Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXXV | Number 2 | 2014 | 271–319

Terry Smith*

Rethinking Modernism and Modernity Now

If we understand modernism to be the most definitive set of responses within the arts to modernity—itself understood as the confluence of social, economic and political forces that definitively shaped the experience of modern life—then, to revisit artistic modernism now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, requires a leap over at least three complex, equivocal yet ultimately powerful acts of historical, even ontological, opening then closure. These operations were performed on modernism by the anti-modernist art movements of the 1970s, by postmodernism in the arts and theory during the 1980s, and, since the 1990s, by the prioritization of contemporaneous difference in most aspects of contemporary life and thought. There is, however, at least one major distinction between these operations: to become truly contemporary—to establish genuine, coeval diversity as the basic condition of being on a world scale—would preclude closure, permanently.

Attributing accurate dates to the occurrence of each of these operations in particular fields of practice—the configuration of global power, say, or the history of thought, or artmaking—is as contentious as was periodizing the many aspects of modernism and modernity themselves. This is so because each of these responses, convergent aspects, openings and closures occurred unevenly in time and space, at different times on the world clock, and in different, not always connected, places. As well, they took distinctive forms in each situation, and therefore, everything about their comparability is controversial. But occur they did, and are doing so now. How might we be accountable to these changes as historical phenomena, how might we track their impact on contemporary life and thought, and discern their relevance to possible futures?

Faced with these challenges, some would deny that modernism and modernity require revisiting: why do so, they insist, when the art that counts remains committed to modernist imperatives (you can forget the rest, as History will do), and the world at large continues, in however surprising ways, to modernize itself

* University of Pittsburgh & University of New South Wales, Sydney

(every significant change is a modernization)? Versions of this view can be found across the ideological spectrum of artworld institutions, from certain museums vested in modernism as an almost entirely aesthetic enterprise to certain critics and historians on the left for whom modernist artists offered the most trenchant critiques of capitalism, the form of geopolitical management that, they believe, still rules the world.[1] To me, for reasons that will become clear, such views are not only redundant; they also entail a kind of willful naivety at one end of the spectrum, and melancholic bitterness at the other. Both end up short-changing the possibilities that they actually value. Instead, let me tackle some of the challenges outlined above, as much as can be done in one essay, by tracing three steps in my own pathway through them. I begin by revisiting an occasion, over twenty years ago, when it became necessary to make some useful distinctions between the key terms, "modern," "modernity," and "modernism," while also profiling their necessary interdependence. At that time, the blurring of these terms in artworld discourse was so constant that it created a kind of conceptual haze, a mix of self-induced ideological mystification and appeals to be rescued by the next artistic advent. I will then return to the anti-modernism within the late modernism of the 1970s, before setting out in conclusion my thoughts on the implications of a revised understanding of the conjunctive modernities—and the polycentric modernisms that they generated—as the social and art historical precursors to the proximate differencing that marks our contemporane-

[1] On MoMA's efforts to absorb contemporary art into its modernist aegis, see Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, chapter 1. At the other end of the spectrum, see Paul Wood, *Modern Art and the Wider World*, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014. Wood's volume highlights the danger of exaggerating the longevity and the actual power of "the West," profiles moments when art from "the wider world" was crucial to not only formal but also critical innovations in European art, and condemns what he sees as the tendency of most theorists of contemporary art, in thrall to ideologies of neoliberal globalization, to forget the radical politics of the early twentieth-century avant-gardes and thus reduce modernism to its mid-century formalist mode. Interesting and provocative on art up to the mid-twentieth century, his study declines into anxious contestation thereafter. With little awareness of the agency of those who brought about their own decolonization as the imperial empires imploded during the wars of the twentieth century, he fails the grasp the purport of the multiple modernities project. Unwilling to rethink the radical politics of the early twentieth century in the light of present circumstances, he values only that contemporary art which he can read in those terms. This perspective leads him, in his concluding chapter, to travesty the views of some curators and commentators on contemporary art, including mine.

ity (our contemporary world being) and the internal diversity that characterizes what we call contemporary art.

Modernism and Modernity Defined

Published in 1996, the *Dictionary of Art* was conceived by its publishers as the visual arts parallel to their *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, the foundational reference in that field since George Grove's first edition of 1879. In 34 volumes, the *Dictionary of Art* aimed to be an exhaustive encyclopedia, with entries by recognized experts on every known artist, architect, artistic technique, art center, and art concept (41,000 articles by 6,700 contributors from 120 countries). Fifteen years in the making, it was edited initially by Hugh Brigstocke, previously curator at the National Gallery Scotland, and then by art historian Jane Shoaf Turner. Both are specialists in the arts of the European Renaissance. The project combined a strong sense of the relative importance of artists, mediums, places, and ideas within a hierarchical, European-based, historical structure—reflected most sharply in the length of entries assigned to them—and a recognition that visual art of note and interest had been made throughout the world and across time. If Michelangelo was celebrated in a 30-page essay, over 40 percent of the entries were devoted to non-Western subjects. There was, however, no entry on "Contemporary Art." The term appears a dozen or so times in the Index where it refers readers to short entries and passing references to contemporary art societies and to names of journals. This remains the case for the latest online editions, where "contemporary art" comes up most prominently as a subsection of the entry on "Aboriginal Australia." There was, and is, no entry on "Modern Art," but there were, and still are, entries on "Modernism" and "Modernity," which I authored.[2]

[2] On the first edition, see Michael Kimmelman, "Michelangelo Meets Buffalo Meat," *New York Times*, April 24, 1997, at http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/24/reviews/970824.24kimmelt.html. London-based publisher Macmillan produced the 1996 edition; Oxford University Press published a revised edition in 2003. It is now available online as *Grove Art Online*, at http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/book/oao_gao. Online users are referred to three entries in the *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*: critic Thomas McEvilley on "Postmodern Transformations of Art," artist-critic Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe on "Aesthetics of Contemporary Art," and artist Mary Kelly on "Images and Desire," each interesting in its own way but in no way constituting an adequate treatment of the subject. Perhaps the revision currently being undertaken will do so.

These articles were written at a time when postmodernist practices prevailed in most artworlds around the world, and postmodernity—especially as it was being critically described by Fredric Jameson and David Harvey—had replaced modernity as the most acute descriptor of our larger condition.[3] Thirty years later, contemporary art has rendered postmodernist practices ingrained and historical, and postmodernity as the overall world picture is being replaced by ideas concerning the contemporaneity of differences within that picture.[4] Asked to write the entry on modernism, I insisted that it be accompanied by an entry on modernity. The editors objected that such a subject was more suited to a dictionary of sociology, history, or politics. I argued that no dictionary of such scope and seriousness of purpose should subscribe to the aestheticization that had attended thinking about art since the advent of Romanticism. Modernist claims to autonomy were a topic to be dealt with *in* the entry, not conceded in advance. To me, postmodernist delight that all forms of accountability to history were now superseded was, in part, a current form of that same claim. I had recently published *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America*, a study of the formation of what I called a "visual imagery of modernity" during the first half of the twentieth century in the United States.[5] Against the idea of a "Machine Age" aesthetic, I showed that this imagery grew within the complex changes to existing visual cultures engendered by the shifts from mass production to mass consumption within capitalist modes of production during that period. In passing, I argued that many of the dynamic transformations then being attributed to

[3] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (July-August, 1984): 59-92, in his *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Social Change*, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 1992.

[4] Pamela M. Lee, *Forgetting the Artworld*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012, argues that we have given up on critical understandings of postmodernity too lightly. This is true of general artworld discourse; it is not true of critical theories of contemporaneity such as those discussed in the last sections of this article.

[5] Terry Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America*, Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1993. The use of the term "America" for a study that confined itself to the United States was not appropriate. This book was based on my dissertation, originally conceived as a comparative study of how artistic modernisms related to relevant economic, cultural, and political formations in a dozen countries in different parts of the world. Having pursued this question in Australia, and noting that its development in France, Germany, and elsewhere in Europe was already the subject of strong scholarship, I was advised to begin with the U.S., as this question was, surprisingly, not being asked by scholars there.

the supposedly new post-Fordist, posthistorical age were, in fact, anticipated or invented during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Even though I was determined that *The Communist Manifesto* would appear somewhere in the *Dictionary*, I had come to feel that "modernity," rather than "capitalism," was the best name for the conditions within which modern art, as every other aspect of modern society, had been created.[6] Modernity encompassed non-capitalist social formations, such as those in the Soviet sphere, which were then imploding but had prevailed for decades; social formations in "advanced" societies, as in indigenous communities for example, that pre-existed capitalism, and were, at their core, not-modern, yet had to deal with the modernizing societies in which they found themselves; and forms of social organization in Asia and Africa that were modernizing in ways that shared some but not all of the key characteristics of Western capitalism. All of these formations, not only those definitive in EuroAmerica, were the base—the actual material, physic, social, cultural, and political conditions—that shaped the superstructural—ideational, rhetorical, discursive—domains within which modernism came to prevail as a leading tendency. In turn, ideas, images, and structures of feeling such as modernism influenced the basic relations between people in society, how they used their tools, how they saw their surroundings, including each other.[7] From this perspective, modernism was modernity's best artistic idea. And, at times, modernism was also unmatched in showing what was worst about modernity.[8]

6 In the event, William H. Shaw and Charles Saumarez Smith did author an entry on "Marxism."

7 I should have included Raymond Williams in the bibliography, as his essay "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural theory" has been pivotal to my thinking since its publication. See *New Left Review*, I/82 (September 1973): 3-16; also in his *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980): 30-49. His "When Was Modernism?" is equally pertinent to this discussion, see *New Left Review*, I/75 (May-June, 1989), from which this is a key sentence: "'Modernism', as a title for a whole cultural movement and moment, has been retrospective as a general term since the 1950s, thereby stranding the dominant version of 'modern' or even 'absolute modern' between, say, 1890 and 1940." This is accurate as to the state of affairs in Europe and the United States, but hopelessly blinkered as a world-wide description—indeed, it excludes vast sections of the world from modernization and from the possibility of modernist art just at the time when these sections began to become modern in ways I will discuss.

8 As T. J. Clark demonstrated in *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

Here are the two articles, one after the other. "Modernism" was preceded by entries on the art history of Modena, the Italian city, and on *Moderne Kunstkring* (Modern Art Circle), a group of Dutch artists active in Paris in the first decade of the twentieth century, who staged influential exhibitions of French art in Amsterdam. An article on the "Modern Movement" in architecture follows my articles, then one on Paula Modersohn-Becker. Online, of course, they are not preceded or followed by anything, except what you did before and what you will do next. (The words in capitals refer to entries elsewhere in the *Dictionary*; internal references are to the titles appearing in the bibliographies to each.[9]). While, for alphabetical reasons, "modernism" appeared before "modernity," I reverse the order here, as I will deal with these subjects in that order in the comments that follow.

> **Modernity**. Term applied to the cultural condition in which the seemingly absolute necessity of innovation becomes a primary fact of life, work and thought. Modernity appeared first in Europe in the 16th century and became dominant in the mid-19th century, with enormous consequences for colonized non-European countries and for residual cultural formations in Europe. It has been described as the first truly "world" culture, universalizing in its ambitions and impact. Modernity is more than merely the state of being modern or the opposition between old and new. This article discusses the nature of modernity and its relation to art.

1. THE NATURE OF MODERNITY. The ecology of pre-modern societies was largely agricultural, based on using renewable resources in restorable conditions, but modern societies in pursuit of greater productivity, profits and the spread of "well-being" are built around machine processing of unrenewable resources. Constant technological progress is required to keep ahead of accelerating consumption, as is the flexibility to switch from exhausted resources to new ones. Incessant change becomes central to cultural experience. The agenda for change is, however, concentrated in the hands of relatively few, is partial in scope and largely arbitrary in its effects. Thus its forms are felt as ambiguous and conflicted. Modernity is the accumulating impact of these forces of modernization on individuals, societies and environments.

