place clearly. Science figures here as a model of conceptual clarity, and it epitomizes the cognitivist orientation of analytic aesthetics.

On the other side, insofar as we can identify distinct alternatives, are traditions associated with what is commonly called continental aesthetics, movements that include aspects and influences coming from phenomenology, hermeneutics, post-structuralism, and post-modernism, with additional influences from critical theory, feminism, and the philosophy of culture. Art here tends to be seen as “the sensuous embodiment of conscious enquiry,” affecting our understanding of how we relate and “interact with other objects and minds”.²³ Emphasis is placed on the body, bodily sensation, and our senses, and on the historical and cultural influences that pervade our understanding. Continental aesthetics embraces diverse movements, certainly, but a feature frequently found in this work is a focus on subjectivity, consciousness, and inter-subjectivity in the process of aesthetic understanding.

These are trends in aesthetic thought and do not define the parameters of the work of any particular scholar, nor are they sharply divided. Differences occur in emphasis and approach, and trends and resemblances are present and apparent both within and between diverse approaches. Yet as conceptual orientations, both suffer from partiality and incompleteness. The philosophical investigations of Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze, Guattari, and other more recent scholars, together with critical insights from psychology and sociology, offer the basis for a somewhat different view of the world of aesthetic understanding. This is a vision that is able to accommodate both the consistency and variability of aesthetic perception. How can we best conceptualize this understanding of aesthetic judgment? Let us consider an account of aesthetic experience that is compatible with this body of empirical data and provides a more comprehensive understanding of judgments of taste.

21 This work is discussed more extensively in *Sensibility and Sense*, chs. 1-4.

22 Cf. Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958).

23 *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Clive Cazeaux (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), iv-vii.

Aesthetic engagement and aesthetic naturalism

The concept of aesthetic engagement signifies human embeddedness and active participation in the experience of appreciation.²⁴ Rather than adopting a sense of distance in contemplating a landscape or an art object, engaged appreciation encourages a close involvement characterized by experiential reciprocity. In place of a separation between viewer and landscape, it affirms a continuity that is both physical and experiential. Aesthetic appreciation encourages such personal engagement. While associated with art, this experience is both encouraged and especially vivid in landscape appreciation, where it becomes not only visual but overtly somatic. Such appreciation is an experience of physical presence that is implicitly or overtly participatory, projecting somatic awareness by virtual projection into the landscape or by actual movement through by it.

When we make perceptual continuity central in aesthetic appreciation, we transform the problem of aesthetic judgment. In place of a dualism of viewer and landscape, of perceiver and object, each of these reciprocates the other, and we have a situation in the form of an aesthetic field, as just described. This field is characterized by an actively perceiving human participant within and part of a sensory environment. Every perceiver contributes to the situation, not only through perceptual activity, but with the invisible dimensions of past experience, memory, knowledge, and conditioning. A whole range of personal and cultural factors colors our active sensory experience, whether or not this is intentional or conscious. This structural order of the aesthetic field is colored by the character of particular occasions.

From such occasions of aesthetic appreciation, judgments of aesthetic value are formed, and we cognize these aesthetic events in the form of aesthetic judgments. Beauty then becomes the positive aesthetic designation of a particular aesthetic field, and the sublime a different, distinctive, usually positive designation. Of course each situation has individual features that vary with time, place, and participants, and our judgments of value are similarly variable. To the extent that occasions and participants share significant features, the aesthetic judgments formed of them will tend to agree. But time, experience, and individual variability introduce irreducible differences, and because no two occasions are exact duplicates, judgments will rarely, if ever, be unanimous. From an empirical standpoint, the variability of aesthetic judgment is no disability; it simply reflects the motile conditions of appreciative experience. Only when a cognitive template is imposed on such experience is variability considered a defect. Universality is a logical desideratum, not an empirical one, and generality is entirely sufficient.

For at the same time, the actual extent of variability is not infinite. Despite social and psychological dissimilarities, humans' biologically based sensory capacities are very much alike. To the extent that these resemblances are reinforced by a common culture, agreement will be the greater, and when there is no common culture, there will be less agreement. In all this, however, disruptive factors lie in the very

24 See Arnold Berleant, *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); and subsequent publications.

differences and influences that Hume noted. Insofar as experience and knowledge are added to interest and perceptual sensitivity, these will be reflected in expert judgment. And variation in expert judgment is no disability: like all judgment, this, too, is open to reflective deliberation and empirical testing.

This view carries important implications, not only for landscape appreciation but for judgments of taste in general. The experience of landscapes, and the experience of nature more generally, identifies a relationship even more than a relation, a situation that finds the human participant embedded within and part of every experiential context. Thus in speaking about engaging landscapes, we identify not only an aesthetics of environment but also a naturalistic metaphysics. How we experience landscapes involves not just an inner feeling or a purely sensory event or a particular kind of aesthetic object. It is rather an embodiment of how we live in the world and of the kind of world we inhabit.

But how we live in the world and how we think and talk about it are often quite different from each other. Formed by a cultural environment, we imbibe a consciousness of its order as part of our growing awareness. Even in a society that allows discussion and debate, the possibility of a critical reconsideration of its parameters of thought is slow to develop and unsure, even more perhaps than open reflection on religious or moral beliefs. Under relatively stable conditions, when cultural change moves imperceptibly, reaction to such convictions, internalized along with other customs, habits, and ideological configurations, rarely emerges for re-evaluation to the point of emancipation or even of conscious acceptance. Even violent opposition may not be a sign of emancipation from a cultural ideology but merely a symptom of discontent. It is difficult to combine impartiality and emotional neutrality with intellectual independence in order to identify and critically consider customary moral and religious beliefs and coolly appraise alternatives.

Understanding judgments of taste in a way that recognizes the influence and force of invitational qualities, affordances, reciprocity, engagement, and the pervasive influence of culture offers not only a conceptual alternative but a living alternative, one that provides an empirical grounding for critical reconsideration. Such an account can accommodate the facts of appreciative experience and judgment without feeling distress over their variability. It is based on perceptual experience rather than on the requirement to conform to an *a priori* logical or epistemic criterion of universality.

The extent of agreement is thus an empirical matter. It is no surprise that its scope is considerable, even though far from universal, considering the biological and cultural commonalities that bind people together. Wittgenstein made a similar point when he averred that “It is...only where there is ‘agreement in ... form of life’ that there can be shared understanding of the meanings of words, gestures, practices ...”²⁵

25 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), 88e, §241. The text here is, “‘So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?’ – It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.” Quoted by David E. Cooper in *A Philosophy of Gardens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 112.

Conclusion

I am not proposing that we abandon altogether efforts to gain aesthetic agreement, but only that we reconsider the kind of contribution that philosophy is able to make. Can we continue to maintain that beauty is something objective and universal, independent of empirical evidence? If so, then we risk being circular. On what other grounds can we retain the belief in the objectivity of beauty? Metaphysical? Mere assertion has no claim on acceptance. Whatever contribution philosophy can make must be germane to the conditions of its inquiry.

It is not necessary to fully accept Bourdieu's reduction of taste to invidious social distinctions to acknowledge the force of his basic claim. Philosophy, despite its origins and conduct as a discipline seeking eternal truths, cannot rise above its cultural origins. It cannot legislate itself out of its social and historical context and it is no more immune to such conditions than any other study. What is true for philosophy is especially applicable to aesthetics, which is grounded in perceptual experience and where we encounter a plurality of judgments of taste as variable as the conditions under which they are made. Distinctions of taste, like all judgments of experience, are subject to the multiple somatic and cultural forces that influence them. Any single factor, including social class, is unlikely to wholly determine the judgment. The same mix of differences that Hume identified in the critic affects everyone.

When we question the presumption that universality is cognitively necessary and is grounded in an independent, objective world, we arrive at a different understanding of judgments of scenic beauty and of taste in general. Any discomfort we may feel from abandoning the quest for universality is the consequence of mistaken expectations, the product of a culture that has misunderstood not just the conclusions of the quest but its very conditions. Further, it requires us to reconsider the contribution that philosophic inquiry can make in such matters.²⁶ Does empirical evidence require that we abandon philosophical claims to objectivity?

26 In a similar critique of disinterestedness, Bourdieu noted that "[e]mpirical" interest enters into the composition of the most disinterested pleasures of pure taste, because the principle of the pleasure derived from these refined games for refined players lies, in the last analysis, in the denied experience of a social relationship of membership and exclusion ... [Positions regarded as inferior are] stigmatized as 'empiricism' or 'historicism' (no doubt because they threaten the very existence of philosophical activity) ..." Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 499.

Bourdieu sees the hierarchy of taste, from vulgar to refined, as reflecting the distinctions of social class, and the intellectual apparatus elaborating and justifying those distinctions as embodying the very same class distinctions. Aesthetics, and philosophy more generally, he claims, are not free intellectual inquiry but are class-prejudicial from the start. Philosophy itself embodies the distinctions that mark social relations in the normativity of its own distinctions.

"In short, the philosophical sense of distinction is another form of the visceral disgust at vulgarity which defines pure taste as an internalized social relationship, a social relationship made flesh, and a philosophically distinguished reading of the *Critique of Judgment* cannot be expected to uncover the social relationship of distinction at the heart of a work that is rightly regarded as the very symbol of philosophical distinction." *Op. cit.*, pp. 499-500. I offered a similar critique of the history of ethical theory in A. Berleant, "The Social Postulate of Theoretical Ethics," *Journal of Value Inquiry*, IV, 1 (January 1970): 1-16.

At issue here is the question of what evidence is relevant. The history of philosophy displays many instances of grave discomfort over empirical evidence. From Plato to Descartes to the present, philosophers in the rationalistic tradition have too often dismissed empirical data as defective in principle. This is not the place to rehearse the long debate between rationalism and empiricism. It is necessary only to recognize that aesthetic inquiry, grounded necessarily in perceptual experience, cannot selectively choose (as Kant did) only the evidence that is compatible with its rationalistic presuppositions. As aesthetics is empirical, it must accommodate empirical data, and philosophical assertions that do not acknowledge such evidence cannot escape being irrelevant. Re-casting our understanding of judgments of taste, we may have to revise our understanding of philosophical aesthetics itself. What, then, can philosophy contribute here?

With its sensitivity to the influence of presuppositions and its sharpened conceptual faculties, philosophical criticism is a powerful tool that has wide applicability. One function of philosophical query is its time-honored critical one of cleaning out the Augean stables, to which this essay hopes to contribute. But aesthetics can also have a constructive function. Comparative aesthetics is one area in which discerning vision can identify resemblances and commonalities among diverse traditions and take note of irreconcilable differences. The growing interest in identifying contrasting features in Western and Eastern aesthetics offers a broad brush whose individual strokes may reveal illuminating subtleties.²⁷ For the past century and longer, artists in the West have drawn increasingly on non-Western cultures: African sculpture, Javanese music, Aboriginal graphics, Chinese gardens, Japanese film, indigenous architectures, and regional literature. Perhaps our philosophical sensibilities can be enriched as our aesthetic ones have been.

For this variability, far from being a shortcoming, actually provides a rich range of data that should be illuminating to aestheticians, as well as to sociologists, psychologists, historians, and anthropologists of art. Aesthetics is a field whose subject is the endlessly varied and complex domains of human experience, where scholars and scientists should acknowledge, respect, and study the varieties of the aesthetic without prejudice: How varied are the standards within and among different cultures? What similarities do they possess and how do they differ? How have they changed over time and from outside influences? What significance do the answers to these questions have for the cultures in which these standards have arisen? Can we identify the varied effects of biological commonalities and of the cultural appropriation of genetic predispositions? Are the structure and course of appreciative experience similar among individuals and cultures? “[T]he penalty of ignoring ... experience ... is that human thought becomes the victim of its own abstractions and ends by denying the dynamic possibilities of nature and life which it was originally called upon to explain and guide.”²⁸ Scenic beauty provides a vivid test for

27 Cf. Ken-ichi Sasaki, *Asian Aesthetics* (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2010).

28 David Bidney, “The Concept of Culture and Some Cultural Fallacies,” in *Theoretical Anthropology* (New York: Columbia U. P., 1953), 47.

the variability of these judgments. And while we end with more questions than we started, there is a significant difference: these questions can, in principle, be answered.

3 On the utility of a universal's fiction

Liliana Coutinho

In today's artistic and philosophical discussions it is important to ask ourselves if the judgment of taste's pretension to universality is still acceptable. However, we should be aware that this question is emerging from a political situation. By 'political' I understand the experience of living together in a human community. In the present historical situation, where different perspectives and ways of world making are constantly and actively in contact, are our cultural norms still valid? Are our conceptual constructions still valuable and operative while we are speaking with someone who was raised in a different tradition, with different ways of perceiving and of figuring the relationship between individual, community and environmental settings in general? Is it possible to make her/him, not only understand my way of experiencing, but also formulate the same judgment of value that my experience impels me to formulate? If it is, should we presuppose a *sensus communis*, which, universally establishes this possibility? If not, should we accept the notion of relativism?

In fact, I think it's unproductive to think the particularity of a singular experience as antagonist to the concept of universal. The diversity implied in relativism does not need to be opposed to universality, nor need we subjugate one to another. In order to understand this better, we should see how the question of knowing whether the judgment of taste is essentially universal or particular and strictly relative to those who experience it, goes hand in hand with another: that of knowing whether our subjective perceptions and judgments can have an effect and pretend to be accepted in the common reality of a community, or if they are to be restricted to the domain of the individual subject. To suppose a strict separation between what concerns a subject, what concerns a particular community and what concerns the universal is to deviate thought from a productive enterprise: the understanding of how one interrelates with the other; how the particular and the universal are both necessary poles of a psycho-geographic figure of the world that happens to be created by Western culture.

The simple, or historic, truth is that, with different opinions, and reclaiming different reasons, we all have to live together in this world. The question we need

to put to ourselves is a clear one: how shall we do that? This is important, and not only in terms of a wider intercultural exchange. Even inside the culture that created it, the concept of the universal never found a way to accommodate itself peacefully. A culture that is alive always finds a way to escape from the trap of mixing up the universal with the kind of sameness that characterizes uniformity of opinions and narrows the imagination, transforming singular ways of living – both individual and cultural – in illegitimate social expressions. If we don't remember this, we risk being confounded with those whom Franz Fanon called, in a context of intercultural relationship dominated by the model of colonization, "well-meaning souls who in cultural congresses point out to him [*the native*] the specificity and wealth of Western values"¹. While thinking about the possibilities of sharing a common world, perhaps it will be useful to remember that 'sharing' is an ambiguous word: it means both communion and division. This 'being together' implies then the good use of distance, in order to avoid over-hasty projections, which could be confounded with real exchange and knowledge of a common terrain of entente.

What I will try to suggest during the rest of my chapter is that the concept of the universal can be, among others, a useful tool in this actual context of globalization, considering this concept from the point of view of the 'mechanics' presented in the Kantian judgment of taste. I will do that with the help of the work of two thinkers: Hannah Arendt, in her last notes on politics, and François Jullien, a French philosopher and translator of Chinese poetry whose work is a contribution to the cross-cultural understanding of Chinese and European culture. We will see that our norms, our pretensions, can be as valid as the norms of other cultures. Nonetheless, perhaps our understanding of them needs to be reformulated and enlarged.

Let us start with a brief reminder of how the judgment of taste relates itself to the idea of universality. I use the expression 'judgment of taste' rather than 'aesthetic judgment' and I do it intentionally, calling attention to Kant's text, when he says that the judgment of taste is *an* aesthetic one, not *the* aesthetic one. It is quite usual to see these two expressions used indistinctly, as if they were one and the same. Even if the reasons for this mixture were an interesting field of research, this is not the place to disentangle this question from its practical implications. However, I would like to focus on this distinction because thinking about the judgment of taste as an event belonging to a larger field of experience will allow us to consider the reverberation of this occurrence in a larger context (outside the artistic field, for instance). In the beginning of §1 of *Analytic of the Beautiful*, while introducing a clear distinction between the judgment of taste and a judgment of knowledge, Kant says:

If we wish to discern whether anything is beautiful or not, we do not refer the representation of it to the object by means of understanding with a view to cognition, but by means of the imagination (acting perhaps in conjunction with understanding)

1 Franz Fanon, *Concerning Violence* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 10.

we refer the representation to the subject and its feeling of pleasure or displeasure. The judgment of taste, therefore, is not a cognitive judgment, and so not logical, but is aesthetic – which means that it is one whose determining ground *cannot be other than subjective*.²

The judgment of taste is an aesthetic judgment because it concerns the subject who is judging, rather than the proprieties of the object that triggers the sentiment in the subject, freeing the object of the necessity of triggering that specific feeling, and freeing the subject from understanding the feeling as a logical and necessary reaction to some proprieties presented in the object. The judgment of taste is thus one event in the larger field of the aesthetic judgments, i.e. judgments concerning subjective experience.

Nevertheless, Kant does not allow us to understand this judgment in terms of a closed and non-relational conception of subjectivity. In this event, judging from the point of view of taste is also to pretend that our own judgment, directly connected with the experience we are actually having, gains an objective character in order to justify its existence in a way that goes beyond its own experience, in order to find an accord with the experience of the other. Divergence and quarrel may occur because, as an aesthetic experience, those who designate an object as beautiful cannot go beyond the limits of their subjective experience, but yet want to see the evidence of their perception recognized by others. However, they will not be allowed to go beyond claim and desire. Since their interlocutor does not feel the same about it, the conflict starts and discussion takes place. We are never allowed to know, with absolute certitude and objectivity, this space where beauty or an accomplished agreement is effectively a universally recognized evidence. This is because, for Kant, to have knowledge we need to be in possession of the conditions of possibility allowing the experience to occur. But these *a priori* conditions are absent in what concerns beauty and harmony, that is to say, in judgment of taste. There is no universally recognized form or figure of beauty prepared to articulate the experience and to forge a common accord, no exterior concept to achieve (because no particular interest allows us to make the bridge between sentiment and concept) or judge in accordance with. Consequently, the experience for which Kant opens a space of possibility through the formulation of his judgment of taste is, not only one that evades the established conditions of possibility for knowledge, but also one that may go beyond our habits.

This specificity of judgment of taste being without concept is the starting point to understand a philosophical procedure that will be useful to keep in mind: the difference of status between the use of the concept of universality in logic and its use in the judgment of taste. In the latter, the universal is not determined by logical necessity, as in practical and moral judgment; the status of the universal in the judgment of taste is not a logical one – which means that it is impossible to extract

2 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, transl. James Creed Meredith (eBooks@Adelaide, 2008). Italics mine.

it from actual and concrete experience. As we will see, it is in this autonomy from the determinacy and interest present in classical logic – which extracts itself from actual experience – that will reside the utility of judgment of taste in the political domain of action and in the consideration of different points of view, so necessary to intercultural exchange.

The universal to which the judgment of taste tends is nothing more than this: a pretension, something we *believe* we have the right to claim. But, following Kant's text, how can we conceive that we have the right to claim it? In his essay on common sense, Canadian art historian Jean-Philippe Uzel points to a 'constitutive illusion' that is at the basis of the answer to this question. He remembers the procedures of Kant's philosophy in creating and avoiding at the same time an illusion that is structural to the judgment of taste, remembering that the pretension to universality is based on *believing* in the existence of an objective aesthetical propriety – objective in the sense of being exterior and independent from individual experience. Quoting Gérard Genette, he proceeds to show why Kant had a strong interest in keeping this illusory image of objectivity:

to create a doubt about this belief in the judgment of taste's universality would not only oblige Kant to reconsider his project of systematization of the three critiques, but also precipitate him into what he most feared: relativism.³

Starting from a philosophical framework in which 'subject' and 'object' are separated from each other, Kant sees this illusion as useful in order to avoid the relativistic conception that allows each participant in the discussion to fall into their own solipsistic judgment, undermining any agreement or common ground of sense. This constitutive illusion is exposed in §7 of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*:

As regards the agreeable, every one concedes that his judgment, which he bases on a private feeling, and in which he declares that an object pleases him, is restricted merely to himself personally. (...) The beautiful stands on quite a different footing. It would, on the contrary, be ridiculous if any one who plumed himself on his taste were to think of justifying himself by saying: "This object (...) is beautiful *for me*." For (...) when he puts a thing on a pedestal and calls it beautiful, he demands the same delight from others. He judges not merely for himself, but for all men, and then speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things.⁴

I want to call your attention to this "*as if it were a property of things*" (italics mine). Why does a philosopher known for being always in defense of truth accept this illusion of the 'as if'? What is his interest in this image? With it, Kant postulates a shared common sense, a kind of territory to which we converge. When judging not

3 Jean-Philippe Uzel, "Perdre le sens commun – Comparaison des approches descriptive et évaluative de l'œuvre d'art", http://www.uqtr.quebec.ca/AE/vol_2/uzel.html#r (accessed : 15th September 2009)

4 Kant, *Critique*. Italics mine.

only for him, but also for the others, this Kantian individual needs to have the possibility to move to another plane, different from the plane determined by his necessities in what concerns his own singular experience, and to think *according* to the universal. He needs to think within a common space wherein both he, himself, and others, with their own singular experiences, can actually coexist – a space for which this ‘as if it were a propriety’ acts as a sign. The truth of the illusion created by this ‘as if’ is not a substantial one, related to a substantial property indicating a necessity and able to subsume all differences under the same formulation of actual harmony. It is a relational one: a truth in whose existence the actions of the individual are strongly implicated; a truth that depends on him and that appears in action. So, when speaking about this ‘as if it was universal’, we should, perhaps, instead of calling it an *illusion* – an erroneous perception of reality –, speak about *fiction* – an imaginative creation, an invention that will be a tool with which to shape the reality of human relationships. Consequently, to emphasize this fictional aspect of reality is not the same as making them both coincide, and neither is it intended to diminish the importance of reality or of truth, as a current and too narrow interpretation of fiction may suggest. It is, instead, to recover the constructive aspect that lies at this notion’s etymological origin: *fictio* – *facere* – *to make*. It also considers the impact of fiction on the formation of reality, and the latter as a process that requires the use of imagination. In that sense, fiction becomes important for its effectiveness, something that was underlined by the philosopher Hans Vaihinger for whom fiction has a constitutive role in knowledge. Addressing the question of the functional aspect of fictions, Vaihinger writes in his book *The philosophy of ‘As if’ – A system of the theoretical, practical and religious fictions of mankind*:

(...) consciously false conceptions and judgments are applied in all sciences; and it shows that these scientific Fictions are to be distinguished from Hypotheses. The latter are assumptions which are probable, assumptions the truth of which can be proved by further experience. They are therefore verifiable. Fictions are never verifiable, for they are hypotheses which are known to be false, but which are employed because of their utility.⁵

The ‘as if’ in the judgment of taste performs two functions. First, it acts as a guarantee that we will not confuse the image, or the judgment, that we make of the experience, with the experience itself, even if the first is part of the second. Second, as a procedure of distancing ourselves from the subjective experience, without ever leaving its terrain, which Arendt found so important to political reflection, and which allowed François Jullien to think about the concept of the universal as a tool for today’s historical experience of sharing a common earth.

As a French philosopher specialized in Greek and Chinese philosophy and poetry, François Jullien shows how different the perception of the same object can be

5 H. Vaihinger, *The philosophy of ‘As if’ – A system of the theoretical, practical and religious fictions of mankind*, transl. C.K. Ogden (Keegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 2nd ed. 1935), xli.

from one culture to another. Nevertheless, he does not do that in order to show some static limits of our knowledge that will push us to a relativistic turn. Under a dynamic view of identity as the interplay of different elements, he shows how these differences can in fact enlarge our field of perception and, with that, our comprehension of the world and of ourselves, opening new spaces for thought and action. We can find an example of this in his analysis of the experience of ‘insipidness’⁶ in classical Chinese poetry. A depreciatory judgment in critical Western thought, to say that a poem is ‘insipid’ has been a quite positive judgment during a certain period of Chinese literary criticism. To say that a poem is insipid was to say that the poet was successful in building the poem in a way that creates at its core a space of availability that welcomes what is still to come. What a perceptive transfiguration most Westerners would need to undergo, in order to recognize in insipidness the taste of potentiality and the richness of flavors that are still to come!

In a recent work⁷, he does the same operation of clarifying the comprehension of a concept, but this time, he does that with the concept of the ‘universal’, distinguishing it from the ‘uniform’ and the ‘common’. The universal differs from the uniformity prompted by ideological political constructs and supported by market economy-based relationships. It differs also from the common, an eminently political concept, because it concerns “that in which we take part, which is shared and in which we are involved”⁸. This distinction is particularly important if we remember that the claim to universality in the judgment of taste is a claim to the universality of subjectivity (as we can read in §6 of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*). If we confound the universal with the common, we risk, for instance, thinking that a regime of belonging and participation that is common to members of a community is universally projectable onto others, forgetting other ways of sharing and organizing daily and political life. In addition, if we confound it with the uniform, we would only be imposing our own views, reducing to a single perception the whole of the world of experience. Here, we will give attention to Jullien’s view of the concept ‘universal’. He begins by showing how usually this concept claims to be a logical concept, presenting itself in two different levels: a weak and a strong one. The axis that unites these two levels of the universal is *necessity*: it has to be like that. The ‘weak’ one is the ordinary, empirical meaning of the universal, which acts by forming a general judgment by induction of what was extensively observed. On the other hand, the ‘strong’ level of the concept presents what he calls an ‘exigency of reason’. In the strong sense, the concept of the universal serves as both an imperative judgment and a prescription:

we pretend from the beginning, before any confirmation by experience, that something must be like that. Without any exception, we affirm not only that the thing was

6 François Jullien, *Eloge de la fadeur* (Paris Ed. Philippe Picquier, 1991).

7 François Jullien, *De l’universel, de l’uniforme, du commun et du dialogue entre les cultures* (Paris: Fayard, 2008).

8 “ce à quoi on prend part, qui est en partage et à quoi on participe”, Jullien, *De l’universel*, 39.

like that until now, but also that it *cannot* be in a different way (...) only what is *a priori* necessary can be universal in law.⁹

We can explain this way of conceiving universality by pointing to the influence of Kant's philosophy in general thought. We know that the problem of cultural diversity was not a topic of concern in the construction of Kant's philosophy, which he carried out by exploring the philosophical consequences of Newton's universal law of nature, where *a priori* universality was a legitimating factor of knowledge.

Jullien proposes his interpretation of the universal, focusing himself on its 'strong' level. This will allow him to conceive the universal not as a substantial reality, but as an instrument of regulation that, once its applications are understood, will have a strong impact on the ethics of ordinary life. But he does that by undermining from the inside any possibility of using this concept in order to impose our views on others, inducing in them what can be defined as a one-sided perspective. In it, he underlines the importance of understanding the concept of the universal, with its implications of removing ourselves from experience and from the relative, as an *enacted* action. Jullien places this action of abstracting ourselves from our subjective experience in two scenarios – images that will act as aids for this action. The first shows a landscape with a stable rock that stands on the peak of a high cliff, rising over the turbulent and scattered sea of human experience in order to see it from a clarifying distance. The second image presents to us with the horizon.

I'll start with the stable rock on the high cliff. Let us imagine someone, who wants to think universally, climbing this cliff in order to place himself on the top of the rock and stare towards the reality underneath him. Extracted from the uncertainty and disorder of experience on the plain, he traces a clear image, measuring, depicting places for things, persons, events and ways of belonging to it. Although Jullien acknowledges this place as the habitual one of "the 'evidence' of science", where objectivity is something valid every time, under all circumstances, usually circularly justified by the premises that science itself presents, he asks if, when we change to a different behavioral domain, from the classical scientific necessity of knowing an objective truth, towards the sphere of social relationships, this kind of circularity in the comprehension of knowledge is still valid. If we answer this question positively, he goes further, asking us if we *should* consider our coexistence under these circular terms. Doing it, we are asked to take a position and to observe its practical consequences: what kind of social world are we constructing by defending behavioral premises valid always and forever, independently from the uncertainty of circumstances and the specificities of the social agents in place? Understood in this way, universality would be an instrument for imposing ideological configurations to social relationships, rather than one allowing the open and conscientious development of them. Even if Jullien puts in question this circular usage of the universal, he does not follow it, as he could logically do, by dismissing the concept of

9 Jullien, *De l'universel*, 18.

the universal from the discussion. He shows that what we call *philosophy* was always something that oscillated between the cliff and the sea and, through this movement, these two poles were created. In this theatre of thought, we need the category of the universal to consider the particular; these two terms are co-constituents and we put questions to one having the other as a reference. Furthermore, through a cross-cultural and comparative study, he suggests that this question of the universal can be a singularity of European culture, a singularity that we need not abandon to accept the singularities of others, because it is a circumstantial part of our cultural and thought history. A singularity that appeared as a procedure of abstraction that supervened the birth of philosophy, while this latter was moving away from poetry-transmitted Greek wisdom. In order to keep the concept of the universal useful, he suggests that we see it as an attribute, rather than as a logical necessity.

We can now see that there is another way to understand the place attributed to universality, not as an axiom or a foundation, not as an absolute extraction from subjective experience, but as a pole in the dynamics of thought and of experience. A pole enounced in Kant by his 'as if'. This place of someone who wants to think from the universal perspective can only be understood effectively if we leave behind any ordinary romantic evocations that the image may inspire, and I think that adherence to the experience implied in the 'mechanics' of the judgment of taste is important to grasp it. It is not a matter of the philosopher isolating himself to look for some kind of truth concerning that from which he isolated himself. Similarly, we need to avoid making any strictly scientific-objectivist projections on this image. This 'peak of the cliff' is not an objective position extracted from all experience, just as the universal in judgment of taste is not a property of an object. It is not necessary to know what we know only when in the middle of the sea. It is an image, an enacted gesture, indicating a possible action of someone who has submerged their feet completely into the sea – to keep the image – in order to acknowledge more than one's own particular position; it is a double position that we can actually take, in order to consider more than our own point of view, more than our habitudes or interests. The image used as a scenario, of someone who climbs a cliff in order to have a view of the global is an image that could also be used to illustrate the feeling of empathy, the action of doubling ourselves, in order to be able to put ourselves in the position of others, never forgetting our own position.¹⁰ The universal, as a fiction in action, can be important as a tool to exercise this feeling.

Hannah Arendt, whose philosophy emerged from quite practical concerns originated by the Second World War and the Cold War, saw this capacity "to think by placing oneself in the place of every other human being"¹¹, which she recognizes in judgment of taste, as a necessity for all political thought and action, because it allows us the possibility of putting ourselves above our particular and subjective conditions of judgment. Far from being objectivity without subject, this capacity

10 Alain Berthoz, with others, explored this possibility in Alain Berthoz and Gérard Jorland, *Empathie* (Paris: Odile Jacobs, 2004).

11 Hannah Arendt, *Qu'est-ce que la politique* (Paris: Points, Editions du Seuil, 1995), 144.

implies being able to judge without criteria, to form a public accord. Arendt supports this capacity of judging without criteria by the evidence of the object that is under judgment, as well as the “aptitude to judge”, which is closer to the “capacity to decide than to the capacity to order and subsume”.¹² The capacity of judging without criteria implies the faculty of always keeping a foot on this “no man’s place” (simultaneously, the place of all humanity) that is the peak of the cliff, as it implies developing one’s capacity to recognize criteria that are emerging from the experience itself – which is not pure and ineffable, being also constituted by fragments of language and logic. The discussion that emerges from this action of thinking as if we were in the place of the other is part of the principle of being together and a path to relational knowledge.

We could say that to think at the top of the cliff is not the same as putting ourselves in the place of the other. But to literally place ourselves in the place of the others is indeed impossible. This movement of thought is mostly something that allows us to organize and to be aware of our experience, while it is happening. We can ‘imagine’: to create an image, knowing that this representation is transitory but nonetheless an important moment in the path of knowledge and of experience because it acts as a trigger, opening a space that is available for the other, as well as for transformation within us. The universal exists in it ‘as if’ it was a place from where we could perceive these interrelations, a provisory image that congregates in itself this postulated property that allows the accord between subjectivities, between differences. The fact that this reality is postulated, and is not an actual one, acts as a way of not letting all those who participate in the dispute move away from the terrain of their particular experience while actively engaged in an intersubjective action. It is a constraint that stops us from erasing the actual differences from our conscience, while showing us the arrogance of certitude of our own perspective, and helping us keep in mind the transitory and relational nature of beliefs, perceptions and scientific measurements. This does not mean it impels us to doubt these perceptions. Instead, it demands from us an understanding of how certainties are always connected to the contingencies of experience, instead of founding an axiom that explains things in an absolute manner. Otherwise, new interactions which can steer us away from what can easily lead to conflict and move us towards a creative interplay will not be allowed.

As a fictional image, we have shown the universal to be an active figure of convergence and an agent for thought. As we said before, Jullien staged another imaginary metaphor for this concept, a figure that clearly diverges from the possible circularity that easily institutes itself between the sea and the peak of the cliff: seeing universality as a horizon. “The universal is in front of us as an horizon”, he said while speaking about the universality of human rights as an instrument of regulation that serves this horizon, which, by its abstraction, is appropriable by different cultures, being formally “indefinitely reconfigurable (...) and transcultur-

12 Arendt, *Qu'est-ce que la politique*, 54.

ally without limits".¹³ This plasticity serves as a guarantee of using them as a tool and as a possibility of protesting against any menace to humanity, anywhere, from any society. As an abstract and unconditional zone of convergence, the horizon is an intentional image, but also a limit. As all horizons do, it moves away when we move toward it: we see that the limit is not where we thought it was. We walk and the distance persists, but we keep walking nonetheless. What could be perceived as deceptive is actually a productive enterprise because it prompts exploration and interaction with the worldly space that stays in between, linking the one who walks with the horizon, and allowing for actual knowledge to develop. While on those routes, perhaps we can start to build the *theorein* – “to see the country” – that this experience of passing through different points of views, different judgments of taste, different sensibilities, is asking for. However, we must keep the following in mind: our intention is not to create a greater, unchanging, unified representation of how the world should work and call it global, or a minimal synthesis that presents itself with the rigid evidence of necessity, but, when necessary, to construct conceptual instruments that can help us enlarge our experience and perceptions, in order to guide and assist our actions, as well as to permit the recognition of singularities and different senses of belonging. A theory that is aware of its lack of self-evidence, and that needs to be interwoven with experience at the same level, without wanting to legitimate it from the outside.

To go deeper in this productive interplay between fiction and knowledge, I will finish by evoking briefly a traditional Arabic tale, where we can find an image of a horizon as a deceptive, but productive image. Its name is *The child and the horizon*. A ten-year-old child nicknamed ‘Dhouibi’ – the small wolf – was known in the village by his disquietude: he was always running from here to there, searching for something nobody ever knew what it was. From his adventures in the village, he always brought something with him, a small object, a tiny bone ... his small treasures. What this child loved the most was to climb to a higher place and look at the horizon. One day, without saying anything to his parents, he decided to go away from his village and meet the horizon. Doing this, he passed through a village much more beautiful than the one where he was born. The horizon was still not there. He went on and on and finally arrived at a place, in the desert, where he found a meditative eremite who gave him a place to sleep. The next morning, he asked the eremite if the horizon was still too far away. The man told him that he also was looking for it, had never got to reach it but had the feeling that he was starting to know it well. He got to know it just by staying there, in quiet meditation. The child was astonished. The man explained to him that the horizon was not far away: it was there, present inside their heads. “We all are running after the horizon and we struggle to find it. / It’s because it’s the limit. You will understand it later, gradually. You are now progressing, Dhouibi, because you had the courage to walk as far as

13 Jullien, *De l’universel*, 182.

here. / And now, go back to your village: you will find there are lots of horizons that you didn't know before."¹⁴

This folk tale points to something that needs to be explored in a different occasion, to how the subject is always contributing to the formation of his objects of experience, of thought, and of the world that he inhabits – we see that this *horizon*, which is so far away and attracts him so much, is indeed inside Dhouibi. The space of multiplicity in favor of which this horizon opens itself is indeed the same that allows the singularity of Dhouibi, as well as the wonder and responsibility of his own vision. We do not need to escape to other landscapes, even if we need to know them. We can, as an exigency of reason, or as a critical and vital human gesture, imagine ourselves in this place of accessibility from where we can perceive others and ourselves on the same plane of actual exchange and interaction, without at the same time ever leaving the terrain of the knowledge that is only possible by being actively engaged in and aware of our own actual experience. In other words: without the need to put away the cultural place that helped to shape us, with its figurative and conceptual constructions as a material to organize our lives in a common territory, with multiple meanings. This, I think, will allow us to know how we interrelate with the world, in order to take full conscience of the – historical, political, emotional, etc. – possibilities of our own specific position, and also to find the mobility, potentiality and multiplicity that inhabit the heart of the structures that define us and our culture.

14 « L'enfant et l'horizon », in Paul André, *Contes des sages du désert* (Paris: Seuil, 2007), 102.

4 Being part of the history of art

Defining non-Western art

Annelies Monseré

Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century, art history did not seem to be of much relevance to the philosophy of art. Art was defined in terms of its function (mostly the function of art was taken to be ‘providing aesthetic pleasure through form’) and was judged upon that basis. Not only avant-garde art challenged these ‘simple’ essentialist definitions. It was also urged that we cannot identify and judge non-Western artworks through our narrow Western paradigms like form and non-functional aesthetic pleasure. In order to understand the significance and to judge the value of an artwork, we need to know its historical context. The relevance of the history of art to the philosophy of art is fully acknowledged by Arthur Danto and Jerrold Levinson. They both formulate historical theories of art. It is claimed by Jerrold Levinson that art hood is dependent on the artifact’s relationship to past artworks, and thus to the history of art. Arthur Danto argues that (the resolution of) the history of art made it possible to define art philosophically. The question I want to address here is the place of non-Western art in these historical theories: how are these artifacts defined and valued as art?

It will be shown that the place of non-Western art in these theories depends (1) on whether non-Western artworks are included in or excluded from art history and (2) on the view of history that is held. First, I will explore the attitude towards non-Western art within the philosophy of art and art history and the changing relationship between the two fields. This change made possible a fuller appreciation of non-Western art, without ending up in relativism. Then, I will examine Levinson’s definition of art and clarify what this definition entails for the categorization of non-Western art. I will point out that Levinson’s actual starting point is the Western history of art. It follows that non-Western artifacts are easily categorized as ‘art-like’, thus, not as art in the full sense. This categorization has damaging consequences for the evaluation of these artifacts. Thirdly, I will turn to Arthur Danto’s theory of art and show how it can account more fully for non-Western art, but is equally exclusionary as it excludes virtually all non-Western art from the history of art.

Art history and the philosophy of art

Contemporary philosophies of art need to take position regarding globalization; how can images, texts and sounds from other cultures be defined. In this respect, the philosophy of art faces similar problems as (art) history. On the one hand, the history of other cultures can be seen through the matrix of Western history. Consequently, the histories of other cultures tend to become variations on the master narrative of European history with its scientific revolutions, Enlightenment and progress.¹ Non-Western cultures will mostly turn out to be “figures of lack”.² Seen through the matrix of Western history, their revolutions and progress will turn out to be less significant. Similarly, if we define and understand the artistic endeavors of other cultures through the matrix of Western art history, we make the art hood of these artifacts fully depend on this history. As these artifacts do not completely match the Western history of art, they will be labeled as ‘artful’ or ‘art-like’, but not as art in the full sense. As such, non-Western is excluded from the centre of the domain of art. On the other hand, the non-Western cultures can be perceived as profoundly different, only to be understood in their own terms. Contextualists take this stance: they claim that all artifacts should be interpreted and judged within their own historical and cultural context. It is remarkable that this leads to a (different) form of cultural exclusion. Contextualists turn non-Western art into something totally alien to our artistic practices and that often implies making it unequal or else disregarding it.³ Contextualism, by judging art along cultural lines, can also have profound conservative consequences. Firstly, though unintentionally, Western art stays referential: all non-Western art is defined as art distinct from ‘our’ tradition. Secondly, it can force the non-West to perform their pure “otherness”.⁴ It essentializes cultures and cultural recognition turns into cultural pressure: members of a culture are not only allowed to perform their cultural practices, but are obliged to do so.⁵ Their artifacts will be labelled as art only insofar as they represent their ‘authentic’ culture. From contextualism, it follows that there is no coherent universal concept of art and non-Western artifacts are excluded from art hood as we understand the concept.

The intensified confrontation with globalization in general and non-Western art in particular begged the question: are art and artistic value concepts of trans-historical and transcultural significance or are they only referring to a specific Western phenomenon from the Renaissance onwards? If all non-Western artifacts are excluded from the domain of art and art is simply equated with post-Renaissance

1 Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History. Who speaks for ‘Indian’ pasts?”, in *The Decolonization Reader*, ed. James D. Le Sueur (New York: Routledge, 2003), 428–448, 428.

2 Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality”, 428–448, 442.

3 Kitty Zijlmans, “An Intercultural Perspective in Art History: Beyond Othering and Appropriation”, in *Is Art History Global?*, ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 289–298, 292.

4 Atreyee Gupta and Sugata Ray, “Responding from the Margins” in Elkins, *Is Art History Global?* 348–357, 350.

5 Ed Jonker, “Identiteit, Burgerschap en de Nationale Canon,” *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 2 (2006): 178–195, 185.

sance, self-conscious art-making then this, on the one hand, makes a concept with a positive value connotation, in the sense that good art is worthwhile, exclusive to Western societies. On the other hand, it renders the concept of art highly Eurocentric and thus of limited relevance in a globalised world. Beyond that, it is empirically hard to maintain that no other society beyond the post-Renaissance Western society had art.⁶ Hence, in order to define and judge all art, we need a theory of art and artistic value that can accommodate artifacts from all cultures and times.

