



## Karatani, continued from page 1

of exchange, whereas Marxists generally start from the capitalist and proletariat, the mode of production. You can see how Uno paved the way to my theories. But it is true that he did not give any thought to the state and the nation.

This is all to indicate our Marxist current, where I formed my ideas and thoughts. Actually, I learned Uno's economics not because I was a Marxist, but because I was a student in an economics department. Up to 1970s, Uno's reading of Capital was compulsory to the students of law and economics at the University of Tokyo. These students were expected to be the elites in the government offices and business world. It is interesting to think that people who learned from Uno about the fatal fragility of capitalism were gathering at the core of the capital-state, just when Japan's industry was rising and overwhelming the U.S. industry. And as those who learned American market-economy theories replaced them, Japan's economy began to fall off!

**BH and HS:** Describe the two "transcritical" political breaks that lead you to write *Transcritique* after the collapse of the Soviet Union and proceed to study modes of exchange after 9/11. What makes Kant necessary for understanding Marx and the history of Marxism in the first place?

**KK:** To me it was not just a theoretical matter. As soon as I finished writing the book, I started a social movement called New Associationist Movement, or NAM. This move in some ways reveals my aims and intentions of writing *Transcritique*, especially on the level of practice. Fredric Jameson commented on the book as follows: "New relations between Kant and Marx are established as well as a new kind of synthesis between Marxism and anarchism." This really captures it all.

I returned to the relationship between Kant and Marx after September 11 of 2001 for the following reasons: In the late 1990s, movements against global capitalism occurred here and there. I wrote *Transcritique* with a sense of optimism of that period, which however was broken by September 11 and persecutions followed by it. I felt that the international movements were destined to split. In fact Al-Qaeda seemed like the perfect example of what Hardt and Negri called the "multitude's revolt." But after the attacks, it had to be excluded from the "multitude." What happened to Al-Qaeda was not exceptional, and other international movements against capital and the state are also to be disrupted and disconnected somehow or the other. Are there ways to evade it?

In retrospect Marx, as well as Bakunin, was keenly aware that the socialist revolution ought to be simultaneous world revolution. That is why they formed the International. But simultaneous world revolution became impossible after the 1870s, with the advent of imperialism. The glory and misery of the Paris Commune denotes it. Marx objected to the anarchists' uprising in Paris first, although later he wrote an homage to it. This was because in his view, revolution in a single nation was sure to be crushed by the neighboring nations. If so, how can a simultaneous world revolution be possible after the imperialist period? The idea of simultaneous world revolution still remains today, but only as a slogan. Marxist or anarchist, the Left only holds on to a groundless belief that revolts in various parts of the world will be connected spontaneously in the course of nature.

Faced with these questions, I began to think about Kant again. I noticed that Kant actually conceived the idea of a federation of nations [free states] much earlier than the French Revolution of 1789, which indicates that his "Perpetual Peace" (1795) was not just a pacifist plan as it is commonly perceived. Despite his ardent support for Rousseauian civil revolution, he was concerned that if it happened in a single nation, it would surely be frustrated by armed intervention by other states. It was with this concern in mind that he proposed a federation of nations. This federation was conceived as a civil revolution, so to speak. In my wording, Kant proposed it not for mere pacifism's sake, but for simultaneous world revolution. Perpetual peace for Kant means abolishing all hostility among the nations. This is nothing other than abolishing all states. And since a state exists vis-à-vis other states, revolution to abolish the state by definition fails if it takes place in a single nation.

Seen in this light, Kant deserves to be called a precursor of simultaneous world revolution. Here Kant and Marx overlap again. Two world-historical events occurred around the time of World War I: the Russian Revolution, based on Marx's ideas, and the formation of the League of Nations, based on Kant's ideas. We should not ask which is more important. Both are necessary and should not be separated. They both fail because they lack each other. In simultaneous world revolution, we shall see them combined.

**BH and HS:** As you explain in the introduction to *The Structure of World History*, creating a total system of analysis became necessary after engaging with Hegel. What motivated your turn to Hegel? How did your previous turn to Kant inform your turn to considering Hegel?

**KK:** I did not like the Hegelian systemic type of thinking almost by temperament. Actually one of my aims in *Transcritique* was the deconstruction of Hegelian logic. But toward the end of completion of the book, I noticed that my theory resembles the Hegelian system. Hegel too grasped the trinity of capital, nation, and state dialectically in his *Philosophy of Right*. Marx in turn criticized this as idealistic and put it upside down, breaking this trinity down into the economic base and the superstructure. State and nation were disposed into the superstructure. The state and nation belong in the superstructure, along with philosophy and literature. But unlike the latter, the former directly stems from the economic base. It is clear when you see it from the perspective of modes of exchange.

Through introducing the concept of mode of exchange, I conceptualized the capital-nation-state. I realized that I returned to Hegel in a way. By the same token, I understood why Marx, who was a critic of Hegel, employed Hegel's Logic amazingly faithfully as the framework of Capital. This was necessary for Marx to

reveal the whole process as to how commodity exchange was transformed into a gigantic system of capitalism. My attempt was to do the same but about all four modes of exchange instead of just one, and moreover to clarify their relationships. For this kind of attempt, a systematic approach is indispensable. I even wonder about the similarity between my mode D and Hegel's "Absolute Geist." But of course, just as Capital differs from Hegel's Logic, my book differs from Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*.

**BH and HS:** What makes your Kantian parallax different from the Hegelian dialectic? Does the Kantian parallax view offer us a way to critically understand and change society in the present that we lose with a consideration of the dialectic of history in capitalism?