[9] *Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner, London: Macmillan, 1996, vol. 21, "Modernism," 775-77, "Modernity," 777-79.

New ideas and modes of expression have occurred in many societies throughout human history, even in civilizations that changed slowly as did that of ancient Egypt. Also frequent is the sense of being modern—that is, being up to date, "of today," or less strongly, part of the present or recent past. Modernity, however, is much more active, engaged and widespread than these occasional and circumstantial occurrences. It is what happens to both everyday and exceptional experience when large sections of a society are undergoing modernization. It is an unfolding of active processes, of changes in all spheres, away from accepted traditions, customary conventions and current practices towards imaginary, often utopian, futures. It is experienced as a constant encounter with the new as a set of challenges and thus demands a reorientation of our sense of self around the presumption that change is the inevitable result of the functioning of forces outside of ourselves, is largely unpredictable and yet may be influenced, to some degree, by individual belief and action. Modernity provokes a preoccupation in us with its definition, occurrence and significance. Modernity is living in, and with, perpetual flux.

In *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote:

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all newly formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face, with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind. (*Selected Works*, p. 38.)

These changes had been resisted from the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. The poet Oliver Goldsmith, in his essay *Visit to Elysium* of 1773, was rudely confronted by Luddite reality: 'I should certainly have fallen beneath the hands of this company of men, who gloried in the title of Modernicides' (*Miscellaneous Works*, London, 1837, I.213).

While many of these factors were nascent in the RENAISSANCE (leading some to label it the Early Modern period), it was during the 19th century in Europe that modernizing forces came to dominate material life: the capitalist system of economic exchange became nearly global; industrialists used new technologies and

rationalized management to introduce mass production; faster means of transportation and communication spread everywhere; millions of people migrated between nations and into cities; governmental and corporate surveillance became increasingly pervasive and was strongly resisted by organized and revolutionary political movements; everyday life was secularized, traditional values were cast as mere nostalgia, and popular culture was shaped into spectacles infused with desires for commodities. Overt ideological struggle is thus characteristic of modernity (*see also* IDEOLOGY). At stake is the direction of modernity itself. Typically, attempts are made by some to recruit modernity's victims as willing subjects and by others to encourage radical resistance. Both sides, however, share an assumption about the inevitability of a modernized future, while rejecting continuity from the past and viewing its persisting forms as anachronistic survivals. They aim to reduce actual global diversity of outlook by insisting on the necessity of unifying, integrative conceptual frameworks, by promoting abstract organizational forms over individual choice. They oppose the inherited hierarchies and also the autonomous differentiality of tradition-based communities – especially those beyond the major European cities—with claims that rationality, materialism and pragmatism are essentially universal. In general, the rhetoric of disruption disguises modernity's fundamental sleight-of-hand: its eventual absorption of tradition, otherness and its own novelty into its expansionary self.

The ideology of modernity is evident in its narratives of universal liberation, a number of which compete and combine. They all presume European leadership and include the revolutionary overthrow of aristocratic, theocratic order to establish the democratic nation state, the promise of progressively increasing wealth for all offered by the political economy of capitalism, and the hope for the realization of rationality in the minds and actions of men held out by Enlightenment philosophy, above all by Kant and Hegel. MARXISM, a widely influential ideology during the period of modernity's hegemony, was a critique of these narratives accompanied by its own grand narrative of the revolutionary destruction of the bourgeois state, the establishment of a socialist state and, eventually, the communism of pure liberation. A less systematic critique of modernity was offered by such philosophers as FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE and MARTIN HEIDEGGER and by such political philosophies as anarchism.

2. MODERNITY AND THE ARTS. These ideologies and materialities have profoundly shaped art and literature. They surfaced first in the QUARREL OF THE ANCIENTS

AND THE MODERNS in 17th century France and England in particular. During the following 150 years, the applied empiricism of the *Encyclopédie* project (1751-72) of Denis Diderot and the ROMANTICISM of many writers and artists mapped out, respectively, a science and an aesthetic increasingly independent of classical precedent. By 1848 THÉOPHILE GAUTIER could assert: "It goes without saying that we accept civilization as it is, with its railways, steamboats, English scientific research, central heating, factory chimneys and all its technical equipment, which have been considered impervious to the picturesque" (*Souvenir*, p. 203). Others were less sanguine—thus the cry from CHARLES BAUDELAIRE in "Le Cygne": "Old Paris is gone (the form of the city...changes much faster, alas! than the mortal heart)" (Baudelaire, p. 209). Such grief for a past visibly disappearing, shot through with anxiety about whether it is possible to keep up with the necessity of novelty, recoil from the present while being embroiled in a searching for the future within it—this dialectical ambivalence is a typically modern mix.

Seeing the Paris of the Second Empire as a key site of modernity, WALTER BENJAMIN traced its definitive figures: the city itself obliterating the countryside except as memory and place of leisure; the volatile crowd against whom individuality was now measured (especially that of the *flâneur*, a new model for the artist); the dislocations of the experience of time and space; the dominance of the world by its "phantasmagorias," its fanciful, fantastic, engrossing yet misleading projections of itself through advertising and political ideologies. In the years after 1900 mass-produced visual imagery proliferated throughout city spaces and in the burgeoning variety of communicative media. International, national, regional and local cultures defined themselves increasingly in terms of identificatory visual images, as did political parties, urban subcultures and even small, occasional, groupings of people. Advertising, entertainment, propaganda and fashion were the primary vehicles for an imagery of modernity that celebrated the MASS PRODUCTION process and then its products. Modern design symbolized the age of mass consumption. Images of factories and workers, cities and crowds, products and consumers appeared regularly in the incessant circulation of signs of the new. Modernist art claimed a definitive closeness to the essential spirit of modernity (*see* MODERNISM). In its avant-garde forms, it also insisted on the necessity of art's autonomy, its pure experimentality. It is also arguable, however, that the various realist tendencies in art since the late 18th century, further inspired by the examples of Gustave Courbet in the mid-19th century, express the experience of

modernity even more directly, if more critically, often picturing its forces at work on individuals seen as part of a social fabric.

Since the late 1960s modernity has been radically reinterpreted. The forces of modernization have been blamed for creating alienating, repressive societies that are increasingly divided between rich and poor, for accelerating the inequities between nations and for wide-scale environmental destruction. Nation states based on such universal systems as socialism, communism, and many forms of capitalism are rapidly losing the consent of their citizens, which in turn is leading to greater repression or the creation of hybrid forms of power-sharing. Theorists of post-modernity argue that the master narratives that have sustained the consent of modernizing societies—ideals of progress, democracy, humanism, modernity itself—have become illegitimate and that the dream of universal rationality that inspired the Enlightenment has ended. Post-modernists call for a new era of anything-goes, open-ended possibility. Yet in practice, old beliefs, especially theocratic ones, are revived, often fanatically, and new cynicisms flourish beside naïve hopes for particular, local changes. This has led, in the late 20th century, to a revisionary reading of the period of modernity as not necessarily closed but rather as a many-sided phenomenon, marked by the ruins of its earlier phases, but still profoundly formative of the present. This situation seems destined to generate textures of experience even more complex than those encompassed by such generic terms as modernity and post-modernity, however expansively they may be defined.

Bibliography

K. Marx and F. Engels: "The Communist Manifesto" (1848), *Selected Works* (Moscow, 1970).

C. Baudelaire: "Le Cygne," (1859); Eng. trans. by F. Scarfe in *Baudelaire: Selected Verse* (Harmondsworth, 1961), 209.

T. Gautier: *Souvenir de théâtre, d'art et de critique* (Paris, 1883).

W. Benjamin: *Charles Baudelaire: Ein Lyriker Dichter im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1939; Eng. trans., London, 1973).

M. Weber: *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen, 1956).

M. Foucault: *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris, 1966); Eng. trans. as *The Order of Things* (New York, 1971).

G. Simmel: *Sociology* (Glencoe, IL, 1969).

M. Heidegger: *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York, 1977).

W. Benjamin: "Passagen-Werk," *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. R. Tiedemann, v (Frankfurt am Main, 1983).

M. Berman: *All that Is Solid Melts into Air* (New York, 1983).

S. Kern: *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (London, 1983).

J. Baudrillard: "Modernité," *Encyclopedia universalis*, xii (Paris, 1985).

S. Buck-Morss: *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA, 1990).

A. Giddens: *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, 1990).

J. Habermas: *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*, Eng. trans. by F.G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA, 1990).

B. Latour: *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes: Essais d'anthropologie symétrique* (Paris, 1991; Eng. trans. by C. Porter, Cambridge, MA, 1993).

T. Smith: *Making the Modern: Industry, Art and Design in America* (Chicago, 1993).

The close, indeed necessary, connection between the two concepts is underscored in the opening sentences of the entry that follows. Despite my efforts to write an essay that would match its subject, and operate like an "open work," I was aware that what I said in summary form at the beginning would most likely function as a *de facto* definition of the term "Modernism" for most readers everywhere. I was, therefore, determined that these sentences would not stand alone, and that readers would be required to turn to the entry on "Modernity," with each shadowing the other as they were being read.

> **Modernism.** Term applied to the invention and the effective pursuit of artistic strategies that seek not just close but essential connections to the powerful forces of social MODERNITY. The responses of modernists to modernity range from triumphal celebration to agonized condemnation and differ in mode from direct picturing of the impacts of modernization to extreme renovations of purely artistic assumptions and practice. Such strategies – pursued by artists working individually or, often, in groups, as well as by critics, historians and theorists – occur in all of the arts, although in disjunctive forms and across varying historical trajectories. They have been strongest in painting, design and the MODERN MOVEMENT in architecture, highly significant in literature and in music, but quite muted in the crafts. They have echoes in aspects of commercial and popular culture. Despite being intermittent in their occurrence and unsystematic in nature, these

strategies have been most effective in Europe and its colonies from the mid-19th century and in the USA from the early 20th, moving from the margins to the center of visual cultures, from reactive radicality to institutionalized normality.

Some early usages of the term "modernism" occur in the context of the recurrent battle between the new and the old. In 1737, Jonathan Swift complained to Alexander Pope about "the corruption of English by those Scribblers, who send us over their trash in Prose and Verse, with abominable curtailings and quaint modernisms" (*Published Works*, 1757, ix: 218b). Yet such disputes were usually local ones, occurring within broader frameworks of cultural continuity, except at periods of epochal change. During the 19th century in Europe, however, modernizing forces became hegemonic, and by the mid-20th century modernity had become the norm in many parts of the world, its effects being felt everywhere.

Within this fast-changing context, certain moments in the history of the visual arts stand out as definitively modernist. The play of modernizing forces in Paris in the 1850s and 1860s was manifest in Courbet's critical realism, Manet's induction of the aesthetics of popular spectacle into high art, and the poetics and art criticism of CHARLES BAUDELAIRE. "By *modernité*," Baudelaire wrote in 1863, "I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable." These artists and writers recognized that to make significant, potentially timeless art, it was necessary to begin from the transitory, ever-changing present. This reversed the historical teachings of the academies. Towards the end of the 19th century the term "modernist" was adopted to identify ART NOUVEAU tendencies in many European countries. A related usage appeared in the claims of SECESSION artists in Germany and elsewhere.

In the years after 1900 Paris was the centre of an explosion of artistic innovations, by Fauvist and Cubist artists, which inspired radical experimentation by Futurists in Italy, Suprematists and Constructivists in Russia, Dadaists in Germany and many others. Subsequent tendencies, such as Surrealism, explored the social and psychological impacts of modernization even more deeply. In general, these artists passed from drastic transformations of tradition to fundamental interrogations of art itself. Such extreme reflexivity, emphasizing negative criticism of the conventional and pursued by these artists usually working in groups, constitutes the avant-garde within modernism.