Most theories of art aim to do this. Formalism provides a good example. Formalists claim that the essential feature of art is (aesthetic) form, and artistic value should be judged on this basis.⁷ Modern art and 'primitive' artifacts can be judged artistically side by side on account of decontextualized formal (aesthetic) similarity between them.⁸ But to define and understand non-Western art only in the light of formal and aesthetic qualities degrades its specific cultural and social context.⁹ Formalism seems to be able to include non-Western and other non-canonical art, but it renders art hood dependent on very narrow Western standards. The principle of formal similarity confirms the cultural dominance of the West rather than lead to the emancipation the formalists intended.¹⁰ The art hood of the artistic endeavors of other cultures is derived from the masterpieces of Western culture and art hood is bestowed on them only through the matrix of our history of art.

Jerrold Levinson and Arthur Danto seem to avoid the pitfalls of both contextualism and formalism. Contra formalism, they claim that we cannot bestow art hood upon artifacts because of their formal aesthetic properties.¹¹ It does not follow that art has no essence. Levinson argues that, for an artifact to be art, it must be seriously intended for regard-as-a-work-of-art, i.e., intended for it to be regarded in any way preexisting artworks are or were correctly regarded. Formal similarity to other artworks is not a sufficient condition for art hood, as the relationship between future and preceding art must be historical and intentional.¹² Thus, an artwork is only correctly regarded in light of its true history of production.¹³ It

6 Dennis Dutton, "A Naturalist Definition of Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64 (2006): 367-377, 368.

7 Clive Bell, "The Aesthetic Hypothesis," in *Art in Theory. 1900-2000*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Malden, 2003), 107-110.

8 Péter György, "Between and After Essentialism and Institutionalism," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57.4 (1999): 421-437, 425.

9 Paul Crowth, "Cultural Exclusion, Normativity, and the Definition of Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 61 (2003): 121-131.

10 György, Péter. "Between and After Essentialism and Institutionalism," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57.4 (1999): 421-437, 426.

11 Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace. A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 113 and Jerrold Levinson, *Contemplating Art. Essays in Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 28.

12 Jerrold Levinson, "Refining Art Historically," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47 (1989): 21-33, 24.

13 Jerrold Levinson, "A Refiner's Fire: Reply to Sartwell and Kolak," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 48 (1990b): 231-235, 231.

follows that non-Western objects cannot be art due to their formal similarity with modern Western art. An African artist from the eighteenth century cannot have intended to make an artifact that would invoke similar regards as a twentieth century painting by Picasso. These non-Western artifacts can be art, but only because they were intended for similar regards as historically *preceding* artworks. A similar view can be found in Danto's philosophy of art. He states that formal affinity between modern art and non-Western artifacts cannot account for the art hood of the latter. Affinity is only relevant when there is a causal, and thus historical, relationship.¹⁴ It does not follow that Levinson and Danto claim that there is no art beyond Western post-Renaissance art. Both argue that an artmaker does not need to have a conscious concept of art. Danto acknowledges that the distinction between artifact and art is not lexically marked in the vocabularies of African languages generally, but claims that the absence of lexical markers can hardly be taken as evidence that the distinction cannot be made or that it is not made in the linguistic community in question.¹⁵ Levinson also accepts the possibility that someone who does not know the concept of an artwork can make an artwork.¹⁶ Their insistence on the historicity of art does not lead to relativism: their theories try to make a valid distinction between art and non-art universally. Their definition should not only be applicable to Western art, but to all art.

In short, these historical theories of art try to identify and understand art within its context without throwing out the idea of a transhistorical and transcultural concept of art. They do this by combining historicism and essentialism. Both Danto and Levinson underwrite historicism with regard to the concept of art, i.e. the idea that art is not the same throughout time and space and is historically conditioned. However, they also argue that this does not entail that art has no universal essence. Yet, they relate historicism and essentialism in different ways and this leads to very different outcomes for the place of non-Western art in their theories. I will first turn to the historical intentional definition of Jerrold Levinson.

Levinson's historicism and art's definition

Levinson argues that historicity is the essence of art. Levinson clearly explains: "So what I mean by historicism with regard to the concept of art, at least in this context, is ... that the only common core of art applicable to art-making today and two thousand years ago, and to any activities and artifacts of other cultures we recognize without strain as evidencing art-making – is one which makes historical reference or connectedness, that is, reference or connectedness to predecessor

14 Arthur C. Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box. The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1992), 50-51.

15 Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box*, 101.

16 Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 141.

works, activities, modes of reception, *internal* to the idea of art-making itself.”¹⁷ An object is art when it is or was intended or projected for overall regard as some prior art is or was correctly regarded.¹⁸ Thus, art hood depends on the intended relationship of the object with the preceding history of art. Levinson defends the separation between the tasks of defining and evaluating art.¹⁹ It follows that art status is value-neutral: the fact that an artifact is art does not imply that it is worthwhile. On the other hand, Levinson makes a clear connection between the way in which art is defined and evaluated. Good artworks, Levinson argues, give at least initially similar rewards as past good artworks.²⁰

His historical definition does not entail that art hood and art content change over time. An artifact is art only due to it being intended for the same kind of regards as preceding artworks. When an artifact invokes the same kind of regards as future artworks, it does not follow that the artifact becomes art only after these future artworks came into existence. The African artifacts that inspired Picasso do not become art because they invite the same kind of regards as Picasso’s art. The artifacts were art all along, because they were intended for inviting similar regards as art that preceded them, or the artifacts were never art in the first place. When an artifact is a source of inspiration to future artists, it is not granted art hood because of this. Levinson calls this position “traditional historicism.”²¹ Traditional historicism is committed to an exclusive role for preceding, rather than succeeding, historical context in the generation of an artifact’s art status and artistic content.²² Then, how can we find out whether, for example, the African artifacts that inspired Picasso are art? It is to this question I will now turn.

Accommodating for non-Western art

Levinson insists that if another culture has art, it must be *art in our sense* more or less.²³ The obvious question is: what is art in our sense? If what is art now and what has been art in the past is historically contingent, then the art hood of an object cannot be determined by its intrinsic characteristics. If this is so, how can non-Western art be related to what art is in our sense? Levinson offers two solutions to this problem. One strategy for assimilating to the intentional-historical conception of art phenomena outside the purview of Western fine art, Levinson argues, is to take the concrete totality of art regards that have accumulated in three thousand years or so of our common culture, all those relatively replete regards intending an object for which – or against which, in the case of revolutionary art – qualifies

17 Jerrold Levinson, “Extending Art Historically,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51 (1993): 411–423, 412.

18 Levinson, *Contemplating Art*, 13.

19 George Dickie, *Art and Value* (Oxford: Blackwells, 2001), 56.

20 Levinson, “Refining Art Historically,” 21–33, 28.

21 Jerrold Levinson, *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 187.

22 Jerrold Levinson, *The Pleasures of Aesthetics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 242.

23 Levinson, “Extending Art Historically,” 411–423, 413.

it as art, and seek to locate them in operation in those other domains, e.g., that of handmade furniture, or sculpted masks, or commercial design, or ritual music, or baton-twirling.²⁴ The other, weaker, strategy for assimilating non-paradigm art phenomena to the intentional-historical picture Levinson proposes is to attempt to identify in other domains simply the same *structure* of connectedness, of intentional invocation, whether immediate or mediate, of predecessor objects of the treatments they were accorded. If found, Levinson states, this would be some reason for thinking of those other domains as art-like, or as containing analogs of art, while perhaps not being strictly art in the particular, historicized sense it has acquired in our culture, and in which our culture is, in all its concreteness, and for better or worse, ineliminably implicated.²⁵

Levinson's first strategy contradicts his traditionalism, historicism and intentionalism. Traditionalism entails that only preceding regards are relevant to the art hood of an artifact and historicism implies that an artifact must be historically related to preceding art. Moreover, for an artifact to be accorded art hood, it is not sufficient that there are preceding artworks that invite similar regards: the artifact must be intended for these regards. Concerning the problem of forgeries, Levinson claims that an original is correctly regarded only in the light of its true history of production, but a forger cannot rationally intend a forgery to be accorded the original regards as such.²⁶ Thus, a forgery is not art, because it was not intended for similar regards as preceding artworks. It was intended for people to believe that it was the original artwork and that is not a correct way of regarding an artwork. Non-Western or art-unconscious art, i.e. art that was made by makers who are unaware of the concept of art, are granted art status in reference to the concrete totality of art regards that have accumulated in three thousand years. But, then this art is not correctly regarded in light of its true history of production. Levinson takes together all possible art regards, while as a historicist he claims that not all art regards are valid at the same time and as a traditionalist he claims that we can only take into account the preceding art regards that were known to the maker. This means that these correct regards cannot be transferred to another cultural and historical setting. Moreover, connecting non-Western art to the art regards of "our common culture" leads to a form of appropriation: the inclusion of non-Western art in the history of art leads to a reaffirmation of the superiority of Western high art and the inferiority of non-Western art that was granted a place in 'our' history of art. Though his historicist position on the one hand makes sure we do not include artifacts into the domain of art because of narrow Western concerns like form or non-functional aesthetic pleasure, as he starts from 'our' concept of art to accord art hood to artifacts from other cultures, art hood is, again, seen through the matrix of our concrete Western history of art.

The second strategy fails to accord art hood to non-Western art in a robust

24 Levinson, "Extending Art Historically," 411-423, 422.

25 Levinson, "Extending Art Historically," 411-423, 422-423.

26 Levinson, "A Refiner's Fire," 231-235, 231.

and full-blown sense. Since we need to look for the same kind of connectedness between past and future non-Western artistic practices as in 'our' history of art, again, the Western history of art is the matrix through which we accord art hood to artifacts from other cultures. In his first article on the definition of art, Levinson starts from the idea that art-unconscious art is art. In succeeding articles, he weakens this claim: art-unconscious art mostly turns out to be artful or art-like.²⁷

Firstly, we need to address the question: what is art-like? Levinson claims it is easy to distinguish pure craft, i.e. the purely functional, from the purely artistic, i.e. the non-functional, from the items in-between, not purely craft, and not wholly art.²⁸ Here, he is clearly inspired by an aesthetic approach he tries to avoid, namely he uses the dichotomies craft/art and functionality/aesthetics. Levinson appears to suggest that we can identify artworks apart from their specific historical context, since he claims that "factors that would dispose one to see a craft object as art would include whether it was fashioned by a single individual and reflected that individual's personality and taste, the amount of care evident in the handling of detail, the degree of attention to form as part from fittingness to function as such, the sense of a statement being made or an attitude expressed. But note that these signs, which would dispose us to classify an object as art, are exactly ones which implicate familiar regards that paradigm artworks of the past have been standardly accorded".²⁹ He seems to make his own definition of art redundant, as we can accord art hood to artifacts on account of the aforementioned intrinsic criteria. However, Levinson explicitly contests this idea. He does not want to provide intrinsic criteria for so-called 'hard cases', these are artifacts that are not easily identified as either art or non-art, such as art-unconscious art and non-Western art. Therefore, the idea that functional art from other cultures is not strictly art and thus art to a lesser degree because of its functionality contradicts his own definition.

Secondly, what does it mean for an artifact to be accorded the status of artful or art-like? They have a clearly inferior status to art in the full sense of the word. Levinson might argue that art is a neutral status, so no value judgment can be deduced from it. Still, he also, rightly, claims that in order for something to be judged, we have to know what we are dealing with.³⁰ The artistic value of art, then, is clearly separated from and superior to the artistic value of something that is art-like. Again, artworks within the tradition of Western high art, also called 'uncontested' artworks, become referential: art-unconscious art seems art-like when it is not historically related to future artworks that are part of the traditional history of art. When, as for example in the case of Gregorian chants, art-unconscious art is art plain.³¹ Gregorian chants can be historically related to later uncontested art, whereas a lot of non-Western art cannot.

27 Levinson, "Extending Art Historically," 411-423, 422-423.

28 Levinson, "Extending Art Historically," 411-423, 422.

29 Levinson, "Extending Art Historically," 411-423, 422.

30 Levinson, *Pleasures of Aesthetics*, 189.

31 Claire Detels, *Soft Boundaries: Revisioning the Arts and Aesthetics in American Education* (Berlin and Garvey: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999), 52-53.

In conclusion, Levinson's definition cannot adequately tackle the problems that the history as well as the philosophy of art faces regarding non-Western art. On the one hand, art hood is derived from 'our' concept of art and from our concrete history of art. It follows that the art hood of non-Western artifacts can only be seen through the matrix of Western art history. On the other hand, Levinson's definition cannot provide a coherent universal concept of art. In order to accommodate for non-Western art, he has to adjust his definition in ways that contradict the original formulation of it. The fundamental problem is that a purely historical definition of art cannot provide a point of departure: it cannot account for artifacts that seem to be a candidate for art hood, but that do not consciously refer to a collection of preceding uncontested artworks. The art status of certain artworks is uncontested because of historical consensus. But, when there is no historical consensus, and this consensus is a rather arbitrary given, then we have no criteria to accord or to deny art hood to certain artifacts. It follows that a minimal intrinsic characterization of art is necessary in order for his historical definition to work. Therefore, I will now turn to the philosophy of art of Arthur Danto. Unlike Levinson, Danto does not propose a purely historical definition of art as he does not equate essentialism and historicism. Historicism is not the essence of art, according to Danto, but the intrinsic essence of art discloses itself through history.

Danto's definition of art

Danto connects historicism and essentialism differently. Danto states: "As an essentialist in philosophy, I am committed to the view that art is eternally the same – that there are conditions necessary and sufficient for something to be an artwork, regardless of time and place. ... But as an historicist I am also committed to the view that what is a work of art at one time cannot be one at another, and in particular that there is a history, enacted through the history of art, in which the essence of art – the necessary and sufficient conditions – are painfully brought to consciousness."³² Danto has not formulated a clear definition of art, but Noël Carroll has derived a definition from Danto's thoughts, and Danto endorses this formulation. The definition states that something is an artwork regardless of time and place if it has a subject (i.e., it is about something) about which it projects some attitude or point-of-view by means of rhetorical ellipsis which ellipsis, in turn, engages audience participation in filling-in what is missing (an operation which can also be called interpretation) where the works in question and the interpretations thereof require an art-historical context.³³

What are the consequences of his definition for non-Western art? Let us return to the African artifacts that inspired Picasso. Both Levinson and Danto agree that

32 Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art. Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1997), 95.

33 Noël Carroll, "Essence, Expression, and History: Arthur Danto's Philosophy of Art," in *Danto and His Critics*, ed. Mark Rollins (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), 79-106, 80.

we cannot accord these artifacts art hood because they resemble artworks of modern Western artists or that they inspired these artists. Danto argues that Picasso *discovered* that these African artifacts were in fact works of art, i.e. they were art all along. Yet, this does not mean that any object that inspires us aesthetically becomes art: “Anything can become an object of detached aesthetic scrutiny – the teeth of a dead dog, ... but, whatever the appearances, the distinction between artwork and artifact, is absolute.”³⁴ Moreover, Danto states that all art has the same philosophical structure. It follows that non-Western art is art in the full sense of the word; it is not merely art-like or artful. Consequently, the artistic value of these artworks is not inferior to the value of Western artworks: “My point, then, is that Picasso discovered ... the fact that, whether known or not, the master carvers of Africa were artists, and that artistic greatness was possible for them, not simply within their own traditions, but against the highest artistic standards there are.”³⁵ Moreover, from the fact that many non-Western artworks are functional, it does not follow that they are art to a lesser degree. Danto states that “[t]heir uses may even form the basis for their being works of art, since the meanings they condense and express may have to do with weaving or with planting, but taken up into a system of beliefs and symbols that constitute a kind of philosophy. In their capacity as works of art they belong to a different totality altogether than that into which they have entry as object of use.”³⁶

Danto’s philosophy of art does not require for all art to be art in our sense: what makes an object an artwork is the fact that it embodies, as a human action gives embodiment to a thought, something we could not form a concept of without the material objects which convey its soul. It is in this sense that the philosophical structure of, for example, African artworks is the same as the philosophical structure of artworks in any culture.³⁷ Danto does not need to give strategies for assimilating to his conception of art phenomena outside the purview of Western fine art. Whatever problems Danto’s definition might raise, the structure of his definition makes sure that (1) art hood is not made dependent on ‘our’ history of art and (2) non-Western art and Western art are equally art. Uncontested artworks from our tradition do not become referential. Still, his historical philosophy of art is by no means unproblematic. His teleological view on history excludes non-Western art not from art hood, but from the history of art.

Danto’s historicism/essentialism

Danto maintains that the transhistorical essence of art only discloses itself through history.³⁸ The end and fulfilment of the history of art is the philosophical under-

34 Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box*, 94.

35 Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box*, 94.

36 Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box*, 106.

37 Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box*, 110.

38 Danto, *After the End of Art*, 28.

standing of what art is. He parallels this history to the personal history of the individual. Everyone tries to achieve an understanding of oneself. We do this through the mistakes we make, the false paths we follow and so on. The first false path in art's history was the close identification of art with picturing. The second false path was the materialist formalist aesthetics of Greenberg.³⁹ The history of art was over once art itself raised the true form of the philosophical question, that is, according to Danto, the question of the difference between artworks and real things.⁴⁰

The idea that indiscernible objects, i.e. objects that have identical perceptible features, do not necessarily have the same object status is the starting point of Danto's theory of art. One object could be an artwork, while the other is not or they could both be artworks, but with totally different artistic meanings. The true status and meaning of an object does not depend on perceptible features. In this respect, there is a clear parallel between Levinson's and Danto's theory. According to Danto, the question of the difference between artworks and mere real things was formulated by Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*. This artwork showed that art and reality can be indiscernible.⁴¹ Danto argues it was the historical mission of art to make philosophy possible, after which art has no historical mission in the great cosmo-historical sweep. The fulfilment of the history of art is the philosophy of art.⁴² The history of art has ended, but it does not follow that art practices will die out. They simply go on existing without a goal. Art is now in a post-historical era and its activities no longer have any historical significance.⁴³ The end of the progressive historical narrative is a liberating idea, or so Danto argues. It liberated artists from the task of making more history, from having to follow the "correct historical line".⁴⁴ Historical significance ceased to be a factor in art criticism.⁴⁵ The post-historical era of art is an era of pluralism. The arts are liberated, having handed the problem of the nature of art over to philosophy, to do what they wanted to, and at this precise historical moment pluralism became the objective historical truth.⁴⁶

In this way Danto's philosophy of art, just as Greenberg's formalism, fails to do justice to other developments in twentieth-century art, such as Russian Constructivism, Dada and Surrealism.⁴⁷ In 'historical times' there was a correct historical line: all the artworks that followed this correct historical line contributed to the history of art. Art that was not historically mandated, however, is excluded: surrealism, for example, did not move forward the (false) formalist Greenbergian nar-

39 Danto, *After the End of Art*, 107.

40 Danto, *After the End of Art*, 113.

41 Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box*, 8.

42 Arthur C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 16.

43 Jane Forsey, "Philosophical Disenfranchisement in Danto's 'The End of Art,'" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59. 4 (2001): 403-409, 405.

44 Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box*, 9.

45 Danto, *After the End of Art*, 27.

46 Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box*, 225.

47 Jason Gaiger, "Danto's Philosophy of Art History," *Association of Art Historians* (1999): 451-454, 453.

rative. Consequently, surrealism did not help the history of art forward, neither in the Greenbergian narrative, nor in Danto's narrative. In the end, his theory is just as exclusionary as Greenberg's. The only difference is that Danto shows a way to recuperate 'historically insignificant' art, as after the end of art, historical significance lost all meaning for art criticism. In this way, it seems to be nondiscriminatory: after the end of art every artwork deserves 'equal judging'. Still, all art beyond the pale of history will never be able to participate in art's own history and as such did not help to attain its goal. Not being able to participate in the historical mission of art undoubtedly diminishes the value of these historically insignificant artworks. Danto himself draws the parallel between the end of the history of art and endings of movies where people live happily ever after. The point is that the story of people living happily ever after will not be told, it is excluded from the movie. Formulating one historical goal for art is denying all art that falls outside this history of setting its own historical goals. A noteworthy consequence is that non-Western art is not granted any specific role in the history of art, since these artworks do not seem to play any part in attaining art's goal of attaining self-understanding. Danto's teleological view follows from his 'robust historicism', a view explicitly contested by Jerrold Levinson.

Minimal historicism versus robust historicism

Both Danto and Levinson agree that one needs to know the historical context in which an object originated in order to know whether the object is art or not. But *being part of history* is a completely different notion in their philosophies. For Levinson, to be part of the history of art entails that there is a specific intentional historical link between an object and past art objects. Danto, on the other hand, grants art objects a place in the historical narrative only if they moved the history of art closer towards the resolution of the historical mission of art. Danto's conception of history is Hegelian: history moves towards a goal, namely self-knowledge. Artworks can fall beyond the pale of history: they are art, but did not participate in the history of art. In Levinson's view, history does not have one *telos* or goal and explicitly rejects teleological variants of history as he wants to clearly distinguish "the minimal historicism of art claimed by my theory from more robust historicisms of a Hegelian or Dantoesque sort, such as ascribe to the development of art an inherent goal, or view the development of art as governed by inherent laws of stylistic evolution".⁴⁸

For understanding an object in its historical context, Levinson sticks to 'surface interpretation'. Past intentions and correct regards are in most cases suggested by the outward face of the object, its context of creation, the process by which it came about and the genre it appears to belong to. In cases of doubt, Levinson argues, people can be queried, journals consulted, etcetera.⁴⁹ Surface interpretation must

48 Levinson, *Contemplating Art*, 13.

49 Levinson, "Refining Art Historically," 21-33, 23.

be scrupulously historical, and refers only to possibilities the maker or artist could have acknowledged without attributing to him knowledge of the human sciences of the future.⁵⁰ Danto claims that surface interpretation is needed, in order to come to a deep interpretation of the object. A deep interpretation is an interpretation that is hidden from the historical object that is being interpreted.⁵¹ Danto's end of the history of art is a form of deep interpretation. Every artist who has contributed to the historical mission of art, is not aware of this. Only afterwards, one can interpret artworks in this way and put them together in this master narrative. In Levinson's view, the history of art cannot end when art is still being made. The history of art is the narrative of objects that are related through historical intentions, but this narrative lacks a hidden structure or mission.

One might wonder why philosophy, and more specifically the question what art is, would be the historical mission of art. Art historian and philosopher David Carrier states: "Why confine art to the task of self-definition, to the quest to determine what art is?"⁵² Danto's idea of one unique historical reason for art follows from his view on narratives: a historical narrative should not be seen as one possible way to tell a history; historical narratives are not just what historians construct. The end of art history as he identifies it, is not merely the end of one narrative, it is the end of this actual sequence of events in the world's history. *After the End of Art* describes the nature of art and is not simply one way of telling art's history.⁵³ Danto is committed to 'narrativism *de re*'; the belief that the history of art itself is narratively structured. Its having an end does not depend on Danto's goals but on its own goals.⁵⁴ Danto states: "It will be clear that, for me, a narrative is something actually lived, something realized in and as history, rather than ... merely the way historians organize event"⁵⁵ Danto claims that after the end of art, art is freed from art historical and philosophical imperatives. But this liberation is only possible through stripping away the possibility for art to set her own historical goals. The philosophy of art assures its own historical significance by being the discipline which defines art as having no historical significance.⁵⁶

It is noteworthy that in his book *Analytical Philosophy of History* (1965) Danto challenged the idea of speculative or substantive history, i.e., a philosophy of history that makes claims about the future. On the one hand, in this book he stresses that historical selection, the objects that are chosen for historical inquiry, is influenced by personal biases. Danto suggests that "historical significance is connected with non-historical significance, and this latter is something which varies with

50 Danto, *Disenfranchisement*, 66.

51 Danto, *Disenfranchisement*, 52.

52 David Carrier, "Danto and His Critics: After the End of Art and Art History," *History and Theory* 37: 4 (1998): 1-16, 14.

53 Carrier, "Danto and His Critics", 1-16, 4.

54 Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box*, 241-242.

55 Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box*, 11.

56 Michael Kelly, "Essentialism and Historicism in Danto's Philosophy of Art" *History and Theory* 37: 4 (1998): 30-43, 43.

variations in the interests of human beings. The stories historians tell must not be relative merely to their temporal location, but also to the non-historical interests they have as human beings. There is, then, if I am right, an inextinguishable factor of convention and of arbitrariness in historical description, and this makes it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to speak, as the substantive philosopher of history wishes to, of *the* story of the whole of history, or, for that matter, the story of any set of events.”⁵⁷ Here, Danto contests the idea that the whole history of art could be written, and certainly the idea that it is possible to claim this history has come to an end. Moreover, he maintains that “narrative organization is something that we do. Not merely that, but the imposition of a narrative organization logically involves us with an inextinguishable subjective factor. There is an element of sheer arbitrariness in it.”⁵⁸ On the other hand, Danto forcefully argues in *Analytical Philosophy of History* that historians can only talk about facts that are in their past. Talking about the future is not practicing history. He states that “we cannot, in brief, consistently have a complete historical account. Our knowledge of the past, in other words, is limited by our knowledge (or ignorance) of the future. ... So if philosophy of history is impossible, complete historical accounts are impossible as well, and historical accounts are thus essentially incomplete.”⁵⁹ Giving a complete account of the history of art is exactly what Danto is trying to do in his book *After the End of Art*.

Levinson seems to adhere the earlier, ‘analytical’ view of history developed and defended by Danto. This view is more beneficial to the place of non-Western art in art history: anything can be an object of historical inquiry and it follows that non-Western artworks do have a history in a full-blown sense. Levinson rightly contests the idea that the history of art has one historical mission and that there is, as a consequence, only one master narrative of art. Still, he does not fully acknowledge that the practice of history plays a big part in the constitution of uncontested artworks. The selection a historian makes is heavily influenced by personal (cultural and social) biases. This does not make their historical narratives incorrect. Yet, if we derive uncontested artworks from these narratives, our selection will be quite subjective. As the collection of uncontested artworks is arbitrary and Levinson has to rely heavily on these artworks in order to identify non-Western art, his identification of them as art or art-like or non-art is quite subjective also.

Conclusion

Arthur Danto and Jerrold Levinson both try to define art universally without ignoring the historicity of art. It follows that they should be able to include non-Western art, without projecting purely Western preoccupations onto it. Still, both give special significance to artworks from the Western history of high art. Levinson resorts to these artworks in order to grant art hood to non-Western artworks that

57 Arthur C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 15.

58 Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, 142.

59 Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, 18.

have no clear uncontested predecessors. Consequently, the art hood of these objects depends on our history of art. As many do not match this history fully, they are called art-like or artful. In Danto's definition, Western high art does not seem to play such a big role. All art is art in the fullest sense. Still, the discovery of this essence of art, i.e. his definition, was made possible through history. As it turns out, this history is, again, the Western history of high art. Though non-Western art is art in the fullest sense, they are not granted any historical significance in Danto's view.

In order to accommodate for art universally without making non-Western art inferior to Western high art, we are in need of a theory of art that adheres to minimal historicism and also formulates minimal intrinsic criteria for art hood. Danto's and Levinson's philosophies of art have provided us with useful means to provide such a theory. Still, both Levinson and Danto exclude non-Western art from the center of the history of art. For Levinson, most non-Western art is called art-like. For Danto, all art, Western or non-Western, is art in the fullest sense, but he does exclude non-Western art from the master narrative of art history.⁶⁰

60 I would like to thank the audience of the *Gimme Shelter: Global Discourses in Aesthetics* conference held at the University of Amsterdam (Oct 8-10, 2009) and organized by the Dutch Federation of Aesthetics, the International Association of Aesthetics and the Dutch Association of Aesthetics. I am especially grateful to Renée van de Vall, Bart Vandenabeele and Hans Maes for their helpful comments.

5 Transcultural studies in aesthetics

Krystyna Wilkoszewska

European aesthetics. The present situation

Aesthetics understood as the philosophy of art is both a strictly European and modern discipline. It was established as late as the middle of the eighteenth century, when the older and broader idea of art as *techne* was replaced by the more limited idea of fine arts. The separation of fine arts caused many serious and considerable consequences, recognized today as the processes of autonomization and aesthetization of art. These processes began in the middle of the eighteenth century (exactly in the same time as the academic discipline of aesthetics came into being) and are often associated with the Kantian concept of disinterestedness in the experience of art. Since then the numerous social functions of art have been gradually reduced and finally only one, the aesthetic function, was attributed to fine arts; the aesthetic was contrasted to the useful. Thus, the works of fine art were there for the sole purpose of being liked.

The process of autonomization of art implied the separation of art from life. Here is some evidence for this:

- a The necessity to call into being the so called 'applied arts', in which the aesthetic function – quite contrary to the case of fine arts – was still strictly connected with the idea of utility. However, the connection caused applied arts to be considered less valuable than 'pure' fine arts.
- b We deal with the separation of works of fine art by putting them into special places, isolated from ordinary life – in museums.

When we speak of European aesthetics we should constantly be aware that the subject matter of this modern discipline was fine art framed in the narrow formula of the aesthetic, as well as that aesthetics, when formulating its main terms and notions, did not need to refer to the idea of art or to the works of art produced in different cultures than the European one.

The model of European modern aesthetics presented here has been sharply criticized for some decades now. The criticism came from different trends present in the contemporary reflection on ideas of art and the aesthetic. Here are two examples:

Arnold Berleant, the founder of environmental aesthetics, recognized relatively early the fatal consequences of Kantian ideas of disinterestedness, that led directly to the separation the aesthetic from the living experience of men. Berleant called his theory 'aesthetics of engagement' and explained that this idea is a deliberate alternative to the Kantian notion of aesthetic disinterestedness. He believes that aesthetic appreciation occurs not only in relation to art objects, but in many kinds of human situations, and may be conjoined with practical ones. "Indeed, of all human activities it is the aesthetic that most directly denies that unfortunate separation between pure and applied, theoretical and practical."¹

Richard Shusterman, the co-creator of pragmatist aesthetics, wrote:

The pragmatic, of course, is inextricably wed to the idea of the practical, precisely that idea against with which the aesthetic is traditionally contrasted and even oppositionally defined as purposeless and disinterested. One of the central aims of this book is to relieve this paradox by challenging the traditional practical/aesthetic opposition and enlarging our conception of the aesthetic from the narrow domain and role that philosophy's dominant modern ideology and cultural economy have assigned it.²

The two selected extracts clearly express the contemporary attempts to go beyond the modern idea of the aesthetic. However, the most lively trend within the criticism of modern aesthetics and its idea of fine arts today appears as a result of processes of globalization and of our broadening experience of other cultures. The open attitude to arts produced in different cultures, as well as to the aesthetic dimension of non-artistic human activities, implied a new kind of investigation in aesthetics called cross-cultural, intercultural or transcultural studies in aesthetics.

Before referring to the ideas in aesthetic research I will first try to address the historical stages of our hitherto relation to arts of cultures different than European.

The attitude towards art in non-European cultures

There are three main stages in the development of our attitude to art in other cultures, especially those that were colonized, not necessarily in the sense of territorial conquest, but rather in the sense of imposing a feeling of inferiority upon non-European cultures, which does not have to go hand in hand with conquering the areas where the cultures originate from.

In the first stage, art of non-European cultures was a topic of interest for cultural anthropology and therefore some special products were described and clas-

1 Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), xii; Com. Arnold Berleant, *Re-thinking Aesthetics* (Hampshire: Ashgate 2004), 1-9, 13-19.

2 Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics. Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), xv.

sified (not evaluated) in anthropological terminology; the products were considered artifacts, not works of art. The subsequent step was made in the beginning of twentieth century, when the products or part of them, for example African masks, attracted the attention of European artists and aestheticians. The effect of this first aesthetic interest in art of non-European cultures was the concept of 'primitive art', which is held in suspicion today, because it was coined by separating some artifacts from their cultural context and subordinating them to European norms of fine arts. According to these norms all social and cultural functions this art performed in its core culture were now reduced to the aesthetic function, which was absent or non-significant in the culture where the art was born. Andre Malraux's activity as a connoisseur of art and as a minister of culture in France is an example for this case.

Malraux was interested in art of – in his terminology – primitive and exotic cultures; but his own idea of art was totally based on the modern European tradition enriched by the accomplishments of avant-garde movements from the first half of twentieth century. Malraux took products from different cultures, cutting them off from their original cultural contexts, and put them in European museums, introducing them into a purely aesthetic context of meanings. In such a situation the chosen artifacts, deprived of their social, religious and magical references, could present their artistic form and evoke an aesthetic experience. This new experience that consisted in taking an aesthetic attitude towards the products originally not connected with aesthetic values was determined by Malraux as 'fascinating' and was possible only by "transmitting the exotic cultures to Europe". Malraux and his contemporaries did not recognize the possessive character of such an approach towards products of other cultures and did not notice that the 'transmission' was one-sided and profitable only to the well-educated European. It is this way of treating art of non-European cultures that today is critically named 'colonialism' in order to stress that the other cultural phenomena were arbitrary subordinated to terms and ideas worked out only with reference to the needs of our European culture and only in the modern period of its development.

During recent decades we entered the next phase called 'post-colonialism'. The progressing globalization of the world on the one hand and the processes of exhaustion of European culture on the other caused our belief in the superiority of our culture over others to weaken; we became – more than ever before – open to different cultures. This new situation opened new possibilities for research into the art of non-European cultures. This became a task for transcultural aesthetics.

The concept of transculturality

I reconstruct the concept of transculturality on the base of Wolfgang Iser's works published during the last years of the twentieth century. The concept exists in a set of related terms such as multiculturalism or interculturality. While the latter

terms both remain part of the modern way of thinking, transculturality is – according to Welsh – definitely of a postmodern character.³ What does it mean?

Although all three concepts are based on the assumption that many cultures exist in the world, the understanding of the idea of plurality itself is not the same in every case. Multi- and interculturality are placed in a modern conception of pluralism, while transculturality refers to the idea of pluralism worked out by post-modern French philosophers. In the modern version of pluralism the multitude is understood as a result of a breaking off of a whole. Every element of the broken whole preserves in itself the memory of the totality it earlier belonged to. But at the same time the element is an independent whole that is confronted with the others. For instance: we can treat all religions as variants in realization of just one general idea of religion that consists in the belief in a supernatural being. Every religion out of many in turn constitutes in itself a coherent whole involving the system of theses, dictates and prohibitions. In this respect religions differ from each other and their encounter frequently lead to collision and even to religious wars.

The postmodern version of pluralism does not begin with a category of a whole. Multitude is not understood here as a derivative state that came into being after a breaking off from a primary wholeness. Multitude is primary and the whole secondary, because the latter is understood as the product of a lasting tendency of the human mind for generalization and totalisation. In the postmodern concept of plurality a category of wholeness is deconstructed on every level of thinking and no phenomenon of reality can be treated as an autonomous coherent whole. Post-modern pluralism shows that multitude goes across – in syncretic terms – every potential wholeness preventing its constitution.

If we apply the two concepts of pluralism to the problem of coexistence of many cultures it becomes clear that multiculturalism accepts the fact that there are many different cultures but understands each culture as a monolithic whole and that interculturalism postulates a dialog between cultures. Both directions, multi- and interculturalism, refer to Herder's theory of culture, quite influential in Europe. Herder saw the different national cultures as monolithic and homogeneous wholes deprived of any significant internal differentiation. Cultures understood in such a way differ from each other radically; they are diverse and opposed to each other, which, in an attempt of contact, causes them to collide rather than to communicate.

The concepts of multi- and interculturality seem to be variations of binary relations, involving two parties, and this kind of language is no longer adequate to describe the complex phenomena of the contemporary world. The new concept of transculturality refers to the image of the world in the process of globalization

3 W. Welsh in his paper "Identity in Time of Globalization – the Transcultural Perspective" presented in the conference "Art in Asia – External View & Internal Response" in Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, September 2001 said that he has developed the conception of transculturality since 1990. He indicated his article "Transculturality: The Changing Forms of Cultures Today", published in *Filozofsky Vestnik* XXII, no. 2 (2001): 59-86 as a kind of summary of his studies.

where the concept of transaction replaces the concept of interaction, the concept of relational networks (defined through terms like rhizome, nomadism, ecosystem) proves to be more appropriate than the idea of binary and opposing relations, and the concepts of complementarity and diaspora take the place of optionality. The common axis of all proposed concepts that are to replace the previous ones is their syncretic character going across the accustomed bipolar relations.

Welsch's idea of transculturality lays down a very ambitious project of research into the co-existence of cultures in the contemporary world. Seen from the point of particular studies in aesthetics, the project is hard to realize. The recognition of transcultural components that go across all cultures demands previous exposure to these cultures and some knowledge of them. European aesthetics never developed comparative studies on a large scale and the neglects in this field are so considerable that the first steps in transcultural research in aesthetics have to be rather bilateral, dialogical approaches: through analytical studies, comparative reflection on ideas, and the description of experiences.

Transcultural aesthetics: my own experience in transcultural studies

At the beginning I wish to explain and emphasize that when I am going to speak about my experience and reflections it is not because I am convinced of the importance of my achievements. Just the opposite, I would like to point out certain difficulties and obstacles I encountered in order to formulate some more general conclusions on this basis regarding transcultural studies in aesthetics.

The initial stage of detailed studies undertaken by the research group I supervised revealed several difficulties. I will only mention some of them.

Although the postulate of studying a selected phenomenon in the network of its relational connections and the rejection of binary oppositions as well as fundamentalist generalizations and assumptions seemed right and constituted a kind of challenge, in practice this turned out to be very difficult to execute. The causes are complex and I shall try to demonstrate them through concrete examples. In a doctoral dissertation, the author undertook the study of aesthetic aspects of urban space in Japan. When the study is conducted by a European, our – that is Western – concepts of space and of culture constitute the point of reference. It turns out, however, that in the practice of doing research this point of reference is inevitably generalized and becomes static, for it is impossible, while investigating a definite problem in Japanese culture, to introduce detailed considerations on the diversity of conceptions of space in European thought and the cultural diversity of Europe. Thus, a specific binary relation arises here. What is more, the relation is asymmetrical, since, on the one hand, a detailed problem is being articulated within Japanese culture perceived in relational diversity; and on the other hand an abstract and static construct emerges, namely the concept of European culture. Neither was it possible to avoid completely the application of generalized concepts of Japanese

culture or aesthetics, though the author managed not to introduce the excessively totalizing concept of Oriental culture. Despite the difficulties, it was possible to indicate some characteristic elements of Japanese urban space and their relation (both in terms of similarities and differences) with certain features of Western city landscape.

Commenting on the methods used, the author writes:

Adapting a transcultural point of view allows to bring out aspects of the researched theme, but compels to make some generalizations; it becomes necessary to contrast ideas in order for them to be legible. This however does not cause contradiction within the method itself, but rather constitutes a way to stress differences within cultural continuity. In other words, when describing for example the differences between urban space of Berlin and Kyoto, we do not rely on them being totally unlike each other, but rather point to specific differences in structuring, perceiving and understanding of certain elements that build up the space.⁴

In the topic mentioned above, and in my opinion on several other occasions another difficulty arises: the concept of transculturality in aesthetic studies, that is, a concept that is indeterminate as regards its object as well as its methodology, overlaps out of necessity with the concept of inter- or rather trans-disciplinarity. And I do not mean here disciplines abundant in tradition, but – in this very case – young disciplines having no fully developed identity, like cultural studies, urban theory, environmental aesthetics or theory of electronic media. Besides, even if philosophers-aestheticians are able to cooperate fairly effectively with, e.g. sociologists or psychologists, they find it much harder – also due to the lack of such a tradition – to collaborate with specialists in modern languages mostly oriented at linguistic research.

Another study analyzed the problem of the shaping of an entrance to a residence (in its broad meaning: a family home, a temple, a tomb) in various cultures, which was finally limited to two cultures – Oriental and European. An entrance to a building is a special space, a zone in between, and first of all the zone of transition between the private and the public. The author attaches strong symbolical meaning to this space of entering and passing through:

It is this element of existential space that is very similar in Europe and Asia, at least in terms of composition. If we remove culture-specific ornamentation, forms and colors, what remains is basically identical. The entrance space in every corner of the world is characterized by a balanced, symmetrical construction and bright colors.⁵

4 Jakub Petri, *Estetyczne aspekty japońskiej przestrzeni miejskiej* [The Aesthetic Aspects of Japanese Urban Space] (Krakow: Universitas, 2011), 10.

5 Beata Gawryszewska, "Estetyka przestrzeni wejściowej domu i ogrodu na przykładzie przestrzeni egzystencjalnej w Europie i Azji" [Aesthetics of Enter Space of Home and Garden as Example of Existential Space in Europe and Asia], in *Transcultural Aesthetics*, ed. Krystyna Wilkoszewska (Krakow: Universitas, 2004), 443.

According to the author human beings have a need for eurhythmics in their entrance space, so even the Japanese dislike for the symmetrical had to make way, and “the amount of rhythmical, symmetrical elements contained within the instance of entrance space and their high symbolic value prove that aesthetics of classical proportions within house and garden plays a vital role for both European and Oriental communities”.⁶

According to Vitruvius the author distinguishes between symmetry and eurhythmia. The latter is based on symmetry and includes the recurrent analogy of main forms and relations between them. But “eurhythmic symmetry” must not mean identity of components on both sides of the axis. First of all they should be graceful and pleasant to the eye.

