

THIRD  
EDITION

Hal Foster  
Rosalind Krauss  
Yve-Alain Bois  
Benjamin H. D. Buchloh  
David Joselit

# ART SINCE 1900

MODERNISM ANTIMODERNISM POSTMODERNISM

Thames & Hudson

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# **ART SINCE 1900**

**MODERNISM ANTIMODERNISM POSTMODERNISM**

**Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois,  
Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, David Joselit**

**Groundbreaking in both its content and its presentation, *Art Since 1900* has been hailed as a landmark study in the history of art. Conceived by some of the most influential art historians of our time, this extraordinary book has now been revised, expanded and brought right up to date to include the latest developments in the study and practice of art. It provides the most comprehensive critical history of art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries ever published.**

With a clear year-by-year structure, the authors present 130 articles, each focusing on a crucial event – such as the creation of a seminal work, the publication of an important text, or the opening of a major exhibition – to tell the myriad stories of art from 1900 to the present. All the key turning points and breakthroughs of modernism and postmodernism are explored in depth, as are the frequent antimodernist reactions that proposed alternative visions. This expanded edition includes a new introduction on the impact of globalization, as well as essays on the development of Synthetic Cubism, early avant-garde film, Brazilian modernism, postmodern architecture, Moscow conceptualism, queer art, South African photography, and the rise of the new museum of art.

The book's flexible structure and extensive cross-referencing enable readers to plot their own course through the century and to follow any one of the many narratives that unfold, be it the history of a medium such as painting, the development of art in a particular country, the influence of a movement such as Surrealism, or the emergence of a stylistic or conceptual body of work such as abstraction or minimalism. Illustrating the text are reproductions of almost eight hundred of the canonical (and anti-canonical) works of the century. A five-part introduction sets out the methodologies that govern the discipline of art history, informing and enhancing the reader's understanding of its practice today. Two roundtable discussions consider some of the questions raised by the preceding decades and look ahead to the future. Background information on key events, places and people is provided in boxes throughout, while a glossary, full bibliography and list of websites add to the reference value of this outstanding volume.

Acclaimed as the definitive work on the subject, *Art Since 1900* is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the complexities of art in the modern age.

With 884 illustrations, 579 in colour

**Hal Foster** is Townsend Martin, Class of 1917, Professor of Art and Archaeology at Princeton University. His many books include *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics; The Anti-Aesthetic; The Return of the Real; Compulsive Beauty; Prosthetic Gods; The Art-Architecture Complex; The First Pop Age; and Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency.*

**Rosalind Krauss** is University Professor at Columbia University. She is the author of *Passages in Modern Sculpture; The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths; Bachelors; The Optical Unconscious; The Picasso Papers; Perpetual Inventory; and Under Blue Cup.*

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On the jacket:  
Gerhard Richter, *Marian*, 1983 (detail). (CR 544-2)  
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art since 1900

To Nikos Stangos (1936–2004), in memoriam

With love, admiration, and grief, we dedicate this book to Nikos Stangos, great editor, poet, and friend, whose belief in this project both instigated and sustained it through the course of its development.

We would like to thank Thomas Neurath and Peter Warner for their patient support, and Nikos Stangos and Andrew Brown for their editorial expertise. The book would not have been begun without Nikos; it would not have been completed without Andrew.

hal foster  
rosalind krauss  
yve-alain bois  
benjamin h. d. buchloh  
david joselit

third edition

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# art since 1900

modernism antimodernism postmodernism

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Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois,  
Benjamin H. D. Buchloh

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Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois,  
Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, David Joselit

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## 1900–1909

- 64 1900a Sigmund Freud publishes *The Interpretation of Dreams*: in Vienna, the rise of the expressive art of Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, and Oskar Kokoschka coincides with the emergence of psychoanalysis.
- 69 1900b Henri Matisse visits Auguste Rodin in his Paris studio but rejects the elder artist's sculptural style.
- 76 1903 Paul Gauguin dies in the Marquesas Islands in the South Pacific: the recourse to tribal art and primitivist fantasies in Gauguin influences the early work of André Derain, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner.  
box • The exotic and the naive
- 82 1906 Paul Cézanne dies at Aix-en-Provence in southern France: following the retrospectives of Vincent van Gogh and Georges Seurat the preceding year, Cézanne's death casts Postimpressionism as the historical past, with Fauvism as its heir.  
box • Roger Fry and the Bloomsbury Group
- 90 1907 With the stylistic inconsistencies and primitivist impulses of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Pablo Picasso launches the most formidable attack ever on mimetic representation.  
box • Gertrude Stein
- 97 1908 Wilhelm Worringer publishes *Abstraction and Empathy*, which contrasts abstract art with representational art as a withdrawal from the world versus an engagement with it; German Expressionism and English Vorticism elaborate this psychological polarity in distinctive ways.

- 102 1909 F. T. Marinetti publishes the first Futurist manifesto on the front page of *Le Figaro* in Paris: for the first time, the avant-garde associates itself with media culture and positions itself in defiance of history and tradition.  
box • Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey



## 1910–1919

- 112 1910 Henri Matisse's *Dance II* and *Music* are condemned at the Salon d'Automne in Paris: in these pictures, Matisse pushes his concept of the "decorative" to an extreme, creating an expansive visual field of color that is difficult to behold.
- 118 1911 Pablo Picasso returns his "borrowed" Iberian stone heads to the Louvre Museum in Paris from which they had been stolen: he transforms his primitivist style and with Georges Braque begins to develop Analytical Cubism.  
box • Guillaume Apollinaire
- 124 1912 Cubist collage is invented amid a set of conflicting circumstances and events: the continuing inspiration of Symbolist poetry, the rise of popular culture, and Socialist protests against the war in the Balkans.
- 130 1913 Robert Delaunay exhibits his "Windows" paintings in Berlin: the initial problems and paradigms of abstraction are elaborated across Europe.
- 137 1914 Vladimir Tatlin develops his constructions and Marcel Duchamp proposes his readymades, the first as a transformation of Cubism, the second as a break with it; in doing so, they offer complementary critiques of the traditional mediums of art.  
box • The "Peau de l'Ours"
- 142 1915 Kazimir Malevich shows his Suprematist canvases at the "0.10" exhibition in Petrograd, thus bringing the Russian Formalist concepts of art and literature into alignment.
- 147 1916a In Zurich, the international movement of Dada is launched in a double reaction to the catastrophe of World War I and the provocations of Futurism and Expressionism.  
box • Dada journals





- 154** 1916b Paul Strand enters the pages of Alfred Stieglitz's magazine *Camera Work*: the American avant-garde forms itself around a complex relationship between photography and the other arts.  
box • The Armory Show
- 160** 1917a After two years of intense research, Piet Mondrian breaks through to abstraction and goes on to invent Neoplasticism.
- 166** 1917b In October 1917, the journal *De Stijl* is launched by Theo van Doesburg in the small Dutch town of Leiden. It appears monthly until 1922, after which publication is irregular. The last issue dates from 1932 as a posthumous homage to van Doesburg shortly after his death in a Swiss sanatorium.
- 172** 1918 Marcel Duchamp paints *Tu m'*: his last ever painting summarizes the departures undertaken in his work, such as the use of chance, the promotion of the readymade, and photography's status as an "index."  
box • Rose Sélavy
- 178** 1919 Pablo Picasso has his first solo exhibition in Paris in thirteen years: the onset of pastiche in his work coincides with a widespread antimodernist reaction.  
box • Sergei Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes  
box • *Rappel à l'ordre*
- 1920–1929**
- 186** 1920 The Dada Fair is held in Berlin: the polarization of avant-garde culture and cultural traditions leads to a politicization of artistic practices and the emergence of photomontage as a new medium.
- 1921a** With *Three Musicians*, Pablo Picasso enlists the classicism of Nicolas Poussin in the development of Synthetic Cubism, the reigning style of postwar modernism.
- 1921b** The members of the Moscow Institute of Artistic Culture define Constructivism as a logical practice responding to the demands of a new collective society.  
box • Soviet institutions
- 204** 1922 Hans Prinzhorn publishes *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*: the "art of the insane" is explored in the work of Paul Klee and Max Ernst.
- 208** 1923 The Bauhaus, the most influential school of modernist art and design in the twentieth century, holds its first public exhibition in Weimar, Germany.
- 214** 1924 André Breton publishes the first issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, establishing the terms of Surrealist aesthetics.  
box • Surrealist journals
- 220** 1925a While the Art Deco exhibition in Paris makes official the birth of modern kitsch, Le Corbusier's machine aesthetics becomes the bad dream of modernism and Aleksandr Rodchenko's Workers' Club advocates a new relationship between men and objects.  
box • Black Deco
- 226** 1925b Curator Gustav F. Hartlaub organizes the first exhibition of Neue Sachlichkeit painting at the Kunsthalle, Mannheim: a variation of the international tendencies of the *rappel à l'ordre*, this new "magic realism" signals the end of Expressionism and Dada practices in Germany.
- 232** 1925c Oskar Schlemmer publishes *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, presenting the mannequin and the automaton as models of the modern performer; other artists, especially women involved in Dada, explore the allegorical potential of the doll and the puppet.
- 238** 1925d On May 3, a public screening of avant-garde cinema titled "The Absolute Film" is held in Berlin: on the program are experimental works by Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, Walter Ruttmann, and Fernand Léger that continue the project of abstraction by filmic means.
- 244** 1926 El Lissitzky's *Demonstration Room* and Kurt Schwitters's *Merzbau* are installed in Hanover, Germany: the architecture of the museum as archive and the allegory of modernist space as melancholia are dialectically conceived by the Constructivist and the Dadaist.
- 248** 1927a After working as a commercial artist in Brussels, René Magritte joins the Surrealist movement in Paris, where his art plays on the idioms of advertising and the ambiguities of language and representation.
- 252** 1927b Constantin Brancusi produces a stainless-steel cast of *The Newborn*: his sculpture unleashes a battle between models of high art and industrial production, brought to a head in the US trial over his *Bird in Space*.

- 256** 1927c Charles Sheeler is commissioned by Ford to document its new River Rouge plant; North American modernists develop a lyrical relation to the machine age, which Georgia O'Keeffe extends to the natural world.  
box • MoMA and Alfred H. Barr, Jr.
- 262** 1928a The publication of "Unism in Painting" by Wladyslaw Strzemiński, followed in 1931 by a book on sculpture he coauthored with Katarzyna Kobro, *The Composition of Space*, marks the apogee of the internationalization of Constructivism.
- 268** 1928b The publication of *Die neue Typographie* by Jan Tschichold confirms the impact of the Soviet avant-garde's production on book design and advertising in capitalist Western European countries, and ratifies the emergence of an international style.
- 274** 1929 The "Film und Foto" exhibition, organized by the Deutscher Werkbund and held in Stuttgart from May 18 to July 7, displays a spectrum of international photographic practices and debates: the exhibition demarcates a climax in twentieth-century photography and marks the emergence of a new critical theory and historiography of the medium.
- 303** 1933 Scandal breaks out over the portrait of Lenin by Diego Rivera in the murals for the Rockefeller Center: the Mexican mural movement produces public political mural work in various American locations and establishes a precedent for political avant-garde art in the United States.
- 308** 1934a At the First All Union Congress of Writers, Andrei Zhdanov lays down the doctrine of Soviet Socialist Realism.
- 314** 1934b In "The Sculptor's Aims," Henry Moore articulates a British aesthetic of direct carving in sculpture that mediates between figuration and abstraction, between Surrealism and Constructivism.
- 319** 1935 Walter Benjamin drafts "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," André Malraux initiates "The Museum without Walls," and Marcel Duchamp begins the *Boîte-en-Vaisselle*: the impact of mechanical reproduction, surfacing into art through photography, is felt within aesthetic theory, art history, and art practice.
- 324** 1936 As part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and other photographers are commissioned to document rural America in the grip of the Great Depression.  
box • Works Progress Administration

## 1930–1939

- 282** 1930a The introduction of mass consumer and fashion magazines in twenties and thirties Weimar Germany generates new frameworks for the production and distribution of photographic imagery and helps foster the emergence of a group of important women photographers.
- 287** 1930b Georges Bataille reviews *L'Art primitif* in *Documents*, making apparent a rift within the avant-garde's relation to primitivism and a deep split within Surrealism.  
box • Carl Einstein
- 292** 1931a Alberto Giacometti, Salvador Dalí, and André Breton publish texts on "the object of symbolic function" in the magazine *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*: Surrealism extends its aesthetic of fetishism and fantasy into the realm of object-making.
- 297** 1931b As Joan Miró reaffirms his vow to "assassinate painting" and Alexander Calder's delicate mobiles are replaced by the stolid stabiles, European painting and sculpture display a new sensibility that reflects Georges Bataille's concept of the "formless."
- 329** 1937a The European powers contest one another in national pavilions of art, trade, and propaganda at the International Exhibition in Paris, while the Nazis open the "Degenerate 'Art'" exhibition, a vast condemnation of modernist art, in Munich.
- 334** 1937b Naum Gabo, Ben Nicholson, and Leslie Martin publish *Circle* in London, solidifying the institutionalization of geometric abstraction.
- 338** 1937c Pablo Picasso unveils *Guernica* in the Spanish Republican pavilion of the International Exhibition in Paris.

- 358** 1943 James A. Porter's *Modern Negro Art*, the first scholarly study of African-American art, is published in New York as the Harlem Renaissance promotes race awareness and heritage.

- 364** 1944a Piet Mondrian dies, leaving unfinished *Victory Boogie Woogie*, a work that exemplifies his conception of painting as a destructive enterprise.

- 369** 1944b At the outbreak of World War II, the "Old Masters" of modern art—Matisse, Picasso, Braque, and Bonnard—consider their refusal to flee occupied France as an act of resistance against barbarity: discovered at the Liberation, the style they had developed during the war years presents a challenge to the new generation of artists.

- 374** Roundtable I Art at mid-century

## 1945–1949

- 388** 1945 David Smith makes *Pillar of Sunday*: constructed sculpture is caught between the craft basis of traditional art and the industrial basis of modern manufacturing.
- 393** 1946 Jean Dubuffet exhibits his "hautes pâtes," which confirm the existence of a new scatological trend in postwar French art, soon to be named "informel."  
box • *Art brut*
- 399** 1947a Josef Albers begins his "Variant" paintings at Black Mountain College in North Carolina a year after László Moholy-Nagy dies in Chicago: imported to the United States, the model of the Bauhaus is transformed by different artistic imperatives and institutional pressures.

- 404** 1947b The publication of *Possibilities* in New York marks the coalescence of Abstract Expressionism as a movement.

- 411** 1949a *Life* magazine asks its readers "Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?": the work of Jackson Pollock emerges as the symbol of advanced art.

- 416** 1949b Cobra, a loose band of young artists from Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam, launches its eponymous magazine, in which they advocate a return to "the vital source of life"; meanwhile in England, the New Brutalists propose a bare aesthetic adequate to the austere conditions of the postwar world.

## 1940–1944

- 348** 1942a The depoliticization of the American avant-garde reaches the point of no return when Clement Greenberg and the editors of *Partisan Review* bid farewell to Marxism.
- 353** 1942b As World War II forces many Surrealists to emigrate from France to the United States, two shows in New York reflect on this condition of exile in different ways.  
box • *Exiles and émigrés*  
box • Peggy Guggenheim

# 1950–1959

424 1951 Barnett Newman's second exhibition fails; he is ostracized by his fellow Abstract Expressionists, only later to be hailed as a father figure by the Minimalist artists.

430 1953 Composer John Cage collaborates on Robert Rauschenberg's *Tire Print*: the indexical imprint is developed as a weapon against the expressive mark in a range of work by Rauschenberg, Ellsworth Kelly, and Cy Twombly.

436 1955a In their first exhibition in Tokyo, the artists of the Gutai group propose a new reading of Jackson Pollock's drip canvases that engages with traditional Japanese aesthetics and interprets the phrase "action painting" in a literal sense.

441 1955b The "Le mouvement" show at the Galerie Denise René in Paris launches kineticism.

447 1956 The exhibition "This is Tomorrow" in London marks the culmination of research into postwar relations between art, science, technology, product design, and popular culture undertaken by the Independent Group, forerunners of British Pop art.

453 1957a Two small vanguard groups, the Lettrist International and the Imaginist Bauhaus, merge to form the Situationist International, the most politically engaged of all postwar movements.

box • Two theses from *The Society of the Spectacle*

460 1957b Ad Reinhardt writes "Twelve Rules for a New Academy": as avant-garde paradigms in painting are reformulated in Europe, the monochrome and grid are explored in the United States by Reinhardt, Robert Ryman, Agnes Martin, and others.

466 1958 Jasper Johns's *Target with Four Faces* appears on the cover of *Artnews* magazine: for some artists like Frank Stella, Johns presents a model of painting in which figure and ground are fused in a single image-object; for others, he opens up the use of everyday signs and conceptual ambiguities alike.

box • Ludwig Wittgenstein

473 1959a Lucio Fontana has his first retrospective; he uses kitsch associations to question idealist modernism, a critique extended by his protégé Piero Manzoni.

477 1959b At the San Francisco Art Association, Bruce Conner shows *CHILD*, a mutilated figure in a high chair made in protest against capital punishment; a practice of assemblage and environment is developed on the West Coast by Conner, Wallace Berman, Ed Kienholz, and others that is more scabrous than its equivalents in New York, Paris, or elsewhere.

483 1959c The Museum of Modern Art in New York mounts "New Images of Man": existentialist aesthetics extends into a Cold War politics of figuration in the work of Alberto Giacometti, Jean Dubuffet, Francis Bacon, Willem de Kooning, and others.

box • Art and the Cold War

488 1959d Richard Avedon's *Observations* and Robert Frank's *The Americans* establish the dialectical parameters of New York School photography.

494 1959e The Manifesto of Neoconcrete Art is published in Rio de Janeiro as a double spread of the daily newspaper *Jornal do Brasil*, replacing the rationalist interpretation of geometric abstraction that was prevalent at the time with a phenomenological one.

# 1960–1969

504 1960a Critic Pierre Restany organizes a group of diverse artists in Paris to form Nouveau Réalisme, redefining the paradigms of collage, the readymade, and the monochrome.

box • The neo-avant-garde

509 1960b Clement Greenberg publishes "Modernist Painting": his criticism reorients itself, and in its new guise shapes the debates of the sixties.

box • Leo Steinberg and the flatbed picture plane

515 1960c Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol start to use cartoons and advertisements as sources for paintings, followed by James Rosenquist, Ed Ruscha, and others: American Pop art is born.

520 1961 In December, Claes Oldenburg opens *The Store* in New York's East Village, an "environment" that mimicked the setting of surrounding cheap shops and from which all the items were for sale: throughout the winter and the following spring, ten different "happenings" would be performed by Oldenburg's Ray Gun Theater in *The Store* locale.

526 1962a In Wiesbaden, West Germany, George Maciunas organizes the first of a series of international events that mark the formation of the Fluxus movement.

534 1962b In Vienna, a group of artists including Günter Brus, Otto Mühl, and Hermann Nitsch come together to form Viennese Actionism.

540 1962c Spurred by the publication of *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863–1922* by Camilla Gray, Western interest revives in the Constructivist principles of Vladimir Tatlin and Aleksandr Rodchenko, which are elaborated in different ways by younger artists such as Dan Flavin, Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt, and others.

box • *Artforum*

545 1962d Clement Greenberg is the first to acknowledge the abstract side of early Pop art, a characteristic that would feature time and again in the work of its leading proponents and those who followed them.

551 1963 After publishing two manifestos with the painter Eugen Schönebeck, Georg Baselitz exhibits *Die Grosse Nacht im Eimer* (Great Night Down the Drain) in Berlin.

556 1964a On July 20, the twentieth anniversary of the failed Stauffenberg coup against Hitler, Joseph Beuys publishes his fictitious autobiography and generates an outbreak of public violence at the "Festival of New Art" in Aachen, West Germany.

562 1964b *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* by Andy Warhol is installed, momentarily, on the facade of the State Pavilion at the World's Fair in New York.

568 1965 Donald Judd publishes "Specific Objects": Minimalism receives its theorization at the hands of its major practitioners, Judd and Robert Morris.

box • Maurice Merleau-Ponty

572 1966a Marcel Duchamp completes his installation *Etant Donnés* in the Philadelphia Museum of Art: his mounting influence on younger artists climaxes with the posthumous revelation of this new work.

576 1966b The exhibition "Eccentric Abstraction" opens in New York: the work of Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, Yayoi Kusama, and others points to an expressive alternative to the sculptural language of Minimalism.

581 1967a Publishing "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," Robert Smithson marks "entropy" as a generative concept of artistic practice in the late sixties.

**585** 1967b The Italian critic Germano Celant mounts the first Arte Povera exhibition.

**591** 1967c For their first manifestation, the four artists of the French group BMPT paint in public, each artist repeating exactly from canvas to canvas a simple configuration of his choice: their form of Conceptualist painting is the latest in a line of attacks against "official" abstraction in postwar France.

**597** 1968a Two major museums committed to the most advanced European and American art of the sixties—the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven and the Städtisches Museum Abteiberg in Mönchengladbach—exhibit the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher, placing them at the forefront of an interest in Conceptual art and photography.

**603** 1968b Conceptual art manifests itself in publications by Sol LeWitt, Dan Graham, and Lawrence Weiner, while Seth Siegelaub organizes its first exhibitions.

box • Artists' journals  
box • Deskilling

**610** 1969 The exhibition "When Attitudes Become Form" in Bern and London surveys Postminimalist developments, while "Anti-Illusion: Procedures / Materials" in New York focuses on Process art, the three principal aspects of which are elaborated by Richard Serra, Robert Morris, and Eva Hesse.

## 1970–1979

**616** 1970 Michael Asher installs his Pomona College Project: the rise of site-specific work opens up a logical field between modernist sculpture and Conceptual art.

**621** 1971 The Guggenheim Museum in New York cancels Hans Haacke's show and suppresses Daniel Buren's contribution to the Sixth Guggenheim International Exhibition: practices of institutional critique encounter the resistance of the Minimalist generation.

box • Michel Foucault

**625** 1972a Marcel Broodthaers installs his "Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures," in Düsseldorf, West Germany.

**630** 1972b The international exhibition Documenta 5, held in Kassel, West Germany, marks the institutional acceptance of Conceptual art in Europe.

**636** 1972c *Learning from Las Vegas* is published; inspired by Las Vegas as well as Pop art, the architects Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown eschew "the duck," or building as sculptural form, in favor of "the decorated shed," in which Pop symbols are foregrounded, thus setting up the stylistic terms of postmodern design.

**644** 1973 The Kitchen Center for Video, Music, and Dance opens its own space in New York: video art claims an institutional space between visual and Performance art, television and film.

**649** 1974 With *Trans-fixed*, in which Chris Burden is nailed to a Volkswagen Beetle, American Performance art reaches an extreme limit of physical presence, and many of its adherents abandon, moderate, or otherwise transform its practice.

**654** 1975a As filmmaker Laura Mulvey publishes her landmark essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," feminist artists like Judy Chicago and Mary Kelly develop different positions on the representation of women.

box • Theory journals

**660** 1975b Ilya Kabakov completes his series of albums *Ten Characters*, an important monument of Moscow Conceptualism.

**668** 1976 In New York, the founding of P.S.1 coincides with the Metropolitan Museum's "King Tut" exhibition: important shifts in the institutional structure of the art world are registered by both alternative spaces and the blockbuster show.

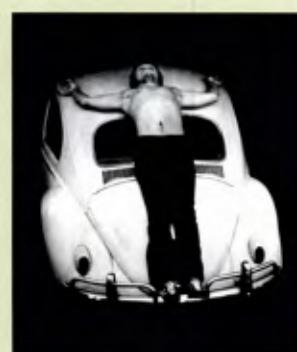
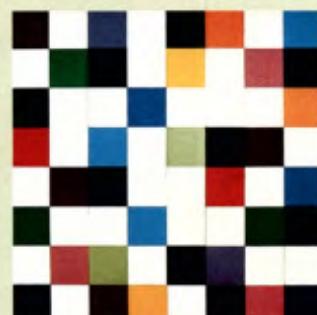
**672** 1977a The "Pictures" exhibition identifies a group of young artists whose strategies of appropriation and critiques of originality advance the notion of "postmodernism" in art.

**676** 1977b Harmony Hammond defends feminist abstraction in the newly founded journal *Heresies*.

## 1980–1989

**688** 1980 Metro Pictures opens in New York: a new group of galleries emerges in order to exhibit young artists involved in a questioning of the photographic image and its uses in news, advertising, and fashion.

box • Jean Baudrillard





692 1984a Victor Burgin delivers his lecture "The Absence of Presence: Conceptualism and Post-Modernisms": the publication of this and other essays by Allan Sekula and Martha Rosler signals a new approach to the legacies of Anglo-American photoconceptualism and to the writing of photographic history and theory.

698 1984b Fredric Jameson publishes "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," as the debate over postmodernism extends beyond art and architecture into cultural politics, and divides into two contrary positions.  
box • Cultural studies

702 1986 "Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture" opens in Boston: as some artists play on the collapse of sculpture into commodities, others underscore the new prominence of design and display.

707 1987 The first ACT-UP action is staged: activism in art is reignited by the AIDS crisis, as collaborative groups and political interventions come to the fore, and a new kind of queer aesthetics is developed.  
box • The US Art Wars

714 1988 Gerhard Richter paints *October 18, 1977*: German artists contemplate the possibility of the renewal of history painting.  
box • Jürgen Habermas

719 1989 "Les Magiciens de la terre," a selection of art from several continents, opens in Paris: postcolonial discourse and multicultural debates affect the production as well as the presentation of contemporary art.  
box • Aboriginal art

741 1993c In New York, the Whitney Biennial foregrounds work focused on identity amid the emergence of a new form of politicized art by African-American artists.

747 1994a A mid-career exhibition of Mike Kelley highlights a pervasive concern with states of regression and abjection, while Robert Gober, Kiki Smith, and others use figures of the broken body to address questions of sexuality and mortality.

752 1994b William Kentridge completes *Felix in Exile*, joining Raymond Pettibon and others in demonstrating the renewed importance of drawing.

756 1997 Santu Mofokeng exhibits *The Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890–1950* in the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale.

764 1998 An exhibition of large video projections by Bill Viola tours several museums: the projected image becomes a pervasive format in contemporary art.  
box • The spectacularization of art  
box • McLuhan, Kittler, and new media

## 2000–2015

773 2001 A mid-career exhibition of Andreas Gursky at the Museum of Modern Art in New York signals the new dominance of a pictorial photography, which is often effected through digital means.

778 2003 With exhibits such as "Utopia Station" and "Zone of Urgency," the Venice Biennale exemplifies the informal and discursive nature of much recent artmaking and curating.

784 2007a With a large retrospective at the Cité de la Musique, Paris acknowledges the importance of American artist Christian Marclay for the future of avant-garde art; the French foreign ministry expresses in its own belief in this future by sending Sophie Calle to represent France at the Venice Biennale; while the Brooklyn Academy of Music commissions the South African William Kentridge to design the sets for their production of *The Magic Flute*.  
box • Brian O'Doherty and the "white cube"

790 2007b "Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century" opens at New York's New Museum: the show marks a new focus on assemblage and accumulations among a younger generation of sculptors.

## 1990–1999

726 1992 Fred Wilson presents *Mining the Museum* in Baltimore: institutional critique extends beyond the museum, and an anthropological model of project art based on fieldwork is adapted by a wide range of artists.  
box • Interdisciplinarity

732 1993a Martin Jay publishes *Downcast Eyes*, a survey of the denigration of vision in modern philosophy: this critique of visuality is explored by a number of contemporary artists.

737 1993b As Rachel Whiteread's *House*, a casting of a terrace house in east London, is demolished, an innovative group of women artists comes to the fore in Britain.



**798** 2007c As Damien Hirst exhibits *For the Love of God*, a platinum cast of a human skull studded with diamonds costing £14 million and for sale for £50 million, some art is explicitly positioned as a media sensation and a market investment.

**857** Glossary  
**866** Further reading  
**876** Selected useful websites  
**878** Picture credits  
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**804** 2009a Tania Bruguera presents *Generic Capitalism* at the multimedia conference "Our Literal Speed," a performance that visualizes the assumed bonds and networks of trust and likemindedness among its art-world audience by transgressing those very bonds.

**810** 2009b Jutta Koether shows "Lux Interior" at Reena Spaulings Gallery in New York, an exhibition that introduces performance and installation into the heart of painting's meaning: the impact of networks on even the most traditional of aesthetic mediums—painting—is widespread among artists in Europe and the United States.

**818** 2009c Harun Farocki exhibits a range of works on the subject of war and vision at the Ludwig Museum in Cologne and Raven Row in London that demonstrate the relationship between popular forms of new-media entertainment such as video games and the conduct of modern war.

**824** 2010a Ai Weiwei's large-scale installation *Sunflower Seeds* opens in the Turbine Hall of London's Tate Modern: Chinese artists respond to China's rapid modernization and economic growth with works that both engage with the country's abundant labor market and morph into social and mass-employment projects in their own right.

**830** 2010b French artist Claire Fontaine, whose "operation" by two human assistants is itself an explicit division of labor, dramatizes the economies of art in a major retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami, Florida: the show marks the emergence of the avatar as a new form of artistic subjecthood.

**836** 2015 As Tate Modern, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art plan further expansions, the Whitney Museum of American Art opens its new building, capping a period of international growth in exhibition space for modern and contemporary art including performance and dance.

**842** Roundtable I The predicament of contemporary art



# How to use this book

*Art Since 1900* has been designed to make it straightforward for you to follow the development of art through the twentieth century and up to the present day. Here are the features that will help you find your way through the book.

Each entry centers on a key moment in the history of twentieth- and twenty-first-century art, indicated by the title at the head of the entry. It might be the creation of a groundbreaking work, the publication of a seminal text, the opening of a crucial exhibition, or another significant event. Where two or more entries appear in any one year, they are identified as 1900a, 1900b, and so on.

Picture references in the text direct you clearly to the illustration under discussion.

Symbols in the margin indicate that other related entries may be of interest. The corresponding cross-references at the foot of the page direct you to the relevant entries. These allow you to follow your own course through the book, to trace, for example, the history of photography or sculpture or the development of abstraction in its different forms.

2009<sub>b</sub>

Jutta Koether shows "Lux Interior" at Reena Spaulings Gallery in New York, an exhibition that introduces performance and installation into the heart of painting's meaning: the impact of networks on even the most traditional of aesthetic mediums—painting—is widespread among artists in Europe and the United States.

With a characteristic flourish of perversity linking painting to pasta, the German artist Martin Kippenberger (1953–97) identified in an interview from 1990–1 the most important painterly problem to arise since Warhol's silkscreens of the sixties: "Simply to hang a painting on the wall and say that it's art is dreadful. The whole network is important! Even spaghetti... When you say art, then everything possible belongs to it. In a gallery that is also the floor, the architecture, the color of the walls." In Kippenberger's work, which included painting and sculpture as well as many hybrid practices in between, the limits of an individual object were consistently challenged. Already in his first painting project of 1976–7, *One of You, a German in Florence* (1), Kippenberger displaced attention from singular works to rapidly executing one hundred canvases, all of the same size, that reproduced snapshots or newspaper clippings. His intention was to make enough paintings so that when piled up they would be as tall as him. Here painting enters several types of network at once: each individual canvas belonged to a "family grouping"; all were assimilated to the fluid economy of

photographic information, referencing the personal snapshot or the journalistic document; and the scale of the series was indexed to the physical characteristics of the artist—namely, his height—as well as his everyday activities, as marked by the choice of motifs that might be recorded by any avid, though eccentric, German resident in Florence.

If we take Kippenberger at his word, then, a significant question arises: How can painting incorporate the multiple networks that frame it? This late-twentieth-century problem, whose relevance has only increased with the turn of the twenty-first century and the growing ubiquity of digital networks, joins a sequence of modernist challenges to painting. Early in the last century, Cubism pushed the limits of what a coherent painterly mark could be by demonstrating the minimum requirements for visual coherence. Mid-twentieth-century gestural abstraction, epitomized by Abstract Expressionism, raised the issue of how representation may approach the status of pure matter—consisting of nothing but raw paint applied to canvas. And finally, during the sixties a whole range of photomechanical procedures pioneered by Pop and



1 • Martin Kippenberger, Untitled (from the series *One of You, a German in Florence*), 1976–7  
Oil on canvas, each 50 × 60 1/8" × 4 23/32"

Boxes throughout provide background information on key personalities, important concepts, and some of the issues surrounding the art of the day. Further elaboration of terms is available in the glossary at the back of the book.



Rose Sélavy

One of the sketches Duchamp drew for the *Large Glass* and published in the *Green Box* shows the double field of the work with the upper area labeled "MAR" (short for *marie* [bride]) and the lower one "CEL" (short for *celibataires* [bachelors]). With this personal identification with the protagonists of the Glass, (MAR + CEL = Marcel) Duchamp thought about assuming a feminine persona. As he told his interviewer, Pierre Cabanne:

Cabanne: Rose Sélavy was born in 1920, I think.

Duchamp: In effect, I wanted to change my identity, and the

first idea that came to me was to take a Jewish name ... I didn't find a Jewish name that I especially liked, or that tempted me, and suddenly I had an idea: why not change sex? It was much simpler. So the name Rose Sélavy came from that ...

Cabanne: You went so far in your sex change as to have yourself photographed dressed as a woman.

Duchamp: It was Man Ray who did the photograph ...

Having stopped work on the *Glass* in 1923, Duchamp transferred his artistic enterprise to this new character and had business cards printed up giving his name and profession as "Rose Sélavy, Precision Oculist." The works he went on to make as "oculist" were machines with turning optical disks—the *Rotary Demisphere* and the *Rotorelief*—as well as films, such as *Anemic Cinema*.

There is a way to understand Rose Sélavy's enterprise as the undermining of the Kantian aesthetic system in which the work of art opens onto a collective visual space acknowledging, in effect, the simultaneity of points of view of all the spectators who are gathered to see it, a multiplicity whose appreciation for the work speaks with, as Kant would say, the universal voice. On the contrary, Duchamp's "precision optics" were, like the holes in the door of his installation *Front d'optique*, available to only one viewer at a time. Organized as optical illusions, they were clearly the solitary visual projection of the viewer placed in the right vector to experience them. As the *Rotorelief*—a set of printed cards—revolved like visual records on a phonograph turntable, their designs of slightly skewed concentric circles spiral to burgeon outward like a balloon inflating and then to reverse themselves into an inward, sucking movement. Some appeared like eyes or breasts, trembling in a phantom space; another sported a goldfish that seemed to be swimming in a basin whose plug had been pulled, so that the fish was being sucked down the drain. In this sense, Duchamp's switch to Rose and her activities marks a turn from an interest in the mechanical (the Bachelor Machine, the Chocolate Grinder) to a concern for the optical.

The decade is indicated at the side of each page.

61-016

Further reading lists at the end of each entry enable you to continue your study by directing you to some of the key books and articles on the subject, including primary and secondary historical documents and recently published texts. A general bibliography and a list of useful websites at the back of the book provide additional resources for research.

The entry's date and name appears at the foot of each page.

Perspective had specifically located this viewer in its plotting of a precise vantage point. But both Cubism and Fauvism, by finding other means to unify the pictorial space, also address themselves to a unified human subject: the viewer/interpreter of the work.

The final implication of Duchamp's removal of his field of operations from the iconic to the indexical sign becomes clear in this context. For beyond its marking a break with "picturing" and a rejection of "skill," beyond its displacement of meaning from repeatable code to unique event, the index's aspect as slisher has implications for the status of the subject, of the one who says "I," in this case Duchamp "himself." For as the subject of the vast self-portrait assembled by Tu m', Duchamp declares himself a disjunctive, fractured subject, split axially into the two facing poles of pronominal space, even as he would split himself sexually into the two opposite poles of gender in the many photographic self-

portraits he would make while in drag and sign "Rose Sélavy" [5]. Taking up Rimbaud's "je est un autre" ("I am other"), Duchamp's shattering of subjectivity was perhaps his most radical act. AK

FURTHER READING

- Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message" and "The Rhetoric of the Image," *Image/Music/Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977);  
Marcel Duchamp, *Saint-Saëns: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (Marguerite du Saëns, Jean Michel Sanjour and Evarist Pesson) (New York: Cornell University Press, 1973);  
Thierry de Dreu, *Pop Art Abstraction: Or Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade* (trans. Diana Polson) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993);  
Thierry de Dreu (ed.), *The Deliberately Unfinished Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991);  
Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Image," *The Originarity of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernists* (Mitos) (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985);  
Robert Lubar, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Grove Press, 1959);  
Frances M. Naumann and Hector Schleifer (eds.), *Alfred H. Barr, Jr.: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000).

# Preface: a reader's guide

This book is organized as a succession of important events, each keyed to an appropriate date, and can thus be read as a chronological account of twentieth- and twenty-first-century art. But, like the pieces of a large puzzle that can be transformed into a great variety of images, its 130 entries can also be arranged in different ways to suit the particular needs of individual readers.

First, some narratives might be constructed along national lines. For example, within the prewar period alone, the story of French art unfolds via studies of figurative sculpture, Fauvist painting, Cubist collage, and Surrealist objects, while German practice is traced in terms of Expressionist painting, Dada photomontage, Bauhaus design, and Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) painting and photography. The Russian avant-garde is followed from its early experiments with new forms and materials, through its direct involvement in political transformation, to its eventual suppression under Stalin. Meanwhile, British and American artists are tracked in their ambivalent oscillation between the demands of national idioms and the attractions of international styles.

As an alternative to such national narratives, the reader might trace transnational developments. For example, again in the prewar period, one might focus on the fascination with tribal objects, the emergence of abstract painting, or the spread of a Constructivist language of forms. The different incarnations of Dada from Zurich to New York, or the various engagements of modernist artists with design, might be compared. More generally, one might cluster entries that treat the great experiment that is modernism as such, or that discuss the virulent reactions against this idea, especially in totalitarian regimes. Mini-histories might be produced not only of the traditional forms of painting and sculpture, but also of new modes distinctive to twentieth- and twenty-first-century art, such as collaged and montaged images, found and readymade

objects, film and video, and digital technologies. For the first time in any survey, a discussion of photography—both in terms of its own development and as a force that radically transforms other media—is woven into the text.

A third approach might be to group entries according to thematic concerns, within the prewar or the postwar periods, or in ways that span both. For example, the impact of the mass media on modern art might be gauged from the first Futurist manifesto, published in a major newspaper, *Le Figaro*, in 1909, through the Situationist critique of consumer culture in France after World War II, to the rise of the artist as celebrity in our own time and the use of the avatar as an artistic strategy. Similarly, the institutions that shaped twentieth-century art might also be explored, either in close focus or in broad overview. For instance, one can review the signal school of modernist design, the Bauhaus, from its interwar incarnations in Germany to its postwar afterlife in the United States. Or one can follow the history of the art exhibition, from the Paris Salons before World War I, through the propagandistic displays of 1937 (including the “Degenerate ‘Art’” [“Entartete ‘Kunst’”] show staged by the Nazis), to the postwar forms of blockbuster exhibition and international survey (such as Documenta 5 in 1972 in Germany). The complicated relationship between art and politics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries can be studied through any number of entries. One might also define an approach through readings in such topics as the relationships between prewar and postwar avant-gardes, or between modernist and postmodernist models of art.

Along with narratives of form and theme, other subtexts in the history of twentieth- and twenty-first-century art can be foregrounded. Especially important to the authors are the theoretical methods that have framed the manifold practices of this art. One such approach is psychoanalytic criticism, which focuses on the subjective effects of the work of art. Another method is the social history of art, which attends to

social, political, and economic contexts. A third seeks to clarify the intrinsic structure of the work—not only how it is made (in the formalist version of this approach) but also how it means (in its structuralist version). Lastly, poststructuralism is deployed in order to critique structuralism's description of communication as the neutral transmission of a message. For poststructuralists, such transmission (whether in a university or an art gallery) is never neutral, always doing the work of establishing the person with the "right" to speak. Many entries present test cases of these four methods, especially when their own development is related to that of the art at issue. For each mode of criticism, an introduction sketching its history and defining its terms is provided, while a fifth considers the impact of globalization on the practice of both art and art history.

As might be expected, these methods often clash: the subjective focus of psychoanalytic criticism, the contextual emphasis of the social history of art, the intrinsic concerns of formalist and structuralist accounts, and the poststructuralist attention to the artist's "right to speak" cannot easily be reconciled. In this book, these tensions are not masked by an unbroken story unified by a single voice; rather, they are dramatized by the five authors, each of whom has a different allegiance to these methods. In this regard, *Art Since 1900* is "dialogical," in the sense given to the term by Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin: each speech act is structured by the positions that it confronts, as a response to other speakers whom it moves to oppose or attempts to persuade. The marks of such dialogue are multiple in this book. They appear in the different types of perspective that one author might privilege, or in the different ways that a single subject—abstraction, say—might be treated by the various voices. This conversation is also carried on through the cross-references that act as signposts to the intersections between the entries. This "intertext" not only allows two different positions to

coexist but also, perhaps in relation to the third perspective provided by the reader, dialectically binds them.

Of course, with new orientations come new omissions. Certain artists and movements, addressed in previous textbooks, are scantied here, and every reader will see grievous exclusions—this is the case for each of the authors as well. But we also have the conviction that the richness of the conversation, as it illuminates different facets of the debates, struggles, breakthroughs, and setbacks of twentieth- and twenty-first-century art, compensates a little for the parts of the story that are left in ellipsis. Our use of the headline to introduce each entry acknowledges both the strengths and the weaknesses of our overall approach, for this telegraphic form can be seen either as a mere signal of a complex event—from which it is then severed—or as an emblematic marker of the very complexity of the history of which it is the evocative precipitate.

The authors wish to acknowledge the precedence of the pedagogical structure developed in Denis Hollier's *A New History of French Literature* and its importance for this text. It is now common practice—in publishing, in teaching, and in curating—to break the art of the twentieth century into two halves separated by World War II. We acknowledge this tendency with the option of the two-volume format; at the same time we believe that a crucial subject for any history of this art is the complex dialogue between prewar and postwar avant-gardes. To tell this story it is necessary to produce the full sweep of the twentieth century at once. But then such a panorama is also essential for the many other stories to which the five of us have lent our voices here.

**Hal Foster**  
**Rosalind Krauss**  
**Yve-Alain Bois**  
**Benjamin H. D. Buchloh**  
**David Joselit**

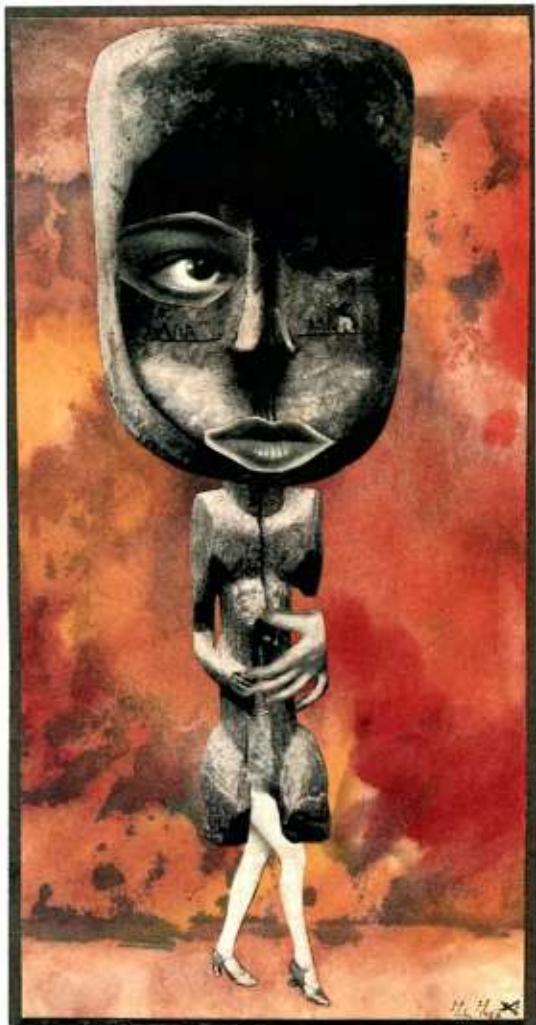
# Introductions

In these five introductions, the authors of *Art Since 1900* set out some of the theoretical methods of framing the art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Each describes the historical development of a particular methodology or set of ideas and explains its relevance to the production and reception of the art of the period.

The last hundred years or so have witnessed several major shifts in both private and public debates about art, its nature, and its functions. These shifts need to be considered in terms of other histories, too: with the emergence of new academic disciplines, new ways of thinking and speaking about cultural production coexist with new modes of expression.

We have written the following methodological introductions in order to identify and analyze the different conventions, approaches, and intellectual projects that underpin our project as a whole. Our intention has been to present the diverse theoretical frameworks that can be found in the book and to explain their relationship to the works and practices discussed in the individual entries. For that reason, each introduction begins with an overview of the mode of criticism, setting it firmly in its historical and intellectual context, before proceeding to a brief discussion of its relevance to the production and interpretation of art. Whether these five introductions are read as stand-alone essays or in conjunction with other texts dealing with the individual modes of criticism, they will inform and enhance understanding in ways that allow each reader to develop an individual approach to the book and to the art of the period.

# 1 Psychoanalysis in modernism and as method



1 • Hannah Höch, *The Sweet One*,  
From an Ethnographic Museum, c. 1926  
Photomontage with watercolor, 30 x 15.5 (11 1/8 x 6 1/8)

In this collage—one of a series that combines found photographs of tribal sculpture and modern women—Höch plays on associations at work in psychoanalytic theory and modernist art: ideas of “the primitive” and the sexual, of racial others and unconscious desires. She exploits these associations to suggest the power of “the New Woman,” but she also seems to mock them, literally cutting up the images, deconstructing and reconstructing them, exposing them as constructions.

**P**sychoanalysis was developed by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and his followers as a “science of the unconscious” in the early years of the twentieth century, at the same time that modernist art came into its own. As with the other interpretative methods presented in these introductions, psychoanalysis thus shares its historical ground with modernist art and intersects with it in various ways throughout the twentieth century. First, artists have drawn directly on psychoanalysis—sometimes to explore its ideas visually, as often in Surrealism in the twenties and thirties, and sometimes to critique them theoretically and politically, as often in feminism in the seventies and eighties. Second, psychoanalysis and modernist art share several interests—a fascination with origins, with dreams and fantasies, with “the primitive,” the child, and the insane, and, more recently, with the workings of subjectivity and sexuality, to name only a few [1]. Third, many psychoanalytic terms have entered the basic vocabulary of twentieth- and twenty-first-century art and criticism (e.g., repression, sublimation, fetishism, the gaze). Here I will focus on historical connections and methodological applications, and, when appropriate, I will key them, along with critical terms, to entries in which they are discussed.

## Historical connections with art

Psychoanalysis emerged in the Vienna of artists such as Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, and Oskar Kokoschka, during the decline of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. With the secession of such artists from the Art Academy, this was a time of Oedipal revolt in advanced art, with subjective experiments in pictorial expression that drew on regressive dreams and erotic fantasies. Bourgeois Vienna did not usually tolerate these experiments, for they suggested a crisis in the stability of the ego and its social institutions—a crisis that Freud was prompted to analyze as well.

This crisis was hardly specific to Vienna; in terms of its relevance to psychoanalysis, it was perhaps most evident in the attraction to things “primitive” on the part of modernists in France and Germany. For some artists this “primitivism” involved a “going-native” of the sort play-acted by Paul Gauguin in the South Seas. For others it was focused on formal revisions of Western conventions of representation, as undertaken, with the

▲ 1924, 1930b, 1931a, 1942b, 1975a   • 1903, 1907, 1922, 1977b, 1987, 1994a   ■ 1900a   ◆ 1903

2 • Meret Oppenheim, *Object* (also called *Fur-Lined Teacup and Déjeuner en fourrure*), 1936  
Fur-covered teacup, saucer, and spoon, height 7.3 (2 1/8")

To make this work, Meret Oppenheim simply lined a teacup, saucer, and spoon bought in Paris with the fur of a Chinese gazelle. Mixing attraction and repulsion, this dis/agreeable work is quintessentially Surrealist, for it adapts the device of the found thing to explore the idea of "the fetish," which psychoanalysis understands as an unlikely object invested with a powerful desire diverted from its proper aim. Here art appreciation is no longer a matter of disinterested teatime propriety: it is boldly interrupted through a smutty allusion to female genitalia that forces us to think about the relation between aesthetics and erotics.

3 • André Masson, *Figure*, 1927  
Oil and sand, 46 x 33 (18 1/8 x 13)

In the Surrealist practice of "automatic writing," the author, released from rational control, "took dictation" from his or her unconscious. André Masson's use of strange materials and gestural marks, sometimes almost dissolving the distinction between the figure and the ground, suggested one method to pursue "psychic automatism," opening up painting to new explorations not only of the unconscious but also of form and its opposite.



▲ aid of African objects, by Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse in Paris. Yet almost all modernists projected onto tribal peoples a purity of artistic vision that was associated with the simplicity of instinctual life. This projection is the primitivist fantasy *par excellence* and psychoanalysis participated in it then even as it provides ways to question it now. (For example, Freud saw tribal peoples as somehow fixed in pre-Oedipal or infantile stages.)

Strange though it may seem today, for some modernists an interest in tribal objects shaded into involvement with the art of children and of the insane. In this regard, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (*Bildnerei der Geisteskranken*), a collection of works by psychotics • presented in 1922 by Hans Prinzhorn (1886–1933), a German psychiatrist trained in psychoanalysis and art history alike, was of special importance to such artists as Paul Klee, Max Ernst, and ■ Jean Dubuffet. Most of these modernists (mis)read the art of the insane as though it were a secret part of the primitivist avant-garde, directly expressive of the unconscious and boldly defiant of all convention. Here psychoanalysts developed a more complicated understanding of paranoid representations as projections of desperate order, and of schizophrenic images as symptoms of radical self-dislocation. And yet such readings also have parallels in modernist art.

An important line of connection runs from the art of the insane, through the early collages of Ernst, to the definition of Surrealism as a disruptive "juxtaposition of two more or less disparate realities," as presented by its leader André Breton [2]. Psychoanalysis influenced Surrealism in its conceptions of the image as a kind of dream, understood by Freud as a distorted writing-in-pictures of a displaced wish, and of the object as a sort of symptom, understood by Freud as a bodily expression of a conflicted desire; but there are several other affinities as well. Among the first to study Freud, the Surrealists attempted to simulate the effects of madness in automatic writing and art alike [3]. In his first "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924), Breton described Surrealism as a "psychic automatism," a liberatory inscription of unconscious impulses "in the absence of

4 • Karel Appel, *A Figure*, 1953

Oil and colored crayons on paper, 64.5 x 49 (25½ x 19½)

After World War II an interest in the unconscious persisted among artists such as the Dutch painter Karel Appel, a member of Cobra (an acronym for the home bases of the group—Copenhagen, Brussels, Amsterdam); at the same time the question of the psyche was reframed by the horrors of the death camps and the atomic bombs. Like other groups, Cobra came to reject the Freudian unconscious explored by the Surrealists as too individualistic; as part of a general turn to the notion of a “collective unconscious” developed by Carl Jung, they explored totemic figures, mythic subjects, and collaborative projects in an often anguished search not only for a “new man” but for a new society.



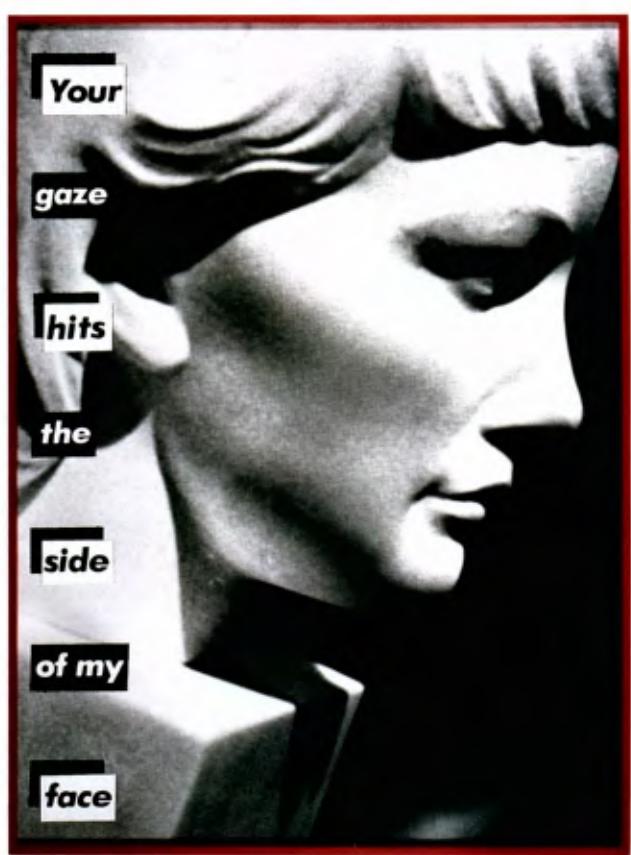
any control exercised by reason.” Yet right here emerges a problem that has dogged the relation between psychoanalysis and art ever since: either the connection between psyche and art work is posited as too direct or immediate, with the result that the specificity of the work is lost, or as too conscious or calculated, as though the psyche could simply be illustrated by the work. (The other methods in this introduction face related problems of mediation and questions of causation; indeed, they vex all art criticism and history.) Although Freud knew little of modernist art (his taste was conservative, and his collection ran to ancient and Asian figurines), he knew enough to be suspicious of both tendencies. In his view, the unconscious was not liberatory—on the contrary—and to propose an art free of repression, or at least convention, was to risk psychopathology, or to pretend to do so in the name of a psychoanalytic art (this is why he once called the Surrealists “absolute cranks”).

Nevertheless, by the early thirties the association of some modernist art with “primitives,” children, and the insane was set, as was its affinity with psychoanalysis. At this time, however, these connections played into the hands of the enemies of this art, most catastrophically the Nazis, who in 1937 moved to rid the world ▲ of such “degenerate” abominations, which they also condemned as “Jewish” and “Bolshevik.” Of course, Nazism was a horrific regression of its own, and it cast a pall over explorations of the unconscious well after World War II. Varieties of Surrealism lingered on in the postwar period, however, and an interest in the unconscious persisted among artists associated with *art informel*, ● Abstract Expressionism, and Cobra [4]. Yet, rather than the difficult mechanisms of the individual psyche explored by Freud, the focus fell on the redemptive archetypes of a “collective unconscious” imagined by Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung (1875–1961), an old apostate of psychoanalysis. (For example, Jackson Pollock was involved in Jungian analysis in ways that affected his painting.)

Partly in reaction against the subjective rhetoric of Abstract Expressionism, much art of the sixties was staunchly antipsychological, concerned instead with ready-made cultural images, as in ■ Pop art, or given geometric forms, as in Minimalism. At the same time, in the involvement of Minimalist, Process, and Performance art with phenomenology there was a reopening to the bodily subject that prepared a reopening to the psychological subject in ♦ feminist art. This engagement was ambivalent, however, for even as feminists used psychoanalysis, they did so mostly in the register of critique, “as a weapon” (in the battle cry of filmmaker Laura Mulvey) directed at the patriarchal ideology that also riddled psychoanalysis. For Freud had associated femininity with passivity, and in his famous account of the Oedipus complex, a tangle of relations in which the little boy is said to desire the mother until threatened by the father, there is no parallel denouement for the little girl, as if in his scheme of things women cannot attain full subjecthood. And Jacques Lacan (1901–81), the French psychoanalyst who proposed an influential reading of Freud, identified woman as such with the lack represented by castration. Nonetheless, for many feminists Freud and Lacan provided the most telling account

5 • Barbara Kruger, *Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face*, 1981  
Photographic silkscreen on vinyl, 139.7 × 104.1 (55 × 41)

Psychoanalysis helped some feminist artists in the eighties to critique power structures not only in high art but in mass culture too: particular attention was drawn to how images in both spheres are structured for a male heterosexual spectatorship—for a "male gaze" empowered with the pleasures of looking, with women mostly figuring as passive objects of this look. In her pieces of the period, the American artist Barbara Kruger juxtaposed appropriated images and critical phrases (sometimes subverted clichés) in order to question this objectification, to welcome women into the place of spectatorship, and to open up space for other kinds of image-making and viewing.



of the formation of the subject in the social order. If there is no natural femininity, these feminists argued, then there is also no natural patriarchy—only a historical culture fitted to the psychic structure, the desires and the fears, of the heterosexual male, and so vulnerable to feminist critique [5, 6]. Indeed, some feminists have insisted that the very marginality of women to the social order, as mapped by psychoanalysis, positions them as its most radical critics. By the nineties this critique was extended by gay and lesbian artists and critics concerned to expose the psychic workings of homophobia, as well by postcolonial practitioners concerned to ▲ mark the racialist projection of cultural others.

### Approaches alternative to Freud

One can critique Freud and Lacan, of course, and still remain within the orbit of psychoanalysis. Artists and critics have had affinities with other schools, especially the "object-relations" psychoanalysis associated with Melanie Klein (1882–1960) and D. W. Winnicott (1896–1971) in England, which influenced such aestheticians as Adrian Stokes (1902–72) and Anton Ehrenzweig (1909–66) and, indirectly, the reception of such artists as Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth. Where Freud saw pre-Oedipal stages (oral, anal, phallic, genital) that the child passes through, Klein saw positions that remain open into adult life. In her account these positions are dominated by the original fantasies of the child, involving violent aggression toward the parents as well as depressive anxiety about this aggression, with an oscillation between visions of destruction and reparation.

For some critics this psychoanalysis spoke to a partial turn in nineties art—away from questions of sexual desire in relation to ■ the social order, toward concerns with bodily drives in relation to life and death. After the moratorium on images of women in some feminist art of the seventies and eighties, Kleinian notions suggested a way to understand this reappearance of the body often in damaged form. A fascination with trauma, both personal and collective, reinforced this interest in the "abject" body, which also led artists and critics to the later writings of the French psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva (born 1941). Of course, social factors—the AIDS epidemic above ◆ all—also drove this pervasive aesthetic of mourning and melancholy. In the present, psychoanalysis remains a resource in art criticism and history, but its role in artmaking is far from clear.

### Levels of Freudian criticism

Psychoanalysis emerged out of clinical work, out of the analysis of symptoms of actual patients (there is much controversy about how Freud manipulated this material, which included his own dreams), and its use in the interpretation of art carries the strengths as well as the weaknesses of this source. There is first the basic question of who or what is to occupy the position of the patient—the work, the artist, the viewer, the critic, or some combination or relay of all these. Then there arises the complicated issue of the different levels of a Freudian



6 • Lynda Benglis, *Untitled*, 1974 (detail)

Color photograph, 25 x 26.5 (9 1/2 x 10 1/4)

With the rise of feminism in the sixties and seventies, some artists attacked patriarchal hierarchies not only in society in general but in the art world in particular: psychoanalysis figured as both weapon—because it offered profound insights into the relation between sexuality and subjectivity—and target—because it tended to associate women not only with passivity but also with lack. In this photograph, used in a notorious advertisement for a gallery show, the American artist Lynda Benglis mocked the macho posturing of some Minimalist and Postminimalist artists, as well as the increased marketing of contemporary art; at the same time, she seized “the phallus” in a way that both literalized its association with plenitude and power and parodied it.

interpretation of art, which I will here reduce to three: symbolic readings, accounts of process, and analogies in rhetoric.

Early attempts in Freudian criticism were governed by symbolic readings of the art work, as if it were a dream to be decoded in terms of a latent message hidden behind a manifest content: “This is not a pipe; it is really a penis.” This sort of criticism complements the kind of art that translates a dream or a fantasy in pictorial terms: art then becomes the encoding of a riddle and criticism its decoding, and the whole exercise is illustrational and circular. Although Freud was quick to stress that cigars are often just cigars, he too practiced this kind of deciphering, which fits in all too well with the traditional method of art history known as “iconography”—a reading back of symbols in a picture to sources in other kinds of texts—a method that most modernist art worked to foil (through abstraction, techniques of chance, and so on). In this regard, the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg has demonstrated an epistemological affinity between psychoanalysis and art history based in connoisseurship. For both discourses (which developed, in modern form, at roughly the same time) are concerned with the symptomatic trait or the telling detail (an idiosyncratic gesture of the hands, say) that might reveal, in psychoanalysis, a hidden conflict in the patient and, in connoisseurship, the proper attribution of the work to an artist.