At the same time developments in modern art were fashioned into influential historical narratives in such exhibitions as *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* (London, 1910), opened by the critic ROGER FRY, and new markets for modernist art were created by the ARMORY SHOW (New York, 1913) and others. Those involved in these developments usually identified each movement or grouping by its name and referred to "the new art" or, increasingly after 1920, "modern art" as the generic term for what was emerging as a broad tendency. Meanwhile, product designers made the term "modernist" fashionable for their ART DECO elegances, but defenders of tradition during the first half of the 20th century saw "modernistic" art as indicative of political excess, diseased social values and the insanity of those who made it.

As a name for the mainstream tendency in 20th-century abstract art "modernism" came into widespread usage only in the 1960s. It was applied to the Abstract Expressionists and to contemporary hard-edge painting, colour field painting and abstract sculpture, most influentially by the American critic CLEMENT GREENBERG. Its lineage was traced back to Manet as the initiator of a sequence of formal innovations, particularly those that lessened illusionism in painting and mimeticism in sculpture. Reflecting the economic and cultural ascendancy of the USA and the enormous power of the New York art market, this viewpoint became orthodox internationally. It was, however, subject to subversion by Pop and Minimalist artists and to devastating criticism by conceptual, political and feminist artists and commentators. By the early 1970s it was displaced as a paradigm for most artists, although it persists in many museums, galleries and educational systems.

What were the practices of modernist artists? A typical strategy was to provoke the shock of the new, to reveal the present as replete with blindingly self-evident value and, at the same instant, to consign the recent past to anachronism. Another was to imagine the future as within reach, and still another was to reclaim the distant and even ancient past as a generalized precedent, a repository of essential values that transcended the style-bound historicisms of the 19th century. Typical modes were these: picturing the environments, artefacts, styles and attitudes of everyday life in the modern world; inventing forms, compositional formats and systems of visual signage that parallel those of the forces of modernization; insisting on art's autonomy—its obligation to secure a space for unbridled creativity, for pure possibility; promoting abstraction as an inevitable historical unfolding; highlighting the separateness of the arts or mixing them in startling ways;

constantly disturbing fixed relationships between artists and works of art and between works and viewers. The basic impulse of modernism within modernity is the drive to create previously unimagined objects and new ways of seeing them.

In the late 20th century, however, the limitations of modernism, its wasteful exclusions, became increasingly evident. Aspects of the culture of non-European peoples were often incorporated into modernist experimentality as estranging devices and signals of "primitive" otherness. This occurred throughout the vanguard movements in Europe around 1900, but from a post-colonial perspective it can be seen as a legacy of imperialism. While the agenda for world art seemed to be set by mainstream École de Paris art movements, and then, after World War II, by developments in American art, artistic practice in the cultural and economic colonies is not necessarily a matter of dependent provincialism. Local artists adopt, adapt and often transform the elements that circulate throughout a system of exchange, which is itself becoming increasingly international. Regional, local, even national, modernisms have occurred all over the world since the 1920s, each with their own distinctive concerns and values. Feminist art historians draw attention to the exclusion of significant work by women artists from the canon of modernist masterpieces, to the social restrictions that prevented these artists from entering into the spaces so vital to modern life, and to the persistence in early modernism of women seen as aesthetic objects (*see* WOMEN AND ART HISTORY). Similarly, modernist art constantly pirated popular and commercial visual cultures, while still insisting on an essential critical distance from the everyday life of modernity. No longer a source of strength, this contradictory pattern of incorporation and exclusion has contributed to modernism's decline.

While modernism no longer inspires artists, its heroic history and its accumulation of masterworks have become standard fare within educated taste as it consumes the visual arts with ever-increasing enthusiasm. Modern Masters, fine designers, great geniuses, modest decorators: a diverse and conflict-free aesthetic has spread outwards from the centers of artistic innovation to become an international modernist culture among the upper and middle classes in most countries with a European heritage.

Post-modern artists and theorists (*see* POST-MODERNISM) tend to reject modernism as a historical narrative binding on current practice, while at the same time rehearsing some of its strategies and quoting instances of early modernist art as

allusions within their circulating of imagery from, potentially, anywhere and any time. Post-modernism is, however, obsessed with modernity; and the issue of whether human societies have moved into a post-modern phase remains open. Another modernist moment in art cannot, therefore, be ruled out.

Bibliography

C. Baudelaire: *Le peintre de la vie moderne* (Paris, 1863; Eng. trans. by J. Mayne, London, 1964).

C. Greenberg: "Modernist Painting," *Art & Literature*, 4 (Spring 1965), pp. 193-201; also in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. F. Francina and C. Harrison (London, 1982).

H.H. Arnason: *A History of Modern Art* (New York, 1969).

M. Bradbury and T. McFarlane: *Modernism, 1890-1930* (Harmondsworth, 1975).

R. Hughes: *The Shock of the New* (London, 1980, rev. 2/1991).

E. Lunn: *Marxism and Modernism* (Berkeley, 1982).

B.H.D. Buchloh, S. Guilbaut and D. Solkin, eds: *Modernism and Modernity* (Halifax, NS, 1983).

T.J. Clark: *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton, 1984).

M. Calinescu: *The Five Faces of Modernity* (Durham, NC, 1987).

D.J. Singal: "Modernist Culture in America," *American Quarterly,* xxxix/1 (Spring 1987) [special issue].

G. Pollock: *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (London, 1988).

Modernity as a Historical Fiction

The broad outlines of these accounts, I believe, retain their adequacy. As do, I think, most of the specific characterizations within them.[10] Yet some striking differences of emphasis would be required if one were writing such entries today. Three stand out. The burgeoning of art and ideas about art from previously colonized or less "advanced" countries and regions of the world since the 1950s—itself inspired by decolonizing and "deWesternizing" forces operative at every lev-

10 So, it seems, do the editors, as I have not been asked to revise them. To my amusement, they remain in widespread use—at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, for example, where they are on the website and in interface usage in the museum as default explanations of that museum's core concept.

el, that have thrown nationalities and the global connections between them into a condition of permanent transition—led, by the 1990s, to what I have named an "iconogeographic turning" within the world's art, an essential element of its becoming contemporary with itself.[11] Second, this becoming contemporary of art is, I argue, a worldwide phenomenon that occurs differently in each place because it grows not only from local "modernisms" (whatever they may be), but, more precisely, from the specifics of the negotiations between traditionalisms, indigeneities, and modernizations in that place, those that occurred not only in art circles but at every level of personal and collective life. Recently, these negotiations take place in unprecedented awareness of the proximity of various other contemporaries everywhere, and in the context of the decline from dominance of Western narratives of art's historical development. Thirdly, work by artists active in Europe and North America during the modern period—work rendered "minor" by concentration on the achievements of the high modernist artists—has come into view for research and evaluation as itself a richly complex *provincial* art.[12] Indeed, far from being a monolithic enterprise, European art has always been the product of internal warring between cultural values—between Rome and the barbarians, Northerners and the Mediterreneans, the Germanic and Latin races—a long-running battle that resurfaced with a vengeance in the mid-twentieth century.[13]

Let me comment on the advantages but also the challenges facing those of us who would revisit modernism in the light of these changes, the first especially. The second I have explored in some detail in my recent books on contemporary art and contemporaneity, so will make only summary remarks at the end of this essay. The third aspect—the retrospective downgrading but also enrichment of

11 On decolonization and De Westernization, see Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. See also Terry Smith, "World Picturing in Contemporary Art: Iconogeographic Turning," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, 6/2 (2005) and 7/1 (2006): 24-46. Vilashini Cooppan's *Worlds Within: National Narratives and Global Connections in Postcolonial Writing*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, exemplifies a parallel project in literary studies.

12 This is an effect within art history and criticism of what Dipesh Chakrabarty explored in relation to historical thinking in his *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

13 For its impact on art historical thinking, see Eric Michaud, "Barbarian Invasions and the Racialization of Art History," *October* 139 (Winter 2012): 57-96.

understandings of EuroAmerican modernism—I will deal with in more depth at another time.

The West versus the Rest debate has sharpened somewhat since my entries in the *Dictionary of Art* where, oblivious to earlier modernizations in China, and in certain Muslim and Mongol empires, I describe modernity as appearing in 15th-century Europe and then spreading throughout the world. Anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot alerts us to the dangers inherent in universalizing our general terms:

> Modernity is a murky term that belongs to a family of words we may label "North Atlantic universals." I mean by that words that project the North Atlantic experience on a universal scale that they themselves have helped to create. North Atlantic universals are particulars that have gained a degree of universality, chunks of human history that have become historical standards. Words such as development, progress, democracy, and nation-state are exemplary members of that family that contracts or expands according to contexts and interlocutors. Belonging to that class does not depend on a fixed meaning. It is a matter of struggle and context about and around these universals and the world they claim to describe.[14]

He goes on to show that these seemingly descriptive terms also carry "visions of the world," preferred ones, offered seductively, as if they were natural, and simply rational. "It makes sense to be modern. It is good to be modern. How could anyone not want to be modern?"[15] The same critique applies to the use of terms such as "the West," which is, as he says, "always a fiction, an exercise in global legitimation":

> That exercise sometimes takes the form of an explicit project in the hands of intellectual, economic, or political leaders. Yet most humans who see themselves as Westerners, aspire to become so, or criticize that aspiration experience the West in the form of a projection: the projection of the North Atlantic as the sole legitimate site for the universal, the default category, the unmarked—so to speak—of

14 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 35.

15 *Ibid.*

> all human possibilities... As in all default categories, the West as the universal unmarked operates only in opposition to the population that it marks.[16]

Along with its coercive, religious, and economic powers, deployment of the conceptual cluster around "modern" has been among the West's most potent weapons in exercising this ideational hegemony. Trouillot continues: "in its most common deployments as a North Atlantic universal, modernity disguises and misconstrues the many Others that it creates. A critical assessment of modernity must start with the revelation of its hidden faces."[17]

Within this framework, other seemingly neutral terms do their world-defining work, always from a Western viewpoint. For example, as philosopher Archille Mbembe reminds us: "Africa as an idea, a concept, has historically served, and continues to serve, as a polemical argument for the West's desire to assert its difference from the rest of the world."[18] Anthropologist James Ferguson adds that a term such as "Africa" is "a category that (like all categories) is historically and socially constructed (indeed, in some sense arbitrary), but also a category that is 'real,' that is imposed with force, that has a mandatory quality; a category within which, and according to which, people must live."[19] He does not mean that such categories should be accepted, rather, that their actuality within world being cannot be overlooked, if effective resistance to them is to be mounted. Understanding their constructed nature is the first step on this path. The same holds for concepts such as "the East," as Edward Said famously demonstrated with regard to "the Orient," and for "America," "Asia," "East/Central Europe," "the Middle East," and "Latin America"—in each case, albeit distinctively, the European location of the primary observer is inscribed in the very word itself. Any revisiting of modernism, any mapping of multiple modernities in the arts or any other sphere, must account for the operations of this double-dealing structure, must track the activities of its agents on both sides of the divide that it constantly recreates, and probe its weaknesses for spaces in which to exercise autonomy.

[16] *Ibid.*, 1-2.
[17] *Ibid.*, 36.
[18] Archille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, 2.
[19] James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007, 5.