The article was intentionally of a minimalist nature. It depended on collected material to illustrate the problem, its analysis and conclusions regarding the occurrence of common elements. In this case it was possible to avoid, at least to a large extent, generalized and static points of reference. The specified phenomenon was actually studied in a relational network of equal elements with regard to a broad range of variants. We could speak here of the rhizomatic flattening of research space organized on the principle of $n + 1$ (the set of examples could always be expanded by another one), devoid of the center and periphery as well as hierarchy and, therefore, depth. Is this what transcultural studies aim at?

In the research on other cultures we had to do with our methodological habits like the building of binary relations, the need of a relatively stable point of reference, and the use of generalizations that were incompatible with the postulates of transcultural aesthetics and which proved to be extremely strong because we still do not have methodological models of transcultural studies. We have a general vision of such studies but no definite ways of its execution. This is why in the first study, trying to preserve the theoretical depth, the danger of simplification sometimes occurred. In the case of the second study we had to do with interesting but rather modest outcomes, considering that the author took into consideration the similarities while ignoring the differences.

On the basis of the two cited examples I would like to formulate some preliminary conclusions:

- 1 It seems that a general attempt to determine the idea of transcultural aesthetics, its subject-matter and the methods of research, is condemned to failure. It is better to begin with detailed investigations, even groping in the dark, in the chosen aesthetic problems, progressively introducing the transcultural perspective. Transcultural aesthetics can be built rather *von unten*, rather *a posteriori*, on the micro- rather than on the macro-level. Global questions seem not to be useful in the time of globalization.
- 2 We should accept the thought that transcultural studies are of a superficial character, but this feature does not make them worthless. In academic studies super-

6 Ibid.

ficiality is traditionally perceived in opposition to depth and negatively valued. This is why scholars find it so difficult to accept the idea of their research being superficial. Nevertheless, in the last few decades we have been boldly revising numerous conceptual oppositions that were inherited from the antique thinkers. What is superficial need not be deceptive, unimportant or confusing. Moreover, aesthetics, probably more strongly than other domains, has always referred to the surface of things. There is a beauty of depth, but there is also a beauty of the surface. Similarly, apart from the truth of the depth there may exist the truth of the surface. The difference is that it refers to something else: the transcultural studies in aesthetics do not strive for profound knowledge of a foreign culture. Rather, they pose the question whether the cognition of other cultures will allow me to understand some problems of my own culture in a more profound way. Transcultural studies, even if they just touch the surface, allow us to give a positive answer to the question formulated in this way.

- 3 The familiar meanings of our aesthetic notions and concepts lose their evidence in confrontation with other cultures. The question arises if European aesthetics is ready to reformulate its main terms and categories from the point of view of transcultural openness and applicability in the broader cultural contexts; first of all the modern post-Kantian idea of art demands revision. This modern, so historically limited, idea of art as the autonomous realm claim to be universal and as such it blocks access to a proper understanding of art produced in other cultures. We should be aware that no other culture – literate or illiterate – separated art from the other forms of human activity to such a degree as our culture did.
- 4 From the limited modern concept of fine arts we should proceed to the broader idea of art, not universal but rather plural and open, that could embrace the numerous variants of artistic activity characteristic for different cultures. This means that the artifactual idea of art that identifies the meaning of art with the special products called works of art should be replaced by the processual idea of art that could involve all creative processes and perceptive experiences as well the different forms of interaction not necessarily ending with the production of artifacts.
- 5 Description and evaluation of other cultures demands a change in the vocabulary and the standards of evaluation accepted in our culture. Using a received language in transcultural studies keeps us within the traditional way of thinking, in a kind of rut that does not allow for full execution of the assumed goals. Using received concepts, phrases and syntax we necessarily formulate sentences that distort the sense of what we wanted to express. In the process of researching it becomes clear that we need a new language for grasping transcultural phenomena. Nevertheless, it would not be profitable to start with the creation of neologisms. So far practice shows that the modification of meanings is accomplished by means of adding prefixes to existing words. I think it is a good way out, but we should remember that the essence of meaning is now located in prefixes rather than in the cores of words.

6 The sheltering agent

Earth as an aesthetic concept in a globalizing world

Kees Vuyk

Die Erde ist das wohin das Aufgehen alles Aufgehendes und zwar als ein solches zurückbirgt. Im Aufgehen west die Erde als das Bergende.¹

(Earth is that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises as such. In the things that arise earth occurs essentially as the sheltering agent.)

Martin Heidegger

World and earth

In a fascinating attempt to give the philosophy of the arts a new, radical turn Heidegger in his essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* makes use of two uncommon aesthetic concepts, viz. ‘world’ and ‘earth’. Of these the last one is the most surprising. Readers of Heidegger are familiar with world as an important notion in *Being and Time*. Earth as a philosophical term appears for the first time in *The Origin of the Work of Art*.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger analyses human existence as Being-there (*Dasein*). This Being-there is explicated as Being-in-the-world. Man and world are thus closely connected. Man is not in the world as a match is in its box. Being-in-the-world indicates the phenomenon that man experiences the things he finds around him first and for all – in everyday life – as closely interconnected, making up a network of significance in which man can live and work as in his world. In his essay on the work of art Heidegger has obviously this world in mind when he writes that the work of art “opens up a world”. A work of art has the power to let things appear as meaningful, thus shaping a world for man. However, this opening up of worlds is not the only thing that the work of art does. Heidegger writes that a work of art “opens up a world and at the same time sets this world back again on earth, which itself *only thus* emerges as *native ground*”.² And a sentence before we read: “earth occurs essentially as the sheltering agent”.

1 Martin Heidegger, “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1950), 31. Translated in English by David Farrell Krell as *Basic Writings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 168.

2 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 168; italics added.

It is this 'earth' as 'sheltering agent' and 'native ground' that I want to explore more closely in this paper. I will connect this exploration with the question whether this earth, as Heidegger's text seems to imply, is suited to give shelter to people (and artworks) wandering in a globalizing world. Is not indeed the earth that which connects all people and nations? Would art that recognizes its earthly component therefore not be something that crosses national borders and cultural boundaries? I will betray already that I think it is not. When Heidegger brings earth into play in his attempt to develop a philosophy of the work of art he makes an important move in understanding the work of art in a new way, but when he advances on this way, I believe he goes one step to far.

In discussion with Vattimo, who has dealt with Heidegger's thoughts about art several times and eventually gives an original elaboration of, I will show that if we refrain from this step we might find an even better starting point to think about the role of art in a globalizing world, not founding but unfounding. A work of art reveals the abyss that underlies every world, the processes of arising and declining, that make that the earth can never be a permanent shelter to humans, but doing so it creates a common unground on which human life in all its varieties may flourish.

Art and world

When Heidegger writes that a work of art opens up a world, it is not difficult to follow him. That an important work of art shows things never seen before or let things well-known appear in a new light is more or less common understanding, certainly in part due to Heidegger and other phenomenological philosophers of art. Different from most other things which normally do not appear to us independently but are always part of a bigger whole – the totality that Heidegger calls world – the work of art stands out, it attracts special attention, it is not just part of *the* world, it is itself *a* world.

Interesting is the change of the particle. In the formula from *Being and Time*, being-in-the-world, world is combined with the determinate particle. In the essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* world comes with the indeterminate particle. In everyday reality man lives in the world. In normal existence there is just one world, the world in which you live. In the encounter with a work of art this work opens up a world, that is essentially its own world, the world of the work of art. Suddenly there is more than one world. There is my world, the world of the spectator, and there is the world of the work of art. The work of art reveals that worlds are there in plural. There is not just my world, but there are other worlds besides the one in which I dwell. The work of art introduces me to alternative worlds.

If we are looking for a global theory of art – or for any globalizing theory – this recognition of the plurality of worlds is certainly an important step. Who lives only in his proper world and is unable to see or simply never became aware of the fact that besides this world there are other worlds, will not feel the need to expand his experience in such a way that it encompasses not only what is going on in his world

but also what passes in other worlds. However, while this recognition of a plurality of worlds may be a necessary condition for a global view on human existence, it is not a sufficient condition. There is still the possibility that one remains indifferent to what is going on in worlds other than one's own. In that situation there is no need to integrate these worlds – or works of art – into an overarching whole. People may even be scared by the new experiences, try to shield themselves from them, and enclose themselves in what they feel to be their proper world.

In order to let the need to integrate emerge, it is necessary that there is an awareness of something common; that the world opened up by the work of art, in one way or another has to do with one's own world; that the distinct worlds take part in a common event. It is here that Heidegger's notion of earth comes into play. According to Heidegger, the work of art not only opens up a world, but it also "sets this world back again on earth". What does Heidegger mean by this? He is quite clear that for him earth is not just "a mass of matter" or "the merely astronomic idea of a planet".³ Heidegger means something very different. "Earth is that whence the arising [i.e. the world opened up by the work of art, KV] brings back and shelters everything that arises as such. In the things that arise, earth occurs essentially as the sheltering agent".⁴

The relationship of earth and world

The relationship of these two characteristics of the work of art in Heidegger's philosophy, its setting up a world and its setting forth the earth⁵, is a topic that bothers many of Heidegger's commentators. Not a few commentators, especially the older ones, solve the problem by simply forgetting the earth and concentrating their attention solely on the artwork as world disclosing.⁶ This approach to Heidegger's philosophy of art can be called phenomenological. It is in line with the earliest reception of *Being and Time*, which also concentrated on those chapters in the first part of this work that contained the phenomenological description of Being-there as being-in-the-world.

David Farrell Krell, the editor of the English translation of a selection of Heidegger's writings, gives an explanation of the relationship of earth and world, that can be considered more or less as the standard explanation: "The work erects a world which in turn opens a space for man and things; but this distinctive openness rests on something more stable and enduring than any world, i.e. the all-sheltering earth".⁷ In this explanation the plurality of worlds of which a work of art makes us aware, is founded on something more fundamental: the earth. In this view the

3 Ibid., 168.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., 172.

6 E.g., Gabriel Liiceanu, "Welt" – Begriff in 'Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes', in *Kunst und Technik*, eds. Walter Biemel and Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989).

7 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 141.

world of a work of art is just one possibility of the many worlds that are contained in the earth and can be brought to light by a work.

In the first comments of Gianni Vattimo on Heidegger's philosophy we find an interpretation of earth that seems akin to this, although it is, in my opinion, more sophisticated. In his early book *Introduction a Heidegger* (1971) Vattimo writes: "If we call world what the work says explicitly in his different interpretations, the earth is in the work a permanent reserve of significations, always ultimately and never definitely to be made explicit".⁸ And in an essay written around 15 years later we read: "The earth, which is not identical with nature (in contrast to the world as culture), represents the permanent ontological reserve of meanings, which makes it so that the work cannot be exhausted by interpretation".⁹ The earth is "always given as that which withdraws and holds itself in reserve".¹⁰ It is because of its being earth that a work of art never gives itself completely to an interpreter. Every work of art has an obscure side. It can therefore never be fully understood. But it is also because of this that a work of art allows not one interpretation but many different interpretations and can be received by people who are not part of the world that the work opens up originally. This makes that works of art that functioned in worlds long past or that are foundational for worlds much different than the one of the recipient – like the Greek Temple, one of Heidegger's favourite examples of a work of art – can still be understood by this recipient, although probably not in the same way as they are understood by the people who dwell(ed) in the world which the work opened up when it was first created.

These interpretations of Heidegger's thought on the work of art can be called, I think, transcendentalist. In these interpretations the work of art is a condition of possibility of the appearance of a world, while the earth is the condition of possibility of the work of art. The advantage of this transcendentalist interpretation is that it can be elaborated into a global theory of art. All true art works open up a world which is essentially a particular world, but as they do not only open up a world but also set forth the earth they hold something in reserve, which means that the reception of the work of art is not limited to its particular world, so that it can also have meaning for recipients outside that world and throw new light on their particular worlds. Art is not bound to a certain culture, true art has something to tell to everyone. It is this ability to generate meaning and to be significant to many people from different parts of the world that can be considered a universal quality of art.

However, there are reasons to question this transcendentalist interpretation of Heidegger. First of all, I think it is too harmonious. Earth understood this way,

8 Gianni Vattimo, *Introduction à Heidegger* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1985), 130. Originally published as *Introduzione a Heidegger* (Bari/Roma: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1971).

9 Gianni Vattimo, "The Work of Art as the Setting to Work of Truth," in *Arts Claim to Truth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 157. Originally published as *Poesia e Ontologia* (Ugo Mursia Editore 1985).

10 Ibid., 157.

especially in the formulations of Krell – “all-sheltering earth” – reminds of popular new age theories of *Gaia*, the mother earth, from which everything arises and to which everything returns. It is doubtful whether this Gaia hypothesis concurs with what Heidegger wanted to tell us. In any case, the word that Heidegger chooses to name the relationship of world and earth: the German *Streit* (English: strife, struggle) does not sound very harmonious.

But there is another reason why I don't think that a transcendentalist approach is the best – or even a good – way to understand Heidegger's philosophy of art. For this I have to go back to *Being and Time*. When we look closely at what Heidegger writes in this book, we notice that in this book being-in-the-world is not a unitary concept. We can discern three ways of being-in-the-world. The first one is the way Being-there inhabits its everyday life. In vivid phenomenological analyses Heidegger describes how man in everyday reality is connected to the world around him in such a way that there is no real boundary between man and world, so that they form a complex whole that Heidegger calls being-in-the-world. Typically the main character of these analyses of everyday life is not a person, but the impersonal ‘one’. Most and for all, Heidegger asserts, people live and die as ‘one lives’ and ‘one dies’.

However this state of interconnectedness of man and world is not the only way of being in the world we find in *Being and Time*. In the second part of his book Heidegger becomes more and more critical of the everyday reality of man that he denounces then as unauthentic (*uneigentlich*). In contrast with this inauthentic state of being he describes another situation, which he calls authentic being (*eigentlich sein*). This authentic being is easily misunderstood. What Heidegger means has nothing to do with (again) new age ideas about ‘finding your true self’ and living your life in perfect ‘harmony’ with your surroundings. On the contrary, in the paragraphs of his book devoted to authentic being Heidegger evokes a very different image, the image of a self that has lost its connections with the world around it and therefore has lost his self as far as this self is always determined by the relations ‘one’ maintains with the world. Authentically man is not at home in the world. In his authentic state man does not encounter a world around him, which fits him like a glove. On the contrary, what man encounters in this state is absolute nothingness. Everything familiar disappears; the unknown, the monstrous is what remains. Authentic being is an anxious, an uncanny situation. Heidegger uses the word *Unheimlichkeit* to describe this situation of man-in-the-world, usually translated in English as ‘uncanniness’ but incompletely so. The German has overtones of meaning like ‘alienation’, ‘being orphaned’, that lack in the English translation.

But Heidegger does not stop his analyses of being-there with this confrontation of authentic and inauthentic being. In the third and last part of his seminal book he goes on to look for an *authentic* way to live *in* the world. This part circles around the word resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*). Man's situation is not exhausted by the choice between living an inauthentic life in a sort of symbiosis with the surrounding world that is the life of everyone (*Man*) and living an authentic life in a state of permanent

anxiety, cut off from every meaningful bond. There is a third option and that is that you resolutely take upon you the world you find around you, by this act of decision transforming your existence in the world from inauthentic to authentic.

I propose that this threefold of inauthentic being, authentic being and resoluteness is the background against which we should read *The Origin of the Work of Art*. When we do this the struggle of world and earth has much likeness with the opposition between inauthentic and authentic being, while their 'reconciliation' in *The Origin of the Work of Art* is achieved by resoluteness, like in *Being and Time*. Indeed, resoluteness plays an important role in the last pages of Heidegger's essay on the work of art. It is part of what Heidegger calls the 'preservation' of the work. For Heidegger preservation is our ultimate response to a work of art, as is clear from the sentence with which he introduces the section on preservation in his essay: "the step toward which everything thus far said tends".¹¹ Only through preservation an artwork becomes the work it truly is, i.e. through preservation truth is set into work. This 'setting-into-work of truth' is Heidegger's ultimate definition of what a work of art is in his essay.

And then, elaborating on the topic of preserving, Heidegger says some very remarkable things. "The poetic projection of truth ... is never carried out in the direction of an indeterminate void. Rather, in the work, truth is thrown toward the coming preservers, that is, toward a historical group of human beings. ... Truly poetic projection is the opening up of that into which human being as historical is already cast. This is *the earth* and, for a historical people, *its earth*, the self-secluding ground on which it rests together with everything that it is already, though still hidden from itself."¹²

In this passage earth gets a very precise meaning. Here it is not a universal transcendental condition of world, it is a particular historical condition. Earth appears to be thought by Heidegger ultimately not as a universal category, a source of possible worlds from which everybody can draw; through resoluteness the work of art is integrated into the history that is lived by the preservers. This remarkable movement runs parallel to what happens in the third part of *Being and Time*. There also, resoluteness posits the human being firmly in history. Being resolute, writes Heidegger, means that you take up your heritage, which, notably, is not a personal heritage, but always the heritage of a people, the historical destiny of the people to which you belong.¹³

11 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 191.

12 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 200; italics added.

13 Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1972 [1926]), 383-84. In a previous publication "Understanding and willing" I have argued that Heidegger under the influence of Nietzsche has considered to call this last step 'willing'. Kees Vuyk, "Understanding and willing," in *The Specter of Relativism: Truth, Dialogue and Phronesis in Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1995), 195-205.

An example: the Van Gogh painting of two shoes

A good example of this Heideggerian reception of a work of art is the way he himself deals in his essay with the ‘well known painting’, as he writes, of Van Gogh depicting two shoes. In fact there are several paintings with this subject. Heidegger seems to mean a painting of 1912. The interpretation he gives of this painting has stirred up a profound discussion. I will come back to that later. For the moment I just want to show how what Heidegger sees in this painting, which he describes in his essay long before he touches the question of how a work of art should be preserved and even before he discusses the duality of World and Earth in his essay – even though as we shall see it is in his description of the painting that this pair of concepts appears for the first time in his essay – is a precise example of his vision that a work of art, when well preserved, sets truth into work.

Let me quote the passage in which Heidegger describes what the painting evokes:

A pair of peasant shoes and nothing more. And yet.

From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome thread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the sole stretches the loneliness of the field path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow destination of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining worry as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending childbed and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. The equipment belongs to the *earth*, and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself.¹⁴

The art historian Meyer Schapiro has criticized Heidegger for his interpretation of this Van Gogh painting. He reproaches him for projecting on it a lot of things that the painting itself does not show. For instance, that these shoes are peasant shoes and belong to a peasant woman. Schapiro builds a convincing case that the shoes in fact were Van Gogh's own shoes, which he painted while staying in Paris, thus being at the time “a man of town and city”.¹⁵ This disagreement has become famous because Derrida has devoted the last part of his book *The Truth in Painting* to it.¹⁶

This is not the place to go into this discussion. I just want to remark that Schapiro – amidst all prejudices with which he reads and misreads Heidegger's interpre-

14 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 160; italics original.

15 Schapiro quoted by Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian MacLeod (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 260.

16 Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian MacLeod (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

tation of the painting, which Derrida has patiently revealed – has a point when he states that Heidegger’s reception of this painting far extends what the painting itself offers us to see. There is a certain excess in Heidegger’s reception of the painting, that is already notable in the text itself, which stands out for its poetic exuberance amidst the more sober language that Heidegger uses in his other analyses. Derrida calls this passage “ridiculous and lamentable”.¹⁷ Heidegger does not just describe the world that the work of art opens up. He even goes beyond what he himself calls ‘the setting forth of the earth’ of the work of the work of art. He does exactly what at the end of his essay he brings forward as the ultimate preservation of a work of art, he sets the work back into *his* earth, the earth on which he dwells as a member of a historical people, the earth of the Black Forest Mountains where he likes to retreat from city life in his mountain cabin, his ‘native ground’, the atmosphere of which we find back in many of his writings.

Strikingly enough Schapiro makes exactly the same move when he sees in the painting the shoes of “a man of town and city” in a book that is a homage to Kurt Goldstein, described by Derrida as “his colleague, fellow man and friend, nomad, émigré, city dweller”.¹⁸

Beyond transcendentalism

In a lucid interpretation of *Being and Time* Slavoj Žižek writes that the standard interpretation of Heidegger’s masterpiece, certainly induced by Heidegger himself, is that the book is unfinished, while the way Žižek sees it the problem of the book is that is in fact too long.¹⁹ The third step Heidegger takes in this book, and as I have shown here, also in his art essay, is a step too much. Many interpreters think that Heidegger in his later work tries to find a way to finish what is left open in *Being and Time*. Žižek reads this later work as Heidegger’s attempts to get rid of this last movement, and, I think, rightly so.

With this last movement Heidegger clearly tries to connect his philosophical analyses with the spirit of the times. He looks for a way in which Being-there can be engaged with the times in which it lives without losing its authenticity. Authentic living should involve more than stepping back from everyday life, regarding it from a distance in a way that Rorty later has called ‘ironic’. It should be a real engagement with what is going on, not just going with the times (as “one” does), but self-consciously deciding where you stand. In order to accomplish this he connects his transcendentalism with a form of historicism. This brings him to the excessive expressions I cited, dangerously excessive because of the dark spirit of the times that hung over Europe when Heidegger wrote down his reflections.

In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, which – although published in 1950 – was conceived and written in the early thirties of the twentieth century, not long after

17 Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 292.

18 Ibid., 273.

19 Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), 107.

the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger is not prepared already to leave behind these movements. On the contrary, he repeats them, with the same outcome that the work of art can only be understood in its truth when it is received in a very particular context and appropriated by a cultural tradition. So, if we want to use Heidegger's philosophy of art to find an aesthetics that is not grounded in a specific cultural tradition but suited to receive and reflect on works of art from cultural traditions all over the world, it is first of all necessary that we get rid of the last pages of Heidegger's essay.

This is I think what Gianni Vattimo tries to do in his later works, e.g. *The Transparent Society* (1992). In the essay 'Art and Oscillation' from this book Vattimo discusses Heidegger's determination of the work of art by means of the concepts world and earth. "The world is set up as the system of significations it inaugurates; the earth is set forth by the work insofar as it is put forward, shown, as the obscure and thematically inexhaustible depths in which the world is *rooted* ... Earth is not world. It is not a system of signifying connections; it is other, the nothing, general gratuitousness and insignificance."²⁰

The shift from transcendentalism is apparent in the terminology. While Vattimo a page earlier had written the work of poetry *founds* a world²¹, in the cited passage he writes that the world, in an obscure way, is rooted in the earth. A bit farther he stresses his choice for this term by declaring: "thence not 'logically' founded."²² What Vattimo does in this later interpretation of Heidegger's philosophy of art is to argue that the work of art is not only a condition of possibility of a world but also its condition of impossibility. His interpretation is no longer transcendentalist but rather deconstructivist. In this interpretation earth is not the common ground but the common un-ground. Earth is the planet on which the human being never will be fully at home, whence it is necessary for him to create on it always temporary and contingent worlds to live his finite life.

Vattimo uses this interpretation of Heidegger to corroborate his thesis that "disorientation is essential to aesthetic experience" (idem). And to clarify this disorientation he refers to the passages on authentic being in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, which I have already discussed.

Earth as unfounding

In the remaining part of this article I will argue that in this later interpretation Vattimo does exactly what Žižek judged that Heidegger should have done, but despite his attempts never really succeeded in doing: get rid of the last part of *Being and Time* (and of the last pages of the work of art essay, that heavily lean on it).

Let us ask the question: what is the nature of the disorientation that according to Vattimo is the effect of an encounter with a work of art? A common understand-

20 Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 53.

21 Ibid., 52.

22 Ibid., 53.

ing of art would tell us that when we are confronted with a work of art, certainly when it is a new work or a work from a tradition that is not well-known to us, we often do not immediately understand it. Its imaginations transgress the borders of our ordinary world. Therefore we feel lost in the world that it offers to us. This is the reason why many people feel uncomfortable with uncommon art and avoid confrontations with it. Instead, they turn to art that is familiar to them or to the offerings of popular culture that they have no difficulty to understand.

Some people are prepared to make an effort to come to an understanding of the work of art. They seek help and guidance; they make a study of the artwork and its maker and along this way succeed in orienting themselves in its imaginative world. A good example of this last manner is the way Schapiro has approached the Van Gogh painting.

However, this is only one possible story of what happens when encountering a work of art. When Vattimo speaks about “aesthetic disorientation” he points to a very different event. What he means is not disorientation in the world of the work but in the world of everyday existence of the person who encounters the work. The impossibility to integrate the work in everyday existence may engender thoughts of doubt and feelings of uncanniness about this everyday existence. To be sure, not every work of art will provoke this effect, but some may; they evoke a world that fascinates us; that we cannot easily pass by or forget, but at the same time find impossible to integrate into our everyday life. We are urged to reconsider this everyday life, to consider the possibility that the world we live in is not *the* world; that it is one of many worlds, a possible world in the sense that it can be and not be. What we encounter, then, is the “possibility of impossibility” as Heidegger has called the encounter with mortality, the being-unto-death, in *Being and Time*.

In *Being and Time* the awareness that being-in-the-world is a being-unto-death marks the passage from inauthentic to authentic being. With Vattimo²³ I believe that the encounter with a work of art in the essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* has the same function of opening up the possibility of impossibility of everything that is meaningful to us in everyday life, the possibility that what we value and foster and care for in daily existence at the end of the day may not be that important, that it may at any moment disappear and appear to mean nothing. It is precisely this that Heidegger refers to when he says that a work of art not only opens up a world but also sets back this world on earth. As Vattimo says: earth marks the moment of “unfounding” that is an inseparable part of art.²⁴

As we have seen, Heidegger, in the art essay as in *Being and Time*, is not prepared to leave it at this. On the contrary he advocates going one step further, pass over this moment of unfounding, and to appropriate the earth as one’s earth, ‘native ground’, a place to find shelter for the turmoil the encounter with a work of art has caused. The way he deals with the Van Gogh painting in his essay offers a

23 Vattimo also makes the connection with death when he calls art “an exercise in mortality.” Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 56.

24 Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 52.

good example of this. And it cannot be denied that many of us make the same move when confronted with an experience that cannot immediately be understood: we relate it to something familiar and trusted and thus give it a place in our world.

Understandable though this appropriative gesture might be, it covers up what is undoubtedly the most important and most characteristic effect of a true encounter with a work of art: that it detaches us from everyday existence. It might be just for a moment, but in this moment we feel lost, no longer at home in the world we thought was unalienably ours. It is thanks to this moment that when we eventually give a place to the work in our world, this world is no longer the same.

In Heideggerian language: when we see (hear, feel) the earth in a work of art, we discover our world as inauthentic, a world that not just discloses, but at the same time conceals; a world in which we can never be fully at home. That is what Heidegger means when he says that the work is the setting-into work of truth. “Yet this definition”, Heidegger comments, “is intentionally ambiguous. It says on the one hand: art is the fixing in place of self-establishing truth in the figure. This happens in creation as the bringing forth of the unconcealment of beings [i.e. setting up a world, KV]. Setting-into-work, however, also means the bringing of work-being into movement and happening [i.e. setting forth the earth, KV] ... *Art then is the becoming and happening of truth.*”²⁵ Truth in Heidegger’s conception is not a stable state of affairs, not a pre-established harmony or the eternal order of the Great Chain of Being, underlying this world of changes, as every metaphysics eventually would have it. No, truth is an event; it is the experience of existence as event, something unstable, finite, possible and impossible at the same time. This experience has no place in everyday life. “Truth is never gathered from things at hand, never form the ordinary.”²⁶ Truth as event is the gift of (among others) works of art.

Conclusion: art in a globalizing world

One question is left: can art, as understood by Vattimo, give shelter in our globalizing world or does it rather contribute to the growing disorientation many people experience today as a consequence of globalization?

Let us remind ourselves that a good work of art is not only something that disorients; it is not only earth set forth, it also opens up a world. The disorientation that a work may cause can therefore not be considered the effect of the experience of something chaotic or disorderly. Of course some works of art are disharmonious, often deliberately so. They are made to shock. But these are exceptions. And even these exceptions, when they are really good, strike us in some way or other as a whole. A work of art therefore does not only disorientates its recipient, it also fascinates. The experience of a work of art is highly ambiguous.

Moreover, as I have stressed above, the encounter with the work of art is disorientating not only with regard to the world of the work but also with regard to the

25 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 196; italics original.

26 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 196.

world in which one lives one's ordinary life. As a consequence of this encounter the recipient may feel no longer at home in his world. However, this disorientation caused by art is different from the existential crisis Heidegger depicts in *Being and Time*, which is a state of pure anxiety comparable to a profound psychological depression. Compared to this the aesthetic crisis is rather superficial; it could be called imaginary. The aesthetic crisis does make your ordinary world lose its character of obviousness; it appears no longer fixed and stable, unquestionably founded, as it seemed before. You are challenged to change at least some of your common views about what is normal and proper. In the encounter with a work of art new perspectives are opened which – and here Heidegger's insistence on the importance of preservation in the last pages of his essay finds its full justification – ask for a reaction from the side of its recipients: they have to reject or to embrace them. In a way one could say that by this act of reception a work is integrated into one's own heritage, however, to say that this preservation means that the work is placed onto 'native ground' is – I hope to have shown – too strong a claim. The truth, it seems to me, is better approached when we say that through this act one's heritage is – it may be for a little bit – transformed and no longer appears as native ground.

A work of art may give us new perspectives, but that is not always the case and it is probably not even its primary effect. The primary function of art is that it carries us away from the world in which we have grown up and that we have learned to experience as proper. A true work of art invites – urges, seduces, appeals – us to step out of the world in which we are originally cast (*geworfen*) and to realize that it is not our definitive home; that this world is a highly artificial construction – as indeed, the work of art itself is – that in time will wither away if it does not before disappear disruptively. At the same time the work shows us that the earth offers many other places that can give shelter, if only we are prepared to leave home. It seems to me that this understanding of the work of art is the most important prerequisite for an aesthetics that wants to transgress traditional boundaries and aims at universal validity.

7 Globalization, technology, aesthetic dwelling

Erik Vogt

According to the Italian hermeneutic philosopher Gianni Vattimo, accounts of globalization in either exclusively sociological or political-economic terms remain severely limited, if they do not deliver an interpretation of the transformation of (the meaning of) Being as such that can clarify what Being signifies in the current process of globalization. That is to say, the meaning of the aperture of Being in/as globalization can only be grasped within the framework of a Heideggerian history of Western metaphysics as history (of the thinking) of Being culminating in the age of *Ge-stell*.

It is the *Ge-stell* as the essence of modern technology that has crystallized and brought to completion the particular form of rationality characterizing and determining the history of Western metaphysics. To be more precise, it is the principle of reason codified by metaphysics that has authorized planetary technology: "Modern technology pushes toward the greatest possible perfection. Perfection is based on the thoroughgoing calculability of objects. The calculability of objects presupposes the unqualified validity of the *principium rationis*. It is in this way that the authority characteristic of the principle of reason determines the essence of the modern, technological age."¹ Thus, the essence of modern technology has revealed itself as calculative thinking pointing to a fundamental transformation of the nature of man's relation to beings, and to the world as a whole, in that entities have been reduced to mere standing-reserve. Planetary technology involves therefore not only the reduction of entities to objects to be mastered, administered and controlled, that is, to exploitable and disposable objects; more radically, they have ultimately been transformed into mere raw material vanishing into objectlessness, thereby enacting the dissolution of the metaphysics of subject-object. That is to say: "Now, the object has dissolved into the merely available, into the stockpile. It is entirely on hand. The subject-object dualism ... underwent its own dissolution."² Moreover, this dissipation of the subject-object dualism implies the impossibility for the hu-

1 Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason* (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), 121.

2 Miguel de Beistegui, *The New Heidegger* (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), 110.

man being of still occupying a position of secure distance toward the process of technology; rather, the human subject itself has become subjected to its challenging and summoning, reaching the point at which it can only be taken as standing-reserve. The following two quotes attest to Heidegger's claim that this processing has fundamentally transformed the being of man: "As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but does so, rather, exclusively as standing-reserve ... then he comes to the brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve."³ And:

The subject-object relation thus reaches, for the first time, its pure 'relational', i.e., ordering character in which both the subject and the object are sucked up as standing-reserves. That does not mean that the subject-object relation vanishes, but rather the opposite: it now attains to its most extreme dominance, which is predetermined from out of Enframing. It becomes a standing-reserve to be commanded and set in order.⁴

But it is precisely at this extreme point of danger generated by the extreme dominance of Enframing that Heidegger repeatedly invokes Hölderlin's words: "But where the danger is, grows the saving power also."⁵ As is well-known, it is because of the demand imposed on us by the *Ge-stell* to think the essence of (the hidden truth of) technology that Heidegger can identify this danger itself as the saving power.⁶ That is to say, it is precisely at this extreme point of danger where both object and subject have been dissolved into mere standing-reserve that Heidegger glimpses a possible anticipation of a different disclosure. He writes: "The experience in Enframing as the constellation of Being and man through the modern world of technology is a prelude to what is called the event of appropriation."⁷ The decisive *Kehre* concealed in the *Ge-stell*'s totality of the technological setting, summoning, provoking and ordering announces a different kind of gathering designated as *Gelassenheit*:

In *Gelassenheit*, it is a different kind of gathering, and of cohesion, that prevails: not that of the total capture and seizure of all things actual, but that of letting-be and releasement of such things from out of their essence (the essence of truth). *Gelassenheit* signals an attitude and comportment toward the world that is altogether different from that of *Ge-stell*. It is an attitude of releasement of beings *for* their being, of letting beings be in their being.⁸

3 Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 26-7.

4 Heidegger, *Technology*, 173.

5 Heidegger, *Technology*, 26-7.

6 Heidegger, *Technology*, 42.

7 Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 36-37.

8 Beistegui, *New Heidegger*, 120.

Thus, the calculability of the *Ge-stell* seems to cast the shadow of the incalculability of *Gelassenheit* – a shadow that comes to the fore in that realm which “is akin to the essence of technology and ... fundamentally different from it. Such a realm is art”⁹ It is via *poiesis* that, so Heidegger, one could thus gain a distance to calculative thought, technology and technological devices. “We must learn to leave them in their right place, to let go of them as something inessential, as something that does not affect us in any decisive manner. In letting go of them, we turn to the world, and to the beings in its midst.”¹⁰ That is, the catastrophe of the *Ge-stell*, when turned in the right manner, might harbor the saving power of a *poietic* thinking preparing for *Gelassenheit* that is supposed to lay the ground for the possible arrival/return of some altogether different Being.

It is precisely against this attempt to re-anchor the question of Being in the *proprium* of *poiesis* that Vattimo mobilizes his *verwinded* (that is, distortive, twisting, secularizing, nihilistic) appropriation of Heidegger’s conception of *Ge-stell*. First, Vattimo concedes that Heidegger ultimately “confined himself to the aperture that takes place in poetry.”¹¹ Moreover, it is no longer possible to appeal – against the “superior global power of the unthought essence of technology” – to another or different foundation for some arrival/return of Being, even if that foundation were a *poietic* one, since this traditionalism would conceal precisely the achievement that marks Heidegger’s *Ge-stell*: the letting-go of all principles, authorities or foundations. In short, Vattimo does not subscribe to Heidegger’s move of installing *poiesis* as the very realm in which the question of Being, which the reign of technology renders universally unpronounceable, has been preserved. Rather, the task of thinking Being is to twist and distort further Heidegger’s meditation on technology as *Ge-stell* in the direction of an account of the proliferation of technology and its globalizing reach. Vattimo thus locates the saving power of the *Ge-stell* not in its concealed *Wink* toward a different (*poietic*) opening, but rather in the *Ge-stell* itself. That is, Heidegger’s *Ge-stell* is not only “the highest point of the metaphysical oblivion of being,” but also “a first, oppressing flash of *Ereignis*, that is of the event of being, beyond the metaphysical oblivion of being.”¹² Vattimo continues: “Precisely in the *Ge-stell*, that is, in the society of technological and total manipulation, Heidegger sees an opportunity of overcoming the oblivion and metaphysical alienation in which Western man has lived until now.”¹³ Since the *Ge-stell* is that event in which, ultimately, “there is nothing to Being as such (*es mit dem Sein selbst nichts mehr ist*)”,¹⁴ and in so far as technology exerts its power of objectification

9 Heidegger, *Technology*, 35.

10 Beistegui, *New Heidegger*, 120.

11 Gianni Vattimo, *Nihilism & Emancipation: Ethics, Politics & Law*, ed. Santiago Zabala. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 13.

12 Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 56.

13 Vattimo, *Transparent Society*, 56.

14 Gianni Vattimo, “Metaphysics and Violence,” in *Weakening Philosophy: Essay in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*, ed. Santiago Zabala (Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007) 400-421, 415.

and representationalism not only on entities, but also on human beings, it can free “Being and humanity from the subject and object of metaphysics”.¹⁵ However, this opportunity indicated by Heidegger himself regarding this flashing of the ‘new’ in the midst of the *Ge-stell* remains at the same time somewhat schematic. Vattimo explains: “The brevity and failure to expand upon this indication, which ... should be seen as an essential gap in Heidegger’s thought is probably motivated ... by the fact ... that Heidegger ... never escaped from a vision of technology dominated by the model of the motor and mechanical energy.”¹⁶ The actual ontological sense of technology can only be disclosed through a “radical shift in our vision of technology”. Thus he continues:

The technology that actually does give us a glimpse of a possible dissolution of the rigid distinction between subject and object is not the mechanical technology of the motor, ... but it might very well be the technology of modern communications, the means by which information is gathered, ordered, and disseminated. To speak more plainly: the possibility of overcoming metaphysics, which Heidegger describes obscurely in the *Ge-stell*, really opens up only when the technology ... ceases to be mechanical and becomes electronic: information and communication technology.¹⁷

Only this updated, distortive-nihilistic interpretation of the *Ge-stell* can provide new meaning to Heidegger’s coterminous definition of modernity as the “age of the world picture”. The reduction of the world to a world picture that, so Heidegger, constitutes the essential trait pertaining to the increasing specialization of science and technology, is again accompanied by a certain shadow of incalculability. Instead of simply releasing this shadow into *Gelassenheit* as an alternative beginning, Vattimo suggests that, far from attempting to extricate it from the web of the *Ge-stell*, it rather has to be grasped as its immanent and nihilistic consequence in the form of a proliferation of conflicting images of the world. “It is this conflict that sets in train a massive enlargement of the system of calculation and prediction, to the point where this movement to the extremes of calculability leads to a general incalculability: the image of the world picture gives way to the dissolution of this image in a Babel of conflicting images.”¹⁸

Heidegger’s analysis of the modern production of the world picture must therefore be extended “from the field of science and its languages ... to the more general sphere of social communication as it has developed thanks to print, radio, television, and everything that we now include under the heading of the Internet”.¹⁹ Vattimo concludes:

15 Vattimo, “Metaphysics and Violence”, 419.

16 Vattimo, *Nihilism & Emancipation*, 14.

17 Vattimo, *Nihilism & Emancipation*, 15.

18 Gianni Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 25–26.

19 Vattimo, *Nihilism & Emancipation*, 16.

We can recognize in the *Ge-stell* a first flashing of the new event of Being to the extent that it brings with it a dissolution of the realistic traits of experience, in other words what I think we might call a weakening of the principle of reality. It is probably only the shift from its mechanical stage to that of electronic information that is determining the advent of postmodernity.²⁰

Thus, the sense of postmodern Being in/as globalization reveals itself as technologically (re-)produced, mass-mediated weak Being – as Being consisting of fragmentary messages/images and enigmatic traces of what no longer exists. The essence of technology becomes a matter of ongoing change, of disclosure understood as unfounding and unsecuring, because it carries, as globalized communication, the implication of a dismantling, an unleashing or releasing of a dynamic made up of highly conflictual forces. Although technology as *Ge-stell* involves a setting up, a setting in place or into representation, it engenders at the same time an unfounding movement, an unsecuring, that breaks things (and humans) free and brings them forth into play by unsettling or disorganizing conventional metaphysical boundaries.²¹

Technology's weakening or erosion of reality in terms of a globalized communication which is intertwined with the tradition of messages and images that are brought to us from what no longer exists, that is, from one's past culture, as well as from other cultures, may be understood as the fulfilment of a "Nietzschean prophecy": "In the end the true world becomes a fable. ... For us, reality is rather the result of the intersection and 'contamination' ... of a multiplicity of images, interpretations and reconstructions circulated by the media in competition with one another and without 'central' coordination."²² In other words, the mass media represent a vertiginous form of the Nietzschean prophecy that "the society of human sciences and generalized communication has moved towards what could, in general, be called the 'fabling of the world'. The images of the world we receive from the media and the human sciences ... are not simply different interpretations of a 'reality' that is 'given' regardless, but rather constitute the very objectivity of the

20 Vattimo, *Nihilism & Emancipation*, 16.

21 See also Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). In his complex and comprehensive philosophical-anthropological account of technology, Stiegler, similar to Vattimo, repeatedly remarks on the ambiguity in Heidegger's works on technology; that is to say, technology in Heidegger appears as "the ultimate obstacle to and the ultimate possibility of thought" – Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1*, 7. Moreover, like Vattimo, Stiegler is attentive to the unfounding and disorienting essence of technology. This dimension of unfounding, unsecuring, unsettling characteristic of technology is also examined by R.L. Rutsky, *High Techn : Art and Technology from the Machine Aesthetic to the Posthuman* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 6-8. What is more, Stiegler, again like Vattimo, insinuates that many of the most promising aspects of Heidegger's meditations on technology come fully into their own, once they are inscribed into the context of a "generalizing of telecommunication techniques" – see Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 2* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 90.