**KK:** I quoted the metaphor of parallax view from Kant's earlier work "Dreams of a Spirit-Seer," in order to elucidate his dialectics in *Critique of Pure Reason*. Hegel remarked that Kant enumerated four examples of



Anti-nuclear protest in Yoyogi Park in Tokyo in July 2012.

antinomy, but in truth contradictions are innumerable and everywhere, and they all can be sublated, if treated dialectically. But I think what Kant meant by "antinomy" is not the kind of contradiction that exists everywhere, but the kind that can never be resolved, no matter how dialectically you treat it. Having said that, the first and second antinomy can actually be resolved. The first antinomy goes like this, as you know: "Thesis: The world has a beginning in time and a limit in space. Antithesis: It is infinite as regards both time and space." According to Kant both thesis and antithesis here are false because it is possible to prove both sides are true. And today, mathematicians and physicists talk about something like the expanding infinite, that is to say, the space can in reality be both finite and infinite. Either way, this is resolvable.

Meanwhile, the third antinomy is of a different kind. In my view, this is the only true antinomy. It goes like this: "Thesis: There is freedom. Antithesis: There is no freedom and everything in the world is determined solely in accordance with laws of nature." Kant concludes that both are true and compatible. With this, Kant presented an antinomy that cannot be resolved.

I feel that Marx, just as Kant, identified a true antinomy in Capital—contradiction between use-value and exchange-value. According to classical economists, every commodity has both use-value and exchange-value. But unless commodities are exchanged with others, they cannot have exchange-value or use-value. Commodities that remain unsold are simply discarded. Mode of exchange C intrinsically accompanies such a risk. Marx called it the *salto mortale* (fatal leap) of commodity. This risk is ordinarily evaded by means of credit system, but eventually exposed as credit crunch.

Marx appears faithful to Hegel's logic in Capital more than anywhere else. But the difference is this: Whereas Hegel's "spirit" overcomes contradictions and realizes itself in the end, Marx's "capital" cannot overcome the initial contradiction (use-value and exchange-value) and retains inevitable crisis. In this regard, Marx's dialectics in Capital is akin to that of Kant's, not of Hegel's.

**BH and HS:** Though you warn against setting up a facile contrast between modes of circulation and modes of production, you've emphasized the mode of circulation and read history through it in your recent work. What do we gain from an analysis based on modes of circulation as opposed to production? Have the politics of consumption deepened our understanding of capitalism, and if so, how?

**KK:** Marxists have been giving priority to labor movement for overthrowing capitalism. I am not opposed to that. The problem is that the labor movement has become increasingly difficult at the production point for many reasons. Counterattacks on the behalf of capital is one of them. In Japan for example, the national railroad was privatized in the 1980s, so as to dismantle the mega-scale labor union, which was capable of staging a general strike at will.

Another reason is the change of working environments and conditions, caused by changes in the production process, introduction of IT, and other things. Now many people cannot find regular employment and are forced into temporary positions of various kinds. Workers have no common ground and cannot come together. The rate of unionization has decreased remarkably. Meanwhile, movements of citizens, consumers, and various minorities became active since 1960s. These people dismiss the labor movement as outdated. But, I do not agree. Is there anyone who is not a worker, among those citizens, consumers, or minorities? Well,

there must be, but not that many. Then, shouldn't we say that these movements are also labor movements in different forms?

Marx made an important remark in *Grundrisse*: capital accumulation (M-C-M') is not achieved by simply exploiting workers at the working place, but only when workers in total buy back their own products at the market. The majority of consumers are either workers or their family members. Hence, I thought, consumers are nothing but workers, standing at the process of circulation. People's location in network of relations is more important than who they are. Therefore consumers' movements are also a form of labor movement. These ought not to be separated.

For that matter, when I was staying in New York in the 1990s, I saw a group of people standing in front of a delicatessen in my neighborhood and calling for a boycott of the "sweatshop." The employees at the delicatessen were working as if nothing was going on. I later found out their strategy. If the employees were to demonstrate themselves, they risk losing their job. So other people come to demonstrate for them. And the employees demonstrate at other shops at other occasions. I found this very clever. After this, I encountered this style of demonstration several times at different places in the city. The boycott is usually understood as consumer movement, but actually it is also labor movement. The point is to fight in the place where it is easier to fight. In addition to that, consumer movement and labor movement should not be separated. They are more powerful when combined.

Social democrats say that with the state power they can control the capitalist economy, justly redistribute wealth, provide social welfare, and so on. But this is only possible at limited places and in limited periods. On top of that, all this remains as part of the mechanism of the trinity of capital-nation-state, and actually contributes to capitalism's survival. In order to overcome capitalism, we need different strategies. On the one hand, we need to struggle with capital and state, while at the same time creating spaces for our livelihood independent of capitalism.

In my manifesto "The Principle of NAM," I identified two types of struggles: internal and excentric. The former is to counter capital and the state within them; it is exemplified by the labor union and political struggle. The latter is to create non-capitalist economy; it is exemplified by cooperative and local currency. These two differ by nature, but can complement each other. We should employ them both at the same time.

**BH and HS:** I want to ask about your notion of historical repetition, that is, the idea that a certain phase of history may resemble a previous phase because of the persistence of the trinity of capital-nation-state, but in new configurations. For example, you argue that Bonapartism has returned in the present. But have the political problems that necessitated Bonapartism in Marx's day ever fundamentally changed? Does a stageist view of history clarify recognition of the more basic phenomenon of capital's reproduction and the task we have to master this?