In such readings the artist is the ultimate source to which the symbols point: the work is taken as his symptomatic expression, and it is used as such in the analysis. Thus in his 1910 study *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood*, Freud leads us from the enigmatic smiles of his *Mona Lisa* and Virgin Marys to posit in the artist a memory regarding his long-lost mother. In this way Freud and his followers looked for signs of psychic disturbances in art (his predecessor Jean-Martin Charcot did the same). This is not to say that Freud sees the artist as psychopathological; in fact he implies that art is one way to avoid this condition. “Art frees the artist from his fantasies,” the French philosopher Sarah Kofman comments, “just as ‘artistic creation’ circumvents neurosis and takes the place of psychoanalytic treatment.” But it is true that such Freudian criticism tends to “psychobiography,” that is, to a profiling of the artist in which art history is remodeled as psychoanalytic case study.

If symbolic readings and psychobiographical accounts can be reductive, this danger may be mitigated if we attend to other aspects of Freud. For most of the time Freud understands the sign less as symbolic, in the sense of directly expressive of a self, a meaning, or a reality, than as symptomatic, a kind of allegorical emblem in which desire and repression are intertwined. Moreover, he does not see art as a simple revision of preexisting memories or fantasies; apart from other things, it can also be, as Kofman suggests, an “originary ‘substitute’” for such scenes, through which we come to know them *for the first time* (this is what Freud attempts in his Leonardo study). Finally, psychobiography is put into productive doubt by the very fact that the psychoanalytic account of the unconscious, of its disruptive effects, puts all intentionality—all authorship, all biography—into productive doubt too.

Freudian criticism is not only concerned with a symbolic decoding of hidden meanings, with the semantics of the psyche. Less obviously, it is also involved with the dynamics of these processes, with an understanding of the sexual energies and unconscious forces that operate in the making as well as the viewing of art. On this second level of psychoanalytic interpretation, Freud revises the old philosophical concept of "aesthetic play" in terms of his own notion of "the pleasure principle," which he defined, in "Two Principles of Mental Functioning" (1911), in opposition to "the reality principle":

*The artist is originally a man [sic] who turns from reality because he cannot come to terms with the demand for the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction as it is first made, and who then in phantasy-life allows full play to his erotic and ambitious wishes. But he finds a way of return from this world of phantasy back to reality; with his special gifts he moulds his fantasies into a new kind of reality, and men concede them a justification as valuable reflections of actual life. Thus by a certain path he actually becomes the hero, king, creator, favorite he desired to be, without pursuing the circuitous path of creating real alterations in the outer world. But this he can only attain because other men feel the same dissatisfaction as he with the renunciation demanded by reality, and because this dissatisfaction, resulting from the displacement of the pleasure-principle by the reality-principle, is itself a part of reality.*

Three years before, in "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" (1908), Freud had speculated on how the artist overcomes our resistance to this performance, which we might otherwise deem solipsistic, if not simply inappropriate:

*[H]e bribes us by the purely formal—that is, aesthetic—yield of pleasure which he offers us in the presentation of his fantasies. We give the name incentive bonus or fore-pleasure to a yield of pleasure such as this, which is offered to us so as to make possible the release of still greater pleasure arising from deeper psychical sources. . . . [O]ur actual enjoyment of an imaginative work proceeds from a liberation of tensions in our minds.*

Let us review some of the (pre)conceptions in these statements. First, the artist avoids some of the "renunciations" that the rest of us must accept, and indulges in some of the fantasies that we must forgo. But we do not resent him for this exemption for three reasons: his fictions reflect reality nonetheless; they are born of the same dissatisfactions that we feel; and we are bribed by the pleasure that we take in the resolution of the formal tensions of the work, a pleasure that opens us to a deeper sort of pleasure—in the resolution of the psychic tensions within us. Note that for Freud art originates in a turn from reality, which is to say that it is fundamentally conservative in relation to the social order, a small aesthetic compensation for our mighty instinctual renunciation. Perhaps this

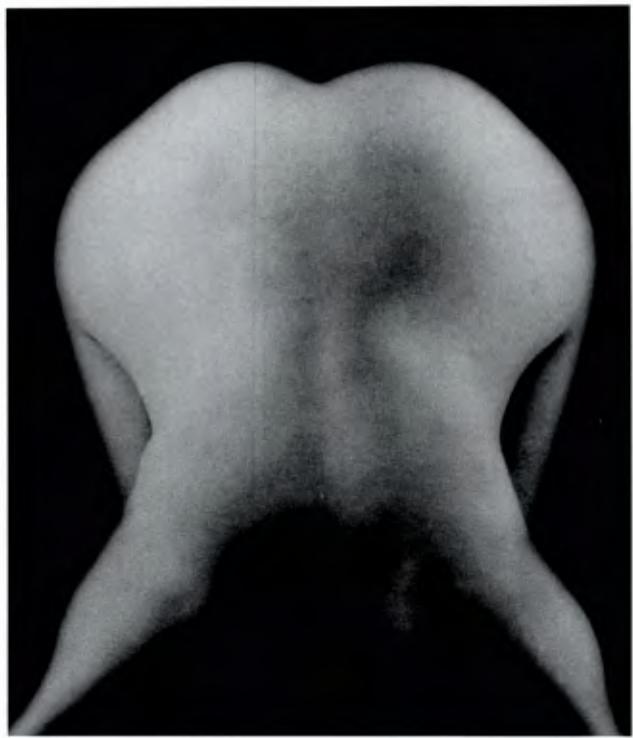
is another reason why he was suspicious of modernist art, concerned as much of it is not to "sublimate" instinctual energies, to divert them from sexual aims into cultural forms, but to go in the opposite direction, to "desublimate" cultural forms, to open them up to these disruptive forces.

### Dreams and fantasies

While the semantics of symbolic interpretation can be too particular, this concern with the dynamics of aesthetic process can be too general. A third level of Freudian criticism may avoid both extremes: the analysis of the rhetoric of the art work in analogy with such visual productions of the psyche as dreams and fantasies. Again, Freud understood the dream as a compromise between a wish and its repression. This compromise is negotiated by the "dream-work," which disguises the wish, in order to fool further repression, through "condensation" of some of its aspects and "displacement" of others. The dream-work then turns the distorted fragments into visual images with an eye to "considerations of representability" in a dream, and finally revises the images to insure that they hang together as a narrative (this is called "secondary revision"). This rhetoric of operations might be brought to bear on the production of some pictures—again, the Surrealists thought so—but there are obvious dangers with such analogies as well. Even when Freud and his followers wrote only about art (or literature), they were concerned to demonstrate points of psychoanalytic theory first and to understand objects of artistic practice second, so that forced applications are built into the discourse, as it were.

Yet there is a more profound problem with analogies drawn between psychoanalysis and visual art. With his early associate Josef Breuer (1842–1925) Freud founded psychoanalysis as a "talking cure"—that is, as a turn away from the visual theater of his teacher, the French pathologist and neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–93), who staged the symptomatic bodies of female hysterics in a public display at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris. The technical innovation of psychoanalysis was to attend to symptomatic language—not only of the dream as a form of writing but also of slips of the tongue, the "free association" of words by the patient, and so on. Moreover, for Freud culture was essentially a working out of the conflicted desires rooted in the Oedipus complex, a working out that is primarily narrative, and it is not clear how such narrative might play out in static forms like painting, sculpture, and the rest. These emphases alone render psychoanalysis ill-suited to questions of visual art. Furthermore, the Lacanian reading of Freud is militantly linguistic; its celebrated axiom—"the unconscious is structured like a language"—means that the psychic processes of condensation and displacement are structurally one with the linguistic tropes of "metaphor" and ▲ "metonymy." No analogy in rhetoric, therefore, would seem to bridge the categorical divide between psychoanalysis and art.

And yet, according to both Freud and Lacan, the crucial events in subject formation are *visual scenes*. For Freud the ego is first



7 • Lee Miller, *Nude Bent Forward*, Paris, c. 1931  
Psychoanalysis is concerned with traumatic scenes, whether actual or imagined, that mark the child profoundly—scenes where he or she discovers sexual difference, for example, scenes that are often visual but also often uncertain in nature. At different times in the twentieth century, artists, such as the Surrealists in the twenties and thirties and feminists in the seventies and eighties, have drawn on such images and scenarios as ways to trouble assumptions about seeing, expectations about gender, and so on. In this photograph by the American artist Lee Miller, a sometime associate of the Surrealists, it is not immediately clear what we see: A body? A male or a female? Or some other category of being, imaging, and feeling?

a bodily image, which, for Lacan in his famous paper on "The Mirror Stage" (1936/49), the infant initially encounters in a reflection that allows for a fragile coherence—a visual coherence as an image. The psychoanalytic critic Jacqueline Rose also alerts us to the "staging" of such events as "moments in which perception founders ... or in which pleasure in looking tips over into the register of excess." Her examples are two traumatic scenes that psychoanalysis posits for the little boy. In the first scene he discovers sexual difference—that girls do not have penises and hence that he may lose his—a perception that "founders" because it implies this grave threat. In the second scene he witnesses sexual intercourse between his parents, which fascinates him as a key to the riddle of his own origin. Freud called these scenes "primal fantasies"—primal both because they are fundamental and because they concern origins. As Rose suggests, such scenes "demonstrate the complexity of an essentially visual space" in ways that can be "used as theoretical prototypes to unsettle our certainties once again"—as indeed they were used, to different ends, in ▲ some Surrealist art of the twenties and thirties [7] and in some feminist art of the seventies and eighties. The important point to emphasize, though, is this: "Each time the stress falls on a problem of seeing. The sexuality lies less in the content of what is seen than in the subjectivity of the viewer." This is where psychoanalysis has the most to offer the interpretation of art, modernist or other. Its account of the effects of the work on the subject and the artist as well as on the viewer (including the critic) places the work, finally, in the position of the analyst as much as the analyzed.

In the end we do well to hold to a double focus: to view psychoanalysis historically, as an object in an ideological field often shared with modernist art, and to apply it theoretically, as a method to understand relevant aspects of this art, to map pertinent parts of the field. This double focus allows us to critique psychoanalysis even as we apply it. First and last, however, this project will be complicated—not only by the difficulties in psychoanalytic speculation, but also by the controversies that always swirl around it. Some of the clinical work of Freud and others was manipulated, to be sure, and some of the concepts are bound up with science that is no longer valid—but do these facts invalidate psychoanalysis as a mode of interpretation of art today? As with the other methods introduced here, the test will be in the fit and the yield of the arguments that we make. And here, as the psychoanalytic critic Leo Bersani reminds us, our "moments of theoretical collapse" may be inseparable from our moments of "psychoanalytic truth."

#### FURTHER READING

- Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986)  
Sigmund Freud, *Art and Literature*, trans. James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1985)  
Sarah Kofman, *The Childhood of Art: An Interpretation of Freud's Aesthetics*, trans. Winifred Woodhull (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988)  
Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973)  
Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986)

Hal Foster

▲ 1924, 1930b, 1931a, 1975a

## 2 The social history of art: models and concepts

Recent histories of art comprise a number of distinct critical models (for example, formalism, structuralist semiotics, psychoanalysis, social art history, and feminism) that have been merged and integrated in various ways, in particular in the work of American and British art historians since the seventies. This situation sometimes makes it difficult, if not altogether pointless, to insist on methodological consistency, let alone on a singular methodological position. The complexity of these various individual strands and of their integrated forms points firstly to the problematic nature of any claim that one particular model should be accepted as exclusively valid or as dominant within the interpretative processes of art history. Our attempts to integrate a broad variety of methodological positions also efface the earlier theoretical rigor that had previously generated a degree of precision in the process of historical analysis and interpretation. That precision now seems to have been lost in an increasingly complex weave of methodological eclecticism.

### The origins of the methodologies

All these models were initially formulated as attempts to displace earlier humanist (subjective) approaches to criticism and interpretation. They had been motivated by the desire to position the study of all types of cultural production (such as literature or the fine arts) on a more solidly scientific basis of method and insight, rather than have criticism remain dependent on the various more-or-less subjective approaches of the late nineteenth century, such as the biographical, psychologistic, and historicist survey methods.

- ▲ Just as the early Russian Formalists made Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic structure the matrix of their own efforts to understand the formation and functions of cultural representation, subsequent historians who attempted to interpret works of art in psychoanalytic terms tried to find a map of artistic subject formation in the writings of Sigmund Freud. Proponents of both models argued that they could generate a verifiable understanding of the processes of aesthetic production and reception, and promised to anchor the "meaning" of the work of art solidly in the operations of either the conventions of language and/or the system of the unconscious, arguing that aesthetic or poetic

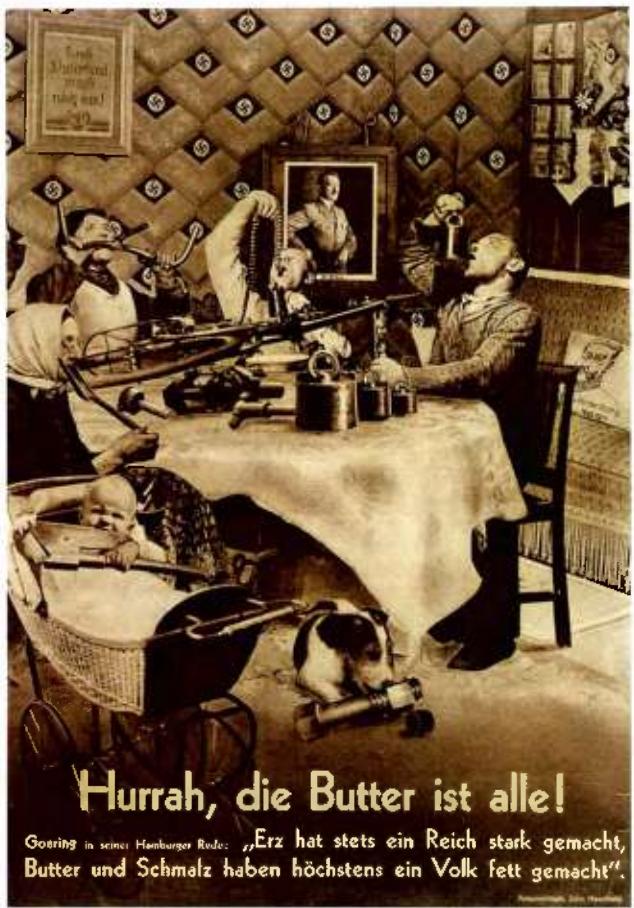
meaning operated in a manner analogous to other linguistic conventions and narrative structures (e.g., the folktale), or, in terms of the unconscious, as in Freud's and Carl Jung's theories, analogous to the joke and the dream, the symptom and the trauma.

The social history of art, from its very beginning in the first decades of the twentieth century, had a similar ambition to make the analysis and interpretation of works of art more rigorous and verifiable. Most importantly, the early social historians of art (Marxist scholars like the Anglo-German Francis Klingender [1907–55] and the Anglo-Hungarian Frederick Antal [1887–1954]) tried to situate cultural representation within the existing communication structures of society, primarily within the field of ideological production under the rise of industrial capitalism. After all, social art history's philosophical inspiration was the scientificity of Marxism itself, a philosophy that had aimed from the very beginning not only to analyze and interpret economic, political, and ideological relations, but also to make the writing of history itself—its historicity—contribute to the larger project of social and political change.

This critical and analytical project of social art history formulated a number of key concepts that I will discuss further: I shall also try to give their original definitions, as well as subsequent modifications to these concepts, in order to acknowledge the increasing complexity of the terminology of social art history, which results partially from the growing differentiation of the philosophical concepts of Marxist thought itself. At the same time, it may become apparent that some of these key concepts are presented not because they are important in the early years of the twenty-first century, but, rather, because of their obsolescence, withering away in the present and in the recent past. This is because the methodological conviction of certain models of analysis has been just as overdetermined as that of all the other methodological models that have temporarily governed the interpretation and the writing of art history at different points in the twentieth century.

### Autonomy

- ▲ German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas (born 1929) has defined the formation of the bourgeois public sphere in general and the development of cultural practices within that



## Hurrah, die Butter ist alle!

Goering in seiner Hamburger Rede: „Erz hat stets ein Reich stark gemacht, Butter und Schmalz haben höchstens ein Volk fett gemacht“.

1 • John Heartfield, "Hurray, the Butter is Finished!", cover for AIZ, December 19, 1935  
Photomontage, 38 x 27 (15 1/4 x 10 1/4)

The work of John Heartfield, along with that of Marcel Duchamp and El Lissitzky, demarcates one of the most important paradigm shifts in the epistemology of twentieth-century modernism. Refiguring photomontage and constructing new textual narratives, it established the only model for artistic practice as communicative action in the age of mass-cultural propaganda. Denounced as such by the intrinsically conservative ideologies of formalists and modernists defending obsolete models of autonomy, it addressed in fact the historical need for a change of audiences and of the forms of distribution. Inevitably, it became the singular, most important example of counterpropaganda to the hegemonic media apparatus of the thirties, the only voice in the visual avant-garde to oppose the rise of fascism as a late form of imperialist capitalism.

sphere as social processes of subjective differentiation that lead to the historical construction of bourgeois individuality. These processes guarantee the individual's identity and historical status as a self-determining and self-governing subject. One of the necessary conditions of bourgeois identity was the subject's capacity to experience the autonomy of the aesthetic, to experience pleasure without interest.

This concept of aesthetic autonomy was as integral to the differentiation of bourgeois subjectivity as it was to the differentiation of cultural production according to its proper technical and procedural characteristics, eventually leading to the modernist orthodoxy of medium-specificity. Inevitably then, autonomy served as a foundational concept during the first five decades of European modernism. From Théophile Gautier's program of *l'art pour l'art* and Édouard Manet's conception of painting as a project of perceptual self-reflexivity, the aesthetics of autonomy culminate in the poetics of Stéphane Mallarmé in the 1880s. Aestheticism conceiving the work of art as a purely self-sufficient and self-reflexive ▲ experience—identified by Walter Benjamin as a nineteenth-century theology of art—generated, in early-twentieth-century formalist thought, similar conceptions that would later become the doxa of painterly self-reflexivity for formalist critics and historians. These ranged from Roger Fry's responses to Postimpressionism—in particular the work of Paul Cézanne—to Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler's neo-Kantian theories of Analytical Cubism, to the ● work of Clement Greenberg (1909–94) in the postwar period. Any attempt to transform autonomy into a transhistorical, if not ontological precondition of aesthetic experience, however, is profoundly problematic. It becomes evident upon closer historical inspection that the formation of the concept of aesthetic autonomy itself was far from autonomous. This is first of all because the aesthetics of autonomy had been determined by the overarching philosophical framework of Enlightenment philosophy (Immanuel Kant's [1724–1804] concept of disinterestedness) while it simultaneously operated in opposition to the rigorous instrumentalization of experience that emerged with the rise of the mercantile capitalist class.

Within the field of cultural representation, the cult of autonomy liberated linguistic and artistic practices from mythical and religious thought just as much as it emancipated them from the politically adulatory service and economic dependency under the auspices of a rigorously controlling feudal patronage. While the cult of autonomy might have originated with the emancipation of bourgeois subjectivity from aristocratic and religious hegemony, autonomy also saw the theocratic and hierarchical structures of that patronage as having their own reality. The modernist aesthetic of autonomy thus constituted the social and subjective sphere from within which an opposition against the totality of interested activities and instrumentalized forms of experience could be articulated in artistic acts of open negation and refusal. Paradoxically, however, these acts served as opposition and—in their ineluctable condition as extreme exceptions from the universal rule—they confirmed the regime of total instrumentalization. One might have



2 • El Lissitzky and Sergei Senkin, *The Task of the Press is the Education of the Masses*, 1928  
Photographic frieze for the international exhibition "Pressa," Cologne

Like Heartfield, El Lissitzky transformed the legacies of collage and photomontage according to the needs of a newly industrialized collective. Especially in the new genre of exhibition design, which he developed in the twenties in works such as the Soviet Pavilion for the international exhibition "Pressa," it became evident that Lissitzky was one of the first (and few) artists of the twenties and thirties to understand that the spaces of public architecture (that is, of simultaneous collective reception) and the space of public information had collapsed in the new spaces of the mass-cultural sphere. Therefore Lissitzky, an exemplary "artist-as-producer," as Walter Benjamin would identify the artist's new social role, would situate his practice within the very parameters and modes of production of a newly developing proletarian public sphere.

to formulate the paradox that an aesthetics of autonomy is thus the highly instrumentalized form of noninstrumentalized experience under liberal bourgeois capitalism.

Actual study of the critical phase of the aesthetic of autonomy in the nineteenth century (from Manet to Mallarmé) would recognize that this very paradox is the actual formative structure of their pictorial and poetic genius. Both define modernist representation as an advanced form of critical self-reflexivity and define their hermetic artifice in assimilation and in opposition to the emerging mass-cultural forms of instrumentalized representation. Typically, the concept of autonomy was both formed by and oppositional to the instrumental logic of bourgeois rationality, rigorously enforcing the requirements of that rationality within the sphere of cultural production through its commitment to empirical criticality. Thereby an aesthetics of autonomy contributed to one of the most fundamental transformations of the experience of the work of art, initiating the shift that Walter Benjamin in his essays of the thirties called the

historical transition from cult-value to exhibition-value. These essays have come to be universally considered as the founding texts of a philosophical theory of the social history of art.

The concept of autonomy also served to idealize the new distribution form of the work of art, now that it had become a free-floating commodity on the bourgeois market of objects and luxury goods. Thus autonomy aesthetics was engendered by the capitalist logic of commodity production as much as it opposed that logic. In fact, the Marxist aesthetician Theodor W. Adorno (1903–69) still maintained in the late sixties that artistic independence and aesthetic autonomy could, paradoxically, be guaranteed only in the commodity structure of the work of art.

### Antiaesthetic

Peter Bürger (born 1936), in his important—although problematic—essay, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974), argued that the new spectrum of antiaesthetic practices in 1913 arose as a contestation of autonomy aesthetics. Thus—according to Bürger—the historical avant-gardes after Cubism universally attempted to “integrate art with life” and to challenge the autonomous “institution of art.” Bürger perceives this project of the antiaesthetic to be at the center ▲ of the revolts of Dadaism, Russian Constructivism, and French Surrealism. Yet, rather than focusing on a nebulously conceived integration of art and life (an integration never satisfactorily defined at any point in history) or on a rather abstract debate on the nature of the institution of art, it seems more productive to focus here on the very strategies that these avant-garde practitioners themselves had propagated: in particular, strategies to initiate fundamental changes in the conception of audience and spectatorial agency, to reverse the bourgeois hierarchy of aesthetic exchange-value and use-value, and most importantly perhaps, to conceive of cultural practices for a newly emerging internationalist proletarian public sphere within the advanced industrial nation states.

Such an approach would not only allow us to differentiate these avant-garde projects more adequately, but would also help us understand that the rise of an aesthetic of technical reproduction (in diametrical opposition to an aesthetic of autonomy) emerges at that very moment of the twenties when the bourgeois public sphere begins to wither away. It is at first displaced by the progressive forces of an emerging proletarian public sphere (as was the case in the ■ early phases of the Soviet Union and the Weimar Republic), only to be followed, of course, by the rise of the mass-cultural public sphere, either in its totalitarian fascist or state-socialist versions ■ in the thirties or by its postwar regimes of the culture industry and of spectacle, emerging with the hegemony of the United States and a largely dependent culture of European reconstruction.

The antiaesthetic dismantles the aesthetics of autonomy on all levels: it replaces originality with technical reproduction, it destroys a work’s aura and the contemplative modes of aesthetic experience and replaces these with communicative action and aspirations toward simultaneous collective perception. The antiaesthetic (such

▲ as the work of John Heartfield [1]) defines its artistic practices as temporary and geopolitically specific (rather than as transhistorical), as participatory (rather than as a unique emanation of an exceptional form of knowledge). The antiaesthetic also operates as • a utilitarian aesthetic (e.g., in the work of the Soviet Productivists [2]), situating the work of art in a social context where it assumes a variety of productive functions such as information and education or political enlightenment, serving the needs of a cultural self-constitution for the newly emerging audiences of the industrial proletariat who were previously excluded from cultural representation on the levels of both production and reception.

### Class, agency, and activism

The central premises of Marxist political theory had been the concepts of class and class-consciousness—the most important factors to drive forward the historical process. Classes served in different moments of history as the agents of historical, social, and political change (e.g., the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, the proletariat, and the most powerful class in the twentieth century, the *petite bourgeoisie*, paradoxically the most neglected by classical Marxist accounts). It had been Marx’s argument that class itself was defined by one crucial condition: a subject’s situation in relation to the means of production.

Thus, privileged access to (or, more decisively, controlling ownership of) the means of production was the constitutive condition of bourgeois class identity in the later eighteenth and the entire nineteenth centuries. In contrast, during the same period, the conditions of proletarianization identify those subjects who will remain forever economically, legally, and socially barred from access to the means of production (which would, of course, also include the means of education and the acquisition of improved professional skills).

Questions concerning the concept of class are central to the social history of art, ranging from the class identity of the artist to whether cultural solidarity or mimetic artistic identification with the struggles of the oppressed and exploited classes of modernity can actually amount to acts of political support for revolutionary or oppositional movements. Marxist political theorists have often regarded that kind of cultural class alliance with considerable skepticism. Yet this mode of class alliance determined practically all politically motivated artistic production of modernity, since very few, if any, artists and intellectuals had actually emerged from the conditions of proletarian existence at that time. Class identity becomes all the more complicated when considering how the consciousness of individual artists might well have become radicalized at certain points (e.g., the revolution of 1848, the revolutions of 1917, or the anti-imperialist struggles of 1968) and artists might then have assumed positions of solidarity with the oppressed classes of those historical moments [3]. Slightly later, however, in the wake of their cultural assimilation, the same artists might have assumed positions of complicit or active affirmation of the ruling order and simply served as the providers of cultural legitimization.



3 • Tina Modotti, *Workers' Demonstration, Mexico, May 1, 1929*

Platinum print. 20.5 x 18 (8 1/8 x 7 1/8)

The work of the Italian-American artist Modotti in Mexico gives evidence of the universality of the political and social commitment among radical artists of the twenties and thirties. Abandoning her training as a "straight" modernist photographer in the mold of Edward Weston, Modotti reoriented herself to make photography a weapon in the political struggle of the Mexican peasant and working class against the eternal deferrals and deceptions of the country's oligarchic rulers. Expanding the tradition of the *Taller Grafico Popular* to address that class now with the means of photographic representation, she nevertheless understood the necessity of making the regionally specific and uneven development of forms of knowledge and artistic culture the basis of her work. Accordingly, Modotti never adopted the seemingly more advanced forms of political photomontage, but retained the bonds of realist depiction necessary for activist political messages in the geopolitical context in which she had situated herself. At the same time, as the image *Workers' Demonstration* signals, she was far from falling into the conciliatory and compensatory realisms of "straight" and "New Objective" photography. What would have been merely a modernist grid of serially repeated objects of industrial manufacture in the work of her historical peers (such as Alfred Renger-Patzsch) becomes one of the most convincing photographic attempts of the twenties and thirties to depict the social presence and political activism of the working and peasant class masses as the actual producers of a country's economic resources.

This also points to the necessary insight that the registers of artistic production and their latent or manifest relationships to political activism are infinitely more differentiated than arguments for the politicization of art might generally have assumed. We are not simply confronted with an alternative between a politically conscious or activist practice on the one hand, and a merely affirmative, hegemonic culture (as the Italian Marxist philosopher and aesthetician Antonio Gramsci [1891–1937] called it) on the other. Yet, the function of hegemonic culture is clearly to sustain power and legitimize the perceptual and behavioral forms of the ruling class through cultural representation, while oppositional cultural practices articulate resistance to hierarchical thought, subvert privileged forms of experience, and destabilize the ruling regimes of vision and perception just as they can also massively and manifestly destabilize governing notions of hegemonic power.

If we accept that some forms of cultural production can assume the role of agency (i.e., that of information and enlightenment, that of criticality and counterinformation), then the social history of art faces one of its most precarious insights, if not a condition of crisis: if it were to align its aesthetic judgment with the condition of political solidarity and class alliance, it would inevitably be left with only a few heroic figures in whom such a correlation between class-consciousness, agency, and revolutionary alliance could actually be ascertained. These examples would include Gustave Courbet and Honoré Daumier in the nineteenth century, ▲ Käthe Kollwitz and John Heartfield in the first half of the twentieth century, and artists such as Martha Rosler [4], Hans Haacke [6], and Allan Sekula in the second half of the twentieth century.

Thus, in recognizing that compliance with class interests and political revolutionary consciousness can at best be considered an exceptional rather than a necessary condition within the aesthetic practices of modernity, it leaves the social art historian with a difficult choice. That is, either to exclude from consideration most actual artistic practices of any particular moment of modernism, disregarding both the artists and their production because of their lack of commitment, class-consciousness, and political correctness, or to recognize the necessity for numerous other criteria (beyond political and social history) to enter the process of historical and critical analysis.

Since the proletarian's only means of survival is the sale of his or her own labor like any other commodity, producing a phenomenal accretion of surplus value to the entrepreneurial bourgeois or to the corporate enterprise by supplying the subject's labor power, it is, therefore, the very condition of labor and the laborer that radical artists from the nineteenth century onward, from Gustave Courbet ■ to the Productivists of the twenties, confront. For the most part, however, they confront it not on the level of iconography (in fact, the almost total absence of the representation of alienated labor is the rule of modernism) but rather with the perpetual question of whether the labor of industrial production and the labor of cultural production can and should be related, and, if so, how—as analogous? as dialectical opposites? as complementary? as mutually exclusive? Marxist attempts to theorize this relationship (and the

4 • Martha Rosler, *Red Stripe Kitchen*, from the series *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful*, 1967–72  
Photomontage printed as color photograph.  
61 × 50.8 (24 × 20)

Rosler is one of the very few artists in the postwar period to have taken up the legacies of the political photomontage work of the thirties. Her series *Bringing the War Back Home: House Beautiful*, begun in 1967, explicitly responds to both a historical and an artistic situation. First of all, the work participated in the growing cultural and political opposition against the imperialist American war in Vietnam. Rather than creating the works as individual photomontages, Rosler conceived them as a series for reproduction and dissemination in a number of antiwar and countercultural journals in order to increase the visibility and impact of the images. She had clearly understood Heartfield's legacy and the dialectics of distribution form and mass-cultural iconography. Second, Rosler explicitly countered the Conceptualist's claim that photography should merely serve as a neutral document of analytical self-criticality, or as an indexical trace of the spatio-temporal stagings of the subject. Rather, she identified photography as one of several discursive tools in the production of ideology in the mass-cultural arsenal. By inserting sudden documentary images of the war in Vietnam into the seemingly blissful and opulent world of American domesticity, Rosler not only reveals the intricate intertwining of domestic and militaristic forms of advanced capitalist consumption, but also manifestly challenges the credibility of photography as a truthful carrier of authentic information.



social art historian's attempts to come to terms with these theorizations) span an extreme range: from a productivist-utilitarian aesthetic that affirms the constitution of the subject as necessary in the production of use-value (as in the Soviet Productivists, ▲ the German Bauhaus, and the De Stijl movements) to an aesthetic of ludic counterproductivity (as in the simultaneous practices of • Surrealism) which negates labor-as-value and denies it any purchase whatsoever on the territory of art. Such an aesthetic regards artistic practice as the one experience where the possibility of historically available forms of unalienated and uninstrumentalized existence shine forth, whether for the first time or as celebratory reminiscences of the bliss of rituals, games, and child's play.

It is no accident, then, that modernism has mostly avoided the actual representation of alienated labor, except for the work of great activist photographers such as Lewis Hine, where the abolition of child labor was the driving agenda of the project. In contrast, whenever painting or photography in the twentieth century celebrated the labor force or the forceful laborer, one could—and can—be sure of being in the company of totalitarian ideologies, whether fascist, Stalinist, or corporate. The heroicization of the body subjected to alienated physical labor serves to instill collective respect for intolerable conditions of subjectivation, and in a false celebration of that labor it also serves to naturalize that which should be critically analyzed in terms of its potential transformation, if not its final abolition. Conversely, the all-too-easy acceptance of artistic practices as mere playful opposition fails to recognize not only the pervasiveness of alienated labor as a governing form of collective experience, but also prematurely accepts the relegation of artistic practice to merely a pointless exemption from the reality principle altogether.

### Ideology: reflection and mediation

The concept of ideology played an important role in the aesthetics of György Lukács (1885–1971), who wrote one of the most cohesive Marxist literary aesthetic theories of the twentieth century. Although rarely addressing artistic visual production, Lukács's theories had a tremendous impact on the formation of social art history in its second phase of the forties and fifties, in particular on the work of his fellow Hungarian Arnold Hauser (1892–1978) and the Austrian Marxist Ernst Fischer (1889–1972).

Lukács's key concept was that of reflection, establishing a rather mechanistic relationship between the forces of the economic and political base and the ideological and institutional superstructure. Ideology was defined as an inverted form of consciousness or—worse—as mere false consciousness. Furthermore, the concept of reflection argued that the phenomena of cultural representation were ultimately mere secondary phenomena of the class politics and ideological interests of a particular historical moment. Subsequently, though, the understanding of reflection would depart from these mechanistic assumptions. Lukács's analysis had in fact argued for an understanding of cultural production as dialectical historical operations, and he saw certain cultural practices (e.g., the



5 • Dan Graham, *Homes for America*,  
from *Arts Magazine*, 1967  
Prnt, 74 x 93 (29½ x 36½)

Graham's publication of one of his earliest works in the layout and presentational format of an article in the pages of a rather prominent American art magazine demarcates one of the key moments of Conceptual art. First of all, modernism's (and Conceptualism's) supposedly radical quest for empirical and critical self-reflexivity is turned in on itself and onto the frames of presentation and distribution. Graham's magazine article anticipates the fact that crucial information on artistic practices is always already mediated by mass-cultural and commercial forms of dissemination. Accordingly, Graham integrates that dimension of distribution into the conception of the work itself. The artist's model of self-reflexivity dialectically shifts from tautology to discursive and institutional critique. What distinguishes his approach to the problems of audience and distribution from the earlier models of the historical avant-garde is the skepticism and the precision with which he positions his operations exclusively within the discursive and institutional sphere of the given conditions of artistic production (rather than the project of utopian social and political transformations). Yet the choice of prefabricated suburban tract-housing in New Jersey first of all expands the subject matter of Pop art from a mere citation of mass-cultural and media iconography to a new focus on social and architectural spaces. At the same time, Graham reveals that the spatial organization of the lowest level of everyday suburban experience and architectural consumption had already prefigured the principles of a serial or modular iterative structure that had defined the sculptural work of his predecessors, the Minimalists.

bourgeois novel and its project of realism) as the quintessential cultural achievement of the progressive forces of the bourgeoisie. When it came to the development of a proletarian aesthetic, however, Lukács became a stalwart of reactionary thought, arguing that the preservation of the legacies of bourgeois culture would have to be an integral force within an emerging proletarian realism. The task of Socialist Realism in Lukács's account eventually came simultaneously to preserve the revolutionary potential of the progressive bourgeois moment that had been betrayed and to lay the foundations of a new proletarian culture that had truly taken possession of the bourgeois means of cultural production.

Since the theorizations of ideology in the sixties, aestheticians and art historians have not only differentiated general theories of ideology, but have also elaborated the questions of how cultural production relates to the apparatus of ideology at large. The question of whether artistic practice operates inside or outside ideological representations has especially preoccupied social art historians since the seventies, all of them arriving at very different answers, depending on the theory of ideology to which they subscribe. Thus, for example, those social art historians who followed the model of the early Marxist phase of American art historian Meyer Schapiro (1904–96) continued to operate under the assumption that cultural representation is the mirror reflection of the ideological interests of a ruling class (e.g., Schapiro's argument about Impressionism being the cultural expression of the leisured share-holding bourgeoisie). According to Schapiro, these cultural representations do not merely articulate the mental universe of the bourgeoisie: they also invest it with the cultural authority to claim and maintain its political legitimacy as a ruling class.

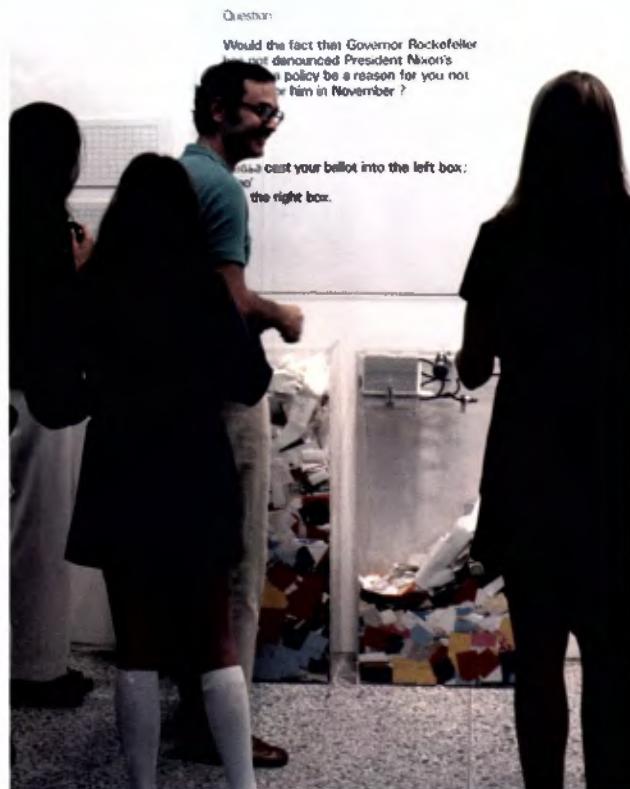
Others have taken Meyer Schapiro's Marxist social history of art as a point of departure, but have also adopted the complex ideas that he developed in his later work. He took the infinitely more complicated questions of mediation between art and ideology into account by recognizing that aesthetic formations are relatively autonomous, rather than fully dependent upon or congruent with ideological interests (a development that is evident, for example, in Schapiro's subsequent turn to an early semiology of abstraction). One result of a more complex theorization of ideology was the attempt to situate artistic representations as dialectical forces within their historically specific moment. That is, in certain cases a particular practice might very well articulate the rise of progressive consciousness not only within an individual artist, but also the progressivity of a patron class and its self-definition in terms of a project of bourgeois enlightenment and ever-expanding social and economic justice (see, for example, Thomas Crow's [born 1948] classic essay "Modernism and Mass Culture," concerning the dialectical conception of the idiom of neo-Impressionist divisionism in its drastic changes from affiliation with the politics of radical anarchism to an indulgent style).

Social art historians of the seventies, like Crow and T. J. Clark (born 1945), conceived of the production of cultural representation as both dependent upon class ideology and generative of counter-ideological models. Thus, the most comprehensive account of

#### 6 • Hans Haacke, *MOMA-Poll*, 1970

Audience participatory installation: two transparent acrylic ballot boxes, each 40 × 20 × 10 (15½ × 7½ × 3½), equipped with photoelectric counter, text

For the exhibition "Information" at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1970, Haacke installed one of the first of his new works to deal with "social systems," called either *Polls* or as *Visitors' Profiles*. In these installations, traditionally passive spectators became active participants. Haacke's subjection of the processes of production and reception to elementary forms of statistical accounting and positivist information is a clear response to the actual principles governing experience in what Adorno had called the "society of administration." At the same time, Haacke's work, like Graham's, shifts attention from the critical analysis of the work's immanent structures of meaning to the external frames of institutions. Thus Haacke repositions Conceptual art in a new critical relation to the socioeconomic conditions determining access and availability of aesthetic experience, a practice later identified as "institutional critique." Haacke's *MOMA-Poll* is a striking example of this shift since it confronts the viewer with a sudden insight into the degree to which the museum as a supposedly neutral space guarding aesthetic autonomy and disinterestedness is imbricated with economic, ideological, and political interests. The work also reconstitutes a condition of responsibility and participation for the viewer that surpasses models of spectatorial involvement previously proposed by artists of the neo-avant-garde, while it recognizes the limitations of the spectators' political aspirations and their psychic range of experience and self-determination.



nineteenth-century modernist painting and its shifting fortunes within the larger apparatus of ideological production can still be found in the complex and increasingly differentiated approach to the question of ideology in the work of Clark, the leading social art historian of the late twentieth century. In Clark's accounts of the work of Daumier and Courbet, for example, ideology and painting are still conceived in the dialectical relations that Lukács had suggested in his accounts of the work of eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature: as an articulation of the progressive forces of the bourgeois class in a process of coming into its own mature identity to accomplish the promises of the French Revolution and of the culture of the Enlightenment at large.

Clark's later work *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (1984), by contrast, does not discuss merely the extreme difficulty of situating the work of Manet and Seurat within such a clear and dynamic relationship to the progressive forces of a particular segment of society. Rather, Clark now faces the task of confronting the newfound complexity of the relationship between ideology and artistic production, and of integrating it with the methodology of social art history that he had developed up to this point. This theoretical crisis undoubtedly resulted in large part from Clark's discovery of the work of the Marxist Lacanian Louis Althusser (1918–90). Althusser's conception of ideology still remains the most productive one, in particular with regard to its capacity to situate aesthetic and art-historical phenomena in a position of relative autonomy with regard to the totality of ideology. This is not just because Althusser theorizes ideology as a totality of linguistic representations in which the subject is constituted in a politicized version of Lacan's account of the symbolic order. Perhaps even more important is Althusser's distinction between the totality of the ideological state apparatus (and its subspheres in all domains of representation) and the explicit exemption of artistic representations (as well as scientific knowledge) from that totality of ideological representations.

#### Popular culture versus mass culture

One of the most important debates among social art historians concerns the question of how so-called high art or avant-garde practices relate to the emerging mass-cultural formations of modernity. And while it is of course understood that these formations change continuously (as the interactions between the two halves of the systems of representation are continuously reconfigured), it has remained a difficult debate whose outcome is often indicative of the particular type of Marxism embraced by the critics of mass culture. It ranges from the most violent rejection of mass-cultural formations in the work of Adorno, whose infamous condemnation of jazz is now universally discredited as a form of eurocentric Alexandrianism that was—worst of all—largely dependent on the author's total lack of actual information about the musical phenomena he so disdained.

The opposite approach to mass-cultural phenomena was first developed in England, in the work of Raymond Williams (1921–88),



7 • Gerhard Richter and Konrad Lueg / Fischer, *Life with Pop—Demonstration for Capitalist Realism*, at Möbelhaus Berges, Düsseldorf, October 11, 1963

In 1963, Gerhard Richter and Konrad Lueg (who later, as Konrad Fischer, became one of Europe's most important dealers of the Minimal and Conceptual generation) staged a performance in a Düsseldorf department store. It initiated a German variation on the neo-avant-garde's international reorientation toward mass culture that—since the late fifties—had gradually displaced postwar forms of abstraction in England, France, and the United States. The neologism "capitalist realism," coined by Richter for this occasion, reverberates with realism's horble "other," the Socialist variety that had defined Richter's educational background in the Communist part of Germany until 1961. The spectacle of boredom, affirmation, and passivity against the backdrop of a totalizing system of objects of consumption took the work of Piero Manzoni as one of its cues, namely the insight that artistic practice would have to be situated more than ever in the interstitial spaces between objects of consumption, sites of spectacle, and ostentatious acts of artistic annihilation. But its brooding melancholic passivity was also a specifically German contribution to the recognition that from now on advanced forms of consumer culture would not only determine behavior in a way that had been previously determined by religious or political belief systems, but that in this particular historical context of Germany they would also serve as the collective permit to repress and to forget the population's recent massive conversion to fascism.

whose crucial distinction between popular culture and mass culture became a productive one for subsequent attempts by cultural historians such as Stuart Hall (1932–2014) to argue for an infinitely more differentiated approach when analyzing mass-cultural phenomena. Hall argued that the same dialectical movement that aestheticians and art historians had detected in the gradual shift of stylistic phenomena from revolutionary and emancipatory to regressive and politically reactionary could be detected in the production of mass culture as well: here a perpetual oscillation from initial contestation and transgression to eventual affirmation in the process of industrialized acculturation would take place. Hall also made it seem plausible that a fundamental first step in overcoming the eurocentric fixation on hegemonic culture (whether high bourgeois or avant-garde) was acceptance that different audiences communicate within different structures of tradition, linguistic convention, and behavioral forms of interaction. Therefore, according to the new cultural-studies approach, the specificity of audience address and experiences should be posited above all claims—as authoritarian as they are numinous—for universally valid criteria of aesthetic evaluation, that is, that hierarchical canonicity whose ultimate and latent goal would always remain the confirmation of the supremacy of white, male, bourgeois culture.

### Sublimation and desublimation

The model of cultural studies that Williams and Hall elaborated, and that became known later as the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, laid the foundations for most of the work in cultural studies being done today. Even though he is not known ever to have engaged with the work of any of the British Marxists, Adorno's counterargument would undoubtedly have been to accuse their project of being one of extending desublimation into the very center of aesthetic experience, its conception and critical evaluation. Desublimation for Adorno internalizes the very destruction of subjectivity further; its agenda is to dismantle the processes of complex consciousness formation, the desire for political self-determination and resistance, and ultimately to annihilate experience itself in order to become totally controlled by the demands of late capitalism.

Another and rather different Marxist aesthetician, Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), conceived of the concept of desublimation in almost the opposite way, arguing that the structure of aesthetic experience consisted of the desire to undermine the apparatus of libidinal repression and to generate an anticipatory moment of an existence liberated from needs and instrumentalizing demands. Marcuse's Freudo-Marxist aesthetic of libidinal liberation was situated at the absolute opposite pole of Adorno's ascetic aesthetics of a negative dialectics, and Adorno did not fail to chastize Marcuse publicly for what he perceived to be the horrifying effects of hedonistic American consumer culture on Marcuse's thoughts.

Whatever the ramifications of Marcuse's reconception of desublimation, it is certainly a term for which ample evidence could be

found in avant-garde practices before and after World War II. Throughout modernity, artistic strategies resist and deny the established claims for technical virtuosity, for exceptional skills, and for conformity with the accepted standards of historical models. They deny the aesthetic any privileged status whatsoever and debase it with all the means of deskilling, by taking recourse to an abject or a low-cultural iconography, or by the emphatic foregrounding of procedures and materials that reinsert the disavowed dimensions of repressed somatic experience back into the space of artistic experience.

### The neo-avant-garde

One of the major conflicts of writing social art history after World War II derives from an overarching condition of asynchronicity. On the one hand, American critics in particular were eager to establish the first hegemonic avant-garde culture of the twentieth century; however, in the course of that project they failed to recognize that the very fact of a reconstruction of a model of avant-garde culture would inevitably affect not only the status of the work being produced under these circumstances, but also, even more profoundly, the critical and historical writing associated with it.

In Adorno's late-modernist *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), the concept of autonomy retains a central role. Unlike Clement Greenberg's remobilization of the concept in favor of an American version of late-modernist aesthetics, Adorno's aesthetics operates within a principle of double negativity. On the one hand, Adorno's late modernism denies the possibility of a renewed access to an aesthetics of autonomy, a possibility annihilated by the final destruction of the bourgeois subject in the aftermath of fascism and the Holocaust. On the other hand, Adorno's aesthetics also deny the possibility of a politicization of artistic practices in the revolutionary perspective of Marxist aesthetics. According to Adorno, politicized art would only serve as an alibi and prohibit actual political change, since the political circumstances for a revolutionary politics are *de facto* not accessible in the moment of postwar reconstruction of culture.

By contrast, American neomodernism and the practices of what Peter Bürger called the neo-avant-garde—most palpably advocated by Greenberg and his disciple Michael Fried (born 1939)—could uphold their claims only at the price of a systematic *geschichtsklitterung*, a manifest attempt at writing history from the perspective of victorious interests, systematically disavowing the major transformations that had occurred within the conception of high art and avant-garde culture discussed above (e.g., the legacies of Dada and the Russian and Soviet avant-gardes). But worse still, these critics failed to see that cultural production after the Holocaust could not simply attempt to establish a continuity of modernist painting and sculpture. Adorno's model of a negative dialectics (most notoriously formulated in his verdict on the impossibility of lyrical poetry after Auschwitz) and his aesthetic theory—in open opposition to Greenberg's neomodernism—suggested the ineluctable necessity of rethinking the very precarious condition of culture at large.

It appears that the strengths and successes of the social history of art are most evident in those historical situations where actual mediations between classes, political interests, and cultural forms of representation are solidly enacted and therefore relatively verifiable. Their unique capacity to reconstruct the narratives around those revolutionary or foundational situations of modernity makes the accounts of social art historians the most compelling interpretations of the first hundred years of modernism, from David in the work of Thomas Crow to the beginnings of Cubism in T. J. Clark's work.

However, when it comes to the historical emergence of avant-garde practices such as abstraction, collage, Dada, or the work of Duchamp, whose innermost *telos* it had been actively to destroy traditional subject-object relationships and to register the destruction of traditional forms of experience, both on the level of narrative and on that of pictorial representation, social art history's attempts to maintain cohesive narrative accounts often emerge at best as either incongruent or incompatible with the structures and morphologies at hand, or at worst, as falsely recuperative. Once the extreme forms of particularization and fragmentation have become the central formal concerns in which postbourgeois subjectivity finds its correlative remnants of figuration, the interpretative desire to reimpose totalizing visions onto historical phenomena sometimes appears reactionary and at other times paranoid in its enforcement of structures of meaning and experience. After all, the radicality of these artistic practices had involved not only their refusal to allow for such visions but also their formulation of syntax and structures where neither narrative nor figuration could still obtain. If meaning could still obtain at all, it would require accounts that would inevitably lead beyond the frameworks of those of deterministic causation.

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### 3 Formalism and structuralism

In 1971–2, the French literary theorist Roland Barthes (1915–80) held a year-long seminar devoted to the history of semiology, the “general science of signs” that had been conceived as an extension of linguistics by the Swiss Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) in his *Course in General Linguistics* (posthumously published in 1916) and simultaneously, under the name of semiotics, by the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) in his *Collected Papers* (also posthumously published, from 1931 to 1958). Barthes had been one of the leading voices of structuralism from the mid-fifties to the late sixties, together with the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009), the philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–84), and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and as such had greatly contributed to the resurrection of the semiological project, which he had clearly laid out in *Elements of Semiology* (1964) and “Structural Analysis of Narratives” (1966). But he had seriously undermined that very project in his most recent books, *S/Z*, *The Empire of Signs* (both 1970), and *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1971).

The curiosity of Barthes’s auditors (myself among them) was immense: in this period of intellectual turmoil marked by a general Oedipal desire to kill the structuralist model, they expected him to ease their understanding of the shift underway from ▲ A (structuralism) to B (poststructuralism)—a term that neatly describes Barthes’s work at the time, but which was never condoned by any of its participants. They anticipated a chronological summary. Logically, such a narrative, after a presentation of Saussure’s and Peirce’s concepts, would have discussed the work of the Russian Formalist school of literary criticism, active from around 1915 to the Stalinist blackout of 1932; then, after one of its members, Roman Jakobson (1896–1982), had left Russia, of the Prague Linguistic Circle grouped around him; then of French structuralism; and finally, in conclusion, it would have dealt with ■ Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction.

Barthes’s audience got the package they had hoped for, but not without a major surprise. Instead of beginning with Saussure, he initiated his survey with an examination of the ideological critique proposed, from the twenties on, by the German Marxist playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956). Although Barthes, no less than his peers, had succumbed to the dream of scientific objectivity when the structuralist movement was at its peak, he now implicitly advocated

a subjective approach. No longer interested in mapping a discipline, he endeavored instead to tell the story of his own semiological adventure, which had started with his discovery of Brecht’s writings. Coming from someone whose assault on biographical (the reading of a literary piece through the life of its author) had always been scathing, the gesture was deliberately provocative. (The enormous polemic engendered by the antibiographicalism of Barthes’s *On Racine* (1963), which had ended in *Criticism and Truth* (1966), Barthes’s brilliant answer to his detractors, and which had done more than anything else to radically transform traditional literary studies in France, was still very much on everyone’s mind.) But there was a strategic motive as well in this Brechtian beginning, a motive that becomes apparent when one turns to the essay in which Barthes had discussed Saussure for the first time.

“Myth Today” was a postscript to the collection of sociological vignettes Barthes had written between 1954 and 1956 and published under the title *Mythologies* (1957). The main body of the book had been written in the Brechtian mode: its stated purpose was to reveal, underneath the pretended “naturalness” of the *petit-bourgeois* ideology conveyed by the media, what was historically determined. But in “Myth Today” Barthes presented Saussure’s work, which he had just discovered, as offering new tools for the kind of Brechtian ideological analysis he had so far been conducting. What is perhaps most striking, in retrospect, is that Barthes’s exposition of Saussurean semiology begins with a plea in favor of formalism. Shortly ▲ after alluding to Andrei Zhdanov and his Stalinist condemnation of formalism and modernism as bourgeois decadence, Barthes writes: “Less terrorized by the specter of ‘formalism,’ historical criticism might have been less sterile; it would have understood that ... the more a system is specifically defined in its forms, the more amenable it is to historical criticism. To parody a well-known saying, I shall say that a little formalism turns one away from History, but that a lot brings one back to it.” In other words, right from the start Barthes conceived of what was soon to be named “structuralism” as part of a broader formalist current in twentieth-century thought. Furthermore, Barthes was denying the claims of the antiformalist champions that formalist critics, in bypassing “content” to scrutinize forms, were retreating from the world and its historical realities to the ivory tower of a humanistic “eternal present.”

"Semiology is a science of forms, since it studies significations apart from their content." Such is the definition that immediately precedes Barthes's passage quoted above. Its terminology is somewhat flawed, for Barthes was still a novice in structural linguistics, and he would soon know that the word "content" has to be replaced by "referent" in such a sentence. But the basic axioms are already there: signs are organized into sets of oppositions that shape their signification, independently of what the signs in question refer to; every human activity partakes of at least one system of signs (generally several at once), whose rules can be tracked down; and, as a producer of signs, man is forever condemned to signification, unable to flee the "prison-house of language," to use Fredric Jameson's formulation. Nothing that man utters is insignificant—even saying "nothing" carries a meaning (or rather multiple meanings, changing according to the context, which is itself structured).

Choosing in 1971 to present these axioms as derived from Brecht (rather than from Saussure, as he had done in 1957), Barthes had a polemical intention: he was pointing to the historical link between modernism and the awareness that language is a structure of signs. Indeed, although Brecht's star has somewhat faded in recent years, he was regarded in postwar Europe as one of the most powerful modernist writers. In his numerous theoretical statements, Brecht had always attacked the myth of the transparency of language that had governed the practice of theater since Aristotle; the self-reflective, anti-illusionistic montagelike devices that interrupted the flow of his plays aimed at aborting the identification of the spectator with any character and, as he phrased it, at producing an effect of "distanciation" or "estrangement."

The first example Barthes commented on in his 1971–2 seminar was a text in which the German writer patiently analyzed the 1934 Christmas speeches of two Nazi leaders (Hermann Goering and Rudolf Hess). What struck Barthes was Brecht's extreme attention to the form of the Nazi texts, which he had followed word for word in order to elaborate his counterdiscourse. Brecht pinpointed the efficacy of these speeches in the seamless flow of their rhetoric: the smokescreen with which Goering and Hess masked their faulty logic and heap of lies was the mellifluous continuity of their language, which functioned like a robust, gooey adhesive.

Brecht, in short, was a formalist, eager to demonstrate that language was not a neutral vehicle made to transparently convey concepts directly from mind to mind, but had a materiality of its own and that this materiality was always charged with significations. But he immensely resented the label of formalism when it was thrown at modern literature as a whole by the Marxist philosopher György Lukács, writing in the USSR at a time when calling anyone a formalist was equivalent to signing his or her death warrant. By then virulently opposed to modernism in general—but in particular to the technique of montage that Sergei Eisenstein invented in film and Brecht adapted to the theater, and to the kind of interior monologue that concludes James Joyce's *Ulysses*—Lukács had proposed nineteenth-century realist novels (those of Balzac in particular) as the model to be emulated, especially if one

was to write from a "proletarian" point of view. Yet it was Lukács who was the "formalist," wrote Brecht in his rebuttal. In calling for a twentieth-century novel with a "revolutionary" content but penned in a form that dated from a century earlier, a form that belonged to the era before the self-reflexivity and anti-illusionism of modernism, Lukács was fetishizing form.

Thus the term "formalist" was an insult that Lukács and Brecht tossed at each other, but the word did not have the same sense for each. For Brecht, a formalist was anyone who could not see that form was inseparable from content, who believed that form was a mere carrier; for Lukács, it was anyone who believed that form even affected content. Brecht's uneasiness with the term, however, should give us pause, especially since the same uneasiness has mushroomed in art history and criticism since the early seventies. (It is particularly noteworthy in this context that the art critic whose name is most associated in America with formalism, Clement Greenberg, also had such misgivings: "Whatever its connotations in Russian, the term has acquired ineradicably vulgar ones in English," he wrote in 1967.) In order to understand the ambivalence, it is useful to recall Barthes's dictum: "a little formalism turns one away from History, but that a lot brings one back to it." For what Brecht resented in Lukács's "formalism" was its denial both of history and of what the Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev would call the "form of content"—of the fact that the very structure of Balzac's novels was grounded upon the world view of a particular social class at a particular juncture in the history of Western Europe. In short, Lukács had practiced only a "restricted" formalism, whose analysis remains at the superficial level of form-as-shape, or morphology.

The antiformalism that was prevalent in the discourse of art criticism in the seventies can thus be explained in great part by a confusion between two kinds of formalism, one that concerns itself essentially with morphology (which I call "restricted" formalism), and one that envisions form as structural—the kind embraced by Brecht when he sorted out the "continuity" of Goering's and Hess's speeches as an essential part of their ideological machine. The confusion was compounded by Greenberg's gradual turnabout. While his analyses of the dialectical role of *trompe-l'oeil* devices

- in Georges Braque's Cubist still lifes [1] or that of the allowness of Jackson Pollock's drippings) are to be counted on the structural ledger, by the late 1950s his discourse was more reminiscent of the morphological mode promulgated at the beginning of the twentieth century by the British writers Clive Bell and Roger Fry, whose concern was merely good design. The distinction between these two formalisms is essential to a retrieval of formalism (as structuralism) from the wastebasket of discarded ideas.

### Structuralism and art history

Although the linguistic/semiological model provided by Saussure became the inspiration for the structuralist movement in the fifties and sixties, art history had already developed structural methods by the time this model became known in the twenties. Furthermore,

1 • Georges Braque, *Violin and Pitcher*, 1910

Oil on canvas, 117 × 73 (46 × 28 1/4)

One of the benchmarks of formalism is its attention to rhetorical devices, to the signification of the means of signification themselves. Examining this painting by Braque, Clement Greenberg singled out the device of the realistic nail and its shadow painted on top of the faceted volumes depicted on the picture's surface. Both flattening the rest of the image and pushing it back into depth, the *troupe-l'œil* nail was for the artist a means of casting some doubt with regard to the traditional, illusionistic mode of representing space.



the first literary critics who can be called structuralists—the ▲ Russian Formalists—were particularly aware of their art-historical antecedents (much more than of Saussure, whom they discovered only after writing many of their groundbreaking works). Finally, it • was Cubism that first helped the Russian Formalists to develop their theories: in deliberately attacking the epistemology of representation, Cubism (and abstract art in its wake) underscored the gap separating reference and meaning and called for a more sophisticated understanding of the nature of signs.

The role played by art history and avant-garde art practice in the formation of a structuralist mode of thinking is little known today, but it is important for our purpose, especially with regard to the accusations of ahistoricism often thrown at structuralism. In fact, one could even say that the birth of art history as a discipline dates from the moment it was able to structure the vast amount of material it had neglected for purely ideological and aesthetic reasons. It might seem odd today that seventeenth-century Baroque art, for example, had fallen into oblivion during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, until Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945) rehabilitated it in *Renaissance and Baroque* (1888). Resolutely opposed to the dominant normative aesthetic of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68), for whom Greek art was an unsurpassable yardstick for all subsequent artistic production, Wölfflin endeavored to show that Baroque art had to be judged by criteria that were not only different from but resolutely opposed to those of Classical art. This idea, that the historical signification of a stylistic language was manifested through its rejection of another one (in this case, a preceding one) would lead Wölfflin to posit “an art history without names” and to establish the set of binary oppositions that constitutes the core of his most famous book, *Principles of Art History*, which appeared in 1915 (linear/painterly, plane/recession, closed/open form; multiplicity/unity; clearness/unclearness).

Wölfflin’s formalist taxonomy, however, was still part of a teleological and idealistic discourse, modeled on Hegel’s view of history, according to which the unfolding of events is prescribed by a set of predetermined laws. (Within every “artistic epoch,” Wölfflin always read the same smooth evolution from linear to painterly, from plane to recession, etc., which left him with little room to explain how one switched from one “epoch” to the next, particularly since he denied nonartistic historical factors much of a causative role in his scheme.) But if Wölfflin’s idealism prevented him from developing his formalism into a structuralism, it is to Alois Riegl (1858–1905) that ones owes the first full elaboration of a meticulous analysis of forms as the best access to a social history of artistic production, signification, and reception.