Modernisms Reimagined

In their statement of aims, the organizers of the 2013 conference *Reimagining Modernism, Mapping The Contemporary: Critical Perspectives on Transnationality in Art*, held at Cambridge University, UK, mark the most recent phases in art historical approaches to this task:

> The conference takes as its point of departure the consolidation of a new historiography of artistic modernism written at a global level and characterized by a weakening or even outright rejection of the demarcations that traditionally served to separate Western artistic practice from 'the rest'. Influential recent studies and exhibitions have argued for the categories of cosmopolitan, rather than national, modernisms; global rather than Anglo-American conceptualism; a diasporic rather than continental Afro-modernism. These developments go beyond a tokenistic inclusion of artistic practices from formerly economically peripheral and semi-peripheral nations into the mainstream canon; they do not simply expand the group of nations understood to be 'core' to the development of modernism in line with changing geopolitical realities and the waning of Western hegemony. Rather, they challenge the imagined community of the nation or region as the basic unit of artistic territorialisation, focusing instead on diverse, networked artistic communities that are understood to cohere at a transnational and/or transregional level, often with particular global cities as their enabling nodes.[20]

The organizers have in mind as models Kobena Mercer's *Annotating Art's Histories: Cross-Cultural Perspectives in the Visual Arts* project, the *Global Conceptualism* exhibition held at the Queens Museum, New York, in 1999, and books such as Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu's *Contemporary African Art since 1980*.[21] These are models for me, too, and are significant signposts in what amounts to a major revisionary undertaking by art historians, curators, certain

[20] *Reimagining Modernism, Mapping The Contemporary: Critical Perspectives on Transnationality in Art*, CRASSH conference, Churchill College, Cambridge University, September 22-3, 2013, organized by Luke Szkrebowski and Devika Singh. I am grateful to the organizers for inviting me to speak. Passages in what follows are drawn from my paper.

[21] See: *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, ed. Kobena Mercer, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press for the International Institute for the Visual Arts, 2005; *Discrepant Abstraction*, ed. Kobena Mercer, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press for the International Institute for the Visual Arts, 2006; *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers*, ed. Kobena Mercer, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press for the International Institute for the Visual Arts, 2008; *Global Conceptualism*, ed. Jane Farver,

artists, museums and art research institutions throughout the world. Yet, while I share the values that inspire this effort, I am concerned about the damage being done to it as an accurate, realistic and generative art historical program if we continue to refer each and every element of this complex tapestry of artistic achievement to the question of whether, or not, or how and to what degree, it was *modernist*.

As an example of the complexities haunting even the most conscientious approach to these matters, let me cite the opening two paragraphs of the review by Holland Cotter "Modernism Blooming in Iran," from the *New York Times*, September 5, 2013:

> Most accounts of modern art say, basically, one thing: the West creates while the world waits, like a grateful beggar, for a nourishing handout. This is false history. Modernism has always been a global adventure happening for different reasons, in different ways, on different schedules, everywhere.
>
> That America and Europe are still barely awake to this reality makes an exhibition like 'Iran Modern,' which opens on Friday at the Asia Society, invaluable educationally. That the show is also terrifically good-looking, threaded through with human drama and composed of work that is both cosmopolitan and, over all, like no other art, doesn't hurt.

After describing a number of works with his usual perspicacity, he concludes:

> That there is drama—many kinds—in modern Iranian art has now been demonstrated beyond doubt: the historical drama of a pre-20th-century past that remains to be explored, of a mid-20th-century present that is still barely understood, and of a future that is being radically altered by politics.
>
> You can also pick up here on the tired drama of Western modernism's insistence on erasing or diminishing anything that it can't claim to have created. And, finally, as a positive, there's the drama of encountering a new modernism. It's one

New York" Queens Museum of Art, 1999; Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art since 1980*, Bologna: Damiani Editore, 2009.

> of many across the globe, and it is one that stands complex and generous—as part of a global picture, but also on its own.[22]

Simply by being concerned with such questions, Cotter stands out among art critics based in New York. Not only does he make a point of reviewing shows of art from elsewhere; he actually travels to report on key exhibitions, new museums, and biennials. His evident commitment to an ethical approach to these issues is also exceptional. He takes seriously his obligation to bring his readership along to a gradually deepening understanding of the complexities attending the making of art in art-producing centers outside of the city. His colleagues prefer to stay on the beat: writing about whatever the galleries in Chelsea, midtown and, in recent years, the Lower East Side decide to show—which is overwhelmingly, to the point of egregious exclusion, art produced in the United States and Europe. Were it not for the few region-focused museums, such as the Asia Society, and the small number of venues sponsored by national governments, regular gallery-goers would be forgiven for thinking that, when it comes to modern and contemporary art, the rest of the world was, with a few spectacular exceptions (mainly Chinese in recent years), an art-free zone.

Cotter is merely summarizing, in a way he believes will be most attractive and palatable to his regular readers, the narrative of multiple modernities that has recently become a paradigm within much art historical, curatorial, and critical thinking concerned with the art of the twentieth century (with some bleeding backward in time and forward to the present). He is right about his readership. Yet there is something askew with this picture if we are to take it as a usable art historical framework, if our goal is to get at the realities in play when artists seek the social and psychic space within their own location to make art, and especially to make art that tells the truth to power. Indeed, with due respect to the constraints within which he is writing, we might characterize Cotter's words as exemplifying *nice modernism*. There is little hint of the depth and degree of conflict that fundamentally shaped modern art in the West—including the intensified form properly characterized as modernist—as it did but differently, modern art everywhere else. Yes, he acknowledges the racist blinkers in the West and elsewhere that so condescendingly reduce the art of the alien others to lesser

[22] Holland Cotter, "Modernism Blooming in Iran," from the *New York Times*, September 5, 2013, C21 and 25.

crafts and fascinating fetishes. And yes, he acknowledges that artists everywhere push against constraints within their "complex" cultures. But he makes the typical mistake of attributing to the "mid-20th-century present" much of the degree and kind of agency that artists working in these cultures wish to have today, an agency described as "generous"—presumably so in command of itself that it can be generous towards others. However much this "gives voice to the others," and genuinely acknowledges the coevality that should be the right of all, it is unrealistic as a picture of the actual working conditions of artists, then as now, in many parts of the world, notably, much of the Middle East, Africa, and northern Asia (especially China).

Descriptions like this come close to presuming that modern artists in Western and non-Western societies had the same kind and degree of agency, both within their "complex" cultures, and in relationship to other, dominant cultures. "Agency" tends to mean the model aspired to in Europe since the sixteenth century, that of the individual with a free will who contracts with others to form a society organized above all to preserve and encourage the flourishing of that will. By the nineteenth century, in certain European centers, artists became widely seen as those who most embodied this spirit of personal freedom. But these are, as we noted above, models developed in just a few of the world's cities. A naïve presumption of this model would attribute at least the possibility of total free agency to every artist everywhere at every time. A slightly more subtle position would hope that, if they were not free initially, they could escape local and global binds by acts of will, by making choices. Again, this looks like wishful back-projection. Or, the fallback position: these artists were freer than they appeared to be to previous chroniclers of their efforts. Perhaps so, but this perspective probably reflects the fact that the historian has more information now, and more willingness to recognize agency when she or he sees it. Overall, however, this perspective leaves curators and art historians with the job of playing "*catch-up modernism*," their task confined to showing how these artists were really modernists, albeit in their own specific and located way. The goal becomes to write each artist into a universal narrative of the shared evolution of modernism, the outline of which has been set by developments in EuroAmerica. This is to fall for a fiction, to perpetuate the master-slave relationship, and, strategically, to play a losing game.

Rebarbative Modernists

I am arguing that if the histories of nineteenth and twentieth century art everywhere on the planet are revised in terms that presume that every artist always aspired to modernize, and either succeeded, or tried but failed, or refused to do so (and was therefore reactionary), then recursion, rather than revision, will actually occur. During this period, ideas concerning modernity, modernization, and modernism were historical constructions, Western fictions that, in all spheres of life and work, were part of the ideological machinery of imperialism and colonization. This was the case in the metropolitan centers, and in the colonies themselves. The enabling as well as the disabling elements of this complex economy must be carefully teased out. When it came to the visual arts, moreover, the modernizing hegemony carried within it a crucial paradox: the modernism of the artists of the 1860s—the Parisian painters, primarily, whose work is widely credited as being definitive of the initial phases of the movement, and a model throughout its subsequent development—was, at its heart, an *internal critique* of modernity itself. In one way or another, the artists and theorists (Charles Baudelaire, most notably), and virtually all subsequent art historical chroniclers and interpreters of the movement, concur in taking this aspect to be definitive of the decisive change in the history of art that they effected. Philosopher Robert B. Pippin has recently offered a concise summary of this situation and its implications:

> What commentators are noticing is that Manet's paintings seem to declare that the norms of pictorial intelligibility and credibility established by conventional techniques had begun to fail and that what was required now was an approach that engaged and in some sense worked through not just the modern threats to pictorial intelligibility and the credibility of paintings but perhaps new, more general threats to the shareable intelligibility of human deeds altogether and even to shareable claims for the legitimacy of human practices as such.[23]

Like my linking of the artistic modernism to social modernity in the entries cited above, and reflecting the "left Hegelianism" of the major commentators on European modernist art (notably T.J. Clark and Michael Fried, but this broad framework also underscores the feminist interpretations of Linda Nochlin and

[23] Robert B. Pippin, *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014, 64.

Griselda Pollock), Pippin is identifying how a profound change in the history of art at the level of both content and form is, in material fact, a constitutive element within a broader shifting of societal communicative modes, themselves reflecting deeper political and economic changes, which have precipitated a crisis in values—indeed, he claims, in the possibility of ethical behavior as such for all humans. None of the connections here are smooth or automatic. They are, rather, conflicted, confused, and rebarbative.

This paradox, which emerges at the heart of European modernism when we see it as an deontological enterprise rather than, as is usually done, a succession of radical renovations of art styles, obliges us to pose some more awkward, but necessary, questions. Accounts of what was most at stake in artistic modernism, such as these, set a high bar for those who would categorize as modernist artworks made in contexts outside the modernizing centers in Europe and, after the 1940s, in the United States. Nevertheless, this can and should be done, otherwise the highest valuations and, indeed, the very possibility of being modern, let alone modernist, remains confined to the West, and, strictly speaking, to a few centers, at just some times and places within it.

As we do so, we need to remain alert to the fact that this kind of account, for all of its accuracy as to the artists it takes as the primary agents, also resonates with the Westernist instinct towards universalism against which Trouillot warns. An important question is this: when we go ahead to note the locally specific artistic and ethical breakthroughs that enable us to identify modernist innovation and reflexivity in the work of certain non-Western artists, what do we make of their aspirations, frequently expressed, toward a wider ethical relevance, if not universality? The implicit assumption within the modernity fiction is that modernization outside the West occurred in ways broadly similar to its evolution in Europe. But if the innovations and the reflexivity are distinct, then we must expect that the larger claims will also be different in kind.

Thirdly, and more generally, focus on modernism served (and still serves) to obscure the persistence, in art-producing sites throughout the world, including in Western centers, of cultural continuity (labeled “traditionalism” by the moderns), as well as appropriations from adjacent cultures or from colonizing ones, counter-modern tendencies, and indigenous art production. Art made during modern times was always more complex, and was made for different reasons,

than those prioritized by the high achieving but relatively narrow concentrations that we rightly label "modernist." The entire array of these interacting forces needs to be taken into account, and their relativities plotted, if we are to develop an art historical approach that, while acknowledging the historical impact of the Western model, supersedes it.

Rethinking Modern Art's Histories

To thoroughly ground this enterprise in the critiques that first made its necessity apparent, we need to step backwards in time, one further step, to the anti-modernism of the 1970s—specifically, the revolt against the dominance of formalist modernism that had, by the 1960s, entrenched itself in criticism, curatorship, art historical writing and much art practice in the metropolitan centers, above all New York. While much of the revolt was inspired by artists seeking to work with unfettered directness in any and all mediums, this very impulse was driven by recognition of the necessity to make art that would respond, without impediment, to the demands of the times. Merging "Art" into "Life" was the simplest of slogans for a situation as complex and as transformative was that of the 1860s. Moreover, such changes were happening not only in the EuroAmerican centers, but also in many places throughout the world, and would continue to do so, I argue, right through to the present, and beyond. This fact changed the dynamic of the master-comprador-slave relationships that operated between metropolitan and peripheral art centers within the world's cultural empires.