**KK:** In the past I extensively dealt with Bonapartism in my writings. But I sort of grew out of this topic. Still, I am interested in the question of repetition of history that Marx discussed in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. There are two aspects: the repetition of the state and the repetition of capital. Repetition in history takes place in the same manner of Freud's "return of the repressed." In Rome, Caesar was assassinated. But, this led to the establishment of an emperor, boosting the police into an empire. It may be said that this process was repeated in modern France. The king was guillotined by the revolutionaries, but came back in a different form, as Napoleon, the emperor. This process was again repeated during the second French Revolution in 1848. Marx noted this repetition. Here, we should not overlook another kind of repetition that Marx pointed out—the economic crisis, which took place in 1851. This was another element that elevated Bonaparte from president to emperor.

In short, both state and capital involve some repetitive elements, and together they create historical repetition. Today I strongly feel historical repetition in East Asia is occurring. The current geo-political structure in East Asia was shaped by Sino-Japanese War (1894), which happened precisely one hundred and twenty years ago. This is, according to me, the approximate length of one cycle. The players involved here were China, Taiwan, North and South Korea, Japan, Okinawa (Ryukyu), and very importantly the U.S. and Russia as well.

It now appears as if we are on the brink of a war. I feel the need to understand this situation from the perspective of historical recurrence caused by the repetitiveness of capital and state. But I am critical of the people who

say that the 1930s is being repeated. In the 1930s China was split and Korea and Taiwan were totally colonized. In the 1890s, however, China was a huge empire, and Japan and the U.S. were complicit as imperialist states. Isn't it evident that the 1890s are similar to today more than the 1930s? Needless to say, similar crisis is taking place in the rest of the world. In my view, this situation is essentially about the old empires and modern imperialism. I tried to elucidate this in *Structure of World History*, and a recent book, *Structure of Empire*.

**BH and HS:** In *Structure of World History*, you agree that revolution must spread worldwide if it is to succeed. Many argue that Trotsky and Lenin made revolution in Russia so that it would spread to Germany and continue throughout the world. Was this their purpose? Were they mistaken to believe the revolution could have spread beyond Russia? If we were to view this as a genuine attempt at world revolution, albeit one that failed, does the failure make world revolution any more or less necessary in the present?

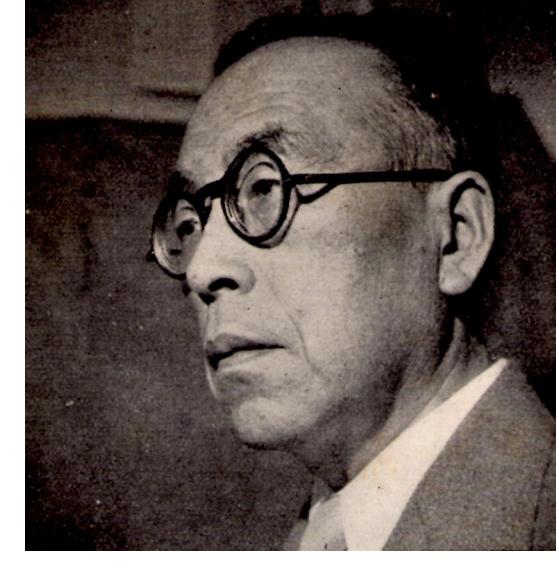
**KK:** I doubt if Trotsky and Lenin thought of the possibility of simultaneous world revolution seriously. After the February Revolution in 1917 there appeared two kinds of assemblies in Russia: the parliament and the soviet, which may be said to represent bourgeois democracy and proletarian democracy respectively. The Bolsheviks

were minorities in both. Then Trotsky and Lenin plotted the so-called October Revolution—practically a military coup—despite objection by all cadres of the Bolsheviks except Stalin. This coup did not only close the parliament but also gradually turned the soviet democracy into the Bolshevik's dictatorship.

What is more, the October Revolution was good news to Germany, whose military was therefore released from the Eastern Front. No doubt it delayed the revolution in Germany. Actually, Germany had helped Lenin to return to Russia from Switzerland for that purpose to begin with. So I don't think Trotsky and Lenin seriously expected the ensuing revolution in Germany. They probably anticipated it, but from different concerns. The revolution would certainly take place there as soon as Germany lost the war. But this prospect made them think of taking power in Russia in advance. They gave priority to their leadership and hegemony in the international revolutionary movement rather than the simultaneous world revolution. It is futile to think of the world revolution based upon Lenin or Trotsky. Nevertheless, I think the idea of the simultaneous world revolution should not be relinquished.

The *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel criticized Kant's idea of the federation of nations, for it only functions with the support of a powerful state, which is capable of punishing violations of international law. For Hegel, no hegemony (or world-historical state), no peace. Such a view is still popular. When the United Nations objected to the unilateralism of the U.S. policy concerning the Iraq War, an American neo-conservative ideologue criticized the UN and its supporters, dismissing them as merely expressing "Kantian Idealism."