Just as Wölfflin had done with the Baroque era, Riegl undertook the rehabilitation of artistic eras that had been marginalized as decadent, most notably the production of late antiquity (*Late Roman Art Industry*, 1901). But he did more than Wölfflin to advance the cause of an anonymous history of art, one that would trace the evolution of formal/structural systems rather than merely study the output of individual artists: if the well-known works of Rembrandt and

Frans Hals figure in his last book, *The Group Portraiture of Holland* (1902), they are as the end-products of a series whose features they inherit and transform. Riegl's historical relativism was radical and had far-reaching consequences, not only because it allowed him to disregard the distinction between high and low, major and minor, pure and applied art, but because it led him to understand every artistic document as a *monument* to be analyzed and posited in relationship with others belonging to the same series. In other words, Riegl demonstrated that it was only after the set of codes enacted (or altered) by an art object had been mapped in their utmost details that one could attempt to discuss that object's signification and the way it related to other series (for example to the history of social formations, of science, and so forth)—an idea that would be of importance for both the Russian Formalists and Michel Foucault. And it is because Riegl understood meaning as structured by a set of oppositions (and not as transparently conveyed) that he was able to challenge the overwhelming role usually given to the referent in the discourse about art since the Renaissance.

### A crisis of reference

A similar crisis of reference provided the initial spark of Russian Formalism around 1915. The polemical target of the Russian Formalist critics was the Symbolist conception that poetry resided in the images it elicited, independent of its linguistic form. But it was through their confrontation with Cubism, then with the first abstract paintings of Kazimir Malevich and the poetic experiments of his friends Velemir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenikh—poems whose sounds referred to nothing but the phonetic nature of language itself—that the Russian Formalists discovered, before they ever heard of Saussure, what the Swiss scholar had called the “arbitrary nature of the sign.”

Allusions to Cubism abound in Roman Jakobson's writings, particularly when he tries to define poetic language as opposed to the language of communication used in everyday life. In “What is Poetry?”, a lecture delivered in 1933, he writes:

*[Poeticity] can be separated out and made independent, like the various devices in say, a Cubist painting. But this is a special case.... Poeticity is present when the word is felt as a word and not a mere representation of the object being named or an outburst of emotion, when words and their composition, their meaning, their external and inner form, acquire a weight and value of their own instead of referring indifferently to reality.... Without contradiction [between sign and object] there is no mobility of concepts, no mobility of signs, and the relationship between concept and sign becomes automatized. Activity comes to a halt, and the awareness of reality dies out.*

These last lines refer to the device of *ostranenie*, or “making strange,” as a rhetorical figure, whose conceptualization by Viktor Shklovsky (1893–1984) in “Art as Device” (1917) is the first

theoretical landmark of Russian Formalism (the family resemblance of this notion with Brecht's “estrangement effect” is not fortuitous). According to Shklovsky, the main function of art is to defamiliarize our perception, which has become automatized, and although Jakobson would later dismiss this first theory of defamiliarization, it is the way he interpreted Cubism at the time. And for good reason, as one could say that the first, so-called “African,” phase of Cubism was rooted in a deliberate practice of estrangement. Witness this declaration of Pablo Picasso (1881–1973): “In those days people said that I made the noses crooked, even in the *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, but I had to make the nose crooked so they would see that it was a nose. I was sure later they would see that it wasn't crooked.”

For Shklovsky, what characterized any work of art was the set of “devices” through which it was reorganizing the “material” (the referent), making it strange. (The notion of “device,” never rigorously defined, was a blanket term by which he designated any stylistic feature or rhetoric construction, encompassing all levels of language—phonetic, syntactic, or semantic.) Later on, when he devoted particular attention to works such as the eighteenth-century “novel” *Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne, where the writer pays more attention to mocking the codes of storytelling than to the plot itself, Shklovsky began to conceive not only our perception of the world but also the daily language of communication as the “material” that literary art rearranges—but the work of art remained for him a sum of devices through which the “material” was de-automatized. For Jakobson, though, the “devices” were not simply piled up in a work but were interdependent, constituting a system, and they had a constructive function, each contributing to the specificity and unity of the work, just as each bone has a role to play in our skeleton. Furthermore, each new artistic device, or each new system of devices, had to be understood either as breaking a previous one that had become deadened and automatized, or as revealing it (laying it bare), as if it had been there all along but unperceived: in short, any artistic device (and not just the world at large or the language of daily communication) could become the “material” made strange by a subsequent one. As a result, any device was always semantically charged for Jakobson, a complex sign bearing several layers of connotations.

It is this second notion of *ostranenie* that Jakobson had in mind when he spoke of the isolation of the various devices in a Cubist work as a “special case”: in laying bare the traditional mechanisms of pictorial representation, Cubism performed for Jakobson and his colleagues the same function that neurosis had played for Freud's discovery of the unconscious. Much as the special (pathological) case of neurosis had led Freud to his general theory of the psychological development of man, the special (defamiliarizing) case of Cubism was seized by the Russian Formalists as support for their antimimetic, structural conception of poetic language.

In hindsight, however, we can see that bestowing a status of “normalcy” to the traditional means of pictorial representation that Cubism fought and whose devices it laid bare is not sustainable: it would posit such traditional means of representation as constituting a

kind of ahistorical norm against which all pictorial enterprises would have to be measured (bringing us back, in effect, to Winckelmann). Perceiving the essentializing danger of this simple dualism (norm / exception), Jakobson grew more suspicious of the normative postulates upon which his early work had been based (the opposition between the language of daily use as norm, and of literature as exception). But he would always take advantage of the model offered by psychoanalysis, according to which *dysfunction* helps us understand *function*. In fact, one of his major contributions to the field of literary criticism—the dichotomy that he established between the metaphoric and metonymic poles of language—was the direct result of his investigation of aphasia, a disorder of the central nervous system characterized by the partial or total loss of the ability to communicate. He noted that for the most part aphasic disturbances concerned either “the selection of linguistic entities” (the choice of *that* sound rather than *this* one, of *that* word rather than *this* one) or “their combination into linguistic units of a higher degree of complexity.” Patients suffering from the first kind of aphasia (which Jakobson terms “the similarity disorder”) cannot substitute a linguistic unit for another one, and metaphor is inaccessible to them; patients suffering from the second kind of aphasia (“the contiguity disorder”) cannot put any linguistic unit into its context, and metonymy (or synecdoche) is senseless for them. The poles of similarity and contiguity were directly borrowed from Saussure (they correspond in his *Course* to the terms *paradigm* and *syntagm*), but they were expressly linked by Jakobson to the Freudian concepts of displacement and condensation: just as the limit between these two activities of the unconscious remained porous for Freud, Jakobson’s polar extremes do not preclude the existence of hybrid or intermediary forms. But once again it is the opposition of these two terms that structured for him the immense domain of world literature. And not only literature: he saw Surrealist art as essentially metaphoric, and Cubism as essentially metonymic.

### The arbitrary nature of the sign

Before we examine a Cubist work from a structural point of view, let us at last turn to Saussure’s famous *Course* and its groundbreaking exposition of what he called the arbitrariness of the sign. Saussure went far beyond the conventional notion of arbitrariness as the absence of any “natural” link between the sign (say, the word “tree”) and its referent (any actual tree), even though he would have been the last to deny this absence, to which the simple existence of multiple languages attests. For Saussure, the arbitrariness involved not only the relation between the sign and its referent, but also that between the signifier (the sound we utter when we pronounce the word “tree” or the letters we trace when we write it down) and the signified (the concept of tree). His principal target was the Adamic conception of language (from Adam’s performance in the Book of Genesis: language as an ensemble of names for things), which he called “chimeric” because it presupposes the existence of an invariable number of signifieds that receive in each particular language a different formal vestment.

This angle of attack led Saussure to separate the problem of referentiality from the problem of signification, understood as the enactment in the utterance (which he called *parole*, as opposed to *langue*, designating the language in which the sign is uttered) of an arbitrary but necessary link between a signifier and a “conceptual” signified. In the most celebrated passage of his *Course*, Saussure wrote:

*In language there are only differences. Even more important, a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences without positive terms... The idea [signified] or phonic substance [signifier] that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it.*

This not only means that a linguistic sign does not signify by itself, but that language is a system of which all units are interdependent. “I eat” and “I ate” have different meanings (though only one letter has shifted its position), but the signified of a temporal present in “I eat” can exist only if it is opposed to the signified of a temporal past in “I ate”: one would simply not be able to identify (and thus understand) a linguistic sign if our mind did not compute its competitors within the system to which it belongs, quickly eliminating the ill-suitors while gauging the context of the utterance (for “I eat” is opposed not only to “I ate,” but to “I gorge,” “I bite,” or even—leaving the semantic realm of food—“I sing,” “I walk,” and so forth). In short, the essential characteristic of any sign is to be what other signs are not. But, Saussure adds,

*the statement that everything in language is negative is true only if the signified and the signifier are considered separately; when we consider the sign in its totality, we have something that is positive in own class.*

In other words, the acoustic signifier and the “conceptual” signified are negatively differential (they define themselves by what they are not), but a positive fact results from their combination, “the sole type of facts that language has,” namely, the sign. Such a caveat might seem strange, given that everywhere else Saussure insisted on the *oppositional* nature of the sign: is he not suddenly reintroducing a substantive quality here, when all his linguistics rests on the discovery that “language is form and not substance”?

Everything revolves around the concept of *value*, one of the most complex and controversial concepts in Saussure. The sign is positive because it has a value determined by what it can be compared with and exchanged with within its own system. This value is absolutely differential, like the value of a hundred-dollar bill in relation to a thousand-dollar bill, but it confers on the sign “something positive.” Value is an economic concept for Saussure; it permits the exchange of signs within a system, but it is also what prevents their perfect exchangeability with signs belonging to another system (the French word *mouton*, for example, has a



2 • Pablo Picasso, *Bull's Head*, 1942

Assemblage (bicycle seat and handlebars),  
33.5 × 43.5 × 19 (13 1/4 × 17 1/8 × 7 1/2)

Although he never read Saussure, Picasso discovered in his own visual terms what the father of structural linguistics had labeled the "arbitrariness of the sign." Given that signs are defined by their opposition to other signs within a given system, anything can stand for anything else if it conforms to the rules of the system in question. Using the handlebar and seat of a bicycle, Picasso remains within the realm of representation, defining the minimum required for a combination of disparate elements to be read as the horned head of a bull, while at the same time demonstrating the metaphoric power of assemblage.

different value than the English *sheep* or *mutton*, because it means both the animal and its meat).

To explain his concept of value, Saussure invoked the metaphor of chess. If, during a game, a piece is lost, it does not matter what other piece replaces it provisionally; the players can arbitrarily choose any substitute they want, any object will do, and even, depending on their capacity to remember, the absence of an object. For it is the piece's function within a system that confers its value (just as it is the piece's position at each moment of the game that gives it its changing signification). "If you augment language by one sign," Saussure said, "you diminish in the same proportion the [value] of the others. Reciprocally, if only two signs had been chosen ... all the [possible] significations would have had to be divided between these two signs. One would have designated one half of the objects, the other, the other half." The value of each of these two inconceivable signs would have been enormous.

Reading such lines, it comes as no surprise that Jakobson and the ▲ Russian Formalists had arrived at similar conclusions through a examination of Cubism—that of Picasso, in particular, who almost maniacally demonstrated the interchangeability of signs within his pictorial system, and whose play on the minimal act required to transform a head into a guitar or a bottle, in a series of collages • he realized in 1913, seem a direct illustration of Saussure's pronouncement. This metaphoric transformation indicates that, *contra* Jakobson, Picasso is not bound to the metonymic pole. Instead, he seems to particularly relish composite structures that are both metaphoric and metonymic. A case in point is the 1944 sculpture of the *Bull's Head* [2], where the conjunction (metonymy) of a bicycle handlebar and seat produced a metaphor (the sum of these two bicycle parts are like a bull's head), but such swift transformations based on the two structuralist operations of substitution and combination are legion in his oeuvre. Which is to say that Picasso's Cubism was a "structuralist activity," to use Barthes's phrase: it not only performed a structural analysis of the figurative tradition of Western art, but it also structurally engineered new objects.

An example is Picasso's invention of what one could call space as a new sculptural material. The fact that the Cubist constructions Picasso created in 1912–13 represent a key moment in the history of sculpture has long been recognized, but the means through which Picasso articulated space anew are not always understood. To make a story short: until Picasso's 1912 *Guitar* [3], Western sculpture, either carved or cast, had either consisted in a mass, a volume that detached itself from a surrounding space conceived as neutral, or retreated to the condition of bas-relief. Helped by his discovery of African art, Picasso realized that Western sculpture was paralyzed by a fear of being swallowed by the real space of objects (in the post-Renaissance system of representation, it was essential that art remained securely roped off from the world in an ethereal realm of illusions). Rather than attempting to discard the rope altogether, as Marcel Duchamp would soon do in his ready-mades, Picasso answered the challenge by making space one of sculpture's materials. Part of the body of his *Guitar* is a virtual



3 • Pablo Picasso, *Guitar*, Fall 1912

Construction of sheet metal, string, and wire,  
77.5 × 35 × 19.3 (30 1/2 × 13 3/4 × 7 1/2)

For structuralism, signs are oppositional and not substantial, which is to say that their shape and signification are solely defined by their difference from all other signs in the same system, and that they would mean nothing in isolation. By the sheer contrasting juxtaposition of void and surface in this sculpture, which marks the birth of what would be called "Synthetic Cubism," whose major formal invention would be collage, Picasso transforms a void into a sign for the skin of a guitar and a protruding cylinder into a sign for its hole. In doing so, he makes a nonsubstance—space—into a material for sculpture.

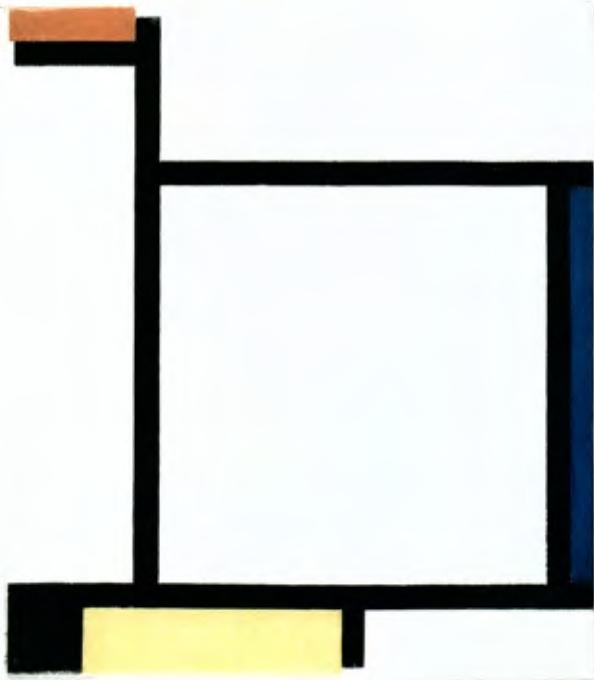
volume whose external surface we do not see (it is immaterial) but that we intuit through the position of other planes. Just as Saussure had discovered with regard to linguistic signs, Picasso found that sculptural signs did not have to be substantial. Empty space could easily be transformed into a differential mark, and as such combined with all kinds of other signs: no longer fear space, Picasso told his fellow sculptors, shape it.

As Jakobson has noted, however, Cubism is a "special case" in which devices can be separated out (in a Cubist painting shading is emphatically independent from contour, for example), and few artists in this century were as good structuralists as Picasso was during his Cubist years. Another candidate proposed ▲ by structuralist critics was Piet Mondrian (1872–1944). Indeed, in deliberately reducing his pictorial vocabulary to very few elements, from 1920 on—black horizontal and vertical lines, planes of primary colors and of "noncolors" (white, black, or gray)—and in producing an extremely various oeuvre within such limited parameters [4], Mondrian demonstrated the combinatory infinitude of any system. In Saussurean terminology, one could say that because the new pictorial *langue* that he created consisted in a handful of elements and rules ("no symmetry" was one of them), the range of possibilities proceeding from such a Spartan language (his *parole*) became all the more apparent. He had limited the corpus of possible pictorial marks within his system, but this very limitation immensely accrued their "value."

Despite the fact that Mondrian seems to be a structuralist *avant la lettre* it is not the structural type of formal analysis, but rather the morphological one, that was first proposed in the study of his art. This morphological formalism, mainly concerned with Mondrian's compositional schemes, remained impressionistic in nature, though it gave us excellent descriptions of the balance or imbalance of planes in his works, the vividness of the colors, the rhythmic staccato. In the end this approach remained tautological, especially in its blunt refusal to discuss "meaning," and it is not by chance that an iconographic, Symbolist interpretation was long thought preferable, even though it ran counter to what the artist himself had to say.

A structural reading of Mondrian's work began to emerge only in the seventies. It examines the semantic function played by various combinations of pictorial elements as Mondrian's work evolved and seeks to understand how a seemingly rigid formal system engendered diverse significations. Rather than assigning a fixed meaning to these elements, as the Symbolist interpretation had wanted to do, it is able to show, for example, that from the early thirties, the "Neoplastic" pictorial vocabulary that he had coined in 1920 and used ever since was transformed into a self-destructive machine destined to abolish not only the figure, as he had done before, but color planes, lines, surfaces, and by extension every possible identity—in other words, that Mondrian's art elicited an epistemological nihilism of ever-growing intensity. In short, if art critics and historians had been more acutely attentive to the formal development of his oeuvre, they might have earlier

▲ 1913, 1917a, 1944a



4 • Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Red, Blue, Black, Yellow, and Gray*, 1921

Oil on canvas, 39.5 × 35 cm (15½ × 13½)

Permutation and combination are the means by which any discourse is generated and as such they constitute the two main aspects of what Barthes called the "structuralist activity." In these two canvases, Mondrian checks, just as a scientist would do, if and how our perception of a central square changes according to the modifications of its surroundings.

on grasped the connection he felt more inclined to make in his writings, from 1930, between what he tried to achieve pictorially and the political views of anarchism. By the same token, however, they would have understood that if his classic Neoplastic work had been governed by a structural ethos, during the last decade of his life this ethos was geared toward the deconstruction of the set of binary oppositions upon which his art had been based: they would have perceived that, like Barthes, Mondrian had begun as a practitioner of structuralism only to become one of its most formidable assailants. But they would have had to be versed in structuralism itself to diagnose his attack.

Two aspects of Mondrian's art after 1920 explain why his art became an ideal object for a structuralist approach: first, it was a closed corpus (not only was the total output small, but as noted above, the number of pictorial elements he used were in a finite number); second, his oeuvre was easily distributed into series. The two first methodological steps taken in any structural analysis are the definition of a closed corpus of objects from which a set of recurrent rules can be deduced, and, within this corpus, the taxonomic constitution of series—and it is indeed only after the multiple series scanning Mondrian's oeuvre had been properly mapped that a more elaborate study of the signification of his works became possible. But what a structural analysis can do with the production of a single artist, it can also do at the microlevel of the single work, as the Russian Formalists or Barthes have amply shown, or at the macrolevel of a whole field, as Claude Lévi-Strauss has demonstrated in his studies of vast ensembles of myths. The method remains the same, only the scale of the object of inquiry changes: in each case, discrete "units" have to be distinguished so that their interrelationship can be understood, and their oppositional signification emerge.

The method has indeed its limits, for it presupposes the internal coherence of the corpus of analysis, its unity—which is why it yields its best results when dealing with a single object or with a series that remains limited in range. Through a forceful critique of the very notions of internal coherence, closed corpus, and authorship, what is now called "poststructuralism," hand in hand with the literary and artistic practices labeled "postmodernist," would efficiently blunt the preeminence that structuralism and formalism had enjoyed in the sixties. But, as numerous entries in this volume make clear, the heuristic power of structural and formalist analysis, especially with regard to the canonical moments of modernism, need not be discarded.

#### FURTHER READING

- Roland Barthes. *Mythologies* (1957), trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Noonday Press, 1972)  
Roman Jakobson. "What is Poetry?" (1933) and "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances" (1966), in Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (eds.), *Language and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987)  
Fredric Jameson. *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972)  
Thomas Levin. "Walter Benjamin and the Theory of Art History," October, no. 47, Winter 1988  
Ferdinand de Saussure. *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966)

Yve-Alain Bois

## 4 Poststructuralism and deconstruction

Throughout the sixties, youthful ideals measured against official cynicism created a collision course that climaxed in the uprisings of 1968, when, in reaction to the Vietnam War, student movements throughout the world—in Berkeley, Berlin, Milan, Paris, Tokyo—erupted into action. A student leaflet circulating in Paris in May 1968 declared the nature of the conflict:

*We refuse to become teachers serving a mechanism of social selection in an educational system operating at the expense of working-class children, to become sociologists drumming up slogans for governmental election campaigns, to become psychologists charged with getting “teams of workers” to “function” according to the best interests of the bosses, to become scientists whose research will be used according to the exclusive interests of the profit economy.*

Behind this refusal was the accusation that the university, long thought to be the precinct of an autonomous, disinterested, “free” search for knowledge, had itself become an interested party to the kind of social engineering the leaflet imputed to both government and industry.

The terms of this indictment and its denial that discrete social functions—whether intellectual research or artistic practice—could be either autonomous or disinterested could not fail to have repercussions beyond the boundaries of the university. They immediately affected the art world as well. In Brussels, for example, Marcel Broodthaers (1924–76) and other Belgian artists joined their student confreres by occupying the Salle de Marbre of the Palais des Beaux-Arts and temporarily “liberating” it from its former administration into their own control. Furthermore, in a gesture that was also patterned on the action of the student movements, Broodthaers coauthored statements that were released to the public in leaflet form. One of them announced, for example, that the Free Association (as the occupiers identified themselves) “condemns the commercialization of all forms of art considered as objects of consumption.” This form of public address, which he had used since 1963, was then to become increasingly the basis of his work, which he was to carry out in the name of a fictitious museum, the “Musée d’Art Moderne,” under the aegis of which

he would mount a dozen sections—such as the “Section XIXème siècle (“Nineteenth-Century Section”) and the “Département des Aigles” (Department of Eagles) [1]—and in the service of which he addressed the public through a series of “Open Letters.” The former separations within the art world—between producers (artists) and distributors (museums or galleries), between critics and makers, between the ones who speak and the ones who are spoken for—were radically challenged by Broodthaers’s museum, an operation that constantly performed a parodic but profound meditation on the vectors of “interest” that run through cultural institutions, as far-from-disinterested accessories of power.

This attitude of refusing the subordinate posture as the one who is spoken for by seizing the right to speak, and consequently of challenging the institutional and social divisions that support these separations of power, had other sources of entitlement besides student politics. There was also the reevaluation of the premises, the suppositions, of the various academic disciplines collectively called the human sciences that crystallized around the time of 1968 into what has been termed poststructuralism.

### There is no “disinterest”

▲ Structuralism—the dominant French methodological position against which poststructuralism rebelled—had viewed any given human activity—language, for example, or kinship systems within a society—as a rule-governed system that is a more or less autonomous, self-maintaining structure, and whose laws operate according to certain formal principles of mutual opposition. This idea of a self-regulating structure, one whose ordering operations are formal and reflexive—that is, they derive from, even while they organize, the material givens of the system itself—can clearly be mapped onto the modernist conception of the different and separate artistic disciplines or mediums. And insofar as this parallel obtains, the intellectual and theoretical battles of 1968 are highly relevant to the developments in the world of art in the seventies and eighties.

Poststructuralism grew out of a refusal to grant structuralism its premise that each system is autonomous, with rules and operations that begin and end within the boundaries of that system. In



1 • Marcel Broodthaers, "Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures (The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present)," 1972  
Installation view

As director of his museum, Broodthaers organized its "Section Publicité" for Documenta, as well as exhibitions of particular richness for other museums, this one for the Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, in 1972. A collection of diverse objects, the eagles included were drawn from mass-cultural material (for example, the stamps on champagne corks) as well as precious objects (such as Roman fibulae), all of them captioned "This is not a work of art." As Broodthaers explained in the catalogue, the caption marries the ideas of Duchamp (the readymade) to those of Magritte (his deconstructive "This is not a pipe," as in the inscription on *The Treachery of Images* of 1929). The museum department responsible for this exhibition was the "Section des Figures" (Illustrations Section).

linguistics, this attitude expanded the limited study of linguistic structures to those modes through which language issues into action, the forms called *shifters* and *performatives*. Shifters are words like "I" and "you," where the referent of "I" (namely, the person who utters it) shifts back and forth in a conversation. Performatives are those verbal utterances that, by being uttered, literally enact their meaning, such as when a speaker announces "I do" at the moment of marriage. Language, it was argued, is not simply a matter of the transmission of messages or the communication of information; it also places the interlocutor under the obligation to reply. It therefore imposes a role, an attitude, a whole discursive system (rules of behavior and of power, as well as of coding and decoding) on the receiver of the linguistic act. Quite apart from the content of any given verbal exchange, then, its very enactment implies the acceptance (or rejection) of the whole institutional frame of that exchange—its "presuppositions," as linguistics student Oswald Ducrot, early in 1968, called them:

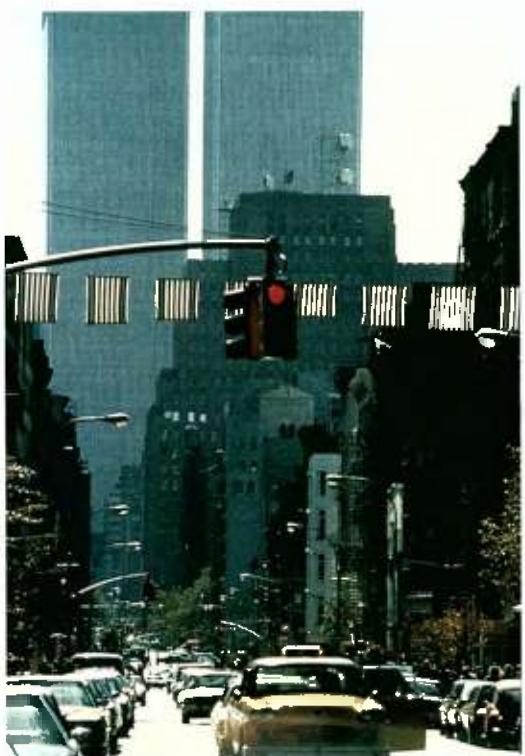
*The rejection of presuppositions constitutes a polemical attitude very different from a critique of what is set forth: specifically, it always implies a large dose of aggressiveness that transforms the dialogue into a confrontation of persons. In rejecting the presuppositions of my interlocutor, I disqualify not only the utterance itself, but also the enunciative act from which it proceeds.*

One form of post-1968 rejection of presuppositions was that French university students now insisted on addressing their professors with the intimate form of the second person—"tu"—and by their first names. They based this on the university's own abrogation of presuppositions when it called in the police (which historically had no jurisdiction within the walls of the Sorbonne) to forcibly evict the student occupiers.

Unlike the idea of the autonomous academic discipline (or work of art) whose frame is thought to be necessarily external to it—a kind of nonessential appendage—the performative notion of language places the frame at the very heart of the speech act. For the verbal exchange, it was being argued, is from the very beginning the act of imposing (or failing to impose) a set of presuppositions on the receiver of that exchange. Speech is thus more than the simple (and neutral) transmission of a message. It is also the enactment of a relation of force, a move to modify the addressee's right to speak. The examples Ducrot used to illustrate the presuppositional imposition of power were a university exam and a police interrogation.

### Challenging the frame

The French structural linguist Émile Benveniste (1902–76) had already done more than anyone else to bring about this transformation in the way language came to be viewed in the sixties. Dividing types of verbal exchange into *narrative* on the one hand and *discourse* on the other, he pointed out that each type has its



2 • Daniel Buren, Photo-souvenir: "Within and beyond the frame," 1973 (detail)

Work in situ, John Weber Gallery, New York

By the early seventies Buren had reduced his painting practice to a type of readymade: canvases cut from commercially produced gray-and-white striped awning material (used for the awnings on French state office buildings) which he would "personalize" by hand-painting over one of the stripes at the edge of the swatch. For the John Weber installation, he ran the canvases through the gallery and out the window across the width of the street—as a kind of bannerlike advertisement for the exhibition.

own characteristic features: narrative (or the writing of history) typically engages the third person and confines itself to a form of the past tense; in contrast, discourse, Benveniste's term for live communication, typically engages the present tense and the first and second persons (the shifters "I" and "you"). Discourse is marked, then, by the existential facts of its active transmission, of the necessary presence within it of both sender and receiver.

The French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault, teaching at the Collège de France in 1969, developed this idea further. Applying Benveniste's term "discourse" to what had always been understood as the neutral communication of scholarly information contained within a given departmental discipline and—like narrative—confined to the transmission of "objective" information, Foucault took up the contrary position that "discourses" are always charged from within by power relations, and even by the exercise of force. Knowledge, according to this argument, ceases to be the autonomous contents of a discipline and now becomes *disciplinary*—that is, marked by the operations of power. Foucault's "discourse," then, like Ducrot's "presuppositions," is an acknowledgment of the discursive frame that shapes the speech event, institutionally, like the relations of power that operate in a classroom or a police station.

- ▲ Brodthaers's seizing of the right to speak, in his guise as "museum director," performed the kind of challenge to institutional frames that poststructuralists such as Foucault were then theorizing. Indeed, Brodthaers made his work out of those very frames, by enacting the rituals of administrative compartmentalization and by parodying the way those compartments in turn create collections of "knowledge." And as the frames were made to become apparent, not outside the work but at its very center, what indeed took place was the putting of "the very legitimacy of the given speech act at stake."
- Under each of the Museum's exhibits, the Department of Eagles affixed the Magrittean label: "This is not a work of art."

Brodthaers was not alone in this decision to make artistic practice out of the framing, as it were, of the institutional frames. Indeed, the whole practice of what came to be called "institutional critique" derived from such a practice—calling attention to the supposedly neutral containers of culture and questioning this putative neutrality. The French artist Daniel Buren, for instance, adopted a strategy to challenge the power of the frames by refusing to leave their presuppositions alone, implicit, unremarked. Instead, his art, emerging in the seventies, was one of marking all those divisions through which power operates. In 1973 he exhibited *Within and beyond the frame* [2]. A work in nineteen sections, each a suspended gray-and-white-striped canvas (unstretched and unframed), Buren's "painting" extended almost two hundred feet, beginning at one end of the John Weber Gallery in New York and gaily continuing out the window to wend its way across the street, like so many flags hung out for a parade, finally attaching itself to the building opposite. The frame referred to in the title of the work was, obviously, the institutional frame of the gallery, a frame that functions to guarantee certain things about the objects it encloses.

▲ 1972a

● 1972a, 1972a

■ 1967c, 1971

3 • Robert Smithson, *A Non-site*

(Franklin, New Jersey), 1968

Painted wooden bins, limestone, silver-gelatin prints and typescript on paper with graphite and transfer letters, mounted on mat board. Bins installed 41.9 x 208.9 x 261.6 (16½ x 82½ x 103); frames 103.5 x 78.1 (40¾ x 30¾).

Smithson's *Non-sites* have been productively related to the dioramas in the Museum of Natural History in New York, in which samples of the natural world are imported into the Museum as exhibits that necessarily contaminate the "purity" of the aesthetic space. The bins or containers of his *Non-sites* comment ironically on Minimalism, accusing it of an aestheticism that Minimalist artists like Donald Judd and Robert Morris would have energetically denied.



These things—like rarity, authenticity, originality, and uniqueness—are part of the value of the work implicitly asserted by the space of the gallery. These values, which are part of what separates art from other objects in our culture, objects that are neither rare, nor original, nor unique, operate then to declare art as an autonomous system within that culture.

Yet rarity, uniqueness, and so forth are also the values to which the gallery attaches a price, in an act that erases any fundamental difference between what it has to sell and the merchandise of any other commercial space. As the identically striped paintings (themselves barely distinguishable from commercially produced awnings) breached the frame of the gallery to pass beyond its confines and out the window, Buren seemed to be asking the viewer to determine at what point they ceased being "paintings" (objects of rarity, originality, etc.) and started being part of another system of objects: flags, sheets hung out to dry, advertisements for the artist's show, carnival bunting. He was probing, that is, the legitimacy of the system's power to bestow value on work.

▲ The question of frames was also at the heart of Robert Smithson's thinking about the relation between the landscape, or natural site, to its aesthetic container, which the artist labeled "non-site." In a series of works called *Non-sites*, Smithson imported mineral material—rocks, slag, slate—from specific locations into the space of the gallery by placing this material into geometrically shaped bins, each one visually connected, by means of its form, to a segment of a wall map indicating the area of the specimens' origin [3]. The obvious act of aestheticizing nature, and of turning the real into a representation of itself through the operations of the geometrical bin to construct the raw matter of the rocks into a sign—trapezoid—that comes to "stand for" the rocks' point of extraction, and thus for the rocks themselves, is what Smithson consigns to the system of the art world's spaces: its galleries, its museums, its magazines.

The ziggurat-like structures of Smithson's bins and maps might imply that it was only an ironic formal game that was at issue in this aspect of his art. But the graduated bins were also addressing a kind of natural history that could be read in the landscape, the successive stages of extracting the ore from the initial bounty, to the progressive barrenness, to a final exhaustion of supply. It was this natural history that could not be represented within the frames of the art world's discourse, concerted as it is to tell quite another story—one of form, of beauty, of self-reference. Therefore, part of Smithson's strategy was to smuggle another, foreign mode of representation into the frame of the gallery, a mode he took, in fact, from the natural history museum, where rocks and bins and maps are not freakish, aestheticized abstractions but the basis of an altogether different system of knowledge: a way of mapping and containing ideas about the "real."

The effort to escape from the aesthetic container, to break the chains of the institutional frame, to challenge the assumptions (and indeed the implicit power relations) established by the art world's presuppositions was thus carried out in the seventies in

By going out into the landscape for the materials of his *Non-sites*, Smithson introduced the idea that the landscape itself might be a sculptural medium. Earthworks were a result of this suggestion, in which artists such as Long, Walter De Maria, Christo, or Michael Heizer operated directly on the earth, often making photographic records of their activities. This dependence on the photographic document was the confirmation of Walter Benjamin's predictions in the 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

relation to specific sites—gallery, museum, rock quarry, Scottish Highlands, California coast—which the work of art functioned to *reframe*. This act of reframing was meant to perform a peculiar kind of reversal. The old aesthetic ideas that the sites used to frame (although invisibly, implicitly) now hovered over these real places like so many exorcised ghosts, while the site itself—its white walls, its neoclassical porticos, its picturesque moors, its rolling hills and rocky outcroppings [4]—became the material support (the way paint and canvas or marble and clay used to be) for a new kind of representation. This representation was the image of the institutional frames themselves, now forced into visibility as though some kind of powerful new developing fluid had unlocked previously secret information from an inert photographic negative.

### Derrida's double session

Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), a philosopher teaching at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, seized upon Benveniste's and Foucault's radicalization of structural linguistics to fashion his own brand of poststructuralism. He started out from the very terms of structuralism itself, in which language is marked by a fundamental ▲ bivalence at the heart of the linguistic sign. According to structuralist logic, while the sign is made up of the pairing of signifier and



▲ Introduction 3

signified, it is the signified (the referent or concept, such as a cat or the idea of “cat”) that has privilege over the mere material form of the signifier (the spoken or written letters *c*, *a*, *t*). This is because the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary: there is no reason why *c*, *a*, *t* should signify “catness”; any other combination of letters could do the job just as well, as the existence of different words for “cat” in different languages demonstrates (“chat,” “gatto,” “Katze,” etc.).

But this inequality between signifier and signified is not the only one at the heart of language. Another feature to emerge from the structuralist model is the unevenness of terms that make up opposing binary pairs such as “young/old” or “man/woman.” This inequality is between a *marked* and an *unmarked* term. The marked half of the pair brings more information into the utterance than the unmarked half, as in the binary “young/old” and the statement “John is as young as Mary.” “As young as” here implies youth, whereas “John is as old as Mary” implies neither youth nor advanced age. It is the unmarked term which opens itself to the higher order of synthesis most easily, a condition that becomes clear if we look at the binary “man/woman,” in which it is “man” that is the unmarked half of the pair (as in “mankind,” “chairman,” “spokesman,” etc.).

That the unmarked term slips past its partner into the position of greater generality gives that term implicit power, thus instituting a hierarchy within the seemingly neutral structure of the binary pairing. It was Derrida’s determination not to continue to let this inequality go without saying, but rather to say it, to “mark” the unmarked term, by using “she” as the general pronoun indicating a person, and—in the theorization of “grammatology” (see below)—to put the signifier in the position of superiority over the signified. This marking of the unmarked Derrida called “deconstruction,” an overturning that makes sense only within the very structuralist frame that it wants to place at the center of its activity by framing that frame.

Derrida’s extremely influential book *Of Grammatology* (1967) proceeded from such a deconstructive operation to mark the unmarked, and thus to expose the invisible frame to view. If we compare the status of “he says” to that of “he writes,” we see that “says” is unmarked, while “writes,” as the specific term, is thus marked. Derrida’s “grammatology” intends to mark speech (*logos*) and thus to overturn this hierarchy, as well as to analyze the sources of speech’s preeminence over writing. This analysis had begun with Derrida’s doctoral thesis, *Speech and Phenomenon*, in which he analyzed the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl’s (1859–1938) dismissal of writing as an infection of the transparency and immediacy of thought’s appearance to itself. And as he analyzed the privilege of *logos* over the dismissed sign of the memory trace (writing, *grammē*), Derrida developed the logic of what he called the *supplement*, an aid brought in to help or extend or supplement a human capacity—as writing extends memory or the reach of the human voice—but which, ironically, ends by supplanting it. Such a hierarchy is also behind the Derridean term

*difference*, itself aurally indistinguishable from *différence*, the French word for that difference on which language is based. *Différance*, which can only be perceived in its written form, refers, precisely, to writing’s operation of the trace and of the break or spacing that opens up the page to the articulation of one sign from another. This spacing allows not only for the play of difference between signifiers that is the basis of language (“cat,” for example, can function as a sign and assume its value in the language system only because it *differs* from “bat” and from “car”), but also for the temporal unfolding of signifieds (meaning being elaborated in time through the gradual iteration of a sentence): *différance* not only differs, then, it also defers, or temporalizes.

If deconstruction is the marking of the unmarked, which Derrida sometimes called the *re-mark*, its striving to frame the frames took the analytical form of the essay “The Parergon,” which attends to Immanuel Kant’s major treatise “The Critique of Judgment” (1790), a treatise that not only founds the discipline of aesthetics but also powerfully supplies modernism with its conviction in the possibility of the autonomy of the arts—the art work’s self-grounding and thus its independence from the conditions of its frame. For Kant argues that “Judgment,” the outcome of aesthetic experience, must be separate from “Reason”; it is not dependent on cognitive judgment but must reveal, Kant argues, the paradoxical condition of “purposiveness without purpose.” This is the source of art’s autonomy, its disinterestedness, its escape from use or instrumentalization. Reason makes use of concepts in its purposive pursuit of knowledge; art, as self-grounding, must abjure concepts, reflecting instead on the sheer purposiveness of nature as a transcendental concept (and thus containing nothing empirical). Kant argues that the logic of the work (the *ergon*) is internal (or proper) to it, such that what is outside it (the *parergon*) is only extraneous ornament and, like the frame on a painting or the columns on a building, mere superfluity or decoration. Derrida’s argument, however, is that Kant’s analysis of aesthetic judgment as self-grounding is not itself self-grounding but imports a frame from the writer’s earlier essay “The Critique of Pure Reason” (1781), a cognitive frame on which to build its transcendental logic. Thus the frame is not extrinsic to the work but comes from *outside* to constitute the inside as an inside. This is the parergonal function of the frame.

Derrida’s own reframing of the frame was perhaps most eloquently carried out in his 1969 text “The Double Session,” referring to a double lecture he gave on the work of the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–98). The first page of the essay shows Derrida’s almost modernist sensitivity to the status of the signifier, a sensitivity that parallels the poststructuralist’s canny assessment of the “truths” of structuralism [5]. Like a modernist monochrome, the page presents itself as a buzz of gray letters as it reproduces a page from the Platonic dialogue “Philebus,” a dialogue devoted to the theory of mimesis (representation, imitation). Into the lower-right corner of this field of gray, however, Derrida inserts another text, also directed at the idea of mimesis: Mallarmé’s “Mimique,”

SOCRATES: And if he had someone with him, he would put what he said to himself into actual speech addressed to his companion, audibly uttering those same thoughts, so that what before we called opinion (*θόγονος*) has now become assertion (*λόγος*).—PROTARCHUS: Of course.—SOCRATES: Whereas if he is alone he continues thinking the same thing by himself, going on his way maybe for a considerable time with the thoughts in his mind.—PROTARCHUS: Undoubtedly.—SOCRATES: Well now, I wonder whether you share my view on these matters.—PROTARCHUS: What is it?—SOCRATES: It seems to me that at such times our soul is like a book (*Δοκεῖ ματ τὸν τῆμον η̄ φυγὴ βιβλίον τοῦ ἐπορευομένου*).—PROTARCHUS: How so?—SOCRATES: It appears to me that the conjunction of memory with sensations, together with the feelings consequent upon memory and sensation, may be said as it were to write words in our souls (*ὑπόδειπνος τῆμον ἀντὶ τοῦ νοούσας σύνεσης*). And when this experience writes what is true, the result is that true opinion and true assertions spring up in us, while when the internal scribe that I have suggested writes what is false (*θεωρητὴ δύστρα* & *τούτος μάτ τηλι γραμματεῖς γραψάτι*), we get the opposite sort of opinions and assertions.—PROTARCHUS: That certainly seems to me right, and I approve of the way you put it.—SOCRATES: Then please give your approval to the presence of a second artist (*τριποιητὴν*) in our souls at such a time.—PROTARCHUS: Who is that?—SOCRATES: A painter (*Ζωγράφος*) who comes after the writer and paints in the soul pictures of these assertions that we make.—PROTARCHUS: How do we make out that he is in his turn etc., and when?—SOCRATES: When we have got those opinions and assertions clear of the act of sight (*όφεστος*) or other sense, and as it were see in ourselves pictures or images (*εἰδώλους*) of what we previously opined or asserted. That does happen with us, doesn't it?—PROTARCHUS: Indeed it does.—SOCRATES: Then are the pictures of true opinions and assertions true, and the pictures of false ones false?—PROTARCHUS: Unquestionably.—SOCRATES: Well, if we are right so far, here is one more point in this connection for us to consider.—PROTARCHUS: What is that?—SOCRATES: Does all this necessarily fulfill us in respect of the present (*τῷ νῦν*) and the past (*τῷ περ* γεγονότων), but not in respect of the future (*τῷ νῦν μελλόντων*)?—PROTARCHUS: On the contrary, it applies equally to them all.—SOCRATES: We said previously, did we not, that pleasures and pains felt in the soul alone might precede those that come through the body? Thus must mean that we have anticipatory pleasure and anticipatory pain in regard to the future.—PROTARCHUS: Very true.—SOCRATES: Now do those writings and paintings (*ὑπόδειπνος τε καὶ τοῦ βιβλίου τοῦ προρευόμενου*), which a while ago we assumed to occur within ourselves, apply to past and present only, and not to the future?—PROTARCHUS: Indeed they do.—SOCRATES: When you say 'indeed they do', do you mean that the last sort are all expectations concerned with what is to come, and that we are full of expectations all our life long?—PROTARCHUS: Undoubtedly.—SOCRATES: Well now, as a supplement to all we have said, here is a further question for you to answer.

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the poet's account of a performance he saw carried out by a famous mime and based on the text "Pierrot, Murderer of His Wife." Behind Derrida, on the blackboard of the classroom, had appeared a three-fold introduction to the lecture, hanging above his words, he said, like a crystal chandelier:

*l'antre de Mallarmé*  
*l'"entre" de Mallarmé*  
*l'entre-deux "Mallarmé"*

Because in French there is no aural distinction between *antre* and *entre*, this textual ornament depends on its written form in order to make any sense, in the same way that *differance* must be written in order to register its signified. This homophonic condition is itself "between-two," as in Mallarmé's "*entre-deux*," a betweenness that Derrida will liken to the fold in a page, a fold which turns the singleness of the material support into an ambiguous doubleness (a fold materialized in turn by the insertion of "Mimique" into the "Philebus" at its corner).

In the text of "The Double Session" itself, Derrida plays, like any good modernist, with the material condition of the numbers that emerge from Plato's and Mallarmé's definitions of mimesis. Plato's definition turns on the number four, while the poet's turns on the double, or the number two. And like any good modernist, Derrida materializes the classical foursome, understanding it as a frame: Plato says that (1) the book imitates the soul's silent dialogue with the self; (2) the value of the book is not intrinsic but depends on the value of what it imitates; (3) the truth of the book can be decided, based on the truthfulness of its imitation; and (4) the book's imitation is constituted by the form of the double. Thus Platonic mimesis doubles what is single (or simple) and, being thus decidable, institutes itself within the operations of truth. Mallarmé's imitation, on the other hand, doubles what is already double or multiple and is, therefore, undecidable: between-two. The text of the mime-drama that Mallarmé recounts in "Mimique" tells of Pierrot's discovery of his wife Columbine's adultery, which he decides to avenge by killing her. Not wanting to be caught, however, he refuses the obvious possibilities of poison, strangling, or shooting, since all of them leave traces. After kicking a rock in frustration, he massages his foot to assuage the pain and inadvertently tickles himself. In his helpless laughter, the idea dawns on him that he will tickle Columbine to death and she will thus die laughing. In the performance, the actual murder is mimed with the actor playing both parts: the diabolical tickler and the convulsively struggling victim, writhing with pleasure. Since such a death is impossible, the imitation imitates not what is simple but rather a multiple, itself a pure function of the signifier, a turn of speech ("to die laughing"; "to be tickled to death"), rather than of actuality. As Mallarmé writes: "The scene illustrates only the idea, not a positive action, in a marriage that is lewd but sacred, a marriage between desire and its achievement, enactment and its memory: here, anticipating, recollecting, in the future, in the past, under a

5 • Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, page 175 ("The Double Session")

Derrida, whose deconstructive theory consisted of an assault on the visual—as a form of presence that his idea of spacing as an aspect of deferral (or *differance*) was meant to dismantle—often invented surprisingly effective visual metaphors for his concepts. Here, the insertion of Mallarmé's "Mimique" into a corner of Plato's "Philebus" suggests, visually, the idea of the fold, or redoubling, that Derrida produces as a new concept of mimesis, in which the double (or second-order copy) doubles no single (or original). Another example occurs in the essay "The Parergon," where a succession of graphic frames is interspersed throughout a text focused on the function of the frame of the work of art, a frame that attempts to essentialize the work as autonomous but which does nothing more than connect it to its context or nonwork.

Photographing works of art as they enter into the spaces arranged for them by collectors, Lawler produces the images as though they were illustrations of interiors in *Vogue* or any other luxury design periodical. Stressing the commodification of the work of art, Lawler's images also focus on the collector's incorporation of the work into his or her domestic space, thereby making it an extension of his subjectivity. The detail of Pollock's web of paint is thus related to the intricate design of the soup tureen, as a form of interpretation personal to the collector.

false appearance of the present. In this way the mime acts. His game ends in a perpetual allusion without breaking the mirror. In this way it sets up a pure condition of fiction."

Imitation that folds over what is already double, or ambiguous, does not, then, enter the realm of truth. It is a copy without a model and its condition is marked by the term *simulacrum*: a copy without an original—"a false appearance of the present." The fold through which the Platonic frame is transmuted into the Mallarméan double (or between-two) is likened by both poet and philosopher to the fold or gutter of a book, which in its crevice was always sexualized for Mallarmé, hence his term "lewd but sacred." This is the fold—"false appearance of the present"—that Derrida will call *hymen*, or will refer to at times as "invagination," by which the condition of the frame will be carried into the inside of an argument, which will, in turn, frame it.

### Art in the age of the simulacrum

Terms like *parergon*, *supplement*, *differance*, and *re-mark* grounded new artistic practice in the wake of modernism. All of these ideas—from the simulacrum to the framing of the frame—became the staple not just of poststructuralism but of postmodernist painting. David Salle, who is perhaps most representative of that painting, developed in a context of young artists who were highly critical of art's traditional claims to transcend mass-cultural conditions. This group—initially including figures like Robert Longo, Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, and Louise Lawler [6]—was fascinated by the reversal between reality and its representation that was being effected by a late-twentieth-century culture of information.

Representations, it was argued, instead of coming *after* reality, in an imitation of it, now precede and construct reality. Our "real" emotions imitate those we see on film and read about in pulp romances; our "real" desires are structured for us by advertising images; the "real" of our politics is prefabricated by television news and Hollywood scenarios of leadership; our "real" selves are conglomerates and repetition of all these images, strung together by narratives not of our own making. To analyze this structure of the representation that precedes its referent (the thing in the real world it is supposed to copy) would cause this group of artists to ask themselves probing questions about the mechanics of the image-culture: its basis in mechanical reproduction, its function as serial repetition, its status as multiple without an original.

"Pictures" was the name given to this work in an early reception of it by the critic Douglas Crimp. There, for example, he examined the way Cindy Sherman, posing for a series of photographic "self-portraits" in a variety of different costumes and settings, each with the look of a fifties movie still and each projecting the image of a stereotypical film heroine—career girl, highly strung hysterics, Southern belle, outdoor girl—had projected her very self as always mediated by, always constructed through, a "picture" that preceded it, thus a copy without an original. The ideas that Crimp and other



critics versed in theories of poststructuralism came to identify with such work involved a serious questioning of notions of authorship, originality, and uniqueness, the foundation stones of institutionalized aesthetic culture. Reflected in the facing mirrors of Sherman's photographs, creating as they did an endlessly retreating horizon of quotation from which the "real" author disappears, these critics saw what Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes had analyzed in the fifties and sixties as "the death of the author."

The work of Sherrie Levine was set in this same context, as she rephotographed photographs by Elliot Porter, Edward Weston, and Walker Evans and presented these as her "own" work, questioning by her act of piracy the status of these figures as authorial sources of the image. Folded into this challenge is an implicit reading of the "original" picture—whether Weston's photographs of the nude torso of his young son Neil, or Porter's wild technicolor landscapes—as itself always already a piracy, involved in an unconscious but inevitable borrowing from the great library of images—the Greek classical torso, the windswept picturesque countryside—that have already educated our eyes. To this kind of radical refusal of traditional conceptions of authorship and originality, a critical stance made unmistakable by its position at the margins of legality, the name "appropriation art" has come to be affixed. And this type of work, building a critique of forms of ownership and fictions of privacy and control came to be identified as postmodernism in its radical form.

The question of where to place this widely practiced, eighties tactic of "appropriation" of the image—whether in a radical camp, as a critique of the power network that threads through reality, always already structuring it, or in a conservative one, as an enthusiastic return to figuration and the artist as image-giver—takes on another dimension when we view the strategy through the eyes of feminist artists. Working with both photographic material appropriated from the mass-cultural image bank and the form of direct address to which advertising often has recourse—as it cajoles, or hectors, or preaches to its viewers and readers, addressing them as "you"—Barbara Kruger elaborates yet another of the presuppositions of the aesthetic discourse, another of its institutional frames. This is the frame of gender, of the unspoken assumption set up between artist and viewer that both of them are male. Articulating this assumption in a work like *Your gaze hits the side of my face* (1981), where the typeface of the message appears in staccato against the image of a classicized female statue, Kruger fills in another part of the presuppositional frame: the message transmitted between the two poles classical linguistics marks as "sender" and "receiver," and assumes is neutral but presupposes as male, is a message put in play by something we could call an always-silent partner, namely, the symbolic form of Woman. Following a poststructuralist linguistic analysis of language and gender, Kruger's work is therefore interested in woman as one of those subjects who do not speak but is, instead, always spoken for. She is, as critic Laura Mulvey writes, structurally "tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning."

This is why Kruger, in this work, does not seize the right to speech the way that Brodthaers had in his open letters but turns instead to "appropriation." Woman, as the "bearer of meaning" is the locus of an endless series of abstractions—she is "nature," "beauty," "motherland," "liberty," "justice"—all of which form the cultural and patriarchal linguistic field; she is the reservoir of meanings from which statements are made. As a woman artist, Kruger acknowledges this position as the silent term through her act of "stealing" her speech, of never laying claim to having become the "maker of meaning."

This question of the woman's relation to the symbolic field of speech and the meaning of her structural dispossession within that field has become the medium of other major works by feminists. One of these, Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973–9), tracks the artist's own connection to her infant son through five years of his development and the 135 exhibits that record the mother-child relationship. This recording, however, is carried on explicitly along the fault line of the woman's experience of the developing autonomy of the male-child as he comes into possession of language. It wants to examine the way the child himself is fetishized by the mother through her own sense of lack.

Two kinds of absences structure the field of aesthetic experience at the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. One of them we could describe as the absence of reality itself as it retreats behind the miragelike screen of the media, sucked up into the vacuum tube of a television monitor, read off like so many printouts from a multinational computer hook-up. The other is the invisibility of the presuppositions of language and of institutions, a seeming absence behind which power is at work, an absence which artists from Mary Kelly, Barbara Kruger, and Cindy Sherman to Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren, and Richard Serra attempt to bring to light.

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#### Rosalind Krauss

# 5 Globalization, networks, and the aggregate as form

Transregional cultural interchange is as old as human history. "Globalization," on the other hand, refers to a historically specific development typically dating from the period of the eighties and nineties, when financial markets were deregulated to an unprecedented degree through the economic policies known as neoliberalism. Under pressure from nongovernmental agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, many developing nations opened—or "liberalized"—markets in order to attract foreign investment, in the process exposing themselves to significant political influence from the West and to financial volatility arising from unsustainable levels of debt. The objective of these policies was to allow capital, including that of multinational corporations, to move more easily from place to place, in pursuit of the least expensive labor and the most profitable consumer markets. Garments sold in Europe and the United States, for instance, might be manufactured one year in China and the next in Pakistan under work conditions that would be unacceptable in the West, while outsourced business services could be provided from India to the entire English-speaking world. Culturally, globalization has led to two diametrically opposed conditions: first, homogenization or what is often called the "McDonaldization" of life; and second, greater diversity and heightened awareness of cultural difference on account of increased and accelerated contact between geographically distant regions. It is within the terms of this paradox—growing infrastructural homogeneity on the one hand, and expanded consciousness of cultural diversity on the other—that a globalized art world arises. Its contravening forces, one moving toward sameness and the other toward difference, need to be recognized and carefully addressed when approaching global contemporary art.

To do so, we must acknowledge the different chronologies of modern art's adoption in different parts of the world. The European avant-gardes of the early twentieth century, including ▲ Cubism, Constructivism, and Surrealism, were arguably devoted to representing and indeed critically challenging the experience of modernization's uneven development from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries (including rapid industrialization and mass urbanization). In whole regions, including

significant areas of Asia and Africa, modern European art was introduced as a belated, but hegemonic, or neocolonial language as opposed to a form of avant-garde protest. In these places, modern art was typically pressed into service as an agent of cultural and economic modernization rather than as an opponent to its many devastating consequences. In this regard, it seems ▲ no coincidence that international booms in Chinese and Russian contemporary art accompanied those nations' market liberalization in the late eighties and nineties. A thriving art market may serve as a bellwether of full-fledged membership in the neoliberal global economy, as well as a prestigious sign of cultural development attractive not only to tourists, but to foreign investment as well. When we refer to "modern art" or "contemporary art," then, we are eliding a wide range of distinct visual dialects, each with its own local histories and semantics. These may be mutually intelligible, but they nonetheless remain significantly different—and often even contradictory.

## Not one but many histories

Let us consider one example of this complexity. During the Meiji Dynasty in Japan (1868–1912), two opposing types of painting emerged: *nihonga*, or Japanese-style painting [1], which arose in opposition to *yōga*, or Western-style painting using oil on canvas, which was informed by European movements like Impressionism and Postimpressionism [2]. While *nihonga* sought to preserve historically Japanese materials and themes, it may be seen as just as modern as *yōga* in its efforts to adapt traditional techniques to contemporary conditions. The opposition between modernized forms of indigenous traditions in *nihonga* and "indigenized" reinventions of modern European forms in *yōga* persisted through the mid-twentieth century in the underlying dynamic of one • of Japan's best-known post-World War II movements, Gutai, where the gesturalism associated with long traditions of ink drawing is scaled up in part as a riposte to Western practices ▲ • of Abstract Expressionism [3]. Although Gutai superficially resembles "American-type painting," Japanese artists at mid-century expressed significantly different attitudes toward matter and art than their American contemporaries, emphasizing the meeting of



1 • Hishida Shunso, *Cat and Plum Blossoms*, 1906

Color on silk, hanging scroll, 1180 × 498 cm (46 ½ × 19 ½)

One of the leading proponents of the *nihonga* style, Shunso integrated the thousand-year-old traditions and conventions of Japanese art with a more modern concern for realism, typified by his use of gradations of color instead of the more restrictive monochrome line drawing of traditional Japanese painting.

2 • Kuroda Seiki, *Lakeside*, 1897

Oil on canvas, 69 × 84.7 cm (27 ¼ × 33 ¾)

Meaning literally "Western-style painting," *yōga* encompassed work produced with a range of techniques, materials, and theories developed in the West, in contrast with the indigenous *nihonga* style. In particular, *yōga* artists such as Seiki, who studied in Paris for a decade from the mid-1880s, emulated the appearance of contemporary Impressionist and Postimpressionist painting from Europe and the United States. As such, the style represents one side of the two-way exchange of visual cultures between Japan and Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century.





3 • Gutai artists, overseen by Michel Tapié (left) and Jiro Yoshihara (right), preparing for the "International Sky Festival" in Osaka in 1960

As Yve-Alain Bois writes in this book, Yoshihara formed the Gutai group, of which he would be both mentor and financial backer, in 1954. He had been inspired by the famous 1949 *Life* article about Jackson Pollock, who became the standard by which Yoshihara would judge the work of his young disciples. The French critic Tapié, the champion of *art informel* painting in France, became an advisor and advocate of Gutai, organizing exhibitions and writing publications that coopted the group as part of a global *informel* movement—one naturally dominated and led by Western figures. And yet despite being “deemed, somewhat condescendingly, the mere oriental offspring of Abstract Expressionism,” as Bois puts it, the transgressive and ludic work of Gutai was in fact the product of a particular and specific context: the unique traditions and rituals of Japanese society and culture.

the artist with his or her material at the expense of making discrete paintings in the Western tradition, which was still the objective of Abstract Expressionism. In China, there was a similar encounter of Western and indigenous traditions from the New Culture Movement during the 1920s onward, but their interaction was nearly extinguished by the forcible expurgation of traditional Chinese painting during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76),

- ▲ in which a Soviet-derived idiom of figurative Socialist Realism was adopted as Chairman Mao’s official art. After this period of imposed “*tabula rasa*,” the Chinese art world gained knowledge of Western art and theory through the greatly increased appearance of translations of various texts in the eighties, leading to an efflorescence of commercially successful and globally circulated
- Chinese contemporary art in the nineties, some of whose most popular practitioners flaunted kitsch references to the Cultural Revolution informed by various Western practices of Pop and
- appropriation art.

What these brief, partial, and highly schematic genealogies are meant to indicate is that seemingly comparable visual idioms—such as oil painting, ink painting, or even Socialist Realism and Pop—may look similar when presented side by side in art settings such as blockbuster exhibitions, biennials, and art fairs but, in fact, they grow out of distinctly different, and even contradictory histories. Recognizing both what is common and what is singular about such practices is a fundamental methodological challenge in writing the history of “global” modern or contemporary art.

One way to address this challenge is to develop a multipolar worldwide art history. While this would seem to be an obvious and attainable goal under the cosmopolitan conditions of globalization, it turns out to be very difficult in practice, partly because the geopolitical alignments of the twentieth century were organized as a succession of bipolar and, more recently, monolithic structures that have profoundly affected the infrastructure as well as the underlying critical value system of the global art world. During the late nineteenth century, much of the developing world experienced colonization of various types, formal and informal. Immediately after the mid-twentieth-century period of decolonization—and indeed perhaps as a result of it—world alliances were forcibly reorganized into a Cold War opposition that pitted the Soviet Union, as the leader of world Communism, against the United States’ promotion of democratic values. This simplistic Manichaean split had dramatic effects on global art practices, not least because it isolated entire regions of the world from one another. Despite efforts to build a movement of nonaligned nations and related cultural policies, the political pressure to take sides and the lure of developmental aid drew a vast proportion of the world into the orbit of either the United States or the Soviet Union between World War II and 1989. Many of these countries were devastated by the effects of not-so-cold proxy wars around the world—in Vietnam, Central America, and Afghanistan to name only a few. With the end of the Cold War, it has been widely accepted that there now exists only one world superpower—the



4 • Kwon Young-woo, *Untitled*, 1977

Korean paper on plywood, 116.8 × 91 cm (46 × 35½")

Kwon Young-woo (1926–2013) was a pioneer of *tansaekhwa*, meaning “monochromatic painting.” From the mid-1960s into the 1970s, artists such as Young-woo manipulated various materials, including soaked canvas and torn paper, in innovative ways to create a distinctively Korean form of abstract art in white, cream, brown, black, or other neutral colors. Although never an official group with a clearly defined set of members or manifesto, *tansaekhwa* was the first Korean art movement to find recognition on the world stage. Its international success was in part because several of the artists lived, studied, and worked in Paris, but also because of the association with Lee Ufan, a Korean artist based in Japan who was the main theorist of the Mono-ha tendency of Japanese art, itself influenced by *Arte Povera* and *Process art*.