22 Vattimo, *Transparent Society*, 7.

world”.²³ The reality of this world “presents itself as softer and more fluid”; what is more, “experience can again acquire the characteristics of oscillation, disorientation and play”.²⁴

By emphasizing the unfounding character of technology in the guise of mass-mediated global communication, Vattimo twists technology free from its modern instrumental or functional definition and releases it as a matter of forms into an affinity with aesthetics – with an aesthetics, however, that, by stripping the artwork of its auratic determination – that is, of conceptions of the artwork and of aesthetic experience appealing to an ideal of “sublation, of harmony, of perfection and completion”, thereby remaining captive to the “illusion of the fullness of Being”²⁵ – becomes equally characterized by unfounding and disorientation.²⁶

This accounts for Vattimo’s project of traversing the Western aesthetic tradition in form of an attempt to distort and dissolve that tradition from the inside by opening it up towards its relation to the world of mass-mediated images in such a way that the explosion and dissemination of art and artwork through the advent of new technologies of communication discloses the globalization of aestheticity;²⁷ that is to say, aesthetic experience coagulates not only around technological meanings (which was already a central characteristic of different artistic avant-garde movements), and mass media not only produce a global aestheticization of existence, but the work of art itself is now also contaminated with the image-and message-saturated world of mass media; the work of art has become an artistic product or commodity that, traversed by the endless messages and images issuing forth from the mass media, acquires a fleeting and weakened existence and thus can no longer be presented in terms of Being “as permanence, grandeur, and force”.²⁸ Vattimo exposes this weakened status of art and artwork by means of an interpretation of Heidegger’s conception of the artwork as “setting-into-work of truth” and *Stoss*, incidentally suggesting its affinity to Walter Benjamin’s notion of shock.²⁹

Briefly, Vattimo recalls the two essential dimensions of the artwork that Heidegger develops in his essay “The Origin of the Work of Art”: the *Aufstellung* of a world and the *Herstellung* of the earth; while *Aufstellung* refers to the institution, founding and opening up of historical worlds, *Herstellung* of the earth signifies the artwork’s *physis* with its mode of *Zeitigung* (covered up precisely by what Benjamin

23 Vattimo, *Transparent Society*, 25–26.

24 Vattimo, *Transparent Society*, 59.

25 Vattimo, “Metaphysics and Violence”, 412.

26 As to the process of the simultaneous severing of art and technology from any notion of instrumentality, I owe this idea to Rutsky, *High Techn*, 7–8.

27 See Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 54. By the way, already Vattimo’s early texts on aesthetics and art demonstrate his continuous interest in, and hermeneutic affirmation of, the proximity between art and “mass culture” – see Gianni Vattimo, *Art’s Claim to Truth*, ed. Santiago Zabala (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

28 Vattimo, *End of Modernity*, 63.

29 See Vattimo, *Transparent Society*, 45–61.

criticizes as aura).³⁰ In other words, only by emphasizing the artwork's production or setting-forth of the earth can one approach its unfounding function in that the "earth is that element of the work which comes forth as ever concealing itself anew, like a sort of nucleus that is never used up by interpretations and never exhausted by meanings".³¹ It is for this very reason that Vattimo likens the artwork to "a funerary monument built to bear the traces and the memory of someone across time, but for others".³² The fact that the work of art in its dimension as *Herstellung* of the earth is constitutively marked by mortality becomes even more obvious when aesthetic experience, having become the focal point under the global conditions of technological reproducibility, is grasped in terms of *Stoss* and shock, thereby revealing its essential relation to mortal danger in face of the artwork's being-there. That is to say, both *Stoss* and shock characterize an aesthetic experience of *Unheimlichkeit*, *Un-zu-hause-sein*, a suspension of the familiarity of the world, its and one's own disorientation and unfounding.³³ In short, disorientation and unfounding as central features of technologically conditioned aesthetic experience are owed to the earth since "it is not world. It is not a system of signifying connections: it is other, the nothing, general gratuitousness and insignificance",³⁴ preventing the artwork and its addressee from ever being recuperated into some final shelter or *Geborgenheit*. Vattimo summarizes:

Shock-*Stoss* is the *Wesen*, the essence, of art in the two senses this expression has in Heidegger's terminology. It is the way in which aesthetic experience presents itself in late modernity, and it is also that which appears to be essential for art *tout court*; that is, its occurrence as the nexus of foundation and unfounding in the form of oscillation and disorientation – and ultimately as the task of mortality.³⁵

Several consequences follow from this account of aesthetic experience (and of art) under the condition of technologically weakened global reality. First, aesthetic experience as an experience of estrangement and discontinuity is generated by the disruptive effects of time and mortality and, already carrying the inscriptions of global mass media, implies rather a pluralization of the beautiful both in intra- and inter-cultural terms. That is to say, modernity's aesthetic utopia is dissolved into a postmodern aesthetic heterotopia in that, if aesthetic experience is still communal experience, then only on condition that one's experience of recognition in an aesthetic model must explicitly "recall and open upon the multiplicity of

³⁰ See Vattimo, *End of Modernity*, 62-63.

³¹ Vattimo, *End of Modernity*, 71.

³² Vattimo, *End of Modernity*, 73.

³³ But even here one has to add immediately that Vattimo secularizes, renders mundane, *Stoss*/shock; that is to say, he deprives these notions of their modernist-grandiose sublimity that, sometimes, even survives in postmodernist discourses on art and aesthetics.

³⁴ Vattimo, *Transparent Society*, 53.

³⁵ Vattimo, *Transparent Society*, 58.

aesthetic models³⁶ and of communities. Moreover, since mass-mediatic aesthetic experience consists essentially in a process of referrals to other possible cultural worlds, it becomes crucial to any emancipative project under the sign of globalization: that is to say, “the salvation of our postmodern civilization can only be an esthetic salvation”³⁷ in that it promulgates an “acceptance of an array of cultural universes”³⁸, and a “liberation of differences, of local elements ... that finally speak up for themselves”³⁹, and that is accompanied by an acknowledgment of the “historicity, contingency and finiteness”⁴⁰ of all the plural voices weaving the web of a global world. Finally, the passage from utopia to heterotopia via the recognition of plural communities and manifold conceptions of the beautiful renders all art essentially decorative or ornamental;⁴¹ the beauty of art can no longer be understood as the auratic site wherein truth finds its sensuous or anticipatory expression; art’s placement is rather provided by the ornament, “in the sense that its essential significance, the interest to which it responds, is the extension of life’s world through a process of referrals to other possible worlds.”⁴² In other words, art is weakened into ornamental art which forms a kind of non-essential, ephemeral background or surplus for aesthetic experience, without any longer being anchored properly in some authentic, essential, or foundational site.

Aesthetic experience which, under the conditions of global *Ge-stell*, is necessarily marked by unfounding and disorientation, resembles an experience of dwelling in uncanniness, of no longer being at home; it is for this very reason that Vattimo maintains a critical distance to those traits of classicist, traditionalist aesthetics that can still be discerned in some of Heidegger’s remarks on place and art. For Heidegger sees place, which he defines as the “locale of the truth of Being”, as being threatened by global *Ge-stell*’s time-space compression:⁴³ “All distances in time and space are shrinking. ... Yet the frantic abolition of all distances brings no nearness. ... Everything gets lumped together into uniform distancelessness.”⁴⁴ This de-

36 Vattimo, *Transparent Society*, 68. This pluralization of an ultimately Gadamerian characterization of the experience of the beautiful becomes available only through and in “mass culture” that “has by no means standardized aesthetic experience ... Instead, it has explosively brought to light the proliferation of what is ‘beautiful’, assigning the word not only to different cultures through its anthropological research, but also to ‘subsystems’ within Western culture itself” – Vattimo, *Transparent Society*, 67.

37 Vattimo, *Nihilism & Emancipation*, 56.

38 Vattimo, *Nihilism & Emancipation*, 96-97.

39 Vattimo, *Transparent Society*, 9.

40 Vattimo, *Transparent Society*, 9.

41 See Vattimo, *Transparent Society*, 71-73.

42 Vattimo, *Transparent Society*, 72.

43 The term ‘time-space compression’ is borrowed from David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA, and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1990), 284-307. For a trenchant critique of post-Heideggerian attempts to formulate either a foundational conception of place that, as “privileged site of lived experience and daily life”, is to take precedence over the homogeneity, uniformity and emptiness supposedly produced by (technologically) flattened and abstracted space, or a version of “rooted cosmopolitanism”, see David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 166-169.

44 Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 165.

stabilization of traditional space-time coordinates generated by global communication mass media produces homelessness, a being-without-roots⁴⁵ and (fear of) a loss of identity; only a re-auratization of place could recover the art of dwelling. But is this reassertion of locale not ultimately marked by a retrospective, classicist conception of art and of aesthetics, that is, by a traditionalism that posits the past as some stable and unified origin? What is more, by claiming implicitly primacy for the life-worldly experience anchored in locale, does this conception of (the) art (of dwelling) not render place as the privileged site of lived experience that has to be defended against and protected from colonization by global technology? Apart from failing to radicalize its own historicity, Heidegger's place-based theory of art and aesthetics seems to remain tied to a possible recuperation of a strong subjectivity closely bound by its supposedly definite dwelling in the *proprium* of place.

Does, then, Vattimo's interpretation of aesthetic experience under the conditions of the global *Ge-stell* imply the endorsement of a kind of aestheticized cultural relativism, according to which the world under the condition of global technology consists of nothing but contingent juxtapositions of different locales unrelated to each other and inhabited by a figure of subjectivity, whose aesthetic experience could only be 'momentive'?⁴⁶ The answer is no; for what Vattimo mobilizes against this conception of a factually-historically contextualized, momentive aesthetic experience, is a thinking of finitude that is faithful to the revelation (issuing forth from being itself as *Ge-stell*) that one's own provenance is such that it is both historically contextualized *and* itself part of the unfolding of a historical destiny: the destiny of global *Ge-stell*. In other words, one must not remain oblivious to the fact that the event of *Ge-stell*, by means of which *a priori* structures (left intact by historicism) are dissolved into the multiplicity of voices, represent not simply some given anarchic factuality, but rather the call of a *Ge-schick* which issues forth from *Über-lieferung*. Thus, the truth of the unfounding horizon of global Enframing is, according to Vattimo, neither "the historically determined paradigm" nor the "pure relativist-historicist detachment", but rather "unfoundation as destiny".⁴⁷ What is more, "unfoundation as destiny" of aesthetic experience brings to light not only the unfounding and disorienting, but also the oscillating character of aesthetic experience, swaying between the poles of disorientation and belonging, estrangement and provenance; aesthetic experience in the epoch of global *Ge-stell* is therefore ultimately about a dwelling together speaking with an irreducible multiplicity, but always in the form of being thrown into a historical-cultural opening that one inherits actively: "Thrownness in a historical opening is always inseparable from active participation in its constitution, its creative interpretation and transformation",⁴⁸ precisely of the sort that, for Vattimo, (contemporary) dwelling implies.

45 Heidegger, *Poetry*, 160.

46 I borrow the terms 'momentive' (as well as 'pluripolar') from Franz Wimmer, *Globalität und Philosophie. Studien zur Interkulturalität* (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2003), 92-114.

47 Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 93.

48 Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 83.

In the age of global *Ge-stell*, dwelling in the *Gestalt* of thrownness-opening can, Vattimo suggests, only mean the assumption of the heritage of the West. “We all belong to the West and ... westernization is a destiny that even ‘other’ cultures that have freed themselves from colonial status ... are unable to escape.”⁴⁹ Consequently, dwelling as assumption of the Western tradition can neither be reduced to the unproblematic continuation of its ‘universalistic’ heritage nor to its simple relativist liquidation in light of the existence of plural non-Western cultures; for what both false universalism and reductionist relativism fail to take into account is that both other, that is, non-Western cultures and Western culture itself have been subject to a global process of contamination; that is to say, while, according to Vattimo, other cultures have been inscribed for some time into the texture of Western culture and are thus aesthetically and politically present in it, at least in form of marginal traces resistant to their *Aufhebung*, Western culture itself, having undergone a process of constitutive weakening in the wake of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles and victories, has had to let go of its strong and violent claim to being the foundational model for humanity and therefore can continue to persist only in a distorted and evacuated manner, making it, along with these other cultures, part of a “vast construction site.”⁵⁰

Consequently, dwelling in global *Ge-stell* amounts to finding shelter in a “vast construction site” of multiple, multicultural traces and residues. At some point, Vattimo compares this being-sheltered to dwelling in the library of a postmodern Babel built by “an endless network of references constituted by the multiple voices of the *Über-lieferung*.”⁵¹ But what figure of subjectivity can, then, correspond to, and take up residence in, this aesthetic experience of dwelling within global *Ge-stell*? Clearly, Vattimo insists that the only appropriate figure is that of weak subjectivity – that is, a subjectivity that is divided, unstable, perpetually oscillating and experiences and undergoes this oscillation, while dwelling within that very oscillation. For once the objectivity of reality has been recast in terms of a complex, dense, and non-transparent technological web of images and messages of the world, subjectivity can no longer be conceived of as “a center of self-consciousness and decision-making, reduced as it is to being the author of statistically predicted choices, playing a multiplicity of social roles that are irreducible to a unity.”⁵² Surprisingly, postmodern dwelling has, according to Vattimo, as its ideal inhabitant the figure of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*. For it is the *Übermensch* who “succeeds in making himself equal to the new technological capacities”, who can actively come to terms and play with the radical transformations that they engender, thereby becoming “an ally of technicians and engineers”;⁵³ however, Vattimo immediately points out that one must not imagine the *Übermensch* in terms of strength, that is, in terms of

49 Vattimo, *Nihilism & Emancipation*, 33.

50 Vattimo, *End of Modernity*, 158.

51 Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 90.

52 Vattimo, *Transparent Society*, 117.

53 Gianni Vattimo, *Dialogue With Nietzsche* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 127.

instrumental or technological mastery driven by some 'instinct of self-preservation' and the struggle for existence, but rather in terms of weakness and moderation. Thus, Vattimo maintains that the *Übermensch*, once pluralized by global *Ge-stell*, belongs "to the most moderate, those who have no need of extreme articles of faith ... and who can think man with a considerable moderation of his value and therefore become small and weak".⁵⁴ Moreover, since the *Übermensch* as experiment with/of freedom is guided by an aesthetic gaze, Vattimo ultimately conceives of the *Übermensch* as a kind of mobile artist.

However, one could, perhaps, invoke another figure of weak subjectivity – latently present in Vattimo's texts, although never fully acknowledged – that might fit his rendition of the technologically generated aesthetic experience of mobile dwelling even better: that of the heterotopian or 'pluripolar' tourist⁵⁵ or, to be more precise, 'post-tourist'⁵⁶ subjectivity.

The aesthetic experience correlated with post-tourist subjectivity is characterized by a virtuality generated by the electronic frame of the different technologies of communication and information, providing for the post-tourist gaze an infinite availability of, and access to, different locales, sites, and places; it is also characterized by the multitude of options no longer constrained by the obsolete modernist opposition between high art and simple pleasure-seeking diversions; finally, it is marked by the self-reflexive recognition that the post-tourist can no longer pretend to being able of immersing herself as neutral and invisible observer into some kind of 'authentic' or 'primitive' past.⁵⁷ In other words, Vattimo's conception of postmodern weak subjectivity dwelling in hyperreality seems to perfectly fit into one framework of postmodern tourism – that of 'simulational post-tourism' – while he would certainly reject the second theoretical framework of postmodern tourism that, emphasizing the possibility of still encountering some 'real other', has been designated 'other postmodern tourism'.⁵⁸ For although both postmodern conceptions of tourism reject modern theories of tourism and their usual homogenization of tourist experience in terms of the search for some 'authentic' experience and identity, and although both emphasize the multiplicity and hybridity of technologically mediated tourist motivations, experiences, knowledges, identities, and environments, 'other postmodern tourism' could still be seen as problematically perpetuating a conception of the relationship between sameness and alterity that remains ignorant of the fact that the encounter with "an Other who is 'totally other'" is ultimately bound to an "ideological condition."⁵⁹ Vattimo refers here pri-

54 Vattimo, *Dialogue With Nietzsche*, 130.

55 For Vattimo's numerous invocations of the tourist see, for example, *Dialogue With Nietzsche*, 6-7; *Nihilism & Emancipation*, 56.

56 The term 'post-tourist' is drawn from Maxine Feifer, *Going Places* (London: MacMillan, 1985). See also John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London, Newbury Park, New Delhi: SAGE, 1990), 100-102.

57 See Feifer, *Going Places*, 271.

58 See I. Munt, "The 'Other' Postmodern Tourism: Culture, Travel and the new Middle Class", *Theory, Culture and Society* 11 (1994): 101-123.

59 Vattimo, *End of Modernity*, 153.

marily to insights shared both by various forms of cultural anthropology and by hermeneutics. That is to say: “As anthropology raises well-founded doubts about the ideological nature of the ideal of an encounter with cultures that are radically other, so hermeneutics also experiences the dream of radical alterity as something which has been definitively *ausgeträumt* at both a theoretical and historical/*geschichtlich* level.”⁶⁰ Moreover, since post-tourism is necessarily inscribed into the sway of hermeneutics that, according to Vattimo, both emerged at a time marked by the “collapse of the unity of the European tradition” and “developed in an era not of radical alterity but of a fully unfolded metaphysical and scientific-technological unification of the world”,⁶¹ post-tourism has to be grasped “as an internal aspect of the general process of Westernization and homologation”.⁶² But, again, this is not a process in which ‘other’ cultures would have simply disappeared; rather, it has generated a “mixed reality in which alterity is entirely exhausted”;⁶³ to put it more succinctly, “the disappearance of alterity does not occur as a part of the dreamed-for total organization of the world, but rather as a condition of widespread contamination”.⁶⁴ Vattimo can thus summarize:

In the process of homologation and contamination, the texts belonging to our tradition, which have always served as the measure of our humanity . . . , progressively lose their cogency as models and become part of this vast construction site of traces and residues, just as the condition of radical alterity of cultures that are other is exposed as an ideal which has perhaps never been realized, and is certainly unrealizable for us.”⁶⁵

Consequently, post-tourist subjectivity can be seen as belonging among those *freie Geister* who stroll contemplatively (and with pleasure) through the vast “construction site of traces and residues” that, although having become instantly available through global *Ge-stell* at the flick of a switch, is ultimately “not very different from the warehouse of theatrical costumes which Nietzsche compares to that ‘garden of history’ in which nineteenth-century humanity wanders without discovering any strong identity, but only an array of ‘masks’”.⁶⁶ This post-tourist subjectivity – gathering *Erlebnisse* but no longer *Erfahrung*; characterized by turning, twisting, circular movements, by heeding to its provenance by means of repeating it in form of creative interpretation and transformation, thereby rendering the presence-absence of tradition as oscillating, ever open result – might therefore be seen to ultimately incarnate, for Vattimo, the aesthetic experience of postmodern dwelling or being-sheltered cor-responding to the call of Being of/as *Über-lieferung* and *Über-eignung* of a multiplicity of traces and voices.

60 Vattimo, *End of Modernity*, 153.

61 Vattimo, *End of Modernity*, 154.

62 Vattimo, *End of Modernity*, 156.

63 Vattimo, *End of Modernity*, 159.

64 Vattimo, *End of Modernity*, 159.

65 Vattimo, *End of Modernity*, 161.

66 Vattimo, *End of Modernity*, 161.

Postscript

Despite Vattimo's occasional references to the "margins of the present which embrace both Third World societies and the ghettos of industrial societies"⁶⁷, it is difficult to see how those groups and individuals forced to occupy, and exist in, these margins could equally be sheltered by the very (aesthetic experience of) post-modern dwelling constitutive of Western, technologically produced post-tourist subjectivity, although it is certainly the case that they have become subjected to post-tourism (think, for instance, of the obscenity of shantytown tourism). To put it bluntly: The claim can be made that Vattimo's celebration of the fluid modality of postmodern dwelling fails to recognize the ways in which postmodern post-tourists are accompanied by the underside of their *alter egos*: vagabonds, exiles, and the poor.⁶⁸ Rendering visible those *alter egos* presupposes, however, that the socio-economic realm is no longer simply subsumed under global technology: that the question of capital is no longer allowed to be directly dissolved into the question (of the essence) of technology. For Vattimo, the question of capital is clearly subordinate to *Ge-stell*'s process of nihilism in which Being has been reduced to exchange-value, and use-values have been entirely consumed in exchange-value. In this respect, Vattimo continues with Heidegger's project of deciphering the essence of (post-)modern dwelling primarily in terms of the question of technology (and of calculative thinking). Thus, he forecloses the very possibility that technology is itself inscribed in the capitalist dynamics of generating surplus-value. In other words, what Vattimo repeatedly presents as the pluralizing, disseminative, and emancipative force of global technology, might in fact have to be grasped as processes that are owed to, and over-determined by, the dynamics of late capitalism's permanent self-revolutionizing character. However, this near-foreclosure of the question of late capitalism from his conception of globalized technology is critically re-examined in one of Vattimo's most recent texts.⁶⁹ To be more precise, Vattimo's latest thinking insists on the urgent task to re-think the relationship between capital and technology by taking up again the question of communism. Although his invocation of, and return to, communism does not (yet) provide an outline of the modes of dwelling corresponding to what he calls "anarchist communism",⁷⁰ Vattimo clearly recognizes that the globalized world has become uninhabitable for the majority of humanity. The operations of speculative capital have led to an alarming increase in the "'absolute' rate of poverty"; that is, they have set in motion a progressive economic "proletarianization" followed underhandedly by "the proletarianization of informatics".⁷¹ Thus, the majority of humanity is not only cut off from economic resources but, due to the 'progress' in globalized technology, is also subjected to

67 Vattimo, *End of Modernity*, 158.

68 For a lucid account of the figure of the vagabond, see Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 77-102.

69 Gianni Vattimo, *Wie werde ich Kommunist* (Berlin: Rotbuch Press, 2008).

70 Vattimo, *Wie werde ich Kommunist*, 104-106.

71 Vattimo, *Wie werde ich Kommunist*, 34.

a control over their lives that was unprecedented in previous societies. Instead of subsuming the economic under the technological, Vattimo now conceives of these two aspects of proletarianization in terms of their mutual conditioning. What is more, the exclusion of the majority of humanity from access to economic and technological resources requires a constantly upgraded defensive walls erected by the capital and its representatives which, in turn, unleashes a progressive “pauperization of the middle classes and makes the life of everyone unbearable – except the lives of those few who have information technologies at their disposal”.⁷² In short, globalized technology has contributed to the mapping of a strictly bifurcated world consisting, on the one hand, of the “bubble media information – a bubble because it actually forms a sphere strictly delimited against those who are not ‘wired’ – and the rest of the world becoming ever more ‘primitive’”.⁷³ It is this bifurcated world that proves wrong any claim to the effect that the proliferation of electronic information leading to everyone being wired to the internet “would solve all conflicts and open a new era devoid of alienation”.⁷⁴

It is for this very reason that Vattimo argues for a renewed focus on the question of political economy in terms of the urgency of political decisions and not merely technological shifts. However, two problems arise here: First, as Vattimo remarks with regard to Silvio Berlusconi’s Italy, politics itself has been mediatized to such an extent that a profound transformation of the political system that is both fully saturated by the power of the media and characterized by the separation of the citizens “from any form of political participation that does not occur in the manner offered by televisual communication and advertising”⁷⁵ seems impossible; moreover, an appeal to liberal democracy remains insufficient since liberal democracy is nothing but the political form of late capitalism. In contrast to his former thesis that current technologies of communication and information somehow directly create or even embody the conditions for the democratic proliferation of multiple and fluid identities and communities, Vattimo now points to a fundamental lacuna haunting contemporary Western liberal democracy; for Western liberal democracies are increasingly administered via media, “chained to the world of mass communication that is itself controlled by capitalist forces”.⁷⁶ Furthermore, since any politics operating within the framework of current Western liberal democracies is ultimately incapable of bursting open the technological bubble of globalized late capitalism, Vattimo concludes that an exit from today’s techno-capitalism might

72 Vattimo, *Wie werde ich Kommunist*, 37.

73 Vattimo, *Wie werde ich Kommunist*, 47.

74 Vattimo, *Wie werde ich Kommunist*, 47.

75 Vattimo, *Wie werde ich Kommunist*, 47.

76 Vattimo, *Wie werde ich Kommunist*, 48.

consist in the political attempt to retrieve “two originary elements of communism” – “Soviets and electricity” – for a conception of the “Internet guided by Soviet ideals”.⁷⁷

77 Vattimo, *Wie werde ich Kommunist*, 105, Incidentally, Vattimo’s hermeneutics of suspicion regarding contemporary Western liberal democracies leads him to a qualified embrace of current Latin American politics, especially of Castro’s Cuba and Chávez’s Venezuela, that put emphasis on forms of internationalism supposed to resist the pull of capitalist-technological globalization – see Vattimo, *Wie werde ich Kommunist*, 101-104.

PART 2

Local artistic traditions in a global context

8 Art in and out of cultural borders

Seeing the transition of Chinese contemporary art from Xu Bing's works¹

Peng Feng

Chinese contemporary art emerged in the late 1970s and can be divided into three stages: (1) aping Western avant-garde, (2) showing Chinese cultural identity, and (3) crossing cultural borders. From the later 1980s to the 1990s, we can see the transition from the first to the second. From the later 1990s to the 2000s, we can see the transition from the second to the third. In this chapter I will just focus on the second transition and take the leading artist Xu Bing as the example.

Xu Bing is a Chinese contemporary artist, who has been especially active in the second transition. From his *Book from the Sky* through *New English Calligraphy* to *Book from the Ground*, we can see how his work moves from showing cultural identity to a new international style. *Book from the Sky*, which consists of thousands pseudo Chinese characters forged by the artist, cannot be read by anybody, including the artist himself. The only meaning of *Book from the Sky* is showing Chinese cultural identity through appropriating the image of Chinese characters which is popularly seen as the symbol of Chinese culture. *New English Calligraphy* is a fusion of written English and written Chinese. The letters of an English word are slightly altered and arranged in a square word format so that the word takes on the ostensible form of a Chinese character, yet remains legible to the English reader. In order to understand and practice *New English Calligraphy*, Chinese readers have to learn English, while English readers should be interested in Chinese calligraphy. It is a wonderful design to mix Chinese and English and to enhance the communication between English readers and Chinese readers. *Book from the Ground* can be read by anybody, irrespective of their cultural or educational background. *Book from the Ground* is a computer program which can translate Chinese and English (and any languages in the future) into a language of icons. When a user types in an English or Chinese sentence and when he or she presses return, it is translated into a language of icons that appears in the window. This program is meant to enable communication regardless of the user's cultural background or level of education.

1 I am greatly indebted to Curtis Carter and Mary Wiseman for their comments and suggestions.

1

As one representative of Chinese artists born in the 1950s, Xu Bing got his art training in the former Soviet system and earned his bachelor's and master's degree from the Print Department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, which preferred Socialist Realism to any kind of art form and style before the end of 1970s. Xu Bing was an excellent student and became professor after graduation. However, he decided to do his own art and became a rebel against Socialist Realism. About this change, Xu Bing says,

That's because in Chinese art circles people know I have a very good foundation and understanding of traditional art and methodologies. My early works were very much built on that foundation, so when I began to incorporate more modern ideas and approaches, many people expressed regret because they felt I was taking a wrong direction ... Another major factor that influenced the change in my artistic direction in the mid-1980s was an exhibition of North Korean painting shown in Beijing. Most of the works were in the style of Socialist Realism, all bright flowers and smiling faces looking up at the Great Leader. Those works were like a mirror clearly reflecting what our own artistic environment in China had become. It was an opportunity to experience the realization that this art was a lot less intelligent than the eyes that were looking at it. I knew that I had to walk away from that kind of art and do something new, my own kind of art.²

According to Socialist Realism, art should come from and serve the people's life. The best way for art to achieve its aim is imitating and transfiguring people's life. In a word, art should be a tool to educate people and to strengthen socialist ideology, and so art cannot be independent, pure, or autonomic. In 1980s, the avant-garde artists launched a movement to purify art language. This purification movement aimed at saving art from utility and substituting heteronomous art for autonomous art. Even if autonomous art or "art for art's sake" was an outdated idea in that time in the West where postmodern art had surpassed modern art, it was still an avant-garde idea in 1980s in China where the art circle was still dominated by Socialist Realism.

Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* (Figure 8.1), created from 1987 to 1991, was one of the representatives of the purification movement. *Book from the Sky* is different from and goes beyond the abstract painting which was practiced by many artists during the purification movement. *Book from the Sky* is totally meaningless. They are not paintings, even abstract painting. They are actually books, unreadable books which consist of thousands of characters forged by Xu Bing. Xu Bing spent four years to do one meaningless thing; he intended to defend the idea that art is meaningless and to fight with the art idea supported by Socialist Realism.

2 Glenn Harper, "Exterior Form-Interior Substance: A Conversation with Xu Bing," *Sculpture* 22.1 (2003), p. 50.

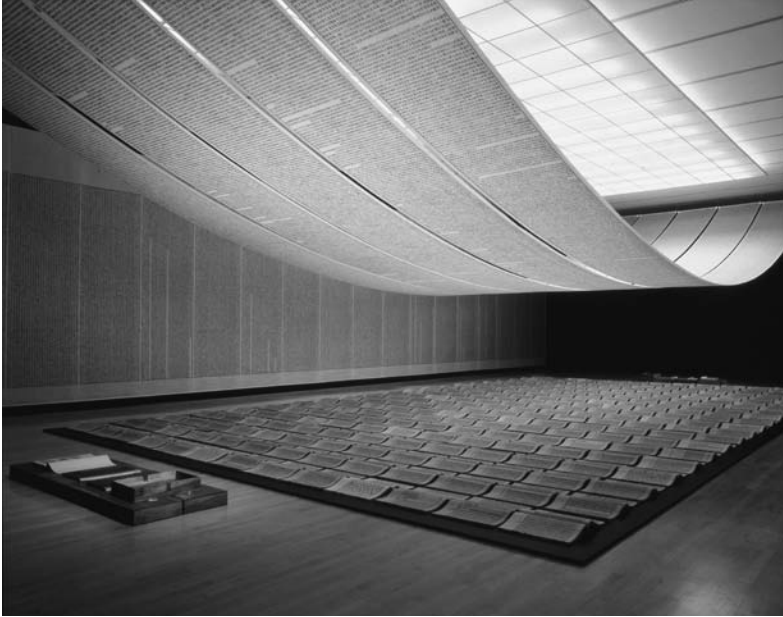


Figure 8.1 Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky*, 1987-1991. Mixed Media Installation.
Ottawa, The National Gallery of Canada (1999)

Book from the Sky manifests the most appropriate and keen-witted way to show meaninglessness. Since the only purpose for characters is to convey meaning, if they cannot reach their purpose, they are not useful at all. In *Book from the Sky*, Xu Bing found the best way to show the conflict between the meaningful and the meaningless. In a word, for the purpose of purifying art language, *Book from the Sky* is much more successful than abstract painting.

Of course, the Purification Movement cannot be only understood as a movement of modern art, i.e. a movement of “art for art’s sake” or formalism, since it has obvious political implications. Xu Bing admits that there are politic elements in his works, even if his original intention is not political. As Xu Bing says to Glenn Harper: “As an artist, I don’t usually think about political factors when I create a work; I am focused on more concrete issues – the methodology I plan to use, what techniques will work best. But at the same time I believe that since Chinese society is such a politically charged environment, and since I grew up in that environment, it is unavoidable that political elements will emerge in my work.”³

In short, through attacking Socialist Realism, the Purification Movement aimed at subverting the whole socialist ideology. But, the political implication in

3 Ibid., 51.

Book from the Sky is so hidden that few audiences can understand it. Instead, most audiences see a cultural implication in it. The books, even unreadable, are easily seen as the symbol of Chinese culture.

2

As Xu Bing moved to United States in 1990, he realized that the significant thing is not to show his Chinese-ness but to do something helping the communication between the Chinese culture and the Western culture or to mix these two different cultures. In 1994, Xu Bing created new writing system for English that he calls *New English Calligraphy* or *Square Word Calligraphy* and he made an installation with the name *Square Calligraphy Classroom* in Copenhagen (Figure 8.2). *New English Calligraphy* looks like Chinese characters but is actually English. *New English Calligraphy* is a fusion of written English and written Chinese. The letters of an English word are slightly altered and arranged in a square word format so that the word takes on the ostensible form of a Chinese character, yet remains legible to the English reader. *New English Calligraphy* is different from *Book from the Sky*. *Book from the Sky* is meaningless to anybody, while *New English Calligraphy* is readable to some. In order to understand and practice *New English Calligraphy*, Chinese readers have to learn English, while English readers should be interested in Chinese calligraphy. *New English Calligraphy* is a wonderful design to mix Chinese and English and to enhance the communication between English and Chinese readers. Xu Bing says,



Figure 8.2 Xu Bing, *Square Calligraphy Classroom*, 1994. Mixed Media Installation. Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst, Berlin (2004)

Square Word Calligraphy ... exists on the borderline between two completely different cultures. To viewers from these two cultures, the characters present equal points of familiarity and of strangeness. A Chinese person recognizes the characters as familiar faces but can't figure out exactly who they are. To a Westerner, they first appear as mysterious glyphs from Asian culture, yet ultimately they can be read and understood ... The absurdity of *Square Word Calligraphy* is that it takes two different words from two completely unrelated language systems and fuses them together into one entity. If you use existing concepts of Chinese or English to try and read or interpret these characters, you won't succeed. This total disconnection between outer appearance and inner substance places people in a kind of shifting cultural position, an uncertain transitional state.⁴

New English Calligraphy is not Xu Bing's first attempt to create a new form of writing by mixing English and Chinese. In 1991, Xu Bing made an installation called "ABC ..." in New York, which can be regarded as the precursor to *New English Calligraphy* (Figure 8.3). "ABC ..." comprises thirty-eight ceramic blocks that represent a sort of transliteration from the twenty-six letters of the Roman alphabet to Chinese characters. Each block bears a Chinese character whose pronunciation is equivalent to that of one letter of the Roman alphabet. The Chinese character is caved on the upper face of the block in the form of a printer's stamp and the Roman letter is printed on the side of the block. For example, the English letter "A" is rendered by the Chinese "Ai", which means sadness. "B" is rendered "bi", which means land on the other side. Some letters need two or three Chinese characters

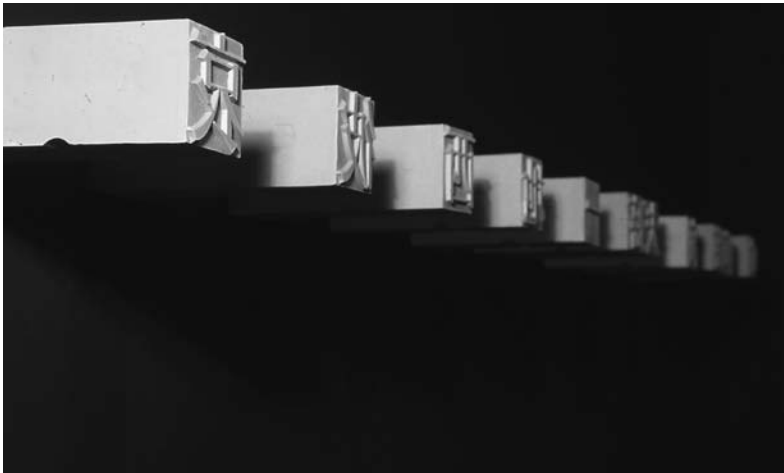


Figure 8.3 Xu Bing, *ABC ...*, 1991. Terracotta Installation. New York, Bronx Museum of the Arts (1994)

4 Ibid., 47.

to transliterate. For example, “W” is rendered “da,” “bu” and “liu” which means big, cloth and six respectively. As a new writing system of English, “ABC ...” is so awkward that nobody would like to use it to write English. But the installation is full of fun for the audience who can read Chinese.

In both *New English Calligraphy* and *"ABC ..."*, we can find that Xu Bing coequally treats Chinese and English. The purpose of the artist is not only to defend his cultural identity but also to mix different cultures. The mixture or fusion of different cultures is an inevitable phenomenon in this globalization era. Xu Bing is very sensitive to this phenomenon and the possible problems arisen from it.

3

Book from the Sky cannot be read by anybody, including the artist himself. Recently, Xu Bing has been working on a project which he calls *Book from the Earth* or *Book from the Ground* (Figure 8.4). The tool or subject is also language. But, as the title suggested, this language is diametrical to *Book from the Sky*. *Book from the Earth* consists of icons and can be understood by anybody, irrespective of their cultural or educational background. Actually, *Book from the Earth* is a computer program which can translate Chinese and English (and any languages in the future) into a language of icons. When a user types in English or Chinese sentence and when he or she presses return, it is translated into a language of icons that appears in the window. As Xu Bing says, "The program is meant to enable communication regardless of the user's cultural background or level of education."⁵

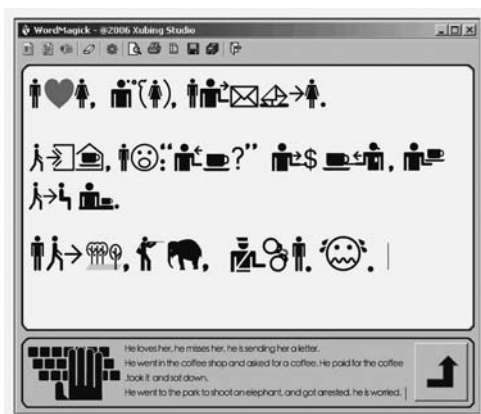


Figure 8.4 Xu Bing, *Book from the Ground*, 2003 (ongoing). Icon-based multimedia language project. Museum of Modern Art, New York (2007)

5 "Interview from the Moma Exhibition," *Bookfromtheground.com*, May 23, 2007, <http://www.bookfromtheground.com/momainterview.htm>.

In this era of globalization, cultural and linguistic miscommunication is unavoidable. Xu Bing teaches at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and works in his studio in New York and travels internationally. He has his own embarrassing experience of cultural and linguistic miscommunication. Even if Xu Bing has lived in New York for twenty years, his English is still limited, since he didn't move to America until he was 35, which is not a good age to learn a new language. Being anxious for communication is the motivation for Xu Bing to create a new universal language which anybody can easily understand. In the beginning, Xu Bing got inspiration from airline safety cards. Since Xu Bing often travels internationally, he has spent a lot of time in airports and on airplanes. The easiest reader is the airline safety card, which uses the least amount of words and icons to explain an important and complex situation. We should have or already have a new language for the people in airports and on airplane. "Airports are the epitome of the 'global village.'" Xu Bing says, "People from many countries, speaking many languages cross paths at the airport with great frequency and in great numbers and so only a language of icons works in this situation."⁶ The second thing which inspired Xu Bing is a gum pack. Xu Bing recalls, "In 2003, I saw icons on a pack of gum that explained how to throw it away when you were done chewing. I realized that if icons can be used to tell a short story, then they should also be able to express a longer, more complex one."⁷ Since that time, Xu Bing has been collecting symbols and icons. *Book from the Earth* just uses collected symbols and icons, and so it is easily understood by anybody.

From Xu Bing's perspective, not only airports need the language of icons but also our "global village" needs it. In other words, the world is becoming an airport, and the corresponding language should be icon language. As Xu Bing says,

Traditional languages grew out of small villages. And now the internet has shrunk the world down to a small village. Today's villagers use many different systems of marks and sounds to communicate, but still have to work and live on the same platform, the world is becoming more and more flat. The languages we use are almost the same as the ones we used a thousand years ago, but our way of life has changed completely. Traditional languages are not adapted to today's world. So it is only today that the Tower of Babel can be realized.⁸

According to Xu Bing, the world is becoming a "global village", where "the convergence of lifestyles, commercial standardization, the globalization of advertising strategies, the increasing convenience of copying and managing images and especially the resistance of a new generation to traditional language forms have all led to the emergence of a language of icons, abbreviations and symbols. The continu-

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

ation of this trend is humanity's future."⁹ The significance of Xu Bing's *Book from the Earth* "doesn't lie in its resemblance to art, but in its ability to present a new perspective."¹⁰ This new perspective is really an international perspective without any cultural and social barriers.

From *Book from the Sky* through *New English Calligraphy* to *Book from the Earth*, we can see the development of Xu Bing's art. The perspective of *Book from the Sky* is pure Chinese, the perspective of *New English Calligraphy* is the hybrid or mix of Chinese and English, and the perspective of *Book from the Earth* is totally international or universal. I call the art with this international or universal perspective new International Style. In the Chinese contemporary art world, we can find more and more art works which have this new International Style, not only in conceptual installations, but also in abstract painting and photo realist painting.