Is Kant's federation of nations really an idealism, which lacks a footing of real power, military or financial? For sure, it is not based upon such powers, but it is not simply idealistic, either. It is based upon a different kind of power, although Kant himself did not specify what it is. The idea of the modes of exchange was indispensable for explaining this. I differentiated various kinds of powers, according to which mode of exchange it belongs to. For instance, political or military power is related to the mode of exchange B, and the power of money comes from the mode C. There is another power, which comes from mode A. That is the power of gifting. To take an example, in tribal society, if someone fails to return to the gift, that person is believed to be cursed. He or she is ostracized or expelled from the community, which was equal to death for them. In fear of such things, people never breach rules. In this kind of society, there is no need for punishment by the state. It may be said that the power of gift is the same as the power of community or public opinion. In this sense, the power of gift is not exclusive to the primitive society. The mode D, which is the mode A's restoration on the higher dimension, also has this power of gifting in abundance, but only in the higher form. You may call it the power of love, if you like. Perpetual peace or the world republic will be based upon this real power, which is far stronger than other powers.



Japanese Marxian economist Uno Kohzo in 1952. He is best known for his book *Principles of Political Economy: Theory of a Purely Capitalist Society*, published in 1964.

Let us suppose that one nation publicly renounces the right to wage war. No state can invade them, because if it does, it is sure to be blamed or ousted by the international community. Renunciation of military power brings real power to the nation, namely the power of gift or love. I think that the power that will bring the world republic into reality must be something like this. It is logically false to counter the state and capital by means of military power and financial power.

The Zapatistas, a guerrilla group in Chiapas, Mexico, conveyed their opinions and situations widely through the Internet and obtained support from various individuals and groups from all over the world, including the United Nations. This kept the Mexican government from intervening. It is often called a new revolution of the information technology era, but in my view its strength lay in the time-honored power of gifting or community. Another example is the so-called Third World movement in the '50s and the '60s, which without arms and money was able to stand up against the First and the Second Worlds. They resorted to the UN as Vijay Prashad vividly accounts in his *Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (2007). They must have been aware of the inherent power of the UN. That was the power of the gift, and the power of international community. It is true that the UN today has fallen under the domination of money and arms, so to speak. Nevertheless, it still has a good potential of being transformed into a Kantian federation of nations. For that purpose, countermovements against capital and state in each nation are also necessary. If the UN is to mediate these revolts, they will not be divided. Revolution in each nation will be unified and create a simultaneous world revolution. IP

## After the Beautiful, continued from pg 2

the conscience of the king, and because the need persists for that role still to be played, it must be art that continues to play it. Wherever there are recognizable deficits, which is to say wherever sovereign social and political authority remains blind to human need, it will be art that discloses those deficits, gives them intelligible form, and hence gives them the entitlement to a place in social space. It is art, in short, that is our main resource for imaging a way to tomorrow. But the only way I can see to build a bridge from Pippin's view that Hegel was wrong to see the political work of mutuality and recognition as completed to the thesis that art continues in its traditional cultural role is to presume that the specific and concrete operations of unjust social power remained fundamentally unchanged from the late eighteenth century to the present. To presume, in other words, that we still have kings, and that they still have consciences. (That our kings should have consciences is, of course, something Hegel explicitly denies). But were this true, it would mean that Hegel was wrong not only about the end of the significance of art in modern times; he would also have to have been wrong that secular modernity represents any fundamental change at all in the total shape of normative social life. The emergence of industrial capitalism, the attendant transformations of the status of paternal authority, the (also attendant) collapse of aristocratic authority over and by means of agricultural holdings, the shifting of centers of wealth in Europe from the countryside to the city, the emergence of republican governments, the expanding spread of the net of world trade, the development of self-conscious working class movements, the invention of forms of mass culture, the early development of self-conscious women's movements—in short, the transformations that make "modernity" a meaningful historical-political concept in the first place—would then make no difference to the question of what practices matter in bringing injuries to mutuality and recognition into the space of redress. Specifically, they would make no difference to the question whether art remained a material embodiment of spirit's self-reconciliation, as Hegel thought it was in earlier epochs of human history. This, I think, would be to treat the history of the institution of art not as historically shaped at all but rather as immune to historical shaping. It would make the significance of art, in its extraordinary indifference to the radical transformation of all other social norms, visible only from the point of view of eternity. And in this way, useless from the point of view of the needs of the present. This position, I think, would save art from historical oblivion by making it an historical ruin forevermore.

Now, the list of epochal changes in the preceding paragraph suggests a more general political point: The transformations characteristic of the emergence of modernity generate a specific form of life in which developments of universal significance persistently negate rather than fulfill the specific interests of the social actors who are their authors and bearers. Jointly, they entail that recognition and redress can no longer be conceived, from either a theoretical or practical point of view, as a matter of mutual address among individuals.

institution of art can come to an end that we can discern its specific cultural significance, its specific social and political functioning. This is not to deny that art after the end of art can have cultural significance other than the material embodiment of self-reconciling spirit. I will close my review of *After the Beautiful* by saying something more about that. But the social world in which the material embodiment of unacknowledged claims on mutual regard can be directed at a beholder—the world in which painting holds primacy among the visual arts—is past, for reasons having to do with the historical development of secular, capitalist modernity.