United States—and that its quasi-imperial power is expressed not in the structural colonialism of explicit governmental administration, but rather through economic pressure (often in collaboration with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) and perpetual military “police actions.”

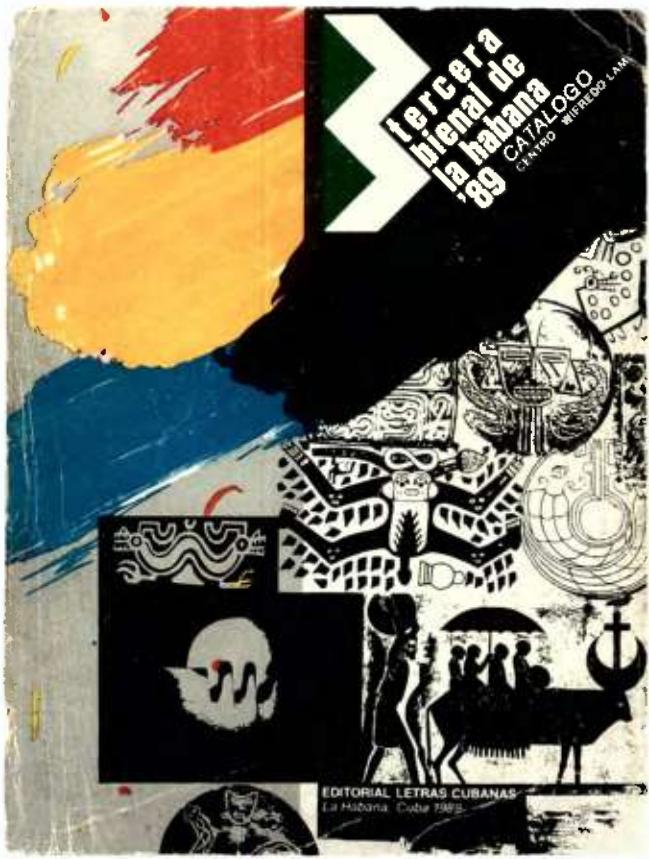
### A global art world?

The “official” or hegemonic art world whose capital and infrastructural power is still centered in the developed nations can also feel monolithic. Despite their far-flung locations, its outposts resemble one another architecturally and programmati-

- ▲ (leading to the desire for museums around the world to seek out a shortlist of star architects or “starchitects”). Art works on exhibit tend to share a formal idiom, belonging to what might be called an international style. Since the late sixties, artists from
- all continents have adapted the lexicon of Conceptual art to a wide variety of local and historically particular questions and themes—forming textual propositions, staging actions, and combining readymade components, instead of producing new or “original” objects. Such works tend to emphasize documentary and research-based procedures; they are often structured in series, and may combine a variety of media ranging from text to video. Regardless of their specific content, such works by “global artists” must communicate across borders if they are to migrate successfully from place to place. This system, which tends toward concentrations of power through the formal requirements it establishes for a work to pass into global circulation, reinscribes the new imperial order within ostensibly open markets and fungible assets. There are, of course, many sorts of art practices flourishing all over the globe that do not enter into circulation within the “official” global art world, or do so only rarely and outside the category of art: as indigenous objects, outsider art, or tourist art. Even when they do gain access to the realm of contemporary art, the frame of reference and values according to which works emerging from cultures that are unfamiliar to global art audiences are judged are not necessarily adjusted from those at play in neoliberal markets. This is because the “art world”—as a mixed configuration composed of market institutions like auction houses, galleries, and art fairs; public institutions like museums and independent spaces; and information outlets ranging from traditional print magazines and newsletters to a broader range of online aggregators and blogs—tends toward uniform principles of judgment. We should remain conscious of the fact that what we call “global contemporary art” can only ever denote a subset of world art production.

In his important book *Asia As Method*, Kuan-Hsing Chen argues against the kind of implicit standard of judgment associated with globalism—whereby Asia, for instance, is judged in dichotomous opposition to the West—in favor of a more fine-grained intraregional analysis. He writes: “The potential of Asia as method is this: using the idea of Asia as an imaginary anchoring point, societies in Asia can become each other’s points

▲ 1972c, 2015 ● 1967c, 1968a, 1968b, 1970, 1971, 1972a, 1972b, 1975b, 1984a ■ 1992, 1997, 2003, 2010b



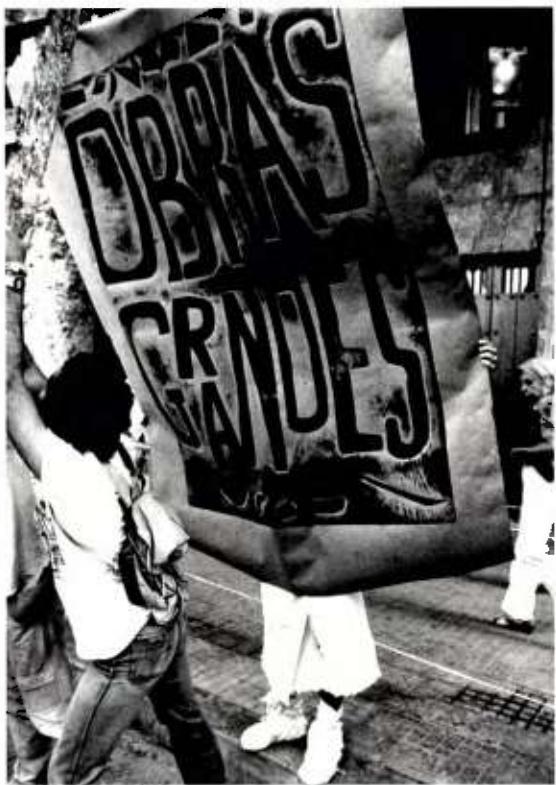
##### 5 • The catalogue of the Third Havana Biennial, 1989

The 1980s saw the birth of a new kind of exhibition that redefined the established model of the international biennial. Notable among them were the Havana, Cairo, and Istanbul biennials, all founded in that decade. These new institutions had a global outlook and political ambition, and they sought to challenge the unequal power relations at play in the art world and in wider society. The main theme of the Third Havana Biennial in 1989 was "Tradition and Contemporaneity," and it included a conference on "Tradition and Contemporaneity in the Arts of the Third World." It was one of the first large-scale exhibitions to aspire to an international reach from outside the European and North American art system, and it featured three hundred artists from forty-one countries. As well as its global nature, it included traditional folk arts alongside the work of recognized artists, thereby extending the territory of contemporary art in other ways too.

of reference, so that the understanding of the self may be transformed, and subjectivity rebuilt." In the context of art history, Joan Kee's 2013 book *Contemporary Korean Art: Tansaekhwa and the Urgency of Method* pursues such an objective by charting the triangulated history of *tansaekhwa*, or Korean monochrome painting, during the seventies as it moves between a rapidly developing Korea whose leading artists both desire to enter the Japanese art world but wish nonetheless to maintain a distinctive Korean identity; Japan, as a recent imperial power and sophisticated art center; and Paris, as the enduringly iconic European art capital whose recognition of a Korean artist remained highly significant for his or her reputation. One of the important distinctions Kee makes is that while many players in the Japanese art scene were particularly interested in establishing a consciousness of Asian versus Western contemporary art—with Japan implicitly representing "Asia"—in Korea, on the other hand, establishing national identity remained extremely important, as marked, for instance, by the distinctive quality of whiteness of *tansaekhwa* monochromes (which was associated with Korean heritage) [4]. Paradoxically, the Japanese art infrastructure, which was then more developed than Korea's, offered an important tool in establishing a visible program of exhibitions that could assert Korean identity. The lesson of Chen and Kee is relevant well beyond Asia: in charting the history of global modern and contemporary art, we cannot remain satisfied with marking the passage of artists from various regions of the world across the threshold of global standards; instead we must learn to understand the complex histories in which global and local networks are articulated together. Indeed, some scholars prefer the term "translocal" as opposed to "global" in order to encompass the heterogeneous mixture of cultures, infrastructures, and aesthetics that any art world assembles.

#### New networks, new models

The period around 1989 marked a shift in global politics, characterized by such seismic historical events as the collapse of the Cold War, the Tiananmen Square protests in Beijing, and the unbanning of the African National Congress, which ultimately led to the ▲ dismantling of apartheid in South Africa. That was also the year of two exemplary exhibitions, the Third Havana Biennial and ● "Les Magiciens de la terre" in Paris, which both broke open the Eurocentrism of the international art world while, somewhat paradoxically, preparing the way for a worldwide explosion of biennials and commercial art fairs. Since this book includes an entry devoted to "Les Magiciens de la terre," I will concentrate here on the Havana Biennial. The latter is distinctive in that it emerges from and produces a new model for art of the Third World (a term used by the Havana organizers, which has since been widely replaced by less hierarchical categories such as the "Global South" or the "developing world"). The Third Havana Biennial was explicitly intended to do what Chen proposes in *Asia As Method*: to build a horizontal network within regions that are marginalized by the



6 • A public print workshop organized as part of the Third Havana Biennial, Calle Cuba, Havana, 1989

As one of the Biennial's ephemeral events, the local Taller de Serigrafía Artística René Portocarrero print workshop organized a public event in the historic center of Havana, during which enormous engravings were made by driving a steamroller over printing plates. Participants could place personal items under the plates to become part of the printed impression.

official international art world, namely Latin America, Africa, and Asia [5]. Instead of writing histories based on the presumption that a Center (the West) transmits its aesthetic forms, institutions, and values to a Periphery (the rest of the world), the organizers in Havana were devoted to serious research in vast, but underrepresented places, building in part on their experience in producing the two previous Havana biennials, which, while physically larger, were less thematically and curatorially focused than the 1989 version. The scope of the event was enabled by Cuba's special position as a Communist state that, while a client or protégé of the Soviet Union, was also devoted to communicating and exporting its own revolution as broadly as possible, especially, though not exclusively, in Latin America. Consequently, while the Biennial had a small budget by European or US standards, it could take advantage of Cuba's broad cultural and diplomatic networks, which spanned much of the so-called Third World, to make contacts with artists' communities that had previously worked in relative isolation.

The innovations introduced by the Third Havana Biennial were threefold: first, it developed a new structure that was no longer based on the competitive model of discrete national pavilions or presentations that characterized the most venerable biennials in Venice and São Paulo. The nation as an organizing principle was replaced by concepts and themes that connected diverse cultures: in 1989, the theme was "Tradition and Contemporaneity." Unlike at previous biennials elsewhere (and its own two first editions), prizes were abolished in order to reduce competitiveness across the diverse and even incommensurable range of works on display. The second important innovation was to include so-called folk or traditional arts. This decision was at the heart of the organizers' efforts to consider questions raised by their theme since the culture of developing nations is often stereotypically aligned with folkloric, self-trained artists, or religious artifacts such as masks or effigies. By focusing on the ideological meanings of the traditional versus the contemporary, this biennial (and to a large extent ▲ "Les Magiciens de la terre" as well) demonstrated that what looks traditional to Western eyes may in fact constitute a complex response to contemporary conditions couched in historical idioms, but serving the same objectives and purposes as other forms of contemporary art. Finally, a third innovation of the Havana Biennial was its emphasis on live interaction among artists, and between them and the general public through conferences, lectures, and workshops. In addition to the main exhibition "Tres Mundos," the Biennial included four thematic clusters, or *núcleos*, the fourth of which was entirely devoted to ephemeral events [6]. By most accounts, one of the Biennial's most significant long-term effects was the vitality of the debate it inspired with regard to "Third World art." Such an emphasis on the international exhibition as an opportunity for connection and dialogue has had a huge impact • on subsequent exhibitions, which have often organized elaborate worldwide platforms for debate and interchange, thus broadening the reach of an exhibition beyond its physical precincts.



7 • The exhibition "Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s," Queens Museum of Art, 1999, showing the sections for Australia and New Zealand (top), Japan (center), and Russia (bottom)

Curated by Jane Farver, Rachel Weiss, Luis Camnitzer and a team of international curators, "Global Conceptualism" began life as an exhibition of Latin American Conceptual art. It soon grew, however, into a broader show of conceptualist practices from other parts of the world that were generally unfamiliar to a Western audience. While these separate movements were connected in myriad ways, they had all emerged out of their own specific local conditions. As Farver remembers, from the beginning, the curators understood "the territory of 'globalism' as having multiple centers in which local events were crucial determinants."

As important as the Third Havana Biennial was in establishing new kinds of networks, its sprawling structure and multiple foci could not be reconciled into any tidy image of global contemporary art. This has been a challenge in large international exhibitions and academic histories ever since. When one's art-historical objective is to reach beyond national and ethnic identity or physical location as the privileged frameworks for a work of art's meaning, in order to tell a truly global story of art's dissemination and migration across the borders of such identities, it is difficult to determine what kind of methodology is appropriate. In recent years, one successful approach has been to trace the variations of a particular aesthetic format as it passes through a variety of cultural contexts. The "Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s" exhibition and related catalogue organized by Queens Museum of Art, New York, of 1999, for instance, was an excellent model for addressing what was common in conceptual practices from around the world without erasing their differences [7]. The ultimate objective of a global art history is not only to develop a broader range of local histories, based on new research and the expertise of a more diverse profession of art historians, but also to develop methods that see past the *innovation* of form (which tends to prioritize the first enunciation of an aesthetic idiom) and value instead its *transitivity* (or, in other words, how its meaning is precisely produced through movement). Under such criteria, the notion of the "derivative" as a negative designation of art works would be replaced by the semantic value of an utterance rooted within a particular historical and cultural context.

### The aggregate as idea and form

Traditionally, one of the primary purposes of art history has been to discover whether a particular historical epoch, such as the current moment of globalization, generates its own unique set of aesthetic forms and practices. Making such a determination is especially difficult with regard to contemporary art, since its recentness affords little historical perspective. Nonetheless, I wish to propose "the aggregator" as one such form. It is instructive to browse the definitions of "aggregate" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The first entry states: "Constituted by the collection of many particles or units into one body, mass, or amount; collective, whole, total." In legal terms, an aggregate is "Composed of many individuals united into one association," and grammatically it signifies "collective." In each sense, an aggregate selects and configures relatively autonomous elements. It presents, therefore, an objective correlative to the influential political concept of the multitude, as developed by philosophers Paolo Virno, Antonio Negri, and Michael Hardt. The multitude, defined by these theorists as a resistant social force indigenous to globalization, is distinct from both national citizenship and class membership along traditional Marxian lines. Instead of establishing common cause based on a unified *identity* (as an American, for instance, or a proletarian), multitudes constitute themselves from independent

individuals drawn from a variety of communities and locations in response to shared conditions or provocations. As Hardt and Negri put it:

*The concept of multitude, then, is meant in one respect to demonstrate that a theory of economic class need not choose between unity and plurality. A multitude is an irreducible multiplicity; the singular social differences that constitute the multitude must always be expressed and can never be flattened into sameness, unity, identity, or indifference.... This is the definition of the multitude ... singularities that act in common.*

One need not subscribe wholeheartedly to Hardt and Negri's utopian claims on behalf of the multitude to recognize its exemplary structure. Like a search engine, the multitude aggregates heterogeneous entities (in this case, persons) through the action of a filter. That the multitude's filter is a shared social demand (such as immigration rights) makes them no less homologous to the algorithms and page rankings more cynically employed by search engines like Google as filters. Both the multitude and the search engine are mechanisms by which singular entities (both persons and objects) may act in common.

With the dramatic expansion of global contemporary art, ▲ online content aggregators like Contemporary Art Daily or e-flux have emerged as major sources of art-world information. These services help to compensate for the limited capacity to travel around the globe in pursuit of contemporary art for even the most privileged and peripatetic person. Their criteria of selection are more intuitive and less mathematically sophisticated than Google's algorithms—they "curate" rather than calculate their inclusions. And while the term narrowly denotes such online tools, the logic of the aggregator is present on many scales of the art world at once: from individual works of art constituted from an array of discrete components, often readymades, right up to biennials and art fairs. These latter differ from conventional museum presentations in that their structures are explicitly aggregative: they provide a common space for singular or autonomous pavilions and national exhibitions (in the case of biennials) and participating galleries (in the case of art fairs), rather than attempting to synthesize their presentations into an overarching theme or narrative as in most museum installations. Two inter-related syntactic structures persist across these scales, from the individual art work to the largest of art fairs. First, the aggregate is a format that accommodates and manifests singularity among its elements—components do not need to be integrated into an overall "composition" to which they would be subordinated. And second, the aggregator provides some kind of common space in which these singular elements are held together in productive, often contradictory association.

Indeed, the virtue of aggregates is their capacity to furnish platforms where the differences among semiautonomous and asynchronous elements can be highlighted and, hopefully, through

thoughtful consideration, negotiated. Their contradictions are not resolved, but rather put on display in order to provoke honest and open-ended dialogue between various positions. Examples of such a strategy abound in recent art, including Mexican artist ▲ Gabriel Orozco's "working tables" holding several distinct objects • he has made or found; American Rachel Harrison's use of pedestals and eccentric, monolith-like forms to carry an array of objects and pictures; or the Chinese artist Song Dong's cataloguing of the contents of his mother's house in China, by laying them all out on a gallery floor around a facsimile of the structure they were once housed in. Since the elements in such works are not integrated into a coherent composition but rather heighten conceptual unevenness, aggregates beg the question of how a common ground may be established within a discontinuous field of singular and often ideologically saturated objects. The aggregate form described here thus differs from two of its ■ close modern cognates: montage and the archive. In montage, individual elements are subsumed within an overall compositional logic; even if the different sources of its constituent elements remain apparent, these components do not typically maintain the disarming quality of independence characteristic of an aggregate, which seems always in danger of falling apart. And unlike an archive, whose principle of selection is inclusive with regard to a theme, institution, period, or event, aggregates proceed from an obscure principle of intuitive selection, typically staging confrontations among a variety of objects that embody entirely different values or epistemologies. An archive, on the other hand, serves to collect, preserve, and even constitute evidence as a pillar of epistemological stability.

I will discuss just one example of the logic of aggregates in practice. Slavs and Tatars are an artist collective whose work engages directly in questions of globalization by addressing an often overlooked geopolitical region: what they define as the area east of the Berlin Wall and west of the Great Wall of China, which witnessed one of the epic ideological contests of the twentieth century, between Islam and Communism. Through texts (transmitted in books as well as in artifacts in exhibitions) and objects, the group explores, among other themes, syncretic expressions of Islam developed in central Asia under Soviet policies of religious suppression. Often Slavs and Tatars heighten the asynchrony of this ideological collision through the citation of medieval scripture as a means of drawing out mystical strands in modern and contemporary art through a logic of what they call "substitution." Indeed, in the catalogue for the 2012 exhibition "Not Moscow Not Mecca" they describe their work as explicitly aggregative: "The collision of different registers, different voices, different worlds, and different logics previously considered to be antithetical, incommensurate, or simply unable to exist in the same page, sentence, or space is crucial to our practice." This desire to bring "different registers" onto the "same page, sentence, or space" is what I have identified as the aggregator's impulse to furnish a platform where unlike things may occupy a common space. In the



8 • Slavs and Tatars, installation shot of the exhibition "Not Moscow Not Mecca," Vienna Secession, 2012

In their exhibitions and texts, Slavs and Tatars assemble an array of ideas, artifacts, and cultural objects that seem to have been collected on journeys to faraway times and places—a visual form, one might say, of travel writing. Asked if their presentations, which are based on extensive research, could be described as archival, the artists say that they prefer to see them as “restorative.” They explain the impulse behind their practice: “Despite its recent critical renaissance or promiscuity . . . the word ‘archival’ still implies a dusty collection of documents and records and the aura that accompanies this material. We believe it is equally important to disrespect one’s sources as to respect them. That is, to reconfigure, restitute, reinterpret, and collide the archival material with the aim of making it relevant and urgent—not just to the specialist in the field, nor just to the intellectual, but also to the layperson who might not otherwise be interested.”

exhibition component of “Not Moscow Not Mecca” at the Vienna Secession, the group generated an exhibition based on the trans-regional histories of fruits in Central Asia, including the apricot, the mulberry, the persimmon, the watermelon, the quince, the fig, the melon, the cucumber, the pomegranate, the sour cherry and the sweet lemon, which they wittily called “The Faculty of Fruits.” The gallery presentation included arrays of readymade (or seemingly readymade) fruits distributed on mirrored platforms in a cross between veiled allegory and blinged-out cornucopia [8]. They also produced a book, which in part documents the fascinating histories of how these fruits grew out of and into various Central Asian cultures, both agriculturally and through myth or legend. Slavs and Tatars’ work thus adapts several of the fundamental strategies of Conceptual art: the *proposition* (how does fruit embody the historical asynchronies of Central Asia?), the *document* (through an account of each fruit’s geographical



## THE APRICOT



17th century Armenia (16c. Armenia) Windenmutterung einer alten Kulturlandschaft 1966

A small, yellowish fruit, cleaved down the middle, is caught up in a custody battle of seismic proportions—and the claimants could not be more mismatched. In one corner, a country whose only instance of independence



The imamoglu of the Naderi museum in Kordi gives to great lengths to shake some apricots from the tree in the courtyard. Uzbekistan, 2011

before 1991 dates to the first century CE; in the other, the world's most populous nation. In the middle, like a child unwilling to choose between (a



Apricots drying in Capadoccia, photo by Gunn Christian-Tersman

petite) mommy and (towering) daddy, the apricot tries to please, providing medicinal relief to both. According to an old Armenian tradition, over twelve maladies can be treated with the flesh and seeds of the apricot. The Hayr [Loyla] have raised their orange, blue, and red flag on the genus and species (*Prunus armeniaca*) with a doppel of Biblical bashes to boot: Noah was not just any tree hugger, but an apricot-tree hugger (the only one to make it into the Ark).

The Chinese, though, give the Caucasus, a land renowned for its poetic streak, a run for its (highly

leveraged) money. Via the velvety skinned fruit, the Middle Kingdom brings together what might seem two disparate worlds to Western eyes – that of medicine and education – for a one-two punch of holistic healing for the body and brain alike. It is no coincidence



My Country by M. Saryan  
Source: National Art Museum, 1982

dence that the fruits here hail from Xinjiang, aka Uighuristan, the westernmost region of China, sometimes lumped into Central Asia under the contested name of East Turkestan. A particularly lyrical way of addressing a doctor in Mandarin is "Expert of the Apricot Grove." Dong Fang, a doctor in the third century CE, asked his patients to plant apricot trees

instead of paying fees. The legend lived on for centuries: When patients sought treatment, they said they were going to the Xiong Lin, or Apricot Forest. Meanwhile, school children, in lieu of flowers, often bring their teachers dried apricots to bless the "apricot altar" or "educational circle."

Between the diasporic duels of the Armenians and the Chinese, a third contender permits a welcome turn of triangulation, one which helps us to move beyond the partisan battles over the precocious, early-ripening fruit. For much of the Latin American world, apricots are called damasco, in reference to their Syrian origins and the early-twentieth-century migrations to that region from the Middle East.

If the fresh fruit incites juicy rivalries, the dried version doesn't disappoint either. When thinking of Damascus today, we turn helplessly to the Turks to will their former Ottoman influence over the restive Syrian capital. In far rosier times, they would turn to the pitted yellow prune and say *bundaniyisi*, *Şam'dakayısi*—the only

thing better than this is an apricot in Damascus.

## THE MULBERRY

A worm with a voracious but selective appetite has proven to have had more of a Eurasian geographical bite than Genghis Khan himself. Gobbling up all the white mulberry tree leaves in its path, the castoffs of every little silk-worm's metamorphosis



Uzbek girls in Khan-Aras patterned turbans. Sovetsky Square, Uzbekistan, 1987

### 9 • Slavs and Tatars, spread from the artists' book *Not Moscow Not Mecca*, 2012

migration and cultural associations published in the related artists' book (9), and the *readymade* (manifest in "real and imagined" fruits displayed on the platforms). But the syntax of the work established parallel singular profiles among adjacent things; their physical copresence and conceptual unevenness begs the question of the common, thus making "Not Moscow Not Mecca" aggregative according to the definition set out above.

Given the vast scale of global contemporary art production, and the wide range of cultural histories from which it emerges, any attempt at a tidy or coherent reading will be speculative at best. The principal challenge in confronting the contemporary art made under conditions of globalization is to hold together two ostensibly contradictory qualities: first, a shared international language of aesthetic form spoken in common; and second, the texture and nuance of different histories and dialects that can make the same image or format mean dramatically different things. Such accommodation of singularity within a common space will always be—even in the world of politics and finance—an art rather than a science.

### FURTHER READING

**Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, and Rachel Weiss.** *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999)

**Kuan-Hsing Chen.** *Asia As Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010)

**Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.** *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004)

**Joan Kee.** *Contemporary Korean Art: Tansaekhwah and the Urgency of Method* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013)

**Gao Minglu.** *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011)

**Slavs and Tatars.** *Not Moscow Not Mecca* (Vienna: Secession, 2012)

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

**Bert Winther-Tamaki.** *Maximum Embodiment: Yōga, The Western Painting of Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012)

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- 64** 1900a Sigmund Freud publishes *The Interpretation of Dreams*: in Vienna, the rise of the expressive art of Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, and Oskar Kokoschka coincides with the emergence of psychoanalysis. HF
- 69** 1900b Henri Matisse visits Auguste Rodin in his Paris studio but rejects the elder artist's sculptural style. YAB
- 76** 1903 Paul Gauguin dies in the Marquesas Islands in the South Pacific: the recourse to tribal art and primitivist fantasies in Gauguin influences the early work of André Derain, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. HF  
box • **The exotic and the naive** HF
- 82** 1906 Paul Cézanne dies at Aix-en-Provence in southern France: following the retrospectives of Vincent van Gogh and Georges Seurat the preceding year, Cézanne's death casts Postimpressionism as the historical past, with Fauvism as its heir. YAB  
box • **Roger Fry and the Bloomsbury Group** RK
- 90** 1907 With the stylistic inconsistencies and primitivist impulses of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Pablo Picasso launches the most formidable attack ever on mimetic representation. YAB  
box • **Gertrude Stein** RK
- 97** 1908 Wilhelm Worringer publishes *Abstraction and Empathy*, which contrasts abstract art with representational art as a withdrawal from the world versus an engagement with it: German Expressionism and English Vorticism elaborate this psychological polarity in distinctive ways. HF
- 102** 1909 F. T. Marinetti publishes the first Futurist manifesto on the front page of *Le Figaro* in Paris: for the first time, the avant-garde associates itself with media culture and positions itself in defiance of history and tradition. BB/RK  
box • **Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey** HF

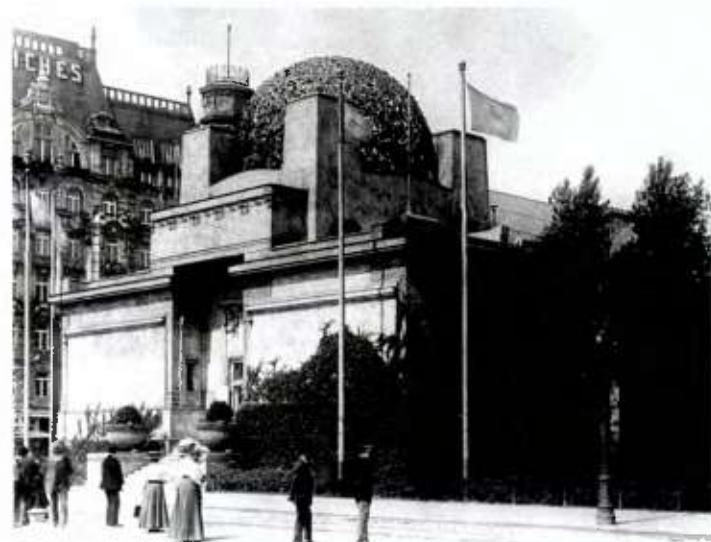
Sigmund Freud publishes *The Interpretation of Dreams*: in Vienna, the rise of the expressive art of Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, and Oskar Kokoschka coincides with the emergence of psychoanalysis.

**S**igmund Freud declares in the epigraph to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, “If I cannot move the higher powers, I will stir up hell.” With this passage, taken from *The Aeneid*, the Viennese founder of psychoanalysis “intended to picture the efforts of the repressed instinctual impulses.” And right here, we might think, lies the connection between this intrepid explorer of the unconscious and such brazen innovators in Viennese art as Gustav Klimt (1862–1918), Egon Schiele (1890–1918), and Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980). For they too seemed to stir up hell, in the early years of the century, through a liberatory expression of repressed instincts and unconscious desires.

These artists did stir up hell, but it was no simple liberation. Unfettered expression is rare in art, let alone in psychoanalysis, and Freud would not have supported it in any case: a conservative collector of ancient, Egyptian, and Asian artifacts, he was wary of modernist artists. The connection between these four Viennese contemporaries is better drawn through the notion of the “dream-work” developed by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. According to this epochal study, a dream is a “rebus,” a broken narrative-in-images, a secret wish struggling to be expressed and an internal censor struggling to suppress it. Such a conflict is often suggested in the most provocative paintings by Klimt, Schiele, and Kokoschka, which are frequently portraits: a struggle between expression and repression in sitter and painter alike. Perhaps more than any other modernist style, this art places the viewer in the position of psychoanalytic interpreter.

### Oedipal revolt

Although Paris is more celebrated as a capital of modernist art, Vienna witnessed several events that are paradigmatic of turn-of-the-century avant-gardes. First was the very act of “secession”—the withdrawal from the Academy of Fine Arts in 1897 of a group of nineteen artists (including Klimt) and architects (including Joseph Maria Olbrich [1867–1908] and Josef Hoffmann [1870–1956]) into an order of its own, replete in this case with its own building [1]. In opposition to the old academic guard, the Secession advocated the new and the youthful in the very names of the international style that it adopted, which was called *art nouveau*



1 • Joseph Maria Olbrich, *House of the Vienna Secession*, 1898  
A view of the main entrance

in French and *Jugendstil* in German (literally, “youth style”). Also typical of avant-gardes was that this advocacy provoked great scandal. First, in 1901, the University of Vienna rejected a grim painting on the subject of philosophy that it had commissioned from Klimt, who responded with a second painting on the subject of medicine that was even more outrageous. Then, in 1908, the School of Arts and Crafts expelled Kokoschka after a performance of his lurid drama of passion and violence, *Murderer, the Hope of Woman*—the first banishment in his long, nomadic life. And finally, in 1912, the authorities charged Schiele with kidnapping and corrupting a minor, jailed him for twenty-four days, and burned many of his sexually explicit drawings.

These controversies were not staged for bourgeois titillation; they pointed to genuine rifts between private reality and public morality in Vienna at the time. For the new art emerged as the Austro-Hungarian Empire was collapsing; it was symptomatic, the historian Carl E. Schorske has suggested, of “the crisis of the liberal ego” in the old order. Here lies a further connection with Freud: more than a liberation of the self, this art attests to a conflict within the individual subject regarding its threatened authorities, the academy and the state—in Freudian terms the superego that

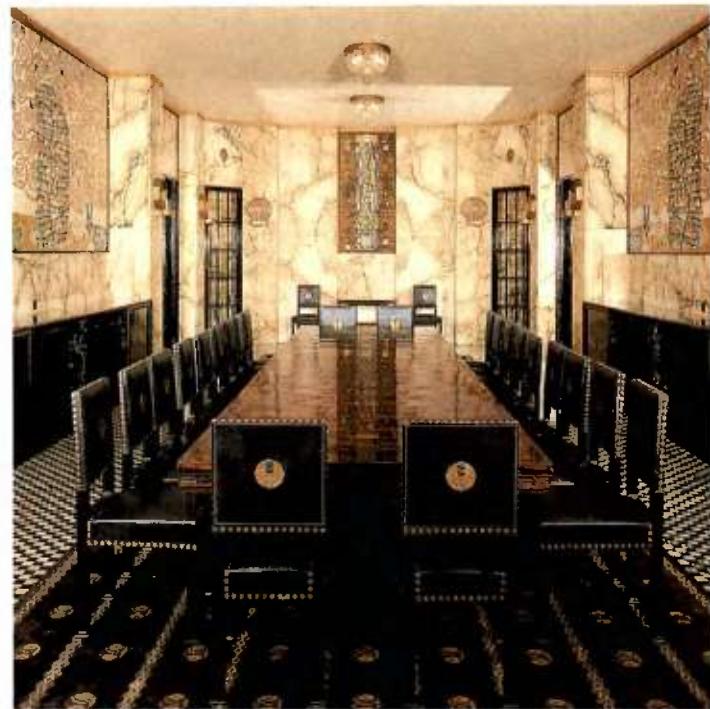
surveys us all—"a crisis of culture characterized by an ambiguous combination of collective oedipal revolt and narcissistic search for a new self" (Schorske).

This crisis was hardly punctual or uniform. Differences existed not only between the Secession and the Academy but also between the Expressionist aesthetic of young painters such as Schiele and Kokoschka and the Art Nouveau ethos of Secession artists such as Klimt, who advocated a "total work of the arts." (This *Gesamtkunstwerk* was exemplified by the Palais Stoclet in Brussels, designed by Hoffmann in 1905–11 with arboreal mosaic murals created by Klimt [2]). The Secession was divided internally as well. In its craft studios (or *Werkstätte*), it promoted the decorative arts, which other modernist styles often suppressed ("the decorative" became a term of anxious embarrassment for many proponents of abstract art); for example, Klimt used such archaic media as tempera and gold-leaf as well as mosaic. On the other hand, in its expressive use of line and color, the Secession also encouraged modernist experiments in abstract form. In this way, it was caught up in contradiction: in style between figuration and abstraction; in mood between fin-de-siècle malaise and early-twentieth-century *joie de vivre*. And this conflict tended to be evoked in the edgy, almost neurasthenic line that Klimt passed on to Schiele and Kokoschka.

In these tensions with the Art Nouveau style of the Secession, the great German critic Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) later glimpsed a basic contradiction between the individual basis of crafted art and the collective basis of industrial production:

*The transfiguration of the lone soul was [the] apparent aim [of Art Nouveau]. Individualism was its theory. With [the Belgian designer Henry] van de Velde, there appeared the house as expression of the personality. Ornament was to such a house what the signature is to a painting. The real significance of Art Nouveau was not expressed in this ideology. It represented the last attempt at a sortie on the part of Art imprisoned by technical advance within her ivory tower. It mobilized all the reserve forces of interiority. They found their expression in the mediumistic language of line, in the flower as symbol of the naked, vegetable Nature that confronted the technologically armed environment.*

If Art Nouveau represented a last sortie on the part of Art, the Secession signaled its full embrace of the Ivory Tower, as exemplified by its white building, replete with floral facade ornament and grill dome, intended by its designer Olbrich as "a temple of art which would offer the art-lover a quiet, elegant place of refuge." Thus, even as the Secession broke with the Academy, it did so only to retreat to a more pristine space of aesthetic autonomy. And yet, in a further contradiction, the Secession took this autonomy to be expressive of the spirit of its time, as announced by the motto inscribed beneath the dome: "TO EACH AGE ITS ART, TO ART ITS FREEDOM." Here is, as art historians in Vienna might have said at the time, the very "artistic will" (or *Kunstwollen*) of this new movement.

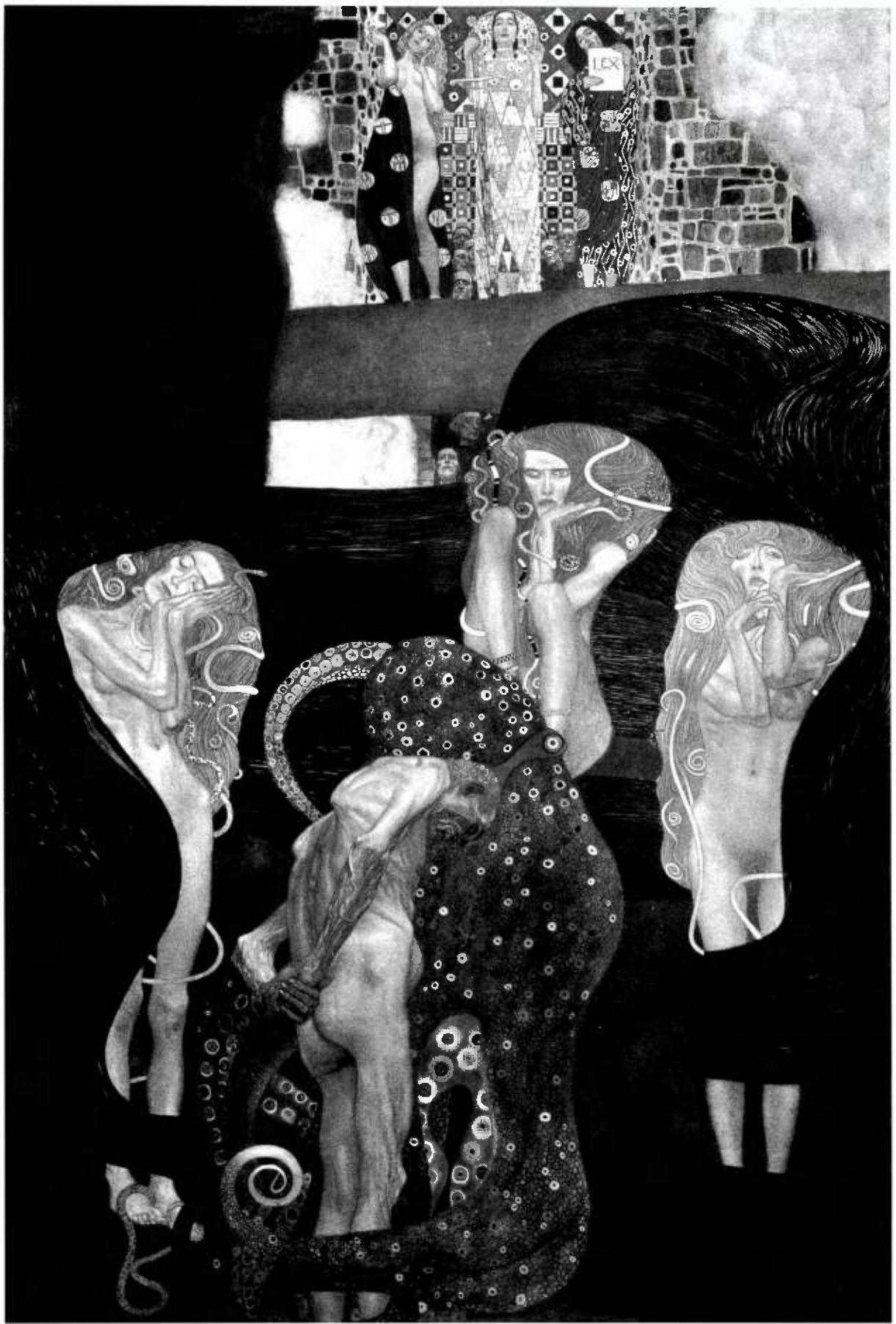


2 • Josef Hoffmann, Palais Stoclet, Brussels, 1905–11  
Dining room murals by Gustav Klimt, furniture by Josef Hoffmann

### Defiance tintured by impotence

The first president of the Vienna Secession was Gustav Klimt, whose career passed from the historical culture of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, through the antitraditional revolt of the avant-garde at the turn of the century, to an ornamental portraiture of Viennese high society after this modernist revolt appeared, to him at least, to be routed. His father, an engraver, had sent him to the School of Arts and Crafts, from which he emerged as an architectural decorator in 1883, just as the monumental buildings of the central Ringstrasse of remodeled Vienna came to completion. His early works included allegorical paintings for two new Ringstrasse buildings—a painting of dramatic figures (including Hamlet) for the ceiling of the City Theater (1886–8) and a painting of cultural representatives (including Athena) for the lobby of the Museum of Art History (1891). In 1894, on the basis of these successes, the new University of Vienna commissioned him to produce three ceiling paintings—representing Philosophy, Medicine, and Jurisprudence, respectively—on the Enlightenment theme of the "Triumph of Light over Darkness." Klimt worked intermittently on the project for the next ten years, exhibiting the first painting, *Philosophy*, in 1900. By this time, however, he was caught up in the Secession, and the finished painting was hardly what the University had in mind. Rather than a pantheon of philosophers, Klimt presented an anguished passage of commingled bodies through an amorphous space overseen by an obscure sphinx in the center and a luminous head (which evoked Medusa more than Athena) at the bottom. In this world, Darkness seemed to triumph over Light.

If Klimt questioned rationalist philosophy in this commission for the University, he mocked therapeutic medicine in the next,



3 • Gustav Klimt, *Jurisprudence*, 1903–7

Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown (destroyed 1945)

unveiled in 1901. Here Medicine is represented as yet another hell, with even more bodies, some slung in sensuous slumber, others massed with cadavers and skeletons—a grotesque phantasmagoria of “the unity of life and death, the interpenetration of instinctual vitality and personal dissolution” (Schorske). An even stronger slap in the face of the University, the painting was again rejected and Klimt rebuked. His rejoinder was to rework the final representation of Jurisprudence [3] into one last hell of criminal punishment, with three large, intense furies around an emaciated man, all naked in a dark space below, and three small, impassive graces gowned in a hieratic space above. These allegorical figures of Truth, Justice, and Law hardly assist the male victim, who, surrounded by octopus tentacles, is at the mercy of the three furies of punishment (one sleeps obliviously, one stares vengefully, one winks as if on the take). Here punishment appears psychologized as castration: the man is gaunt, his head bowed, his penis near the maw of the octopus. In a sense, it is this constricted man whom Schiele and Kokoschka will attempt to liberate, though in their art too he will remain broken. “His very defiance was tintured by the spirit of impotence,” Schorske writes of Klimt. This is true of Schiele and Kokoschka as well.

These failed commissions signaled a general crisis in public art at this time: clearly, public taste and advanced painting had parted company. For the most part, Klimt then withdrew from the avant-garde in order to paint realistic portraits of stylish socialites, ornamental people set against ornamental backgrounds. His withdrawal left it to Schiele and Kokoschka to probe “repressed instinctual impulses,” and they did so in the guise of often anguished figures stripped of historical reference and social context. (To look at his figures, Schiele once remarked, is “to look inside.”) Skeptical of the decorative refinements of Art Nouveau, both Schiele and Kokoschka turned to Postimpressionist and Symbolist painters for expressive precedents. (As in other capitals, retrospective exhibitions of Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin were influential, as were Secession shows of the Norwegian Edvard Munch [1863–1944] and the Swiss Ferdinand Hodler [1853–1918].)

### Symptomatic portraiture

Having grown up in a bourgeois family of railway officials, Egon Schiele met Klimt in 1907 and soon adapted the sinuous, sensuous line of his mentor into his own angular, anxious mode of drawing; in the ten years before his death (Schiele died in the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918) he produced some three hundred paintings and three thousand works on paper. In bloody reds and earthy browns, pale yellows and bleak blacks, Schiele attempted to paint pathos directly in melancholic landscapes with blighted trees, as well as desperate pictures of aggrieved mothers and children. More notorious are his drawings of adolescent girls, often sexually exposed, and his self-portraits, sometimes in similarly explicit positions. If Klimt and Kokoschka explored the reciprocal relation between sadistic and masochistic drives, so Schiele probed another Freudian pair of

perverse pleasures—voyeurism and exhibitionism. Often he stares so intently—into the mirror, at us—that the difference between his gaze and ours threatens to dissolve, and he seems to become his only viewer, the solitary voyeur of his own display. But for the most part, Schiele does not seem defiantly proud of his self-image so much as pathetically exposed by its damage.

Consider his *Nude Self-Portrait in Gray with Open Mouth* [4]. The figure recalls the emaciated victim of *Jurisprudence* turned round and made younger. He has broken free; yet free, he is broken: his arms are no longer bound—they are amputated. Less an angel in flight, he is a scarecrow pinioned and cut at the knees. His slight asymmetry skews other oppositions as well: although male, his penis is retracted, and his torso is more feminine than not. With rings around his eyes, his face resembles a death-mask, and his open mouth could be interpreted equally as a vital scream or as a deathly gaping. This self-portrait seems to capture the moment when vitality and mortality meet in neurotic morbidity.

This transformation of the figure is the primary legacy of Viennese art at this time. It might seem conservative in relation to other



4 • Egon Schiele, *Nude Self-Portrait in Gray with Open Mouth*, 1910  
Gouache and black crayon on paper, 44.8 × 31.5 (17½ × 12½)

modernist art, but it provoked the Nazis to condemn it as “degenerate” thirty years later. Well past its service as classical ideal (the academic nude) and a social type (the proper portrait), the figure here becomes a cipher of psychosexual disturbance. Without direct influence from Freud, these artists developed a sort of symptomatic portraiture that extended van Gogh’s expressive renderings of people, a portraiture that evokes less the desires of the artist than the repressions of the sitter—indirectly, through tics and tensions of the body. Here, what the attenuated, often emaciated line is in Klimt and Schiele, the agitated, often scratched line is in Kokoschka: a sign of a tortuous surfacing of subjective conflict.

Also influenced by Klimt, Oskar Kokoschka developed this symptomatic portraiture further than Schiele, and he probed its disruptive dimension further too—to the point where he was forced to leave Vienna altogether. During his troubles, Kokoschka was supported by the modernist architect and critic Adolf Loos (1870–1933), already notorious for his austere designs and fierce polemics, and the 1909 Kokoschka portrait of this great purist could be said to capture their “partnership of opposites” [5]. Similar to the Schiele self-portrait in stylistic respects (down to the ringed eyes), the painting evokes a subjectivity that is nonetheless quite different. The clothed Loos gazes inward: he is composed, but one senses he is under great pressure. Indeed, rather than expressed, or pressed outward, his being seems compressed, or pressed inward. Self-possessed in both senses of the term, he reins in his energies with an intensity that seems to deform his wrung hands.

A year before the portrait was painted, Loos had published his diatribe against the Art Nouveau of the Secession; titled • “Ornament and Crime” (1908), it might as well have read “Ornament is Crime.” Loos deemed ornament not only erotic in origin ■ but excremental as well, and though he excused such amorality in children and “savages,” “the man of our day who, in response to an inner urge, smears the walls with erotic symbols is a criminal or a degenerate.” Not coincidentally, in this land given the excremental nickname “Kakania” by the novelist Robert Musil, Freud published his first paper on “character and anal eroticism” in 1908 as well. Yet, whereas Freud wanted merely to *understand* the civilized purposes of this repression of anal-erotic drives, Loos wanted to *enforce* them: “A country’s culture can be assessed by the extent to which its lavatory walls are smeared,” he wrote. “The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects.” Loos was not sympathetic to psychoanalysis; his friend and compatriot the critic Karl Kraus (1874–1936) once called it “the disease of which it thinks it is the cure.” But like Freud, Loos did imagine the anal as a messy zone of indistinctness, and this is why he implied that the applied arts of the Secession and the violent outbursts of Expressionism were excremental. Against such confusion, Loos and Kraus demanded a self-critical practice in which each art, language, and discipline would be made ever more distinct, proper, and pure. We do well to remember that Vienna was the home not only of such disruptive painters as



5 • Oskar Kokoschka, *Portrait of the Architect Adolf Loos*, 1909

Oil on canvas, 73.7 × 92.7 (29 × 36½)

Klimt, Schiele, and Kokoschka, but also of such disciplinary voices as Loos in architecture, Kraus in journalism, Arnold Schoenberg ▲ (1874–1951) in music, and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) in philosophy (who once wrote that “all philosophy is the critique of language”). Already at the beginning of the century, then, we find in Vienna an opposition fundamental to much modernism that followed: an opposition between expressive freedoms and rigorous constraints. HF

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Henri Matisse visits Auguste Rodin in his Paris studio but rejects the elder artist's sculptural style.

**W**hen Henri Matisse (1869–1954) visited Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) in his studio in 1900, the sixty-year-old artist was a towering figure. Rodin had long enjoyed a considerable reputation as the lone sculptor who had been able to rejuvenate a moribund medium after a full century of tedious academic monuments and predictable kitsch statues. But his sculptural production was split, as American art historian Leo Steinberg has noted, between a public and a private one: while his reputation had been largely based on his marble works, which in some ways continued rather than overturned the academic tradition, the larger and more innovative part of his output (in numerous plasters rarely cast in bronze) was kept in the secrecy of his studio. His *Monument to Balzac*, with its thick column of a body cloaked in an overcoat depriving it of any traditional expressive attribute, was perhaps the first public sculpture in which Rodin revealed his preferred, private style: its unveiling in 1898, which created an enormous scandal, may be considered the birth of modern sculpture. Rodin had worked assiduously on the monument for seven years and was wounded (though perhaps not entirely surprised) when it was dismissed as a “crude sketch” by the members of the Société des Gens de Lettres who had commissioned it and was recklessly caricatured by the press (it would not be installed in its present public location in Paris until 1939). Rodin responded to the criticism by erecting a pavilion at the 1900 Universal Exhibition, held at various sites across Paris from April to November of that year, to house a retrospective of his works: for Matisse and many others at this point, Rodin represented the romantic ideal of the uncompromising artist, refusing to yield to the pressures of a bourgeois society.

Legend has it that when Matisse, encouraged by an admiring friend who was one of Rodin’s many assistants, visited the elder sculptor, he brought with him a selection of his rapid sketches after the model in order to obtain feedback, and that Rodin did not much like what he saw. The advice he gave—that Matisse should “fuss” more over his drawing and add details—met a resolutely deaf ear: there was not much difference between this precept and the École des Beaux-Arts instruction that Matisse had already definitively rejected (and which he would have expected Rodin to scorn as well).

### In the footsteps of the master

But whatever guidance Matisse had sought from Rodin concerning his drawing method, his visit must have been prompted above all by a curiosity with regard to Rodin’s sculptural practice. It is uncertain if Matisse was already working on *The Serf* [1] at that point; but, whether as the underlying cause of the visit or as its immediate effect, this sculpture marks both Matisse’s first serious



1 • Henri Matisse, *The Serf*, 1900–3 (1908 cast)  
Bronze. height 92.4 (36 1/2)

engagement with Rodin's art and his definitive departure from it, for it is a direct answer to Rodin's armless *The Walking Man* [2], which was exhibited as a study for *Saint John the Baptist*, along with the much tamer, anatomically whole *Saint John* itself, in the 1900 pavilion. By using the same model—a man nicknamed Bevilaqua, long known to be a favorite of Rodin's—in approximately the same pose, Matisse underlined both his debt to Rodin and their differences, a dialectic later sharpened by the amputation of *The Serf*'s arms at the time of its casting, in 1908.

Even though Rodin's *Walking Man* is not really walking—as Leo Steinberg pointed out, both his feet are anchored onto the ground, much like those of a "prizefighter in a delivery of a blow"—the illusion is that of bound energy: the movement is arrested, but the figure is ready to spring. Matisse's *Serf*, by contrast, is irremediably static, self-contained. The spectator is never tempted to imagine the figure moving, never tempted to animate it in his or her mind. The body itself seems malleable: the ungracious proportions of the model are accentuated by the sinuous curve traced in space by the whole figure, a general undulation stemming from the prominent belly and spanning the height of the whole body, up through the recessed thorax and the hunched back to the tilted head in one direction, and down to the right shin functioning as a break under the inward-bent knee in the other. It suggests no extension of any kind, into neither mental nor physical space: one of the first resolutely modernist antimonuments, the sculpture asserts its autonomy as an object.

This is not to say that *The Serf* owes nothing to Rodin's craft. The sculpture's very impression of malleability comes in great part from the surface agitation of the work, a stylistic feature essential to Rodin's "private" art and signaling one of the greatest upheavals of the Western sculptural tradition since antiquity—a tradition that demanded of the sculptor that he "give life" to the marble (the myth of Pygmalion), that he make one believe (or rather *pretend* to make one believe, since nobody is ever fooled) that his statue is endowed with organic life. While the public Rodin is wholly heir to this tradition, the private Rodin is a master of "process art," his sculpture being a catalog of the procedures, accidental or not, that make up the art of modeling or casting. The gaping wound in the back of *The Walking Man*, the great scrape across that of *Flying Figure* (1890–1), the excrescences on the forehead of his 1898 *Baudelaire*, and many other "anomalies" set into the bronze testify to Rodin's determination to treat sculptural processes as a language whose signs are manipulable. In other words, the public Rodin champions the transparency of sculpture as a language, whereas the private Rodin insists on its opacity, on its materiality.

Matisse, no doubt stimulated by these examples, accentuates the agitation of *The Serf*'s surface; he amasses muscular discontinuities, conceiving all his sculpture as an accumulation of more or less even, small round shapes, or of knife-strokes on which light falters. But in doing so, he goes too far and approaches the style of Medardo Rosso (1858–1928), the Italian self-proclaimed rival of Rodin who labeled himself an Impressionist and indeed aspired to imitate



2 • Auguste Rodin, *The Walking Man*, 1900  
Bronze, 84 × 51.5 × 50.8 (33 × 20½ × 20)

Impressionist brush-strokes in his wax sculptures. Unlike Rodin's, Rosso's sculpture is pictorial, and it is strictly frontal. The dematerializing effect of light on Rosso's surfaces, the way the contours of his figures are eaten up by shadow and can only be experienced from a single point of view—these are features that Matisse comes to reject at the very moment he is flirting with their possibility.

*The Serf*, one of the two pieces through which Matisse learned the art of sculpture (it necessitated between three and five hundred sessions with the model!), is thus a paradoxical work: in his uncontrolled imitation of Rodin's "processual" marks, Matisse is more royalist than the king. The surface agitation itself comes dangerously close to destroying the integrity of the figure and its overall arabesque, and to transforming it, as Rosso would have it, into an ersatz picture. From then on, Matisse would understand better the principle of Rodin's materiality, and never abuse it again in this way. Almost all of his future bronzes would continue to bear the marks of his manipulation of the clay, but without endangering the physicality of the sculpture. Perhaps the most striking example of this effect is the exaggeration of the forehead of *Jeannette V* [3], which had such a vivid impact on Picasso when he discovered it in 1930 that he set out to emulate it in a series of heads or busts he modeled shortly thereafter.

## Matisse breaks away

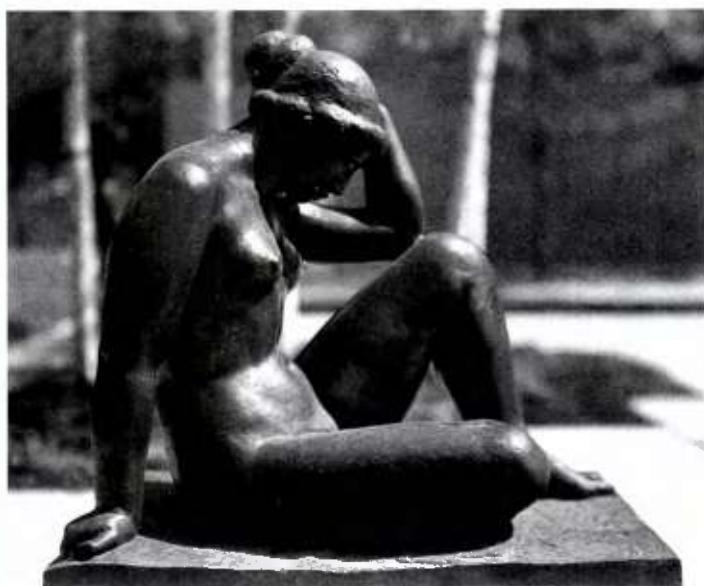
But during his visit to Rodin's studio Matisse also learned what fundamentally differentiated his aesthetic from that of the master: "I could not understand how Rodin could work on his *Saint John*, cutting off the hand and holding it on a peg; he worked on the details holding it in his left hand, it seems, anyhow keeping it detached from the whole, then replacing it on the end of the arm; then he tried to find its direction in accord with his general movement. Already, for myself I could only envisage the general architecture, replacing explanatory details by a living and suggestive synthesis." Matisse had already realized that he was not a "realist" when he modeled a jaguar after a work by the nineteenth-century French sculptor Antoine-Louis Barye and failed to understand the anatomy of a flayed cat he had secured for the occasion (*Jaguar Devouring a Hare* [1899–1901], the other sculpture through which he learned this art and bid farewell to anatomic verisimilitude). So it was not the bare artificiality of Rodin's method that Matisse resented but his combination of grafted fragments and his endless fascination with the partial figure.

Which is to say that Matisse ignored one of the most modern aspects of Rodin's practice, one that Constantin Brancusi, on the



3 • Henri Matisse, *Jeannette V.*, 1916

Bronze, height 58 (22 1/2")



4 • Aristide Maillol, *La Méditerranée* (The Mediterranean), 1902–5

Bronze, 104.1 x 114.3 x 75.6 (41 x 45 x 29 1/2") including base

contrary, would emulate and refine (it is not by chance that Brancusi, after a brief apprenticeship in Rodin's studio, had fled under the spell of a veritable "anxiety of influence," claiming that "nothing grows under the shadows of the great trees"). One could even say that the cut-and-paste aspect of Rodin's sculpture, by which the cast of the same figure or fragment of figure is reused in different groups and different orientations in space, represents the first bout of what would become, with Picasso's Cubist constructions, one of the main tropes of twentieth-century art.

Matisse resisted Rodin's metonymic fragmentation, and in some ways his sculpture represents the opposite approach. With other sculptors, such a desire to think the figure as an indivisible whole developed into an academic fashion, especially since it went along with an entrenched attachment to the traditional motif of the female nude. It brought about, for instance, the plump nudes of Aristide Maillol (1861–1944) [4], or the much leaner silhouettes, on the other side of the Rhine, of Wilhelm Lehmbruck (1881–1919)—both sculptors strongly leaning on the Greco-Roman tradition and opting, against Rodin and Matisse, for resolutely smooth surfaces by which the bronze is required to imitate marble. This reaffirmation of the whole even engendered a kind of hybrid sculpture that one could call pseudo-Cubist, or proto-Art Deco: Jacques Lipchitz, Raymond Duchamp-Villon, and Henri Laurens in Paris and, to a certain extent, Jacob Epstein and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska in England all produced works that seem to rely upon a Cubist mode of articulation but in effect magnify the solidity of the mass, their planar discontinuity remaining at the superficial level of a stylistic wrapping and never fully engaging the volume in space.

The fundamental trait that distinguishes their works from Matisse's is that they are fully frontal—made to be seen from a single point of view (or sometimes four distinct ones, in the case of Maillol

1900-1906



5 • Henri Matisse, *The Back (I)*, c. 1909  
Bronze, 188.9 × 113 × 16.5 (74½ × 44½ × 6½)



6 • Henri Matisse, *The Back (II)*, 1916  
Bronze, 188.5 × 121 × 15.2 (74½ × 47½ × 6)

or Laurens)—while Matisse’s are eloquently not. To understand this point, it would be helpful to consider what German-American art historian Rudolf Wittkower proposed, along with the example of Rodin, as one of only two avenues offered to Matisse’s generation by the sculpture of the nineteenth century, that is, the theories of German sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand (1847–1921)—unlikely as it may be that Matisse ever knew of Hildebrand except by hearsay. Hildebrand held that all sculpture should be a disguised relief, made of three planes staggered in depth, whose legibility must be immediately accessible from a set point of view. (In his eyes, the greatness of Michelangelo is that he always allows us to discern the virtual presence of the block of marble: his figures are “sandwiched” between the front and back of the original stone mass.) An actual relief is even better, Hildebrand wrote, since, in this, the (framed) figures are virtually freed from having to deal with the anxieties of the infinite surrounding space. In short, Hildebrand thought in terms of planes (and held modeling in contempt as too physical).