4

The storm of globalization is sweeping across our planet. Thanks to the rapid growth of new technologies of transport and telecommunication, the world has become a small village. But the attitudes to globalization vary with different disciplines. In science and technology, people completely benefit from globalization. In economics and politics, people partly welcome globalization. While, in culture and art, the attitude to globalization seems not to be friendly. In this era of globalization, the spirit of the avant-garde is not to be found in art but in technology. In comparison with the progressive spirit of technology, art, even so-called avant-garde art, is very conservative. Under the shelter of multiculturalism, contemporary art is indulging in cultural identity. Omnifarious symbols of culture are appropriated in postmodernism. Art is becoming totally diverse, reminiscent, and no longer the representative of the spirit of the times. Art reaches its end in both Hegel's and Danto's senses.

The problem of contemporary art is a part of the problem of contemporary culture. The life of culture follows from its identity. In the globalization process, cultures are inevitably interactive and influence one another. We are living within a cosmopolitan culture, characterized by cultural hybridity. As Jeremy Waldron argues, "In this context, to immerse oneself in the traditional practices of, say, an aboriginal culture might be a fascinating anthropological experiment, but it involves an artificial dislocation from what actually is going on in the world."¹¹

Art, as a part of cosmopolitan culture, should move away from the crisis of cultural identity. Jean-Pierre Salgas has advocated that French artists must aim to

9 Ibid.

10 Kevin Kwong (ed.), "Character Building," South China Sunday Morning Post, November 12, 2006, http://www.movius.us/articles/SCMP_HanBing.pdf

11 Jeremy Waldron, "Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative," in *The Rights of Minority Cultures*, ed. Will Kymlicka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 100.

take the “Frenchness” out of French Art.¹² The New International Style in China is a resonance from the east to Salgas’ advocacy.

The new technology shared by the world makes postmodernism too trivial and obsolete. The cosmopolitan culture based on new technologies is emerging all over the world. We are entering a new age. It is the age of digital recombination or the age of the technological sublime, according to Jos de Mul, which is different from Walter Benjamin’s age of mechanical reproduction.¹³ The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction has exhibition value, while the work of art in the age of digital recombination has manipulation value. For this manipulation value, the most important thing is not cultural implication but mastering the technology of new media.

12 Jean-Pierre Salgas, “We Must Aim to Take the Frenchness Out of French Art,” *The Art Newspaper* 129 (2002): 14-15. I am greatly indebted to Curtis Carter for his inspiring paper and presentation: “Globalization, Hegemony, and the Influences of Western Art in China,” presented at the Center for Aesthetics, Peking University, December 18, 2009.

13 I am greatly indebted to Jos de Mul for his inspiring papers and presentations: “The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Recombination,” presented at China Central Academy of Fine Art, December 10, 2009; “Radical romanticism: Art in the age of the technological sublime,” presented at the Center for Aesthetics, Peking University, December 11, 2009.

9 Then and now

Globalization and the avant-garde in Chinese contemporary art¹

Curtis L. Carter

1

My interest in globalization in reference to Chinese contemporary art began with a paper, “Conceptual Art: A Base for Global Art or the End of Art?” which was published in the *International Yearbook of Aesthetics*, Volume 8, 2004. In the previous paper the focus was on a comparison of global conceptual art in the works of Xu Bing (Chinese) and Joseph Kosuth (North American). Since that time, I have continued my investigation of contemporary Chinese art with a particular interest in the global exchanges that have taken place between China and the West, as it relates to the efforts of Chinese artists to address the question of how to build upon their rich Chinese heritage while addressing the international influences wrought by globalization and ongoing internal changes.

Global art in this context refers to art that is a part of, or participates in world-wide cultural exchange or commerce.² The particular focus here will be the role of globalization in the creation of an avant-garde art in China. Given the recent global mobility of Chinese artists between Western art centers in Europe and America and China, the effects of globalization must include the impact of their movement on contemporary Chinese art, as well as the movement of art from West to East.

In some respects, the development of avant-garde art in China runs parallel to the introduction of Western aesthetics into China as they both are introduced in the early years of the twentieth century and involve the flow of ideas from West to East. Gao Jianping’s writings on this topic in “Chinese Aesthetics in the Context of Globalization,” *International Yearbook of Aesthetics*, Volume 8, 2004, and elsewhere offer a complementary account of the influences of Western aesthetics on the twentieth century developments in Chinese aesthetics.

Aside from any global Western influences on Chinese art that may have resulted from the presence of the Jesuit artists of the seventeenth century in China, or the contributions of indigenous moments such as Dao or Chan Buddhism to

1 Copyright, All rights Reserved, March 26, 2012

2 Curtis L. Carter, “Conceptual Art: A Base for Global Art or the End of Art?,” *International Yearbook of Aesthetics* 8 (2004): 15-28.

the spirit of the avant-garde, in China, there has been a significant presence of the avant-garde in China, beginning in the first decades of the twentieth century, and continuing to the present.³ Avant-garde art has persisted, notwithstanding notable interventions such as the Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1976, uneasiness of official government agencies, and the resistance of the population at large to embrace new and unfamiliar forms of art that do not fit traditional assumptions concerning art.

Before proceeding further into the subject of the avant-garde art in China, it is necessary to discuss the question, to what extent, and under what conditions it is possible to apply Western art-historical concepts such as 'avant-garde' to non-Western art? An extensive body of writings on the Western aesthetic avant-garde is available to document the importance of this development in the West and in China. In essence, the research will reveal two key notions of Western avant-garde theory and practice. Differences between proponents of the avant-garde based on aesthetic considerations, and the proponents of art in support of radical social change have existed since the early nineteenth century, as reflected in the writings of Henri Saint-Simon (1760-1825), Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) and others. Saint-Simon saw the artists as agents of social change, and Baudelaire writing in 1851 condemned the notion of 'art for art's sake'.⁴ At its height in Paris of the 1920s and 1930s when Paris reigned as the art capitol of the world, the avant-garde in the West manifests itself most fully in Dada and Surrealism. It is said that the Surrealists of the 1920s and 1930s literally turned an orderly view of bourgeois life upside down by introducing a new form of myth aimed at freeing all minds.⁵

With respect to its societal applications, Peter Bürger writing in the late twentieth century represents the social avant-garde as an antidote to the dissociation of art from the praxis of life in a bourgeois society. Following Jürgen Habermas, Bürger views the European avant-garde of the early twentieth century as an attack on art, which he believed existed mainly in an anaesthetized state in bourgeois society.⁶ Bürger found missing from the autonomous institution of art as it exists in bourgeois society the social engagement required to produce radical social change. Art when connected to life, he believes, can serve as a positive force against tyrannical political and economic developments and as an aid to actualizing freedom and justice.

There now exists as well an extensive body of writings on the Western aesthetic avant-garde. Among these are the writings of Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosen-

3 For further development of this topic see Curtis L. Carter, "Avant Garde in Chinese Art," in *Subversive Strategies in Contemporary Chinese Art*, eds., Mar Wiseman and Liu Yuedi (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011), 295-320.

4 Henri de Saint-Simon, "Opinions Litteraries, Philosophiques et Industrielles (Paris, 1825)," in *Oeuvres de Saint-Simon et d'Enfantin (1865-1879)*, vol. 39 (Aalen: Reprint, 1964).

5 See Patrice Higonnet, *Paris: Capital of the World*, trans., Arthur Goldblammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 383-397.

6 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 49.

berg, Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster and others.⁷ In contrast to the social approach, these writers focused on the avant-garde in reference to the developments in Western Modernism as it manifest itself in stylistic changes: Impressionism, Futurism, Cubism, Dada, Surrealism and other modern developments centering in Paris, and later in New York. Among these writers, Krauss proposed abandonment of 'avant-garde' as a useful concept for interpreting Western art after Modernism beyond 1970 because of changes in critical theory and the emergence of post-modern art. Krauss's view is not widely supported, as there has been a continuing development of avant-garde both in the West and in the East.⁸

The question, then, is what is the rationale for the application of avant-garde art theory to artistic developments in China? Although the term 'avant-garde' has previously been mainly identified with developments in modern Western art, it is also necessary to recognize the corresponding elements in Chinese art and culture. During the past ten years, Chinese avant-garde art has become the focus of several important books by Chinese scholars such as Wu Hung (*Exhibiting Experimental Art in China*, 2000), Xiao Tang (*Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut*, 2008), and Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-garde in Twentieth Century China*, 2011).⁹ Each of these writers addresses an aspect of the emergence of the avant-garde in China that began in the 1920s.

Xiao Tang frames the connection between avant-garde in the West and its relevance for Chinese art in the context of the modern woodcut movement in China that took place in China in the 1920s and thirties in the context of the political and institutional changes that occurred in Republican China. He argues that the Chinese woodcut movement, which has its roots in part in Western Expressionist woodcuts, qualifies as avant-garde because it challenged prevailing aesthetics in China and provided a link between art and the nation's political agenda. Following Bürger's analysis of avant-garde in the West, Tang argues that, "On at least two issues, the Chinese woodcut movement had much in common with the historical avant-garde movements in early twentieth century Europe, such as Dadaism: it voiced a radical critique of art as an institution or social subsystem, and it aimed at

7 Clement Greenburg, "Culture in General: Avant-garde and Kitsch," in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961) Harold Rosenberg, "Avant-garde," in *Quality: its image in the arts*, eds. Louis Kronenberger and Marshall Lee (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 418-449; Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985), 156; Hal Foster, *The Return of the real: The avant-garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1966), 5-15. See also Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-garde*, trans. Gerald Fitz (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

8 Hal Foster argues against "a premature dismissal of the avant-garde." He asserts that critical theory of the middle 1970s was itself a secret continuation of the avant-garde. See Hal Foster, *The Return of the real*, 5-15.

9 Wu Hung, *Exhibiting Experimental Art in China* (Chicago: The Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 2000). Xiaobing Tang, *Origins of the Chinese Avant Garde: The Modern Woodcut* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2008).

reintegrating art into the praxis of life".¹⁰ For Chinese artists, as Tang observed, this meant confronting both "a nascent modern system of artistic values and practices" and "an entrenched traditional aesthetic order and sensibility".

In contrast to Tang's focus on the early years, Gao Minglu's account of the avant-garde attends mainly to the role and character of this development in China during the past thirty years. If it were the case that the avant-garde's influence in Western art had diminished after 1970, as Krauss suggested, the opposite is true in China where avant-garde art has indeed flourished during this period. With the emergence of new art spaces for the production and exhibition of art representing an expansion of artists' studios, artists' villages, and now art districts, as Gao Minglu argues, there is increasing evidence for a burgeoning Chinese avant-garde art. In addition, the increasing progress toward political tolerance of artistic freedom, art academies, and the global commercial system allow for expanded dialogue among artists and their audiences.¹¹

A common theme found in these writings is the aim of linking art and politics (Tang), or the embrace of a new Chinese modernity that unifies politics, aesthetics and social life (Gao Minglu). For Tang this aim is to be realized by a fusion of Western and Chinese aesthetic and artistic practices so as to forge a new tool for addressing changing political or societal aspirations, as in woodcut art.

Taking a broader theoretical approach, Gao Minglu understands Chinese avant-garde in reference to modernity. He contrasts Western modernity based on a progression of temporal-historical epochs (pre-modern, modern, post-modern) where the avant-garde emerges in the conflict between aesthetic autonomy seeking individual creative freedom and capitalist bourgeois materialist values, with "total modernity" in Chinese contemporary culture. According to Gao Minglu, Chinese history does not fit the linear periodization of the Western system. Total modernity, as Gao Minglu argues, consists of "particular time, particular space, and truth of mine," and represents a century-long effort in China to realize an ideal environment by focusing on specific physical spaces and social environments. Contemporary avant-garde art in China as understood in the context of "total modernity" thus aims toward integrating art and life as a whole by concatenating art into particular social projects and taking into account changes in the social and political environments.¹² Given these assumptions, as Gao Minglu would argue, Chinese avant-garde art today is best understood in the context of specific local time and space embodiments. This does not mean that the Chinese embodiments occur in isolation from external influences or artistic movement from the West, as Gao Minglu acknowledges the influences of Dada, Surrealism, and Pop art explicitly. Similarly he recognizes the complexities of globalization and other shifting social and political forces for Chinese avant-garde artists.

10 Xiaobing Tang, *Origins of the Chinese Avant Garde: The Modern Woodcut* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2008), 5.

11 Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-garde in Twentieth Century Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 2-5.

12 Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-garde*, 3, 4.

Wu Hung's approach to Chinese contemporary art in his book, *Exhibiting Experimental Art in China* focuses on the problems with public exhibiting of the art, beginning with the first experimental exhibition of the Stars group held outside the National Gallery of China in 1979. As Wu Hung represents experimental art, it differs from official art under sponsorship of the party, academic art focused on technical training and aesthetics standards, popular urban visual culture attuned to international fashion, and international commercial art.¹³ He prefers the concept of 'experimental art' (shiyān měishù) to 'avant-garde' (qiánwēi or xiānfēng), possibly to differentiate current developments from its more radical historical meanings or to avoid the confrontational tone implicit in 'avant-garde'. (Gao Minglu prefers the latter, arguing that the more moderate term 'experimental' is not well suited to express the range and 'contemporaneity' of the new art movements from the 1970s to the present.)¹⁴

Judging from this brief review of literature applicable to the theory and practice of the avant-garde in China, it appears that this concept has relevance to the development of art in China as well as to artistic developments in the European-American context.

2

In the remainder of the paper I will offer an additional perspective on the avant-garde and give a brief account of how this concept is present in Chinese art from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. My aim is not to supplant the insights of the Chinese scholars and others previously considered but to augment their analysis with a closer look at the process that underlies the avant-garde in both Western and Chinese cultures.

The main task will be to examine the role of improvisation as the core of aesthetic avant-garde art and the emergence of experimental art and relate this concept to developments in Western and Chinese art. Improvisation challenges, and seeks to replace existing hierarchal systems of artistic creation. It offers new concepts including the concept of open form. Open form invites change and offers the possibility of replacing the repetition of traditional forms and preset structures. Understood in this context, improvisation is a means of suppressing historical consciousness. In suppressing historical consciousness, avant-garde practices serve to break the chain of reliance on existing artistic, and thus encourage the discovery of new ideas. With improvisation, there is the hope that artists will discover what could not be found in merely relying on existing artistic practices. Experimentation as it applies here involved not only an invention of new media and styles but also involves rethinking of the forms and locations of exhibitions and sites for artistic

13 Wu Hung, "Exhibiting Experimental Art in China," *Fathom Archive: University of Chicago Library Digital Collection*, <http://fathom.lib.uchicago.edu/1/777777122473>.

14 Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-garde in Twentieth Century Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 8, 9.

production as well as their roles. As well, the avant-garde calls for rethinking the fundamental questions about art education and the role of art in society.

My view of the avant-garde in its historic role and in its contemporary applications, thus embraces both its aesthetics of innovation and experimentation, *and* its role as an agent of radical social change. In these respects, the concept of the artistic avant-garde is not limited to a particular period of art history, or to a particular culture. I propose the view that the avant-garde in both its aesthetic and social senses is a recurring phenomenon throughout the history of art, beginning at least in the nineteenth century with the possibility of even earlier moments of experiment and change that might qualify as avant-garde. In any event, it continues to recur throughout history when innovation in artistic concepts, or in the technology necessary to implement them is developed. In some circumstances, major social changes such as globalization call for new art that challenges and seeks to replace existing art. Such developments may even demand reexamination of the connections of art to changes in the social and political environment, as we have seen in China throughout the past century.

While Western Modernism represents an important historical context for understanding one stage of the avant-garde, it does not define how its future manifestations will take place. Hence, the avant-garde neither begins nor ends with Western Modernism, although Modernism provides for one of its important showings. Yet it is possible to understand modernity in a different sense, as Gao Minglu has proposed, focusing on art in a particular time, place, and understanding. In any event, openness to the dialectic between the art of the past and new art is important to understanding the transitions that take place as avant-garde art moves from one stage of a culture to another, or to another culture.

From the beginning of the twentieth century to the present, aesthetic and social avant-garde developments originating in Western societies have served as the background necessary for identifying and assessing the emergence of avant-garde art in China. Yet, as we have seen in the previous section, developments in China itself offer their own social and political environments for determining particular manifestations of the avant-garde. Allowing for these cultural differences and temporal contexts, it appears that avant-garde efforts represent an important part of the history of Chinese art.

Given the presence of well-established traditional Chinese artistic practices such as calligraphy and brush and ink painting based on copying master artists, it may come as a surprise to find such a strong art presence based on avant-garde practices. Training of artists in the major Chinese art academies in the twenty-first century still includes learning traditional Chinese art techniques. And their use often extends into contemporary art practices.

On the other hand, the works of Individualist artists of the seventeenth century such as Ch'ing dynasty artists Tao Chi [Shih-t'ao] Kun-ts'an, Yun Shou 'ing, and Chu Ta [Pa-tashan-jen] (1626 ca.-1705) suggest that not all artists were content to simply copy the masters. A hint of the avant-garde spirit is perhaps expressed in the words of the artists Shih-t'ao and K'un-ts'an, respectively:

I am always myself and must naturally be present in my work. The beards and eyebrows of the masters cannot grow on my face ... I express my own lungs and bowels and show my own beard and eyebrows. If it happens that my work approaches that of some old painter it is he who comes close to me, not I who am imitating him. I have got it by nature and there is no one among the old masters whom I cannot follow and transform.¹⁵ (Shih-t'ao)

The question is how to find peace in a world of suffering. You ask why I came hither. I cannot tell you the reason. I am living high in a tree and looking down. Here I can rest free from all troubles like a bird in its nest. People call me a dangerous man, but I answer 'you are like devils'.¹⁶ (K'un-ts'an)

A cursory look at traditional Chinese landscapes, as well as scrolls featuring fish, flower, bird and rock paintings of the seventeenth century by artists referred to as the Individualists (Shih-t'ao Tao Chi [Shih-t'ao] Kun-ts-an, Yun Shou 'ing, and Chu Ta [Pa-tashan-jen) offers evidence that innovative experimentation has existed in Chinese art well before the twentieth century. Experiments of these artists with brush work, color, expression of emotion, and abstraction, as well as shifting attitudes toward painting, point toward challenges to the artistic conventions of their traditional predecessors. Although aware of tradition, the Individualist artists chose to use tradition with originality and freedom, and to depart from it in their own development. Their rebellion against traditional painting of the master painters was mainly aesthetic, consisting of stylistic innovations. However, artists such as Shih-t'ao and Bada shan ren (Pa-ta-shan-jen) also signaled their societal discontent by adopting the lives of monks.

In any event, their collective aesthetic and societal differences with respect to tradition were apparently sufficient to warrant near exclusion from official imperial collections of the new dynasty.¹⁷ From these examples it is not possible to attribute to earlier developments in Chinese art a fully developed case for the avant-garde prior to the end of the nineteenth century. However, there are at least symptoms of the spirit of avant-garde practices, both aesthetic and social, in these artists' work and lives as noted.

The participation of Chinese artists in avant-garde activities from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present is more complex. Important considerations affecting the development of avant-garde art include both developments within China's culture and history and the external influences of art in the West. On a philosophical level, Chan Buddhism shares with the avant-garde a symphonious world view. In mainland China, Chan Buddhism "encourages an ironic sensibility

15 Sherman E. Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting* (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1954), 115.

16 Sherman, *Chinese Landscape Painting*, 115.

17 Ibid., 115-125.

and denies the privilege of any one doctrine in the search for enlightenment".¹⁸ By emphasizing the process of *becoming* instead of *being*, Chan Buddhism approaches art from the perspective of constant change.¹⁹ This attitude essentially frees the artist's mind from attachment to any particular tradition in art and creates a natural receptivity to innovation and change characteristic of the avant-garde.

Another factor internal to China is the dramatic changes taking place in the social and political climate. As the Imperial system of governance ended and a new republic was established in 1911 by Sun Yat-Sen and his followers, the call for reform in the social and political system was accompanied by the demand for a new art of the people. The spirit of the reformers with respect to literature is expressed in the words of Chen Duxin, newly appointed dean of the college of letters at Beijing University in 1917: "I am willing to brave the enmity of all the pedantic scholars of the country" ... in support of revolutionary principles aimed at destroying aristocratic literature in favor of a "plain and simple expressive literature of the people" based on realism.²⁰ A similar radical view on behalf of the visual arts is reflected in the words of Lin Fengman, a progressive artist and arts educator in an address to The Great Beijing Art Meeting in 1927:

Down with the tradition of copying!
Down with the art of the aristocratic minority!
Down with the antisocial art that is divorced from the masses!
Up with the creative art that represents the times!
Up with art that can be shared with all of the people!
Up with the people's art that stands at the crossroads!²¹

Lin Fengman left the more conservative atmosphere of Beijing to found a new art academy at Hangzhou where he attempted to implement his ideas.

Arguably, the key external factor in the development of avant-garde art in China is the global influences from the West. Although Western pictorial means were known in China among professional commercial artists as early as the seventeenth century, these developments had little effect on other aspects of Chinese art. Western influences in art related to the avant-garde likely began with Chinese artists studying in Japan at the beginning of the twentieth century, and with the importation of Japanese teachers into China to introduce Western art techniques as interpreted through Japanese eyes to Chinese students and artists. The success of

18 Gao Minglu, "Conceptual Art with anti-conceptual Attitude: Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong," in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s-1980s*, exhibition catalogue (Queens Museum of New York, 1999), 127.

19 Kenneth K. Inada, "The Buddhist Aesthetic Nature: A Challenge to Rationalism and Empiricism," *Asian Philosophy*, 4, no. 2 (1994). See also Gao Jianping, *The Expressive Act in Chinese Art: From Calligraphy to Painting* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: Aesthetica Upsaliensia 7, 1996), 192.

20 Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1996), 33.

21 Meishu (1986:4) 64 n.2 Cited in Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, 44.

Japanese artists in adapting Western art to Asian culture, attracted many Chinese painters to study in Japan as well as with Japanese teachers imported to teach art in China.

Of the numerous Chinese artists who benefitted from their studies in Japan, the brothers Gao Qifeng (1879-1951) and Gao Jianfu (1889-1933) were especially important to the creation of a Chinese avant-garde in the early twentieth century. The two brothers, together with Chen Shuren, are credited with bringing Japanese *ni-honga* style, a blend of Japanese and Western art, to Canton where they established the Lingnan School of Chinese painting. The result was a new style of Chinese painting known as New National Painting. In conjunction with his roles as artist and educator, Gao Jianfu's efforts included founding *Zhenxiang huabao* (The True Record), a magazine dedicated to promoting the new art and progressive social and political ideas.

Gao Jianfu's art was influential in the advancement of Western art ideas among other Chinese artists of the period. His aim was to create a new pictorial language for Chinese art based on a synthesis of Chinese and Western art. His approach involved attending to portrait painting, lighting and shade, and linear perspective found in Western art and applying these elements to Chinese brush strokes, composition, inking, coloring in the manner of the literati tradition of painting.²² In an effort to make the art comprehensible to the masses he focused on contemporary themes from everyday life.

Gao Jianfu's approach looked beyond painting itself to the improvement of human nature and the betterment of society. He believed that traditional painting failed in all of its social functions except for serving an elite few scholars and the literate aristocracy.²³ His intent was to challenge and replace traditional art with art that would serve to reform the thought patterns of persons at every level of society. This meant replacing reflective, poetic scroll paintings and poems with art that embraces both Chinese and Western pictorial elements and is visually attractive, attention getting, and containing an element of shock. One of Gao Jianfu's paintings, *Flying in the Rain* (1932) portrays a squadron of biplanes over a misty ink wash landscape with a pagoda in the background. The painting is executed on a Chinese scroll and is said to have been based on sketches made from an airplane. Viewing the landscape from an airplane view would have been a daring perch for a painter in the early age of aviation in the late 1920s.²⁴

Such a painting would have no doubt been anathema to the literati painters of

22 Christina Chu, "The Lingnan School and Its Followers: Radical Innovations in Southern China," in *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth Century China*, eds. Julia F. Anderson and Kuiyi Shen (New York: Guggenheim Museum Foundation, 1998), 68.

23 In contrast to Gao Jianfu's revolutionary approach to art, intent on making art accessible to the people, the aristocratic tradition limited access to famous paintings based on social standing. Viewing important works of art was considered a "limited and intense" social experience with rules and prescriptions on how to visualize or contemplate the art. See Craig Clunas, *Pictures and visibility in Early Modern China* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1997), 112, 114-117.

24 Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, 52-55.

the period.²⁵ Opponents of change did not consider the new art based on Western art ideas as art at all, in the sense of Chinese traditional art. Rather, Western based art was initially considered in the category of “maps, charts, mechanical, and geometric drawings apart from art.”²⁶

Gao Jianfu was politically identified with Sun Yat-sen’s revolutionary political movement. He served as a local commander with oversight of assassinations of Manchu officials and the manufacture of bombs supplied to the revolutionary forces. After leaving politics, he dedicated his efforts to promoting his ideas on the role of the arts in shaping human nature and society within the art schools of Shanghai and Canton where he served as a member of the Guomindang Industrial Art commission and head of the Provincial Art School. Later on he and his brother founded the Spring Awakening Art Academy which provided them greater freedom for pursuing their own ideas for reform in Chinese art.

Given the state of Chinese art at the beginning of the twentieth century, the New National Art (xin guohua) of the Lingnan School constitutes an important stage in the development of the Chinese aesthetic avant-garde. Moreover, this new art functioned as a means of revolutionary social change aimed at changing the existing state of Manchu society. In this respect, it also qualifies as an example of the social avant-garde as explained earlier.

In what sense do the changes initiated by the Lingnan School warrant the label avant-garde? Not all of the changes in the art of China during this era would necessarily qualify as innovations of style when seen initially from the perspective of a Western observer. For example, it could be argued that the introduction of Western realism into Chinese painting draws upon an existing painting style and techniques previously developed in the West. In this respect, Gao Jianfu’s art is based on the appropriation of existing techniques from western art and also from Chinese traditional art. However, appropriation is one of the recognized means of introducing avant-garde transitions into art both in the West and in China. As used here, the concept of appropriation refers to the practice of taking over existing concepts, images, or means of production and using them for artistic purposes in another context. For example, Picasso uses African tribal images in developing his own, what was then considered avant-garde art. As well, appropriation is an acknowledged practice in Western postmodern art of the late twentieth century. Chinese traditional artists also freely appropriate images from earlier master artists in their own art. However, when viewed in the context of traditional Chinese art, the introduction of art based on a merging of elements of Western and Chinese art constitutes a radical, avant-garde shift in the understanding of what could be considered art.

25 Michael Sullivan, who admits his antipathy to the Lingnan art, believes that the school was based on a misconception of the nature and purpose of art, in its lack of passion for form. He argues that the Lingnan movement was limited in its influence because of anti-Japanese feeling in China based on aggression toward China and its location in Guangdong Province out of the main centers in Shanghai and Beijing. See Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, 57.

26 Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, 32.

Finally it is useful to look briefly at the types of changes that globalization and the emergence of the avant-garde brought to Chinese art. In his book, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, Michael Sullivan describes the rift between the new art and traditional art in these words:

The revolution in Chinese twentieth century art most profound in its implications for the future was not the introduction of new media and styles, or even the change from conventionalization to realism, but the questioning – and for many total abandonment – of the traditional Chinese belief that the purposes of art were to express the ideal of harmony between man and nature, to uphold tradition, and to give pleasure.²⁷

Perhaps one of the outcomes of the avant-garde art in China is a shift from harmony between man and nature to social harmony where art is linked to all aspects of life including the political.

The type of Western influences Chinese artists chose to bring back to China based on their experiences in Paris and elsewhere varied considerably. For example, Xu Beihong (1895-1953) favored a conservative eighteenth century romantic realism. He used it to create landscape and portrait paintings in opposition to the modernist influences.²⁸ Mayching Kao, another Chinese artist working in Paris in the early part of the twentieth century, saw many options including “the individual styles of Manet, Monet, Cezanne, van Gogh, Derain and Vlaminck ... as a repertoire from which to pick and choose”.²⁹ Among the options were a range of then avant-garde styles – Post-impressionism, Cubism, Fauvism, Surrealism, Dada – all at work changing the course of Western traditional art. Lin Fengmian (1900-1991), chose to follow the modernists Matisse and Modigliani in bringing avant-garde modernism to China.

Given the availability of such a range of experimental arts, one might assume that Paris would generate considerable influence toward the advancement of avant-garde art in China. Contrary to expectations, the Paris avant-garde had only limited success in China. This may have been a result of the resistance of Chinese artists, as well as the fact that the Paris avant-garde seemed less relevant to the changing social and political needs of Chinese society.

The first official National Art Exhibition of 1929 featuring Western influenced avant-garde was held in Shanghai and opened to mixed reviews. Similarly, the 1935 NOVA exhibition of the China Independent Art Association with paintings by Chinese, Japanese and other artists inspired by the Fauve and Surrealist movements

27 Ibid., 26.

28 See Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1996), 59, 71, 72; Kuiyi Shen, “The Lure of the West,” in *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth Century China*, eds. Julia F. Anderson and Kuiyi Shen (New York: Guggenheim Museum Foundation, 1998), 177, 178.

29 Mayching Kao, “The Beginning of Western-style Painting Movement in Relationship to Reforms of Education in early Twentieth-Century China,” *New Asia Academic Bulletin* 4 (1983): 99.

was roundly criticized in the press, and ended NOVA. However, the editor of *Yifeng magazine* featured the exhibition and included a copy of André Breton's *Manifesto of 1924*.

Despite these and other scattered efforts to establish the avant-garde, the challenges of absorbing the changes mandated by Western Realism, let alone the various Western avant-garde movements that questioned traditional Western Realism, proved daunting. As Michael Sullivan has noted, without the support of scholarship, poetry and the literary culture on which traditional Chinese art was based, individual Chinese artists found difficulty in establishing their own way to create art in the new styles. Opening up of the subjects of painting beyond "agreeable or symbolic themes" grounded in social and aesthetic harmony created major problems for the Chinese artists. For example, nude models and the nude as subject were particularly uncomfortable for Chinese artists and art consumers. These factors and a general lack of support for Western innovations in Chinese culture thus hindered the development of a vigorous avant-garde.³⁰ Add to these considerations the fact that some Chinese critics such as Chen Yifan believed that modern avant-garde art must be inspired by a revolutionary democratic nationalism capable of advancing the social and political aims of China.³¹ It was not immediately clear to Chinese engaged in the challenges of forging a new China and dealing with the Japanese occupation how the Paris avant-garde suited the aims of the social revolution taking place in China.

The story of globalization and the avant-garde continues through the period of the Cultural Revolution but with a different focus. Western influences apart from those ensuing from Russian Socialist Realism were temporarily deterred. It was not until the 1980s that globally inspired avant-garde art was again able to proceed with a greater openness. In the interim, some Chinese artists chose exile as a means of developing their art, but many remained in China and continued to explore the possibilities opened up by globalization and the avant-garde. These developments are a story for another occasion.

This brief look at the influences of globalization on the development of the avant-garde in Chinese art touches in a preliminary way on strengths and limits of global influences in the art of a particular culture. In this respect, China represents a highly developed, rich and complex art culture that is undergoing the forces of massive change internally while attempting to absorb the forces brought about by globalization. This investigation into the topic suggests that global intervention in this instance has served as a catalyst for change enabling the advancement of avant-garde aspects of Chinese art long before the more obvious developments after the Cultural Revolution and policy changes after 1980. The resulting changes in Chinese art are a product of globalizing forces working in relation to already existing strengths based on a long history of Chinese art. Existing strengths in Chinese

30 Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, 66.

31 Che'en I-Fan, "The Modern Trend in Contemporary Chinese Art," *T'ien Hsia Monthly* (January 1937): 47. Also cited in Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, 67.

culture and art provide a strong foundation able to accept new ideas from outside while remaining focused on the integrity of existing Chinese art traditions. The creative involvement of global forces from the West has undoubtedly strengthened the position of Chinese art worldwide, both in aesthetic and economic terms.

Not all Chinese avant-garde artists today fit easily into the categories noted here linking art to social or political objectives. Rather, like their seventeenth century Chinese ancestors (Shih-t'ao and K'un-ts'an), and their European avant-garde predecessors whose main concern was with the aesthetic, a notable portion of today's artists look inward to the subjective as the source of their avant-garde expressions. These artists focus their creative output on "more personal aesthetic characteristics" concerned with self-esteem and possibly spiritual autonomy as a wedge against oppressive societal struggles. Artists today do not shy away from externalizing these concerns through performance art using the body and expressions of violence to address a wide range of concerns that bear on the meaning of humanity.³² Others focus their contributions to avant-garde art on the aesthetic aspects of art itself.

The effects of globalization and avant-garde art on Chinese art continue to evolve. Chinese avant-garde art has become a topic of interest in the main press as well as for scholarly investigations. An article titled, "The Avant-garde goes too Far?" in the March 4, 2012 issue of *China Daily* contains an ambiguity in its message. The title of the article raises the question of limits for the avant-garde, while the article focuses on increasing government tolerance of nudity, abstract art, literary erotica, and rock and roll music, perhaps signaling a greater tolerance of creative freedom.³³ With the continuing development of Chinese avant-garde today, the emphasis is increasingly on finding ways to ground the art in Chinese history and culture while absorbing the innovative spirit and practices from the West. At the center of such developments are perhaps conflicting aims that emerge from a century of developments in Chinese avant-garde art. On the one hand, there is the ongoing utopian element that aspires to link art and politics with the aim of advancing the unification of culture and the betterment of society. On the other hand, the range of creative expression suggests a flourishing array of innovation, while protest against constraints on freedom of expression and the commodification of art remain on-going concerns for avant-garde artists.

One prospective outcome for Chinese art is the likelihood to find Beijing in the position to host the title of world art capitol, thus replacing New York, Paris, and Rome as previous contenders.

32 Lv Peng, Zhu Zhu, Kao Chienhui, eds., *Thirty Years of Adventures: Art and Artists from 1979* (Hong-kong: Timezone 8, 2011), 149, 175-178.

33 Melinda Liu, "The Avant-garde goes too Far," *China Daily*, March 4 2012, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-08/02/content_356928.htm.

10 Within the flux of the contemporary

In conversation with the Raqs Media Collective

Parul Dave Mukherji

In 1992 when Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narulla and Shuddhabrata Sengupta formed the Raqs Media Collective, Indian economy and politics were undergoing unprecedented convulsions. It coincided with several key shifts in economy and politics that left far reaching repercussions in the art world as well as civil society in India. With the fall of the Berlin Wall behind them, global capitalism now operated in an increasingly uni-polar world. This period witnessed the massive expansion of information technology that was going to radically transform the public sphere in India.

Not being part of an art school, RMC did not feel encumbered by the baggage that every art student had to carry. Trained as media specialists at a prominent media practice department, they were tuned to the changed times shaped by mass media. They experimented with the language of moving images and their foray into the cultural scene was via documentaries that queried the very genre of the documentary.

At the time of their engagement with film making in 1992, the globalized economy had unleashed communal forces in civil society with increasing withering of the secular ethos of Nehruvian socialism. It was within the charged ambience of unprecedented changes in civil society that these three students of the Media Studies centre joined hands. With their participation in Documenta 11 in 2002 they made their entry into the art world. With media as their middle name, they signal a break from art practices that had until then had largely defined the art world via the traditional medium of painting and sculpture. Unlike any other collective, theirs was predicated on disavowal of two modalities of art practice that are intricately interwoven- claims of individual authorship and national identity.

Unburdened by the legacy of the past, the RMC broke fresh ground by their very rejection of the authorial voice, on one hand, and the *avant garde* function of the artist, on the other. The latter had a fraught presence in the history of modern Indian art, and underpinned the elitist status of Indian modernists who would often self-consciously distance themselves from 'the people' and acknowledge the public mainly as a subject matter in art works.

By embracing a collective identity that was free of individual subjectivity and 'Indian' identity, the RMC broke out of the constraint of a given temporality and spatiality dictated by the national modern and ventured into the space of the global on their own terms.

In their video, *The Capital of Accumulation*, the critique of capitalism is not carried out from a distance as a thematic of representation alone but envisaged through intertwined histories that bring cities of Berlin, Mumbai and Warsaw on the same page. Capitalism is not an entity anchored to a given territory but seen as movement of capital, people, goods and images. Declaring that nations now exist in a state of ruin, they zero in on cities as nodes of capitalist accumulation and encounter between nature and culture; whether it is the migratory birds in search of new habitat or the animals in the Berlin Zoo, they turn their gaze at political events demanding accountability of human excesses. With ecology entering the frame, the cartography of the world changes taking on a planetary dimension. It causes the world to shrink, pulling different regions together in closer connectivity that leave little room for large ethnic labels like 'Indian' and 'Western' to hang on its surface. In place of thick labels of nationality and ethnicity, there will only be thin tenuous lines on their personalized globe which criss-cross to index their journeys and projects. These lines of network, being real and fictitious at the same time, are open to translation into, say, a woven carpet that marks their journeys in a different register of reality, at once concrete and virtual.

With media defining their practice, it was a space clearing gesture in a way that distinguished their art practice from the ontological stability of any autographic form. As media practitioners, the very basis of representation that assumes a distance between the agent and object of representation gets upturned as do simple notions of activism. In their practice, the RCM refuses the division between text and images and their activism remains grounded in the synaesthesia of seeing and hearing. If there is a place for the political, it lies in the privileging of listening over viewing. If conventional activism is equated with seeing and the mastery of the gaze that sets apart the activist from the public where action speaks louder than words, theirs is the activism of intense listening that is as attentive to speech as it is to silence.

- 1 *As far as I know, your foray into the art world was through documentaries. I know you all don't subscribe to the standard notion of activism and perhaps intervention is more appropriate here. What are your thoughts on activism?*

The Viennese satirist Karl Kraus once said: "Those who now have nothing to say because actions are speaking continue to talk. Let him who has something to say come forward and be silent." We think silence is not given its due in the world. Silence is important, because you can't listen effectively if there is no space created through silence around any given instance of speech. Though we use text and words quite often, we have often preferred to work through an ethic of listening rather than speaking in our work. If at all we could be described as activists, then the only way would be to see (or hear) us as 'activist listeners'.

Art cannot stop wars, end hunger, reverse global warming, bring about democracy or socialism, end racism, sexism or homophobia. What art can do is to deepen and sharpen our intellectual and emotional responses to our time, our lives and our world, and this desired depth and acuteness can perhaps lay the foundation for a more considered, more thoughtful, more just and open way of living in the world.

- 2 *Time is a category forever under erasure in many of your works. It is something that you are always pulling apart in many of your projects and yet it spurs your critical space. You often take 'time' as something 'foldable' into space, into geography (my favourite is THE SURFACE OF EACH DAY IS A DIFFERENT PLANET- the title of your Tate Britain installation) Do you see in this inflection a possible critique of the logic of global capitalism when time meanders in different directions and folds back into itself and almost slows it down?*

There is a section towards the end of *The Capital of Accumulation* where we see thousands of rose-hued flamingoes foraging on the marsh at Sewri at the edge of Bombay. We are told that someday soon there will be a six lane highway that will cut through this marshland, and that a new city, an SEZ will rise, not in six years or in six hundred, but perhaps in a time that spans just six months. The flamingoes, however, seem to be in no hurry to give way to this six lane highway to a six month city. They feed and forage to a different rhythm.

We say here – “The earth moves sluggishly, and life takes its time, to grow, to move, to fly, to mate, to nest, to feed, even to die. Capital needs a swifter wobble about the planetary axis, shorter seasons, brief lunch breaks, a snapper interval between one working day and another, something more pliable than that slow, variable capital, that wet mass called humans.”

But the planet isn't going to deliver a faster wobble to Capital. The rotation of the earth, its orbit around the sun, the circuits of the moon and stars, the flight paths of migratory birds, these rhythms, and the rhythms that constitute the ebb and flow of life on earth, do not yet follow the time-table of Capital. Our work is an exploration of the discrepancies between these different kinds of temporal patterns. The fact that we can recognize this relationship as a discrepant, dissonant one means that if you are attentive to the beats of different clocks, there is no escaping the possibility of a critique of capital, on temporal terms. The swifter wobble is not going to happen.

Our thinking on time and things temporal occurs under the twin signs of interruption and potential. Interruptions interfere with the flow of the way things are, potentials point to how they might yet be. Both these tendencies can be seen at work (and at play) such as in *The Afternoon Unregistered on the Richter Scale* and *36 Planes of Emotion*. In the first, an interruption takes the form of the un-freezing of an archival photograph, and in the second, we extend the palette of emotions to include states of potential actualized through an assemblage of phrases, surfaces and transparencies that evoke a cluster of invented collective nouns. The nouns name the feelings we know we can have only when we consider the coupling and prolif-

eration of ways of being. Either way, what gets triggered is an insurgency of latent possibilities, tremors that are sharp yet far too subtle to register on a Richter scale. Our play with words, light and electricity, sign language, archival traces, counting exercises are all a search for an insurgent reading of time.

- 3 *Again, it is temporality that opens up the question of the archive. Archive in contemporary art practice has acquired multiple meanings – archive as an official record of the past, as gaps to be revisited, as repository of collective memory, as the space of the counterfactual. How does ‘archiving’ as a verb relate to your practice? How is it aided by technology that you opt for?*

We are living in the very beginning of the 21st century, and the twentieth century was a heavy, heavy time. It was like 5 centuries in one. The twentieth century was a century about pushing people in to oblivion. If you survive the twentieth century, as all of us have, then we think that you are in a condition where you really have to reflect on what happened. So it is not a surprise to us that a lot of contemporary art nowadays turns to history, deals with archives, investigation of memory and so on. This is perhaps a necessary task at the moment. It may not always be, but right now it seems like something we all need to be doing.