Now, even as I type this, I realize it is strange to be so insistent about the point, since at some level Pippin

Cézanne's late bather paintings could be understood as expressing the ever more limited possibilities of answering those questions, or perhaps intimations of the suspicion that they cannot be answered or that they can be answered only at the level of the shareability of a rather brutish meaning. . . . They are nevertheless extraordinarily powerful, effective paintings despite those limitations because Cézanne has found a way of keeping those questions alive, and so continuing to draw the beholder into the paintings and so into the questions. [129]

Effective as paintings but, given that the level of shared and embodied meaning is 'rather brutish', by which I

Only when art is seen as an element of spirit's self-crafting does its true cultural significance come before consciousness and our esteem for it as an institution arise. And this means: only when seen in historical perspective. Art's pastness is the frame historical consciousness puts around the institution of art in order to make its significance intelligible for, Hegel thinks, the very first time. In that sense, grasping art's pastness is necessary for it to have continuing cultural significance. (To put the point in brief: It would be strange for Hegel, a historical thinker through-and-through, to take an institution's pastness as a mark merely of the wanings of its significance and not also of its dawning.) This is



Paul Cézanne, Bathers, circa 1890.

must agree. Here I return to what I claimed above is Pippin's disavowed endorsement of Clark's thesis about the ruination of modernism. The centerpiece of Pippin's interpretation of Manet is a reading of the famous 'vacant stares' of Manet's figures from the 1860s on. In these vacant stares, Pippin sees an allegory of the condition of painting in general: Faces and/as surfaces that challenge the beholder to see what the painted figure being looked at cannot show, at least not in terms of the historical conventions for painting faces. The aesthetic

understand Pippin to mean a- or pre-social, nonetheless not effective, perhaps, as art? That 'perhaps' is, I suggest, all Hegel needs for the thesis that art is a thing of the past to take root, for in it the norms, on one hand, of art and, on the other, of mutuality and recognition part company. Indeed, that the norms have effectively divorced is evident in Pippin's concluding comment about Cézanne.

The paintings, all of them, the still lifes, the landscapes, and the figural paintings, exude such an immense self-confidence in the possibility of even a much more reduced or narrower frame within which Manet's questions can continue to be interrogated, and in the continuing distinctness and importance of such a unique form of visual or gestural intelligibility, that the mysteriousness of the paintings never evinces a hint of skepticism or despair. [129]

To my eyes Cézanne's paintings are far from self-confident and are suffused with melancholy and doubt. (I will not argue for the judgment here, but readers can get a sense of my thinking by comparing Cézanne's paintings to those of Raphael, Titian, Velázquez or even David.). But even if the paintings are self-confident, then even more so must we conclude that Cézanne had cleaved artistic and social intelligibility clean apart. For as Pippin observes in interpreting Manet's vacant gazes:

Intelligibility is a conceptual articulation that is an achievement of some sort...not being able to do this with any confidence is what it means for there to be no 'reconciliation of Geist with itself'...so the 'weakened presence' of animated subjectivity in those expressions is not a sign of some discovery about the absence of human subjectivity in favor of mere corporeal bodies but the failure of the historical world to allow for the realization of such subjectivity in the only way it can become actual. [57]

The greater the brutishness of the historical world, it appears, the greater the confidence of the painter who will not transcend it. Hegel's thesis about the end of art drives a wedge between painting and art in order to allow for the possibility that painting will continue even as art becomes a thing of the past. Continue as what? That remains to be seen. But in any case it seems to me that the thought that art is a thing of the past is indispensable for any account of the continuities and discontinuities in the history of modernist painting to make sense of modernist painting, as art or not.

Let me close by acknowledging that my insistence on the centrality of the thesis that art is a thing of the past to the interpretation of modernist painting will ring false to many readers of Hegel and Pippin. It is, after all, a common interpretation of Hegel that his point of in asserting that art is a thing of the past simply is to say that its significance has waned for us. But Hegel's point was, I believe, opposite to this. The significance of cultural forms becomes vivid to us, and their invaluable work vividly in danger of disappearing from consciousness, at the moment they are seen as retreating into the past, and this danger is the spark for criticism and philosophy. In the introduction to the lectures on aesthetics, Hegel says:

[The] point of view [in which consideration of the matter by the Understanding's abstract reflection is dissolved] is not only the reawakening of philosophy in general, but also the reawakening of the science of art; indeed it is this reawakening alone that aesthetics proper, as a science, has really to thank for its genuine origin, and art for its higher estimation.

what I think Hegel meant in the full expression of the thesis that art is a thing of the past: "Art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past." The 'remains'—which Pippin's shorthand version, 'art is a thing of the past', elides—matter. Art continues to press on us meanings and needs that have not been articulated and taken up in secular modernity, meanings and needs which therefore remain, in the present, in the past. As things of the past, they point to the future, but not the future in which they remain things of the past. With the force of compulsion, those broken-off meanings and unmet needs haunt beholders, like Manet's vacant gazes and Cézanne's brutish bathers, because they do not concede to the demands of reconciliation in the present. In that sense, perhaps they remain engines of spirit's reconciliation with itself, but only if they also remind us that the sphere in which spirit's self-reconciliation is worked out—the sphere of ethics and politics—has all along required that art become a thing of the past. Pippin writes that "Hegel did not sufficiently take into account the inherently irresolvable or perennial character of the problem of freedom, and because of that, he thought that something like the need for an 'intuitive' comprehension of the Absolute could be overcome" [65-66]. I would prefer to reverse that thought and say: Only when the need for an intuitive comprehension of the Absolute can be overcome can the problem of freedom in secular, capitalist modernity properly be posed. Only, that is, when art ceaselessly disgorges its meanings into the future can it be seen from the point of view of reconciliation. Seen, that is, from the point of view of an eternity that becomes visible to us only when we, in our present form, step to the side. The leading question for the politics of art in our historical moment is whether we can see in art not a fantastical achievement of mutuality and recognition but the possibility that, for us, all such achievements are nothing but fantastical. Only by keeping hold of the possibility that art is a thing of the past can the matter of art's fate have immediate significance in the here and now.