Even in the series of four *Back* reliefs that he produced from 1909 to 1930, Matisse disobeyed Hildebrand’s instructions (he was in fact closer here than ever to Rodin, whose other famous “failed” monument, *The Gates of Hell*, is an opaque confusion of forms against which the eye, allowed no progression in depth, can only come to an abrupt halt). As conceived by Hildebrand and by the entire academic tradition, the relief presupposes a background representing an imaginary space from which the figures emerge, with the anatomical knowledge of the beholder providing all the necessary information concerning what is concealed from view. The relief’s background functions like the picture plane in the system elaborated during the Renaissance by Leon Battista Alberti: it is a virtual plane, assumed to be transparent. In some respects, in fact, the *Backs* could be seen as an ironic response to Hildebrand in that the figure gradually becomes identified with the wall bearing it: in *The Back (I)* [5], the figure is leaning on the wall (there is a realist justification for this strange pose that so willfully ignores the conventions of the genre);



7 • Henri Matisse, *The Back (III)*, 1916  
Bronze. 189.2 × 111.8 × 15.2 (74½ × 44 × 6)



8 • Henri Matisse, *The Back (IV)*, 1931  
Bronze. 188 × 112.4 × 15.2 (74 × 44½ × 6)

1900–1909

in *The Back (II)* [6], the differentiation between the modeling of the back and the treatment of the background begins to blur (in certain light conditions, the vertebral column disappears almost entirely); in *The Back (III)* [7], the figure is almost completely aligned with the limits of the "support"; in *The Back (IV)* [8], it has become a simple modulation of the support (there is no difference between the braid of hair and the space that continues it between the legs—simply a difference in degree of protrusion). In short, if for once Matisse actually did sculpt as a painter here (as he wrongly claimed he always did), he in no sense forgot the pictorial revolution he had carried out beforehand: he borrowed from his painting the anti-illusionism and ▲ the "decorative" effect (Matisse's name for the *allover*) that characterizes it. Needless to say, this is a far cry from Hildebrand.

But the *Backs*, being reliefs, are an exception. Most of Matisse's bronzes command the beholder to move round them. A case in point is *The Serpentine* [9]. If the critics have long since noted that the title refers to the "S" traced by the figure in space and to the

reduction of its anatomy to mere ropes, the allusion to the *figura serpentinata*—a principle established by Michelangelo and taken to extremes by Mannerism—has often escaped them. Matisse, however, was fully conscious of his historical borrowing ("Maillol worked through mass like the Ancients, while I work through the arabesque, like the Renaissance artist," he used to say). Right at the end of his life, noting that the model of *The Serpentine* (taken from a photograph) was "a small plump woman," he explained that he had ended up "doing her that way so that everything was visible, regardless of the point of view." He also talked of "transparency," even going as far to suggest that the work anticipates the Cubist revolution. But Matisse was mistaken on this point, for at least two reasons.

#### The inaccessible "thing-in-itself"

We have seen that Matisse rejected (with Rodin) the ideal of the imaginary transparency of the material cherished by both the



9 • Henri Matisse, *The Serpentine*, 1909

Bronze, 56.5 x 28 x 19 (22½ x 11 x 7½)

academic tradition and by Hildebrand, but when he speaks of transparency here he has two other meanings of the word in mind. One encapsulates the related dream of an *ideational* transparency, that of a full and immediate grasp of the work of art's signification; and the other designates, in studio parlance, the use of empty space by modern sculptors. To start with the latter, *The Serpentine's* "transparency" has nothing to do with the way in which empty space—in the wake of Picasso's famous *Guitar* from the fall of 1912—is transformed in Cubist sculpture into one of the major constitutive elements in a system of oppositional signs. In *The Serpentine*, empty space is only a secondary effect of the pose, and Matisse never used it again. The other issue is more important, for what actually happens is the opposite of what Matisse claims: you can never see everything at once; whatever your point of view, you can never fully grasp the work's signification. As one moves around *The Serpentine*, one sees a kind of spatial accordion, constantly expanding and contracting (or, to employ another metaphor, the negative spaces open and close like butterfly wings). One is constantly surprised by the multiplicity of aspects that are each time absolutely unforeseeable. From the back, its minuscule insect-head (that of a praying mantis?) reveals a massive head of hair that comes as a complete shock; the joins of the arabesques formed by the torso, the arms, and the left leg ceaselessly break the body without ever negating its plumb line (the right leg is rigorously parallel to the vertical pillar on which the elbow rests). In short, you can circle *The Serpentine* a hundred times, but you will never finally manage to possess it; its curvilinear dance in space ensures its wholeness but also its distance: this wholeness, that of the thing-in-itself, is made inaccessible to us.

And it is precisely here that one pinpoints the major difference between Matisse's sculpture and the art of Michelangelo, for example, or of Giambologna, to which it has been compared. For Giambologna also forces you to move around his sculptures, but there always comes a moment when your journey around a piece reaches a discernible endpoint, always a moment when you realize what is going on. The reason is simple: on the one hand, the distortions produced by the *contrapposto* always remain within the limits of anatomical knowledge (thanks to which we "overlook" a certain conspicuously elongated leg or an impossibly foreshortened knee, and read the figure as a continuous form); on the other hand, the gestures represented always have some kind of justification, either realist or rhetorical (like a kneeling bather drying herself, or the *Sabine* whose pathetic gesture, calling on heaven to rescue her from the colossus who is carrying her off, completes the spiral of the sculptor's most famous group). Matisse cares little for all of this—for anatomy (he simply ignores it, once again driving home the lesson learned from the private Rodin) or for evocative gestures.

The fact that there is no climax to our circumnavigation around a sculpture by Matisse, nor any privileged view afforded at any time, and, moreover, that the different aspects are unpredictable from one point of view to the next, explains the difficulty one experiences when trying to photograph it: only a film, perhaps, would do justice



10 • Henri Matisse, *Reclining Nude I (Aurora)*, 1907

Bronze, height 34.5 (13½")

to the absence of arris—sharp planar edges—that characterizes Matisse's flow. Conscious of this difficulty, Matisse offered to help photographers charged with publicizing his sculptures. Not surprisingly, he rarely chose a frontal view (he showed the five *Jeannettes* in profile, for example, or from behind). Or if he did, it is when the axis of the figure itself was not organized frontally. It seems that what mattered most to him was to find the most eccentric, least expected point of view, which is often the one where the arabesques close the sculpture in on itself (and which therefore provides the least information on its contortions). Matisse often had several photographs taken of the same work, and seemed to take pleasure in the sharp discordances from one to the next. He chose three points of view for *Reclining Nude I* [10]: frontal (as it appears in the background of the painting *The Music Lesson* [1916/17] at the Barnes Foundation); in three-quarter profile angled toward the back, which folds in on itself the arm raised in a simple vertical and reveals the "helmet" of hair; but also in full profile (facing the feet), from an angle that enlarges the whole figure, crushes the torso and the bulge of the thigh, fills out the shoulders and, above all, blocks all access to the length of the belly. It is as if he were playing a game with cognition, teasing our desire for its fullness, and declaring its necessary incompleteness—the very condition of modernity. YAB

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Paul Gauguin dies in the Marquesas Islands in the South Pacific: the recourse to tribal art and primitivist fantasies in Gauguin influences the early work of André Derain, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner.

**F**our painters of the late nineteenth century influenced modernists in the early twentieth century more than all others: Georges Seurat (1859–91), Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), Vincent van Gogh (1853–90), and Paul Gauguin (1848–1903). Each proposed a new purity in painting, but each did so according to a different priority: Seurat stressed optical effects; Cézanne, pictorial structure; van Gogh privileged the expressive dimension of painting; Gauguin, its visionary potential. Although not as generative in terms of style, Gauguin was more influential as a persona: the father of modernist “primitivism,” he reformulated the vocation of the Romantic artist as a kind of vision-quest among tribal cultures. Inspired by his example, some modernist artists attempted to go native, or at least to play at it. Two German Expressionists, Emil Nolde (1867–1956) and Max Pechstein (1881–1955), traveled to the South Pacific in emulation of Gauguin, while two others, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938) and Erich Heckel (1883–1970), restaged primitive life in their studio decor or on nature outings. But many modernists drew on tribal art for forms and motifs: some, like Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso, did so in profound, structural ways; others, in superficial, illustrational ways.

All of these artists sought to challenge European conventions that they felt to be repressive, and all imagined the primitive as an exotic world where style and self might be refashioned dramatically. Here primitivism extends well beyond art: it is a fantasy, indeed a whole cluster of fantasies, concerning return to origin, escape into nature, liberation of instinct, and the like, all of which were projected onto the tribal cultures of racial others, especially in Oceania and Africa. But even as a fantasy-construction, primitivism had real effects: it was not only part of the global project of European imperialism (on which the very passageways to the colonies, the very appearance of tribal objects in the metropolises, depended), but also part of the local maneuverings of the avant-garde. Like prior returns *inside* Western art (e.g., the Romantic recovery of medieval art in the nineteenth century by artists such as the Pre-Raphaelites), these primitivist sojourns *outside* Western art were strategic: they appeared to offer a way not only to exceed old academic conventions of art but also to trump recent avant-garde styles (e.g., Realism, Impressionism, neo-Impressionism)

that were deemed to be too concerned with strictly modern subjects or purely perceptual problems.

### Primitivist pastiche

Gauguin came to his primitivist quest late, only after he had lost a lucrative position on the Paris Stock Exchange in 1883, at the age of thirty-five. Initially, he worked in Brittany in western France, still a folkloric region then, along with other Symbolist artists such as Émile Bernard (1868–1941), first in 1886 and, after a failed trip to Panama and Martinique in 1887, again in 1888. Gauguin was inspired to go to Tahiti in part by the “native villages” that were set up like zoo displays of indigenous peoples at the 1889 Universal Exhibition in Paris; he was also very taken by Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show. For all its rhetoric of purity, primitivism was often just such a mix of kitsch and cliché (legend has it that Gauguin arrived in Tahiti wearing a cowboy hat). Apart from an eighteen-month return to Paris in late 1893 to manage the market for his art, he lived in Tahiti from 1891 until his final move to the Marquesas Islands in 1901. In effect, Gauguin pushed beyond the folk culture of Brittany to the tropical paradise of Tahiti (such was its legendary status, at least since Denis Diderot’s *Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville* was published in 1796), and then on to the Marquesas, which he saw as a place of sacrifice and cannibalism, dark complement to light Tahiti. As he did so, Gauguin understood his voyage out in space as a voyage back in time: “Civilization is falling from me little by little,” he wrote in his Tahitian memoir *Noa-Noa* (1893). This conflation, as if *farther away* from Europe equaled *farther back* in civilization, is characteristic of primitivism, indeed of the racialist ideology of cultural evolution still pervasive at the time.

Yet Gauguin also proposed a partial revaluation of this ideology. For in his paintings and writings the primitive became the pure term and the European, the corrupt. In “the kingdom of gold,” he wrote of Europe just prior to his first departure for Tahiti, “everything is putrefied, even men, even the arts.” This is the source of both his stylistic rejection of Realism and his Romantic critique of capitalism, two positions that his Expressionist followers held as well. Of course, to reverse this opposition of primitive and European was not to undo or to deconstruct it. The two terms remained



1 • André Derain, *The Dance*, 1905–6

Oil and distemper on canvas, 179.5 × 228.6 (70½ × 90)

very much in place, and his revision of this binarism only forced Gauguin into an ambivalent position. "I am the Indian and the man of sensitivity [in one]," he once wrote to his abandoned wife Mette, with a special emphasis on his partial Peruvian ancestry. His myth of Tahitian purity also flew in the face of the social facts. In 1891, after ten years as a French colony, Tahiti was hardly the "unknown paradise" where "to live is to sing and to love," and the Tahitians hardly a new race after the biblical Flood, as Gauguin presented them in the pages of *Noa-Noa*.

If Polynesia was polyglot, so was his art. Less purist than eclectic, Gauguin drew on the courtly art of Peru, Cambodia, Java, and Egypt more than on the tribal art of Oceania or Africa. ("Courtly" and "tribal" suggest different sociopolitical orders, though both terms are now almost as disputed as "primitive.") Often motifs from these various cultures appear in strange ensembles; the Tahitian women in his *Market Day* (1892), for example, sit in poses derived from a tomb painting of Eighteenth-Dynasty Egypt. Nor did his arrival in Tahiti transform his style dramatically: the bold contours Gauguin derived from the stone sculptures of Breton

churches, as well as the strong colors he developed from Japanese prints, persisted. So did many of his subjects: the visionary spirituality of the Breton womenfolk in *Vision after the Sermon* (1888), for example, becomes the saintly simplicity of the native Tahitian women in *We Hail Thee, Mary* (1891), only here pagan innocence rather than folk belief redefines Christian grace. Such syncretism of style and subject matter might suggest a primordial sharing of aesthetic and religious impulses across cultures (this possibility interested other primitivists, like Nolde, too), but it also points to a paradox of much primitivist art: that it often pursues purity and primacy through hybridity and pastiche. Indeed, primitivism is often as mixed stylistically as it is contradictory ideologically, and it is this eclectic construction that Gauguin passed on to his legatees.

#### Avant-garde gambits

A large Gauguin retrospective was held at the Salon d'Automne in Paris in 1906, yet artists such as Picasso had begun to study him as early as 1901. Already in a painting such as *The Dance* [1]—

## The exotic and the naïve

Primitivism was hardly the first exoticism in modern Europe: phantasmatic versions of the East abounded in art and literature alike. The eighteenth century saw a fashion for Chinese porcelain (*chinoiserie*), and nineteenth-century artists were drawn first to North Africa and the Middle East (Orientalism) and then to Japan (*japonisme*). These fascinations often followed historic conquests (e.g., the Napoleonic campaign in Egypt in 1798, and the forced opening of Japan to foreign trade in 1853) and imperial byways (e.g., French artists tended to head to French colonies, German artists to Germany, and so on). But these places were “imaginary geographies” (in the words of Edward Said in his 1978 book *Orientalism*); that is, they were space-time maps onto which psychological ambivalence and political ambition could be projected.

Thus Orientalist art often depicted the Middle East as ancient, a cradle of civilization, but also as decrepit, corrupt, feminine, in need of imperial rule. Japan was known to be an ancient culture too, but *japonistes* perceived its past as innocent, with a pure vision that, retained in Japanese prints, fans, and screens, might be accessed by Europeans clouded by Western conventions of representation. Primitivism projected an even more primordial origin, but here too the primitive was divided into a pastoral or noble savage (in the sensuous paradise of the tropics, often associated with Oceania) and a bloody or ignoble savage (in the sexual heart of darkness, usually connected to Africa). Each of these exotic theaters persists to this day, however muted or inflected, and others have joined them, propagated, as was the case then, by mass media. Avant-gardists appealed to these imaginary geographies for tactical reasons. The Impressionists and Postimpressionists had already occupied Japan, Picasso once suggested, so his generation grabbed up Africa instead, though some like Matisse and Paul Klee retained Orientalist settings as well. By the same token, the Surrealists turned to Oceania, Mexico, and the Pacific Northwest because the arts there were more surrealistic, so they said, but it was also in order

to circumvent the Cubists and the Expressionists. The rule that a step outside a tradition is also a strategy within it holds for the frequent turn to folk art as well—whether it is Gauguin and Breton crucifixes, Wassily Kandinsky and Bavarian glass painting, or Kazimir Malevich and Vladimir Tatlin and Byzantine icons.

A special case is the modernist celebration of the “naïve” artist, such as Henri Rousseau (1844–1910), also known as Le Douanier (customs officer), so named after his day job for fifteen years. Naïve art was often associated with child, tribal, and folk art as untutored and intuitive. And yet Rousseau was a Parisian, not a peasant, who, far from oblivious to academic art, attempted a realist representation based on studio photographs and Salon compositions. In part his painting seemed surreal to his avant-garde contemporaries simply because it was technically awkward. Guillaume Apollinaire tells us that Rousseau measured the features of his portrait sitters, then transferred the lengths directly to the canvas, only to produce, in the pursuit of a realist effect, a surreal one. His jungle pictures also have an anxious intensity, as everyday house plants are transformed, with each vine and leaf meticulously contoured and flattened whole to the canvas, into an eerily animate forest. Rousseau was sincere, as was the appreciation of his modernist friends—among them Picasso, who hosted a banquet in his honor in 1908. Sincere, but, again, these identifications were often tactical and temporary. Here the last word might be given to the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu: “The artist agrees with the ‘bourgeois’ in one respect: he prefers naïveté to ‘pretentiousness.’ The essential merit of the ‘common people’ is that they have none of the pretensions to art (or power) which inspire the ambitions of the ‘petit bourgeois.’ Their indifference tacitly acknowledges the monopoly. That is why, in the mythology of artist and intellectuals, whose outflanking and double-negating strategies sometimes lead them back to ‘popular’ tastes and opinions, the ‘people’ so often play a role not unlike that of the peasantry in the conservative ideologies of the declining aristocracy.”

a rhythmic arrangement of ornamental women set in an imaginary tropical scene replete with parrot and snake—André Derain (1880–1954) treated the primitivism of Gauguin as if it were a Fauvist theme park of decorative freedom and feminine sensuality. Matisse also painted such idylls in *Luxe, calme et volupté* (1904–5) and *Le Bonheur de vivre* (1905–6), but his scenes are more pastoral than primitivist, and, like Picasso, when he engaged tribal art directly in 1906, his interest was more formal than thematic. Ironically, this formal interest led both Matisse and Picasso away from Gauguin around the time of his retrospective. Concerned to strengthen the structural basis of their art, both turned from Gauguin and Oceanic motifs to Cézanne and African objects, which they read in terms of each other—partly to defend against the excessive influence of either term. Indeed, Picasso later insisted that the African objects—which he, like Matisse, collected—were “witnesses” to the development of his art rather than “models” for

it—a defensive recognition of the importance of tribal art that other primitivists would also make.

The primitivist trajectories of Matisse and Picasso were divergent. Initially, both were interested in the Egyptian sculpture they saw at the Louvre. But Picasso soon turned to Iberian reliefs, whose broad contours influenced his portraits of 1906–7, while Matisse, who was always more involved in the Orientalist dimension of French painting, traveled to North Africa. From late 1906, however, both artists were prepared to learn from African masks and figures. “Van Gogh had Japanese prints,” Picasso once remarked succinctly, “we had Africa.” But, again, they developed different lessons from its art. Whereas African sculpture was crucial to Cubist collage and construction in particular, Matisse used it to stake out a plastic alternative to Cubism. Above all, he admired its “invented planes and proportions.” This is apparent in his sculptures of the time, such as *Two Negresses* (1908), which

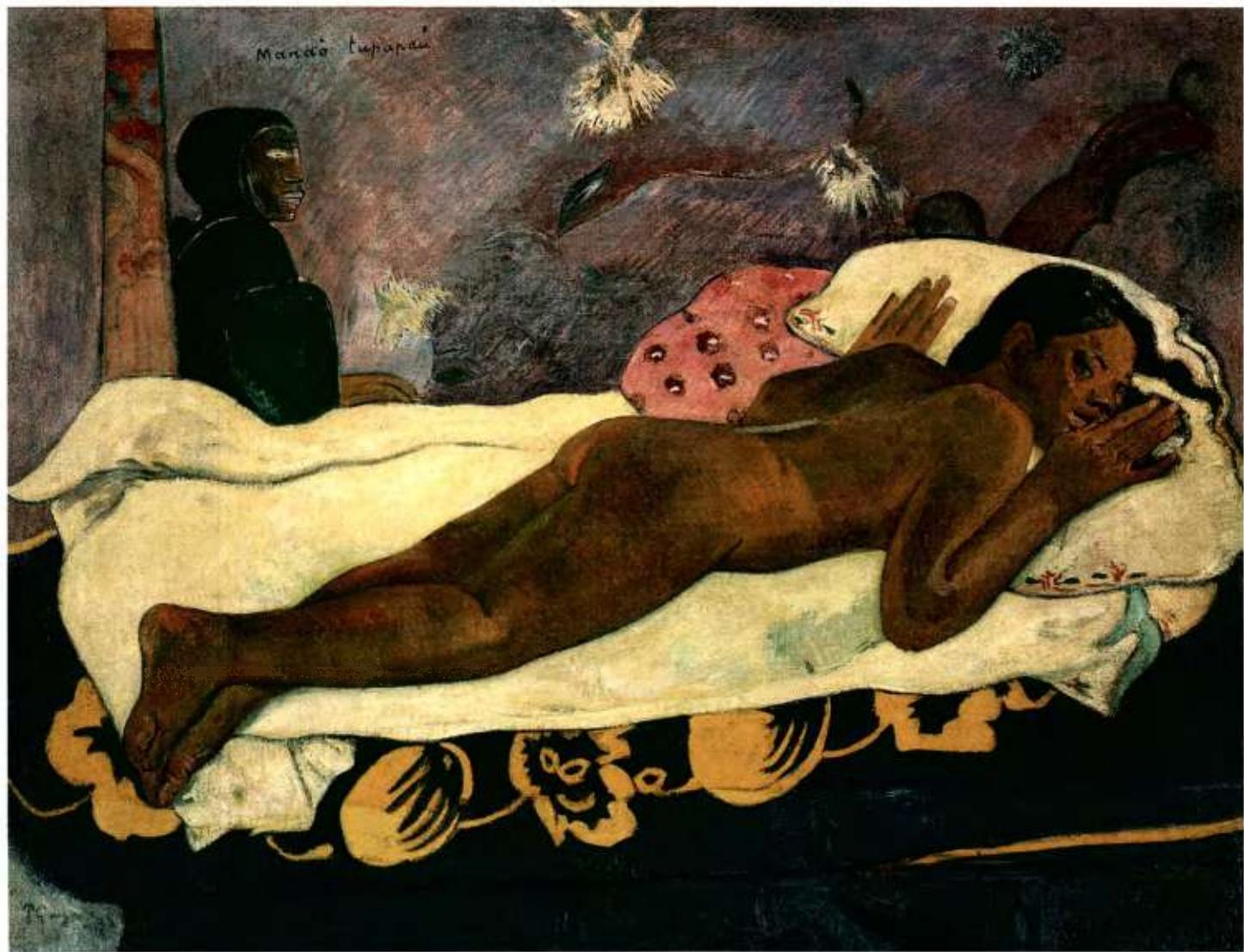
possesses the large heads, round breasts, and prominent buttocks of some African figures. But “invented planes and proportions” are also evident in his contemporaneous paintings, where they helped Matisse to simplify his drawing and to free his color from descriptive functions. This is evident in his foremost primitivist canvas, *The Blue Nude: Souvenir of Biskra*, which, like its sculptural ▲ counterpart, *Reclining Nude I* (1907), is a radical revision of the academic nude.

Ever since Édouard Manet (1832–83) cast the academic nude—from the *Venuses* of Titian to the *Odaliskes* of Ingres—onto the lowly divan of a Parisian prostitute in *Olympia* (1863), avant-garde painting staked its transgressive claims on the subversion of this genre more than any other. Gauguin copied *Olympia* on canvas [2] as well as in a photograph, which he took to Tahiti as a kind of talisman, and he painted his adolescent Tahitian wife Teha’amana in a scene that cites Manet’s painting. But *The Spirit of the Dead Watching* [3] recalls *Olympia* mostly in order to trump it. For the art historian Griselda Pollock this is an “avant-garde gambit” of



2 • Paul Gauguin, *Copy of Manet's Olympia*, 1890–1

Oil on canvas, 89 × 130 (35 × 51½)



3 • Paul Gauguin, *The Spirit of the Dead Watching (Manao Tupapau)*, 1892

Oil on burlap mounted on canvas, 73 × 92 (28½ × 36½)

three moves in one: Gauguin makes reference to a tradition, here not only the tradition of the academic nude but also its avant-garde subversion; he also shows deference to its masters, here not only Titian and Ingres but also Manet; and finally, he proposes his own difference, an Oedipal challenge to all these paternal precedents, a claiming of master status alongside them. Clearly, Matisse with ▲ *The Blue Nude*, Picasso with *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907), and Kirchner with *Girl under a Japanese Umbrella* [4] are also involved in a pictorial competition with artistic forebears and with each other, one staged, as it were, on the bodies of women. Each artist looks outside the Western tradition—in a turn to tribal art, in a fantasy of a primitive body—as a way to advance inside the Western tradition. In retrospect, this outside, this other, is then incorporated into the formal dialectic of modernist art.

First Gauguin revises Manet, reworks his blunt scene of a Paris prostitute into an imaginary vision of a Tahitian “spirit of the dead.” He inverts the figures, substitutes a black spirit for the black maid in *Olympia*, and replaces the white body of the prostitute with the black body of the primitive girl. Gauguin also averts her gaze (this is crucial: Olympia returns our gaze, stares the male viewer down as if he were a customer), and rotates her body so as to expose her buttocks (this, too, is crucial: it is a sexual pose that Teha'amana, unlike Olympia, does not control—the implied male viewer does). It is with this double precedent of *Olympia* and *Spirit* that, in quick succession after the Gauguin retrospective, Matisse, Picasso, and Kirchner all wrestle. In *The Blue Nude*:

*Souvenir of Biskra* [5], Matisse moves the newly forged figure of the prostitute/primitive to an Orientalist site, the oasis of Biskra in North Africa (which he had visited in 1906), whose ground lines and palm fronds echo the contours of the bent elbow and prominent buttocks of his nude. In doing so, he recalls the odalisque term in this particular dialectic of the primitive body (an odalisque was a female slave, usually a concubine, in the Near East, a fantasy figure for many nineteenth-century artists); and yet, as noted above, his figure is more Africanist than Orientalist (as if to underscore this point, Matisse added the subtitle in 1931). So, even as Matisse recovers the pose of *Olympia*, he also deepens the primitivizing of feminine sexuality begun in *Spirit*, the principal sign of which is the prominent buttocks (made so by the violent rotation of her left leg across her pubic area). In this way *The Blue Nude* trumps both Manet and Gauguin—another modernist victory won on the battleground of the prostitute/primitive nude.

### Primitivist ambivalence

Shown to great uproar in the Salon des Indépendants of 1907, *The Blue Nude* then provokes Picasso to an extreme of rivalry with *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, which returns the primitive body to a brothel, and so “resolves” prostitute and primitive in one figure. Moreover, Picasso multiplies this figure by five—three visaged in his Iberian manner, two in his African—and pushes them vertically to the frontal plane of the canvas where they gaze at the viewer with a sexual threat that exceeds not only the Gauguin and the Matisse but also the Manet. In *Girl under a Japanese Umbrella*, Kirchner, too, responds to *The Blue Nude* (he could not have seen *Les Demoiselles*); he inverts the pose but retains the signal rotation of the body that raises the buttocks. Kirchner also replaces the Orientalist setting of *The Blue Nude* with *japoniste* props like the parasol. But the telling element of the decor is the frieze of sketchy figures above the nude. This recalls the wall hangings that decorated his studio with sexually explicit images, some inspired by house beams from the German colony of Palau that Kirchner had studied in the ethnographic museum in Dresden. In this frieze, Kirchner points to a fantasy of anal eroticism only implied by *Spirit* and *The Blue Nude*, and so points as well to a narcissistic dimension of modernist primitivism that is not simply formal—and perhaps not as masterful as it first seems. For the prostitute/primitive is such a fraught image not only because it disrupts an academic genre but also because it provokes great ambivalence concerning sexual and racial differences.

Although subordinated as a prostitute, Olympia commands her sex, which she covers with her hand, and this partial power is crucial to the provocation of the painting. In *Spirit*, Gauguin takes this female power away: Teha'amana is prone, subordinate to the gaze of the viewer. Yet the tradition of the primitive body is not simply about voyeuristic mastery. Gauguin concocted a story of religious dread to accompany his painting, but this diverts us from its sexual significance: *Spirit* is a dream of sexual mastery, but this



4 • Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Girl under a Japanese Umbrella*, 1907

Oil on canvas. 92.5 × 80.5 (36½ × 31½)

▲ 1907



5 • Henri Matisse, *The Blue Nude: Souvenir of Biskra*, 1907

Oil on canvas, 92.1 x 142.5 (36 1/4 x 56 1/8)

mastery is not actual; its pictorial performance may even compensate for a felt lack of such mastery in real life. This suggests that the painting works on an anxiety or an ambivalence that Gauguin secretly, maybe unconsciously, presumed. This ambivalence—perhaps a simultaneous desire and dread of feminine sexuality—is more active in *The Blue Nude*, and Matisse defended against it more actively, too. “If I met such a woman in the street,” he stated unequivocally after his painting was attacked, “I should run away in terror. Above all I do not create a human, I make a picture.” Kirchner seems not to have needed such a defense; at least in *Girl under a Japanese Umbrella* he paraded an erotic fantasy without much anxiety—but also without much force.

It was the problematic genius of Picasso that led him to work his sexual and racial ambivalences into thematic and formal experiments. In effect, *Les Demoiselles* maps two memory-scenes onto one another: a distant visit to a bordello in Barcelona (his student home) and a recent visit to the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro in Paris (now the Musée de l’Homme), both apparently traumatic for Picasso—the first sexually, the second racially, in ways that the painting conflates. The encounter in the ethnographic museum was momentous: among other effects, Picasso transformed *Les Demoiselles* in its wake. Such visits—to tribal exhibits at museums, fairs, circuses, and the like—were important

to many primitivists, and a few were later narrated precisely as traumatic encounters in accounts in which the full significance of tribal art is revealed in retrospect, only to be denied in part (again, the claim that such objects are “witnesses,” not “models”). In one version of the tale of his visit to the Trocadéro, Picasso called *Les Demoiselles* his “first exorcism painting.” This term is suggestive in ways that he did not suspect, for much modernist primitivism engages tribal art and primitive bodies only at times to exorcise them formally, just as it recognizes sexual, racial, and cultural differences only at times to disavow them fetishistically. HF

#### FURTHER READING

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Paul Cézanne dies at Aix-en-Provence in southern France: following the retrospectives of Vincent van Gogh and Georges Seurat the preceding year, Cézanne's death casts Postimpressionism as the historical past, with Fauvism as its heir.

**H**enri Matisse was very fond of a particular Cézanne dictum: "Beware of the influential master!" He often quoted it when addressing the issue of inheritance and tradition. Noting that Cézanne had revisited Poussin in order to escape from the spell of Courbet, he would take pride in the fact that he, Matisse, had "never avoided the influence of others," emphasizing the importance of Cézanne in his own formation (he is "a sort of god of painting," "the master of us all"; "if Cézanne is right, I am right," and so on). But Matisse's claim that he was strong enough to assimilate the example of a master without succumbing to it is disingenuous when it comes to Cézanne. Unlike his friend, and future fellow Fauve, Charles Camoin (1879–1965), who jauntily visited the aging painter in Aix several times, Matisse was acutely aware of the potential danger that Cézanne represented for young admirers like himself. Looking at Matisse's *Still Life with a Purro I*, or his *Place des Lices, Saint-Tropez*, both painted in the summer of 1904, one cannot help but think of a statement he made half a century later (it was one of his last): "When one imitates a master, the technique of the master strangles the imitator and forms around him a barrier that paralyzes him."

#### The four evangelists of Postimpressionism

The year 1904 was when Cézanne, cut off from a world that had ridiculed him all his life, finally attained celebrity. Imposing articles were published about him (notably an essay by Émile Bernard [1868–1941]); dealers other than Ambroise Vollard, his lone official supporter since 1895, started gambling on him (he had a one-man show in Berlin); and in the fall, a mini-retrospective of his work (with thirty-one paintings) was presented at the Salon d'Automne, one of the two annual Parisian art fairs of the time (three years later, in 1907, its spring equivalent, the Salon des Indépendants, would top this event with an exhibition double in size).

A document from 1905 provides a window onto the atmosphere of the Parisian art world at the time. The poet-critic Charles Morice's "Enquête sur les tendances actuelles des arts plastiques" (Investigation of Current Trends in the Plastic Arts) presented the answers to a questionnaire that its author had sent to artists of various persuasions. The question that received the longest and

most passionate replies was "What do you think of Cézanne?" (Matisse did not bother to give his obvious answer). The rise of Cézanne's reputation was then unstoppable: by the time he died, in October 1906, his appeal was so pervasive that his foremost champion, the painter-theoretician Maurice Denis (1870–1943)—who had paradoxically seen him as the savior of the moribund tradition of French classicism—cried foul and berated the work of his many followers as either too derivative or, in the case of Matisse, nothing less than a betrayal.

Morice's "Investigation" helps us to put this sudden hype surrounding Cézanne into context. He had bluntly asked: "Is Impressionism finished?" Then, more diplomatically: "Are we on the eve of something?" and "Must the painter expect everything from nature, or must he only ask from it the plastic means to realize the thought that is in him?" These questions were followed by a request for an evaluation of the work of Whistler, Fantin-Latour, and Gauguin, as well as that of Cézanne. If the query about Gauguin was to be expected, since Morice had long been a close ally of the painter's (he had coauthored *Noa-Noa* with him), those concerning Whistler and Fantin-Latour, testifying to Morice's active participation in the Symbolist movement twenty years earlier, were incongruous (as the answers confirmed). A more savvy critic would have juxtaposed the names of van Gogh and Seurat with those of Cézanne and Gauguin in such a questionnaire, for by then it had become obvious that the new generation's loud "Yes" to Morice's sequence of anti-Impressionism questions was a cumulative effect of this quartet's coeval work.

It should be noted that van Gogh and Seurat were long dead—the first in 1890, the second, the following year—and that Gauguin, who died in 1903, had been abroad for more than a decade. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that, among the four evangelists of Postimpressionism, Cézanne should be the most present at this point. Yet, for Matisse and his peers, it was urgent to reckon with them all. Between 1903 and Cézanne's death in 1906, van Gogh, Gauguin, and Seurat had each been celebrated by several retrospective exhibitions (with their attendant string of publications), sometimes with the direct involvement of Matisse. And while the personal relationships between these four father-figures of modernist painting had been marred by hostile

ignorance, if not outright conflict, it now seemed possible to grasp what they had in common.

Their direct epigones had already done some of the groundwork as far as art theory was concerned. Both Denis and Bernard had advocated a synthesis between the art of Gauguin and that of Cézanne; but the most important event for Matisse and his cohorts was the serialization of Paul Signac's *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme* (From Eugène Delacroix to neo-Impressionism) in *La Revue blanche* in 1898. Not only did this treatise present Seurat's method (indifferently labeled "divisionism" or "neo-impressionism") in an orderly, accessible fashion, but, as its title made clear, it was conceived as a teleological account, as a genealogy of the "new" in art from the early nineteenth century on. There was surprisingly little emphasis on Seurat's dream or on the optical physiology theories on which it was based—the idea that the human eye could perform something like the prismatic decomposition of light in reverse, that the "divided" colors would resynthesize on the retina in order to attain the luminosity of the sun—perhaps because Signac had already admitted to himself that this was a chimera. Rather, Signac insisted on the successive "contributions" of Delacroix and of the Impressionists, understood as having paved the way for the total emancipation of pure color performed by neo-Impressionism. Within such a context, Cézanne's idiosyncratic, atomistic brush-strokes (one color per stroke, each kept conspicuously discrete) were deemed a congruent contribution consolidating the ban on the mixing of colors that had still been standard practice during Impressionism.

Matisse's first encounter with Signac's gospel was premature. After a trip to London in order to see Turner's paintings (on the advice of Cézanne's mentor, the old Camille Pissarro), he had headed for Corsica, where his art—then a murky and not-so-competent form of Impressionism—turned "epileptic," as he wrote in a panic to a friend, upon his sudden discovery of southern light. In the numerous paintings he completed in Corsica and then in Toulouse in 1898 and 1899, the feverish brush-strokes are thick with impasto, and the colors ineluctably lose their intended incandescence as the pastes mix directly on the canvas. The cardinal axiom of Postimpressionism (of whatever persuasion), that one had to "organize one's sensation," to use Cézanne's celebrated phrase, came to Matisse via Signac precisely at this point. But his attempt at following the minute procedures required by the divisionist system, during the next few months, remained frustrating. Yet this failure exacerbated his desire to comprehend the whole of Postimpressionism (he notably purchased several works by its masters—then a considerable financial sacrifice for him—including a small painting by Gauguin and, above all, Cézanne's *Three Bathers*, a painting from the mid- to late 1870s that he would treasure like a talisman until he donated it to the city of Paris in 1936).

Cohabiting with these few works and never missing a Postimpressionist show constituted the major part of Matisse's modernist education prior to his second bout of divisionism. He gradually understood that despite major differences in their art,

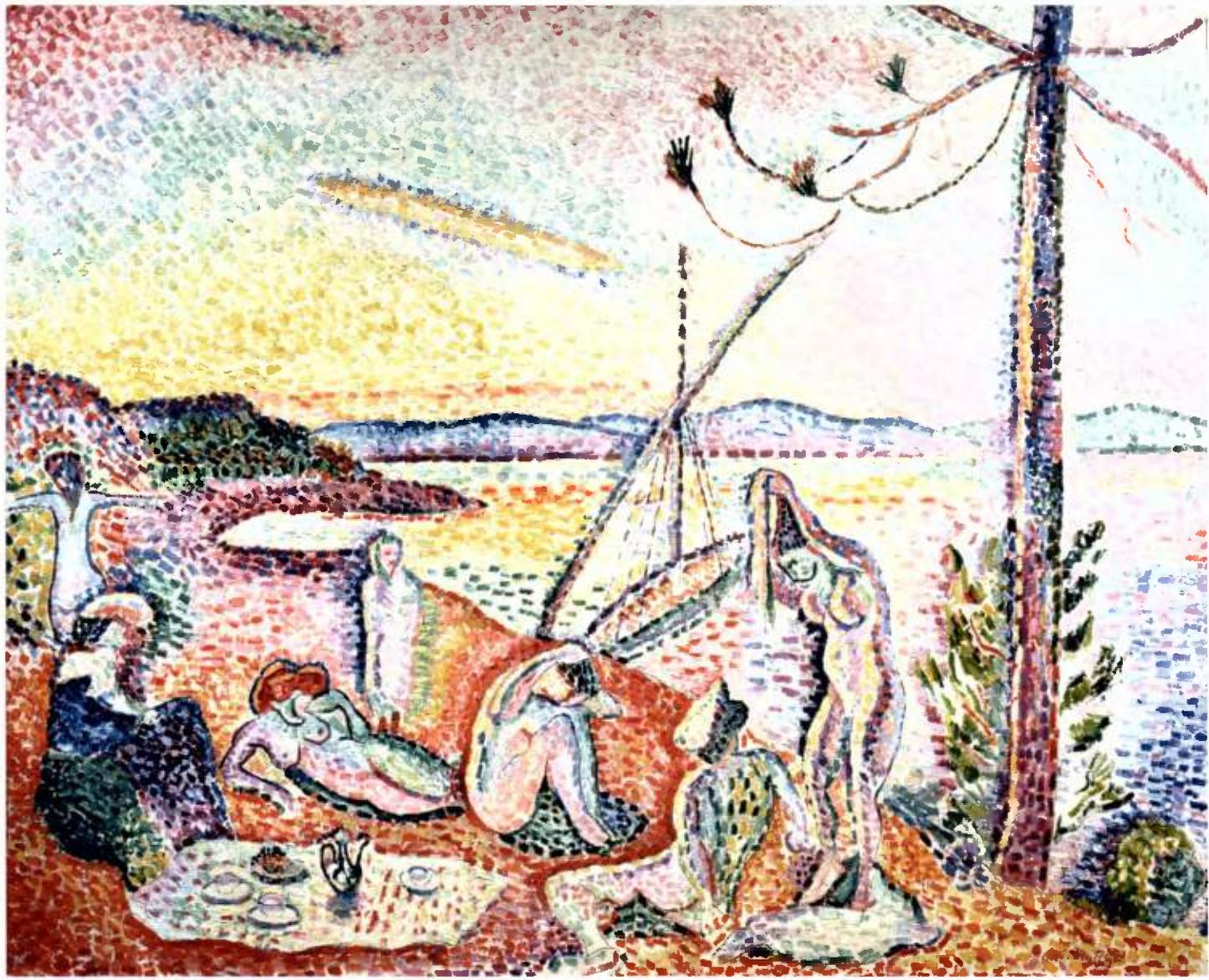
1900-1906

the four major Postimpressionists had all stressed that if color and line were to be celebrated, if their expressive function were to be enhanced, they had to become independent from the objects they depicted. Further, these artists showed Matisse that the only way to assert this autonomy of the basic elements of painting was first to isolate them (as a chemist would do) and then to recombine them into a new synthetic whole. Although Seurat had erred when he sought to apply this experimental method to the immateriality of light, that unreachable Holy Grail of painters, his analysis/synthesis process resulted in the apotheosis of the physical, nonmimetic components of painting, and it was such a return to basics, Matisse was now ready to see, that governed Postimpressionism in general. Because divisionism was the only Postimpressionist branch that came with an explicit method, it was a good place from which to start again. When Signac invited Matisse to spend the summer of 1904 in Saint-Tropez, Matisse was still trying out the various Postimpressionist dialects, but he was a far more seasoned modernist than he had been in 1898. Even though it was now harder for Matisse to play the apprentice, the timing was right.

### Matisse comes of age to lead the Fauves

As far as Signac was concerned, the anxious and reluctant Matisse was finally turning out to be his best pupil: Signac purchased *Luxe, calme et volupté* [1], the major canvas that Matisse completed in Paris upon his return from Saint-Tropez and exhibited at the 1905 Salon des Indépendants (where both van Gogh and Seurat had a retrospective). Was it the idyllic subject matter that particularly seduced Signac—five naked nymphs picnicking by the seashore under the eyes of a crouched, dressed Madame Matisse and those of a standing child wrapped in a towel? Or was it the title derived from Charles Baudelaire (1821–67), a rare direct literary allusion in Matisse's oeuvre? Whatever the case, Signac chose not to notice the heavy colored contours wriggling all over the composition in defiance of his system. But when Matisse sent *Le Bonheur de vivre* to the Salon des Indépendants of the subsequent year, Signac was incensed by precisely such elements in this canvas, and by the undivided flat planes of color. Between these two events, the Fauve scandal had taken place at the infamous 1905 Salon d'Automne.

As the British critic, painter, and teacher Lawrence Gowing remarked, "Fauvism was the best prepared of all the twentieth-century revolutions." But one should add that it was also one of the shortest: it lasted but a season. True, most of the Fauves had known each other for years and had long considered the older Matisse as their leader (between 1895 and 1896, Albert Marquet [1875–1947], Henri Manguin [1874–1949], and Charles Camoin were his colleagues in the studio of Gustave Moreau, the only oasis of freedom at the École des Beaux-Arts, and when he switched to the Académie Carrrière after Moreau's death in 1898, he met André Derain, who soon introduced him to Maurice de Vlaminck [1876–1958]). But the initial spark can be traced to Matisse's visit to Vlaminck's studio, at Derain's urging, in February 1905. Matisse had then just



1 • Henri Matisse, *Luxe, calme et volupté*, 1904–5

Oil on canvas, 98.3 × 118.5 (38½ × 46½)

finished *Luxe, calme et volupté*, of which he was rightfully proud, but now he felt unsettled by the coloristic violence of Vlaminck's production. It would take him the whole summer, which he spent with Derain in Collioure, close to the Spanish border, to get over Vlaminck's jejune audacity. Spurred by Derain's presence, and by the visit they paid together to a trove of Gauguin's works, he painted nonstop for four consecutive months. The results of this strikingly productive campaign were the key works of what was soon to be called Fauvism.

Upon seeing the academic marbles of a now long-forgotten sculptor in the middle of the room where the work of Matisse and his friends Derain, Vlaminck, Camoin, Manguin, and Marquet was exhibited at the 1905 Salon d'Automne, a critic exclaimed "Donatello chez les fauves!" ("Donatello among the wild beasts!"). The label stuck—perhaps the most celebrated baptismal episode of twentieth-century art—in large part because the uproar was considerable. Matisse's Fauve canvases—*The Woman with the Hat* [2] in particu-

lar, painted shortly after his return from Collioure—provoked the crowd's hilarity as no work had done since the public display of Manet's *Olympia* in 1863, and news that this infamous painting had been purchased (by Gertrude and Leo Stein) did not calm the sarcasm of the press. Not only did Matisse's associates benefit from his sudden fame, but the idea that he was the head of a new school of painting crystallized, and indeed his art was emulated (the initial Fauves were soon joined by others such as Raoul Dufy [1877–1953], Othon Friesz [1879–1949], Kees van Dongen [1877–1968] and, momentarily, Georges Braque [1882–1963]). But while his acolytes, with the exception of Braque, got forever stuck in the exploitation (and banalization) of the pictorial language invented during the summer of 1905, for Matisse the Collioure explosion had been only a beginning: it marked the moment when he finally achieved the synthesis of the four trends of Postimpressionism that had captivated him, and laid the ground for his own system, whose first fully fledged pictorial manifestation would be *Le Bonheur de vivre*.



### Roger Fry (1866–1934) and the Bloomsbury Group

Undoubtedly the most passionate supporter of advanced French painting in the English-speaking world at the beginning of the twentieth century was the British artist and critic Roger Fry. It was he who, with his 1910 exhibition “Manet and the Post-Impressionists” at the Grafton Gallery, first introduced the work of Cézanne, van Gogh, Gauguin, Seurat, Matisse, and others to an incredulous London public, in the process coining the now-familiar term “Postimpressionism.” He followed the show with a second in 1912, again at the Grafton Gallery, “The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition.”

Fry was one of the most prominent members of the Bloomsbury Group, a shifting community of artists and writers in London during the opening decades of the twentieth century that included the novelist Virginia Woolf and her husband Leonard; her sister, the painter Vanessa Bell, and Bell’s lover Duncan Grant; the Strachey brothers, James and Lytton, both writers; and the economist John Maynard Keynes.

Fry’s aestheticism and passion for avant-garde French art formed part of the Group’s model for a life devoted to the minute analysis of sensation and of consciousness. As the poet Stephen Spender described it: “Not to regard the French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters as sacrosanct, not to be an agnostic and in politics a Liberal with Socialist leanings, was to put oneself outside Bloomsbury.” In his 1938 essay “My Early Beliefs,” Keynes tried to convey the sensibility of the Group:

*Nothing mattered except states of mind, our own and other people’s of course, but chiefly our own. These states of mind were not associated with action or achievement or with consequences. They consisted in timeless, passionate states of contemplation and communion, largely unattached to “before” and “after.” Their value depended, in accordance with the principle of organic unity, on the state of affairs as a whole which could not be usefully analyzed into parts.*

The example Keynes gives of such a state is of being in love:

*The appropriate subjects of passionate contemplation and communion were a beloved person, beauty and truth, and one’s prime objects in life were love, the creation and enjoyment of aesthetic experience and the pursuit of knowledge.*

Virginia Woolf’s recollection of Fry illustrates many of Keynes’s characterizations of Bloomsbury, such as the pursuit of “timeless, passionate states of contemplation and communion, largely unattached to ‘before’ and ‘after’” whose “value depended, in accordance with the principle of organic unity, on the state of affairs as a whole which could not be usefully analyzed into parts.” Accordingly, she describes Fry’s lectures at the Queen’s Hall in London in 1932, and the effect they had on their audience:

*He had only to point to a passage in a picture and to murmur the word “plasticity” and a magical atmosphere was created. He looked like a fasting friar with a rope round his waist in spite of his evening dress: the religion of his convictions. “Slide, please,” he said. And there was the picture—Rembrandt, Chardin, Poussin, Cézanne—in black and white upon the screen. And the lecturer pointed. His long wand, trembling like the antenna of some miraculously sensitive insect, settled upon some “rhythymical phrase,” some sequence; some diagonal. And then he went on to make the audience see—the gem-like notes; the aquamarines; and topazes that lie in the hollow of his satin gowns; bleaching the lights to evanescent pallors. Somehow the black-and-white slide on the screen became radiant through the mist, and took on the grain and texture of the actual canvas.*

*He added on the spur of the moment what he had just seen as if for the first time. That, perhaps, was the secret of his hold over his audience. They could see the sensation strike and form; he could lay bare the very moment of perception. So with pauses and spurts the world of spiritual reality emerged in slide after slide—in Poussin, in Chardin, in Rembrandt, in Cézanne—in its uplands and its lowlands, all connected, all somehow made whole and entire, upon the great screen in the Queen’s Hall.*

Fry’s conviction that aesthetic experience could be communicated by bringing another to perceive a work’s organic unity, and its accompanying feature of “plasticity,” led to a style of verbal exposition focused exclusively on the formal character of a given work. Consequently, his writing has been labeled “formalist.” Trying to convey Fry’s pursuit of perceptual immediacy, Woolf recounts his words about looking at pictures: “I spent the afternoon in the Louvre. I tried to forget all my ideas and theories and to look at everything as though I’d never seen it before.... It’s only so that one can make discoveries.... Each work must be a new and a nameless experience.” It is possible to discover Fry’s capture of this “new and nameless experience” in the essays he wrote, some of which are collected in *Vision and Design* (1920) and *Transformations* (1926).



2 • Henri Matisse, *The Woman with the Hat*, 1905

Oil on canvas, 81.3 × 60.3 (32 × 23 1/4)

### Matisse's system

What one witnesses first in Matisse's Fauve output is the progressive abandonment of the divisionist brush-stroke: Matisse retains from Signac's tutoring the use of pure color and the organization of the picture plane through contrasts of complementary pairs (this is what ensures the picture's coloristic tension), but he relinquishes the most easily recognizable common denominator of Cézanne and Seurat: their search for a unitary mode of notation (the pointillist dot, the constructive stroke) that could be used indifferently for the figures and the ground. And other major traits of Postimpressionism are summoned: from Gauguin and van Gogh, flat, unmodulated planes of nonmimetic color and thick contours with a rhythm of their own; from van Gogh's drawings, a differentiation of the effect of linear marks through variations in their thickness and their closeness to one another; from Cézanne, a conception of the pictorial surface as a totalizing field where everything, even the unpainted white areas, plays a constructive role in bolstering the energy of the picture.

The moment when Matisse "gets" Cézanne—and stops merely trying to imitate him, as he had done in the past—is also his farewell to the tedium of pointillism: while Signac had advocated filling the composition outward from any area (or more precisely,

from any line of demarcation) chosen as a point of departure, the myriad dots being patiently added in a sequence preordained by the "law of contrasts," Matisse found out that he could not follow this myopic, incremental procedure. As is made clear by one of the few unfinished canvases from the Fauve season, *Portrait of Madame Matisse* [3], Matisse, like Cézanne, works on all areas of his picture at once and distributes his color contrasts so that they echo all over the surface (note, for example, the way the triad orange/green-ocher/red-pink is disseminated and calls in turn for various neighboring greens). There is a gradual process, to be sure, but it concerns the level of color saturation: a color harmony is determined at first in a subdued mode (it was at this point that *Portrait of Madame Matisse* was interrupted), then it is heated up, all parts of the canvas being simultaneously brought to a higher pitch. Would the public of the Salon d'Automne have found *The Woman with the Hat* less offensive if Matisse had shown with it this abandoned work? Would the piercing dabs of vermilion, the palettelike fan, the rainbow mask of the face, the harlequin background, the dissolution of the very hat's unity into a shapeless bouquet, the telescoped anatomy, as seen through a zoom lens—would all this have seemed less arbitrary to the laughing crowd if Matisse had allowed them a glimpse at his working method? Nothing is less certain. *The Open Window* [4], now perhaps the most celebrated of the Fauve canvases, was no less decried at the



3 • Henri Matisse, *Portrait of Madame Matisse*, 1905

Oil on canvas, 46 × 38 (18 1/8 × 15)

4 • Henri Matisse,  
*The Open Window*, 1905  
Oil on canvas, 55.2 x 46.4  
(21½ x 18½)



1900–1909

Salon, and yet it is less aggressive than the others, and more transparent about its procedures: it is easy to sort out the pairs of complementary colors that structure it, make it vibrate and visually expand, and that order our gaze never to stop at any given point.

Shortly after the Fauve salon, Matisse, reflecting upon his achievement of the past few months, stumbled upon an axiom that would remain one his guidelines all his life. It can be summarized by the statement, "One square centimeter of any blue is not as blue as a square meter of the same blue," and indeed, speaking about the red planes of his *Interior at Collioure (The Siesta)* from c.1905–6, Matisse would marvel at the fact that, although they looked to be of a different hue, they had all been painted straight out of the same tube. Discovering that color relations are above all surface-quantity relations was a major step. Struck by a statement Cézanne had made about the foundational unity of color and

drawing, he had been complaining to Signac that in his work, and particularly in *Luxe, calme et volupté*, so cherished by the older artist, the two components were split and even contradicting each other. Now, through his equation "quality = quantity," as he often put it, he understood why for Cézanne the traditional opposition between color and drawing was necessarily annulled: since any single color can be modulated by a mere change of proportion, any division of a plain surface is in itself a coloristic procedure. "What counts most with colors are relationships. Thanks to them and them alone a drawing can be intensely colored without there being any need for actual color," wrote Matisse. In fact, it is very probable that Matisse made this discovery about color while working on a series of black-and-white woodcuts in the beginning of 1906, and then set himself up to apply or to verify it in *Le Bonheur de vivre* [5].



5 • Henri Matisse, *Le Bonheur de vivre* (The Joy of Life), 1906

Oil on canvas, 174 × 240 (68½ × 94⅔)

### A parricide in paint

The largest and most ambitious work he had painted so far, *Le Bonheur de vivre* constituted his sole entry at the 1906 Salon des Indépendants. Six months after the Fauve scandal, the stakes were high: it was all or nothing, and Matisse carefully planned his composition in the most academic fashion, establishing first the decor from sketches made at Collioure and then planting, one by one, the figures or groups of figures that he had studied separately. But if the elaboration of this vast machine had been academic, the result was not. Never had flat planes of unmodulated pure color been used on such a scale, with such violent clashes of primary hues; never had contours so thick, also painted in bright hues, danced such free arabesques; never had anatomies been so "deformed," bodies melting together as if made of mercury—except perhaps in Gauguin's prints, which Matisse had revisited during the summer. With this bombshell, he wanted definitively to turn over a page of the Western tradition of painting. And to make sure that one got the message, he reinforced it by means of a cannibalistic attack at the iconographic level.

Scholars have painstakingly pursued the vast array of sources that Matisse convoked in this canvas. Ingres is predominant (he had a retrospective at the 1905 Salon d'Automne, with his *The Turkish Bath* and *The Golden Age* prominently displayed), as is the Postimpressionist quartet; but Pollaiuolo, Titian, Giorgione, Agostino Carracci, Cranach, Poussin, Watteau, Puvis de Chavannes, Maurice Denis, and many more painters are also invited to this ecumenical banquet. New guests keep being discovered; the whole pantheon of Western painting seems to be quoted—back to the very origin, since even prehistoric cave painting can be traced in the contours of the goats on the right. This medley of sources goes hand in hand with the stylistic disunity of the canvas and the discrepancies of scale—yet further rules of the pictorial tradition that Matisse deliberately upsets.

And that is not all: behind the paradisiacal imagery of the frolicking nymphs, behind the happy theme (the Joy of Life), the painting has a somber ring to it. For if the pastoral genre to which the canvas refers established a direct connection between physical beauty, visual pleasure, and the origin of desire, it was also based on a solid anchoring of sexual difference—something that, as Margaret Werth

has shown, Matisse perturbs here in countless ways. Werth starts by observing that the shepherd flutist, the only male figure in the painting, had initially been conceived as a female nude; she then notes that the sexual attributes of the other flutist, the large nude in the foreground, also clearly female in a study, were suppressed; that all the figures either have counterparts or form couples, but that all of them—apart from the shepherd and the “Ingresque” nude standing on the left, gazing at the spectator—are de-anatomized. (The culmination of this sadistic assault on the body is provided by the couple kissing in the foreground, two bodies—one of indeterminate sex—virtually melded with a single head.) The montagelike nature of the composition, with “disjunctive transitions” that are “characteristic of dream images or hallucination,” leads Werth to construct a psychoanalytic interpretation of the painting as a phantasmatic screen, a polysemic image conjuring up a series of contradictory sexual drives corresponding to the polymorphous infantile sexuality that Freud uncovered (narcissism, auto-eroticism, sadism, exhibitionism)—a catalog that revolves around the Oedipus complex and the concomitant castration anxiety.

At all levels (formal, stylistic, thematic), the painting is parodic. The dancers of *Le Bonheur de vivre* celebrate the definite toppling of a dreaded authority—that of the academic canon legislated by the École des Beaux-Arts. But Matisse let us know that the resulting freedom is not without risks, for whoever kills the symbolic father is left without guidance and must endlessly reinvent his own art in order to keep it alive. As such, this canvas opens the gates of twentieth-century art. YAB

#### FURTHER READING

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# 1907

With the stylistic inconsistencies and primitivist impulses of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Pablo Picasso launches the most formidable attack ever on mimetic representation.

**P**icasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* [1] has acquired a mythical status: it is a manifesto, a battlefield, a herald of modern art. Fully conscious that he was producing a major work, Picasso threw everything into its elaboration: all his ideas, all his energy, all his knowledge. We now know *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* as one of the "most worked-upon" canvases ever, and due attention is paid to the sixteen sketchbooks and numerous studies in various media that Picasso devoted to its making—not counting the drawings and paintings produced in the picture's immediate wake, in which Picasso further explored a whole range of avenues opened up by the painting during its fast-paced genesis.

But if no modern picture has been as much discussed during the last quarter of a century—with book-length essays and even an entire exhibition with a two-volume catalogue glorifying it—this plethora of commentary follows a striking dearth of discussion. Indeed, the painting long remained in quasi obscurity—one could even say that it was resisted. (A telling anecdote of this resistance: it seems that at the end of the twenties, two decades after *Les Demoiselles*'s completion, the collector Jacques Doucet intended to bequeath the picture to the Musée du Louvre, but the museum refused the offer, as it had done with the Cézannes of the Gustave Caillebotte bequest in 1894). Late recognition is the stuff of which legends are made, but what is so particular in this case is that the painting's deferred reception is not just linked to but also commanded by its subject matter and formal structure: *Les Demoiselles* is above all a work about beholding, about the trauma engendered by a visual summons.

Circumstances played a role in this spectacular delay. To begin with the painting had almost no public life for thirty years. Until Doucet bought it from Picasso for a song in 1924—at the urging of André Breton and to the immediate regret of the artist—*Les Demoiselles* had moved out of the artist's studio only once or twice, and then only during World War I: for two weeks in July 1916, in a semiprivate exhibition organized by the critic André Salmon at the Salon d'Antin (during which the painting acquired its present title), and possibly in the joint exhibition of Matisse's and Picasso's work in January–February 1918, organized by the dealer ▲ Paul Guillaume and with a catalogue prefaced by Guillaume Apollinaire. In the fall and winter of 1907, friends and visitors had

seen the painting in Picasso's studio immediately after its completion, but access to it had rapidly dwindled (because of Picasso's numerous moves, often to cramped quarters, and his understandable desire always to show the latest crop of his protean and ever-changing production, the canvas was rarely on view even for the circle of the artist's intimates, which accounts for the paucity of their comments). Once in Doucet's possession, the painting was visible only by appointment, until it was sold by his widow to a dealer in the fall of 1937. Immediately shipped to New York, it was then bought by the Museum of Modern Art, where it became the museum's most precious fixture—the end of *Les Demoiselles*'s private life.

The literature roughly follows a similar pattern. The painting was not even specifically named in the rare early articles that devoted a passage to it (by Gelett Burgess in 1910, André Salmon in 1912, and Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler in 1916 and 1920). Furthermore, it was only very rarely reproduced before its landing in New York: after Burgess's journalistic piece ("The Wild Men in Paris," in the May 1910 issue of the *Architectural Record*), its reproduction was not published until 1925, in the journal *La Révolution surréaliste* (by no means a bestseller), and to appear in a monograph on the artist it had to await Gertrude Stein's [2] *Picasso* of 1938. Shortly thereafter,

▲ Alfred H. Barr's *Picasso: Forty Years of His Art*, which functioned as the catalogue of the Museum of Modern Art's 1939 Picasso retrospective, began the process of *Les Demoiselles*'s canonization. But Barr's seminal account, which received its definitive touch in 1951, when his text was revised for the publication of *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art*, and which became the standard view of the painting, consolidated rather than broke down the walls of resistance that had encircled the work since its inception. Barr's view was • not fundamentally challenged until Leo Steinberg's (1920–2011) groundbreaking essay "The Philosophical Brothel" appeared in 1972. No previous text had done as much to transform the status of *Les Demoiselles*, and all subsequent studies are appendages to it.

A "transitional picture"?

Before the publication of Steinberg's study, the consensus was that *Les Demoiselles* was the "first Cubist painting" (and thus, as Barr puts it, a "transitional picture," perhaps more important for what it



1 • Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, June–July 1907

Oil on canvas, 243.8 × 233.7 (80 × 78)

announced than as a work in itself). Barr had ignored the corollary of this notion in Kahnweiler's account, namely that the picture had been left unfinished, but this idea was nevertheless accepted by everyone else, and most authors marked it by criticizing the picture's "lack of unity." The stylistic discrepancy between the canvas's left and right sides was seen as a function of Picasso's rapid shift of interest from the archaic Iberian sculpture that had helped him finish his *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* [2] in the late summer of 1906 to

African art, which he had finally encountered with a new impact and coherence during a visit to the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro midway through the elaboration of *Les Demoiselles*. The quest for sources did not stop there: Barr had named Cézanne, Matisse, and El Greco; others would add Gauguin, Ingres, and Manet.