Since the sixteenth century at least, the freedom of certain Europeans had depended upon the unfreedom of others in their own societies, then, as the empires of many European states expanded, freedom at home depended increasingly on the oppression and exploitation of others elsewhere in the world. Not only were past times in one's locality designated "pre-modern" (and those at great temporal distance, "pre-historical"), but also contemporaneous cultures, those subject to colonization, were designated as "not-modern," distanced not only in terms of real yet linked space but also by being placed into an earlier stage of the story of human evolution. Like its Chinese predecessor and its Ottoman parallel, European modernity originates in this ontological violence, towards itself and its necessary others. As the modern world system developed, this structural inequity operated between central and peripheral artworlds everywhere in increasingly elaborate and nuanced forms. It also shaped the disposition of

cultural power within even the most seemingly privileged art centers, New York not excepted. In 1974, I characterized the world situation for late modern artists, wherever they were located and however often they traveled, as taking the form of a provincializing double bind:

> Provincialism appears primarily as an attitude of subservience to a hierarchy of externally imposed cultural values. It is not simply the product of a colonialist history; nor it is merely a function of geographic location. Most New York artists, critics, collectors, dealers, and gallery-goers are provincialist in their outlook, attitudes, and positions within the system. Members of artworlds outside of New York—on every continent, including North America—are likewise provincial, although in different ways. The projection of the New York artworld as the metropolitan center for art by every other artworld is symptomatic of the provincialism of each of them.

I was convinced, however, that seeing this structure for what it was, treating it not as an intractable problem but a potentially manageable problematic, was the first step towards breaking free from it. The second paragraph read:

> Most of us treat this projection as if it were a construction of reality—and it is, in the sense that it is almost universally shared. However, those who are able to live adequately within the framework of the respect for the essential differentness of diverse yet related cultures recognize that this projection does not have the force of 'natural law.' It is, rather, a viewpoint that, while effectively governing majority behavior, is as culturally relative as any other. That is, it is one among many ways of defining the (different) situations we are in.[24]

Written from inside my membership of the Art & Language group, this polemic is symptomatic of the anti-modernist sentiment emergent within late modern, critical art practices during the 1970s. It parallels the feminist accounts that were also directed against the then prevailing view of modernism as an avant-garde formalism, at its core indifferent to the lifeworld concerns of artists or anyone else.[25]

---

24 Terry Smith, "The Provincialism Problem," *Artforum* XII/ 1 (September 1974): 54. See also Samir Amin, *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976.

25 In his 1965 "Modernist Painting," Clement Greenberg outlined the most influential, and reductive, formulation. See *Art & Literature* 4 (Spring 1965): 193-201; also in Clement Green-

Without either falling for the Westernist fiction, or naively believing that because we can see it as such it will evaporate, how might we acknowledge the realities of this framework as it evolved during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries while also accurately portraying how artists and other artworld actors worked within it and against it? Those of us who would chronicle the art produced at given places during the past two or three hundred years are faced, first and foremost, with the task of profiling the effects of this "system," marking its disabling and enabling elements, its strengths and weaknesses, its hold and the holes within it.

For artists working in colonial settings, there has been only one positive effect, albeit not a simple one. External models, including those initiated at the imperial center, can provide references for artmaking with broader horizons, for techniques and perspectives that extend the confines of local artworlds, breach the limits of local cultures, and defy censorship by local political powers. Unlike citizenship, art is not about conformity, or consensus; no matter how closed the situation, it always strives to exceed its points of origination, be they material, personal, or social. Such dynamics should be valued, not only because art requires it, but also because they energize locality, test it, extend its range, and its negotiating capabilities. Denying external worlds in the name of protecting locality is self-defeating parochialism. Nevertheless, in the name of the post-West world to come, we should acknowledge that priority in identifying exactly how and when to act within this network of relations should rest with local agents.

There is little doubt that the disabling effects of the provincializing system have been much more prevalent than enabling ones. According to my definition in the *Dictionary of Art*, the most modern artists were those closest to the core energies of modernity itself, to the sources of that energy, the most modern societies, and the art centers within them. Also, according to the second part of the definition above, and the summary by Pippin, the truly, indeed only, modern*ist* artists are those who effected profound and influential transformations in the nature of

berg, *The Collected Essays and Fiction: Modernism With A Vengeance, 1957-1969*, ed. John O'Brian, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. Key feminist texts include Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," *Art News* (January 1971): 20-39 and 67-71, in her *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1988, 147-158; and Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*, London: Routledge, 1988.

Art itself during modern times. Thus the one-way traffic in judgments of artistic achievement: "[Sidney] Nolan is admired as a great *Australian* artist, while [Jackson] Pollock is taken to be a great artist—his Americanness accepted as a secondary aspect of his achievement qua artist."[26] In his 1955 essay "'American-Type' Painting," Clement Greenberg treated the New York setting in which the artists he was discussing worked as incidental to their artistic achievement. His key statement about Pollock was this: "I do not think it exaggerated to say that Pollock's 1946-50 manner really took up Analytical Cubism from the point that Picasso and Braque left it when, in their collages of 1912 and 1913, they drew back from the utter abstractness to which Analytical Cubism seemed headed."[27] It has taken until recent years for art historians to see Pollock and other American artists of similar stature as profoundly shaped by, and shapers of, a local, indeed provincial, culture that fought its way to its sense of self, as distinct from acting out a triumphalist narrative of New York replacing Paris as the center of world art.[28]

Within this world system, the actual exclusion of artists, critics, and others from ongoing participation in the most innovative circles of a metropolitan center led to the perception (on the part of artists themselves, their peers, and external evaluators) that art made outside these centers was derivative, delayed, undeveloped, etc. On the face of it, given how small such circles necessarily are, how chancy their activities, and the internal battles they face, open access and equal opportunity are impossible expectations. But hierarchical valuing systems are by nature centripetal. For the outsider, value is located inside, and the possibility of change—originality being the highest value for moderns—can only come from elsewhere, from the other side of a closed door, or from a distant power. In historical retrospect, how does one discern the art that effectively countered this pernicious effect? During the modern period, one route was hyper-conformity: doing better what they do at the center, and, preferably, doing it better there, with appropriate recognition. The most common pathway was compromise. A

[26] Smith, "The Provincialism Problem," 55.

[27] Clement Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting," in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1961, 218.

[28] Compare Irving Sandler's *Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism*, New York: Harper & Row, 1977, to his localist accounts of the scene in and around Greenwich village, such as *A Sweeper-Up After Artists: A Memoir*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2003, and Anne Middleton Wagner's critically provincializing reading of post-War art in the United States, *A House Divided: American Art since 1955*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

bolder option was to create a reimagined art, leading to better ideas about what art might be, and, hopefully, provoking from critics and commentators better accounts of such changes. Given the inequities of opportunity, and the internalization of dependence, this was rare, but it did happen. For example, in the neo-concretist movement that flourished in Brazil in the late 1950s and early 1960s, in the work of Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, and others, and in the better ideas in, for example, Ferreira Gullar's "Theory of the Non-Object" (1959).[29]

Is exceptionality what we are looking for? Yes, of course, but within which frameworks? Something more is needed if we are to truly acknowledge the patterns that form, the repetitions that occur, the structures that are created, only to become subject to constant revision as circumstances change. So, we should be open to the singularities, occurrences, coincidences—in a word, the contemporaneities—that can cluster to become convergences, or shared outlooks, whenever and wherever they appear. Despite the risk of retreating to anything-goes particularism, is this not better than broadening the definition, and thus lowering the bar, such that every artist who was at all modern anywhere becomes part of the same story of the onward march of art, and can then, by vague, well-intentioned blurring, be crowned a modernist too? The wishful thinking here turns on blurring the two, opposing kinds of meaning that adding the suffix "ist" to a noun can evoke. In this case, within European art since the 1860s, "modernist" names the extreme, *more-modern-than-modern* questioning in certain (usually avant-garde) artworks of modernity's ways of seeing itself, whereas, outside this setting, "modernist" identifies art that *looks like* European modern and modernist art, or, somewhat better, *behaves like* this art, albeit in ways calibrated to its own setting.

I strongly suggest that, if we are to accurately grasp the relative nature of the multiple modernities generated within the different art-producing centers around the world during the past two centuries, the focus be on "modern art at x, y, or z place and time," not modern*ist* art. To measure every artist against an abstract but, in fact, Parisian and then New York notion of what counts as modernism is the real exclusion. Particularly if modernism is a version of that which took its definitive form only in the 1950s and 1960s, in the criticism of Clement

[29] Ferreira Gullar, "Theory of the Non-Object" (1959), in Mercer, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, 170-3, translated and introduced by Michael Asbury, whose essay "Neoconcretism and Minimalism: Cosmopolitanism at a Local level and a Canonical Provincialism," in *Ibid.*, 174-189, adds valuable nuances to this discussion.

Greenberg, Michael Fried, and others before spreading virally through the late modern artworld in EuroAmerica and its cultural colonies. Very few artists, even in these metropolitan centers, made genuinely modernist art by this criterion. At the opposite extreme, design historians and curators of historical collections are increasingly taking a more open approach, one that sees modernism as the simply the design style apparent in the fine and decorative arts between the two world wars and up to the 1960s.[30] This is to treat "modernism" as if it were above all a style, or a look, that configured at certain major art centers, and then, like a perfume, diluted as it dissipated itself elsewhere, until it finally became historical, subject only to retrospective revivals within the framework of later styles. Such capacious approaches are the obverse of formalist narrowness, yet are little more than all-inclusive generalizations that prioritize appearances while remaining, at their core, modeled on a form of Eurocentric diffusionism. In contrast, formalist approaches have proven themselves oblivious to the very idea that art from cultures outside of Europe and the United States might be of any interest at all.

A different way of opening the aperture to take in expanded notions of what kinds of art might have been modern (as distinct from modernist) is to focus on the options available to artists in particular times and places. Soviet Socialist Realism was *the* modern art in Russia and its satellites for most of the twentieth century.[31] From the late nineteenth century, the naturalism of the French and German academies and salons, and the realisms that questioned it, became the dominant modern, European styles for public artmaking in many Asian countries, Japan notably, and China, where they remain a staple of art school instruction, alongside ink painting.[32]

Examples such as these expand the principle basic to the theory of alternative or multiple modernities—that, as Gaonkar puts it, "modernity always unfolds within a specific culture or civilizational context."[33] They indicate that each

[30] For example, see *Modernism: Designing a New World, 1914-1939*, ed. Christopher Wilk, London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2006.

[31] In his *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, Boris Groys attributes to the Soviet state itself the modernist avant-garde dream of total social transformation.

[32] See John Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, Sydney and Honolulu: Craftsman House, 1998.

[33] Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "On Alternative Modernities," *Alternative Modernities*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001, 14.

distinctive manifestation is also, in principle and frequent practice, connected through cross-cultural linkages to other modernities. These are long-term historical processes. To Sanjay Subrahmanyan, speaking of early modernizations in South Asia from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, "modernity is a global and *conjunctural* phenomenon, not a virus that spreads from one place to another. It is located in a series of historical processes that brought relatively isolated societies into contact."[34] These connections between modernities occurred with ever increasing intensity during the modern period, until such conjunctures have become the highly volatile norm in our contemporary times. Thinking about the work of modern artists in Latin America during the twentieth century, curator Mari-Carmen Ramirez speaks of their vital relationships to both European centers and those elsewhere in the region as "intersecting modernisms."[35] Susan Stanford Friedman, in a brilliant 2006 survey of postcolonial thinking about cultural modernities, and about literary modernism as what she calls "the expressive dimension of modernity," is led to conclude that

> Polycentric modernities produce polycentric modernisms, ones that are simultaneously distinctive and yet produced through indigenizations of traveling modernities that take place within frequently extreme differences of power. This dynamic is particularly true for the modernisms developing out of colonialism and its demise throughout the century. Theorizing modernism in this way fundamentally alters the conventional end points of twentieth century modernism…It requires the recognition that the 'periods' of modernism are multiple and that modernism is alive and thriving whenever the historical convergence of radical rupture takes place.[36]

---

[34] Sanjay Subrahmanyan, "Hearing Voices; Vignettes of Early Modernity in South Asia, 1400-1750," *Daedalus* 127/3 (1998): 99-100.