This, at least, is what I meant in urging that the question of art's future is inseparable from the possibility that it is—and remains—for us a thing of the past. IP

<sup>1</sup> Although I wouldn't gamble big money on my powers of recall, I cannot remember any discussion, aside from a few footnotes dealing with other critics and theorists, of any American painters. This matters not because it betrays any sectarianism on Pippin's part but because it leaves hanging the question: in which historical moment is the redemption of modernist painting supposed to be persuasive?

<sup>2</sup> Pippin cites Greenberg several times, but never this particular passage from 'Modernist Painting', a proof-text of sorts for Fried.

<sup>3</sup> For important contemporary work emphasizing the political nature of enduring modern problems of mutuality and recognition in Hegel, see Frank Ruda's *Hegel's Rabble: An Investigation into Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (Continuum, 2011) and Matt S. Whitt, "The Problem of Poverty and the Limits of Freedom in Hegel's Theory of the Ethical State," *Political Theory* 41 (2013): 257-284.

<sup>4</sup> This position is the starting point for Marx's own (Hegelian) project, which begins with a critique of Hegel's theory of the state.



Rembrandt, Self-Portrait with Two Circles, 1665-69.

als in a political space made unitary and coherent by a singular sovereign authority. For this reason, social space that is intrinsically contradictory—what we might, to capture the matter in a formula, call the space of capitalist modernity—threatens the address of art not so much with extinction as with irrelevance. But then again: if one thinks of the function of art as rectifying deficits of mutuality and recognition, perhaps irrelevance simply is the way art goes extinct by rendering itself serenely insensitive to historical-political change? Perhaps, in other words, art goes extinct by carrying on unchanged, thereby allowing us to indulge the fantasy of a mode of redress that is unavailable to us?

It is, I want to suggest, in order to block exactly this possibility that Hegel framed the thesis that art had become a thing of the past. Put another way: It is, for Hegel, only when we can frame the thought that the

work of painting, in this light, is to activate a refusal of intelligibility. That the refusal is potent in Manet is undeniable, and that that undeniability is connected to the recollection and repudiation of the conventions of painterly meaning that Manet is overturning cannot be gainsaid. But that it is refusal, and that refusal, even under the rubric of 'challenge', matters to the work of Manet's figuration, is central to Pippin's interpretation. "The striking gazes in Manet's paintings . . . raise at once the question of the point of modern easel painting and at the same time the possibility of social relations responsive to the challenge raised in the gazes, a challenge to the possible embodiment of mutually achieved meaning in sensible materiality" [129]. Is this not to say: Manet's paintings work as paintings only on condition that they run the risk of failing as art? And in the case of Cézanne the matter is even clearer, or at least more dire.

# After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism

Book review: Robert B. Pippin, *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism*. Chicago: University Press, 2013

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In one of the notebooks he kept between 1914 and 1916, Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote that "the work of art is the object seen from the point of view of eternity; and the good life is the world seen from the point of view of eternity. This is the connection between art and ethics." It is not hard to understand, Wittgenstein's enthusiasm to serve in the Austrian army notwithstanding, how the experience of civilization-destroying war would open up the question of eternity, of how distant a perspective we need to be able to see the ways and things of our world as redeemable, or even as worthy of redemption. It is of course an enduring temptation to the philosophical temperament to take what Thomas Nagel called the view from nowhere. But there is nothing quite like a disastrous outbreak of barbaric inhumanity to lend urgency to the question of perspective on the present moment—paradoxically, to give the question immediate significance in the here and now.

Philosophers and theorists of a critical bent never cease to work through this paradox. For us, the degree of urgency to see things not from the point of view of tomorrow, or the day after that, but from the point of view of eternity is a measure of the direness of the present, for it expresses how even a robust grip on today can sometimes still show us no plausibly human way forward. The humanly habitable point of view of eternity is the fantastical perspective generated out of the experience of the exhaustion of the value of all finite human perspectives. Like all good fantasies—of which, when one pauses to think about it, there are not that many—the point of view of eternity blasts open a space of criticism in the obdurately hostile present. Because, however, the very idea of an escape from history is shaped on all sides by the historical urgency that generates it, it is just as much as a symptom of its moment in history as a resource for criticism of it. In working through this paradox, the critical philosopher hopes to pry the prospect of justified life away from the point of view of eternity while nonetheless preserving for reflective thinking the possibility that no less philosophical point of view will make the present intelligible. The problem of how to take fantastical conceptions of what lies outside of the present as the present's most precious symptoms and therefore, suitably criticized, as the main resource for intelligently taking our immediate next steps was given its most tensile form in Hegel's conception of Absolute Knowing. I shall return to this below. But something of this tension is there even in Wittgenstein [who, at the time he wrote the note about art and ethics, was nobody's idea of an historically-minded critical thinker] when he identifies the work of art as embodying the perspective of eternity on 'the object'—as, in other words, depicting the object as already outside the flow of erosive time [or, we might say in another idiom, from the point of view of redemption]—yet still, given that the work of art is an intentional human product, insists on seeing it here and now. Perhaps all critical philosophers are in some measure ambivalent about the idea that there is a non-religious point of view of eternity. We want to be able to freeze the flow of history that never ceases to wash away all things of value; at the same time, since we, too, live in and make history, we do not want the things we value to be frozen away from us. We want to rescue what we love but for ourselves. Even when we take the long view, therefore, we cannot but feel that we may have already suffered the losses we had been aiming to stem.