Though Barr had published three of Picasso's preliminary studies for *Les Demoiselles*, he had merely paid lip service to them and no attention at all to the many others already made available in

## Gertrude Stein (1874–1946)

The youngest child of an upper-middle-class, American-Jewish family, the writer Gertrude Stein spent her first years in Europe, her youth in Oakland, and her university time at Harvard and The Johns Hopkins Medical School, before joining her older brother Leo in Paris in the winter of 1904–5. Buying Matisse's *The Woman with a Hat* from the 1905 Salon des Indépendants, she and Leo began avidly to collect advanced painting and to entertain artists and writers at their home on the rue de Fleurus. Deeply influenced by her sense of modernist composition, which, following her understanding of Cézanne, she saw as creating a uniform emphasis, without internal hierarchy, center, or "frame," she determined to capture the "object as object" with each aspect of it equally compelling and alive: "Always and always, Must write the hymn of repetition." Between 1906 and 1911, corresponding to the development of Cubism, she put this formal principle to work in her massive novel *The Making of Americans*. By 1910, Leo had turned against Picasso and his Cubist "funny business," and by 1913 he had separated his half of their collection to move to Florence. Gertrude continued to live on the rue de Fleurus with her lifelong companion Alice B. Toklas. Her accounts of her special friendship with Picasso are found in *Matisse, Picasso and Gertrude Stein* (1933), *Picasso* (1938), and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933).



2 • Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, late summer 1906

Oil on canvas, 100 × 81.3 (39 1/8 × 32)

Christian Zervos's catalogue raisonné of Picasso's work, then in progress. In its early state, the composition consisted of seven figures in a theatrical arrangement derived from the Baroque tradition, replete with the usual curtains opening onto a stage [3]. In the center, a clothed sailor was seated among five prostitutes, each of whom was turning her head toward an intruder, a medical student entering at the left holding a skull in his hand (replaced by a book in some studies). For Barr, this morbid scenario, which he saw as "a kind of *memento mori* [reminder of death] allegory or charade" on the wages of sin, could be all the more easily dispensed with since Picasso himself had quickly dropped it. In the final version, Barr wrote, "all implications of a moralistic contrast between virtue (the man with the skull) and vice (the man surrounded by food and woman) have been eliminated in favour of a purely formal figure composition, which as it develops becomes more and more dehumanized and abstract."

In his essay, Steinberg dismissed most of these views, which by then had turned into clichés. The picture could not be reduced to a "purely formal figure composition" that would make it (according to the rather unsophisticated view offered of Cubism at the time) a mere forerunner of things to come. Picasso had indeed abandoned the "*memento mori* allegory," but not the sexual theatics of the painting (which is undoubtedly why Steinberg borrowed as the title of his piece one of the first names given to the picture by

Picasso's friends, "Le Bordel philosophique" [The Philosophical Brothel]). Furthermore, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*'s lack of stylistic unity was not an effect of haste but a deliberate strategy: it was a late decision, to be sure, but in keeping with the elimination of the two male figures and the adoption of an almost square, vertical format, less "scenic" than that of all the studies for the general composition ▲ of the picture. And the primitivizing appeal to African art was not just happenstance (Picasso had been introduced to African art by Matisse in 1906 [4], months before his decision to shift the masklike faces of the two *demoiselles* on the right from an "Iberian" to an "African" model [5]): it shared in the thematic organization of the painting, even if Picasso later denied its significance.

Rejecting Barr's "*memento mori*," Steinberg changed the terms of the allegory put aside by Picasso from those of "death versus hedonism" to those of "cool, detached learning versus the demands of sex." Both the book and the skull present in Picasso's studies indicate that the medical student is the one who does not participate; he does not even look at the *demoiselles*. As for the timid sailor, he is there to be initiated by the fearsome females. His androgyny in many sketches sharply contrasts with his phallic attribute: the *porron* (a wine flask with an erect spout) on the table. Soon the sailor disappeared and the student underwent a gender switch. In the completed canvas he is replaced by the standing nude opening the curtain on the left. Conversely, the bodies of several *demoiselles*



3 • Pablo Picasso, *Medical Student, Sailor, and Five Nudes in a Bordello* (composition study for *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*), March–April 1907. Crayon drawing, 47.6 × 76.2 (18½ × 30)



Below left

4 • Photograph of Picasso in his studio in the Bateau-Lavoir, Paris, 1908

Below

5 • Pablo Picasso, *Study for the Head of the Crouching Demoiselle*, June–July 1907

Gouache on paper, 63 × 48 (24½ × 18½)



were masculine in many drawings. There is enough cumulative evidence, then, to determine that while he was working on the picture Picasso's thematic concern revolved around the primordial question of sexual difference, and that of the fear of sex. So his problem seems to have been how to hold onto this theme while relinquishing the allegory.

This is where the stylistic disjunction of the final canvas comes into play, and not only that but also the utter isolation of the five prostitutes vis-à-vis one another, and the suppression of clear spatial coordinates. (On close inspection, the discrepancies are even stronger than Barr had noted, and they do not concern only the right-hand "African" side of the picture: the hand of the standing *démoiselle* who replaced the student at the far left seems severed from her body, and the sketchbooks reveal, as Steinberg notes, that her immediate neighbor, most often read as standing, is in fact lying down even though she has been verticalized and made parallel to the picture's surface.) Whereas in the first scenario the characters react to the student's entrance and the spectator looks on from outside, in the finished painting "this rule of traditional narrative art yields to an anti-narrative counter-principle: neighboring figures share neither a common space nor a common action, do not communicate or interact, but relate singly, directly, to the spectator.... The event, the epiphany, the sudden entrance, is still the theme—but rotated through 90 degrees towards a viewer conceived as the picture's opposite pole." In other words, it is the work's lack of stylistic and scenic unity that binds the painting to the spectator: the core of the picture is the frightful gaze of the *démoiselles*, particularly those with the deliberately monstrous faces on the right. Their "Africanism," according to the ideology of the time that made Africa the "dark continent," is a device designed to fend off the beholder. (An old word derived from the Greek and meaning "having the power to avert evil" describes the intimidating glare of Picasso's nudes particularly well: it is *apotropaic*.) The picture's complex structure, as William Rubin showed in the longest study ever devoted to the work (which emphasized Picasso's deep-seated death anxiety), concerns the link that ties Eros to Thanatos, that is, sex to death.

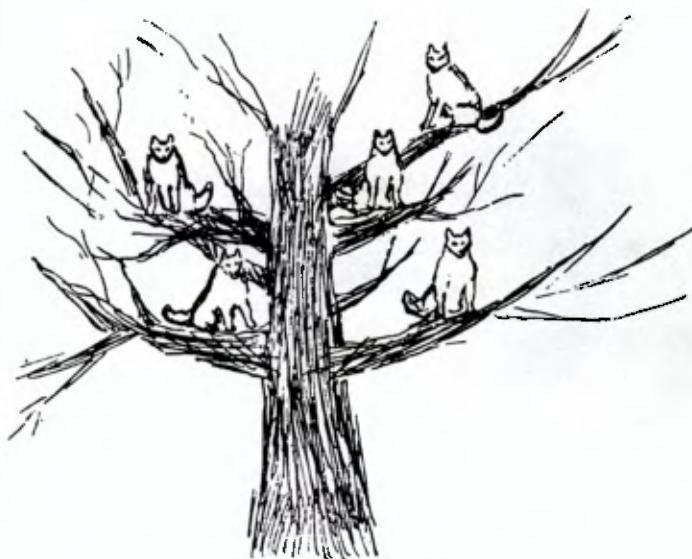
### The trauma of the gaze

▲ We are now moving into Freudian territory, a fairly recent step in the literature devoted to the painting. Several psychoanalytic scenarios dealing with the "primal scene" and the "castration complex" apply amazingly well to *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. They help us understand both the suppression of the allegory and the brutality of the finished picture. One thinks, here, either of the remembered childhood dream of Freud's most famous patient, Sergei Pankejeff (1887–1979)—the "Wolf-Man" [6]—in which the boy found himself petrified as his window opened and he was stared at by motionless wolves (the dream being the aftereffect of the shock of the primal scene [his witnessing parental intercourse])—or of Freud's short text on the head of the Medusa, with all its multitude of meanings.

These include the notion that the Medusa's head is the female sex organ—the sight of which arouses castration anxiety in the young male; the image of castration itself (decapitation); and the denial of castration, on the one hand by a multiplication of penises (her hair consists of snakes) and, on the other, by its power to turn the spectator to stone, in other words, into an erect, albeit dead, phallus.

In front of Picasso's painting, too, the beholder is nailed to the floor by the whores who address him more violently, as Steinberg points out, than by any picture since Velázquez's *Las Meninas*. In switching from the "narrative" (allegory) to the "iconic" mode, to use the terms employed by Rubin, that is, from the historical tone of stories ("Once upon a time") to the personal threat ("Look at me; I'm watching you"), Picasso both revealed the fixity of the viewer's position as established by the monocular perspective on which Western painting had been based and, by recasting it as petrification, demonized it. The undiminished power of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* lies in this very operation, called the "return of the repressed": in it, Picasso highlighted the contradictory libidinal forces at work in the very act of beholding, making of his whole picture the Medusa's head. Bordello pictures are part of a long tradition within the genre of erotic art (a tradition that Picasso knew well: he had long admired Degas's monotypes and for years had yearned to collect them—a dream he could fulfill only late in life). These soft-porn scenes are meant to gratify the voyeurism of male, heterosexual, art lovers. Picasso overthrows this tradition: interrupting the story, the gaze of his *démoiselles* challenges the (male) spectator by signifying to him that his comfortable position, outside the narrative scene, is not as secure as he might think. No wonder the painting was resisted for so long.

One of its early adversaries no doubt understood, at least partially, what was going on. Matisse was furious when he saw the painting (some accounts say he was in stitches, but this amounts to



6 • Sergei C. Pankejeff's sketch of his remembered childhood dream (c. 1910), published in Sigmund Freud's "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," 1918



7 • Pablo Picasso, *Three Women*, 1907  
Oil on canvas, 200 × 178 (78½ × 70½)

the same thing). He was a bit like Poussin saying of Caravaggio (to whom we owe the best representation of Medusa's head, and who was criticized in his time for being unable to "compose a real story") that he had been "born to destroy painting." Undoubtedly, rivalry was a sting that sharpened Matisse's perception (just as it had stimulated Picasso's), for just a year and a half earlier Matisse had completed his breakthrough canvas *Le Bonheur de vivre*, whose thematic is in many ways very close to that of Picasso's picture (one detects in it the same conflictual imagery revolving around the castration complex). Matisse knew that this canvas (which Picasso saw every time he went to dinner at the house of Gertrude and Leo Stein) had strongly impressed the younger artist, notably for its syncretic cannibalizing of a whole array of historical sources. For Picasso, one of the most devastating challenges must have been the forceful way in which Matisse had co-opted Ingres's *The Turkish Bath*, which had struck both artists at the 1905 Salon d'Automne: how tame was the Ingrisme of his own Rose period, by comparison, particularly of *The Harem*, painted in Gosol in the summer of 1906, just a few months before he tackled *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and only a few weeks before he "painted in" the face of Gertrude Stein's portrait! Meanwhile, Matisse had also thrown in another challenge:

- shortly after introducing Picasso to African art he had painted his *Blue Nude*, the first canvas ever to de-aestheticize the traditional motif of the female nude explicitly by way of "primitivism." And now Picasso was combining both acts of parricide against the Western tradition: juxtaposing contradictory sources into a medley that annulled their decorum and their historical significance, and at the same time borrowing from other cultures. In both *Le Bonheur de vivre* and *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, the parricide was astutely linked to an Oedipal thematics, but Picasso, in focusing his attack on the very condition of beholding, had carried the struggle against mimesis much further.

### The crisis of representation

We can now return to the standard, pre-Steinberg assumption that *Les Demoiselles* was the "first" Cubist painting. While certainly wrong if one reads early Cubism as a kind of geometric stylization of volumes, this assumption makes sense if Cubism is understood as a radical questioning of the rules of representation. In grafting an Iberian masklike face onto the bust of Gertrude Stein, in conceiving of a face as a given sign that could be borrowed from a vast repertory, Picasso had called the illusionistic conventions of depiction into question. But in *Les Demoiselles* he pushed the idea that signs are migratory and combinatory, and that their signification depends upon their context, even further, though he did not fully explore it. This would be the work of Cubism as a whole, whose origin can then be located in *Three Women* of 1908 [7], in which Picasso strove to display a single signlike unit (the triangle) for every element of the painting, whatever it was supposed to depict. But several studies for the face of the crouching *demi*oiselle at the lower right—the site of the most startling attack on the very idea of

beauty in relation to woman—reveal that he had sensed the endless metaphoric possibilities of the sign system he was inventing: in these studies, we can see that face is in the process of being transformed into a torso [5]. Yet these amorphic experiments were put aside and one had to wait for Picasso's second examination ▲ of African art in his collages, in 1912, for the full implication of his semiological impulse to be reached. Thus *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* was a traumatic event; and its profound effect was deferred for Picasso as well: it took him the whole adventure of Cubism to be able to account for what he had done. YAB

#### FURTHER READING

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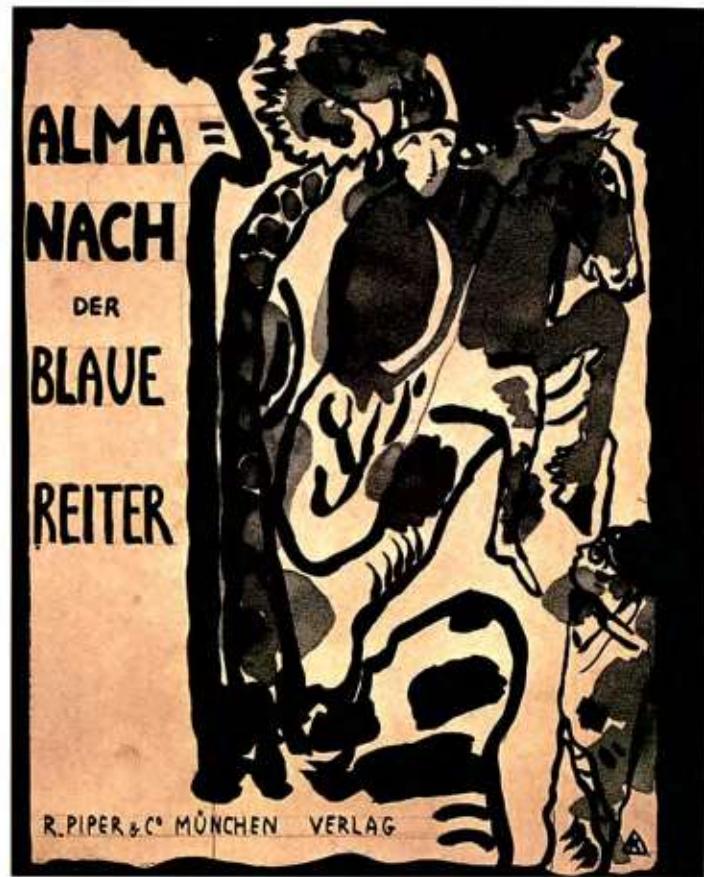
**Leo Steinberg.** "The Philosophical Brothel" (1972), second edition October, no. 44, Spring 1989

# 1908

Wilhelm Worringer publishes *Abstraction and Empathy*, which contrasts abstract art with representational art as a withdrawal from the world versus an engagement with it; German Expressionism and English Vorticism elaborate this psychological polarity in distinctive ways.

"I caught a strange thought," the German Expressionist Franz Marc (1880–1916) wrote from the front during World War I (where he would soon be killed), "it had settled on my open hand like a butterfly—the thought that people once before, a long time ago, like alter egos, loved abstractions as we do now. Many an object hidden away in our museums of anthropology looks at us with strangely disturbing eyes. What made them possible, these products of a sheer will to abstraction?" However strange, this thought was not entirely new: Marc echoes French poet Charles Baudelaire on poetic "correspondences," and the notions of an affinity between abstract arts, of the tribal artist as alter ego of the modern artist, and of a primordial will to abstraction are all in keeping with a dissertation written in 1908 by the German art historian Wilhelm Worringer (1881–1965). The connection is not accidental, as another letter from Marc makes clear. In early 1912 he wrote his Russian colleague Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), with whom he had founded the association of artists Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider) in Munich in 1911: "I am just reading Worringer's *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* [Abstraction and Empathy], a good mind, whom we need very much. Marvelously disciplined thinking, concise and cool, extremely cool."

Worringer was not an unambiguous advocate of the German Expressionists. When they were attacked by a jingoistic antimodernist in 1911, he defended them as harbingers of a new age marked by an embrace of elemental forms, an interest in tribal art, and, above all, a rejection of the "rationalized sight" that he deemed too dominant from the Renaissance through neo-Impressionist painting. Otherwise Worringer left the terms of his affiliation vague; for example, in a 1910 foreword to *Abstraction and Empathy*, he noted only a "parallelism" with "the new goals of expression." However, this parallelism did point to an "inner necessity" in the age, and this metaphysical bent was shared by the Blaue Reiter artists, who often wrote of their art in terms of a "spiritual awakening." This was most evident in the *Blaue Reiter Almanach* that Marc and Kandinsky published in 1912 with a cover image of a blue rider by Kandinsky inspired by folk images of Saint George [1]. Apart from Expressionist work, this influential collection of essays and illustrations featured tribal art from the Pacific Northwest, Oceania, and Africa, the art of children, Egyptian puppets, Japanese masks and prints, medieval



1 • Wassily Kandinsky, final study for the cover of the *Blaue Reiter Almanach*, 1911  
Watercolor, India ink and pencil. 27.6 × 21.9 (10½ × 8½)

German sculpture and woodcuts, Russian folk art, and Bavarian devotional glass paintings. Kandinsky was especially drawn to the latter two forms, while his partner, Gabriele Münter (1877–1962), was strongly attracted to the art of children, the emotive immediacy of which she sought to convey in her own painting.

A metaphysical approach to art was also practiced by Die Brücke (The Bridge), the other primary group of German Expressionists.

▲ Headed by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, it was founded in Dresden in 1905, included Fritz Beyl (1880–1966), Erich Heckel, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884–1976), all of whom were once architectural students, and was disbanded in Berlin eight years later. The metaphysical bent is clear from the names of the two groups:

the Blaue Reiter was titled after a traditional figure of Christian revelation ("one stands before the new works as in a dream," Marc wrote in a prospectus for the *Almanach*, "and hears the horsemen of the Apocalypse"), while Die Brücke derived its name from Friedrich Nietzsche, who stated in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–92) that "man is a rope, fastened between animal and Superman—a rope over an abyss ... he is a bridge and not an end." German Expressionism echoed the metaphysical concerns of *Abstraction and Empathy* in other ways too. Like Worringer, Marc expressed the natural world as a place of primal flux, while Kirchner expressed the urban world as a place of primitive vitality. However, this very insistence on *expression* did not fully correspond with the Worringerian conception of abstraction.

### Opposed styles

*Abstraction and Empathy* develops two notions—*Einfühlung* or "empathy," derived from the German psychologist and philosopher Theodor Lipps (1851–1914), and *Kunstwollen* or "artistic will," derived from the Viennese art historian Alois Riegl—in order to relate different artistic styles to different "psychic states." Across history and culture, Worringer argues, two opposed styles—naturalistic representation and geometric abstraction—have expressed two opposed attitudes—an empathetic engagement with the world and a shocked withdrawal from it. "Whereas the precondition for the urge to empathy is a happy pantheistic relationship of confidence between man and the phenomena of the external world,"

Worringer writes, "the urge to abstraction is the outcome of a great inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world ... We might describe this state as an immense spiritual dread of space." This condition of dread before nature (Worringer was influenced here by Georg Simmel [1858–1918], the great German sociologist of alienation) is very different from the state of intimacy with nature that Gauguin, for example, projected onto the primitive. According to Worringer, primitive man sees nature as a hostile chaos: "dominated by an immense need for tranquility," the tribal artist turns to abstraction as "a refuge from appearances." This notion led Worringer to construct a problematic hierarchy of culture (as outlined in *Form in Gothic* [1910], his sequel to *Abstraction and Empathy*), with the primitive at the bottom. The modern, however, was not placed at the top: on the contrary, "slipped down from the pride of knowledge, [modern] man is now just as lost and helpless vis-à-vis the world-picture as primitive man." As a consequence, according to Worringer, the modern artist also struggles to arrest and separate the flux of phenomena, to abstract and preserve the stability of forms: driven once more by "inner unrest" and "spatial dread," he too turns to abstraction. This account is very different from later celebrations of abstract art, the triumphal humanism of which Worringer challenges before the fact.

But does this account of abstraction really suit the Blaue Reiter, as Marc and Kandinsky [2] hoped it might? It might be more relevant to Die Brücke, for it could be argued that Kirchner and colleagues used abstract elements—unreal colors, uneasy perspec-



2 • Wassily Kandinsky,  
*With Three Riders*, 1911  
Ink and watercolor on paper,  
25 × 32 (9 1/2 × 12 1/2)

▲ 1903

tives—in order to register “inner unrest” and “spiritual dread.” Like Worringer, Kirchner often pictured modernity as primitive, not only in the figure of the primitive prostitute that he inherited from Manet and Gauguin by way of Matisse and Picasso, but also in the streets of the modern city where, for observers such as Simmel, the prostitute was only emblematic of a general regression. Just as, according to Worringer, the natural world appeared chaotic to primitives, so, too, according to Kirchner, did the urban world appear chaotic to moderns (German industrialization was fast and furious during the first two decades of the century). In *The Street, Dresden* (3), Kirchner evokes Dresden as a vital but nervous confrontation: huddled masses border the picture and block its expanse, while several figures, mostly women with faces that resemble masks, bear down on us (the little girl here is especially bizarre). With its distorted space and lurid orange-red, the picture is tinged with the anxiety often associated with the painting of Edvard Munch, the Norwegian forerunner of the Expressionists. At the same time the figures also suggest the “blasé attitude” that Simmel ascribed to “the mental life” of the modern city. “The metropolitan type,” Simmel argued in a famous essay of 1903, “develops an organ protecting him against the threatening currents and discrepancies of his external environment.” *The Street* might evoke such a current in the electric line that courses around the figures and through the avenue in orange, green, and blue. Part nervous stimulation, part protective shield, this line isolates these urban dwellers even as it also connects them: it suggests a paradoxical kind of alienation that unites. This effect becomes more extreme in “The Street” paintings that Kirchner produced in Berlin after his move there, with other Die Brücke members, in 1911: the colors of these pictures are more acrid, the perspectives are more perverse (he adapted Cubism and Futurism for this effect), and the figures (often prostitutes and clients) are more anxious-blase. If there is a new kind of modern beauty here, as art historian Charles Haxthausen has argued, it is also, at least in part, a terrible beauty.

Again, for Worringer, abstraction served to ease the stimulation provoked by the chaos of the world. Kirchner, on the other hand, approached abstraction in order to register this stimulation, indeed to heighten it. The abstraction of the Blaue Reiter is different again: Marc moved toward abstraction in pursuit of a connection with the natural world, while Kandinsky did so in search of a communion with the spiritual realm. For both artists, the isolation of human beings was a problem to overcome, not a condition to deepen. “We search,” Kandinsky wrote in 1909, “for artistic forms that reveal the penetration of these collected forces.” Rather than abstraction *versus* empathy, then, the Blaue Reiter proposed an aesthetic of abstraction *as* empathy—empathy with nature and/or spirit. (In this respect they were in line with the “abstract empathy” already suggested in the *Jugendstil* or Art Nouveau style in Munich that influenced Kandinsky.) The Blaue Reiter artists sought an equation of feeling and form, a reconciliation between “inner necessity” and outer world; Kandinsky insisted that the very “contents” of his art are “what the spectator *lives* or *feels* while



3 • Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *The Street, Dresden*, 1908  
Oil on canvas. 150.5 × 200 (59½ × 78½)

under the effect of the *form and color combinations* of the picture.” And this is one reason why they took music, which featured prominently in the *Almanach*, as an aesthetic paragon. Again, this was not to reverse the Worringerian poles of abstraction and empathy but to force them together: as Kandinsky states in the *Almanach*, “Realism = Abstraction; Abstraction = Realism.”

### Pantheistic penetration

If Kandinsky aspired to a transcendental world of spirit, Marc delved into the immanent world of nature. Guided at first by Gauguin, Marc defined his project in 1910 as “a pantheistic penetration into the pulsating flow of blood in nature, in trees, in animals, in the atmosphere.” To trace this flow he elaborated two kinds of drawing: first, a fluent, organic, and airy line influenced by Matisse and Kandinsky; then, a more constricted, geometric, and anxious line influenced by Picasso and Robert Delaunay (like Kirchner, Marc adapted Cubism to his own ends). Marc also devised a color symbolism to modulate the moods of this flow: blue was “severe” and “spiritual”; yellow, “gentle” and “sensual”; red, “brutal” and “heavy.” Although this intuitive system was gendered reductively (blue as masculine, yellow as feminine), it led Marc, in the few years left to him, to produce a number of animal paintings that are among the finest in the Western tradition. Finally, however, these pictures do not convey an “animalization of art” (Marc) so much as a humanization of nature: less than empathetic communion with nature, they suggest an expressive projection on the part of the artist. In 1853 the English aesthetician John Ruskin critiqued this projection as “the pathetic fallacy”; some time after 1913 Marc also came to question it:

*Is there a more mysterious idea for an artist than to imagine how nature is reflected in the eyes of an animal? How does a horse see the world, how does an eagle, a doe, or a dog?... Who says the doe feels the world to be Cubistic? It's the doe that feels,*

*therefore the landscape must be “doelike.” The artistic logic of Picasso, Kandinsky, Delaunay, Burluk [a Russian associate of the Blaue Reiter], etc., is perfect. They don’t “see” the doe and they don’t care. They project their inner world—which is the noun of the sentence. Naturalism contributes the object. The predicate ... is rendered but rarely.*

Rather than an imposed expression, Marc sought an empathic abstraction that might resolve self and other pictorially. No doubt this is an impossible ideal, but a painting such as *The Fate of Animals* [4] does evoke one kind of “pantheistic penetration.” Here, however, the common point between human and animal seems to be pain or agony—even the trees appear to be butchered. Indeed, on the back of the canvas Marc scrawled “and all being is flaming suffering,” as if, like urban tension in Kirchner, natural suffering in Marc was the one thing that united all creatures. And yet, the very desperation of this work points to the ultimate separation between beings: after all, suffering is singular and solitary in its effects. In his pursuit of empathy, Marc touches

its limit: the animal other is revealed as precisely other, inhuman, beyond empathy. This is still not abstraction versus empathy, but it is no longer abstraction as empathy. Empathy has failed, and here abstraction becomes the sign of this limit.

### Dehumanization as diagnostic

In the end, the model of abstraction versus empathy might pertain less to German Expressionism than to English Vorticism, a movement—named by the poet-critic Ezra Pound (1885–1972) and directed by the prolific painter-novelist-critic Wyndham Lewis ▲ (1882–1957)—that included the sculptors Jacob Epstein (1880–1959) and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1891–1915) and the painter David Bomberg (1890–1957), among others. The connection here to Worringer is not as attenuated as it might seem. In January 1914, the poet-critic T. E. Hulme (1883–1917), an associate of the Vorticists, delivered a lecture in London on “Modern Art and its Philosophy” that adapted *Abstraction and Empathy* toward an advocacy of Vorticism. Here Hulme—who, like Gaudier-Brzeska



4 • Franz Marc, *The Fate of the Animals*, 1913

Oil on canvas, 194.3 × 261.6 (76½ × 103)

▲ 1934b

and Marc, would soon die in the war that effectively ended both Vorticism and Expressionism—divided modern art into two opposed styles—the organic (his version of the empathic) and the geometric (his version of the abstract). Like Worringer, he then argued that these styles correspond to two opposed “attitudes”—an “insipid optimism,” dominant since the Renaissance, that placed man at the center of nature, and a steely antihumanism, emergent in Vorticist art, that valued “a feeling of separation in the face of outside nature.”

“What he said,” Lewis remarked of Hulme, “I did”—though, again, it was Worringer who set the aesthetic terms for both men. In “The New Egos,” a text published in *Blast* (1914), his vitriolic journal of Vorticism, Lewis presented his own Worringerian parable. It concerns two complementary figures, “a civilized savage” and a “modern town-dweller”; neither is “secure” as both live in a “vagueness of space.” Yet the civilized savage is able to ease his insecurity with an art of the figure abstracted to a “simple black human bullet,” whereas the modern town-dweller only senses that “the old form of egotism is no longer fit for such conditions as now prevail.” Lewis concludes his parable with a Worringerian credo: “All clean, clear-cut emotions depend on the element of strangeness, and surprise, and primitive detachment. Dehumanization is the chief diagnostic of the World.” The Expressionists agreed with this diagnosis, but Lewis saw dehumanization as a solution as much as a problem: if the modern age is to survive its own dehumanization, it must dehumanize further; it must take “strangeness, and surprise, and primitive detachment” to the limit.

Lewis rarely forgoes the human figure altogether. His early “designs” often manifest a tension between figure and surround, as if the body, never secure, were caught between definition, about to break free as an autonomous form, and dispersal, about to be invaded by space. Slowly, however, Lewis abstracts the figure, as if to harden it into a “simple black human bullet.” Sometimes this hardening appears to come from without—outside in—as in *The Vorticist* (1912), in which the body seems to be shocked into abstraction by a hostile world. Sometimes it appears to come from within—inside out—as in *Vorticist Design* (c. 1914), in which the body seems to be driven to abstraction by some innate will. In one especially concentrated figure, *The Enemy of the Stars* [5], the two kinds of armoring appear to converge. On the one hand, with a head like a receiver, the figure looks reified from without, its skin turned into a shield; on the other hand, stripped of organs and arms, it also looks reified from within, its bone structure turned into a “few abstract mechanical relations” (as Hulme once remarked of these figures). In either case, this “enemy of the stars” is the opposite of the Blue Rider whom Kandinsky evokes on an ascent toward the heavens: here Lewis suggests an abstraction of the figure that is indeed antiempathic. HF

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T. E. Hulme, *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Herbert Read (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987 [first published 1924])



5 • Wyndham Lewis, *The Enemy of the Stars*, 1913  
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# 1909

F. T. Marinetti publishes the first Futurist manifesto on the front page of *Le Figaro* in Paris: for the first time, the avant-garde associates itself with media culture and positions itself in defiance of history and tradition.

**O**n February 20, 1909, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944) published his “Manifeste de fondation du Futurisme,” the first Futurist manifesto, on the front page of the French newspaper *Le Figaro* [1]. This event signaled the public arrival of Futurism, and pointed in multiple ways to its specific project.

First of all, it showed that, from its very outset, Futurism wished to establish the avant-garde’s liaison with mass culture. Second, it demonstrated a conviction that all techniques and strategies operative in mass-cultural production would henceforth be essential for the propagation of avant-garde practices as well; the mere decision to publish the manifesto in the widest-circulation newspaper in France demonstrated the triple embrace of advertising, journalism, and forms of mass distribution. Third, it indicated that, from its initial stages, Futurism was committed to a fusion of artistic practices with advanced forms of technology in a way that Cubism, while confronting this question in the development of collage, would never wholly embrace. The slogans of Futurism that celebrated “congenital dynamism,” “the break-up of the object,” and “light as a destroyer of forms,” while also lauding the mechanical, famously declared that a speeding automobile is “more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace”: this was to prefer the industrialized object to the unique rarity of the cult statue. And last, although not yet visible in 1909, it prepared the way for Futurism to overturn traditional assumptions about the avant-garde’s innate tendency toward, and association with, progressivist, leftist—if not Marxist—politics. For Futurism was to become, in Italy in 1919, the first avant-garde movement of the twentieth century to have its own political and ideological project assimilated into the formation of fascist ideology.

## From backwater to frontrunner

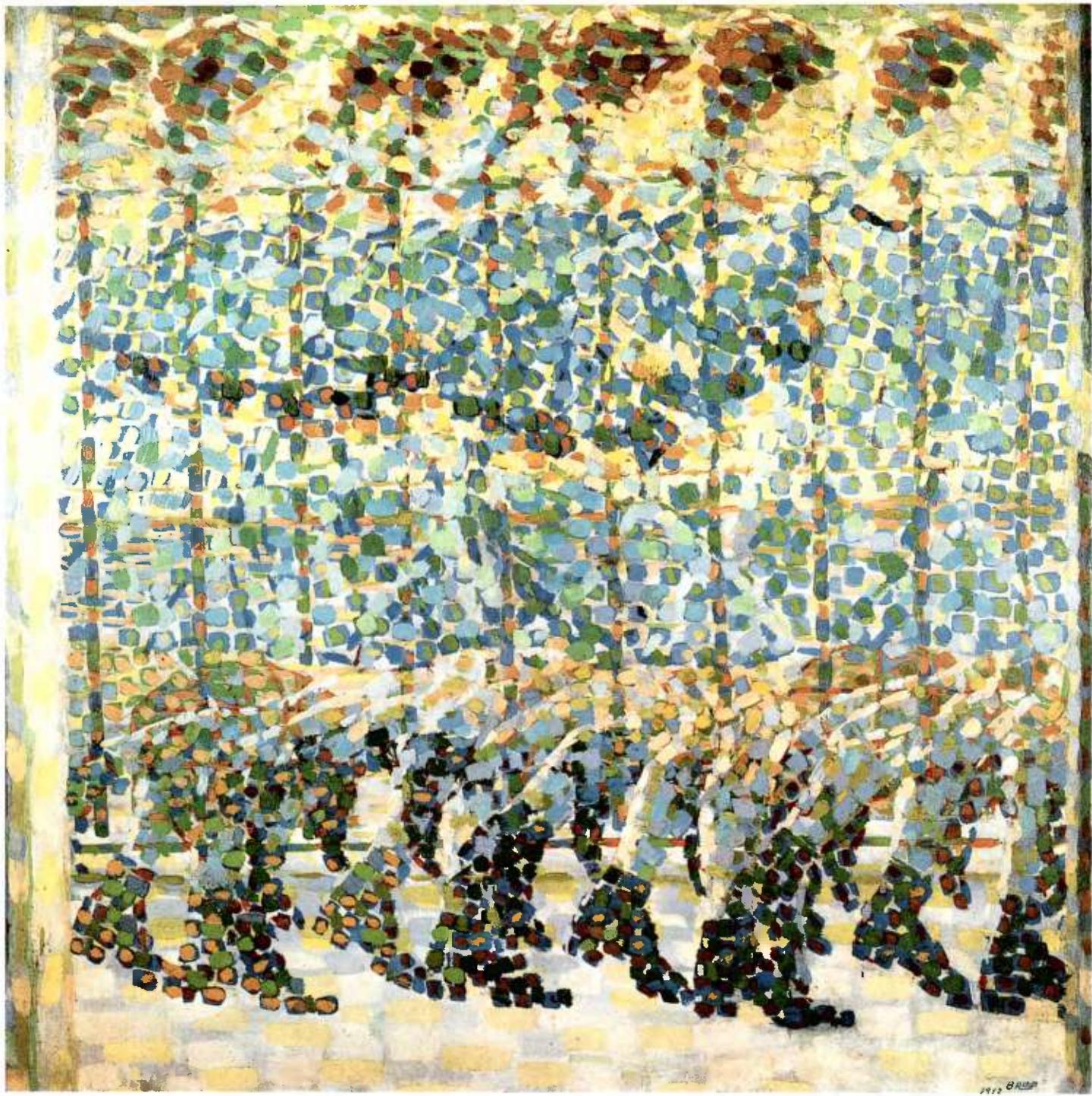
In terms of its artists’ models, the background of Futurism is complex. Its sources are to be found in nineteenth-century French Symbolism, in French neo-Impressionist or divisionist painting, and in early-twentieth-century Cubism, which was evolving contemporaneously with Futurism and was clearly known to the majority of the artists in the Italian movement. What was specifically Italian in Futurism’s formation, however, was the very

belatedness of this modernist avant-garde. Thus, at the moment of the manifesto’s first publication, the key figures of Futurist painting, such as Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916), Giacomo Balla (1871–1958), and Carlo Carrà (1881–1966), were still working in the rather *retardataire* manner of 1880s divisionism. None of the strategies that had emerged in Paris in the wake of Cézanne’s discoveries, or in the development of Fauvism or early Cubism, entered Futurist painting at its earliest moment, that is to say, prior to 1910. Furthermore, Futurism was typified by the eclecticism with which these belatedly discovered avant-garde strategies were adapted. Indeed, the speed with which they were then patched together in order to reformulate a new Futurist pictorial and sculptural aesthetic is indicative of that very eclecticism.

In the wake of Marinetti’s manifesto, several other Futurist manifestos followed, written by artists who had joined the group. Among them were *Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto*, published in 1910 and signed by Boccioni, Balla, Carrà, Luigi Russolo (1885–1947), and Gino Severini (1883–1966); the *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture*, published in 1912 by Boccioni; *Fotodinamismo futurista*, also published in 1912, by the photographer Anton Giulio Bragaglia; a 1912 manifesto of Futurist music by Ballila Pratella (1880–1955); Russolo’s “The Art of Noises” in 1913; and a manifesto of Futurist architecture by Antonio Sant’Elia (1888–1916) in 1914.

As pronounced in these documents, the strategies of Futurism revolved around three central issues. First, there was an emphasis on synesthesia (the breaking down of the boundaries between the different senses, for instance, between sight, sound, and touch) and kinesthesia (the breaking down of the distinction between the body at rest and the body in motion). Second, Futurism tried to construct an analogue between pictorial signification and existing technologies of vision and representation, such as those being developed by photography—particularly in its extended forms, such as chronophotography—and by early cinema. Third, Futurism’s rigorous condemnation of the culture of the past, its violent attack on the legacies of bourgeois tradition, organized an equally passionate affirmation of the need to integrate art with advanced technology, even the technology of warfare, opening up the movement to fascism.





2 • Giacomo Balla, *Girl Running on a Balcony*, 1912

Oil on canvas, 125 x 125 (49½ x 49½)

Futurism's stress on synesthesia and kinesthesia followed directly from its critique of the bourgeois aesthetic according to which painting and sculpture were traditionally understood as static arts. It was in contradistinction to this that Futurism strove to incorporate the experience of simultaneity, temporality, and bodily movement within the boundaries of the art object. Such an attempt to make the perception of movement an integral element of the representation of the body in space was informed by Futurism's discovery of the French scientist Étienne-Jules Marey's

"chronophotography," an early form of stroboscopic work. Paradoxically, however, it was the literalness with which Balla and Boccioni used a divisionist pictorial idiom to interpret Marey's scientific device that marked their work as strangely delayed and limited, since the very status of the painting as a singular static object was something the Futurist painters never challenged. Further, in trying to adopt chronophotography to their own art, the Futurists bound the pictorial signifier into a purely *mimetic* relationship with the technological field—picturing movement by

blurring outlines, for example—rather than into a *structural* one, such as adopting the serial forms of industrial production.

### Futures without a past

Balla was undoubtedly the most interesting painter in the movement, even though at the time of the first manifesto in 1909 he was still working in a very traditional way, as he literally applied divisionist methods to the perception of light and public urban space. This is most evident in his painting *Street Light* (1909–10), where the juxtaposition between nature and culture is programmatically stated in the opposition between a street lantern and the moon, and where the dynamism of light waves is executed in a painfully literal manner by swallowlike wedges that surge away from the luminous source, which are transformed chromatically as they move from the iridescence at the picture's center toward the complete absence of chroma at its margins, a representation of darkness and night.



3 • Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913 (1931 cast)  
Bronze, 111.2 × 88.5 × 40 (43 1/2 × 34 1/2 × 15 3/4)



4 • Giacomo Balla, *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*, 1912  
Oil on canvas, 89.9 × 109.9 (35 1/2 × 43 1/4)

By 1912 Balla had redefined his pictorial syntax by folding the repetitive contours characteristic of chronophotography into his own representation of objects. Paintings such as *Girl Running on a Balcony* [2] or *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* [4], both from 1912, are significant for the literal way they inscribe the simultaneity of the perception of movement onto the spatial organization of the painting. In 1913, Balla's step to abandon representation altogether in order to find a more adequate way to depict speed, temporality, movement, and visual transformation led to one of the first valid models of nonrepresentational painting. With all figuration deleted, these works were devoted both to the repetition of a structural armature in order to articulate sequence and speed and to a nonrepresentational chromatic idiom that abandoned all references to local color. The compositional and coloristic matrix thus formed no longer participates in what could be called ▲ Cubism's transformation of Renaissance perspective into a new phenomenological space; rather, Balla attempts a transformation of pictorial space into a mechanical, optical, or a temporal space by means of fully nonrepresentational strategies.

Two examples of Boccioni's sculpture clarify the Futurist relationship to the kinesthetic perception of objects in space. The first, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* [3], in its peculiar ambiguity between a robot and an amphibious figure, once again attempts to incorporate the traces visible in Marey's chronophotography into the sculptural body. Yet, at the same time as it inserts the fluidity of perception into a static representation, it generates the peculiar hybrid between spatial contiguity and the singular, holistic, sculptural object. In Boccioni's *Dynamism of a Speeding Horse and House* [5], Futurism's susceptibility to the illusionistic adaptation of motion photography is rejected, however, in favor of a static object in which the effects of simultaneity and kinesthesia are produced by the mere juxtaposition of different materials and the degree of fragmentation to which they are presented. Unlike

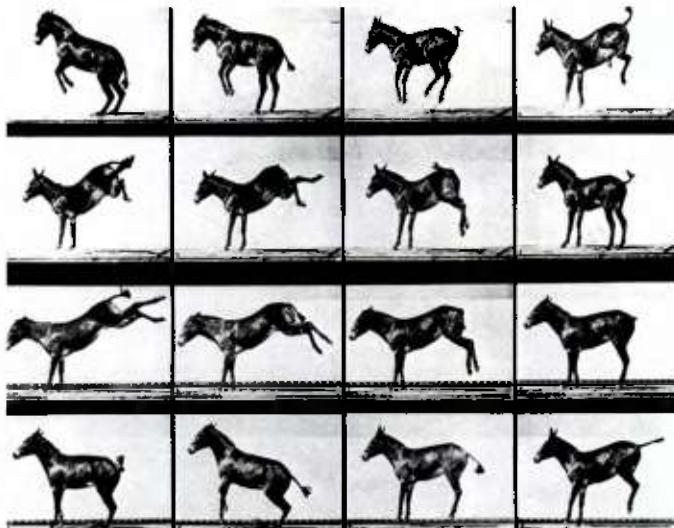
**Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904)  
and Étienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904)**

The Englishman Eadweard Muybridge and the Frenchman Étienne-Jules Marey are yoked in time and by work: not only do they share the same birth and death dates, but also together they pioneered the photographic study of movement in ways that influenced not only the development of Futurist art but also the modern rationalization of labor and, it could be argued, of space-time in general.

First known as a photographer of American West and Central American landscapes, Muybridge was enlisted in 1872 by Leland Stanford, the millionaire ex-governor of California, in a racing dispute about the gait of horses. In Palo Alto, Muybridge photographed horses with a battery of cameras; typically, he arranged the images in rows and reshot them in a grid that could be scanned both horizontally and vertically. A book, *The Horse in Motion*, which Stanford bowdlerized, appeared in 1882, the same year that Muybridge sailed to Europe for a lecture tour. In Paris he was welcomed by Marey, the famous photographer Nadar, the Salon painter Ernest Meissonier, and the great physiologist Hermann von Helmholtz—some indication of the range of interest in this work that registered perceptual units beyond the limits of human vision.

Unlike Muybridge, who considered himself an artist, Marey was a physiologist by training who had previously worked on graphic methods to record motion. When he first saw work by Muybridge in the science journal *La Nature* in 1878, he turned to photography as a more precise and neutral way to register discrete movement. Marey first devised a photographic gun with a circular plate that yielded near-instantaneous serial photographs from a singular viewpoint. He then used a slotted disk in front of the camera to break up movement in set intervals that could be registered on a single photographic plate; it was this work that he first described as “chronophotography.” In order to avoid superimposition, Marey clad his subjects entirely in black, with metal-studded strips along arms and legs (bits of paper were used for animals). Along with the singular viewpoint, this device effectively restored a spatio-temporal coherence to the very perceptual field that was otherwise fragmented. It was more scientific than the Muybridge approach, which did not have a consistent point of view or interval between images, but it was also less radical in its disruption of the apparent continuum of vision.

It was this disruption that most intrigued the modernists—the Futurists in their pursuit of a subversive speed, and artists like Marcel Duchamp in their search for spatio-temporal dimensions not previously perceived. But could it be that, like Muybridge and Marey, these artists were also involved in a historical dialectic that far exceeded their work as individuals—a modern dialectic of a ceaseless renovation of perception, of a perpetual liberating and redisciplining of vision that would persist throughout the twentieth century?





5 • Umberto Boccioni, *Dynamism of a Speeding Horse and House*, 1914–15  
Gouache, oil, wood, paste-board, copper, and painted iron, 112.9 × 115 (44½ × 45½)

*Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, which retains the traditional sculptural methods of modeling and bronze-casting, the work incorporates industrially produced materials as called for in Boccioni's own manifesto: leather, found fragments of glass, shards of metal, preformed elements of wood. One of the first fully nonrepresentational sculptures of the twentieth century, it compares most adequately with the abstract sculpture produced in ▲ Russia at that time by Vladimir Tatlin.

Insofar as collage surfaced as the key technique in the contradictory range of Futurism's attempts to fuse avant-garde sensibilities with mass culture, Carrà's *Interventionist Demonstration* [6] is a central example of the Futurist aesthetic as it came to a climax just before World War I. Indeed, the work incorporates all of the devices with which Futurism was most engaged: the legacy of divisionist painting; the Cubist fragmentation of traditional perceptual space; the insertion of clippings from newspapers and found materials from advertising; the suggestion of kinesthesia through a visual dynamic set up by the collage's construction as both a vortex and a matrix of crisscrossing power lines set as mutually counteractive diagonals; and last, but not least, the juxtaposition of the separate phonetic dimension of language with its graphic signifiers.

Typically enough, the phonetic performance of language in *Interventionist Demonstration* is in almost all instances onomatopoeic. In directly imitating the sounds of sirens (the wail evoked by "HU-HU-HU-HU"), the screeches of engines and machine guns ("TRrrrrrrrr" or "traak tatataak"), the screams of people ("EVVIVAAA"), it is distinctly different from the structural

analysis of the phonetic, the textual, and the graphic components of language in Russian Cubo-Futurist poetry or the *calligrammes* of ▲ Apollinaire. The juxtaposition of anti-German war slogans ("Down with Austro-Hungary") with found advertising material, or the concatenation of Italian patriotic declarations ("Italia Italia") with musical fragments, continues the technique of Cubist collage but turns this aesthetic into a new model of mass-cultural instigation and propaganda. Its glorification of war is further registered in the drum beats evoked by the words "ZANG TUMB TUUM."

#### A liberation of language: *parole in libertà*

*Zang Tumb Tuum* of 1914, the first collection of Marinetti's "free word poetry" was prefaced by his slightly earlier manifesto of Futurist poetry, *Destruction of Syntax—Imagination without Strings—Words-in-Freedom*. Using a set of expressive typographic and orthographic variations and an unstructured spatial organization, *Zang Tumb Tuum* tries to express the sights, sounds, and smells of the poet's experience in Tripoli. This assertion of "words-in-freedom" emerged from a long and complicated dialogue with late-nineteenth-century Symbolist poetry and its early-twentieth-century legacy in France. Although deeply influenced by, and dependent upon, the example of Mallarmé, Marinetti publicly declared his opposition to the French poet's project. Insisting that



6 • Carlo Carrà, *Interventionist Demonstration*, 1914  
Tempera and collage on cardboard, 38.5 × 30 (15½ × 11½)

words must be liberated from the static and esoteric models of language with which Mallarmé had been engaged, Marinetti promoted a new dynamic of “wireless imagination” intended to assimilate the simultaneity of perception to the new sounds of advertising and technological experience. *Words-in-Freedom* is the programmatic declaration by Marinetti in which all of the traditional fetters to which language had been subjected—lexicality, the production of meaning, syntax, grammar—are supposedly ruptured in favor of a purely phonetic, purely textual, purely graphic performance. But in fact, against Marinetti’s will, the mimetic relationship to the technological apparatus binds this model of poetry all the more into the traditional determinants of linguistic representation.

This was the source of one of the conflicts that arose between ▲ Marinetti and the Russian avant-garde when in 1914 the Italian poet went to Moscow in an attempt to proselytize for Futurism. What the Russian Cubo-Futurist poets criticized Marinetti for was the relationship manifested in his work between poetry and the mimetic operations of language, particularly his use of onomatopoeia—the formation of words imitating sounds associated with the act or objects to be denoted. At that time, the Russian Futurists had already moved to a structuralist understanding of • the arbitrary logic of language, which meant that they enforced a strict separation of both the phonetics and the graphics of signs—the way language sounds and the way it looks—from the natural world to which those signs might refer. So insistent were the Russian Futurists on making this separation the subject of their own writing that they carried it to the point of constructing a new ■ antisemantic and antilexical poetry.

### Fascism and Futurism

The rise of fascism in Italy at the end of World War I brought the ideological and political orientation of Futurism into focus. The celebration of technology, the anti-*passatista* (antitraditionalist) position, the rigorous condemnation of the culture of the past, the violent deformation of the legacies of bourgeois culture, were all essential elements of Futurism from its inception. But these were now linked with an equally passionate affirmation of the necessity to integrate art and warfare as the most advanced instance of the technological. If in the first manifesto Marinetti had constructed a myth of origin for the Futurist movement—he recounts the moment of his awakening when, racing in his sports car, he overturned in the muddy waters of a suburban ditch thereupon to emerge, reborn, as a post-Symbolist artist and Futurist poet—this had already announced a deep commitment to the irrationality of violence and power.

Marinetti’s espousal of advanced industrial technology and the aesthetic of the machine led him to welcome the outbreak of war as a great purification in line with his overall hatred of tradition and bourgeois cultural subjectivity. As the first avant-gardist to set out deliberately to destroy tradition, Marinetti declared his own war by calling for the destruction of cultural institutions—opera houses,

theaters, libraries, museums. In doing so, he positioned Futurist culture at the forefront of a newly emerging rupture between the avant-garde and tradition by organizing the avant-garde as the stage for the annihilation of historical continuity and historical memory. Further, Marinetti’s subsequent, postwar attempt to synchronize art and advanced technology with fascist ideology was to be the only occasion in the history of twentieth-century avant-gardes where a link between these elements was positioned explicitly in the perspective of reactionary right-wing politics.

In the embrace of fascism by Marinetti—who unsuccessfully stood for parliament as a Fascist Party candidate in 1919, and who eventually became Mussolini’s cultural adviser—one of the key problems facing twentieth-century avant-gardes thus emerged. This is the question of whether avant-garde practices are still to be situated within the bourgeois public sphere or whether they should aim to contribute to the formation of different mass-cultural public spheres, be they fascist public spheres (if there could ever be such a ▲ thing) or proletarian public spheres, the goal of Russian and Soviet • artists working at that time. Alternatively, as in the case of Dada, the avant-garde could rally for the destruction of the bourgeois public sphere, including its institutions and discursive formations.

With the accidental death of Boccioni in 1916, the death in battle of Sant’Elia in the same year, and the radical change in political and aesthetic orientation on the parts of Severini and Carrà around the same time, Futurism lost its way as an avant-garde movement (although Marinetti would continue to pursue a Futurist agenda in art, literature, and politics throughout the twenties and thirties). Severini, living in Paris, abandoned his Cubo-divisionist pictorial strategies in 1916 and adopted pure, classical forms inspired by ■ the art of the Italian Renaissance. By returning to tradition in this way, and by using quattrocento painting as the matrix of *italianità*, he was a harbinger of the later, gradual secession of fascist ideology ♦ from modernist practices. This ideology of the nation state would undertake to connect itself instead to the roots of local cultures, whose origins it would seek to recover.

The encounter between Carrà and Giorgio de Chirico in a military hospital in Ferrara in 1917 triggered a further instance of counterreaction within the avant-garde. Carrà had already become restless under the yoke of Futurism and had written that he no longer cared for “emotional electricians’ games.” Now, he absorbed de Chirico’s attention to form [7]. Practically overnight, Carrà abandoned all the Futurist projects with which he had been involved to practice the older man’s *pittura metafisica*. In this sense, the discovery of de Chirico has to be recognized as an integral element of Italian avant-garde thinking at that time. Turning to the geometric solidity of “primitivist” painters such as Le Douanier Rousseau and the early Renaissance artists Giotto and Uccello, Carrà spoke of them as the creators of “plastic worlds,” or better, “plastic tragedies.” His article on Giotto in the newspaper *La Voce* (1915) addressed Giotto as a man devoted to “pure plasticity,” the “fourteenth-century visionary” who brought the “magic silence of forms” back to life. Giotto, he wrote, was dedicated to “the original



7 • Giorgio de Chirico, *The Disquieting Muses*, 1925

Oil on canvas, 97 x 67 (38 1/4 x 26 1/4)

solidity of things." Carrà's celebration of formal solidity as the antidote to Futurist disintegration repeats the terms through which modernist painting had originally developed pictorial stability in reaction against a pursuit of the evanescence of light. "We, who feel that we are the nondegenerate offspring of a great race of builders," Carrà wrote in the catalogue of his 1917 exhibition in Milan, "have always sought precise, substantial figures and terms, and the ideal atmosphere without which a painting does not go beyond elaborate technicalism and episodic analysis of external reality." Thus does Carrà reject Impressionism and the Futurist imitation of its effects. In 1918, Carrà theorized the method that he and de Chirico had developed in the essay "Contributo a un nuovo arte metafisica."

Carrà's *Metaphysical Muse* [8] demonstrates his absorption of de Chirico's visual repertory. On the slanting floorboards of a shallow stage, he places the plaster mannequin of a tennis player, in combination with geometrical solids and painted stage sets of maps and buildings. In fact, all the paintings he showed in the Milan exhibition shared the nocturnal silence of de Chirico's palace courtyards and city squares, interrupted by nothing except long, isolated shadows.



8 • Carlo Carrà, *Metaphysical Muse*, 1917

Oil on canvas, 90 x 66 (35 3/8 x 26)

After noise, silence; after the celebration of the mass displacements imposed by war, praise for the patrician sensibilities of tradition. Carrà's and Severini's emergence from the very ranks of Futurism to become key followers of de Chirico was the first and perhaps the most intense example of the antimodernism or countermodernism that subsequently spread throughout Europe in various parallel movements, to which the collective name "*rappel à l'ordre*" was given. Paradoxically, it was within the art of de Chirico and Carrà that the dimension of historical memory so vituperatively prosecuted and eroded within the first four years of Futurist activity returned with a vengeance, to become the central issue within which these artists would continue to operate. BB/RK

#### FURTHER READING

- Umbro Apollonio (ed.), *Futurist Manifestos* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973)
- Anne Coffin Hanson (ed.), *The Futurist Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1983)
- Pontus Hulten (ed.), *Futurism and Futurisms* (New York: Abbeville Press, and London: Thames & Hudson, 1986)
- Marianne Martin, *Futurist Art and Theory 1909–1915* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968)
- Christine Poggi, *In Defiance of Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992)

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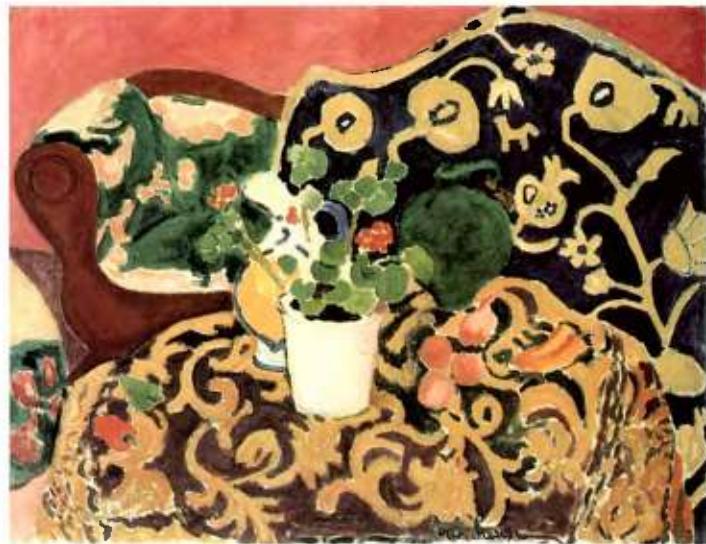
- 112 1910 Henri Matisse's *Dance II* and *Music* are condemned at the Salon d'Automne in Paris; in these pictures, Matisse pushes his concept of the "decorative" to an extreme, creating an expansive visual field of color that is difficult to behold. **YAB**
- 118 1911 Pablo Picasso returns his "borrowed" Iberian stone heads to the Louvre Museum in Paris from which they had been stolen; he transforms his primitivist style and with Georges Braque begins to develop Analytical Cubism. **RK**  
**box • Guillaume Apollinaire** **RK**
- 124 1912 Cubist collage is invented amid a set of conflicting circumstances and events: the continuing inspiration of Symbolist poetry, the rise of popular culture, and Socialist protests against the war in the Balkans. **RK**
- 130 1913 Robert Delaunay exhibits his "Windows" paintings in Berlin: the initial problems and paradigms of abstraction are elaborated across Europe. **HF**
- 137 1914 Vladimir Tatlin develops his constructions and Marcel Duchamp proposes his readymades, the first as a transformation of Cubism, the second as a break with it; in doing so, they offer complementary critiques of the traditional mediums of art. **HF**  
**box • The "Peau de l'Ours"** **RK**
- 142 1915 Kazimir Malevich shows his Suprematist canvases at the "0.10" exhibition in Petrograd, thus bringing the Russian Formalist concepts of art and literature into alignment. **YAB**
- 147 1916a In Zurich, the international movement of Dada is launched in a double reaction to the catastrophe of World War I and the provocations of Futurism and Expressionism. **HF**  
**box • Dada journals** **RK**
- 154 1916b Paul Strand enters the pages of Alfred Stieglitz's magazine *Camera Work*: the American avant-garde forms itself around a complex relationship between photography and the other arts. **RK**  
**box • The Armory Show** **RK**
- 160 1917a After two years of intense research, Piet Mondrian breaks through to abstraction and goes on to invent Neoplasticism. **YAB**
- 166 1917b In October 1917, the journal *De Stijl* is launched by Theo van Doesburg in the small Dutch town of Leiden. It appears monthly until 1922, after which publication is irregular. The last issue dates from 1932 as a posthumous homage to van Doesburg shortly after his death in a Swiss sanatorium. **YAB**
- 172 1918 Marcel Duchamp paints *Tu m'*: his last ever painting summarizes the departures undertaken in his work, such as the use of chance, the promotion of the readymade, and photography's status as an "index." **RK**  
**box • Rose Sélavy** **RK**
- 178 1919 Pablo Picasso has his first solo exhibition in Paris in thirteen years: the onset of pastiche in his work coincides with a widespread antimodernist reaction. **RK**  
**box • Sergei Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes** **RK**  
**box • Rappel à l'ordre** **RK**

Henri Matisse's *Dance II* and *Music* are condemned at the Salon d'Automne in Paris: in these pictures, Matisse pushes his concept of the "decorative" to an extreme, creating an expansive visual field of color that is difficult to behold.

**M**y picture threw me out onto the streets!" Matisse declared to a friend who was surprised by his impromptu visit. Two days earlier this friend had left him carefully preparing his material and, stockpiling groceries, vowing to lock himself up for a month in order to realize an important commission he had just received—and now Matisse felt he could not add a single stroke to his hastily brushed canvas. The picture in question was either *Seville Still Life* or *Spanish Still Life* [1], both painted "in a fever" in December 1910 while the artist was resting in Spain. "This is the work of a nervous man," Matisse would later say of the pair, and indeed there is perhaps no more agitated painting in his entire production than these two still lifes.

The circumstances of their making are worth recalling. Coming back to Paris elated from a trip to Munich, where he had gone to see the first major exhibition ever devoted to Islamic art, Matisse was confronted with an almost unanimously negative critical response to *Dance II* [2] and *Music* [3], the canvases he had sent to the 1910 Salon d'Automne, the annual showcase for contemporary art established seven years earlier (his sole supporter was the poet Guillaume ▲ Apollinaire, for whom he felt no sympathy). By then he was used to such turmoil surrounding his work, to some extent even thriving on it; but this time the hostile consensus hit him hard. Not only did it catch Matisse at a moment when he was particularly fragile (his father had died a day after his return to Paris), it also had an immediate effect on his most courageous and faithful patron, the Russian collector Sergei Shchukin, who had commissioned the two large paintings and had been enthusiastically following their progress from afar. Shchukin arrived in Paris in the midst of this public uproar, and, balking, decided at the eleventh hour not to accept them. (Adding to Matisse's injury, his dealers borrowed his studio to display the work they had convinced Shchukin to purchase instead, the large *grisaille* sketch for a mural by Puvis de Chavannes.)