[35] Mari-Carmen Ramirez, "The Necessity of Concreteness: An Abstract Art That is Not an Abstraction," address to the conference *Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic 1945-1965*, Haus der Kunst, Munich, May 21-25, 2014.

[36] Susan Stanford Friedman, "Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies," *Modernism/modernity* 13/3 (September 2006): 435 and 439. Friedman's essay boldly attempts for modern literature what I am aiming to do for the modern visual arts in this text. Although our theoretical approaches are consonant on most points, I am obliged to register the relatively smaller scale of visual arts production during the modern period (its exponential growth is relatively recent) and its greater reliance on enabling and disseminative frameworks—artworlds, if you will, in post-1960s parlance. In the modern visual arts, this leads, mostly, to a more hierarchical

Echoing, and adding to, Fredric Jameson's famous exhortation "Always historicize!" Friedman urges us to "Always spatialize!" Hear, hear!

Movement across cultural space, of course, goes in many directions. Reversing the usual flow, historians of multiple modernities are noticing something that has been obvious to artists for decades: that the initiating energy so vital to modernist avant-gardism came as much from artists who traveled from the colonies, or from otherwise dependent cultures, to the metropolitan centers as it did from artists native to them. In his *The Politics of Modernism*, speaking mainly of literature, Raymond Williams noted that it was in "a generation of 'provincial' immigrants to the great imperial capitals that avant-garde formations and their distanced, 'estranged' forms have their matrix," an idea developed for the visual arts in Bernard Smith's *Modernism's History*.[37] Ex-colonial artists can be found at every point of avant-garde rupture in Europe and the United States. Start with Pissarro, go on to Picasso, add Rivera, and the list grows and grows, and will be endless. Recognition that this is the case is slowly spreading through art historical accounts and exhibitions at significant venues.[38]

Transcultural Iconomorphism

On the level of compositional strategies, one thing that all of these artists have in common is a penchant for what my mentor, Antipodean art historian Bernard Smith identified as *iconomophism*. This is an ancient capacity of the visual arts, to be found wherever an image or object has a double identity as we see it, or is shown ready to change into another—by fusion, figure-ground reversal, ex-

---

and exclusionary institutional framework, and more convention-bound art practice, than the more individual act of writing.

37 Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism*, London: Verso, 1989, and Bernard Smith, *Modernism's History: A Study in Twentieth Century Art and Ideas*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

38 David Carrier sketched a broad framework for this approach in his *A World Art History and Its Objects*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008. The 2008 CIHA conference was devoted to it, see Jaynie Anderson, *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence, Proceedings of the 32nd International Congress in the History of Art*, Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2009. Anthologies include *Cultural Contact and the Making of European Art since the Age of Exploration*, ed. Mary D. Sheriff, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010, and *World Art and the Legacies of Colonial Violence*, ed. Daniel J. Rycroft, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013. The online journal *Atl@s Bulletin* is devoted to detailed studies of "transnationality" in art.

truded adjacency, or our switch of viewing position. Iconomorphism is fundamental to the religious arts, in which the icon is the passage toward the spiritual being, and the viewer could become one with it, if belief were intense enough and the being was so disposed. In 1962, Smith had something more modest in mind: a compositional device to enable the simultaneous use of images that are normally shown separately, a hybridization that changed the look and the meanings of both, at once, and with considerable shock effect. His examples were Sidney Nolan's Ned Kelly series, Francis Bacon's screaming popes, Larry Rivers' historical tableaux, and Arthur Boyd's half-caste bride series.[39] Smith surmised that this innovation on the part of these post-war figurative painters was, perhaps, a more or less unconscious resistance to the rise of abstraction, then being promoted as the universal passageway to a free art by United States agencies. But we should not forget that, for these artists as well as the Abstract Expressionists (long before their official promotion as American heroes), iconomorphy was made vivid for them early in their careers, by Picasso in particular and Surrealism in general.

The long history of exchanges of valued objects between cultures is replete with imagery that hybridizes elements from the traditions of each party to the trade. From this perspective, modern art in general, and modernism in particular, in Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is largely the story of a cultural *narrowing*, winnowing, usually under the banner of developing a national culture, and then, as we have seen, critically interrogating it, or in the name of art's necessary autonomy, usually sought in terms of abstraction or formal reflexivity. There are, of course, exceptions, such as Gauguin's journeys to the islands of the Pacific. And there is the necessary, spectral double of this withdrawal: modernist primitivism. Meanwhile, however, most artists outside of Europe, and in its provinces, or at its peripheries, had become artists in contexts where traditional craft practices remained vital, and had inherited from their modernizing predecessors strategies appropriate to their dependent distance from the centers. I have argued elsewhere that, in settler colonies such as the United States, Australia, Canada, South Africa, Argentina and Brazil,

[39] Bernard Smith, "Image and Meaning in Recent Painting," *The Listener* 68/1738 (19 July, 1962): 93-6. Iconomorphism in painting and sculpture during this period find obvious parallels in the use of doubled voices and plot structures in novels such as Chinua Achibe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1967), the latter movingly analyzed by Friedman in her essay cited above.

modern artists continually refined processes of *adopting*, *adapting*, and, in rare cases, *transforming* the artistic elements (imagery, subject matter, techniques, and styles) and modes of artist behavior that had achieved currency in the centers. Some rested content with adopting a dominant or new style, and exploring its implications as best they could. Others adapted its elements to existing local motifs and styles, to fit local needs and interests, creating icons for their national cultures, including in some cases critical, interrogatory ones. A few fused both to come up with transformations of relevance to artists everywhere.[40]

Perhaps a term such as *transcultural iconomophism* might best name the artistic strategies in play in these situations, especially when volatile adaptation and intense transformation has taken place, and above all, when the imagery being fused, and the ethical imperatives being tackled, originate in two or more settings or cultures, all of which are sites of experience for the artist involved, who effectuates a transpositioning of aesthetic and ethical values in his or her work. We might see the intersections here as artistic realizations of conjunctive difference, a convergence that maintains distinctiveness within the new unity it has effected. This is the sense of "relation" theorized by Caribbean philosopher Edouard Glissant in his *Poetics of Relation*.[41]

These strategies are not confined to the artists of the settler colonies such as those mentioned above. They are operative, albeit later in time, in the modern art of colonies that were sparsely settled by colonizers, and had large indigenous populations, notably those in Africa, the Middle East, and East and South East Asia. (As a modernizing imperial autocracy, Japan sets a distinct agenda for North Asia throughout this period.) This lateness is not a "belatedness" according to a modernist clock set in Paris, London, Moscow, or New York, rather, it is a recognition that these strategies were taken up by exceptional artists from these places, usually those few able to travel to the centers. They became truly viable for a critical mass of artists in such countries only later in the century, after World

---

[40] Terry Smith, *Transformations in Australian Art: vol. 2, Modernism and Aboriginality*, Sydney: Craftsman House, 2002, introduction, chapters 1 and 2. The concept of *antropófagia*, developed by Oswald de Andrade in Brazil in 1928 to describe the "cannibalistic" absorption of European cultural influences by Latin American artists, is a brilliant metaphor for the most intense version of this process.

[41] Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* [1990], Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

War II, as part of the broader process of anti-colonial struggle, independence and decolonization.[42] Indeed, artists from these regions are now the key drivers of the main current within contemporary art, as I will show in the next two sections. In our post-Hegelian world, the slaves have become, if not the masters, at least masterly in their command of the art required by our contemporaneity.

Acknowledging Art Historical Multiplicity

My main argument has been that those of us who would chronicle the history of the art produced in both colonizing and colonized countries since the sixteenth century must ground our accounts in a picture of the historical unfolding of the relationships between indigenous, traditional (inherited, continuing), and modernizing practices, seeing each of them, and the shifting relationships between them, not as variant expressions of autochthonous ethnic essences, but as social constructions by individuals working cooperatively or in contestation in order to do the variety of things that art does: picture, celebrate, confirm, question, expose fragilities, or imagine things otherwise. Part of what shapes the art in each place will be assumptions about what it is to be an artist in that community, thematics important to one's predecessors, the interests of one's teachers, and the expectations of immediate audiences. Recent writing about the key concerns of artists working in certain parts of Africa, for example, have evoked themes such as "violence," "the animal," and "time," while "black" and "post-black" are terms with some currency among African-American artists working in the United States.[43] No one is suggesting that these themes are definitive of such practices, or that every African artist does, or should, deal with them to be authentically "African" or an African-American. They are, rather, recurrent concerns that have become distinctive to art's role within that place, and thus become matters of not only social but also art historical fact.

[42] Pioneering close studies of these changes include Ifitkhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South East Asia*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010; Ming Tiempo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010; and Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.

[43] Achille Mbembe, "Flow: What Does Africa Name?" in *Flow*, ed. Christine Y. Kim, New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2008; Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, chapter 10, "Our Others: The Beauty of the Animal."

Cultural models distributed by the colonizer will seek to set artistic agendas, but open perspectives enable us to see that such impacts were often matched by re-deployment of those models in acts of counter-appropriation.[44] Examples from an artist's region, from proximate localities, colonized or not, may have been as formative, if not more so, than those emanating from the major centers. Comparative regional art histories are, therefore, urgently needed.[45] On the other hand, regional identification, when it is externally-imposed—as, say, a presumption that art from Asian, African, China, or Central Europe should deal with issues of identity relevant to the region's relationship to the West—can distort the nature of the work of artists whose practice is in fact based in one country or in a city or a locality, or is, in their view, entirely personal.[46]

What we need from historians and critics are better narratives of the development of art during modern times in every art-producing center or region, and of the shifts from modern to contemporary art, when they occurred, and as they are doing so now. I made a start on this while devising the structure of *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, a survey of the ways in which the kinds of art produced in each region of the world became contemporary during the later years of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first. As I noted in the introduction:

> Organizing the book in this way is the result of some hard choices about how modern and contemporary art relate to recent geopolitical history, the volatility of which has led to incessant conflict between peoples with different world-pictures and distinct senses of their place in the world. Much of this conflict is traceable to a failure to understand the intricate connections between the local and the global in a planetary sense—that is, an inability to think regionally in

[44] As theorized by Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, and Partha Mitter, "Reflections of Modern Art and National Identity in Colonial India: An Interview," in Mercer, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, 24-49.

[45] To date, few have been attempted, but interest in such projects is growing. Curators and artists have led this effort, beginning with the region emphasis of the Bienal de la Habana since 1986, and continuing through such projects as East Art Map. Art historians include John Clark, *Asian Modernities: Chinese and Thai Art Compared, 1980 to 1999*, Sydney: Power Publications, 2010; and Anthony Gardner, *Mapping South: Journeys in South-South Cultural Relations*, Melbourne: The South Project, 2013.

[46] John Clark, "Asian Modern and Contemporary Art," *Oxford Art Online*.

> the context of a vision of the needs of the planet and all who live upon it. No one pretends that this is easy to do.[47]

I drew on the work of human geographers Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, especially their book *The Myth of Continents*.[48] They suggested that if one pays attention to historical processes rather than imagined civilizational traits, to assemblages of ideas, practices, and social institutions (that is, cultures) while acknowledging but not privileging political dominance and subordination, and to the interaction between peoples in each region as much as their internal relationships, a useful picture of regionality in the world can be drawn.