There is a healthy dose of this ambivalence in *After the Beautiful*, a new book by Robert Pippin. Pippin is one of our foremost contemporary Hegelians, and those familiar with his canonical academic works *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* and *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture* will not be surprised by the general aims of *After the Beautiful*. In arguing that we should apply a Hegelian way of thinking to post-Hegelian visual art, Pippin aims to redeem the cultural and philosophical significance of modernist painting as one of our most valuable ways of making intelligible [and so, in line with the general claim of Modernism as a Philosophical Problem, also redressable] the ethical and political damages of modern life. But in an age in which the primacy of painting is no longer credible, this significance, Pippin knows, may well be lost to us. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that, at a level never made fully explicit in *After the Beautiful*, Pippin is drawn by a view of T.J. Clark's that, at the argumentative level, he is dead-set against: "Already the modernist past is a ruin, the logic of whose architecture we do not remotely grasp" (81). Caught between these two poles, Pippin must go to extraordinary lengths to deny the very history that has left the significance of modernist art in danger, if not in absolute ruins. At least this is what I shall argue below.

At first glance, my characterization of Pippin's broad aim will seem too grand to readers familiar with him only from *After the Beautiful*. This is a small book and its ambitions seem small-scale as well. Pippin begins by saying, "In the following, I deal with a very small fraction of the European and American visual art now more or less commonly identified as 'modernist,' itself a fraction of the poetry, novels, drama, music, dance and architecture also so classified" (1). And, in fact, even this is an overstatement of the historical reach of *After the Beautiful*, by the end of which Pippin has argued quite narrowly that we can make intelligible the aesthetic development of and within modernist European painting from Édouard Manet through Paul Cézanne from a Hegelian

point of view.<sup>1</sup> I call this ambition small-scale, however, not simply because Pippin's reach is limited; one might reasonably think making modernist European painting from Manet through Cézanne intelligible is reach enough! I do so rather because Pippin himself believes this work has already been done, largely by Clark [in his art-historical work prior to Farewell to an Idea, whence the quotation above] and Michael Fried, who is one of the dedicatees of *After the Beautiful*. Granted, neither Clark nor Fried avows himself Hegelian in Pippin's sense. That the force and rigor of Clark and Fried's positions can best be underwritten from a Hegelian point of view is, however, an essential part of Pippin's argument. For anyone interested in theoretically-minded art history, there are original and valuable insights to be gleaned from Pippin's reconstructions of the landmark accounts of modernist art by Clark and Fried. Still, I am not sure that anyone who already finds Clark and Fried to be important thinkers about artistic and aesthetic modernism will find them more interesting just in case they turn out to be Hegelians *après la lettre et malgré eux*. But this, I confess, is a minor matter. Pippin's working-through of the implicit Hegelianism of Clark and Fried is, in the end, a stalking horse for the real stakes of *After the Beautiful*, which have more to do with what a Hegelian philosophy of art must be and do to serve the redemptive ends Pippin sets his sights on. These stakes go deep enough to merit sustained reflection.

Beyond its critical reconstruction of Clark and Fried, *After the Beautiful* has two ambitions. They are, as will become apparent, intimately connected, but nonetheless can be teased apart.

(A) Pippin's first ambition is to establish, albeit in a philosophical voice, the claim of Clement Greenberg that "nothing could be further from the authentic art of our time than the idea of a rupture of continuity. . . . Lacking the past of art, and the need and compulsion to maintain its standards of excellence, Modernist art would lack both substance and justification."<sup>2</sup> In other words, Pippin aims to elaborate a critical and narrative structure in which modernist forms of painting that, to all appearances, have broken from the conventions of

aspiration toward an intimacy of mutuality and reciprocity that is, at its purest or most paradigmatic expression, love" (21). Love, as Hegel put it, is "a reconciliation of the spirit with itself." In love, spirit goes wholly out of itself toward the other and yet finds itself not lost but completed in otherness. And just as the articulation of love as mutuality and reciprocity—as, that is, essentially social subjectivity—was the task of Christian painting [Hegel's other name for romantic art], so, too, "modernist painting will begin to work out, in its uniquely aesthetic mode of intelligibility, the historical fate in modernity of the social subjectivity necessarily at issue in the painting's address to the holder" (22). In taking up this task, painting becomes modernist and thereby preserves, by reworking, the logic of social subjectivity central to Hegel's account of social norms in general, now stripped of its explicitly Christian underpinnings. Pippin claims, in a fashion licensed by a Hegelian understanding of how social norms are expressed in agents' actions, appearances, and addresses to one another in social space, that the transformations in the appearance of painting wrought by Manet and Cézanne are changes not in appearance alone. To the contrary, those transformations express the transformed social circumstances—call it the advent and early emergence of European modernity—in which the self-reconciling work of spirit perforce takes on new forms.

(B) Pippin's second ambition is to defend his effort "to project Hegel into the [GH: Hegel's] future" (35) against an especially glaring difficulty. For, whatever elements of Hegel's philosophy of art can be retrieved and redeployed for the task of making modernist art intelligible, the account cannot in the end be true to Hegel. Standing in the way is Hegel's notorious claim, made before Manet was even born, that "art is a thing of the past." On the face of it, Hegel's claim for a radical historical rupture between the art of the past and the art-like productions of his own time makes his philosophy of art rebarbative to any strong claims for the continuity of pre-modernist and modernist art. But as Hegel's philosophy of art is, for Pippin, our best guide to the historical and cultural significance of the art that came after him, Pippin must demonstrate that the key insights of Hegel can be prised away from the irreducibly retrospective point of view Hegel himself seemed to think made those insights possible. In other words, Pippin's deeper ambition is to unfreeze the core claims of Hegel's philosophy of art from Hegel's view that the great parade of art has passed—from, that is, Hegel's historicized version of the point of view of eternity.