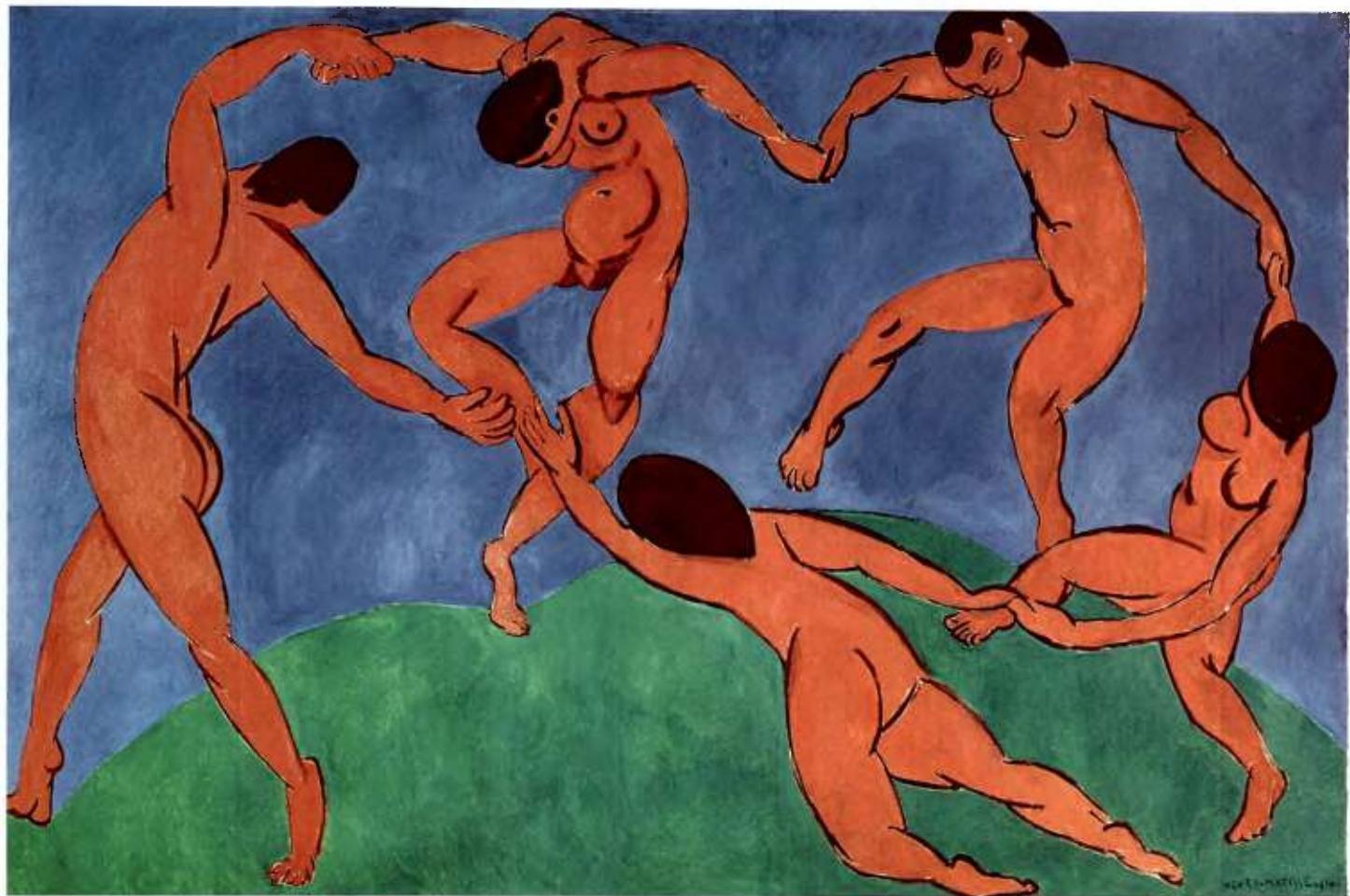
Feeling guilty on his way back to Moscow, Shchukin sent a telegram rescinding his decision and asking for *Dance II* and *Music* to be shipped at great speed, followed by a letter canceling the purchase of the Puvis and apologizing for his momentary weakness. The immediate danger of the end of Shchukin's support was averted, but Matisse was shaken by these about-faces. Mulling over the fickleness of collectors and the treachery of art dealers, he left



1 • Henri Matisse, *Spanish Still Life*, 1910–11  
Oil on canvas, 89 × 116 (35 × 45½")

for Spain, where for a whole month he was unable to sleep or work. There, he received Shchukin's latest commission for two still lifes (which would be very handsomely paid), as well as the news that *Dance II* and *Music* had arrived safely in Moscow ("I hope to come to like them one day," Shchukin wrote).

Rather than taming his style for the new commission, Matisse took a huge gamble—a true "all or nothing"—in carrying one of its features to the extreme, namely the decorative profusion that had characterized many of his works from the previous years, such as the 1908 *Harmony in Red*, which already belonged to Shchukin. As if he had nothing to lose (which was very far from being the case), Matisse refused to retreat toward the neoclassical conception of the decorative represented by Puvis: it is as if he were warning his patron—who had suddenly become worried about the nudity of the figures in *Dance II* and *Music*, and about what was called at the time their "Dionysian" character—that a still life could be just as visually disquieting. One could even argue that, in proposing *Seville Still Life* and *Spanish Still Life* to Shchukin immediately after the two panels the Russian collector had found so hard to swallow, Matisse was deliberately alternating between two modes—one austere, one swarming—as if to demonstrate that they were two sides of the



2 • Henri Matisse, *Dance II*, 1910

Oil on canvas, 260 × 391 (101% × 153%)

same coin. The prior holdings of the Shchukin Collection suggest that this might have been a consistent strategy on the part of Matisse (compare the sparse 1908 *Game of Bowls* and the 1909 *Nymph and Satyr with Harmony in Red*, bought shortly before the still-life commission); and Shchukin's subsequent purchases followed the same pattern (compare the austere 1912 *Conversation with The Painter's Family* or *The Pink Studio* of 1911, bought at the same time).

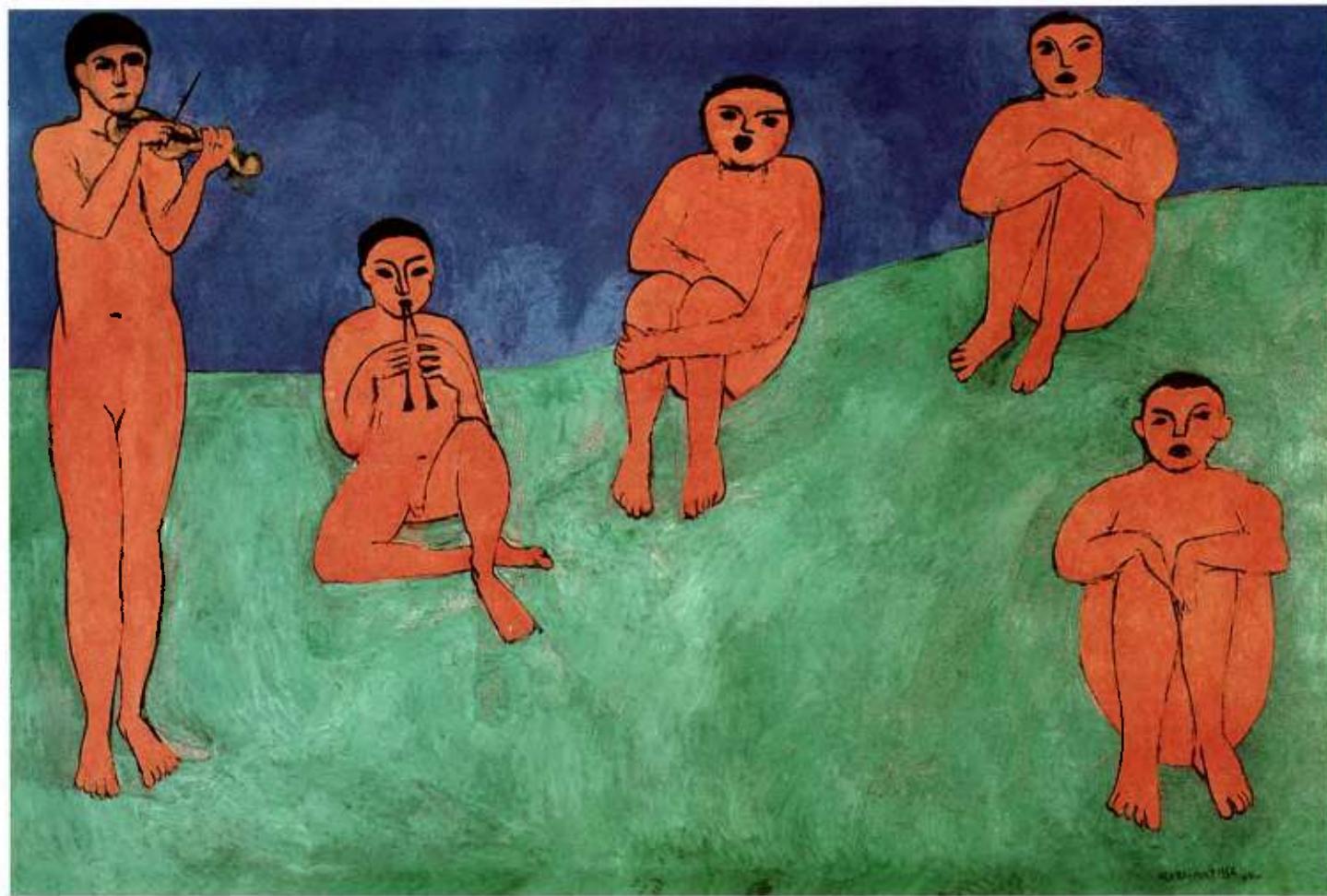
#### An "aesthetic of blinding"

Both *Seville Still Life* and *Spanish Still Life* are difficult to behold—that is, the viewer cannot gaze at their pullulating arabesques and color flashes for very long. As had already happened in *Le Bonheur de vivre*, but now much more so, these paintings appear to spin before the eye; nothing there ever seems to come to rest. Flowers, fruits, and pots pop up like bubbles that dissolve into their busy, swirling background as quickly as one manages to isolate them. The centrality of the figure is dismantled: the viewer feels compelled to look at everything at once, at the whole visual field, but at the same time feels forced to rely on peripheral vision to do so, at the expense of control over that very field.

Now, compare this turbulence with *Music* [3]. At first sight nothing could be more dissimilar to the frantic still lifes than the

sobriety of this large composition. But this difference dwindles once actual scale is taken into consideration. For when confronted with *Music*'s one hundred-plus square feet of saturated color, and its frieze of five musicians evenly distributed on the surface, once again one stumbles upon an aporia of perception: either one tries to contemplate the figures one by one but cannot do so because of the sheer coloristic summons of the rest of the canvas; or, conversely, one attempts to take in the vast surface at a glance but cannot prevent the optical vibrations that are caused by the figures' vermilion forms as they clash with the blue-and-green ground from deflecting our grasp of the visual field. Figure and ground constantly annul each other in a crescendo of energies—that is, the very opposition upon which human perception is based is deliberately destabilized—and our vision ends up blurred, blinded by excess.

This "aesthetic of blinding" was already in place in 1906—it was the result of Matisse's complex negotiations, during the heyday of ▲ Fauvism, with the legacy of Postimpressionism. But it assumed a new urgency around 1908, at which time Matisse reflected upon it in his famous "Notes of a Painter," one of the most articulate artistic manifestos of the twentieth century. There, among other things, Matisse defined the diffraction of the gaze that he was aiming for as the core of his concept of expression: "Expression, for me,



3 • Henri Matisse, *Music*, 1910

Oil on canvas, 260 × 389 (101½ × 153¼)

does not reside in passions glowing in a human face or manifested by a violent movement. The entire arrangement of my picture is expressive: the place occupied by the figures, the empty spaces around them, the proportions, everything has its share." In other words, as he would keep saying all his life, "expression and decoration are one and the same thing."

#### Matisse answers the younger Picasso

Many factors contributed to the sudden acceleration of Matisse's art and theoretical sophistication in 1908. One of them, perhaps the most important, was his competition with Picasso. In the fall of 1907 he had seen *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Picasso's direct answer to both his *Le Bonheur de vivre* and his *Blue Nude*. The painting had made Matisse uneasy, in part because it had carried primitivism further than any of his own previous attempts, and he had to respond.

His first reply was the large *Bathers with a Turtle* [4], one of his barest and eeriest canvases (the primitivism of the central, standing nude has been noted by all commentators). Countering Picasso's "Medusa effect," Matisse turned the glare of his giant nudes away from the beholder—but not without signaling that a simple retreat

to the traditional regime of mimetic identification was no longer an available option (on this point he was concurring with Picasso). The picture is not the depiction of a bucolic scene, nor is it an allegory. What are these huge creatures doing, feeding a turtle they do not even look at? We cannot understand the motive of their action any more than they seem able to communicate it among themselves. The spectator is left to ponder over the enigmatic "expression" of the standing nude or that of her seated neighbor. But no clue is given by their surroundings. For the first time in Matisse's work the decor is reduced to modulated bands of plain color, as in Byzantine mosaics: green for the grass, blue for the water, blue-green for the somber sky—a cipher of a landscape, frontally facing us. This is an uninhabitable world, into which we are not invited.

Shchukin had perceived the profound melancholy of this work and, saddened that it had been sold to another collector, he asked Matisse for a substitute. That was to be *Game of Bowls*, a far less powerful painting, but indicative of the direction Matisse's work was to take. The "landscape" is as bare as in *Bathers with a Turtle* (though the color spectrum is much lighter), but now formal rhythms set the composition in motion (the three dark-haired heads of the players being ironically echoed by their three green bowls). There are no mysterious expressions here: the distorted

faces of Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* are no longer Matisse's concern; the features of the bathers are written in shorthand. The visual rhythm, whose function was still embryonic in *Bathers with a Turtle*, is now what unifies the canvas.

The next step was *Harmony in Red* [5], Matisse's first fully successful realization of what would be his lifelong pictorial program: a surface so tense that our gaze rebounds from it; a composition so dispersed, so rippled with echoes in all directions, that we cannot gaze at it selectively; a maze so energetic that it always seems to expand laterally. Matisse made one last attempt at painting in Picasso's centripetal mode in his *Nymph and Satyr* of late 1908 (again for Shchukin), one of his very few paintings with a violent theme. But this was to remain an exception (matched only by a series of drawings and unfinished canvases on the same theme from 1935, and by the studies for *The Stations of the Cross* ceramic panel in the Vence Chapel from 1949): after it, we will not be asked

to look at an action from a distance; instead, we will be confronted with a wall of painting forcing its color saturation onto us.

A certain form of violence is implied by this kind of address. Today, after so many pages praising Matisse as the painter of "happiness" (or, conversely, berating his "hedonism"), the particular type of aggressiveness embedded in his art is somewhat veiled. But the fiercely negative response that he received at the time—▲ which kept accelerating from the reception of *Luxe, calme et volupté* at the 1905 Salon des Indépendants, through the Fauve scandal of 1905 and the cries that greeted *Le Bonheur de vivre* in 1906 and *Blue Nude* in 1907, to the nearly universal condemnation of *Dance II* and *Music* in 1910—is a clear indication that he was touching a sensitive nerve. What became obvious in the case of the reception of these last two works is that it was precisely Matisse's conception of the "decorative" that was perceived as a slap in the face of tradition—the tradition of painting as well as the tradition of beholding.



4 • Henri Matisse, *Bathers with a Turtle*, 1908

Oil on canvas 179.1 × 220.3 (70½ × 87⅔)

▲ 1908



5 • Henri Matisse, *Harmony in Red*, 1908

Oil on canvas. 180 × 220 (70½ × 86⅔")

### Hypnotic "decorations"

It was not by chance that Matisse's dealers had been quick to offer Shchukin a Puvis in replacement for his two panels. High expectations were vested in the notion of the "decorative" at that very moment, the 1910 Salon marking the climax of the numerous debates that had been raging on the issue since the turn of the century (it was deemed capable of restoring the greatness of French art after the crisis of representation engendered by Postimpressionism and further deepened by Fauvism and Cubism). A return to Puvis—"decorative" compositions draped in a neoclassical rhetoric—was called for, but this is exactly what Matisse refused to condone. He labeled *Dance II* and *Music* "decorative panels" when sending them to the Salon, and this enraged the critics: the paintings were not made to soothe the eye, to gently adorn a wall; they were the crude product of a madman, posterlike bacchanals that threatened to swirl out of their frame.

The high-pitched color was obviously a major cause of this resistance, but it would not have had such an impact if it had not been for the ample scale of the works (not only are they large but also the number of elements they display are reduced: in each canvas there are only five figures of the same "lobster" color, as was said at the time, and two background zones—blue for the sky and green for the land). In fact, the coloristic impact of *Dance II* and *Music*, which remained unequaled in painting until the large canvases of Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman in the late forties, provided the clearest confirmation of Matisse's principle according to which "a square centimeter of blue is less blue than a square meter of the same blue." ▲

But if the anticlassical decenteredness of these works was perceived as a threat, and criticized in *Music* even more than in *Dance II*, it is also because with them Matisse finally found a means to emulate properly, though with different means, Picasso's apotropaic stance in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. Although it is just as bare as *Music*, *Dance II* partakes in the profuse mode of Matisse's

notion of the "decorative." Looking at it, we are condemned to endless motion, forbidden to let our gaze ever break the circling round of its feverish arabesque. The only escape from this hypnotic frenzy is to recoil, just as Matisse had done, panicked in front of his own Spanish still lifes. Yet *Music* is more powerful, though in a subtler fashion, in this interdiction to join in peacefully.

Like Picasso's *Les Demoiselles*, this painting had begun as a genre scene, the five musicians (among them a woman) looking at each other, interacting. In the final canvas, the figures, now all male, have undergone the same ninety-degree rotation that Leo Steinberg discussed in Picasso's painting: stilted in their pose, ignoring each other, they stare terrifyingly at us. Matisse himself is said to have been afraid by what he called the "silence" of this canvas: in contrast with the sweeping movement of *Dance II*, in *Music* everything is arrested. The black holes of the three singers' mouths are unequivocally morbid (closer to signaling death than sound); the violinist's bow poised before the downstroke is nothing but ominous. In his review of the Salon, Yakov Tugenhold, one of the most gifted Russian critics of the time (Shchukin paid careful attention to his prose), described the figures of *Music* as "boy werewolves hypnotized by the first-ever strains of the first instruments." No critical metaphor could better indicate that in this canvas Matisse is charting the same Freudian territory as Picasso had done in his brothel scene, for, even more than *Les Demoiselles*, *Music* is akin to the image of the Wolf-Man's dream. We have to add a proviso to Tugenhold's metaphor, however: it is not the musicians but the spectators who are hypnotized.

This hypnosis is based on a pendulum in our perception that makes us switch from our incapacity to focus on the figures to that of seizing the whole visual field at once, an oscillation that defines the very invention of Matisse's concept of the "decorative," and which is particularly difficult to obtain in a sparse composition. It is thus not surprising that Matisse should have preferred the overcrowded mode as a surefire means to keep the beholder's gaze moving. It should be noted, however, that he never totally relinquished the barren version of the decorative, that it played a major role in his production at several key moments of his career, most notably when his rivalry with Picasso was at stake. One such moment was when he was trying to learn the language of Cubism, from 1913 to 1917 (after which he retreated to Nice and into Impressionism until 1931, when the conjoined commissions of an illustrated Mallarmé book and that of a mural on the theme of Dance for the Barnes Foundation led him back to the aesthetics of his youth). From Matisse's "Cubist" years date works such as *French Window in Collioure* (1914) or *The Yellow Curtain* (c. 1915), so strikingly similar, once again, to works by Rothko or Newman, or *The Blue Window* (1913) and *The Piano Lesson* (1916), whose oneiric atmosphere the Surrealist poet André Breton found so appealing. ▲

The works immediately following *Dance II* and *Music*, however, swung in the other direction. After the two "nervous" Spanish still lifes came the famous large interiors of 1911, *The Red Studio*, *Interior with Eggplants* [6], *The Pink Studio*, and *The Painter's Family* (the last



6 • Henri Matisse, *Interior with Eggplants*, 1911

Oil on canvas, 212 x 246 (82½ x 96⅔)

two immediately purchased by Shchukin). Less frenetic than the pictures done at Seville, and considerably larger, they explore the same isotropic universe in expansion. In *The Red Studio*, a monochrome bath of redness floods the field, annulling even the possibility of contour (which exists only negatively, as unpainted, reserved areas of the canvas); in *The Painter's Family*, the multiplication of decorative patterns that surround the figure makes us oblivious to the most violent color contrasts, such as the opposition between the unmitigated black dress of the standing figure and the lemon-yellow book she holds; in *Interior with Eggplants*, the most underrated but most radical work of the series, everything cooperates in leading us astray: the pulsating repetition of the flower motif that invades floor and walls and blurs their demarcation; the reflection in the mirror that coloristically matches the landscape outside the window and confuses levels of reality; the syncopated rhythm and different

scales of the ornamental fabrics; the gestures of the two sculptures (one on the table, the other on the mantelpiece) that rhyme with the arabesques of the folded screen. The three eggplants that give the painting its title are right in the middle of the canvas, but Matisse has blinded us to them and it is only through a conscious effort that we manage, only fleetingly, to locate them. YAB

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Pablo Picasso returns his “borrowed” Iberian stone heads to the Louvre Museum in Paris from which they had been stolen: he transforms his primitivist style and with Georges Braque begins to develop Analytical Cubism.

**D**uring 1907, the year in which the poet-critic Guillaume Apollinaire employed him as a secretary, the young rascal Géry Pieret would regularly ask Apollinaire’s artist- and writer-friends if they would like anything from the Louvre. They assumed, of course, that he meant the Louvre Department Store. In fact, he meant the Louvre Museum, from which he had taken to stealing various items displayed in undervisited galleries.

It was on his return from one of these pilfering trips that Pieret offered two archaic Iberian stone heads to Picasso, who had discovered this type of sculpture in 1906 in Spain and had used it for his portrait of the American writer Gertrude Stein. Substituting the prismatic physiognomy of its carving—the heavily lidded, staring eyes; the continuous plane that runs the forehead into the bridge of the nose; the parallel ridges that form the mouth—for the sitter’s face, Picasso was convinced that this impassive mask was “truer” to Stein’s likeness than any faithfulness to her actual features could be. He was thus only too happy to acquire these talismanic objects; and “Pieret’s heads” went on to serve as the basis for the features of the three left-hand nudes in *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*.

But in 1911, when Pieret disastrously popped back up in the lives of both Apollinaire and Picasso, primitivism had been left behind in the artist’s development of Cubism, and thus the heads had long since vanished from his pictorial concerns, if not from the back of his cupboard. Picasso’s sudden problem was that at the end of August 1911 Pieret had taken his latest Louvre “acquisition” to the offices of *Paris Journal*, selling the newspaper his story about how easy it was to filch from the museum. Since the Louvre had just suffered, one week earlier, the theft of its most precious object, Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa*, and a dragnet was being set up by the Paris police, Apollinaire panicked, alerted Picasso, and the two of them handed Picasso’s Iberian heads over to the newspaper, which, publishing this turn of events as well, led the authorities to both poet and painter. They were taken in for questioning, Apollinaire being held far longer than Picasso, but were eventually released without charge.

### The rise of analysis

The artistic distance that separated Picasso in late 1911 from the primitivism for which the heads had served him earlier was

enormous. The Iberian heads and African masks that Picasso had used as models in 1907 and 1908 had been a means of “distortion,” to use the term of art historian Carl Einstein when, in 1929, he tried to understand the development of Cubism. But this “simplistic” distortion, Einstein wrote, gave way “to a period of analysis and fragmentation and finally to a period of synthesis.” Analysis was also the word applied to the shattering of the surfaces of objects and their amalgamation to the space around them when Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Picasso’s dealer during Cubism’s development, sat down to write the most serious early account of the movement, *The Rise of Cubism* (1920). And so the term *analytical* got appended to Cubism, and “Analytical Cubism” became the rubric under which to contemplate the transformation Picasso and Georges Braque had achieved in 1911. For by that time, they had swept away the unified perspective of centuries of naturalistic painting and had invented instead a pictorial language that would translate coffee cups and wine bottles, faces and torsos, guitars and pedestal tables into so many tiny, slightly tilted planes.

To look at any work from this “analytical” phase of Cubism, Picasso’s *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* of 1910 [1], for instance, or Braque’s *The Portuguese (The Emigrant)* from 1911–12 [2], is to observe several consistent characteristics. First, there is a strange contraction of the painters’ palettes, from the full color spectrum to an abstemious monochrome—Braque’s picture is all ochers and umbers like a sepia-toned photograph; Picasso’s, mainly pewter and silver with a few glints of copper. Second, there is an extreme flattening of the visual space as though a roller had pressed all the volume out of the bodies, bursting their contours open in the process so that what little surrounding space remains could flow effortlessly inside their eroded boundaries. Third, there is the visual vocabulary used to describe the physical remains of this explosive process.

This, given its proclivity for the geometrical, supports the “Cubist” appellation. It consists, on the one hand, of shallow planes set more or less parallel to the picture surface, their slight tilt a matter of the patches of light and shade that flicker over the entire field, darkening one edge of a given plane only to illuminate the other but not doing this in any way consistent with a single light source. On the other, it establishes a linear network that scores the

entire surface with an intermittent grid: at certain points, identifiable as the edges of described objects—Kahnweiler's jacket lapels or his jawline, for instance, or the Portuguese sitter's sleeve or the neck of his guitar; at others, the edges of planes that, scaffoldlike, seem merely to be structuring the space; and at still others, a vertical or horizontal trace that attaches to nothing at all but continues the grid's repetitive network. Finally, there are the small grace-notes of naturalistic details, such as the single arc of Kahnweiler's mustache or the double one of his watch-chain.

Given the exceedingly slight information we can gain from this about either the figures or their settings, the explanations that grew up around Picasso's and Braque's Cubism at this time are extremely curious. For whether it was Apollinaire in his essays collected as *The Cubist Painters* (1913), or the artists Albert Gleizes (1881–1953) and Jean Metzinger (1883–1956) in their book *On Cubism* (1912), or any of the critics and poets gathered around the movement, such as André Salmon (1881–1969) or Maurice Raynal (1884–1954), all the writers attempted to justify this swerve away from realism by arguing that what was being delivered to the viewer was *more* not less knowledge of the depicted object. Stating that natural vision is impoverished since we can never see the whole of a three-dimensional object from any single vantage point—the most we see of a cube, for example, is three of its faces—they argued that Cubism overcomes this handicap by breaking with a single perspective to show the sides and back simultaneously with the front, so that we apprehend the thing from everywhere, grasping it conceptually as a composite of the views we would have if we actually moved around it. Positing the superiority of conceptual knowledge over merely perceptual realism, these writers inevitably gravitated toward the language of science, describing the break with perspective as a move toward non-Euclidean geometry, or the simultaneity of distinct spatial positions as a function of the fourth dimension.

### The laws of painting as such

Kahnweiler, who had exhibited the 1908 Braque landscapes that gave Cubism its name (the journalist-critic Louis Vauxcelles wrote that Braque had reduced "everything to geometric schemas, to cubes"), and who had been active as Picasso's dealer since 1909, had a very different argument to make about the inner workings of Cubism, one far easier to reconcile with how the paintings actually look. Cut off by the outbreak of World War I from his Paris gallery and the pictorial movement he had followed so closely, Kahnweiler used his time in Switzerland to reflect on the meaning of Cubism, composing his explanation in 1915–16.

Arguing that Cubism was exclusively concerned with bringing about the unity of the pictorial object, *The Rise of Cubism* defines this unity as the necessary fusion of two seemingly irreconcilable opposites: the depicted volumes of "real" objects and the flatness of the painter's own physical object (just as "real" as anything in the world before the artist), which is the canvas plane of the picture. Reasoning that the pictorial tool to represent volume had always

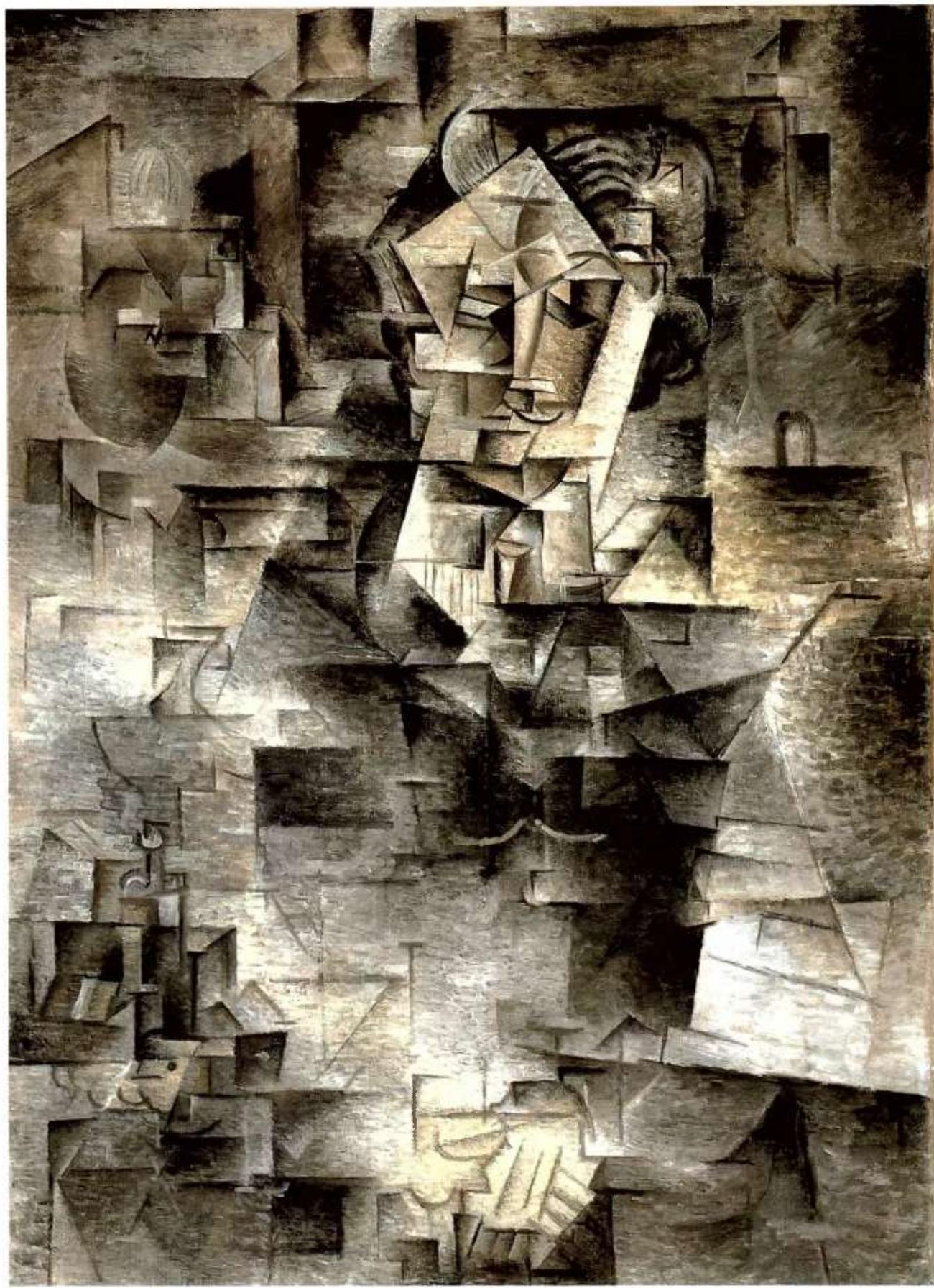


Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918)

Born the illegitimate son of a member of the lesser Polish nobility, Guillaume Albert Apollinaire de Kostrowitzky grew up on the French Riviera among the cosmopolitan *demi-monde*. At seventeen, deeply affected by the poets Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé, he composed a handwritten anarcho-symbolist "newspaper" filled with his own poems and articles. Apollinaire soon became an active figure in a Parisian avant-garde that included Alfred Jarry and André Salmon, and he met Picasso in 1903. Together with Salmon and Max Jacob, he formed the group known as the *bande à Picasso* (the Picasso gang). Having started to write art criticism in 1905, he steadily campaigned for advanced painting, publishing *The Cubist Painters* in 1913, the same year in which he published the major collection of his poems *Alcools*. At the outbreak of World War I, Apollinaire enlisted in the French Army and was sent to the front in early 1915. From there, he mailed a stream of postcards to his friends containing his notes and *calligrammes*, the typographically experimental poems he published in 1918.

Hit by shrapnel in the trenches in early 1916, Apollinaire was trepanned and returned to Paris. In 1917, he delivered the lecture "L'esprit nouveau et les poètes," and in 1918 he staged the play *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, both of them anticipating the aesthetics of Surrealism. Weakened by his wounds, he succumbed to an influenza epidemic that swept Paris in November 1918.

been the shading that brings forms into illusionistic relief, and that shading was a matter of the gray- or tonal-scale alone, Kahnweiler saw the logic of banishing color from the Cubist "analysis" and of solving the problem in part by using the shading tool against its own grain: creating the lowest possible relief so that depicted volume would be far more reconcilable with the flat surface. Further, he explained the logic of piercing the envelopes of closed volumes in order to override the gaps opened up between the edges of objects and thus to be able to declare the unbroken continuity of the canvas plane. If he ended by declaring that "this new language has given painting an unprecedented freedom," this was not as an argument about conceptual mastery over the world's empirical data—as in Apollinaire's notion of Cubism keeping up with



1 • Pablo Picasso, *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, Fall-Winter 1910

Oil on canvas, 100.6 × 72.8 (39½ × 28½)

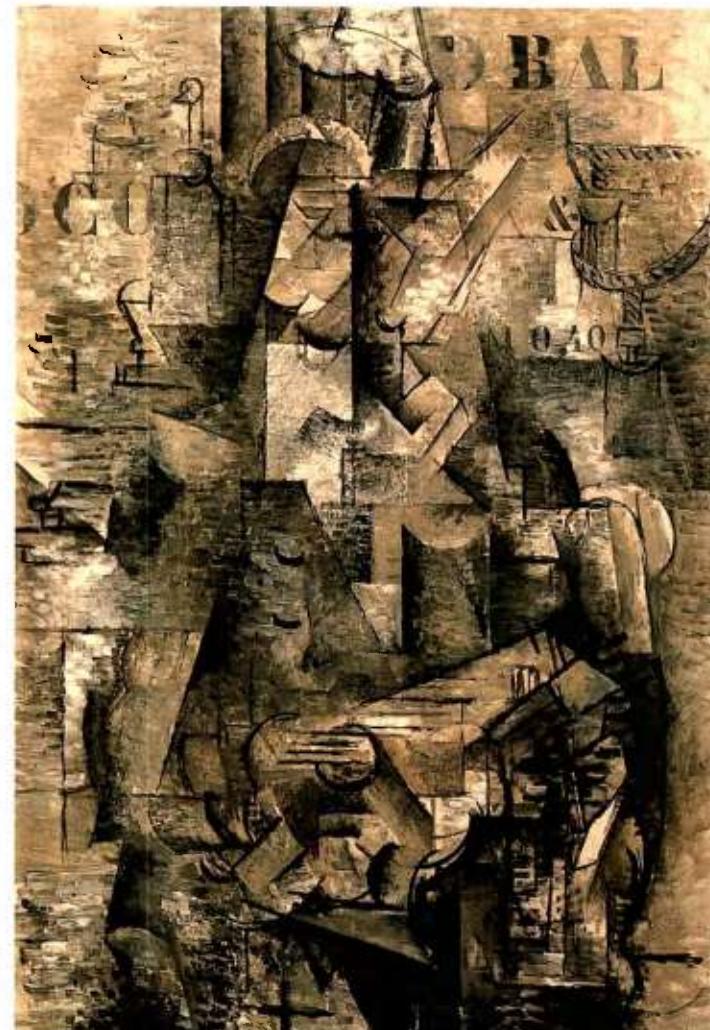
modern science—but one of securing the autonomy and internal logic of the picture object.

This explanation, dismissing extra-pictorial motivations for Cubism, accorded with the understanding of those who used the new style, as Piet Mondrian would, as the basis for developing a purely abstract art. Not that Mondrian was disengaged from the world of modernity, such as developments in science and industry, but he believed that for a painter to be modern he needed first and foremost to understand the logic of his own domain and to make this understanding evident in his work. Such a theory would later emerge as the doctrine of “modernism” (as opposed to modernity) that the American critic Clement Greenberg would enunciate in the early sixties by arguing that modernist painting had adopted the approach of scientific rationalism and of Enlightenment logic by limiting its practice to the area of “its own competence” and thus—exhibiting “what was unique and irreducible in each particular art”—to demonstrating the laws of painting rather than those of nature.

It is not surprising, then, that Greenberg’s discussion of how Cubism developed would reinforce Kahnweiler’s. Tracing an unbroken progression toward the compression of pictorial space, beginning with *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* and ending with the 1912 invention of collage, Greenberg saw Analytical Cubism as the increasing fusion of two types of flatness: the “depicted flatness” by which the tilted planes shoved the fragmented objects closer and closer to the surface; and the “literal flatness” of that surface itself. If by 1911 in a picture such as Braque’s *The Portuguese* [2], Greenberg said, these two types of flatness threatened to have become indistinguishable, so that the grid would seem to be articulating only one surface and one flatness, the Cubists responded by adding illusionistic devices, only now ones that would “undeceive the eye,” rather than, as in traditional practice, continuing to fool it. Such devices consisted of things like a depicted “nail” seeming to pierce the top of a canvas so as fictively to cast its shadow onto the surface “beneath” it; or they are to be found in the stenciled lettering of *The Portuguese*, which, by demonstrably sitting on top of the canvas surface (the result of the letters’ semimechanical application), pushes the little patches of shading and the barely tilted geometric shapes back into the field of depicted relief just “below” that surface.

#### A mountain to climb

In pointing to the fact that Braque adopted these devices earlier than Picasso—not only the stenciled lettering and the nails illusionistically tacking the whole canvas to the studio wall but also the wood-graining patterns employed by house painters—Greenberg set up an internal competition between the two artists, thereby rupturing their “cordée,” or self-proclaimed posture of having been roped together like mountaineers as they explored their new pictorial terrain (their collaboration was so shared that they often did not sign their own paintings). This vision of a race toward flatness was further enhanced by the question of which of the two first



2 • Georges Braque, *The Portuguese (The Emigrant)*, Fall 1911–early 1912  
Oil on canvas, 114.6 × 81.6 (45½ × 32½)

1910–1912

internalized the lessons of late Cézanne by adopting the practice of visual slippage between adjacent elements (called *passage*, in French) that was an early version of the Cubist piercing of the spatial envelopes of objects.

Yet as our eyes become increasingly accustomed to this group of paintings, we realize that the works of the two men are consistently differentiated by the greater concern for transparency in Braque’s and the denser, more tactile quality of Picasso’s—something underscored by the latter’s interest in exploring the possibilities of Cubism for sculpture. This compressed sense of density, this interest in the experience of touch, made art historian Leo Steinberg protest against the merging of the two artists’ concerns and thus the blurring of our vision of individual pictures.

Indeed, Picasso’s overwhelming concern with a vestigial kind of depth—manifested most dramatically in the landscapes he painted in Spain at Horta de Ebro in 1909 [3]—makes the whole schema of Cubism’s development by a progressive flattening of pictorial space seem peculiarly incomplete. For in these works, where we seem to be looking upward—houses ascending a hill toward the top of a mountain, for example, their splayed-apart roof and wall planes



3 • Pablo Picasso, *Houses on the Hill, Horta de Ebro*, Summer 1909  
Oil on canvas. 65 × 81.5 (25½ × 32⅓)



4 • Pablo Picasso, *Girl with a Mandolin (Fanny Tellier)*, Spring 1910  
Oil on canvas. 100.3 × 73.6 (39½ × 29)

allying them with the frontal picture surface—and yet, in total contradiction, to be precipitously plunging downward through the full-blown spatial chasm opened between the houses, it is not flatness that is at issue but quite another matter. This could be called the rupture between visual and tactile experience, something that had obsessed nineteenth-century psychology with the problem of how the separate pieces of sensory information could be unified into a single perceptual manifold.

This problem enters the writing on Cubism as well, as when Gleizes and Metzinger say in *On Cubism* that “the convergence which perspective teaches us to represent cannot evoke the idea of depth,” so that “to establish pictorial space, we must have recourse to tactile and motor sensations.” However, the idea of a simultaneous spatial composite, the solution they thought Cubism had reached, was very far from Picasso’s results at Horta, where, as ▲ Gertrude Stein insisted, the style was born. For the Horta paintings tear the composite apart. They make depth something tactile, a matter of bodily sensation, a vertiginous plunge down through the center of the work. And they make vision something veil-like (and thus strangely compressed to the flatness of a screen): the array of shapes hung always parallel to our plane of vision to form that shimmering, curtainlike veil that James Joyce called the “diaphane.”

Thus, if for his part Picasso was interested in late Cézanne, his focus was on something different from Braque’s interest in the reconciliatory effect of *passage*. It was, instead, on the effect of divisiveness to be found in Cézanne’s late paintings, as when in many still lifes the objects on the table hang decorously in visual space but, as the floor on which that table sits approaches the position of the painter/viewer, the boards seem to give way beneath our feet. In doing so, the works dramatize the separation of sensory channels of experience—visual versus tactile—thereby bringing the painter up against the problem of visual skepticism, namely that the only tool at his or her command is vision, but that depth is something vision can never directly see. The poet and critic Maurice Raynal had touched on this skepticism in 1912 when he referred to “Berkeley’s idealism” and spoke of the “inadequacy” and “error” of painting dependent on vision. As we have seen, the consistent position of such a critic was to substitute “conception” for vision, and thus “to fill in a gap in our seeing.” Picasso, however, seemed not to be interested in filling in this gap, but instead, in exacerbating it, like a sore that will not heal.

Unlike Braque’s attention to still life, Picasso therefore returned again and again to the subject of portraiture. There he pursued the logic of the way his sitters—his lovers and closest friends—were fated to vanish from his tactile connection to them behind the visual veil of the “diaphane” with its frontalized shapes; but at the same time he expressed his dismay at this fact by the display of gratuitously “helpless” pockets of shading, a velvety voluptuousness increasingly detached from the volumes they would formerly have described. This is to be found behind the right arm and breast of Fanny Tellier (the sitter for *Girl with a Mandolin* [4]) or in the area around Kahnweiler’s chin and ear.

▲ 1907



5 • Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Chair Caning*, 1912

Oil and pasted oilcloth on canvas, surrounded with rope, 27 x 34.9 (10 1/2 x 13 1/2)

And nowhere is this disjunction between the visual and the tactile as absolute and as economically stated than in the *Still Life with Chair Caning* [5] that Picasso painted in the spring of 1912, near the very end of Analytical Cubism. Affixing a length of rope around the edge of an oval canvas, Picasso creates a little still life that appears both to be set within the carved frame of a normal painting, and thus arranged in relation to the vertical field of our plane of vision, and to be laid out on the surface of an oval table, the carved edge of which is presented by the same rope and the covering for which is given literally by a glued-on section of printed oilcloth. Like the downward plunge at Horta, the table-top view is presented as one alternative here, a horizontal in direct opposition to the "diaphane's" vertical, a bodily perspective declaring the tactile as separate from the visual.

Braque's commitment to transparency declares his fidelity to the visuality of the visual arts, his obedience to the tradition of painting-as-diaphane. His *Homage to J. S. Bach* (1911–12) places a violin (signaled by the telltale "f"-holes and the scroll of its neck)

on a table behind a music-stand holding the score titled "J. S. BACH" (a slant rhyme on Braque's name). Because of the patchy shading, each object reads clearly behind the other and the still life falls before our eyes like a lacy curtain. RK

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# 1912

Cubist collage is invented amid a set of conflicting circumstances and events: the continuing inspiration of Symbolist poetry, the rise of popular culture, and Socialist protests against the war in the Balkans.

▲ f modernism consistently allied itself with “the shock of the new,” the form this took in poetry was expressed by Guillaume Apollinaire in the summer of 1912 as he abruptly changed the title of his forthcoming book of poems from the Symbolist-sounding *Eau de vie* to the more popularly jazzy *Alcools* and hastily wrote a new work to add to the collection. This poem, “Zone,” registered the jolt that modernity had delivered to Apollinaire by celebrating the linguistic pleasures of billboards and street signs.

Apollinaire’s announcement came at the very moment when a former literary avant-garde was transforming itself into the establishment through the newly formed magazine *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (N. R. F.) and its championing of writers such as André Gide, Paul Valéry, and most importantly—with Albert Thibaudet’s scholarly study now devoted to him—Stéphane Mallarmé. But what Apollinaire was signaling was that the barricade that Symbolism—and Mallarmé in particular—had tried to erect between newspaper journalism and poetry had now broken open. One had only to look at “Zone” to see this. “The handbills, catalogs, posters that sing out loud and clear,” it proclaims, “that’s the morning’s poetry, and for prose there are the newspapers ... tabloids lurid with police reports.”

Newsapers, which “Zone” celebrated as a source for literature, proved the turning-point for Cubism as well, particularly Picasso’s, as, in the fall of 1912, he transformed Analytical Cubism into the new medium of collage. If collage literally means “gluing,” Picasso had, of course, already begun this process earlier in the year ▲ with his *Still Life with Chair Caning*, an Analytical Cubist painting onto which he had glued a swathe of mechanically printed oilcloth. But the mere attachment of foreign matter to an unchanged ■ pictorial conception—as in the case of the Futurist painter Gino Severini, who, in 1912, fixed real sequins onto his frenetic depictions of dancers—was quite distinct from the path Cubism was to follow once Braque introduced [1], and Picasso took up, the integration of relatively large-scale paper shapes onto the surfaces of Cubist drawings.

With this development—called *papier collé*—the entire vocabulary of Cubism suddenly changed. Gone were the little canted planes with fractured patches of modeling, sometimes attached at their corners, sometimes floating freely or gravitating toward a

section of the picture’s gridded surface. In their place now were papers of various shapes and descriptions: wallpapers, newspapers, bottle labels, musical scores, even bits of the artist’s old, discarded drawings. Overlaying each other the way papers would on a desk or work table, these sheets align themselves with the frontality of the supporting surface; and beyond signaling the surface’s frontal condition, they also declare it to be paper-thin, only as deep as the distance from the topmost sheet to the ones below it.

Visually, however, the operations of *papier collé* work against this simple literalism, as when, for instance, several papers combine to force the background sheet to read as the frontmost element by defining it—against the grain of its material position—as the surface of the leading object on the still life’s table, a wine bottle, perhaps, or a musical instrument [2]. The visual play of such a “figure–ground reversal” had also been a staple of much of Analytical Cubism. But collage now went beyond this into the declaration of a rupture with what could be called—using the semiological term for it—the “iconic” itself.

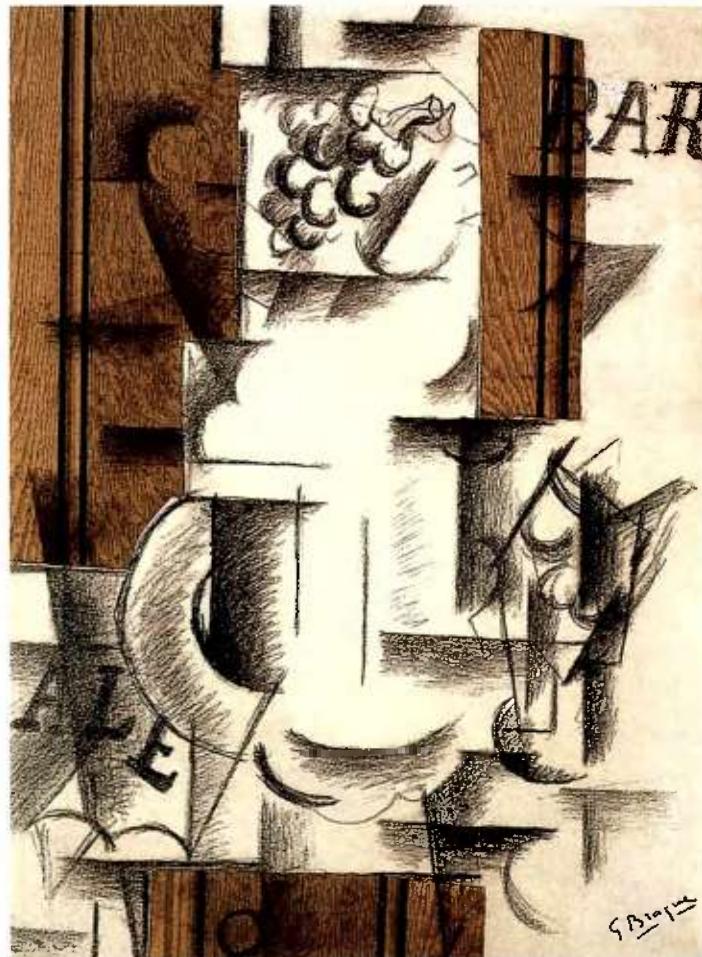
Visual representation had always presumed that its domain was the “iconic,” in the sense of the image’s possessing some level of resemblance to the thing it portrayed. A matter of “looking like,” resemblance could survive many levels of stylization and remain intact as a coherent system of representation: that square attached to that inverted triangle joined to those zigzag shapes producing, say, the visual identities of head, torso, and legs. What seemed to have nothing to do with the iconic was the domain the semiologists call “symbolic,” by which they mean the wholly arbitrary signs (because in no way resembling the referent) that make up, for example, language: the words *dog* and *cat* bearing no visible or audible connection to the meanings they represent or to the objects to which those meanings refer.

## Swept away

It was by adopting just this arbitrary form of the “symbolic” that Picasso’s collage declared its break with a whole system of representation based on “looking like.” The clearest example brings this about by deploying two newspaper shapes in such a way as to declare that they were cut, jigsaw-puzzle fashion, from a single

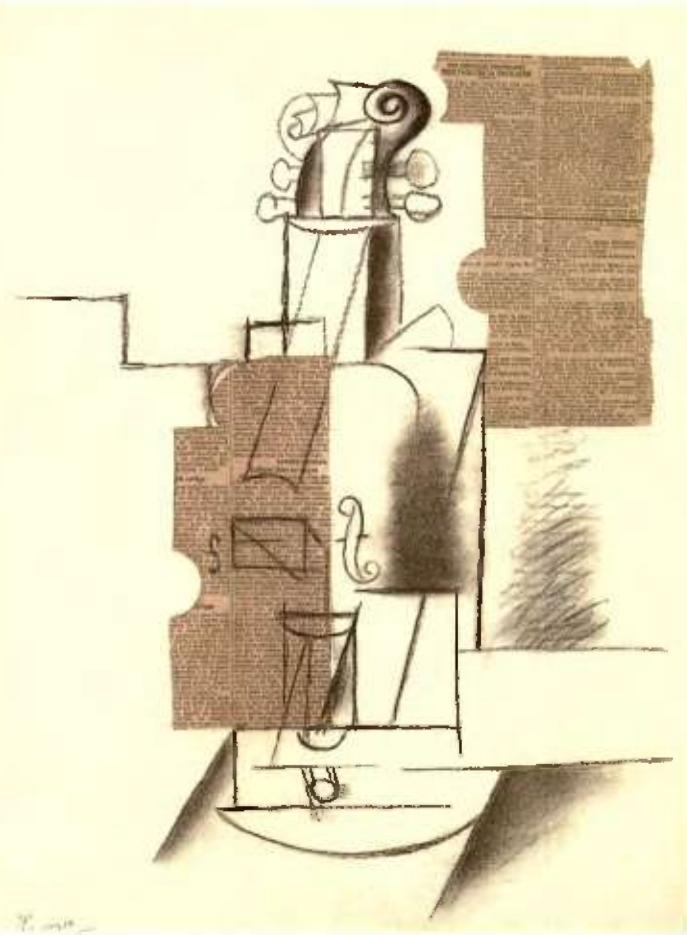
original sheet [2]. One of these fragments sits within a passage of charcoal drawing to establish the solid face of a violin, the paper's lines of type functioning as a stand-in for the grained wood of the instrument. The other, however, gravitating to the upper right of the collage, declares itself not the continuation of its "twin" but, instead, the contradictory opposite, since *this* fragment's lines of type now appear to assume the kind of broken or scumbled color through which painters have traditionally indicated light-filled atmosphere, thereby organizing the newsprint piece as a sign for "background" in relation to the violin's "figure."

▲ Using what semiologists would call a "paradigm"—a binary opposition through which each half of the pair gains its meaning by *not* signifying the other—the collage's manipulation of this pair declares that what any element in the work will mean will be entirely a function of a set of negative contrasts rather than the positive identification of "looking like." For even if the two elements are literally cut from the same cloth, the oppositional system into which they are now bound contrasts the meaning of one—opaque, frontal, objective—with that of the other—transparent, luminous, amorphous. Picasso's collage thus makes the elements of the work function according to the structural-linguistic definition of the sign itself as "relative, opposite, and negative." In doing so, collage seems not only to have taken on the visually arbitrary condition of



1 • Georges Braque, *Fruit Dish and Glass*, 1912

Charcoal and pasted paper, 62 × 44.5 (24 1/8 × 17 1/2)



2 • Pablo Picasso, *Violin*, 1912

Pasted paper and charcoal, 62 × 47 (24 1/8 × 18 1/2)

linguistic signs but also to be participating in (or, according to the Russian-born linguist Roman Jakobson, even initiating) a revolution in Western representation that goes beyond the visual to extend to the literary, and past that into the political economy.

#### Off the gold standard

For if the meaning of the arbitrary sign is established by convention rather than what might seem the natural truth of "looking like," it can, in turn, be likened to the token money of modern banking systems, the value of which is a function of law rather than a coin's "real" worth as a given measure of gold or silver or a note's redeemable relation to precious metal. Literary scholars have thus set up a parallel between naturalism as an aesthetic condition and the gold standard as an economic system in which monetary signs, like literary ones, were understood to be transparent to the reality that underwrote them.

If the point of this parallel is to prepare the literary critic for the modernist departure from the gold standard and its adoption of "token" signs—arbitrary in themselves and thus convertible to any value set by a signifying matrix or set of laws—no one effected this break with linguistic naturalism as radically or as early as did Stéphane Mallarmé, within whose poetry and prose the linguistic

sign was treated as wildly “polysemic,” or productive of multiple—and often opposed—meanings.

Just to stay with the term *gold*, Mallarmé used it not only to explore the phenomenon of the metal and its related concepts of richness or luminosity but also to take advantage of the fact that the word in French for gold (“*or*”) is identical to the conjunction translated as “now”; it is thus productive of the kind of temporal or logical deflection of the flow of language that the poet went on to exploit, not just at the level of meaning (that is, the signified) but also at that of the material support for the sign (the signifier). Thus in the poem titled “Or” this element appears everywhere, both freestanding and embedded within larger signs, a signifier that sometimes folds over onto its signified—“*trésor*”—but more often one that does not—“*déhor*,” “*fantasmagorique*,” “*horizon*,” “*majore*,” “*hors*”—seeming thereby to demonstrate that it is the very uncontrollability of the physical spread of *or* that makes it a signifier truly cut free of the gold standard of even its most shifting signified.

There is of course a paradox in using this example within the larger account of modernity—including that of Picasso’s collage—as something established by the arbitrariness of the token-money economy. For Mallarmé deploys the very marker of what token-money set out to replace, namely (outmoded) gold, to celebrate the freely circulating meaning of the new system. Yet the value he continues to accord to gold is not that of the old naturalism but rather that of the sensuous material of poetic language in which nothing is transparent to meaning without passing through the carnality of the signifier’s flesh, its visual outline, its music: /gold/ = sound; *or* = sonore. This was the poetic gold that Mallarmé explicitly contrasted with what he called the *numéraire*, or empty cash value, of newspaper journalism in which, in his eyes, language had reached its zero point of being a mere instrument of reporting.

### Prospecting on the fringes

The interpretation of Picasso’s collage is, within art-historical scholarship, a battleground in which various parts of the foregoing discussion are pitted against one another. For on the one hand there is the bond between Picasso and Apollinaire, the painter’s great friend and most active apologist, which would support the model of Picasso’s having a “make it new” (or, as Apollinaire called it, an *esprit nouveau*) attitude toward journalism and the newspaper—almost, as it were, throwing “the morning’s poetry” in Mallarmé’s face. Emphasizing Apollinaire’s exultation in what was modern, both in the sense of what was most ephemeral and what was most at odds with traditional forms of experience, this position would ally Picasso’s use of newsprint and other cheap papers with a willful attack on the fine-arts medium of oil painting and its drive for both permanence and compositional unity. The highly unstable condition of newsprint condemns collage from the outset to the transitory; while the procedures for laying out, pinning, and gluing *papiers collés* resemble commercial design strategies more than they do the protocols of the fine arts.



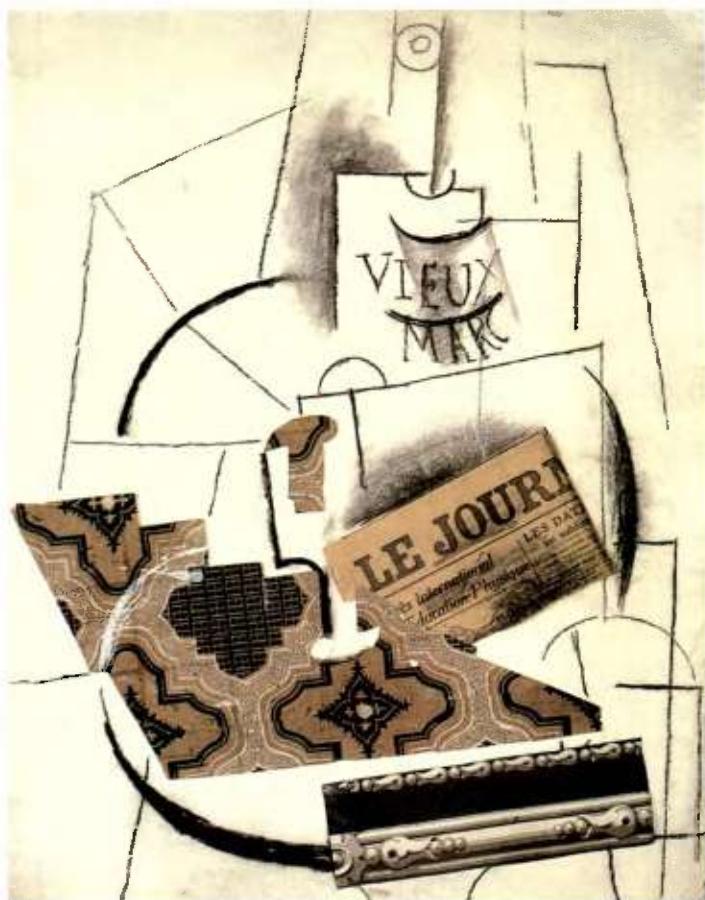
3 • Pablo Picasso, *Table with Bottle, Wine Glass, and Newspaper*, Fall–Winter 1912  
Pasted paper, charcoal, and gouache, 62 × 48 (24½ × 18⅔)

This position would also see Picasso, like Apollinaire, as being caught up in a drive to find aesthetic experience at the margins of what was socially regulated, since it was only from that place that the advanced artist could construct an image of freedom. As the art historian Thomas Crow has argued, this drive has consistently led the avant-garde toward “low” forms of entertainment and unregimented spaces (for Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec [1864–1901] this had been the twilight-zone nightclub; for Picasso, it was the working man’s café), even though, ironically, such prospecting has always ended by opening up such spaces for further socialization and commodification by the very forces the advanced artist sought to escape.