But it would be incorrect to say that this means that contemporary art is somehow in the thrall of the past. Any attempt to look outside the limitations of the present will take one in the direction of other possibilities. Here, the present is a reference, and the past and the future are directions in which the outward gaze travels. The point is not that we are all fascinated by the past; rather it is that we are not blinded by the present. This leaves us all free to explore the record of times past as well as the dreams of times future. And these outward moves, in turn, allow us to look at the present. Because one can only look at the present as an object if one can position oneself away from it.

We excavate the archives, and we make time capsules. This means that we create archives in the past and posit archives for the future. The thing is, as people who constantly annotate each other, we are the witnesses to the generation of our own electronic archive, on a daily basis. Someday, the many hard drives and computers that surround us, and the works that we have made, scattered across the world, will have to be accounted for as the reservoirs of our collective memory, of our collective’s memory.

In the early ‘90s our studio had a machine that was used by many of our friends and comrades. It was a modest production site for research notes, for writing proposals, projecting scenarios, for producing booklets on work and political economy, essays, criticism, correspondence, catalogues, etc. This poor, overworked machine went through various disruptions – crashes, version changes, incompatibility issues, upgrades and new software. During the course of one of the crashes we found that the data in the machine became progressively ‘chewed’ with each successive attempt to re-start the computer. All we have today from that world are inchoate memories, the beginnings of a few processes, a few completed works and

scattered printouts of the twisted thread of productive acts. We are still coming to terms with the fact that the readings, arguments and practices of a decade are now only a bit of illegible digital residue. So, as you can see, we have experienced the fact that time does not move in a smooth linear transition from the past to the future at first hand. We know that this can happen again. It is within this flux, around its tilts, crests and troughs that we try to create work, live and have our conversations.

- 4 *Contemporary artist as ethnographers has by now become a tired label. Your cross-cultural entry into another country is often through a metropolitan city. All cities at night look almost indistinguishable from an aerial perspective. Does cartography then offer a useful lens to map urban landscape? Does it work to bring make distant places come closer or inversely the familiar, uncanny?*

From topology, a sub-branch of mathematics, we learn that it takes just four colours to make a map of the world. A map is always a reduction, an abstraction. A map takes a complex reality and tells a story about its terrain using minimal elements. If we never confuse the map for the territory, we get a sense of the lay of the land. When we look at cities, we view what surrounds us, not as planners would, but as detectives and fabulists. We read maps as one would a crime novel. We draw them as one would pictures in a fable. As diagrams, maps are representational machines, we can annotate space to mark it for common elements, and divide a place into all its constituent parts. All these are ways of telling stories, with co-incidences and parallels, with place for distinction and room for echoes, with one hand always held out in greeting towards all that is uncannily familiar or obliquely strange.

- 5 *Biographies of cities inflect personal memories. In The Capital of Accumulation, the parallel lives of two or three cities unfold through the interspaces between nature and culture, environment and politics in Berlin, Warsaw, Mumbai. How is the split screen a useful device? The line in between always keeps the focus on the framing of the narratives and makes visible that which is meant to elude vision.*

The split screen in *The Capital of Accumulation* is not a device to produce distinction between cities. It is not there to put Bombay on the right screen and Berlin on the left screen, thereby creating a platform of comparisons. The split screen is there to do the precise opposite: For the logic of the work to override the possibility of contrast and comparison. For Berlin, Bombay and Warsaw to be seen as strands that weave in and out of each other rather than as peaks to be distributed across the work. Also, two screens evoke a book. What you have read and what awaits in anticipation is always in front of you as two simple pages.

- 6 *You have long exploded the framework of the national modern since the late 1990s when Raqs Media Collective began to acquire visibility in the contemporary art scene. While the national modern is increasingly brought under contestation within the country, the international exhibitionary spaces continue to hold on to it even in current globalized times. How do you negotiate with this when asked to curate an exhibition of contemporary art in the West?*

The curatorial and artistic impulses we work with do not require us to gesture towards the nation. We work with questions that are both more precise as well as more open than nationalism can allow for. When we were asked to curate a section of Manifesta: The European Biennial of Contemporary Art, in Bolzano (Italy) in 2008, we were clear that we were not going to do a 'representation' of Europe, even from the notional outside. What we were interested in doing was to use the opportunity to curate a Biennial to investigate a set of questions that we had been interested in. These centered around the generative power of that which is usually considered to be residue or residual. *The Rest of Now* – the exhibition that came out of this process – was able to address Europe as the residue of the history of Industrial Capitalism, and to imagine how the residual could be retrieved as a generative space. It did that not by obsessing with Europe or European-ness, but by investigating the dynamics of residue. Let us say that Europe is a giant abandoned factory (we were working in precisely such a factory as our site in Bolzano). In any abandoned industrial facility there is an amazing proliferation of biodiversity – strange plants, quiet animals and many kinds of micro-organisms. An abandoned industrial facility, in biological terms, is anything but a wasteland. We were interested in what was growing through the concrete. We can take this metaphor and extend it to gesture to how one can think about constructions and edifices such as nationalism. Nationalism is a ruin. The thing to do, if passing time in the ruin, or in its vicinity, is not to try and restore it, but to look for the life forms that are generated by the very abandonment of the ruin. Our approach to the question of nationalism, national identity and other identity tropes is to approach them as ruins, and then to look for, and work with what is growing in the shadow of the ruin. These forms of life, not the ruin, will determine the future.

7 *From being labeled as uncritical globalists, now the RMC is seen as cutting edge theorists. What brought about this shift in perception?*

Transiting between labels that are not (and never were) of our own choosing feels strange. We follow our curiosities, doubts and passions. Perhaps the term 'cutting edge' is not a very useful one. After all, we are people, not knives, axes, *rampurichakus*¹, shaving blades or lawn mowers!

We do not privilege anchorage, nor is there an albatross of vagabondage hung around our neck. Our attitude to the global is a matter of fact, not of fancy. The world is global today, it has been global before. There are differences in power between locations, but these are offset by differences in power, within locations. The crucial question is the choice of a critical compass with which to orient oneself to power, wherever it comes from and howsoever it operates, not a mental subordination to the co-ordinates of location.

Perhaps the shift in perception regarding us that you gesture towards has come about because some of the things we have been quietly insisting on, such as the

1 Locally made knife.

necessity to see nationalism and the nation-state for the ruin that it is, has now become more acceptable today than it was in the nineties of the twentieth century or even in the early years of this century, at least in our milieu. No nation state, not even the most powerful one, such as the United States, is anything but a wreck today. There is a grudging, but widespread acceptance of the implications of this reality in our times that cuts across an ever widening spectrum of views and positions. This was more or less inevitable, so it does not come to us as a surprise.

- 8 *Aesthetics and politics intersected in your work long before Ranciere's meditation on the subject. In your interview with Moinak Biswas, you have stated about your association of art with plenitude. What implication does this have for politics then?*

First of all, it means forging a politics with means other than resentment and by situating one's political subjectivity on grounds other than victimhood. It means recognizing that the abundance within our lives, not the poverty of our circumstances, is the true engine of transformation. It also means a cessation of building up the adversary by magnifying its power, or by denying one's own agency. Much of radical politics today suffers from aggrandizing the opposition, and wedded to a perverse self-denial. The paranoia that rules today's radicals' psychologies consists in endowing the state and corporations with much greater repressive means than they actually possess. Life is still far more diverse, far more insubordinate, far more pleasurable and full of meaning than it would be if the dystopic diagnoses of the present were actually true. This means that the supposedly 'apolitical' subjects – the people that self styled radicals like to call 'the inert masses' – are actually not yet defeated by capital. We think that in the last couple of years there has been a tectonic shift in global consciousness. Movements – like what happened (and is continuing to happen) in Tahrir Square in Cairo, in Athens, Madrid, London and Tel Aviv or in the rash of 'occupy' initiatives in the United States and elsewhere, are indicative of a clear difference.

The coming decade is going to be one of profound turbulence. For the first time in recent history, factory occupations (that came from outside the mainstream of the trade union movement) in India, were actually able to translate their desires into a degree of reality. This happened outside the spotlight that was focused on Anna Hazare, his 'team' and his opposition. Something is changing, and we think it has to do with people realizing a realistic measure of their own powers, unrestrained by the conventional language of politics and mobilization. Perhaps this 'apolitical' generation will turn out to be the most cannily political after all. All of this has to do with an enjoyment of the multitude's sense of its own abundances.

- 9 *Is it possible to view The Utopia Station for the Venice Biennale as site specific? An island within an island? Does it engender both an event and a discourse? Is it imagined as a place for the unexpected guest (Atithi) as in a Sarai? To turn to Utopia into a Hearing Aid, you had to let the ear take the place of the eyes.*

The Utopia Station project (as imagined by its curators – Molly Nesbit, Rikrit Tiravanija and Hans Ulrich Obrist) has had from the very beginning a nomadic character. Its site-specificity includes its willingness to move from the site, when required, every time. It has stationed itself in the Venice Biennale, it stationed itself in the World Social Forum in Porto Allegre at one time, in University contexts, in theatres and in museums. It may take different forms in the future. But in each instance, our understanding is that it tries to create food for the eyes, the mind, the soul and the political and ethical senses. Any such platform (and you are not incorrect in attaching Sarai in a broader sense to this set of possibilities) has to be prepared to be surprised. It has to make room for the unexpected, the unplanned for, the unexpected guest – the one who comes without warning or intimation of his date of arrival – his *tithi*- the *Atithi*. We think that any initiative that tries to take what is positive in the utopian impulse (and not everything utopian is necessarily positive) has at the very least to be prepared to welcome that which can transform its very being. What good would an Utopia (which is always a challenge to the present to change) be if it were not prepared to challenge itself to change. When we founded Sarai we were searching for a space for the hospitality for this spirit that was willing to be transformed even as it sought to transform what was around it. That is why the metaphor of Sarai was useful and apt, as a space for the care of what is as yet un-thought of. No Sarai would work without its *musafirs*, its *atithis*, its guests.

Often, the first signs and intimations of the change that is already at work are not the ones that make themselves visible. If they were visible, they would cease to exist. That is why to be open to Utopia also means being prepared to listen more carefully than usual. The change that we seek in the world may be already afoot, but it might be that we cannot yet see it, because it does not want to be seen. That is why we need to cultivate a careful and fearless form of listening. To let our retinas rest once in a while and use utopia as our hearing aid.

- 10 *Often, your works creates a dialogue between text and image – Utopia is a Hearing Aid, and in quite the same way in Surjection where the slow dance like gesture of the hand as a seductive image that cohabits with colonial surveillance and the history of forensics. However, there are more conceptual, text based works that eschew images and turn words into sensuous ensembles as lit up in Reading Light, an installation at the Oscar Niemeyer's building in Paris. How do you arrive at decisions that pitch the work along the broad spectrum of words and images?*

For us, words are images, and images can be read and written, even if one does not use words to inscribe them. The work of art does not happen on the surface of an object. It happens within the neural circuitry of the brain and within the layers of consciousness, within the folds of memory and prophecy. The eyes are the only visible part of the brain, that is why they tend to dominate our vision, but we forget that the skin too is a sense organ, a platform where nerve endings cluster and proliferate, a surface of our mind. We find goose pimples interesting, because they are episodes when the skin is thinking. Our desire is to make the skin think (and

hopefully not crawl), the eyes feel, the ears read and the mind dance. That is why we make art.

That is why we are so interested in the notion of the 'after-image', in what you see in your consciousness when your eyes have stopped seeing something. We are also interested in synaesthesia, in the crossing of the wires between the senses. In seeing sound, hearing light, reading touch. The brain does not discriminate between words, sounds, tactile sensations and images, it treats them all equally, albeit differently, and sometimes it scrambles the senses, or plays with them, in dreams, memories and hallucinations.

Being a triangulation of brains and minds, the signals that travel within our extended neural network often bounce and ricochet in unexpected ways. Sometimes what began as a word or a phrase in one of our minds becomes an image when it is received or transmitted by another, and then transformed into a potential object by the third, and so on. We have a sense, born of habit and practice, of when to make this work of relaying take a pause and then about when to send it out in the world. All of our work is a continuing game, a continuing set of branching, interlocking, interweaving investigations. Sometimes it becomes necessary to realize something textually, at other times, the trigger that started the ball of an idea rolling takes it into a purely imagistic, or phatic direction. Sometimes it becomes necessary to be analytical, at other times we can work quite frankly with sentiment and feeling, at sometimes we are annotative, at other times we make work that engenders annotations in the future. It all depends on what the voltage is in the neural circuit, and on the state of play between our minds.

- 11 *In discussions around public sphere, you have preferred 'crowd' to 'public' or rather public in flux – as missing or yet to come. Does not this view of the public have a utopian dimension – a notion of projective future that you strongly reject elsewhere? Or is this public already there waiting for the right mode of address to make itself visible in the post media world?*

We are interested in the crowd – not as a description, but as an invocation – as a call for people to gather. A public is one that already knows what it has gathered for. The things we are interested in do not involve a received, already available understanding of what it means to stand, or to stand together. We are interested in uncertainties of all kinds, including the uncertainty of mobilization, and the mobilization of uncertainty. This is not a matter of waiting to form the 'right mode of address' – or of endless loops of rhetorical trial and error in preparation of the magic slogan that will suddenly transform people into willing and ready publics. Of course this involves a notion of projective futures, but we are fully aware that this future is something that has to be produced, by the wills of people who will seldom act in concert with each other. So it is a matter of investigating the isotopes of collective consciousness, things that have resonant chemical properties even if they differ in their masses.

- 12 *Today the global is privileged in much contemporary art practice including yours. How is the global different from the earlier cosmopolitan that informed much of twentieth century art practice?*

That which you call cosmopolitan was the yearning of a thin slice of a displaced bohemian diaspora, at home nowhere, for an acute corner of the real estate of bohemia, as found scattered in splinters and splices, in municipal districts and post-code zones of some cities. Today, we are living and working in a very different set of circumstances. Of course, artists travel a great deal (artists have always travelled, what has altered is the scale, frequency and intensity of journeys) but the art world is no longer looking for *qiblain* (cardinal points towards which to pay homage). But artists of our generation, say those living and practicing in a city like Delhi, would not easily think of migrating, to Paris or London or Berlin (or even Bombay). This means that we are confident that our location is not a handicap to our production of a global discourse. It also means that we offer few explanations for who we are and what we do.

We are speaking to the world from where we stand also because we are engaged in an intense conversation with the city where we happen to live. At the same time, our peers, our audience, our public is frankly, here and everywhere. We are citizens of our time, not of the postal zones and country codes that tag us. And this is true of everyone of our generation in the art world today.

We have to concede, though, that this is something still being thought through in the art-world, and an adequate understanding of its possibilities and implications as well as a conceptual mobilization is still under process.

- 13 *While whirling around the world like contemporary dervishes fits your nomadic life style and self description as “Raqs”, your relationship to Delhi as a location has a special resonance to your practice.*

Delhi is a good place to whirl from and to whirl back to and to whirl in. There is a tradition about Mehrauli, in Delhi, being the centre of the world. The Iron Pillar that never rusts next to the Qutab Minar in Mehrauli is said to mark the ‘axis mundi’. It reaches deep underground, impaling Vasuki, the mythic world-snake, making sure it doesn’t stir, and the world does not come tumbling down. We like this image. It’s nice to live in a city that keeps the world balanced on the head of a quivering snake. Delhi is a palimpsest, a city of the future and the past, tangential to the present. It suits our time-travelling proclivities. We feel at home here, because we are at home, at large, in the world.

11 Looking for Nasreen

In search of a cross-cultural and performative aesthetics

Renée van de Vall

Introduction

It was Nina Sabnani, animation filmmaker and professor at the India Institute for Technology Bombay, who introduced me to the work of the Indian artist Nasreen Mohamedi. While preparing lunch, Nina gave me a catalogue of Nasreen's work to look through, *Nasreen in Retrospect*, in which she herself had written an entry.¹

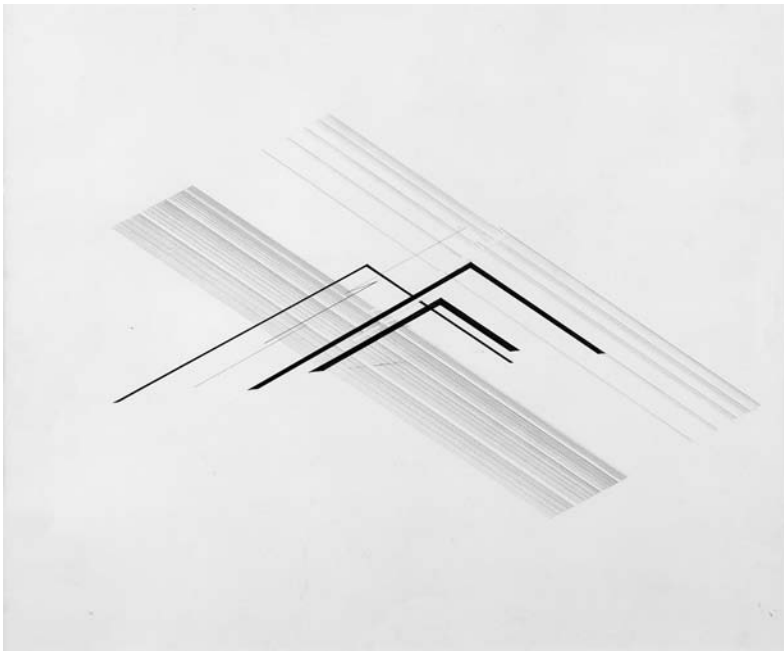


Figure 11.1 Nasreen Mohamedi. *Untitled*, ca. 1982. Ink on paper, 22 x 28 3/8 in.

¹ Unfortunately, the catalogue is out of print and I have not been able to use it for this paper.

I was deeply struck. It was as if a language I am very familiar with, the language of modern abstraction, was spoken with a new pronunciation; I felt I understood what it was – or is – about, yet I didn't. All kinds of pairs of contrasting adjectives struggled for formulation: sensitive, yet severe; uncompromising but fragile; geometrical and lyrical at the same time. There was a sense of space that intrigued me. The warmth and respect with which Nina spoke about her former teacher added to my fascination.

Entering upon a subject like this opens the question of appropriateness and even propriety – who am I, knowing so little about the history of art in India, to write about this work?² – and of appropriation – another European scholar suddenly and most timely infatuated with Asian art – and these questions increased when I noticed the growing interest in Nasreen's work in Europe and America. Yet I do allow myself the thought that embarking upon this project might be honouring Nasreen's own cosmopolitanism: she travelled to Iran, Turkey, Japan, Europe and America and when her own fascinations are mentioned they range from Arabic to Japanese calligraphy and Zen Buddhism, from deserts to sophisticated technology; from Turkish and Mughal architecture to Corbusier's Modernist urban design in Chandigarh.

Art, space and cultural difference

Empirically, my looking for Nasreen started that afternoon in Nina's place. Theoretically, I found two other starting points or footholds, the first in Jale Erzen's work on non-Western aesthetics, the second in Geeta Kapur's writings on Indian art and in particular her work on Nasreen.

Jale Erzen approaches art and architecture from an anthropological angle, holding that cultures differentiate themselves through embodying different phenomenologies; different deeply engrained perceptual structures of temporal and spatial orientation, which, I would suggest, differently shape patterns of embodiment and subjectivity. These structures are represented in the way architecture and art model temporal and spatial experience; but art and architecture do not only express these structures, they also condition them. Experiencing and structuring are interdependent and simultaneous. This means that these structures can change. Writing has fundamentally changed the structuring of our memories, like linear perspective has changed spatial perception. Erzen pleads for a diversified aesthetics and a plurality of art histories, in which instead of valuing and interpreting non-Western art in terms of Western standards and linear progression, other cultures

2 I am deeply grateful to Nina, Archana Shastri and Parul Dave Mukherji for introducing me to India's art worlds.

approach their artistic expressions in the light of their own sensibilities and experiential deep structures.³

Geeta Kapur's 1977 catalogue of modern Indian painting, titled *Pictorial Space*, theorizes pictorial space in Indian art in a way that could serve as an example of the kind of aesthetics Erzen might have in mind. According to Kapur, pictorial space does two things at once: it transcribes the given world into a visual form and it also implies a metaphysical proposition. This was true for Renaissance perspective space and for the Cubist distortions of it; it is also true for classical Indian art, which Kapur understands in terms of the Indian metaphysical concept of *Sunya*: zero. "A concept, which is based on the paradox of the maximum potential contained within an irreducible minimum. Space, then, is the ground for the immanence of the world of matter and form."⁴ The pictorial space of the ancient Ajanta murals (Buddhist cave paintings in the Indian state of Maharashtra, dating from the 2nd century BC to the 7th century) presupposes the void as an inexhaustible potential: figures advancing from undefined depths, everything being "simultaneously present, approaching the surface and held together in a compact spatial structure, through multiple, interacting viewpoints and perspectives." Thus, the Ajanta murals seem to correspond to a metaphysics in which complementary entities achieve a mystical unity through geometrical unity. Positive and negative space are not treated as figure and ground, Kapur writes, but converted "into a structure of interpenetrating parts, each part claiming attention in an alternating sequence, which allows an undulating rhythm to pervade the entire structure without disrupting its wholeness."⁵

Taken together, Erzen's and Kapur's texts brought me to the question, what would happen if one would look at Nasreen's work as a metaphysical proposition? What kind of metaphysics would result, how in particular would one understand space, time, and subjective embodiment as seen through her work?

Nasreen's Modernism

Nasreen Mohamedi was born in Karachi in 1937. Her family moved to Bombay (now Mumbai) when she was 7 years old; she studied at St. Martin's School of Art in London between 1954 and 1957. After her graduation she stayed for a while in Bahrain, where her family had business interests; she returned to Mumbai where she had her first solo exhibition in 1961. In the years 1961 to 1963 she studied

3 Erzen, Jale Nejdet. "Time and Space: Reconstructing Aesthetics" in *International Yearbook of Aesthetics. Aesthetics and the Dialogues among Cultures* ed. Gao Jianping, 11 (2007). 78-87. In contrast to the linguistic use of the term (e.g. Chomsky), in Erzen's more phenomenological approach 'deep structures' are culturally variable; I take them to be perceptual patterns that are formed through habit. I am grateful to Karin Wenz for alerting me to this different meaning of the concept.

4 Kapur, Geeta. *Pictorial Space. A Point of View on Contemporary Indian Art*. An Exhibition Conceived and Compiled by Geeta Kapur December 14 1977 to January 1978. New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi; Rahindra Bhavan Galleries 1977. 3.

5 Ibid.

again, now in Paris; from there she first moved to Delhi, then to Baroda where she became a staff member of the Fine Art Department. In 1990 Nasreen died from Parkinson's disease.

It is interesting to see how Nasreen is presently being discovered in America and Europe. In the last 2, 3 years her work has been shown in 8 exhibitions, among them the Documenta in Kassel in 2007 and solo exhibitions in New York, Oslo and Milton Keynes UK. In January 2009 Jawarhalal Nehru University's School of Art and Aesthetics organised a seminar on her work. Geeta Kapur's talk for this seminar was shown on video in the Milton Keynes exhibition where I happened to see it.

In the catalogues and articles surrounding this revival of interest, there is a kind of friction between the need to place her work in a particular context on the one hand and the need to acknowledge both her individuality and the universality of her 'message' on the other. This friction is inherent in all art criticism, but here complicated by the issue of non-Western or non-Euramerican Modernism(s).

The Modernist tradition in art has for a long time defined itself in such a way – as an autonomous history purifying itself from external purposes, and pre-occupied with itself in terms of formal stylistic developments and the possibilities of its medium – that only (or primarily) European and American artists merited inclusion in the canon.⁶ When after WO II contemporary art from non-Western countries or of non-Western immigrants within the West presented itself to Western criticism, it encountered an interpretative and evaluative vacuum. Western critics either identified these works with a traditional culture of origin, in spite of the untraditional character of the work, or saw them as derivative, epigones of mainstream, Western trends. They took for granted a one-way direction of 'influence' from centre to periphery, ignoring that in many regions modern art traditions had been developing since the nineteenth century and that Western Modernism had been built drawing upon pictorial styles and techniques derived from non-Western traditions, whether modern or not.⁷ But even when the importance of non-Western modernities is acknowledged, the vocabulary of the acknowledgement might still be tricky. Fearful of assimilating, these modernities are often described in terms of an 'otherness' that still presupposes an opposition to a singular 'same' centre, ignoring the differences

6 See for instance Kitty Zijlmans, The Discourse on contemporary Art and the Globalization of the Art System, in Zijlmans, Kitty and van Damme, Wilfried. *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*. Amsterdam: Valiz 2008. pp. 135-150.

7 I refrain from using the word pre-modern, because it presupposes a singular developmental path from a particular endogenous tradition to a supposedly universal modernity. For a critique of the implications of this historicist approach to modernity see Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. With a new preface by the author. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press 2008/2000.

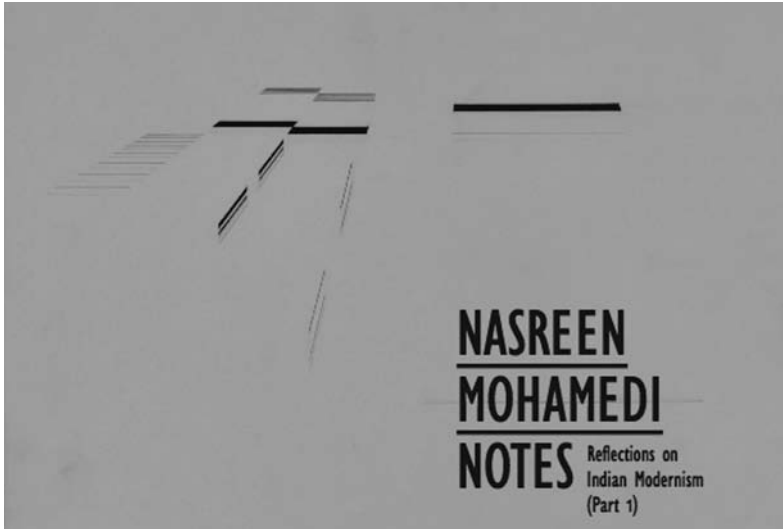


Figure 11.2 Cover of exhibition catalogue *Nasreen Mohamedi. Notes – Reflections on Indian Modernism (Part 1)*. Office for Contemporary Art, Oslo, 6 March-20 June 2009

between the different ‘others’ and possible similarities and relations between them that do *not* include Europe or America as an inevitable connecting node.⁸

Take the exhibition *Nasreen Mohamedi. Notes – Reflections on Indian Modernism*, initially in the Office of Contemporary Art in Oslo, Norway and later in Milton Keynes, UK. There is an interesting contrast between the title of the exhibition, emphasizing the Indian-ness of Nasreen’s Modernism, and the texts written or spoken in its wake, that stress her individualism and the universality of her work. When she is nevertheless ‘placed’, it is in terms that are everything but ‘Indian’: her cosmopolitanism; her going against the grain by adhering to abstraction when the dominant trend in modern art in India was a figurative narrative style; the inadequacy of pinpointing her ethnically, geographically, religiously or otherwise. However, when she is positioned as an icon not of Indian-ness but of Modernism, albeit one forgotten and to be discovered as such in the West, this is also problematic. Of course, there are many sources, affinities and resemblances to draw upon. Nasreen’s early work has been related to Kandinsky, Abstract Expressionism, and the Paris School. The work of her middle period is, because of her grids, compared with the Minimalists, particularly with Agnes Martin. Her third period of geometrical abstraction, has been connected to Russian Suprematism – Malevich – rather

⁸ For a subtle discussion of notions of ‘otherness’: Clark, John. “Modernities in Art: How Are They ‘Other?’”. In Zijlmans, Kitty and van Damme, Wilfried. *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*. Amsterdam: Valiz 2008. 401-418.

than to European or American abstraction. Her place within Indian Modernism is indicated in terms of her contacts with the former Progressive Artists Group and later with her colleagues in Baroda, in particular Jeram Patel. However, in spite of these affinities she doesn't seem to fit neatly into any art-historical line of development. The most fine-grained art-historical placement I came across was in terms of 'postMinimalism', qualified however by the remark that she "was operating outside the chronologies of European and North American art".⁹ As she developed her grids before she became acquainted with Agnes Martin's work and did not react upon or against an earlier strand of Minimalism, the rigid sense of periodization involved in such placements has little explanatory value for her work. A label like 'alternative Modernism' is too much of a catch-all term, as Grant Watson notes, to be helpful.¹⁰

On cross-cultural understanding and judgment of art

The same kind of friction arises when we move from art-historical placement to aesthetic appreciation and interpretation. The question then is, broadly: should we approach the work as an individual contribution to a potentially universal intellectual and artistic discourse – with the danger that 'universal' actually means 'Western' – or approach it as the expression of a particular cultural complex of sensibilities – which seems to preclude all possibility of understanding for outsiders to that culture, who do not share the deep structures articulated in the work? If indeed, art harks back to deep structures of perception that are culturally specific, like Erzen holds, I would propose that we turn the idea around: rather than to take as the condition for the understanding of an artwork that one fully understands – that is: lives – its cultural background, including the perceptual structures it expresses, one could try to understand these structures through exploring their articulation in artworks. This exploration might result in a partial understanding only, but who says that understanding is to be exhaustive to be valid or valuable? Experiencing, interpreting and appreciating art are always continuing and open-ended processes, not only when the art is foreign, but also when it stems from one's own tradition.

The above-mentioned friction corresponds with a judgemental impasse. Either the work is authentically 'other', but then the European observer lacks the background to understand and evaluate the work on its own merits.¹¹ Or s/he is able to understand and value it, but then the suspicion is warranted that the work has conformed itself to Western aesthetic models and standards. I would like to suggest that this impasse has a root in a specific predisposition of traditional aesthetics, recently criticised – in the context of Western art and aesthetics – by Alexander Nehamas:

9 Watson, Grant. "Nasreen Mohamedi; Passage and Placement," *Afterall. A Journal of Art, Context and Inquiry* 21 (2009), 27–35.

10 Ibid.

11 The same argument can be reversed and applied to non-Western observers not understanding Western art; this incomprehension however is seldom invoked to doubt the quality of the *art*, rather than of the *observer* whereas in the case of the Western incomprehension of non-Western (contemporary) art this doubt seems almost always somewhere at stake.

to understand our appreciation of aesthetic value (Nehamas' topic is beauty) in terms of a judgement based on an immediate, a-temporal appearance, disengaged from other life concerns.¹² This presupposes that the beauty of art would be all on the surface. Such a judgement, according to Nehamas, can only form a beginning: the value of a work of art does not lie in its immediate appearance but depends on features that lie more deeply within it and can be discerned and appreciated only in a continuing affective and interpretative engagement. Like in love and friendship, beauty in art depends on a 'commitment to the future'. One wants to involve the beautiful work in one's life, be close to it and learn to understand it, to be emotionally, ethically, and intellectually enriched and changed by it – without any guarantee that one will not be disappointed. Beauty is only a "promise of happiness" that, however, may structure and change one's life.

It could be worthwhile to bring Nehamas' more performative and dialogical understanding of aesthetic appreciation to bear on global discourses in aesthetics. Rather than seeking an (a priori) shelter in searching for the proper conditions for an a-temporal aesthetic judgement, regardless of whether these are located in the universality of what connects cultures or in the particularity of what differentiates them, such discourses might adopt a different rationale and articulate an open-ended dynamics of engagement, triggered and sustained by mutual fascination and curiosity; an approach that, like love and friendship, requires that both parties meet each other on an equal footing and accept that, indeed, their lives might be changed in the encounter. Such a performative approach to aesthetics opens the theoretical possibility that participants of one culture learn about modes of experience cultivated in another culture through a sustained engagement with its art.

Space and perception in Nasreen's drawings

With all of this in mind, let us return to Nasreen's work. Nasreen's drawings are non-perspectival. But there might be a difference between an art that emphatically denies perspective and an art that bypasses it. This question may be pivotal for the connection of art with perceptual deep structures, as linear, central perspective is considered to be co-constitutive of modern Western metaphysics with its subject-object dichotomy and epistemology founded on logical and mathematical rationality and distanced observation; features that perhaps are not engendered but then at least supported by a visual regime lately coined as 'Cartesian perspectivism' (Jay).¹³ However, this begs the question whether there are other visual regimes (or in Erzen's terms; deep structures) available and if so, how do they configure

12 Nehamas, Alexander. *Only a Promise of Happiness. The Place of Beauty in a World of Art*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2007).

13 Jay, Martin. "Scopic Regimes of Modernity", in Foster, Hal (ed.), *Vision and Visuality*. Seattle: Dia Art Foundation / Bay Press 1988. 3-23 and Jay, Martin. *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press 1993.

space, time, subjectivity, and embodiment? And what role has pictorial space in these regimes?

Which brings us back to Geeta Kapur. Nasreen's elementary and austere compositions seem far removed from the visual abundance of the Ajanta murals, but some characteristics of the sense of space described by Kapur – space not as a three-dimensional and in itself empty container of objects, but as a potential, a void, a stillness from which the visible forms issue forth and come to appearance, that particular sense of space seems to me to inhabit Nasreen's drawings as well. Nasreen's figures are not *in* space like a table is in a room. Neither are they *in front of* a background or *behind* it: they are simply not located. Rather than their ground, the pictorial space is their soil – the womb that brings them to existence, if that metaphor would not seem too organic for a geometrical artist like Nasreen.

In this non-perspectivalism Nasreen's work differs from the non-perspectivalism of Euroamerican Modernism.¹⁴ Modern painting in the West has focused on the struggle against the illusion of three-dimensionality that has dominated Western painting since the Renaissance. Cézanne, Cubism, Mondrian and Malevich, the American Colour Field painters have successively and progressively foregrounded the painting's flatness and material surface¹⁵. This emphasis on the picture's surface was informed by non-Western traditions, such as Japanese prints, primitive art, and Persian miniatures. Indian artists, however, says Kapur, belong "to a tradition where the flatness of the picture is never in dispute. We know with what ingenuity a flat pictorial space is structured in the Indian miniatures."¹⁶

However, could we call Nasreen's drawings 'flat'? I would rather say that whereas in Western Modernism the 2D flatness of the pictorial surface is articulated, and articulated in an explicit negation of 3D depth, in the drawings of Nasreen, this confrontation between 3D and 2D is not an issue at all. The spectator of a Rothko painting is squarely positioned in front of a depth s/he is not allowed to see because it is hidden behind a veil or cloud or screen. Nasreen's spectators do not seem to occupy a definite position; they do or do not partake in the pictorial space along different experiential modes. Agnes Martin's grids emphasize the surface as a surface; in Nasreen's grids the surface is not emphasized for its own sake.

14 For an account of the introduction of linear perspective in Indian art education by the British colonial educators, see Pinney, Christopher, *Photos of the Gods. The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*. London: Reaktion Books 2004. I fully agree with Pinney's plea for an embodied, sensory aesthetics, focusing not on how images 'look' but what they 'do' and exploring the relations between the body and the image (Ibid. 8; 22).

15 At least according to the standard art-historical accounts following Greenberg's formalism. Although too simplistic to do justice to the diversity of artistic stakes of Western Modernism, for the purpose of this paper it may serve as a useful shorthand characterisation. For a more thorough phenomenological interpretation of some major abstract paintings by Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still see van de Vall, Renée. *Een subliem gevoel van plaats. Een filosofische interpretatie van het werk van Barnett Newman*. Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij 1994; my analysis of Nasreen's work follows the interpretative approach developed in this book.

16 Kapur, op.cit., 6.

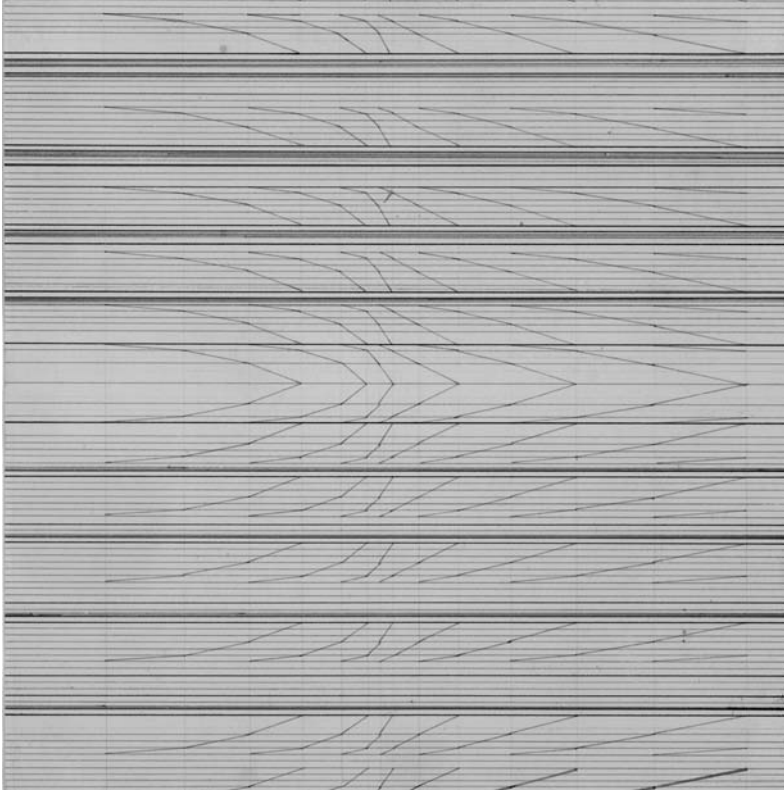


Figure 11.3 Nasreen Mohamedi. *Untitled* 1970s,
graphite and ink on paper 19 x 19 cm.

The grid-like drawings of Nasreen's 'middle' period stretch over the whole surface. There is infinite variation and movement within them. They are about light, reflection, shimmering, vibration; the analogy with sound waves is apparent. Although Martin's line paintings suggest trembling, spiritual vibrations as well, I would say that Nasreen's grids embody more movement: rather than shimmering veils, they suggest rhythmic patterns, like ripples in a lake or the forms of flames in a fire. Moreover, the grids are not 'flat'. As surfaces, they do not foreground the material picture plane, but are rather transparent. They generate and modulate space. There are playful distortions, tiny gaps, irregularities and openings that catch the eye.

The grids capture light; they also capture the gaze of the spectator. One of Nasreen's most quoted diary lines, "A spider can only make a web but it makes it to perfection", may apply here very literally.



Figure 11.4 Nasreen Mohamedi. *Untitled* (2 works) pencil and ink 11 x 13,8 in.

In the later works, abstract forms made from straight or curved lines float within an empty field that is dimension-less. The forms themselves are highly dynamic and indicate different, often crosscutting directions. As formal structures they open a space within the blank field, a space defined by intersecting movements. But the elements that together compose these formal structures contain again another spatial dimension within them, the space emerging between the lines that make up the elements. The eyes may first register the all-over composition encountering a kind of hushed void, conforming to the kind of wide open, trance-like stare a Rothko might evoke, then follow the specific forms in their strong, compelling movements, then disappear into a detail, caught by – entangled in – the fine lines of the drawing, and finally disentangle itself and draw back again. Rather than a static scheme or form that moulds visual experience, space here is an event, a layered coming into appearance, corresponding to a phased involvement of the spectator. Space is temporally structured.

In a later essay devoted to Nasreen's work¹⁷ Kapur refers to Norman Bryson's

17 Geeta Kapur, "Elegy for an Unclaimed Beloved", in *When was Modernism. Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika Books 2000), 68.. This is a dense and sometimes almost incomprehensible text, but at the same time it is one of the most beautiful and insightful essays I ever read about an artist's work. There is hardly anything I could think of writing about Nasreen's drawings that is not in one way or the other already touched upon by Kapur.

concept of the *glance* – “fleeting, evanescent, always at the point of vanishing and taking the view with it” to characterize the particular mode of visibility addressed in the drawings.¹⁸ Yes and no. It is a beginning. It distinguishes the involvement of the spectator configured in this work from the regime of the *gaze* constituted through the conventions of central linear perspective. But Bryson’s distinction is too crude, more concerned with criticizing the perspectival gaze than with describing alternative modes of visibility and Kapur’s own descriptions are far more subtle than this categorization suggests. Evanescent as the glance might be, the concept as it is defined does not capture the profound stillness and distance that emanate from this work. Stillness and distance might seem to bring back the perspectival gaze, but in this work they don’t. The stillness is not static or fixated. The form floats but “then settles quit firmly”.¹⁹ The forms emanate, remaining distant but not in terms of a measurable location. There is experiential distance, but not staged as a pre-given positioning of a subject as separated from its object. It is rather a movement in which the viewing spectator zooms in from a wide view into a specific spatial configuration into a finely worked detail and zooms out again.

The promise

Looking at Nasreen’s work as a metaphysical proposition and trying to understand how space, time, and subjective embodiment are articulated in her work, I have come to suspect that she derives her pictorial metaphysics from several traditions. The space and time configured in the drawings of her middle period might evoke some of the features described by Erzen in another article on the basic principles of Islamic aesthetics: the mirrors, reflections and screens expressing the confusion of reality and illusion, the repetitions pointing to the constant change within permanence, for instance.²⁰ As, on the other hand, the empty spaces in which the forms of her later work emerge stage a meditative openness and aloofness which might be related to what Kapur calls Nasreen’s ascetic ‘vacation of self’ and to her deep attraction to Tao and Zen.²¹ This attraction might also explain why the subtle, yet precise spatiotemporal dynamics of Nasreen’s translucent figures seem to bear an affinity with how the traditional Chinese painter, according to philosopher and sinologist François Jullien, painted “le monde émergeant-s’immergeant”: “il le peint sortant de la confusion originelle ou s’y replongeant, selon la grande alternance

18 Bryson, Norman. *Vision and Painting. The Logic of the Gaze*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press 1983.