These considerations were helpful in arriving at the structure of my book, one that largely treats art as it is produced at localities within regions, and—following the impact of the forces of globalization, decolonization, and those within contemporaneity—between and across these regions. The first section explores how contemporary issues were pivotal to the critical practices of late modern artists in EuroAmerica. I traded off the risk of prioritizing "the West" against a frank acknowledgement of the predominance of Western centers during that period, which I take to be historical fact. The main body of the book, however, traces the evolution of indigenous, traditional, appropriative, and modernizing tendencies in the art of the major world regions, especially as these intertwined during the twentieth century, and above all as they provided platforms (or not, in some cases) for the emergence, or appearance, of a contemporary art in each region. Geopolitical realities in each region usually meant that one or two countries played a leading role in culture, although of course that changed over time. Within countries, certain cities or areas were prominent, and operated as centers for internal regions. Exchanges usually occurred between artists and arts organizations based in these cities: regional ones often, but more so during the modern period between these cities and those of the relevant Western colonizing power. Decolonization, earlier and more so than globalization, has been vital to the possibility of contemporary art as a world wide phenomenon, although of course neoliberal globalization has also pervaded artworlds everywhere, as it has most spheres of life.

---

47 Terry Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, London: Laurence King; Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2011, Introduction.

48 Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

In tracing the evolution of these artistic changes, I noted important differences between the kinds of art made possible within the conditions created by different colonizing purposes and procedures, some of which continue to resonant today. Settler colonies such as those established on the North American and Australasian continents—that is, colonies where European modes of life were established and indigenous peoples were quickly reduced in numbers—differed from those, such as Brazil and Argentina, which became independent nations during the period of modern nation-state creation in Europe. Despite their geographic location at some, often considerable, distance from their imperial center, these nations were substantively part of "the West" during the modern period, and remain so. Yet the provincialism dynamic operated strongly for them, highlighting their thirst for coevality, for recognition on all sides of their contemporaneous particularity as well as their ability to contribute to the growth of shared cultures and, since the Bandung Conference of 1954, to solutions to worldwide problems.

Substantial differences are to be noted within Africa, between the Francophone and Anglophone colonies, and between countries within each block. The mobile borders of Europe have been, in recent years, as volatile as the nations constituting its core, with the idea of contemporary art (not least via the Soros Centers) playing interesting roles during the implosion of the Soviet sphere and the expansion of the European Union. The complexity of development in the different parts of Asia defies brief description, but it can be traced with care. In some regions, such as the Middle East and much of North Africa, modern art was rare, and mostly confined to male practitioners, but contemporary art has enabled women artists from the region to become the most internationally prominent.

The Western, provincializing fiction has had the effect of excluding the possibility that Indigenous art might, in certain circumstances, be a modern art practice. Typically, it is often regarded as tribal, pre-modern, or timeless. The process at the core of colonization, everywhere in the world, is that the colonizers regard the colonized, particularly if they are Indigenous peoples, as survivors from an earlier era, as anachronisms, as non-contemporaneous contemporaries. Time itself will inevitably erase them: why not, then, speed it up a little, subject them to temporal cleansing? Against this, the struggle of Indigenous peoples is to outlive modernity by becoming contemporary, while at the same time maintaining traditional values that are regarded as indispensable, values important to peoples for whom the world is not only secular but also spiritual. To do this success-

fully under conditions of extreme precarity, it is not enough to simply demand the right to do so, or to work out how to live a divided life. It becomes necessary to try to change the terms of the equation, to persuade the more powerful to try to reimagine their world as a world in which people who live differently are also genuine contemporaries—people who *belong* to the same time as you. This has been the mute appeal of Indigenous art ever since it was consciously made in forms legible to others, and on formats that they could take away. In Australia, for example, this begins on Melville Island in 1870.[49]

Debates about this question have developed further in Australia than anywhere else, so let me introduce this topic by reference to them. Ian McLean has argued that, since white settlement in 1788, Australian Aboriginal artists have made continuous adjustments and accommodations to European/settler imposed modernity, and that their art is, therefore, a kind of "modernism."[50] Aboriginal adjustment certainly can be considered as one among what are currently understood as "multiple modernities," but doing so is subject to the cautions I have been issuing in this article. It was, in fact, rarely named "modern," perhaps because, as was the case with art from Africa, EuroAmericans could not conceive indigenous peoples as modern in any sense except to their detriment. Instead, in European art market sales, book titles, etc., the output from Africa, Oceania and Australia was designated as "traditional" or "contemporary." This has led McLean to also argue, provocatively, that Aboriginal art is, in this sense, the first contemporary art.[51] These are complex matters, requiring careful exploration, which has been undertaken for some decades by scholars in many parts of the world, but is only beginning to be seen in global contexts.

Ruth B. Phillips rightly insists that tracking the artistic trafficking between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures in this context has a particular importance, and a great relevance as to how we might understand the complex cross-cultural connections we have been mapping. Far from being a matter of formal

---

49 See Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, London: Phaidon, 1998.

50 Ian McLean, "Aboriginal Modernism in Central Australia," in *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers*, 72-93.

51 See Ian McLean, *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art*, Sydney: Power Publications, 2011, introduction. Actually, the usage is prior in relation to Africa in the early 1960s—see Ulli Beier, *Contemporary Art in Africa*, New York and London: Praeger, 1968, and art market nomenclature from the same period for "primitive" art.

exchanges between utterly distinct, slow-changing, monolithic cultural blocs, this trafficking is much more a case of contingent, individual encounters that actually occur often enough for a pattern to be discerned. "In all of these encounters we find the same triangulated pattern, which brings into dynamic association the de-territorialized western artist, the colonized and dispossessed native artist, and the modernist ideology of artistic primitivism," the last usually represented by a European scholar of the primitive arts, displaced due to the rise of fascism in Germany or, later, dissatisfaction with post-war consumerism.[52] Her examples include the artist Margaret Preston and the scholar Leonard Adam in Australia during the 1930s, Oscar Jacobsen and Kiowa artists in Kansas during the same decade, George Swinton and Inuit artists in the Artic in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and Ulli Beier and Suzanne Wenger at Oshogbo, Nigeria, during the early years of independence. While inequity attends all such encounters, mutuality was their currency, and certain shared benefits emerged in each case, not least for the Indigenous artists. In many societies, these have grown—in some cases, such as in Australian Aboriginal art, they have become sustainable settings for the production of a contemporary Indigenous art.

Trying to decide whether Indigenous art is "traditional," "modern," or "contemporary" might sound like a haggling over words, or a petty debate about the correct art critical term to apply to the case. But our entire discussion has demonstrated that there is much more at stake. The breakthrough achievement of artists such as Emily Kame Kngwarreye and El Anatsui may amount to something more than innovations in the history of art. If we take seriously the deepest challenges of what I have called the current condition of contemporaneity, there are profound implications here not only for EuroAmerican-style modernity—including the versions being pursued in Asia and elsewhere at the moment—but also for the life-worlds that have precipitated the transnational transition. The latter includes Australian Aboriginal spirituality, Native American art, and Indigenous art throughout the world. The seismic shifts in the nature of human being on the planet—not just the after-effects of colonization, bad as they are—that we are experiencing today is undermining all singular, essentialist world-views, ways of life, and art practices.

52 Ruth Phillips, "The Turn of the Primitive: Modernism, The Stranger, and the Indigenous Artist," in *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers*, 47.

Profound questions about the nature of human world being after the time of the West are raised by the persistence, indeed, growth of indigenous arts and cultures in world circumstances that seem to be less and less propitious. We are alerted to a deep challenge, one that has always existed but which, today, in contemporary circumstances, is on the surface of everyday experience, and is written large across the scenarios of our world picturing. We are face-to-face with the foundational fact of cultural incommensurability inside our shared humanity, and are, at the same time, exposed, without alibi, to the end of the possibility of universality for all models of individual differentiation within social formations. Actually, this leaves issues of "the West" and "the Rest" in the dust—quite literally, when it comes to global warming, in the coal dust, smog, and storm surges. Such a profound undermining of modern models of globality calls on us to imagine our being on this planet in new, complex, contemporary ways. Does the art that we admire today signal to us the tragic implosion of modern pasts, the dazzling array of contemporist presentism, or the breaking through to a necessary, planetary mutuality? I strongly suspect that it is doing all three of these things, at once, differently but contemporaneously.

The Contemporary Supersession of Modernism

The conference organizers at Cambridge elaborated their first proposition about reimagining modernism cited above into a second, as follows:

> As postmodernism has taken its place in history so we are obliged to rearticulate the notion of the "contemporary" once again. This conference explores the ways in which doing so requires us to revisit the putative supersession of modernism, examining what types of relations may be found between modernist and contemporary transnational artistic practices. Does the development of a transnational history of artistic modernism reflect the ascendancy of a genuinely postcolonial disciplinary moment, one that surrenders the idea of Western exceptionalism? Is there a risk that we are witnessing a reorientation of scholarly priorities in step with the type of selective "denationalization" pursued by global capital, one that preserves deep, if no longer uniform, structural inequities between the global North and South, West and East, while continuing to rely

> on the power of particular nation states as its guarantor? In the name of what present, then, is the past to be reimagined?[53]

Yes, of course there is this risk, in everything that we do, in no matter what sphere of life, as global capital seeks to continue its dominance, not only of the economic management of our lives but of our imaginations. Against this, I have been arguing that if you continue to return every change in contemporary art to some kind of modernism, however elaborated, updated, decolonized, or contemporized, you will fall short of grasping the complexities of the present. Worse, you condemn contemporary art to suspended animation in what the RAQs Media Collective call "modernity's waiting room," an immobilized space, one that immobilizes all who enter it, a place of waiting for the next great art unifier, the next really big art story. Here, postmodernism meets post-Marxism in a shared melancholia. But the big story is that there is no big story: no new trains have come for decades. A real modernist would say that none of consequence have appeared since the 1960s.

The upshot is that, while these questions certainly move us along from the catch-up modernisms model, they risk bringing us only to a kind of altermodernism, an international modernism of the others.[54] Is that all there is to transnationality? Or, to dilute the mix still further, what is this art, or wider aesthetic, that challenges "the imagined community of the nation or region as the basic unit of artistic territorialisation, focusing instead on diverse, networked artistic communities that are understood to cohere at a transnational and/or transregional level, often with particular global cities as their enabling nodes"? This formulation, from the Cambridge conference organizers, shares language with the elite corps of any global corporation, but is intended to evoke the critical ideal of cross-cultural exchange underlying Mercer's "cosmopolitan modernisms." He asks: "Could 'the cosmopolitan' serve as a conceptual tool capable of cutting through the congested, and often confusing condition created by the competing vocabularies?'[55] Not, I suggest, if it remains tied to modernism as the most val-

---

53 Luke Szkrebowski and Devika Singh, *Reimagining Modernism, Mapping The Contemporary: Critical Perspectives on Transnationality in Art*, CRASSH conference, Churchill College, Cambridge University, September 22-3, 2013.

54 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Altermodern: Tate Triennial 2009*, London: Tate Publishing, 2009.

55 *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, 9.

ued art noun. Meskimmon and Papastergiadis explore a more open approach, one more closely related to contemporary concerns about world connectivity.[56]

A confusion of terms has indeed come to characterize the efforts of theorists wishing to identify the key aspects of contemporary art. "Global art" today can be understood as art that serves the dominant neoliberal international order, specifically the spectacular works generated by international competition between artists competing for market prominence.[57] A variant is "biennale art," which describes artworks distorted by the obligation to represent your country by creating a striking art souvenir. In contrast, some see "global art" more positively as the art of a decolonized "globality."[58] Pakistan-born British artist Rasheed Araeen has for decades argued for the recognition of the innovations of Afro-Asian artists in Western societies, and offered trenchant objections to generalizations such as "the new internationalism."[59]

In the face of impending planetary catastrophe, some artists and commentators are asking how art might contribute toward the development of the kind of connected imagination that could enable humans to survive extinction. The term "world art," like "world music," rightly receives the opprobrium of having been a North Atlantic universal of the worst kind. It certainly does have a history in modern European art discourse of identifying art from the rest of the world, outside of Europe. A deeper, longer history is its use among art historians and

56 Marsha Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination*, London: Routledge, 2010; and Nikos Papastergiadis, *Cosmopolitan Cultures*, London: Polity, 2012.