In the rest of this review, I will focus on Pippin's critique of the thesis that art is a thing of the past. I have two reasons for this decision. First, as I hinted in my summary of Pippin's first ambition, I think it is in large part uncontroversial to treat art as a social product, irrespective of whether one is Hegelian or not. The part of the first ambition that is specifically Hegelian, and by no means uncontroversial, has to do with the role played by modernist art in the project of spirit's self-reconciliation. But I will touch on that theme in any case since the authority to play that role is exactly what Hegel is denying to the art of our time in claiming that art is a thing of the past. Pippin's strategy to deny Hegel's thesis that

means that art might have ended. That Hegel saw this challenge, with which we still struggle today, makes him one of the enduring figures of the philosophy of art.

If Hegel's thesis that art was over by the first third of the nineteenth century means there could be no significant painting afterwards, then, for Pippin's view that modernist painting is an art insofar as it is continuous with the painting of preceding centuries to be true, Hegel must be wrong. But Pippin does not try to re-enfranchise modernist art by directly criticizing Hegel's thesis about a fundamental break in the history of art. Rather, he gives a highly particular account of Hegel's extra-aesthetic, ethico-political motivation for positing the thesis in the first place. There are several variants of this argument in *After the Beautiful* and the variations matter, but I will quote one nearly in full to get to work.

[For Hegel, the] modern shape of spirit was a world of freedom realized, or reconciled social relations of persons who are free because they actually stand in relations of at least institutionally secured mutuality of recognition. We have reached a form of self- and other-understanding where there is nothing substantial left to be "worked out," no fundamental residual irrationality in the way we make claims on each other and about the world.

In a word—and I shall simply assume that this does not need to be argued—this is all clearly false as a claim about European modernity in the first third of the nineteenth century, and its being false means that the particular failure and partial success of the modern attempt at the realization of freedom would still require, in Hegel's own terms, an attempt at the sort of understanding just referred to: an objective embodiment and self-recognition, or the world of art. (37)

In other words: Hegel's thesis that art had become a thing of the past was driven, according to Pippin, not directly by an insight into fundamental changes in the norms of artistic intelligibility but instead by a specifically ethico-political conviction that there was no more work—or, at least, no more fundamental work—to be done, by art [or, for that matter, any other institution] to bring the unacknowledged and unsatisfied demands of mutuality and recognition before consciousness. It seems to me, however, more consistent with Hegel's political writings that they lead to a position that is, even if it seems on its face similar, in fact diametrically opposed in its implications. From the standpoint of Absolute Knowing, which has no truck with the idea than any facts of human sociality are merely given by nature but locates and treats them as products of human history, the problem of the unsatisfied demands of mutuality and recognition can never be solved once and for all. It is a cardinal achievement of Absolute Knowing—that's call it in this context secular modernity—that no system of norms can ever reasonably declare itself definitive, in the sense of fully adequate to the demands on mutuality and recognition the world continually throws up. This implies that problems of mutuality and recognition can now finally be seen to be concretely historico-political



Édouard Manet's *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* (The Luncheon on the Grass), 1863.

the history of painting that preceded them, can be seen to be engaged nonetheless—engaged, in fact, thereby—in the same project as those historical paintings. The critical and narrative logic that can best reveal how a rupture in the conventions and appearance of painting can be the means for painting to carry on its traditional cultural project under new and difficult conditions is, Pippin argues, essentially Hegelian. This logic has two component parts. The first, which I will take as an uncontroversial aspect of art-historical understanding as such, Hegelian and otherwise, is that, "normative change in the practice of art [can be made intelligible] by understanding . . . alterations within broader social, religious, and even philosophical changes" (34-35). The second part has to do more specifically with Hegel's view of painting: because "painting . . . is a romantic art and an address to the other, [it] has to embody an

art is a thing of the past is, in summary form, to demonstrate that Hegel's belief that "Geist [self-reconciling spirit] does not require a material embodiment to be fully realized Geist . . . is not motivated by anything essential to Hegel's account and represents a misstep, not an inference consistent with Hegel's overall project" (22-23). Perhaps this is true, and certainly it is beyond me in the space of a review to persuade anyone otherwise. But if it is true, so much the worse for Hegel. For Hegel's conviction that art is a thing of the past is the most—and perhaps the only—philosophically significant thought about the art that came after him that Hegel ever had. Let me be explicit: Hegel may have been wrong about art having ended, but it remains the case that no question about normative continuity and discontinuity in the history of modernist art is meaningful from the Hegelian point of view absent some accounting for what it

problems. And it is for this reason that the encompassing horizon of secular modernity is, for Hegel, the state, which is to say, an internally differentiated political institution.<sup>3</sup>

But even were we to accede to Pippin's view that the work of mutuality and recognition remained [and remains] fundamentally and radically incomplete, which is to say, in the terms I am proffering, that the social and political problem of modernity remained [and remains] as yet incompletely formed,<sup>4</sup> why would it follow that art continued to have anything to contribute to the forming of them? The inference is at least under-argued, and may even be a non sequitur. Pippin's position, I think, is that because, prior to the first third of the nineteenth century, art [and especially painting: think, for instance, of Raphael, Titian, Velázquez or even David] caught