19 Kapur 2000, 82.

20 Erzen, Jale Nejdett. “Islamic Aesthetics. An Alternative Way to Knowledge”, in *Global Theories of the Arts and Aesthetics*, ed. Susan L. Feagin. Malden MA & Oxford UK: American Society for Aesthetics & Blackwell 2007. 69-75.

21 Kapur 2000, 80.

respiratoire qui le fait exister, au lieu de prétendre l'immobiliser comme Être et le déterminer comme objet.²²

If my suggestion is correct, these affinities might indicate that 'deep perceptual structures of spatial and temporal orientation' indeed differ profoundly, but not necessarily along clearly demarcated geographical, religious or culture-historical lines. Art, moreover, may mediate between these structures, not by effacing differences, but by translating and transforming experiences from one context to another. If we understand art not primarily as expression of given – culturally rooted – sensibilities, but rather as articulation of new experiential possibilities, we might better understand what Nasreen might have been looking for. She worked in an abstract, modern style for which she found inspiration in the Western Modernist tradition, in Indian, Japanese, Arab and Turkish art and architecture. Explaining her work in terms of the artistic sources and perceptual structures she drew upon might help us in finding an entrance, but can never be the endpoint of the interpretation; the crux is to understand how the works themselves translate, combine and renew these sources and structures.

At this point, I cannot and do not want to claim that I have arrived at such understanding. What started that afternoon in Nina's apartment, was indeed a long-term engagement, a continued looking and re-looking, which has not yet come to an end and in which I am helped by various friends and colleagues who have either known and studied with Nasreen or who read what I write about her. It is through one of these conversations, however, that I discovered something very important about Nasreen's work that points into the direction of an answer. Why do you write in such impersonal terms about your own experience of her work, a close colleague asked me, when usually you write very precisely about how art affects you emotionally? Indeed, it has always been important to me to avoid writing about 'the spectator', with its implication that the observations I noted would be objectively there in the painting and equally apparent to everyone, rather than the result of a personal, interpretative 'seeing with'.²³ I have tried accordingly to rewrite this essay, and found I couldn't; not because I wasn't personally involved, but because the involvement the drawings evoked addressed a different layer of feeling than that of my individual emotions. The promise that first attracted me to Nasreen's work had something to do with its – for me – unfamiliar combination of sensitivity with severity; gradually I came to recognize and appreciate its profound and concentrated stillness. What I may have learned in the engagement, at first without realizing it, was a sense of space and time in which 'I' is no longer an issue; a sense of space and

22 François Jullien, *La Grande Image n'a pas de forme. À partir des Arts de peindre de la Chine ancienne*. Paris: Éditions de Seuil 2003, 2021.

23 For an eloquent and profound discussion of this Merleau-Pontian notion in the context of contemporary art, see Saara Hacklin, *Divergencies of Perception. The Possibilities of Merleau-Pontian Phenomenology in Analyses of Contemporary Art*. PhD thesis University of Helsinki, Helsinki 2012.

time Nasreen herself might have been looking for as well, as she indicates in one of her diary texts:²⁴

Nature is so true.

Such truth in her silence.

If only we would listen to her intricacies.

Then there is no difference in sound and vision. There must be space far beyond logical.

24 1980; quoted in *Drawing Space. Contemporary Indian Drawing: Sheela Gowda, N.S. Harsha, Nasreen Mohamedi*. London: Institute of International Visual Arts 2000, p. 48.

12 Memory as resistance

The body and urban form

Jale Erzen

I begin by voicing two sources of concern that have been frustrating my relation to the city since some time. It is mainly the cities in Turkey that constitute my references, but I believe that the most obvious problems concern cities everywhere. The problems could be stated as 1) Growing aggression of the mercantile system, infiltrating every possible space, leaving no free, individual breathing atmosphere. Baudrillard mentions this as the growing cancerous condition within the capitalist system.¹ 2) Growing insecurity and aggression of those who are pushed aside, and whose rights to exist are ignored.

One of the most powerful economic tools in the process of globalization is the new building of cities. The new urban form is dictated by corporate industries which are the locomotif of globalization. While creating a culture of spectacle, the new urban form displaces the sense of home, and historical references are maintained merely as tourist attractions.

Population growth in developing and under-developed countries, necessitating migration to large cities for work and for social services is one of the main reasons upsetting the urban order. On the other hand, the centralization of power and of resources often turns this situation into an economic and political advantage for those in control. In Turkey this is obvious in the rapidly built social housing complexes that replace the older peripheral settlements where migrants used to create an environment based on kinship and solidarity, with qualities reminding one of their original villages. Although these old settlements lacked many facilities they held these people together and gave them a sense of belonging and autonomy. The new social housing is of very low quality, costs beyond the means of the people who are displaced and disrupts their existing social relations. Many of these people have to move to more distant areas and have to subsist on marginal work such as collecting trash and are being hired only on a daily basis. As their memories are suppressed in new and alien environments they are increasingly assimilated into the system. In a political condition where all powers and decision taking are cen-

1 Jean Baudrillard, *De la séduction* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1979): 236

tralized it is only those in penury without much to lose, who have the possibility to upset the existing order. On the one hand this may create chaotic situations in urban contexts, while on the other hand it is the only direction towards creating a consciousness about inequalities.

Many contemporary artists have dealt in their art with these uprooted people, presenting their life and work as a new dialectic towards new possibilities. Ege Berensel, a documentary filmmaker and theoretician writes:

The movement of multitudes designates new spaces, their journeys create new settlements. Autonomous movement is what defines the place that is appropriate for multitudes. While the productive flow of bodies define the new rivers and ports, a new geography is constructed by the multitude. World cities become the huge hangars and circulation locomotifs, temporary settlement areas and multiple diffusion networks of a lively humanity that instantly becomes communal ... These movements are often at the price of terrible pains, but in these movements there is also an aspiration for freedom that is not satisfied as long as new spaces for new liberties are not obtained ... such movements create richness everywhere.²

As globalization, which all over the world results in a codified lifestyle, increasingly eradicates cultural differences, there is growing frustration felt by those excluded from sharing the benefits of capitalist consumption. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the shantytowns and peripheral settlements of the megalopolis. The repetitious production of capitalist taste on the one hand, and the forced conservation of frozen traditional attitudes and forms for those under penury make the two contrasting faces of most urban conditions all over the world today.

I will try to approach these questions from the perspective of the relation of the city to the body, and how the approach to the body and the constitution of society has changed as the result of the changing of the tools of memory. As the tools of memory change from the oral to the literate, to the conserved image in photography, and to the digital, the relation to the body changes as well, creating a relationship to the environment that has, in the end, become mostly mechanical. This mechanical understanding of the body which goes along with the capitalist lifestyle constitutes the main approach criteria behind most urban planning. Of course, underlying this, are the guiding economic exigencies related to construction and circulation. Communal concepts and relations are transformed as well, as the urban environment no longer contains references to social values. In the present urban context where diverse cultural and political groups live together, communal values are imposed by political powers which hold the economic means and which fragment these groups according to economic gains.

A more natural urban change which happens as the result of intelligently planned national strategies and politics where people would not have to abandon their

2 Ege Berensel, "Between the Images", *B-zone: Becoming Europe And Beyond*, Edited by Anselm Franke (Actar/Kunst-Werke Berlin, 15 August 2006), 248-255.

localities in great numbers could be possible. If examples of industrialization from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are studied more humane alternatives can be designed. It is generally with sudden economic and industrial changes that people are disrupted and cities are destroyed under titanic pressures. This is happening in rapidly changing countries where capitalist interests turn all existing orders upside down. Countries in Africa, in the Near East, in India and Turkey are the common examples besides China where political and economic changes move faster than humanly and culturally possible. In such cases political powers become repressive to impose immediate action. Cities are torn down and rebuilt and very few references that serve memory for the conservation of heterogeneous cultural identities are conserved. The frozen conservation of cities is of course not what we should be after, but an analysis showing how the city has become unmindful of the individual and of the human body is important to understand the mechanisms of violent global change. This analysis may imply a new concept of the city that could relate more meaningfully to human senses and to human needs.

We can look at the human body and its relation to the city, from several view points: from the perspective of Bergson's *Memoire et matiere*, from Guillemette Bollen's concept of the articulated body, and from Richard Sennett's perspective of the bodily effort. All these relate in some way or another to a phenomenological approach, erasing the gap between object and subject. In such an approach, the subject, which in this case is the body and its human agent, does not relate and create meanings through the use of objects, instruments, but it is the event itself; it is through the subject and its sentient being that the event, the form and the meaning happen. Taken within the context of urban planning, this would mean that all design imperatives are taken from the point of view of the actions of the body, its needs and relations to the environment. The body and the human agent, at all moments act and relate to the environment as the result of physical and mental mnemonic accumulation. Therefore environmental mnemonic references are extremely important for the action of the body and of the human agent in harmony with the environment.

In the early twentieth century, the reshaping of the world to adapt to new ways of production and consumption through the growing power of industry happened in the most visible and demanding way through the city, in all its physical elements. Old settlements had to make way for new housing, new circulation and new business. The past had to be eliminated both physically and from memory. The most striking artistic movement that represented this train of thought was of course, Futurism, which had its strong counterpart in architecture and city planning, such as in the work of Sant' Elia. The reason why such a movement should emerge in Italy, the least industrial of all places, was perhaps because history still had much hold over it in a most physical way. In spite of this ideology of amnesia and destruction, it is interesting that Italy conserved much of its historical presence in the form of architecture and art. The reason was that fortunately its economy did not step up to its ideals. One of the most important reasons was that lower income Italians did

not so much immigrate to the big Italian cities because the economy did not offer them jobs, as in the more industrialized countries. What happened in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century is now happening in the rest of the world at a speed that is made possible by new building industries, new technologies and triggered with credit systems and population needs.

One of the most conspicuous effects of globalization is the uprooting of people from their settlements. The trend began in the mid-nineteenth century with the advent of industrialization. The exchange of minorities according to religious affinity was another ground, which was advocated by American foreign policies. The capitalist production needed increasingly more non-qualified workers in the factories. With the evacuation of rural areas, there was work and food only in the city. Besides, in most countries, both education and health services are only to be found in the cities. Every big city, and increasingly, every city with some economic potential, today houses a diversity of people from different lands, nations, cultures, religions. In the European cities people come from colonized lands; in other countries it is the people from the land, with different local cultural backgrounds that crowd the cities. What is common today to all cities in the world is the fragmentation due to class and culture differences. Globalization has brought to the surface social diversities which are repressed by the capitalist system and where the need for identity is satisfied in a kind of common consensus in the most popular level of culture, including religious affiliation. As the city grows it is surrounded by low income settlements with insufficient cultural, recreational and educational facilities. With the recent economic crisis, this means that more and more jobless people make up the larger part of the population.

Certain contemporary writers have focused on the charms of poor neighborhoods. In an article entitled 'Aesthetics and Penury' I tried to show that people who did not have the budget to buy goods for their needs, often came up with creative means to embellish their surroundings, to create living environments that catered to many diverse needs.³ People who have written about the aesthetics of the city, often focused on poor areas, showing how much more diverse and rich in character these areas could be in comparison to upper class neighborhoods where forms were often quite repetitious, rather boring and cold.

Contemporary Turkish artists have very often taken up peripheral settlements and squatters around Istanbul as subjects of their videos. The irony is that although they were supposedly commenting on injustices, in some of these videos there was a strong tendency to aestheticize. Because many immigrants were trying to continue their local culture in an uprooted and alienated way, they had to invent ad hoc methods to revive what they had lost. The organic environment of the village was replaced by make-do settlements made of recycled or found scrap. In the long run these settlements have become grounds of local culture; yet all over the world, penury always creates similar situations. Instead of traditional identities and

3 Jale Erzen, "Aesthetics and Penury," *Chronika Aisthetikes/Annales d'Esthetique/Annals for Aesthetics* 41B (2001-2002): 441-451.

cultures we begin to have a global and placeless culture of penury. From China to Tunisia or Algeria lower income settlements or shantytowns begin to look alike.

At another level, with higher income neighborhoods, the situation may even seem worse. Because these areas can adapt more easily to new needs of shopping, circulation and recreation, they are frequently remodeled. Houses are often torn down to make place for new buildings, roads are constantly changed, and neighborhoods go through constant make-overs. In the end, all traces of the past are erased. The neighborhood becomes simply a functional mechanism stripped of all identity. As Wim Wenders' films indicate these are shallow spaces.⁴ The sense of place is only preserved through literature. In fact, in Turkey there is recently a very lively growth in literature referring to the memory of cities. In Ankara, several districts have created civil associations not only to embellish their neighborhoods, but to create archives of old photographs and oral memories. As the city becomes neutral and merely a place for transportation, there is an increasing desire to relate to the past, if only in an imaginary way.

I will develop my further arguments on amnesia and memory according to different viewpoints developed by Henri Bergson, Guillemette Bolens, Gilles Deleuze, and Richard Sennett. Guillemette Bolens, in her book *La logique du corps articu-*



Figure 12.1 Photo No.104-0460. Extensive building activity in a peripheral area of Ankara, the capital of Turkey, where the radicalist government is applying populist design to attract lower middle classes with fundamentalist religious affinity. Photocredits: Melih Uçar, Selda Bancı, Gülnur Güvenç, Onut Mat; Archival of UCTEA Chamber of Architects of Turkey Ankara Branch

4 Andrew Light, "Wim Wenders and the Everyday Aesthetics of Technology and Space," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 2 (1997): 215-229.



Figure 12.2 Photo No. DSCN0008. A make-do waterfall by the highway with apartments designed to reflect neo-muslim design.

Photocredits: Melih Uçar, Selda Bancı, Gülnur Güvenç, Onut Mat; Archival of UCTEA Chamber of Architects of Turkey Ankara Branch

laire, based on her doctoral thesis, analyzes the logic of the human body in pre-Socratic times, and traces the different approaches that have changed throughout history, according to the changing tools of memory.⁵ The Homeric understanding of the body as the source of events, the source of creation, and the source of all the different values, changes when the Greek society becomes literate. She explains how, in oral cultures, the body is always thought of as movement. She explains how the creative event is not dependent on an instrument outside the human body, which the body uses as an object, but rather that the creative event is the movement of the body. “This is what Deadalus creates for Ariane in Knossos: more than an architecture, more than a choreography, and more than dancing bodies, he creates the movements of a dance.”⁶ Bolens also gives an example from Central Africa, where a villager was asked what he thought of the new director of the local school, to which he replied “Let us see first how he dances”⁷.

Accordingly, in an oral society it is the movement of the body which creates the ideas, the emotions and the relations to the world. As Eric H. Havelock has also analyzed in his book *Preface to Plato*⁸, with the development of writing, the understanding of the body changes from being a source of movement and creation

5 Guilleumette Bolens, *La logique du corps articulaire*, (Rennes:Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2000)

6 Bolens, *La logique du corps articulaire*, 215-222.

7 Ibid., 215-222.

8 Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1967).

to being understood as an envelope where the important elements are the openings that create the relation between the interior and the exterior. In oral cultures all signs relate to the body; this means that before anything else, the city is conceived of as an environment which takes its ordering principle from the movements of the body. Accordingly, "the human body today symbolizes something other than itself in its being framed in aesthetic, religious, political and athletic meanings".⁹ In the twentieth century, new technologies, as apparatus of memory, have modified the limits of the body. For example the x-ray has changed the way we consider the inside and the organs of the body. Bolens claims that with digital technologies our relation to language and hence to memory has changed once again. This affects the way we consider and understand our environment.

According to Henri Bergson, each moment contains within it, and in its final constitution all the preceding history that it has lived through.¹⁰ Therefore, in a certain sense there is no forgetting. The body is a depository of all the changes that it has gone through in all its physical forms. Therefore, the body also relates to the environment in unconscious ways through its past experiences in a certain place. This is important in the development of meanings and relations between a city and its inhabitants. All the changes of a city are also recorded in the body of its citizens. In this sense, if a person has lived through changes, s/he can still feel a part of that city and will appreciate the traces of the change that s/he experienced. In the novel of Kazuo Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, the protagonist sits on a bench in a newly modelled part of the city and the memory of that place as formerly a room of his house will come back.¹¹ There is sadness, but at least there is also connection to place through memory. What is terribly disturbing is when the body is displaced. This happens with great migrations. In that case, more intentional means of relationships have to be created between the individuals and the urban form. This is a responsibility of all kinds of urban designers, in the new make-up of global culture.

On the other hand, Gilles Deleuze, in *Anti-Oedipe*, mentions the constant desire to forget. Accordingly, capitalism constructs its mechanism on forgetting, although it uses similar concepts with previous periods in developing its consumption methodology.¹² As Deleuze explains in *Mille Plateaux*, the capitalist body is a body without organs, a body that is deterritorialized. The relation to the earth has been transformed to a relation to money and images. In *Anti-Oedipe* Deleuze talks about someone who only sees images and has no insight.¹³ The city offers a multiplicity of images, without meaning or without any real sight. This is how capitalism can secure itself and colonize the world. As claimed by Bolens, by inflicting codes on the body of the world and on the human body, culture can continue

9 Bolens, *La logique du corps articulaire*, 214-222.

10 Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire* (Paris: Quadrige/Puf, 2007): 172-184

11 Kazuo Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986).

12 Gilles Deleuze et Felix Guattari, "Comment se faire un corps sans Organes ?", in *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1980): 185-205

13 Gilles Deleuze et Felix Guattari, "Sauvages, barbares, civilisés" in *Anti-Oedipe Capitalism et Schizophrénie* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1972-1973): 291-306

through ruptures. However, with bodies that are deterritorialized and changed into rhizomes the continuation of culture is not possible, instead the repetitious reproduction of capitalist production takes over.

Richard Sennett's two books are vital in this context; namely, *Flesh and Stone*, where he tells the story of Western urban forms through the attitudes to the body that have changed in time and, *The Uses of Disorder*, where he analyses certain fixities that occur in adolescence, which create people who are making undemocratic urban policies.¹⁴ If as Sennett argues, the city is formed on the understanding of the human body, then in the sense of Bergson, the city, as a body, is also a depository of history. Yet, this natural body of the city has been mutilated in modern history.

In understanding and evaluating the city, or any other environment, one has to see how the body moves, acts and feels in it. The city has no sense if one judges it only from a visual point of view. Even the visual has to be evaluated from the movements and positions of the body. One of the great charms of the cities in Asia and in the Middle East is how they abound with stimuli that direct the body and awake the senses in diverse ways. One feels a great sense of connection even if one is a total stranger. According to Sennett the effort that the body exerts and which gives it pain, is a way of understanding other people, the sensations of others; it creates an openness and sense of community. The city, relates to the body in different ways in the Orient and in the Occident. According to Sennett, who has analyzed the body relation to the city in terms of the Judeo-Christian sense of pain, the city relates directly to the body by putting the body in various chores. His analyses exclude Oriental cities. In many ways, all Oriental cities, from the Japanese to the Indian, and of course the Islamic cities, create situations where the body is challenged. This happens in diverse ways; in the Islamic city the body is constantly stimulated by sounds, smells, different currents of air, sun and shade; as one winds through the labyrinth of streets, the variety between the crowded areas or the isolated side streets, all create different sensations. As public buildings, it is the mosque or the madrasa, and the dome and minaret that have common meanings; in the Islamic city, or any pre-modern Oriental city there are no public monuments such as sculptures or public buildings that have a social meaning. One understands the city mostly in sensual ways. Moreover, the prayer in the mosque also demands bodily effort. In the Far East religious temples are places where one enters without shoes, makes offerings, bends down, bows, etc. Often such temples are on top of hills or at places that are not easily accessible. In Japan, one has to take small forest paths around the city to reach a temple. All this means bodily effort. It is through such bodily effort that one becomes aware, not only mentally but in the sense that Bergson talks about memory, that one internalizes the meanings in a physical sense. It is therefore obvious that, contrary to Sennett's assumption that the bodily effort is a Judeo-Christian tradition, we find it in all cultures. Also, as Merleau-Ponty has

14 Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996); Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone* (London: W.W. Norton, 1994).

shown, meaning is internalized first, only in a bodily sense.¹⁵ The aesthetic of the city has to be seen from this perspective.

What has happened today is that the city is formed not in relation to the human body but in relation to mechanical models. The speed of the traffic and the terrorizing accidents that can happen show to what a degree the models are inhuman and how alien they are to the human body. To make up for this lack of physical relationship, the municipalities create spectacles that relate only to the visual sense. They also have to create artificial memories; references that anyone can choose from any

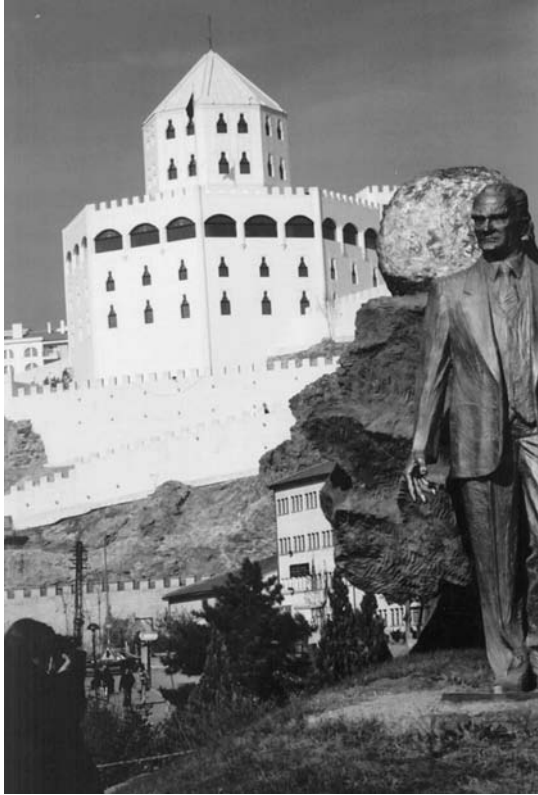


Figure 12.3 Photo No. Tara-0018. A building supposed to look like historic Asian-Turkish citadels to remind one of the Asian roots of Turkish culture. In the same neighbourhood, on top of an artificial waterfall, stands the statue of Atatürk, founder of the Turkish Republic. These two symbols are obviously contradictory. Photocredits: Melih Uçar, Selda Bancı, Gülnur Güvenç, Onut Mat; Archival of UCTEA Chamber of Architects of Turkey Ankara Branch

15 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenologie de la Perception* (Paris: TEL Gallimard, 1945).

cultural example: If you want to have a Hindu wedding or a Christian wedding you can do so in any of the appropriate buildings offered to your taste, as we see, for example, in South Korea. Or, if one comes from the country and has no sense of relation to the city, the municipality can create a new history to relate to, as in the case of Ankara.

In most of today's cities rituals and ceremonies have been discarded, because discipline, time and patience are needed for these; also with such events people are not observers but actors. In the culture of consumption one is not expected to act, one often has to accept what is offered. The new city is a spectacle, or rather an illusion. It can assume the history of any place and present it as its own. In Ankara the municipality has chosen to favor the history of Cengiz Khan, assuming he was the ancestor of the Turks in Asia. Thus Ankara presents images of an assumed Asiatic past that has nothing to do with its real history. As the old part of the Ankara was being redesigned in the late 1980s, remains of the old Roman city were discovered: a forum with colonnades, houses, temples, etc. This was all covered up because it did not belong to a past that the municipality wanted to glorify, although the Augustus temple is still standing with its bilingual Roman and Greek inscriptions. What is happening in Ankara in a conspicuous way is happening in many cities all over the world, even if with less emphasis on present political ideologies. In Paris, the Place de la Sorbonne has been 'embellished' with a white marble water flow, placed on the old cobblestones that used to cover the square. The little library of philosophy books in the corner has become a clothes store. As you sit in the little café overlooking the square, you are reminded that the old Sorbonne is slowly pushed to oblivion by a municipality that wants to seduce a consumerist public.

Was the Paris of Baudelaire or of Hemingway similar to our cities and only different to the degree of their technological possibilities? Did the people of those days see the same dissolution of meaning in comparison with the past that we do today? In Manet's painting of the Luxembourg Park we recognize many of the city's intellectuals. Can anything similar happen today? Can we see the city's intellectuals in a city park, taking part in a public gathering? When we read *Mme Bovary*, or Zola's books, and the comments of Pierre Bourdieu, we see how much the city had a role in the ideology of freedom that Flaubert or Baudelaire believed in.¹⁶ Was the Tour Eiffel just as meaningless as a spectacle as it is forced to be today with the pink fluorescent lighting that is applied to it? What does Hong Kong have to offer with a kaleidoscope of changing colored lights every minute, while its harbor and the activity of its waters can offer more meaningful events and dynamism?

Today we can no longer talk about a pure Oriental or a pure Occidental city. As I have mentioned before, Paris has probably more inhabitants from all over the world than Parisians; the city today, no matter where it is, lacks a relation to the individual, whether that person is a local or an immigrant. In some cases, as I have mentioned for Istanbul, the peripheral settlements of migrants may show more

16 Pierre Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'Art* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1992).

local culture than one can see in the central areas of the city. This is because people who have been uprooted from a very traditional environment, feel an urgent need to refer to their previous life. In time this will be transformed to a popular culture that is accessible by all, in the consumerist capitalist environment.

In creating a local relationship with the city to make one's existence meaningful in it, I believe that the inclusion of culture in all its forms is important. Cultural events or products, such as theatre, music, poetry readings, art exhibitions, always relate to the individual and bring out the individual and the subjective. Even when we watch a play by Ibsen, we find something that relates to us personally. In some way or other cultural events always trigger our memories. This is why today art is becoming so much of an attraction; in the moment of being alone with any kind of culture, one returns to oneself and one's values and convictions are revived.

Without doubt there are certain design solutions that can create bodily involvement. The encouragement of public transportation can be one of these, creating warm public relations. Design solutions such as those concerning scale, pedestrian circulation, inclusion of nature, will also activate bodily relations. In such design projects, it is important that the sense of place that is created relates also to the local culture. On the other hand, against the globalization and neutralization of the environment, culture becomes the most vital means of direct bodily and emotional relationship to a place. If municipalities think that illusions and fluorescent lights can replace cultural events, they are mistaken. Although probably, in a political sense they are less threatening to the status quo.

13 From slogans to urban sceneries during three decades of sanctions (1979-2009)

Susan Habib

Introduction

This paper searches three decades of wall painting in their urban surrounding and relies mainly on fieldwork undertaken at various points of Tehran. All generations of these urban wall paintings have been sponsored by the official authorities.

One of the main characteristics of Iranian traditional painting is known as usefulness. Painting had to be used for covering a book, cup, curtain or a wall. During the last three decades, after the 1979 Revolution and establishment of the new regime in Iran, wall painting has been almost the only urban art in Tehran, propagating ideas of the authorities with religious or political messages. The paintings were usually accompanied by some writings, slogans or quotations. Some of the main principles of Iranian traditional painting (miniature) besides features and techniques from Western art were plainly observed in those paintings. While these kinds of murals still are applied, they are typical of the 1980s. The 1990s brought a more peaceful, abstract and decorative approach to the wall paintings, which borrowed features from traditional arts and crafts, but did not necessarily follow its principles. Slogans or quotations rarely were seen besides those paintings. Even so, the messages were softer and writings were visually collated with the painting. Nevertheless, both the 1980s and 1990s wall paintings on Tehran façades were almost always two-dimensional and insensible towards their physical urban surrounding. Now that Iran is celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the revolution a sudden change is observed in Tehran murals. Subjects of most of these murals are not political. Human figures are not martyrs, or important political characters, but ordinary people. They seem to refer to stories which happen either in a rural or urban background or even in a surreal scene. They might be cheerful, funny, or super-realist. Some of them remind of *trompe l'oeil* paintings, and others of Fabio Rieti's or Bernard Lassus's works. They also may borrow features from Iranian traditional painting, but their most outstanding characteristics are their three-dimensionality and responsiveness to their nearby street façades.

Such a change happens in the capital of a country living with more than 30 years of sanctions, and in "isolation" from the global economy. This does not mean,

however, that Iranian culture stands outside broader cultural movements of globalization.

A short history of mural painting in Iran

Iranians are well-known for their colour knowledge and culture which is formed through centuries of dealing with colour in several fields including art and architecture, literature or in making every day-life goods such as pottery, glassware, tile and ceramics, carpet, kilim and textiles. Exterior surfaces including domes and façades in Iranian public architecture have been exhibiting the will and effort of Iranians to make fresh colours everlasting in their urban space. Paint was good in interiors, yet not good enough on exteriors in a region with diverse climates and temperatures. That is a lengthy story of glazed tiles and ceramics covering domes and façades in Iranian architecture. The history of painting in Iranian architecture is another subject to study.

Architectural evidence confirms the existence of paintings and reliefs on interior and exterior façades in Iranian public architecture before Islam. Then, with Islam and because of some religious beliefs which prohibited painting, follow decades of abstract and geometric patterns instead of realistic painting.¹ This happened in almost all fields of art and architecture and *Taz-hib* or gilding (one of decorations used mostly in Iranian bookbinding, on covers or margins of books, mainly by gold, azure, turquoise, green, and other colours, with floral and geometrical patterns) became one of the most popular kinds of painting and decoration in books and manuscripts, and its influences were seen on saddles, carpets, clothes, also on façades, portals and domes. With the Mongols, Iranians became familiar with another kind of painting, which was the miniature – a very superficial way of naming Eastern painting. One may obtain more detailed data on how Iranians changed the Mogul painting to an Iranian one in particular, and on Iranian art and architecture through history in general, from Pope's *Iranian Architecture* or Grabar's *Formation of Islamic Art* books and other sources. Miniature or let's call it "traditional Iranian painting after Islam", or in short: "Iranian painting" was being used along with *Taz-hib* in books. Thousands of books or beautifully compiled collections are published on this subject; several documentaries are made on different schools of Iranian painting. Yet, one case in the long story of Iranian painting may link paintings of the eighteenth and nineteenth century to today's murals of Tehran. That is,

transferring of painting from book pages onto walls of buildings. This may be considered as an introduction that paved the way for the evolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth century painting. The first challenge was the dimension of the paintings, which was changed from book page-size to wall-size; and the change of dimension caused change of techniques for applying paint on surfaces. This is how murals [in-

1 Pope, Arthur Upham. *Persian Architecture: The Triumph of Form and Color* (U.S.A.: Thames and Hudson, 1965).

side] of Ali-Qapu Palace made the base for murals [inside] of Chehel-Sotun which are one of the important foundations of Iranian painting during the eighteenth century.²

Iranian painting of the eighteenth and nineteenth century passes through horrific historical events during the Safavids, Afghan and Uzbek raids, the Zand and Qajar dynasties. At the period, Iran's capital was replaced three times in less than fifty years, which shows how art could be affected by this lack of sustainable authority and social stability. In spite of all these events, the painting of this period comes to its peak in the first half of the nineteenth century. The schools of Harat, Tabriz, Qazvin and Esfahan faded out and the Eighteenth Century School began to take shape. Influences from Western culture and painting that were begun earlier in the sixteenth century became more obvious in these paintings, yet the main structure remains Iranian. Aghdashloo believes that one of the characteristics of Iranian painting is its dynamism and impressionability and that is how it is affected by, for example, Chinese art and meanwhile converts it to something completely Iranian. This is something that Iranian culture has done in other fields as well. So it is the same when one talks about the Western culture and its influences on Iranian painting.

Impressionability of eighteenth and nineteenth century painting by Western art not only does not reduce its value, but gives it a pleasant ambience which is a recall of a similar new spirit in the Sassanian art.³

The return of decoration, which had begun to decline after the sixteenth century, is one of the characteristics of the paintings of the first half of the nineteenth century. Decoration began to appear everywhere again, this time in a different way. It covered surfaces that at a time were covered by *Taz-hib*. It was nourished by different sources, such as buds and flowers, leaves, *Boteh-Jeqeh* (a traditional Iranian motif resembling a cypress tree bent in the wind) and other Iranian and Western motives. Another characteristic is modelling or making the portraits similar to physical features of the painted character. This is something taken from Western art. Before, in traditional Iranian painting there was not such an effort, but the main characters were drawn bigger than others and were placed usually in the center of the picture. From the architectural point of view it is important to know that Iranian art and specifically painting had to be useful, it had to be used for something either a book, cup, curtain, wall or building. So when in the eighteenth and nineteenth century murals entered the palaces, some recessed shelves or niches were considered and prepared for placement of these paintings. Portraits of kings, princes, ladies and

2 Aghdashloo, Aidin, "A glance at Iranian painting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries," in *Of Joys and Yearnings, Selected Essays and Dialogues, 1974-1991*. Compiled by Aidin Aghdashloo (Tehran: Atiyeh, second edition, 1999) (Persian).

3 Ibid. 46.

dancers, religious, romance or mythical stories, and rarely *nature morte* or *still life* were among the subjects of those paintings, but never ordinary people and social life, which is not unexpected since these paintings were produced and exhibited in palaces. However the arrival and acquaintance with the film camera in 1901, and before that, the photographic camera, during the Qajar period, were factors that helped documenting everyday life by the camera besides painting.

Banners of *Naghali* and *Vaghe'e-khani*

Another kind of painting, with disagreement amongst experts as to the dates of its beginning, is painting to company the act of *Naghali* or *Vaghe'e-khani*. Some state that it started during the Safavid period, some refer to even earlier times and others believe that it is a rational continuation of the nineteenth century painting. A fourth theory is that it began with the Constitutional Revolution in Iran (between 1905 and 1911). However all experts agree that murals were created and used in palaces and the houses of wealthy families. Ordinary people mostly were illiterate and therefore narration had an important role as a form of entertainment as well as hearing news of the city or elsewhere. Narration could be boring, but when it was accompanied by painting, it could be more attractive. This kind of painting was called *Coffee House Painting*. These paintings were found either on walls of the coffee houses, but mostly on banners, so the narrator could move it to different places, like city squares or streets, gather people around and tell them the stories. The paintings were depictions of several scenes of stories mostly from the *Shahnameh* (The Book of Kings, an enormous poetic opus written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi around 1000 AD and is the national epic of Iran.) or love stories of Nezami (1141-1209), one of the greatest romantic epic poets in Persian literature.

The narrator of the stories of courageous heroes and ancient mythical legends started to act out the characters' actions, in hunts, battles or other such adventures, to captivate and keep the audience. They tried to convey the concept and the image to their audience by dramatizing, using masks and adding expressive gestures to words, and that was how the performing arts grew and expanded. This form of narration continued in two forms of *Naghali* and *Pardeh-khani* (screen-reading) or *Vaghe'e-khani* (event-reading) which were practiced in villages and city squares, and also in army camps between the battles to motivate the soldiers.⁴

A similar kind of painting is used for *Ta'ziyeh*, which is a form of traditional-religious theatre that takes place every year during *Moharram* (name of one of the months in the Arabic calendar) for the anniversary of *Ashura* (the day the third Imam of the Shia and his companions were martyred in Karbala). Again narration is important during *Ta'ziyeh*. Therefore, let's call such paintings in general *narrative*

4 Pardeh-khani, <http://cinemamuseum.ir/en/Content.aspx?ID=Cinema>, accessed February 18 2009.

paintings. These are usually simple paintings. All experts agree that they were never used as decorative paintings. Scenes, heroes or heroines were drawn according to the flow of the narrated story, the gestures and voice tone of the narrator, whose ability of storytelling was an important factor to attract people.

A glimpse of the contemporary historical context

Meanwhile, since the beginning of the twentieth century, the Qajar dynasty was declining and Iran and especially Tehran was the scene of radical political and socio-cultural changes. The Iranian Constitutional Revolution (between 1905 and 1911), the years before and after that are known as the first formation of conflict between tradition and modernity in Iran. A very rapid review of Iranian contemporary history will show these outstanding events: the dissolution of the Qajar dynasty, the ascension of Reza Shah Pahlavi to the throne, two World Wars and the role of Iran as the “Bridge to Victory” in ending the second World War, the exile of Reza Shah and the reign of his son: Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, his escape from Iran and the American coup in 1953 against Mohammad Mossadegh, the prime minister and the return of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, then the Revolution of 1979 and the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran.⁵

Modern art education, however, had started in the first modern institution of higher learning: *Dar-al-Fonun* in 1851 (during the Qajar period by Amir Kabir, the chief minister) in Tehran. Later, the School of Delicate Crafts (early 1900s), the Institute of Fine Arts (1930s), the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Tehran (1941), then the Faculty of Decorative Arts (1960) and several others later expanded the mission over the next hundred years. The 1940s, after the establishment of the Faculty of Fine Arts, is acknowledged as the decade of the outset of the modern art movement in Iran. Meanwhile, other art institutions and faculties were established. Another important event in the 1970s, just before the 1979 revolution, was the design and construction of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tehran by the architect, Kamran Diba who was the museum’s first director. He established a rich collection of modern art for the museum. Meanwhile, artists were sent to Europe to be educated and learn more about modern art. By the 1960s and 1970s Iranian artists were active in almost all fields of contemporary art and were producing in several styles. Tehran had become a modern capital with modern streets, squares and buildings. The growth of the capital was fast, yet it was going to be even faster in the following decades. As for the urban scenery, murals were rarely painted on facades, except for advertisements. The absolute rule of the monarchy was sensed mostly by statues of the Shah and not by paintings or murals. Art works were mostly exhibited in museums and art galleries, in either private or semi-public spaces.

By February 1979, Iran faced one of the most radical changes in her history. Today, after thirty years, Tehran is the largest city in the Middle East and is the

5 Abrahamian, Ervand. *Iran between Two Revolutions*. Translated to Persian by Ahmad Golmohammadi, and Mohammad Ebrahim Fattahi (Tehran: Ney, 1998) (Persian).

most populated city in South Western Asia with a population of approximately 12 million in Greater Tehran.⁶ Millions of cars move in Tehran's forty eight highways every day.⁷

Tehran murals during three decades between 1979 to 2009

During the months before the establishment of the Islamic Republic writing slogans on walls was the most popular way of expression. Tehran had lots of walls to be written on. However it got even more after the revolution. Now it has lots of highways: highways that cut neighborhoods make lots of vacant walls. Remembering that painting in Iran had to be useful, therefore, paintings could cover the vacant walls.

Urban wall painting in Tehran is coeval to the 1979 Revolution in Iran and takeover of the U.S. Embassy in 1980, when Hanibal Alkhas,⁸ the Iranian painter, and his students started painting walls of the former embassy. It was after a regime change and walls in Tehran and other cities were full of pro-revolutionary slogans or those against the overthrown Pahlavi Regime. The capital's image needed to be renewed and show its new revolutionary image to the citizens and to the world. The Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) followed one of the most important revolutions of the century, and wall paintings conveyed messages of the Revolution, war, martyrdom, slogans against "the enemies", and political and religious belief. The paintings were usually accompanied by some writings, slogans or quotations. Subjects of this era of Tehran murals could be classified mainly in three groups. The first group consists of paintings with direct political messages from or about religious leadership to the public. These might be in forms of propagating against enemies, glorifying martyrdom or remembering martyrs of either the revolution or the "Imposed War" with Iraq (between 1980-1988), and repeating words or slogans from the leadership or authorities. Some of the main principles of Iranian traditional painting (miniature) besides features and techniques from Western and Latin American art were plainly observed in those paintings. While these kinds of murals still are applied, they are typical of the 1980s.

There are similarities between these murals and the eighteenth and nineteenth century paintings and their public versions: the narrative paintings. In these murals photographic features are replaced with the painters' ability for modelling or simulation of the characters: something that painters of the eighteenth and nineteenth century paintings created through their skills. The second similarity is placing the main character at the center of the picture. These murals usually contain one character, yet the third similarity is that if other characters are shown in the mural, the main character is covering more space. The last similarity is seen in the martyrs

6 Population of Iran, <http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/99936>, accessed December 16 2012.

7 *Tehran streets Atlas* (Tehran Municipality, third edition, 2005) (Persian).

8 Barati, Parviz. "Future painting will be determined on walls." *Mehrnameh*, 7 (2011): 78 (Persian).



Figure 13.1 Mural showing one of the martyrs of Iranian Army in its urban context.
Photograph by the author



Figure 13.2 Mural showing anti-American slogan. Photograph by the author

or glorifying martyrdom, when the mural tries to give the message that martyrs are going to be with holy characters like the prophet, imams and specifically the twelfth Imam who according to Shi'i beliefs has disappeared and will re-appear to bring peace to the world. Although the prohibition of drawing realistic portraits of holy persons is ignored in various traditional paintings years ago, still some murals obey this rule. All these confirm Ulrich Marzolph's statement as: "They combine traditional modes of artistic expression with intentions of contemporary concern for Iran."⁹

The second group of Tehran Murals is abstract, two-dimensional, and mostly decorative ones with or without political and religious messages. They may borrow geometrical patterns of Iranian traditional paintings, traditional textiles, or may use abstract forms. These might be applied by paint or ceramics. They usually belong to the post-war period or 1990s. The colours are more vivid, the subjects more peaceful. These might be accompanied by writings, yet the content is not hostile. They might contain urban or rural scenes, yet are very abstract and two-



Figure 13.3 Oil on canvas painting, early nineteenth century showing Imam Ali and his sons. Courtesy Aidin Aghdashlou

9 http://www.docvolksverhaal.nl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=146&Itemid=68, accessed February 15 2009.