57 Some commentators welcome this, for example, (*Global Art*, eds. Silvia von Benningsen, Irene Gludowacz, and Susanne van Hagen (Ostfildern: Hatje Kantz, 2009). Others, whose views I share, are intensely critical of it: Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; reissued as *Contemporary Art: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

58 *The Global Contemporary: The Rise of New Art Worlds after 1989*, eds. Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg, Peter Weibel, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press for ZKM, Karlsruhe, 2013. This exhibition/publication was the culmination of their important Global Art and the Museum project, see http://www.globalartmuseum.de/site/home. See also Nancy Adajania, "Time to Restage the World: Theorising a New and Complicated Sense of Solidarity," in (ed.), *21st Century: Art in the First Decade*, ed. Miranda Wallace, Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, 2010, 222-29.

59 Rasheed Araeen, "New Internationalism, or the Multiculturalism of Global Bantustans," in *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. Jean Fisher, London: Kala Press, 1994.

museum curators as signifying *all* of art *of* the known world. More recently, it is gaining sense as designating "worldy art, that which is coming *from* a rapidly decolonizing and globalizing world.[60] Whether, and how, contemporary art may be *for* a world to come is, I have argued, its most burning question.

Faced with the daunting challenges of being accountable to this array of complexities, it is understandable (but not excusable) that some might seek refuge in the individual artist "solution." Mercer, for example, says of his *Alternative Art Histories* series, that

> Rather than seeking to fulfill an ideological programme for a totally "inclusive" global art history—whatever that might be—the creative ambition for the series is to bring together research and scholarship that foregrounds attention to individual artists and the institutional contexts in which their ideas and works were forged.[61]

Yes, we must focus on particular works by individual artists or groups, and on the specifics of the immediate contexts in which they were created, but not leave open the gap between that focus and something as vague and distant as "global art." What Mercer probably had in mind was perhaps something like "the art of the modern world," rather than "global art" as it is understood in contemporary circumstances, where the idea of "globalization" is operating as a North Atlantic universal. I have no doubt that we share the view that connecting the dots within and between individual artists, groups, localities, nations, and regions is what is required of art history now, not a retreat into particularism. One thing that has retreated, within the terminological babble just described, is modernism.

Contemporary Art, Incorporating Re and Neo-Modernisms

The core *art historical* idea in my recent writing is the claim that a worldwide shift from modern to contemporary art was prefigured in the major movements

[60] See, for example, *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, eds. Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme, Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008. See also *World Art*, eds. George Lau, Daniel Rycroft, Veronica Sekules 1/1 (March 2011): "Editorial"; and *Humanities Research Journal*, Australian National University, Canberra, XIX/2 (2013), special issue on "The World and World-Making in Art," including the editors' "Introduction," 1-10, and my "Worlds Pictured in Contemporary Art: Planes and Connectivities," 11-26. Wood, *Modern Art and the Wider World,* also favors a form of world art studies.

[61] *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, 8.

in late modern art of the 1950s and 1960s in EuroAmerica, and became explicit in artworld discourse there during the 1970s and 1980s. Postmodernist practice was an important signal of this change, postmodern and poststructuralist theory its first analysis. A market phenomenon in the major centers during the 1990s, contemporary art was at the same time expanded, but also divided, by art emergent from the rest of the world. Since then, contemporary art everywhere has engaged more and more with spectacle culture—with image-saturated commerce, globalized lifestyle, and social media—and with anxieties caused by political volatility and climate change. These developments flow through the present, thus shaping art's imaginable futures—in the short term at least.[62]

Unlike the art styles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these changes from modern to contemporary art were not a monopolizing phenomenon that spread outwards from a predominant center, or set of centers. Rather, as I suggested above, and showed in *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, they occurred at different times and in distinctive ways in each cultural region and in each art-producing locality.[63] I have been arguing throughout this article that the histories specific to each place should be acknowledged, valued, and carefully tracked alongside recognition of their interaction with other local and regional tendencies, and with the waxing and waning of more powerful regional and

62 Terry Smith, *Sodobna umetnost in sodobnost [Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity]*, ed. Aleš Erjavec, Ljubljana: SDLK, Slovensko društvo likovnih kritikov [Slovenian Society of Art Critics], 2013.

63 In her "By Whose Rules? Contemporary Art and the Geography of Art Historic Significance," *Artl@s Bulletin* 2/1 (2013): Article 8, Anna W. Brzyski offers an excellent discussion of how modern, and indeed modernist, modes of art historical thinking about what it is for art to be "con-temporary" (with time, up-to-date, modern) on the part of artists and art historians in Europe since the late nineteenth century have persisted into the frameworks within which some historians of contemporary art perceive certain forms of art made today as contemporary while dismissing the rest. She summarizes my "discussion of contemporary art as an art of contemporaneity, a concept which acknowledges the impact of geography on the perception of time, postulates, in effect, the existence of different art-time zones—different geographic temporalities or ways of being in time, which are configured by unique local conditions and histories—all of which, nevertheless, give rise to contemporary art that is recognizable as contemporary." This is accurate, up to the "nevertheless," a move I do not make, and would not, precisely for the reason she adduces: it would imply that "local art histories can be woven together into a narrative that terminates everywhere in contemporary art." Not so, as I show, in *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, to be the case everywhere, and as she correctly points to in her article with reference to the minority status of contemporary art within the art scene in China today.

international art-producing centers. Applied retrospectively, and with due regard for the cautions issued above that they were not only or most significantly modernist, but were, rather, multiple in character, this approach is, as we have noted, leading to greatly enriched histories of the art actually made throughout the world during the modern period. Complexity within modernity itself laid the groundwork for the diversity that we now see flowing through the present. But contemporary difference is different from that which prevailed during the modern period.

When seen on a world scale, or from a worldy perspective, present art practice is shaped not only by persistent modernisms—those from the Western centers, but also, and increasingly, by continuity from the multiple modernities that we have been reviewing. Even more so, both quantitatively and qualitatively, contemporary art is shaped by various transformatory indigeneities, by renovations of continuing traditional practices, by ongoing Modern art cultures (as distinct from modernist ones), by highly evolved forms of critical, postcolonial (that is, decolonizing) art, and by new forms of contemporary creativity. All of these, together, constitute "contemporary art." Their volatile interweaving is how art became fully contemporary, how the seismic shifting from modern to contemporary art occurred.

What, then, are the different kinds of art that coexist in contemporary conditions? As a core *art critical* idea, I have argued, in *Contemporary Art: World Currents* and other recent publications, that three strong currents may be discerned within the extraordinary quantity and seemingly limitless diversity of art made since around 1989. *Remodernist*, *retro-sensationalist*, and *spectacularist* tendencies fuse into one current, which continues to predominate in EuroAmerican and other modernizing art worlds and markets, with widespread effect both inside and outside those constituencies. Against these, a second current has emerged, especially from previously colonized cultures: art created according to nationalist, identarian, and critical priorities. It came into prominence on international circuits such as biennials and traveling temporary exhibitions: this is the art of *transnational transitionality*. For many of the artists, curators and commentators involved, it has evolved through at least three discernable phases: a reactive, anti-imperialist search for national and localist imagery; then a rejection of simplistic identarianism and corrupted nationalism in favor of a naïve internationalism; followed by a broader search for an integrated cosmopoli-

tanism, or worldliness, in the context of the permanent transition of all things and relations. The third current cannot be named as a style, a period, or a tendency. It proliferates below the radar of generalization. It results from the great increase in the number of artists worldwide and the opportunities offered by new informational and communicative technologies to millions of users. These changes have led to the viral spread of small-scale, interactive, do-it-yourself art (and art-like output) that is concerned less with high art style or confrontational politics and more with tentative explorations of temporality, place, affiliation, and affect—the ever-more-uncertain conditions of living within contemporaneity on a fragile planet.

Each of the three currents disseminates itself (not entirely, but predominantly) through appropriate—indeed, matching—institutional formats. Remodernism, retro-sensationalist and spectacularist art are usually found in major public or dedicated private museums, prominent commercial galleries, the auction rooms of the "great houses," and the celebrity collections, largely in or near the centers of economic power that drove modernity. Biennials, along with traveling exhibitions promoting the art of a country or region, have been an ideal venue for postcolonial critique. These have led to the emergence of a string of new, area-specific markets. The widespread art of contemporaneity appears rarely in such venues—although some of it doubtless will, as the institutions adapt for survival and certain artists make their accommodations—preferring alternative spaces, public temporary displays, the net, zines and other do-it-yourself-with-friends networks. There is, of course, no exclusive matching of tendency and disseminative format. Just as crossovers between what I am discerning here as currents are frequent at the level of art practice, connections between the formats abound, and artists have come to use them as gateways, more or less according to their potential and convenience.

While these currents are contemporaneous at present, how might we imagine them changing, in themselves, in relation to each other, in response to as yet unpredictable new currents and even less predictable changes to the complex flows of art in the world? A small flutter of excitement occurs every few years as a critic, a curator, or a group of artist somewhere announces that modernism's time has come again (as I predicted at the end of my entry in the *Dictionary of Art*, perhaps without sufficiently underscoring the ironic tone that I intended). Since modernism and modernity have dipped below the art historical and onto-

logical horizon, however, these moments occur as revivals, that usually replay one or two aspects of an earlier artist's strategy and, with more or less (usually less) intensity, mix these repeats with a contemporary strategy. Discerning a "Neo-Modern" or "neo-formalist" tendency in recent art shown in New York, Brooklyn-based art critic David Geers suggests that artists such as Mark Grotjann, Josh Smith, Gedi Sibony, for example, "might juxtapose a modernist look with a material process, counterbalancing aesthetic delectation with ascetic denial."[64] Such strategies have been staple in art schools throughout the West for decades, and now predominate in art fairs, not least because they make ideal, small, saleable packages. Geers correctly sees this as a tendency that "greets a pre-primed spectator, already indoctrinated into the codes and mythologies of the modern, who happily welcomes it as a return to old certainties—an echo of a lost golden age."[65]

Neomodernist moments are simply the most contemporary instances of the remodernist self-renovation that continues to drive the first of the currents I have discerned. It prevails, still, in the major art market and museum centers of the world, but is historically residual and will eventually fade. The second current, that of transnational transition, took shape due to local necessities but was also, everywhere, a reaction to the dominance of EuroAmerican art. It has come to prominence relatively recently, and will, I believe, prevail as the major shaper of the world's art for some time. Looked at on the level of an ontological exchange, there is a dialectical antagonism in operation between these two currents, because both are products of modernity's inner historical logic, itself dialectical. But the third current is emergent and will increasingly set the terms of what will count in the future. We already know that these terms will be different in kind from those first formed during modern times. History is one such term: less and less is it understood as linear and unidirectional, a matter of periods that succeed each other. Even the residual, dominant, emergent layering on which I am relying is losing force as a form of explanation. It contests with a contemporary kind of historical consciousness, one that begins from the present and travels back and forth in time and across space, seeking to visit the present of particular places in the past or the future, hoping to participate in their contemporaneity—which, it is anticipated, will be different from that of today, not because it is an

[64] David Geers, "Neo-Modern," *October* 139 (Winter 2012): 10.

[65] *Ibid.*, 14.

earlier moment in an unfolding narrative of human development, but because, like all contemporary moments, it is what it is.

Note: This essay was written while a Clark Fellow at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts, Spring 2014. I thank my fellow Fellows, especially Ruth B. Phillips, for their conversations, and Thadeus Dowad for research assistance.