Figure 13.4 Mural glorifying martyrdom. Photograph by the author

dimensional. These murals are not commanding and simply accompany passersby who live in this over-crowded city, either physically or visually.

Recently a third group of murals is sharing Tehran's scenery. The first and most eye-catching characteristic seen on these is their three-dimensionality and attempt to make a kind of visual communication with their nearby environment. Unlike earlier murals that were totally oblivious towards their surrounding environment they are responding, sometimes with a professional style and sometimes quite unskillfully. They surprise, make jokes and seem to be familiar with super-realist paintings, *trompe l'oeil* and Bernard Lassus's works. They also may borrow elements from Iranian traditional painting, yet even those are three-dimensional. Their content may also be religious; even so, the message is not overt. The views they bring to the cityscape might be urban or rural, but not political. The human beings they depict are not martyrs, but ordinary citizens. Tehran Municipality authorities state that their aim is "improving the visual cityscape"¹⁰ which is good news; if this means that their attempt will not be limited to facades that in any case are two-dimensional.

10 <http://www.mardomsalari.com/template1/News.aspx?NID=3656>, accessed August 4 2008.



Figure 13.5 A mural with a collection of elements from traditional Iranian paintings. Photograph by the author



Figure 13.6 Mural on the east wall of the Vanak Square, maybe recalling the place years ago when it was Vanak Village with a response to the building's main façade. Photograph by the author



Figure 13.7 Mural on the western wall of the Vanak Square with surreal figures playing with openings of the wall. Photograph by the author



Figure 13.8 One of the murals on Navvab Highway with its details, a kind of combination of super realistic, religious and imaginary figures.
Photograph by the author



Figure 13.9 Another super-realistic touch to a vacant wall in Tehran.
Photograph by the author

Conclusion

The last three decades have brought radical changes for Iranians and Tehran as the capital of the country has been the face of these changes. One may read some aspects of those through the only public art of these years; government sponsored mural painting. Therefore, these murals reflect messages from Iranian authorities to the public. Tehran murals might be classified in three groups: The first are those with slogans either against enemies or words recalling memorial of the revolution, the war with Iraq, the martyrs or glorifying martyrdom. These murals are usually accompanied with words and mostly belong to the first decade after the 1979 revolution. This first group of murals is usually sharp, use photography and painting techniques, and take direct features or aspects from Iranian traditional painting. The second group of murals, which are mostly created in the 1990s, are more peaceful and abstract, borrow features from traditional painting, and yet try to combine them in new compositions, rarely are accompanied with words or slogans and if so, the writing or poem is a part of the composition, and in form of either traditional or modern calligraphy. The third group appeared in the late 2000s. The main characteristic of this third group is three-dimensionality and its responsiveness to its surroundings. Neither the first, nor the second group was sensitive or responsive to their surroundings. They were patches to the buildings, two-dimen-

sional, serious and official. But the third group usually shows a sense of humor. If it used features of Iranian traditional painting, it reproduced it in an imaginary way, combined those in three-dimensional backgrounds, in relation with the immediate or distant surroundings. However, some have their impact through three-dimensionality, yet their proportions disregarding their physical background make them giant and their addressee seems to be high speed cars and not passing by citizens. While this change in the third group of Tehran murals shows a kind of counting and respecting urban life in an over-crowded capital, the absence of other fields of public arts and user-friendly urban spaces is sensed. The role of murals might be enriching the urban space, yet their nature as two-dimensional public arts, being applied on surfaces cannot be denied. However, their three-dimensional space designs, even in small scales, might be more helpful to create more relaxing points or whatever quality is desired by the designers or decision-makers in a crowd and noisy city like Tehran.

Although Tehran has recently been relatively isolated from global economic developments, the changes in urban mural painting can be considered to be part of a broader, global culture. It all depends on how terms like 'global' and 'globalization' are defined and where and when one locates globalization's beginnings. Ahmad Golmohammadi, in his book, *Globalization, Culture, Identity* searches for definitions of globalization, categorizes them in three generations and examines them in social, economic, political and cultural aspects. He comes to a definition: "globalization is the process of compression of time and space by which people of the world more or less and relatively consciously integrate to a single global community."¹¹

Some definitions of globalization find it relevant to capitalism¹² and some to modernity,¹³ while some others believe that globalization is as old as history of civilization.¹⁴ The last is the definition the author of this text agrees with. Capitalism, modernity, modernization, etc., are only some of the "ism"s, "ity"s, "ization"s throughout history which are more familiar to our memories or more recent to our time. A well-known story from *Golestan* (*The Rose Garden*) of Sa'di (Sa'di or Saadi (1210-1291), one of the major Persian poets of the Medieval Period, known for the depth of his social and moral thoughts mainly expressed in *Boostan* (*the Orchard*) and *Golestan* or *The Rose Garden*.) is about a merchant whose last desire before a kind of retirement is carrying Persian Brimstone to China, because he has heard it fetched a high price, also carry Chinese porcelain to Rum and Rumi Brocade to India and Indian steel to Aleppo, convey glass-ware of Aleppo to Yemen, striped cloth of Yemen to Persia and then abandon trading and sit down in a shop and rest.

11 Golmohammadi, Ahmad. *Globalization, Culture, Identity* (Tehran: Ney Publishing Co, 2002, 2010 (fourth printing)) (Persian).

12 Sweezy, Paul. "More (or less) on Globalization," *Monthly Review*, 49.4 (1997).

13 Clark, Ian. *Globalization and Fragmentation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

14 Holton, Robert. *Globalization and the Nation-State* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

It's not only trade. Culture moves along with commerce, with economic power.¹⁵

Therefore, globalization in this text means interaction of people, societies, and cultures, which is expressed in different ways in art. In this process, it is not only international policies and global economy that are at stake, but one can talk more about the heritage of the contemporary humanity. In this sense, globalization is not a new concept. Its history is as long as history of mankind. The difference in today's world is its speed and the role of technology, easier access to travel and direct contacts, digital media and internet on this speed and interaction of cultures. "Being global" as Jahanbagloo says, means perception and comprehension of the global heritage.¹⁶ Being global is different from specific acts of globalizing like the globalization of manufacturing. This approach is respectful to its own as well as other cultures and let those make their own links and connections, and grow up. One example can be the difference between nations or countries who accepted Islam through Arabs, and through Iranians. Those who accepted Islam as a new religion through Arabs, speak Arabic now: Look at the North African nations and cultures. And those who became Moslem through Iranians speak their own languages; they still have their own dialects and other specific cultural traditions. Look at countries placed in the east of Iran on the map, or even Turkey. Acceptance of Islam did not bring a serious cut in their process of growth and development. While Iran and Iranians had lived this kind of cut, as Zarrinkoob describes in his *Two Centuries of Silence*, when Iranians were obliged to write and speak in Arabic and forget their language: Persian.¹⁷

Mohsen Solasi in his *Iranian world and the globalist Iran*, points to historical evidences and objective observations of a globalist approach in Iranians' cultural behaviour. This globalist approach has paved the way for readiness of acceptance and absorbance of other cultures, to establish reciprocal impressions with other nationalities and not perceiving others as aliens, and therefore, Iranians have the tendency to feel empathy and be compatible instead of repel and reject them and live in isolation.¹⁸

Mohammad Ali Eslami Nodoushan, one of the most celebrated contemporary writers on Iranian culture and literature, in *Iran and her solitude* analyses how Iran has saved her culture and identity by one specific feature, which is *change* or *transformation* and *be the same*.¹⁹ By this way, the roots, the core has been saved and nurtured by adaptation to the time's conditions, in spite of ups and downs of

15 Sa'di. *Golestan*. (written 1258 A.C.E.), based on Mohammad Ali Foroughi's version (Tehran: Sorayesh, 2003), Chapter 3, Story 22 (Persian).

16 Jahanbagloo, Ramin. *Globalization, Interviews with 15 Contemporary Thinkers*. Compiled by Ramin Jahanbegloo (Tehran: Markaz Publishing Co., 2003, 2007(fourth printing)) (Persian).

17 Zarrinkoob, Abdolhossein. *Two Centuries of Silence, A narration of events and historical situation of Iran during two early centuries of Islam, from Arab Invasion till the appearance of Taherian government*. (Tehran: Javidan Pubs, 1957, 1977 (seventh printing)) (Persian).

18 Solaasi, Mohsen. *Iranian World and the Globalist Iran* (Tehran: Markaz Publishing Co., 1999, 2010 (sixth printing)) (Persian).

19 Eslami Nodoushan, Mohammad Ali. *Iran and her Solitude* (Tehran: Enteshar Pubs, 1997) (Persian).

Iranian history. He quotes from A.J. Arberry's *The Legacy of Persia* believing that if Greeks are known as people of inquiry, and Romans as experts of management and sovereignty, Iranians must be known as people of the world.²⁰

Iranians, as “people of the world”, follow events of their time in every field one can imagine. The variety of books translated to Persian from English, French, Polish, Japanese etc. or written originally in Persian, or number of Iranians following social networks, diversity of subjects discussed in Persian weblogs on the World Wide Web are only easy examples. Being a part of their world, being influenced by it and influencing their world is what Iranians find more appropriate to their historical background. Iranians are proud of Achaemenids and their Satrap system which was respectful to every culture and religion under their sovereignty. They are proud of “Iranianizing” invaders throughout their history. They are aware that they have had serious impacts on both Eastern and Western cultures and they know that they have more to present to the world and get more from them. This tradition of being global shows in three decades of Tehran mural painting.

Acknowledgments

I am thankful to Aidin Aghdashloo for reviewing this paper. I am grateful to Serveh Naghshbandi for her company during photography and Maryam Rahmanian for her fast editing of the text. I cannot forget Renée van de Vall's and Jos de Mul's patience and guidance.

20 Arberry, Arthur John. *The Legacy of Persia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).

14 How different is the art of different cultures?

Heinz Kimmerle

General introduction

Art is historically and geographically universal

In the collections of most academic Institutes for Prehistory one can find not only different tools and weapons, such as stone axes, clubs and scrapers, but also pieces which we would call pieces of art: male sexual organs, symbols of fertility, and images of gods or idols. These pieces show that art is of the same age as mankind. And this is not only true for visual art. Since the famous *Essay on the Origin of Language* of Johann Gottfried Herder it has often been stated that human language started as some kind of poetry which had its roots in the “sounds of living nature”.¹ With regard to human history we can assert that art is universally connected with mankind.

Impressing examples of pieces of art dating back very far in human history and prehistory are the paintings or drawings in the caves of Lascaux and other places in the south of France, as well as in the Tsodillo Hills of Botswana and at different places in Namibia. Georges Bataille has said with reference to the judgment of Picasso that the paintings in the cave of Lascaux, which are more than 20.000 years old, “have not been surpassed by any later work of art”.² Already in the beginning the highest standards were realised. Ernst and Anneliese Scherz, who have documented prehistoric drawings on some rocks in Namibia, come to the conclusion that the ability of human beings to create important works of art is independent of their “stage of civilisation”.³ This means, the concept of historical progress is not applicable to art. A close analysis of this thesis is given by Ernst H. Gombrich in his book *Kunst und Fortschritt*.⁴ In Hegel’s conception of art in his earliest book

1 Johann G. Herder, *Sprachphilosophische Schriften*, ed. Erich Heintel (Hamburg: Meiner, 1960), 31 seq. and 85.

2 Georges Bataille, *Lascaux oder die Geburt der Kunst*, trans. Karl Hemmerich (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1983), 7.

3 Anneliese and Ernst Scherz, *Afrikanse rotskunst. Rotstekeningen in Namibië*, trans. Bartholomeus H. Westerveld (Amsterdam: Horizon, 1976), 26.

4 Ernest Gombrich, *Kunst und Fortschritt* (Cologne: DuMont, 1978), 20-29, 76-82.

published under his name from the year 1801 he states – quite contrary to his later opinions – that philosophy and art are not progressing in history and – due to this fact – that the properly philosophical in philosophy and the properly artistic in art are not subject to historical conditions and historical changes. Hegel argues that Raphael is just as little dependent on the Greek sculptor Apelles as Shakespeare is on Sophocles. Genuine philosophy and genuine works of art always perform the same task in the different periods of time, namely to grasp their time in concepts or by the means of artistic expression. In this way they are perfect in themselves.⁵

This conception of Hegel that philosophy and art have the same task “at all times” can be transferred from the historical to the geographical dimension, speaking about the different areas of the world. This leads to the conclusion that philosophy and art have this task also “at all places”. Consequently, the genuine works of art in all cultures are perfect in themselves. No one is higher or better than the other. They are strictly equal in standard and can be compared on the level of equality.⁶

This means that art is not only universal in historical respect, but also in geographical respect. However, art cannot be grasped in its universality. What we have are only its different historical and cultural forms. The universality of art as such is always evading. In a certain sense it can be encountered as what the works of art of the different regions of time and of place have in common. In this connection, which products of human work are pieces of art, here and now as well as in other cultures and other times, has to be judged by the public and the critics of art through the way in which they receive them. The question how different the art of different cultures is can be answered by looking at pieces of art in this manner, stating their specificity, comparing them and analyzing the interactions between them.

The question of specific differences between the arts of different cultures

In the following discourse this question will be dealt with in a certain way. Especially the visual arts will be discussed and we will concentrate on the relation between European and African art. The starting point is the Eurocentric judgment of art in the philosophies of art during the period of Enlightenment. It was Hegel at a later stage of his thinking who has formulated in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* in the most clear and most radical way that in India and Egypt art is searching its genuine expression and that only in ancient Greece as the cradle of European civilisation its full realisation is reached. We will show how this judgment has gradually been abandoned and how finally an intercultural position of aesthetics has been reached. The Eurocentric position began to change in the late nineteenth century. The influence of Japanese painting in the time of van Gogh and the high estimation of

5 Georg W.F. Hegel. “Differenz des Fichte’schen und Schelling’schen Systems der Philosophie,” in *Hegel, Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by order of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, vol. IV of *Jenaer Kritische Schriften*, ed. Hartmut Buchner and Otto Pöggeler (Hamburg: Meiner, 1968), 12.

6 Heinz Kimmerle, “Das Verhältnis von Philosophie und Geschichte am Anfang der Jenaer Periode des Hegelschen Denkens und dessen aktuelle Bedeutung,” in *Die Eigenbedeutung der Jenaer Systemkonzeptionen Hegels*, ed. Heinz Kimmerle (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004), 11–24, see 21–22.

African masks by Picasso and other painters are well known. These influences were broadened by famous exhibitions which in the beginning were wrongly labelled as showing 'primitive art'. Later on other exhibitions were organised in which this co-operation happened in a more adequate manner. By common projects of European and Western artists with non-Western colleagues on the level of equality, certain ways of exchange and mutual enrichment were developed. As an example relations and communications between European and African art and artists are presented. Thus an intercultural conception of aesthetics becomes possible. It forms a specific way of dealing with the differences of art in different cultures, which has to be distinguished from comparative or cross-cultural aesthetic positions. Intercultural aesthetics presupposes the universality of art at all times and all places and shows how this becomes concrete in the art of different cultures. These differences are irreducible. Worldwide communication of artists and organizers of exhibitions helps to find out what is common in the production and reception of and what remains different and also which new differences originate from this communication.

The Eurocentric conception of art in Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*

Art has existed in its full realisation only in Europe

In the period of Enlightenment it is a common opinion that art or at least high art, Art with a capital A, only exists in Europe. According to Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* it was the period of ancient Greece where art, particularly the art of sculpturing, has reached the "top of beauty".⁷ According to Hegel there has been a symbolic form of art in India and in Egypt which has brought forth certain artistic products. But there the essence of art – that it is the appearance of the absolute spirit in natural things which are given to us by sense data – is not yet adequately expressed. For Hegel ancient Greece is the classical period of art, in which the absolute spirit has found its adequate outward appearance.⁸ In the Middle Ages and in modern times this full realisation of the essence of art is lost again. There is only a longing or even craving for it. In this sense, according to Hegel, the whole history of art after the classical period in Greece is romantic art. Certain works of romantic art in this sense are judged to be examples of great artistic performances. Nevertheless this conception of Hegel forms a strange view on the history of European art. The specific value of the different periods of this history cannot sufficiently be understood by it. And outside European history no art in the full sense of the word can be found. Thus Hegel has worked out the Eurocentric conception of the philosophies of Enlightenment in a clear and radical way: after certain Oriental and Egyptian pre-stages, art in its full realisation has existed only in Europe. There is no doubt that this conception is part of the ideology of colonisation. According to this ide-

7 Georg W.F. Hegel, *Ästhetik*, ed. Friedrich Bassenge, vol. I (Berlin: Das europäische Buch, 1985), 423.

8 Hegel, *Ästhetik*, 296-297.

ology other parts of the world can be and may be subjected to European mastery because they have no art and no other intrinsic value. This conception and the whole attitude which belongs to it were generally accepted in the ways of thought throughout most of the nineteenth century.

The rise of communication between Western and non-Western art

First steps of overcoming Eurocentrism in Western art

During the last decade of the nineteenth century the estimation of non-Western art by Western artists began to change. Van Gogh and Gauguin, Picasso, Breton, Braque and others were inspired by art from Japan and Oceania and by African masks. Cornée Jacobs from the Rotterdam Academy of Arts has done special research on this issue and given many details about the influences of non-Western art on these painters.⁹ With all the artists concerned there was no longer a feeling of European superiority above foreign art. In this respect these artists were a real avant-garde with respect to the rest of the society. In the meantime colonialism and the subjection of large parts of the world by European politics and economy were perpetuated on a broad scale. In philosophy as well the idea that every culture has its own philosophy and that the philosophies of all cultures are of the same value came up much later than the high esteem of non-Western art in the European history of art since the end of the nineteenth century.

After World War II, in the 1950s and 1960s, many colonies of European states struggled for and finally reached political independence. A new perspective on these parts of the world became common. Their art was generally accepted as art. It was a remainder of the colonial period that art from Africa and Oceania was regarded as being *primitive*. This was, of course, a wrong judgment, although it was not meant in a negative sense. In 1977 the first exhibition of the Centre Pompidou in Paris showed modern European art of the twentieth century: pieces of cubistic paintings and collages. These works of art were combined with religious or ritual objects from Africa and Oceania, especially masks and pieces of wood carving. Between both parts of the exhibition were formal analogies or family resemblances. Also other exhibitions in New York and in Paris in the 1980s, which are described in detail by Jacobs, departed from the assumption that certain styles in contemporary Western art were comparable to 'primitive art' in respect of the "conceptual and ideographic approach".

Jean-Hubert Martin, one of the organisers of these exhibitions, obviously felt uncomfortable with the notion of primitivism and changed his terminology by

9 Cornée Jacobs, "Artistieke praktijken in intercultureel perspectief," *Tutti Frutti*, Sampler No: A081/300 04 of the Rotterdam Academy of Arts, (2004): 10-33.

speaking of 'so called primitive art' or rather of 'early art'.¹⁰ However, these notions are not useful either. Simple means of expression, a direct and powerful way to express feelings or a worldview are not primitive. With regard to philosophy Heidegger has said that a simple language, speaking in simple words, is the most difficult thing at all. And, as we have said in the introduction, early stages of art are not on a lower level than what has been produced later in history. Nevertheless these exhibitions have started certain forms of cooperation between the Western organisers and the Western artists concerned on the one hand and art and artists from other parts of the world on the other. They form important steps on the way of definitely overcoming Eurocentrism in Western art.

Equal valuation and specific differences between African and Western art

From 1990 onwards the cooperation between Western organisers of exhibitions and non-Western artists has taken place in a more adequate manner. Thus a cooperation on the level of full equality has become possible. We will concentrate here on some examples of exchanges between African and Western art. Let me start with the work of Jackson Hlungwani from the Limpopo Province of South Africa. His work has been exhibited at Johannesburg in 1989. Many people from the West, especially artists, have visited him and discussed with him his worldview and his work as an artist. He combines traditional African art and modern influences. The technique of Jackson Hlungwani, like that of many other African artists of today, is traditional woodcarving. There is a strong religious background in the personal life of the artist and in public life of South Africa. Some of his works show that Jackson's reception of Christian ideas, which have come to Africa from the West, is also critical. There is a strong ironic trait in his artistic work. For an adequate understanding of his work it is also necessary to mention that he loves nature. Among the many pieces of art which represent animals there are before all fishes. These animals play an important role in the traditional mythology of the area where he lives. An interesting example is the wooden statue *Christ playing football*¹¹ (Figure 14.1).

In this sculpture two especially strong life forces are brought together. Christian religion and the person of Christ are regarded as very powerful. And in public life football games are highly influential. A humorous attitude is presupposed for making such a piece of art. There are many other works of Hlungwani with a similar background. I mention two: *The reconciliation of Kain and Abel* and *A happy devil*. This is not only a fresh and inspiring view on European and Western mythology. The choice of the material, mainly dead wood, and the technique of carving which changes the natural forms as little as possible form valuable arguments in the communication with Western visitors and artists.

A close connection with a long tradition of African art can be found in the works of the San. From 1993 to 1994 an exhibition of art by the San has been

10 Jean-Hubert Martin, "Ist die zeitgenössische Kunst universell?" in: *Neue Kunst aus Afrika*, ed. Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Berlin: Edition Braus, 1996), 62-70.

11 Jeksemi S. Hlungwani, *An Exhibition* (Johannesburg: BMW (South Africa), 1989), 7.



Figure 14.1 Jackson Hlungwani, *Christ playing football*, 1987. Wooden sculpture

organised in the Ethnographic Museum of Rotterdam which is now called 'World Museum'. This exhibition has been widely discussed in the Dutch newspapers. The drawings on the rocks of caves in Namibia and in Botswana, which are more than 10.000 years old, have been mentioned above. The artists of the San of today try to continue this very ancient tradition and to adapt it to their present life. Insofar as they are not uprooted from their own lifestyle, they still live before all by hunting. In their works of art they show their special and intensive relations with animals. A beautiful example is the picture of a leopard chasing two roebucks, made by the artist Sobe¹² (Figure 14.2).

The situation in most parts of Africa is characterised by finding a way from the traditional way of life to a modern attitude of thinking and doing things. This situation is deeply different from modern life in Europe and in the West. To visit exhibitions of art which mirror this African situation means to dive into a foreign world. Nevertheless we can see that it is art and feel a close relationship.

Exhibitions of African art in two German museums, in the Ludwig Forum in Aachen and in the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, in 1994 and 1996, bring present African art even closer to the Western situation. They show that the African art of today is different from traditional art, but that it can be recognised as being African. The cultural and historical background is very much African. Like in traditional African sculptures a strong and direct expression of experiences and of looking at the world is present in the pictures and sculptures of these exhibitions. Important and characteristically African is also that they often tell a story. But modern

12 Bianca Stigter, "De geiten worden geometrisch. Traditie en eigen stijl in de moderne Bushmen-kunst", in: *NRC Handelsblad, Cultureel Supplement*, November, 29, 1993, 5.



Figure 14.2 Sobe, *A leopard chasing two roebucks*, 1980. Charcoal drawing

techniques and modern materials are used. The paintings and the sculptures are no longer made for some religious or ritual use, but for being showed in a gallery or in a museum. It becomes clear that the African artists no longer live in a colonised situation, but have a message to the world. African art in these exhibitions shows to an international public what in the world of today the specifically African experience is.

The Africa project of the Ludwig Forum combined several exhibitions with lectures, music performances and other manifestations. One main aspect of the project was the connection of '*Spirit* and *spirits* in Africa'. The idea behind it was: You can only understand the spirit of Africa if you take into account that the belief in spirits is still very strong. In Europe and in the Western world there is also a remarkable revival of spirituality. But the belief in spirits and the role which this belief plays in African daily life are different. First and foremost still the spirits of the ancestors are very important. But also nature is full of spirits; in plants and animals, in rocks and rivers and in other parts of the landscape spirits can dwell. And behind the powers in politics and in history spirits are at work. You have to understand African spirituality, if you want to grasp the spirit of African art. By the same token Europeans can discover in the deep-structure of their own consciousness equivalents of the African experience. Let me give three examples. The first picture is from Middel Art from Nigeria: *Firing squad* (1971) (Figure 14.3).

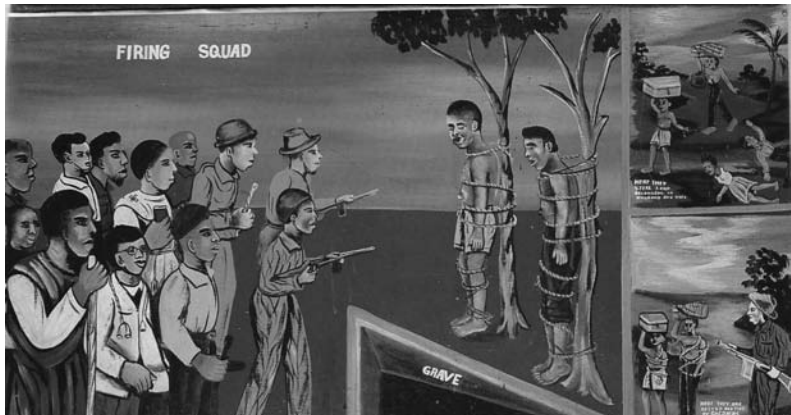


Figure 14.3 Middel Art, *Firing squad*, 1971. Oil painting

In its three parts this picture tells the story of two thieves who have been stealing much of the property of a couple (see the small picture at the right side above). They have been arrested by the police (see the small picture at the right side below). Then they are shot by a firing squad (shown in the main picture). Extreme forms of violence in and between African societies, which can be seen on this picture, are explained by Fanon as continuation of the violence which had been exercised by the colonial powers.¹³ However, this violence has also to be judged in connection with the belief in spirits, here especially bad spirits, against which must be fought as heavily as possible.

It should be noted that traditionally with certain African communities serious cases of theft have been punished with the death penalty. That we have to do with a deeply different world may become clear from the fact that in case of murder often no death penalty was inflicted upon the offender. In the traditional Gikuyu community of Kenya the punishment for killing a man was 100 goats, for killing a woman 30 goats.

The second picture is from Sam Nitro from Tanzania: *Harvesting sugar-cane* (1977) (Figure 14.4). On this picture women are working hard in a field of sugar-cane. Especially the colours show that these women are in a certain sense part of nature.

The third picture is from of T.M. Penck from Germany: *Metaphysical passage through a zebra* (1975) (Figure 14.5). It belongs to the section 'Africa within us'.¹⁴ On this third picture, by a German artist who has studied African life and African art for a long time, the most important aspect is the close relation of the people to nature.

13 Frantz Fanon, *Die Verdammten dieser Erde*, trans. Traugott König (Reinbek/Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1969), 17-37.

14 Afrika im Ludwig Forum, 19.8.1993 – 23.1.1994: *Skizzen eines Projekts*. Edited by Wolfgang Becker, Aachen: Ludwig Forum für internationale Kunst, 1993., 46-47 and 103.



Figure 14.4 Sam Nitro, *Harvesting sugar cane*, 1977. Oil painting



Figure 14.5 A.R. Penck, *Metaphysical passage through a zebra*, 1975. Oil painting

The picture shows a common life of human beings with animals living in the jungle. The human beings take over certain properties of a zebra. It is not the cruelty of nature, but its peacefulness, which is referred to, although its influences on the human beings are very strong. Obviously there is more affinity with the picture of Sam Nitro than with that of Middel Art. Of course, there could be shown pictures of extreme violence also from this section 'Africa within us'. Summarising the message of the three pictures I would say that there are different dimensions of the African experience, which are and remain foreign for Western viewers. Nevertheless it is possible to get access to them and to start a process of mutual learning from each other.

Ways of communication between African and Western art

In this paragraph *A European Art Exhibition* will be discussed, which has been organised in 1991 in the Municipal Museum of The Hague by the Netherlands Office for Fine Arts. The title of the exhibition was *Rhizome*. This title has been taken over from the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. They speak of a rhizome or a rootstock which connects phenomena in a invisible way, under the ground, so to speak. Unexpectedly and unpredictably things are there and seem to belong together in some way or other. At this exhibition the works of ten artists from different parts of the world who live in Europe have been shown. The works of Iba Ndiaye, who has been born in St Louis in Senegal and lived in Paris in 1991, are very instructive for the ways of communication between African and Western art. Ndiaye has said that he had come to France in order to learn the craft of painting. According to him, in Africa there were not enough possibilities for this technical education, which he regarded essential for the performance of his art on an international level. Nevertheless for him it remained true that "My whole oral culture, my whole metabolism, my whole way of life is African".

The following picture of Ndiaye is called *Head of the night* (1991) (Figure 14.6). One could also call this picture: *The cry*.¹⁵ It reminds one of the well-known painting by Edvard Munch with this title. The rhizomatic connection with Western pieces of art becomes clear when it is compared with a picture of the British painter Francis Bacon from 1949 which bears the title *Head VI*¹⁶ (Figure 14.7).

There are other pictures of Ndiaye, of Munch and of Bacon with the gesture of crying. The cultural differences get less or even vanish on the level of such elementary feelings and their expression. It does not matter whether the artist comes from Senegal, from Norway or from Great Britain. Crying as the expression of utmost desperation means the same to them. In this case the cultural differences are no longer important.

Such a relation, which brings together art works from different cultures in an unexpected way, can be found in the exhibition *Astonishment and Power* in the US-American National Museum of African Art at the Smithsonian Institution in Wash-

15 Haags Gemeentemuseum and The Netherlands Office for Fine Arts, *Rhizome* (The Hague: Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst, 1991), 107.

16 Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon – Logik der Sensation* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1995), II:6.



Figure 14.6 Iba Ndiaye, *Head of the night*, 1991. Acryl painting



Figure 14.7 Francis Bacon, *Head VI*, 1949. Charcoal drawing

ington, DC. So called 'Minkisi', power-figures from Central Africa, were shown in this exhibition. These figures have magic powers to influence the will of human beings. The power-figures, of which one will be shown below (Figure 14.8), were confronted with work of Renée Stout, an African-American lady, who carries the spirituality of her African ancestors still with her. She was born in 1958 in Junction City, Kansas, and lived in Washington in 1993. Although she did not know where her ancestors in Africa came from, she was especially and directly inspired by the Minkisi from Central Africa. Here is given an example of such a power figure. The nails and pieces of iron in the wooden figure symbolise the aura of power which surrounds the body.¹⁷

A milestone in the history of making African art a normal, well respected and inspiring part of world-art was the Documenta 11 in Kassel in 2002, organised by Okwui Enwezor, a Nigerian organiser of art manifestations living in New York.



Figure 14.8 Unknown, *Power figure from Central Africa*, first half of the 20th century. Wooden sculpture

17 The foto is taken from Erna Beumers and Hans-Joachim Koloss, eds., *Kings of Africa. Art and Authority in Central Africa* (Utrecht: Foundation 'Kings of Africa', 1992), Nr. 67.

African art from all parts of the continent was fairly well represented. Surprisingly there were among the African contributions besides some installations before all video-films and computer-graphics. Obviously the use of highly modern technical means has a strong fascination for African artists. Nevertheless all the African contributions to the Documenta 11 remained immediately recognisable as African. According to Enwezor there is a “dialectical relation” of art to “historical experiences” not specifically in Africa, but worldwide.¹⁸

Common projects of European artists with non-Western colleagues

A deeper and even more intensive connection between European and non-Western art emerges when European artists and their non-European colleagues directly work together. It is well known that the Dutch painter Corneille has had a persevering cooperation with artists of the Dogon, a people living in the present state of Mali. He has visited them in Mali, and he has invited them to come and work with him in the Netherlands. By this kind of cooperation one can learn a lot about the differences between the cultures. These differences prove to be fruitful for both sides. It is apt to speak of dialogues between the artists of different cultures. These dialogues lead to an enrichment which could not have been achieved by cooperations with members of the same culture only.

African-European inspiration

Here a short report will be given about a practical project of a group of artists from Düsseldorf and the Ruhr-district on the one hand and artists from Pedakondji, a village close to Lomé, the capital of the state of Togo, on the other. The German artists are former students of Joseph Beuys. The project has taken place in 1991. It is documented in a bilingual book called *Afrikanisch-europäische Inspiration / Inspiration Afro-Européenne* with pictures, photos and texts.¹⁹ The results of the common project have been shown in exhibitions in Düsseldorf, Leipzig, Prien, and Hamburg. Four Togolese and five German artists have participated in a close cooperation in the village Pedakondji for a couple of months. The village is described by Ulrich Krempel, one of the German artists, as being situated “between African tradition and European innovation”. Two examples of cuttings from pieces of art which have come forth from the dialogues between these artists are shown below. The first one is of Sokey Edoth from Pedakondji in Togo (Figure 14.9).

There is no better interpretation of this picture than what is written on it by the artist: “Il faut restituer l’âme à la terre. La terre n’est ni à Satan ni à Dieu.” If the earth does belong neither to the Devil nor to God, human beings are responsible for it. They can damage it and rescue it.

18 Gerti Fietzek, red., *Documenta 11_Plattform 5: Ausstellung. Katalog* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2002), 40.

19 El Loko and Thomas Schönauer, *Afrikanisch-europäische Inspiration / Inspiration Afro-Européenne* (Rees: Keyes GmbH, 1993), the pages of the book do not carry numbers.



Figure 14.9 Sokey Edorh, *Untitled*, 1991. Oil painting

The second cutting from a painting is of Regine Rothlach from the Ruhr-District in Germany (Figure 14.10). We can see a woman carrying in her womb – and that means taking utmost care of – a human being and an animal. Thus we get an impression of what, among other subjects, the dialogues of the European and the African artists were about. They felt a common responsibility of man for the earth and for nature which are in danger all over.

In praise of contamination

It should be mentioned that in the age of globalisation the cooperation of artists often leads to hybrid constructions. Kwame Anthony Appiah explicitly celebrates hybridity of art. In his book on *Cosmopolitanism* there is chapter ‘In Praise of Contamination’. He departs from the thesis that there is no “cultural purity” and that an intermingling of ideas and cultures always has taken place. All that gives a special chance to the cooperation of artists in a period of time when “mass migration” becomes a characteristic phenomenon.²⁰

²⁰ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism. Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York/London: Norton & Company, 2006), 111-113.



Figure 14.10 Regine Rothlach, *Untitled*, 1991. Oil painting

An intercultural conception of aesthetics

To open a place for the other

The French philosopher Luce Irigaray writes in her recent book *Sharing the World*: “To open a place for the other, for a world different from ours, from the inside of our tradition, is the first and the most difficult multicultural gesture.” And she adds to that a few pages later: “The existence of the total and always already differentiated real that we are can be approached, affirmed, and expressed to the other by art.”²¹ In these two sentences the essentials are summarised for an intercultural conception of aesthetics. First and foremost openness for the other of another culture is necessary. It includes respect for this other, not in a technical or superficial sense, but from the heart, from the inside of what we are. That means, the other of another culture is regarded as existing on the same level. Our own existence as well as that of the other are already differentiated. New and other differentiations

21 21 Luce Irigaray, *Sharing the World* (London/New York: Continuum, 2008), 133 and 135.

come up on both sides in and by the encounter between the members of different cultures. The works of art are special media for this encounter.

Intercultural aesthetics

Therefore, intercultural aesthetics is especially able to show what is important for interculturality and for the encounter of different cultures. There is no doubt, also aesthetics or philosophy of art has to free itself from its Eurocentric legacy and from its enclosure in a purely academic discipline. For quite a long time aesthetics was isolated “from important *intercultural* developments within the intercultural art world”. This isolation has to be overcome. Therefore contributions from different countries and different parts of the world should be enclosed in the theoretical and practical work on *Intercultural Aesthetics*.²² Besides discussing European or Western, Indian and Japanese, African and Chinese works of art, showing their embedding in their respective cultures and developing theoretical reflections on their history and ontology are highly important for this work. Their irreducible differences and their common character as art have to be shown. If there is no superiority of the art of one culture above that of the other, but fruitful differences, it is our first task to gather information about each other. Indian *rasa*-theory and Kant’s concept of *sensus communis* can be helpful when we want to understand the double bind of equal status and different ways of expression of the art of all cultures. Producing art and judging art is not just done by individuals. Deeper levels of perception and the expectation of common judgments about beauty form a bridge not only from one person to another but also between different cultures.

Practical examples are necessary to make concrete what is theoretically explained. Traumatic experiences for instance often form a specific starting point for aesthetic productions. Adorno once has said that after the Shoa poetry no longer is possible. He was not right. What is too horrible for ordinary words, the holocaust in Nazi Germany, the extermination of most of the Red Indians in America, the genocide of opponents by the communist leaders in Cambodia, and the deeply inhuman treatment of the Aborigines in Australia can be expressed by art. It is true that artists have to use unconventional means in order to “present the unrepresentable”.²³ Thus they fulfil an ethical obligation of humankind. Here again we enter a dimension wherein cultural differences are no longer relevant.

Intercultural aesthetics concentrates on the dialogues between the art of different cultures. In doing so it can make use of other approaches, such as cross-cultural and trans-cultural theories and practical examples.

22 Antoon Van den Braembussche, Heinz Kimmerle, and Nicole Note, eds., *Intercultural Aesthetics. A Worldview Perspective* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 1. See for the following the ‘Introduction’ as a whole: 1-9.

23 Antoon Van den Braembussche, “Presenting the Unrepresentable. On Trauma and Visual Art,” in *Intercultural Aesthetics*, 119-136.

A cosmopolitan position

When we come to the double insight of the fruitfulness of cultural differences of artistic expression and their vanishing in extreme situations, we may call this a cosmopolitan position. Analysing this position Appiah discusses the problem whether art that has been stolen from African countries by colonial powers has to be given back or not. He finds that in certain cases, when these pieces are closely connected with the place where they have been produced, they have to be given back. In other cases, when works of art have a more general character, they should be left there, where they are being taken care of in the best way. He calls it the cosmopolitan dimension of artworks that everybody can enjoy them at any place, that they are a legacy of mankind. Let me quote him literally: "We can correspond to art that is not ours; indeed, we can fully respond to 'our' art only if we move beyond thinking of it as ours and start to respond to it as art."²⁴

To give more shape to this cosmopolitan position, we have to ask, how the dialogues between artists of different cultures and the reception of artworks from different cultures can take place in the most adequate way. When we are asked 'Gimme shelter', we have to give it, whenever the conditions allow us to do that. But there is more: Giving shelter, in a cosmopolitan ethics, is a mutual obligation. The artists and the art-consumers of different cultures have to give shelter to each other.

We have to think about this cosmopolitan imperative and find out what it means in general and especially for artists and art-consumers giving shelter to the other and giving it to each other. This question can be answered by referring to what Derrida calls "unconditional hospitality". The conditions of hospitality, which are necessary in concrete situations, have to correspond to the principle of unconditional hospitality. For a more detailed interpretation Derrida follows Kant, who makes a difference between the 'right to visit', which is universal and which has to be conceded by the guest-state everybody who comes with honest purposes, and the 'right to stay', which can be subjected to certain conditions. At the same time Derrida criticises Kant for being Eurocentric when he says that Europe "is likely to give laws in the future to all other parts of the world".²⁵ Instead Derrida calls for "a new European thinking, a totally new object in view and responsibility of Europe", which are free from any kind of nationalism, also a European nationalism. What Europe has to offer to the world is the promise of the intention to practice democracy and justice. This promise demands an "attention full of respect" for the non-Western others all over the world.²⁶ For the rest there is nothing special about the Western part of the world.

²⁴ Appiah, op. cit. (in note 20), 130-135, see 135.

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort* (Paris: Galilée, 1997), 29 and 51-57; Derrida, *Le droit à la philosophie du point de vue cosmopolitique* (Paris: Éditions Unesco, 1997), 22 and 28-30; cf. Immanuel Kant, "Zum ewigen Frieden," in *Kants Werke.*, vol. VIII (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968), 357-358; Kant, "Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht," in *Kants Werke*, vol. VIII, 29-30.

²⁶ Derrida, *Schurken. Zwei Essays über die Vernunft*, trans. Horst Brühmann (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), 214.

All this belongs to an intercultural conception of aesthetics. I dare say that it exceeds what is known as a comparative approach or as a cross-cultural view. It is necessary and fruitful to compare the works of art from different cultures and to go back and forth between them. Thus the most important step is taken already that the art of other cultures is worthwhile to be looked at and to be taken into consideration seriously. And may be that the equal value of the art of all cultures also is yet presupposed in that. That is the common ground of comparative, cross-cultural and intercultural conceptions. Dialogues between artists from different cultures can do more: they lead to processes of mutual exchanges and enrichments. And they open up a cosmopolitan horizon.

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PARUL DAVE-MUKHERJI is a professor and dean at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She holds a PhD in Indology from Oxford University. She is the co-convenor of the Forum on Contemporary Theory and co-editor of the *Journal of Contemporary Thought*. Her publications include *Towards A New Art History: Studies in Indian Art* (co-edited, 2003) and the guest edited special issue on Visual Culture of the *Journal of Contemporary Thought* (2003); *Rethinking Modernity* (co-edited, 2005); 'Putting the World in a Book: How Global Can Art History Be Today', in J. Anderson (ed.), *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence* (2009). Her current research focuses on comparative aesthetics, contemporary art in India and Asia and the impact of globalization on art theory and the discipline of art history.

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ISBN 978 90 8964 598 2



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR AESTHETICS

AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

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