If these arguments posit Picasso’s embrace of both the “low” and the “modern” values of the newspaper, there are also those commentators who picture his reasons for exploiting this material as primarily political. Picasso, they say, cut the columns of newsprint so that we can read the articles he selected, many of which in the fall of 1912 reported on the war then raging in the Balkans. This is true, of course, at the level of the headlines—an early collage [3] presents us with “*Un Coup de Théâtre*, *La Bulgarie*, *La Serbie*, *Le Monténégro sign[ent]*” (“A Turn of Events, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro Sign”)—but also in the small type where battlefield reports are grouped around a café table that faces accounts of a social antiwar rally in Paris [4]. In giving what she sees as Picasso’s reasons for this,

4 • Pablo Picasso, *Glass and Bottle of Suze*, 1912

Pasted paper, gouache, and charcoal, 65.4 × 50.2 (25½ × 19½")



5 • Pablo Picasso, *Bottle of Vieux Marc, Glass, and Newspaper*, 1913

Charcoal and pasted and pinned paper, 63 x 49 (24 1/2 x 19 1/2)

art historian Patricia Leighten has argued, variously, that he is bringing the reader/viewer into contact with a politically charged reality in the Balkans; or that he is presenting the reader/viewer with the kind of heated discussion that would be going on in a Parisian café where workers, unable to afford a newspaper subscription, would go for their daily news; or again, that Picasso is taking apart the managed cacophony of the newspaper—with its interests in serving up news as so many disjointed entertainments—and is using collage as a means of “counterdiscourse” that will have the power to rearrange the separate stories into a coherent account of capital’s manipulation of the social field.

With these propositions we have come progressively further away from the idea of collage as performing a rupture with an older naturalistic, “iconic” system of representation. For whether we imagine Picasso deploying newspaper reports to picture a faraway reality, or using them to depict people conversing in a café, or making them into a coherent ideological picture where previously there had been nothing but confusion, we still think of visual signs as connecting directly to the things in the world they are supposed to be depicting. Picasso’s only innovation would be, then, to replace his disputants with speech-balloons for their arguments as he seats them with perfect representational decorum around a more or less conventionally drawn café table. We have, that is, an example of the politically committed artist (although

Picasso’s politics during this period are themselves open to dispute), but we have lost Picasso as the artistic innovator at the level of importance to the whole history of representation with whom we were engaging at the outset.

This is where the claims of Mallarmé begin to challenge those of Apollinaire, even the Apollinaire who seemed to respond to Picasso’s collage by inventing his own fusion of the verbal and the visual in the *calligrammes* he began to fashion in 1914. For constellating written signs into graphic images, the *calligrammes* become doubly “iconic”: the letters forming the graphic shape of a pocket watch, for example, merely reinforce at the level of the visual what they express in textual form: “It’s five to noon, at last!” And if they thereby take on the graphic excitement of advertisements or product logos, the *calligrammes* nonetheless betray what is most radical in Picasso’s challenge to representation: his refusal of the unambiguous “icon” in favor of the endlessly mutational play of the “symbol.”

Like Mallarmé’s mutational play, where nothing is ever just one thing—as when signifiers divide, doubling “son or” (his or her gold) with “son or” (the sound “or” and by implication the sonority of poetry)—Picasso’s signs mutate visually by folding over onto one another to produce the oppositional pair of the paradigm. As in the earlier *Violin*, this is apparent in the *Bottle of Vieux Marc, Glass, and Newspaper* (5), where a toquelike shape, cut from a sheet of wallpaper, reads as transparency by articulating both the lip of the wine glass and its liquid contents, while below, the upside-down silhouette left by the “toque’s” excision from the sheet registers the opacity of the stem and base of the object, declaring itself a figure (no matter how ghostly) against the wallpaper’s tablecloth ground. The paradigm is perfectly expressed, as the signifiers—identical in shape—produce each other’s meaning, their opposition in space (right side up/upside down) echoing their semantic reversal.

If the play of visual meaning in the collages is thus mutational, the textual play mobilized by Picasso’s use of newsprint is also cut free from the fixity of any one “speaker” to whose voice, or opinion, or ideological position we might attribute it. For no sooner do we decide that Picasso has cut an item from the financial pages to denounce the exploitation of the worker, and thereby to “speak” through the means of this clipping, than we have to remember that Apollinaire, from his perch as writer for a half-fraudulent financial magazine, was famous for handing out spurious advice about the stock market and that the voice the collage plants here could just as easily be “his.” Picasso had, indeed, let Mallarmé himself speak from the surfaces of various of these collages, as when “*Au Bon Marché*” doubles a voice like Fernande Olivier’s (Picasso’s ex-mistress)—speaking of white sales and a trousseau—with the various voices that Mallarmé used as pen-names in his elegant fashion magazine *La Dernière Mode*, or when the headline *Un coup de thé* sounds the title of Mallarmé’s most radical poem: “*Un coup de dés*.”

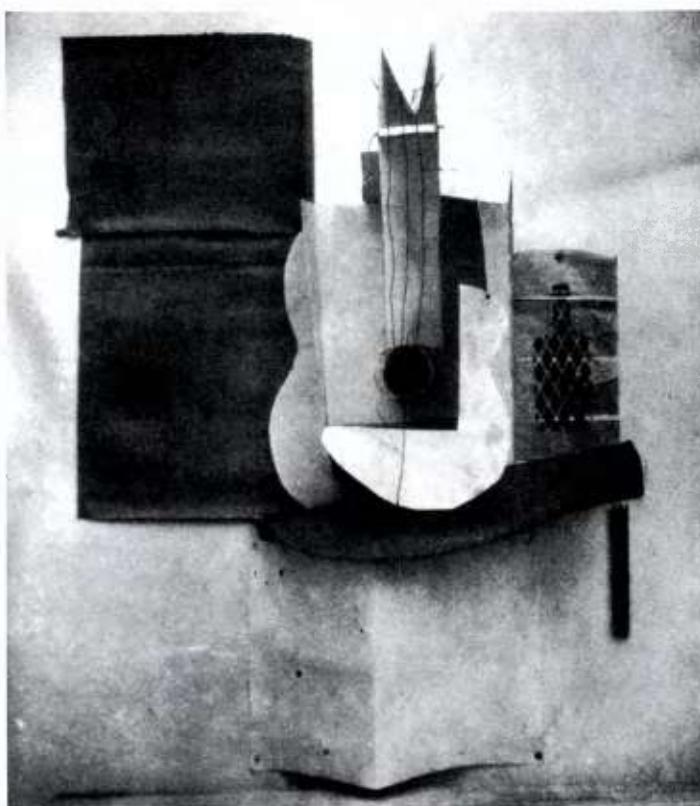
Much has been made of Picasso’s recourse to the models of ▲ distortion and simplification offered by African tribal art.

Kahnweiler insisted, however, that it was a particular mask in Picasso's collection that "opened these painters' eyes." This mask from the Ivory Coast tribe called Grebo is a collection of "paradigms."

Picasso's own venture into constructed sculpture shows the effect of the Grebo example. Made of sheet metal, string, and wire, ▲ his *Guitar* of 1912 [6] establishes the instrument's shape through a single plane of metal from which the sound-hole projects, much like the eyes of the Grebo mask. Each plane hovers against the relief-plane as figure against ground, a form of paradigm which the earlier *Violin* had so brilliantly explored. The earliest collage to reflect the lesson of the Grebo mask is *Guitar, Sheet Music, and Glass* [7], in which each collage piece reads as hovering against the flat sheet of the background, the black crescent of the guitar's lowest edge doubling as its shadow cast on the supporting table; its sound-hole seeming to project as a solid tube in front of the instrument's body. RK

#### FURTHER READING

- Yve-Alain Bois, "Kahnweiler's Lesson," *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990)  
 Yve-Alain Bois, "The Semiology of Cubism," in Lynn Zelevansky (ed.), *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992)  
 Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture," in Serge Guilbaut, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, and David Sorkin (eds), *Modernism and Modernity* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983)  
 Rosalind Krauss, *The Picasso Papers* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998)  
 Patricia Leighten, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897–1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989)  
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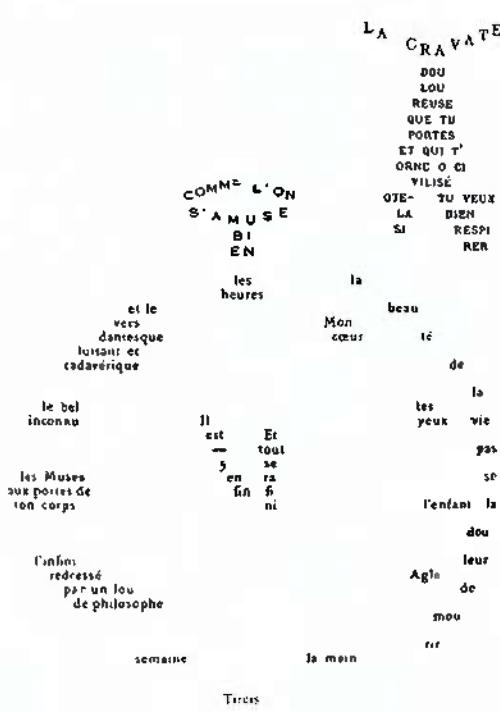


6 • Construction mounted in Picasso's studio at 5 bis, rue Schoelcher, 1913  
 Includes cardboard maquette for *Guitar* (destroyed)



7 • Pablo Picasso, *Guitar, Sheet Music, and Glass*, Fall 1912  
 Pasted paper, gouache, and charcoal, 47.9 × 36.5 (18 1/2 × 14 1/2")

1910–1919



8 • Guillaume Apollinaire, "La Cravate et la montre," 1914  
 From *Calligrammes: Poèmes de la paix et de la guerre, 1913–16, Part I: Ondes*, 1925

# 1913

Robert Delaunay exhibits his “Windows” paintings in Berlin: the initial problems and paradigms of abstraction are elaborated across Europe.

Cézanne broke the fruit dish,” Robert Delaunay (1895–1941) once remarked, “and we should not glue it together again, as the Cubists do.” This call for abstraction is clear enough, yet its actual development was complicated: centered on painting, abstraction was driven by diverse motivations, methods, and models. Some artists deepened the painterly aspect of Impressionism; others, the expressive dimension of Postimpressionism; still others, the linear design of Art Nouveau. The fragmented “fruit dish” of Cézanne and Picasso was influential to many painters on the verge of nonrepresentational art; the broad color fields of Matisse were inspirational to others; and the bold geometric forms of African sculpture also served as an important provocation, sometimes replaced or supplemented by folk art (and, in Russia, by religious icons). In 1912–13 such precedents and provocations converged to allow the recognition of abstraction as a value, even a necessity, in its own right. Since abstraction is primordial to the arts of several cultures, there is no question of a single origin or a first abstraction; in this sense, abstraction was found as much as it was invented. In a famous anecdote Wassily Kandinsky told how, when he returned one night to his studio in Murnau, Germany (he dated the event to 1910), he failed to recognize one of his paintings upside down in the dim light—only to discover the expressive potential of abstract forms through this experience.

If there was no one parent of abstraction, there were several midwives, in particular the Frenchman Delaunay, the Russian Sonia Terk (1885–1979; she married Delaunay in 1910), the Dutchman Piet Mondrian, and the Russians Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich (1878–1935). The last three are often given pride of place as the most committed, but other early abstractionists include the Czech František Kupka (1871–1957), the Frenchman Fernand Léger (1881–1955), the Russian Rayonists Mikhail Larionov (1881–1964) and Natalia Goncharova (1881–1962), the English Vorticist Wyndham Lewis, the Italian Futurists Giacomo Balla and Gino Severini, the German-Swiss Paul Klee (1879–1940), the Alsatian Hans Arp (1888–1966), the Swiss Sophie Taeuber (1889–1943; she married Arp in 1921), the American Synchromists Morgan Russell (1886–1953) and Stanton Macdonald-Wright (1890–1973), and still others like the American Arthur Dove (1880–1946), who called

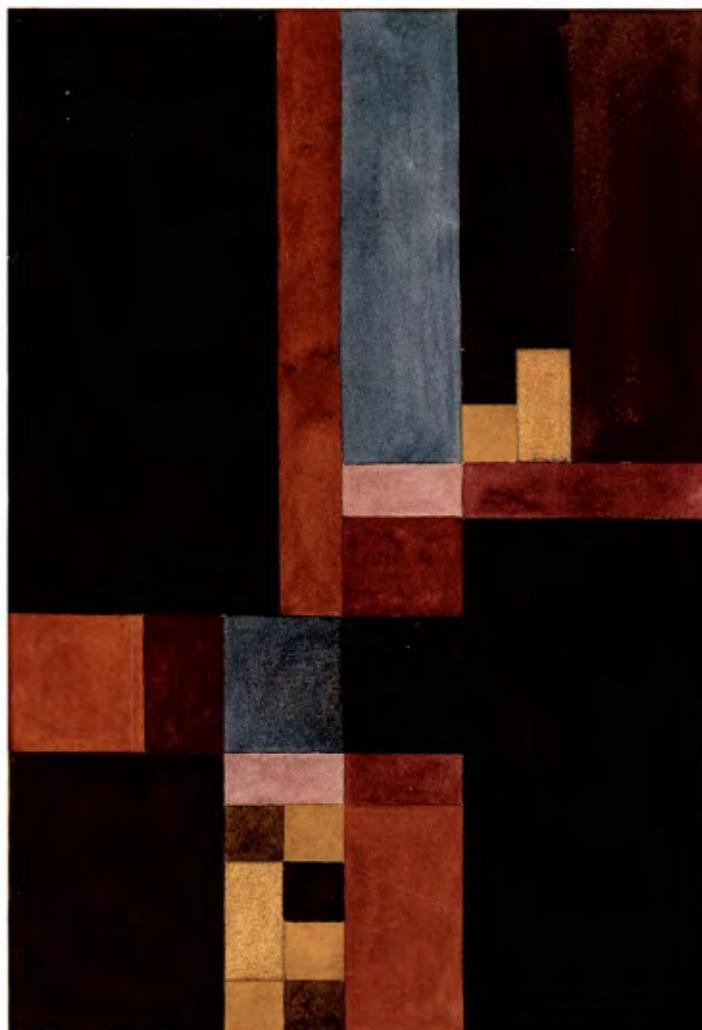
his near-abstractions “extractions.” This list makes two points obvious at once: abstraction was international, and many of its innovators were not formed in avant-garde Paris. Why would this be so? Although Matisse and Picasso opened the way to abstraction, they were too invested in the world of objects—or, more precisely, in the visual play of figures and signs that this world afforded—to enter into abstraction fully. On the other hand, Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian, Klee, and Kupka were formed in cultures (Russian, Dutch, German, Czech) whose metaphysical imperatives and/or iconoclastic impulses might have made abstraction less alien.

In this respect Russia was especially important as a crucible for abstraction. There were important collections of avant-garde painting (the Shchukin Collection alone boasted thirty-seven Matisses and forty Picassos), vigorous exhibitions of international art not only in St. Petersburg and Moscow but in provincial cities too, and a range of groups eager to assimilate the lessons of Symbolism, Fauvism, Futurism, and Cubism, as well as to elaborate on folk art, children’s drawings, and medieval icons (an exhibition of restored icons was staged in Moscow in 1913). The latter interests were strong in Larionov, who was drawn to the popular woodcarvings known as *lubki*, and Goncharova, whose early paintings of peasant life also reflect the simple forms and strong outlines of peasant carvings, embroidery, and enamels. Larionov and Goncharova were very active in exhibition-making too (“Knave of Diamonds” in 1910 and “The Donkey’s Tail” in 1912 were the most important); and inspired by Cubist and Futurist works, they moved away from primitivist experiments toward a form of abstraction marked by fractured lines and luminous colors—a style that Larionov dubbed Rayonism for the manner in which the surface of the painting seems to be struck by multiple rays of light that cross, crystallize, and sometimes dissolve there. The structure of these paintings owes much to Cubism, but the dynamism is Futurist (as is the rhetoric that supported them), and this combination of Cubist faceting and Futurist movement resulted in paintings that are among the earliest abstractions anywhere. Only a few such works were made, however, before Larionov and Goncharova fled the war for Paris (where they were often commissioned to design sets and costumes for the Ballets Russes produced by Sergei Diaghilev).

Even as abstraction moved away from a mimetic relation to the world, it did not necessarily embrace the “arbitrary” nature of the visual sign as explored in Cubist collage and construction. Abstract artists might have declined to depict worldly things, but they often aspired to evoke transcendental concepts—such as “feeling,” “spirit,” or “purity”—and in this way they replaced one type of grounding, one form of authority, with another. (In such influential texts as “Concerning the Spiritual in Art” [1911], Kandinsky called this new authority “internal necessity,” and others came up with similar coinages.) Such insistence on transcendental truths betrays an anxiety that abstraction might be arbitrary in two additional senses. First, arbitrary in the sense of *decorative*: in a 1914 lecture in Cologne, Kandinsky cautioned that “ornamental” abstraction might impede rather than produce the requisite transcendental effect of art. And, second, arbitrary in the sense of *meaningless*: faced with the charge, actual or anticipated, that abstraction had no meaning at all, its proponents often overcompensated with tendentious claims of absolute meanings—transcendental for Kandinsky, revelatory for Malevich, utopian for Mondrian, and so on. When not defined in such grandiose terms, abstraction was often framed negatively—against art based in mimesis (which was regarded as academic) and against design intended as decoration (which was regarded as a low or applied form). But many exceptions qualify this rule. For example, how are we to categorize the grids of Sophie Taeuber [1], who sometimes based these works (which predate the first modular abstractions by Mondrian) on the quasi-spontaneous arrangements of collaged squares of Hans Arp? For his part, Arp called them “probably the first examples of ‘concrete art,’ at once ‘pure and independent’ and ‘elementary and spontaneous.’” Are they high art? Low? Transcendental in ambition? Decorative? Programmatic? Aleatory? These works complicated such hierarchical oppositions almost before they were in place.

## Definitions and debates

Standard definitions favor the idea of abstraction as idealization. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers “separated from matter,” “ideal,” and “theoretical” for the adjective *abstract*, and “deduct,” “remove,” and “disengage” for the verb. Appropriate for some artists who evoked ideal states through disengagement from the world, these meanings did not suit others who privileged the opposite terms—the materiality of paint on canvas, or the worldliness of utilitarian designs. This tension between idealist and materialist imperatives runs throughout modernist abstraction, and it is not solved by related terms such as “nonobjective” or “pure.” Abstraction approaches the nonobjective by definition; on the other hand, many artists sought “objectivity” above all—to make an art as “concrete” and as “real” as an object in the world. Indeed, Delaunay, Léger, Arp, Malevich, and Mondrian all declared abstraction the most *realist* of modes for this very reason. So, too, abstraction was often promoted as “pure,” the final refinement of art for its own sake; on the other hand, purity was often associated



1 • Sophie Taeuber, *Horizontal Vertical*, 1917

Watercolor, 23 x 15.5 (9 x 6 1/8)

1910–1919

with reduction to the constituent materials of a medium, the stuff of paint and canvas, which are difficult to see as pure. In the end, these tensions are integral to abstraction, which is best defined as a category that manages such contradictions—holds them in suspension, or puts them into dialectical play.

The materialist / idealist opposition governed discourses around abstraction as well. Some artists were guided by Platonic, Hegelian, or spiritualist philosophies. For instance, Malevich, Kandinsky, Mondrian, and Kupka were all influenced by Theosophy, which held (among other beliefs) that man evolved from physical to spiritual states in a series of stages that could be evoked by geometric forms; in *Evolution* (1911), Mondrian imaged the geometric sublimation of a female figure in this way. Perhaps paradoxically, some artists also looked to science to support the idealist version of abstraction. “Why should we continue to follow nature,” Mondrian asked around 1919, “when many other fields have left nature behind?” In this regard non-Euclidean geometry interested artists as diverse as Malevich and Marcel Duchamp for its nonperspectival conception of space and its antimaterialist idea of form. In addition, analogies were made to other arts, especially music.

"All art," the English aesthetician Walter Pater famously remarked, "constantly aspires towards the condition of music"; so it was still for some artists in the first generation of abstractionists. (This points to a further paradox: can the essence of one art, painting, be found via another art, such as music?) Klee and Kupka were drawn to Baroque and classical music, Johann Sebastian Bach in particular;

- ▲ Kandinsky, to late-Romantic and modern music, especially Richard Wagner and Arnold Schoenberg. Indeed, Kandinsky patterned the categories of his early abstractions—"Improvisations," "Impressions," "Compositions"—on music, which also influenced his emphasis on color tone, linear rhythm, "thorough-bass" (a notion derived from Goethe), and immediacy to feeling. Kupka, too, stressed the Symbolist analogy between pure music and pure painting, with the attendant implication that such art could act directly "on the soul" without the distraction of content or subject matter; his large canvas *Amorpha, Fugue in Two Colors* [2] is often claimed as the first nonfigurative painting to be exhibited publicly in Paris, at the Salon d'Automne in 1912, though it was inspired in part by the mundane movements of a multicolored ball (a plaything of his stepdaughter), as well as by the celestial motions of the planets (which had also informed his previous *Disks of Newton* paintings).

- For his part, Mondrian adored jazz: he found its syncopated rhythm analogous to his asymmetrical equilibrium of color planes, and its resistance to melodic narratives parallel to his resistance to temporal readings of visual art.

Other abstract artists were driven by materialist concerns. Some looked to abstraction as the only mode adequate to the becoming-abstract of the object-world in a world transfigured by new modes of commodity production, public transportation, and image reproduction. The project to capture the increased mobility of products, people, and images in the modern city was not strictly

- Futurist; it also provoked artists such as Léger to a paradoxical type of realist abstraction. In his *Contrast of Forms* [3], we see a symbiosis of human and mechanical forms abstracted as if to the geometric specifications of the canvas. Indeed, by the end of the decade Léger would conceive painting, in analogy with the machine, as a device of interrelated parts. Yet already in 1913 he referred the abstraction of his painting, as well as the separation of all modernist arts, to a capitalist division of labor—a modern condition that he sought to make a modernist virtue:

*Each art is isolating itself and limiting itself to its own domain.*

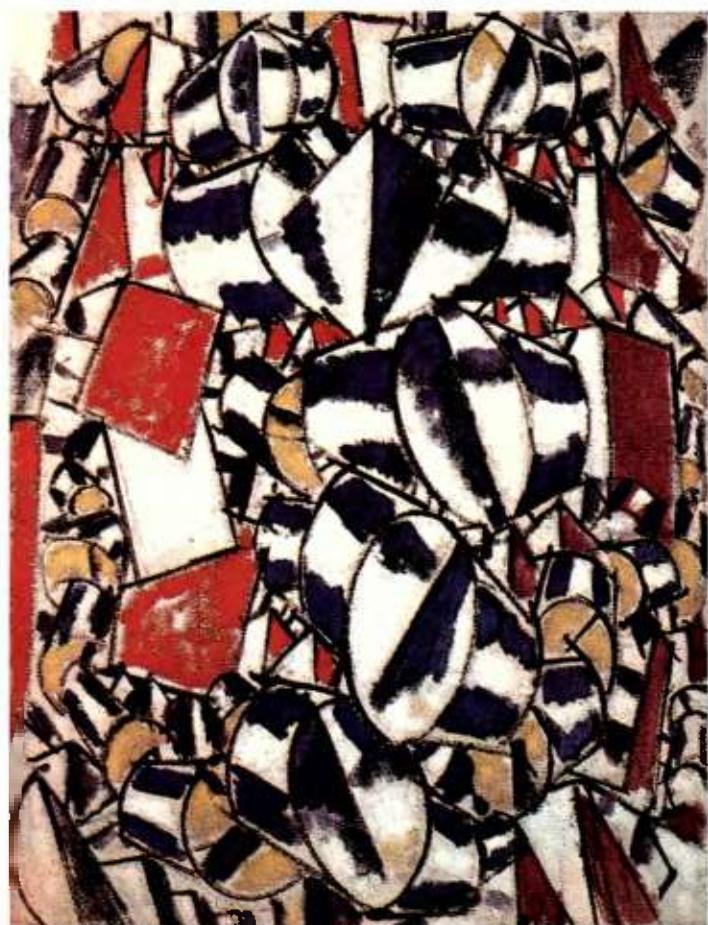
*Specialization is a modern characteristic, and pictorial art, like all other manifestations of human genius, must submit to its law; it is logical, for by limiting each discipline to its own purpose, it enables achievements to be intensified. In this way pictorial art gains in realism. The modern conception is not simply a passing abstraction, valid only for a few initiates; it is the total expression of a new generation whose needs it shares and whose aspirations it answers.*

- Cubism was the first style to perform this paradox of an art that appears both abstract and realist, and it remained the crucible for most abstract artists. Yet "Cubism did not accept the logical conse-



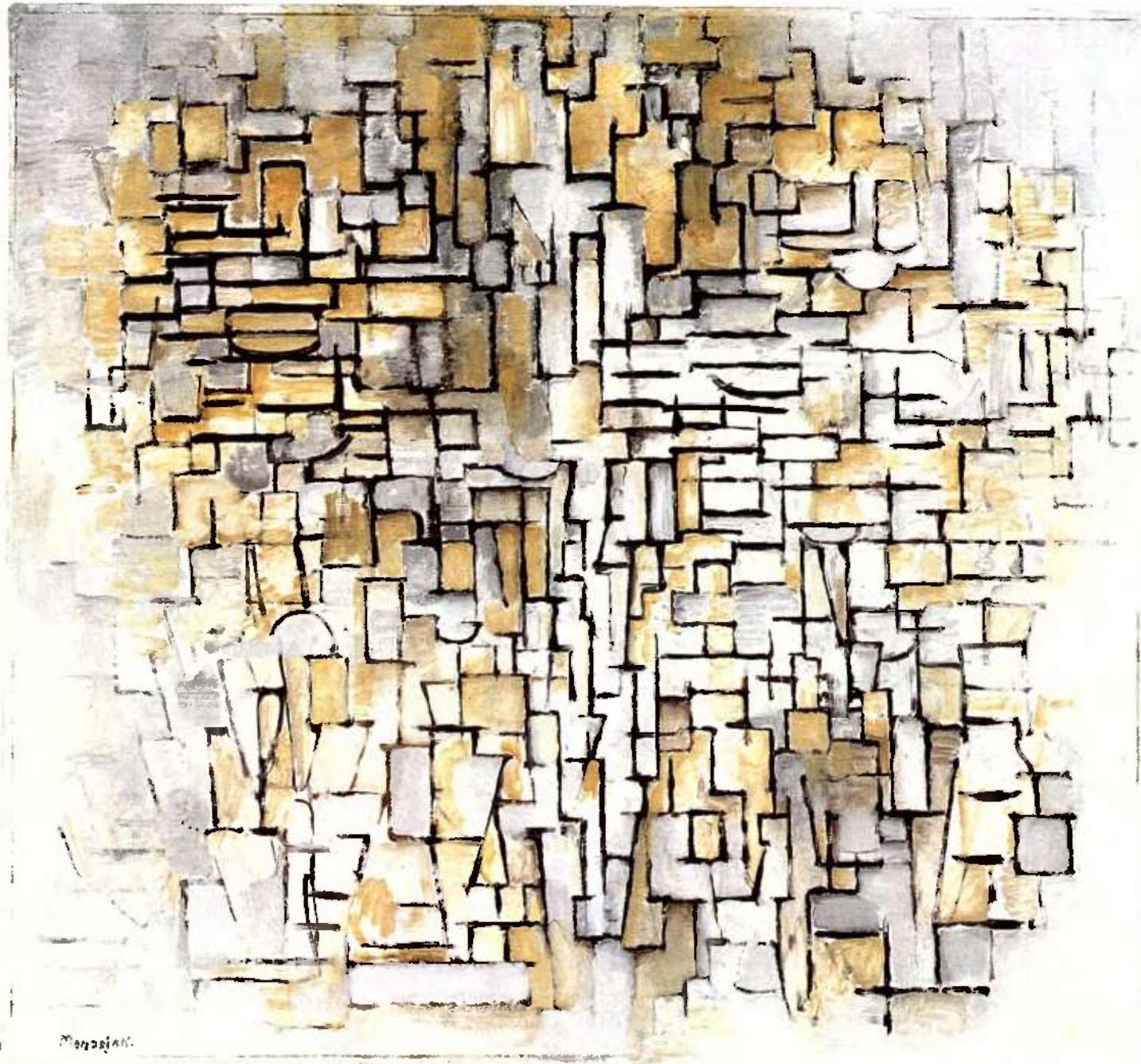
2 • František Kupka, *Amorpha, Fugue in Two Colors*, 1912

Oil on canvas, 211.8 x 220 (83 1/4 x 86 1/2)



3 • Fernand Léger, *Contrast of Forms*, 1913

Oil on canvas, 55 x 46 (21 1/2 x 18)



4 • Piet Mondrian, TABLEAU No. 2 / COMPOSITION No. VII, 1913

Oil on canvas, 104.4 x 113.6 cm (41 1/8 x 44 1/2")

quences of its own discoveries," Mondrian remarked in a retrospect shared by others, "it was not developing towards its own goals, the expression of pure plastics." Thus in 1912–13 some artists pushed the "analytical" aspect of Cubism to dissolve the motif altogether. They did so either in linear coordination with the implicit grid of the canvas, as with Mondrian in a work such as *Tableau No. 2/Composition VII* [4], or through prismatic effects of color seen as light, as with Delaunay in a work such as *Fenêtres simultanées sur la ville* (*Simultaneous Windows on the City*) [5]. If Mondrian explicited the grid in a way that exceeded the faceted planes of Cubism, Delaunay intensified color in a manner that was alien to its muted palette. Meanwhile,

of Cubist collage were the immediate precedent for the abstract color planes of Malevich, while the factual elements of Cubist construction, which Picasso showed Vladimir Tatlin in Paris in the spring of 1914, were one provocation of his Constructivist "analysis of materials." Some kind of passage through Cubism became almost a prerequisite for followers: "From a [Cubist] analysis of the volume and space of objects to the [Constructivist] organization of elements," the Russian Liubov Popova (1889–1924) wrote in a 1922 studio note, as if this development were already a catechism.

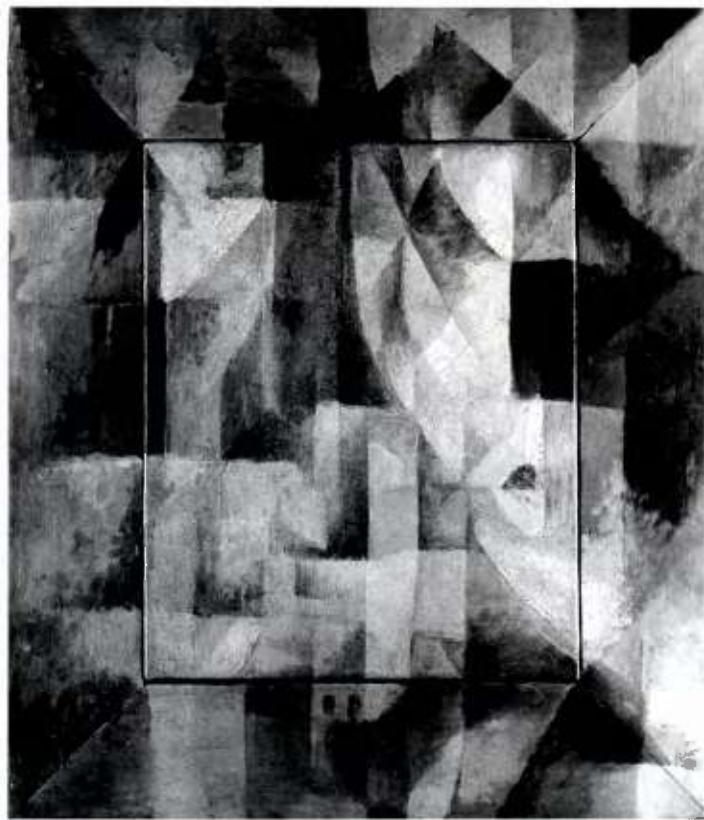
In most instances one element of painting was made dominant, even turned into a medium of meaning in its own right: thus the grid in *Tableau No. 2*, the color planes in Malevich's

light in Delaunay, of monochrome geometries in Malevich. Soon these elements were refined further into two relatively stable paradigms of abstract painting: the grid and the monochrome. To a great extent they became fixed because the grid worked to undo the primordial oppositions of line and color, figure and ground, motif and frame (it was the genius of Mondrian to explore these possibilities), and the monochrome worked to negate the two dominant paradigms of Western painting since the Renaissance: the window and the mirror (it was the hubris of Malevich to announce the end of these old orders).

In 1913, as they advanced toward the grid and the monochrome respectively, Delaunay and Malevich provide an instructive contrast. Delaunay mostly scoffed at models extrinsic to painting: "I never speak of mathematics and never bother with spirit"; "I am horrified by music and noise." Concerned with "pictorial realities" alone, he looked to color to carry all aspects of painting: "color gives depth (not perspective, nonsequential but simultaneous) and form and movement." To this end, Delaunay developed "the law of simultaneous contrasts," which French artists from Delacroix to Seurat had adapted from an 1839 treatise by the chemist Michel-Eugène Chevreul, into his own notion of *simultanéisme*. Besides color contrasts, this "simultaneity" pertains to the immediacy of pictorial image to retinal image, indeed to the transcendental simultaneity of the visual arts as opposed to the mundane temporality of the verbal arts (this opposition is a persistent one in modern aesthetics from the German Enlightenment philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing [1729–81] to the late-modernist critics

▲ Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried). In some of these interests Delaunay was joined by Morgan Russell and Stanton Macdonald-Wright, who were also active in Paris in these years. They too treated light in terms of prismatic color, though they allowed for effects of spatial projection and even temporal duration that Delaunay tended to resist; they also pursued musical analogies for abstraction that Delaunay tended to dismiss.

Delaunay made his breakthrough in his "Windows" series, some twenty-three paintings and drawings executed in 1912, thirteen of which were shown to great effect in Berlin in January 1913 (he had previously exhibited with the Blaue Reiter in Munich). To coincide with the show, Klee translated a text by Delaunay titled "Light" that presented a series of equations among color, light, eye, brain, and soul. In his aesthetic the painting is the "window" of all these "transparencies"—a medium abstracted into immediacy, dissolved into what it mediates. In this way Delaunay hardly rejected the old paradigm of painting-as-window; on the contrary, he *purified* it: the reality of vision is delivered in the abstraction of painting. Consider *Simultaneous Windows on the City*, which set the compositional type for the series. The Eiffel Tower, the central motif of his entire oeuvre, is now vestigial, its green arcs caught up in a play of opaque and transparent color planes pushed beyond Cubist faceting toward a post-Cubist grid (which, in the neo-Impressionist fashion of Seurat, Delaunay extended to the frame). The windows are thus referential, pictorial, and objective all at once; they reconcile the "sublime subject" of Paris with the "self-evident structure" of painting, as the poet-critic Guillaume Apollinaire, a great Delaunay supporter, once remarked. Delaunay rendered the medium opaque, only to make it disappear again in the interests of transparent immediacy. In effect, *Simultaneous Windows on the City* are windows without curtains, almost eyes without lids: color as light is nearly blinding here. The next step was to do away altogether with the windows in order to present the painting in direct analogy with the retina. This is what Delaunay did in *Disk* [6], the purest of abstractions at this time, a circular painting of seven concentric bands of solid colors divided into quarters, with the more intense primaries and complementaries closer to the center. Although sometimes dismissed as a mere demonstration of color theory—a color chart in fact—*Disk* contains resources for abstraction (utter nonreferentiality and opticality, structured canvas and composition) that would not be developed fully for another fifty years or more. The year 1913 was also a significant one for Sonia Terk Delaunay, who, already active in design (primarily books and embroidery), illustrated *The Prose of the Transsiberian and of the Little Jeanne of France* by the avant-garde poet Blaise Cendrars [7]. Published on a single sheet of paper two meters long folded into twelve panels, this object-book combined avant-garde abstraction and typography (the same text was set in ten typefaces, and a railroad map was included) in order to evoke the prismatic simultaneity of modern life. Often exhibited and reproduced, the book cover was widely influential (Terk may have affected German modernists almost as much as her husband did), and its success encouraged her to apply the same "simultanist"



5 • Robert Delaunay, *Fenêtres simultanées sur la ville*, 1911–12  
Oil on canvas and wood, 46 60 (18 1/2 × 23 1/2)

▲ 1917a, 1944a, 1957b

▲ 1942a, 1960b

● 1908

■ 1911, 1912



6 • Robert Delaunay, *Premier disque simultané* (Disk [The First Disk]), 1913–14

Oil on canvas, diameter 135 (52 3/4)

rhythms of abstract colors to other designs—clothes, posters, even electric lamps devised to diffuse light into color on Paris streets.

Malevich took a different course: not to purify painting-as-window but to paint it out. He referred his first total abstraction, ▲ *Black Square* (1915), to a sketch for a backdrop that he designed for a Futurist opera, *Victory over the Sun* (1913), an opera opposed to Symbolist art ("the old, accepted concept of the beautiful sun," its composer V. N. Matiushin once scoffed) as well as to naturalist theater. Here Malevich places, in a perspectival box, a square divided diagonally into a black triangle above and a white triangle

below in order to evoke the "victory over the sun," the eclipse of light by dark, perhaps the overcoming of empirical vision and perspectival space by transcendental vision and modernist infinity [8]. In this sketch the countdown to his own private *tabula rasa* begins: on the other side of this "zero of form," Malevich announced, lies "the supremacy of pure feeling in creative art"—hence his term for his abstract style, Suprematism.

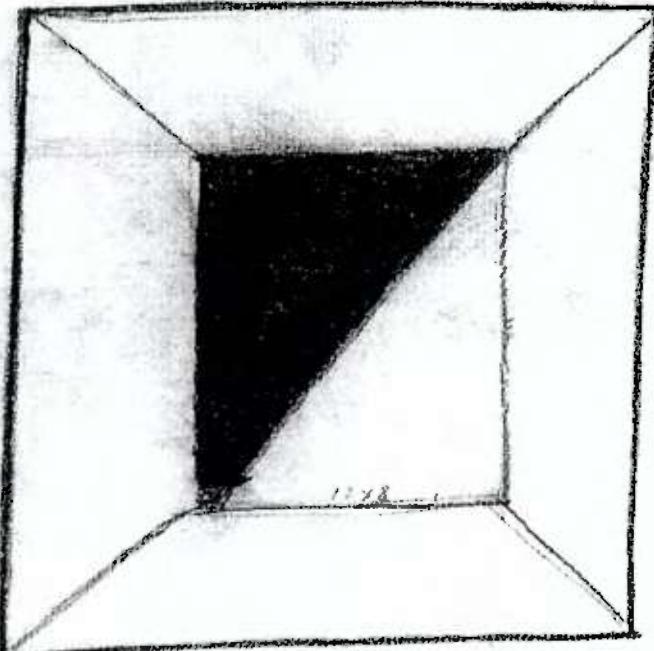
Thus Delaunay and Malevich appear to be opposed: the first proclaims the transparency of the window to color as light; the second, the victory over the sun in the triumph of the black square. But both

7 • Sonia Terk Delaunay, *La Prose du Transsiberian et de la Petite Jeanne de France*

(The Prose of the Transsiberian and of the Little Jeanne of France), 1913

Watercolor on paper, 193.5 x 37 (76½ x 14½)

are high priests of pure vision, and this renders them opposites that belong together. Even as Delaunay atomizes the motif in his color as light, while Malevich darkens it through his eclipse of the sun, both cancel one relation to reality only to affirm another, higher relation, and in this transformation they are joined by others such as Kandinsky and Mondrian for whom abstraction is the apotheosis of the real, not its downfall. They may render the medium opaque, self-evidently material as canvas and paint, but they do so in order to

B • Kazimir Malevich, sketch for *Victory over the Sun*, Act 2, Scene I, 1913

Graphite pencil on paper, 21 x 27 (8½ x 10½)

render it transparent again—to feeling, spirit, or purity, all of which these abstractions are asked to signify at one time or another.

In the end abstraction is a paradoxical mode that suspends such oppositions—between spiritual effect and decorative design, between material surface and ideal window, between singular work and serial repetition (bereft of external referents, abstract paintings tend to be read internally, in terms of one another, in sets, and they are often designated in this manner too: “*Untitled # 1, 2, 3 ...*”). The materialist/idealistic contradiction might be the most profound of all: painting as a plane covered with paint, the medium disclosed in its empirical materiality, versus painting as a map of a transcendental order, a window to a world of spirit. For the French ▲ philosopher Michel Foucault, however, this relation is less contradictory than complementary: modern thought, he argues, often comprehends both kinds of investigations, empirical and transcendental, and both kinds of dispositions, materialist and idealist. Nonetheless, this tension is experienced as a contradiction not only in modernist art but also in modern culture at large, and it suggests one reason why this culture has privileged artists who, like Mondrian, are able to hold on to both poles at once, who offer aesthetic resolutions to this apparent contradiction. HF

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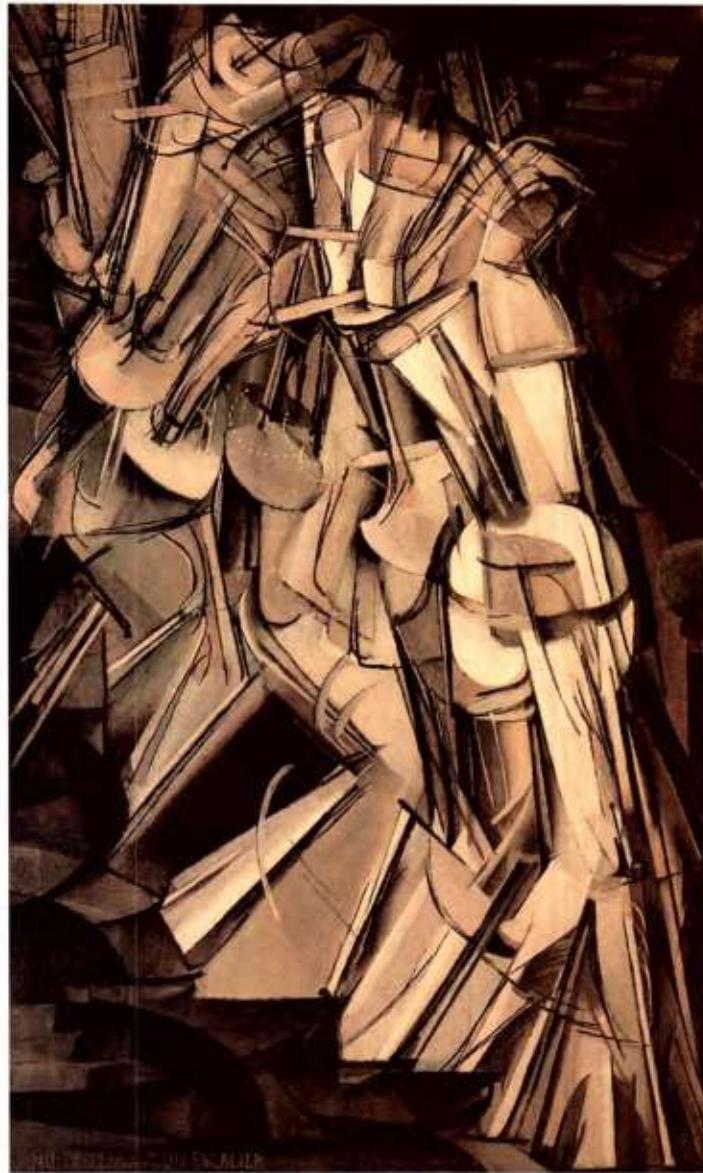
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# 1914

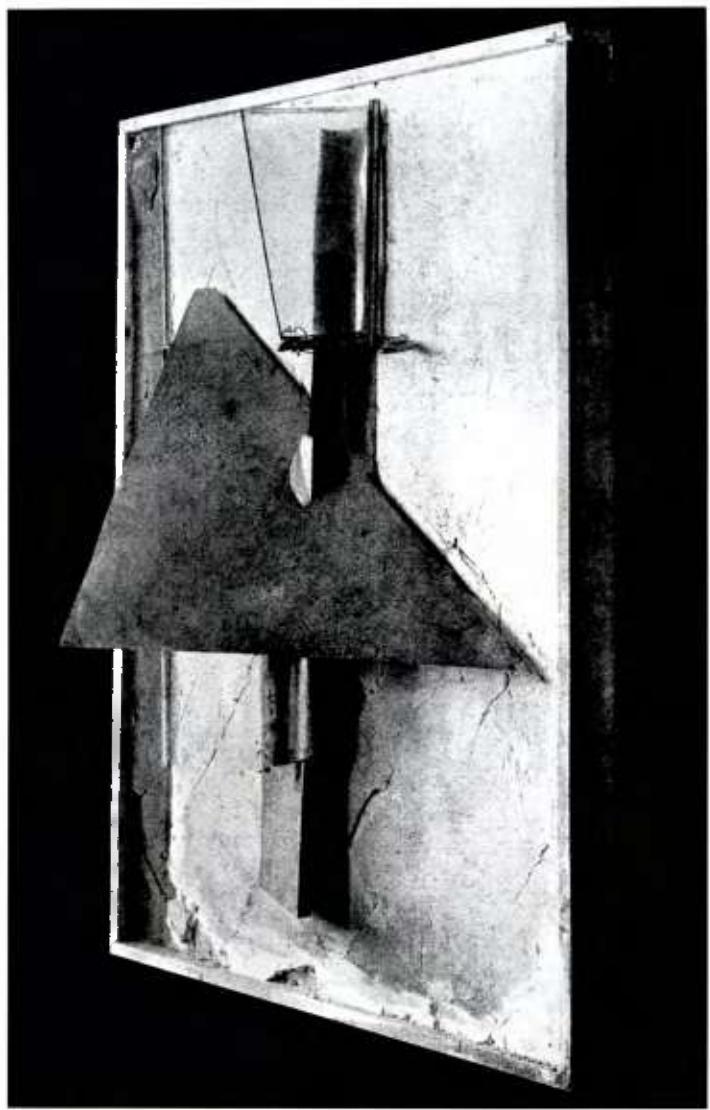
Vladimir Tatlin develops his constructions and Marcel Duchamp proposes his readymades, the first as a transformation of Cubism, the second as a break with it; in doing so, they offer complementary critiques of the traditional mediums of art.

The years 1912–14 were momentous ones in the avant-garde. New forms of picture-making such as abstraction and collage broke with representational painting, and new forms of object-making such as the construction and the ready-made challenged figurative sculpture, as the old focus on the human body was displaced by new explorations of industrial materials and commercial products. These developments were internal to modernist art, but they were also influenced by external events, such as the increased industrialization and commodification of everyday life, which was far more advanced in the Paris of Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) than in the Moscow and St. Petersburg of Vladimir Tatlin (1885–1953). At the same time, these new objects seemed almost to anticipate such worldly transformations. The first Tatlin constructions preceded the Russian Revolution in 1917, while the first Duchamp readymades predated the commodity culture of the twenties. “What happened from the social aspect in 1917,” Tatlin wrote, “was realized in our work as pictorial artists in 1914, when ‘materials, volume, and construction’ were accepted as our foundations.” Such materialist foundations were achieved in Constructivist art, Tatlin implies, before they were established in Communist society.

Yet the breaks marked by the construction and the readymade were not as punctual or as final as we often like to think. Art historians favor the dramatic convenience of the signal event: Duchamp, pressed by his own brothers to withdraw his Cubist painting *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2* [1] from the Salon des Indépendants in the spring of 1912, abandons painting altogether; or Tatlin, on a visit to Paris in the spring of 1914, encounters the Cubist constructions of Picasso and proceeds directly to his own reliefs. These events did occur, but they were not simple causes; indeed, the readymade and the construction must be seen as complementary responses to two overdetermined developments. First, Duchamp and Tatlin were responding in different ways to a crisis in representation signaled by Cubism. Second, that crisis had revealed a truth about “bourgeois” art, both academic and avant-garde, to which the two artists were also responding—that it was presumed to be autonomous, separate from social life, an institution in its own right. “The category *art as institution* was not invented by the avant-garde movements,” the German critic Peter



1 • Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2*, 1912  
Oil on canvas, 147 × 89.2 (57½ × 35½)



2 • Vladimir Tatlin, *Selection of Materials: Iron, Stucco, Glass, Asphalt*, 1914

Dimensions unknown

▲ Bürger writes in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974). "But it only became recognizable after the avant-garde movements had criticized the autonomy status of art in developed bourgeois society." Once valued as the sign of artistic freedom, according to Bürger, this autonomy had become the mark of its "social ineffectuality," and this in turn prompted "the self-critique of art" advanced paradigmatically by Duchamp and Tatlin.

### The material dictates the form

Tatlin was born in the Ukrainian city of Khar'kov to a poet-mother and an engineer-father who was an expert on American railroads. Although active in the Cubo-Futurist avant-garde by 1907–8, Tatlin remained a sometime sailor (likely a ship's carpenter) until 1914–15. These facts are more than anecdotal: his work was oriented by the parental poles of poetics and engineering, and directed by his keen sense of crafted materials. His 1914 sojourn to Paris was epiphanic—■ he probably saw such Picasso constructions as *Guitar* (1912)

—although he was already acquainted with Cubism from the great ▲ Shchukin Collection in Moscow. This is evident from such early paintings as *The Sailor: A Self-Portrait* (1911–12), which shows some quasi-Cubist facetting. Yet his first monumental figures are pushed toward the picture plane in a way more suggestive of archaic Russian pictures than contemporary Cubist ones—not only the folkloric woodprints that were popular in his Cubo-Futurist milieu but also religious icons, whose muted palette of colors, flat application of paint, and sheer materiality appealed to Tatlin. Sculptor and critic Vladimir Markov suggested why as early as 1914: "Let us remember icons; they are embellished with metal halos, metal casings on the shoulders, fringes and incrustations; the painting itself is decorated with precious stones and metals, etc. All of this destroys our contemporary conception of painting." In this modernist rereading of the medieval icon, its very materiality disallows any illusion of the real world and instead conducts "the people to beauty, to religion, to God." In his constructions Tatlin reversed the thrust of this anti-illusionism in order to direct the viewer not to a transcendental realm of God but to an immanent reality of materials. In effect, he ■ used the Russian icon as Picasso had used the African mask: as a "witness" to his own analytical development of modernist precedents, as a guide to an art no longer governed by resemblance.

His first known relief, *The Bottle* (1913, now lost), remains a Cubist still life, with different materials used to signify different objects (e.g., glass for bottle). Set within a frame, it is still more pictorial composition than material construction, though his basic repertoire of wood, metal, and glass is in place. In *Selection of Materials: Iron, Stucco, Glass, Asphalt* [2], Tatlin is already on the threshold of Constructivism. The frame remains, but the materials are no longer composed pictorially. An iron triangle projects into space, in contrast with a wooden rod set at an angle in the stucco surface; below and above are two further juxtapositions of curved metal and cut glass. *Selection* has the character of a demonstration: it first lists its materials, then allows intrinsic properties to suggest appropriate forms. "The material dictates the forms, and not the opposite," critic Nikolai Tarabukin wrote in a 1916 definition of Constructivism based on such works. "Wood, metal, glass, etc. impose different constructions." For Tatlin, machined wood was square and planar, and so suggested rectilinear forms; metal could be cut and bent, and so suggested curvilinear forms; glass was somewhere in between, with a transparency that might also mediate between interior and exterior surfaces. How different this materialism is from the ambiguity of Cubist constructions! Far from the "arbitrary," Tatlin sought to make his constructions "necessary" through this "truth to materials," an ur-modernist aesthetic that tended also to be an ethics and, after the Russian Revolution, a politics as well.

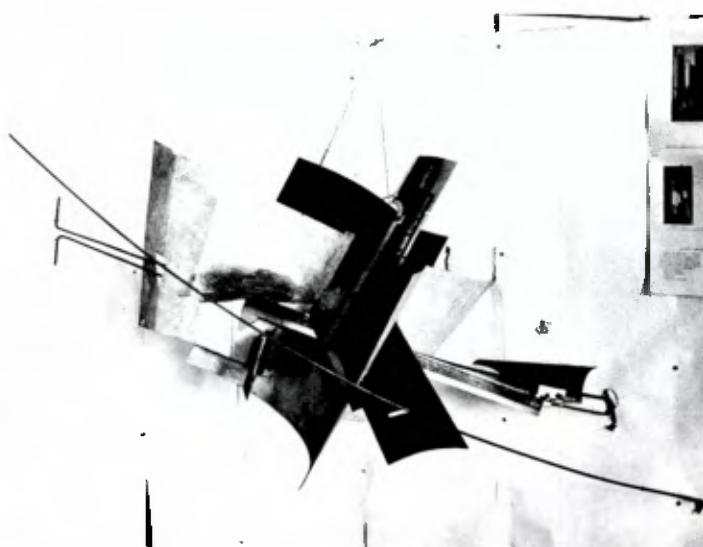
Yet this was not merely a positivistic reduction to materials, as would often be the case in postwar versions of the aesthetic. For along with Cubist constructions and Russian icons, a third model was in play here—the contemporaneous language experiments of ■ "transnational" poets such as Aleksei Kruchenikh and Velemir

Khlebnikov, whose play *Zangezi Tatlin* directed and designed in 1923. Khlebnikov not only shattered syntax but also broke language down into phonemes, the basic units of speech. He did so, however, not with a Futurist or Dadaist delight in destruction but in order to reassemble these pieces of sound and script into new "word-constructions" suggestive of new meanings. It was this constructive act that Tatlin affirmed: "Parallel to his word-constructions, I decided to make material constructions."

After 1914 Tatlin adopted the term "counter-relief," as if to signal a dialectical advance in his constructions: just as the first "painterly reliefs" exceeded painting, so the new "counter-reliefs," which extended from the wall, exceeded the painterly reliefs. Sometimes these counter-reliefs were suspended across corners with axial wires and rods [3]. These "corner counter-reliefs" were complex constructions of metal planes, squared and curved, perpendicular and angular. Not painting, sculpture, or architecture, they were "counters" to all three arts that activated materials, spaces, and viewers in new ways. First shown in December 1915 at "0.10: The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings" in Petrograd (once St. Petersburg, soon to be Leningrad), where Tatlin vied with Kazimir Malevich for leadership of the Russian avant-garde, the counter-reliefs drew young artists into the experimental ("laboratory") phase of Constructivism. If the painterly reliefs advanced the Constructivist notion of *faktura*, which, in contradistinction to Western "facture," stressed the mechanical aspect of the painterly mark rather than its subjective side, the counter-reliefs advanced the Constructivist notion of *construction*, which, in opposition to Western "composition," stressed active engagement with art rather than contemplative reflection of it. Yet to be developed was the third notion of Constructivism, *tectonics*, the dialectical connection of Constructivist formal experimentation with Communist principles of socioeconomic organization, but this most difficult step in the Constructivist program had to await the Revolution.

#### Works of art without the artist

Son of a supportive notary-father, Duchamp had three siblings who were also artists. His two older brothers, Jacques Villon (1875–1963) and Raymond Duchamp-Villon (1876–1918), drew Marcel into the "Puteaux Group" of Cubists around Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger. This circle had begun to turn Cubism into a doctrine by 1912, and Duchamp withdrew over its rejection of his *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2*. Stung by the controversy, Duchamp would never again be its victim; on the contrary, he became a master of the art of provocation—one of his more ambiguous legacies to twentieth-century art. The mysterious move from his Cubist paintings, which are mostly "nudes," "virgins," and "brides" tinted with personal eroticism, to his readymades, which are mostly banal products distanced from subjectivity, remains a provocation in its own right. We have only a few pieces of this puzzle. In the summer of 1912 Duchamp lived in Munich,



3 • Vladimir Tatlin, *Corner Counter-Relief*, 1915

Iron, aluminum, primer, dimensions unknown

which he later called "the scene of my complete liberation"—perhaps from the strictly "retinal" concerns of the Parisian avant-garde ("retinal" was his term for painting that did not engage the "gray matter" of the mind). Earlier, in 1911, he had befriended the wealthy Francis Picabia (1879–1953), who had introduced him to the idea of the artist as dandyish "negator," an attitude that Duchamp would later adopt and develop. Also in 1911 he had attended a play by Raymond Roussel (1877–1933) based on his novel *Impressions of Africa* (1910). Extremely eccentric, Roussel made a method out of the arbitrary: he would select a phrase, construct a homophone of it (that is, a phrase similar in sound but not in sense), use one of the phrases to begin the story and the other to end it, and then concoct a narrative to connect the two. Writing here became a dysfunctional kind of machine. "Roussel showed me the way," Duchamp insisted, not only to the homophonic puns and dysfunctional machines of his "rotoreliefs," but more generally to his various stratagems that combined chance and choice, the arbitrary and the given. These stratagems, such as his mechanical drawings and readymade objects, put conventional notions of art and artist alike into radical doubt; they were "works of art without an artist to make them," he once remarked.

Two further anecdotes are telling in this regard. In 1911 Duchamp painted an "exploded" coffee grinder; in its "diagrammatic aspect," he commented later, "I began to think I could avoid all contact with traditional pictorial painting." Then, in 1912, at the Salon de la locomotion aérienne, he remarked to his friend, the sculptor Constantin Brancusi: "Painting is over. Who'd do better than this propeller? Tell me, could you do that?" This was not an endorsement of machine art before the fact—again, the machines that interested Duchamp were dysfunctional figures of frustrated desire (like the ones that populate his *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, also known as the *Large Glass*, 1915–23). But the question does point to the queries soon posed in his own work: What is the relation of utilitarian objects to aesthetic objects, of

### The "Peau de l'Ours"

The readymade, perhaps more than other art form, exposes the complicated relationship between art and the market. On the one hand, endowing an object (even, as Duchamp showed, a mass-produced one such as a urinal) with aesthetic value, could inflate its price from lowly work to masterpiece. On the other, the buying and selling of these expensive works has the same structure as the marketing of any other luxury item, thus lowering the object (aesthetically speaking) to the level of any other commodity. Hence the avant-garde found itself trapped within a structural condition in which it was in an endless race with the very capital logic it wished to expose.

That the avant-garde would prove to be an excellent investment was the bet that businessman André Level made in 1904 when, with twelve other speculators, he founded the "Peau de l'Ours" [Skin of the Bear], a consortium to buy avant-garde works, hold them for ten years, and then sell them off at auction. By 1907, Level's group had already been buying Matisse and Picasso heavily, and in that year it acquired Picasso's *Family of Saltimbanques* directly from the artist for 1,000 francs (expending the whole of its budget for the year). When it came to the time for the sale, held at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris on March 2, 1914, their collection of 145 items, consisting primarily of Fauvist and Cubist works, went under the hammer. Level advertised the event heavily, drawing large crowds to the presale exhibition and the auction itself, making it a kind of verdict on avant-garde art. In the event, the *Family of Saltimbanques*—the success of the evening—was sold for 12,650 francs, while the whole collection had increased its price fourfold, the initial investment of 27,500 francs now returning an impressive total of 116,545 francs.

commodities to art? Can a picture be made as anonymous, as non-subjective, as "perfect" as a propeller? From this point on he did prefer objects that were given, not made, and images that were scripted, not invented (not "retinal" at all), such as his two *Chocolate Grinders* diagrammed in projection in 1913 and 1914. Sly allusions to sex and scatology, these grinders of colored substances also parodied painting, reduced it to the status of an industrial diagram—which, as art historian Molly Nesbit has shown, informed the teaching of drawing in French schools when Duchamp was a child.

### He chose it

Duchamp used chance to decenter authorship, but his quintessential device in this respect was the readymade, an appropriated product positioned as art. This device allowed him to leap past old aesthetic questions of craft, medium, and taste ("is it good or bad painting or sculpture?") to new questions that were potentially ontological ("what is art?"), epistemological ("how do we know it?"), and institutional ("who determines it?"). Two of his notes are

especially important here. The first, written in 1913, is a programmatic question: "Can one make works that are not 'works' of art?" The second, from 1914, is an obscure fragment: "A kind of pictorial Nominalism." Both notes suggest that Duchamp had begun to construe *naming* art—that is, nominating a given image or object as art—as tantamount to *making* art. Although the term was not yet in place, the first "readymade" was a bicycle wheel set upside down on a stool [4]. He would find the name for his new technique, precisely *readymade*, only when he moved to New York in 1915 for the war, as a label for clothing bought off the rack, potentially mass produced and consumed. How are we to read this wheel? As "art" at all? Indeed, as a "work" at all (for it involved almost no labor of his own)? Or is this wheel that spins freely nothing but work, nothing but function? *Bottlerack* (1914) pushed the question of use further. Although it might suggest an abstract sculpture, this bottle-dryer remains both a utilitarian object and a simple commodity, and so compels us to consider the complex relationships between aesthetic ▲ value, use-value, and exchange-value.



▲ Marcel Duchamp, *Bicycle Wheel*, 1913 (1964 replica, original lost)  
Readymade: bicycle wheel fixed to a stool, height 126 (49½")

The most notorious readymade was a urinal named *Fountain* [5], which compounded the provocative questions of the other readymades with a scandalous evocation of the bathroom. Duchamp chose the urinal from a New York showroom of J. L. Mott Iron Works, a manufacturer of such fixtures, rotated it ninety degrees, signed it R. Mutt ("R" for Richard, slang for a rich man, and "Mutt" to refer both to Mott and to Mutt, a popular cartoon character of the time), set it on a pedestal, and submitted it to the American Society of Independent Artists for its first exhibition in April 1917. Duchamp was the chair of the hanging committee, but the show was unjuried, that is, it accepted all 2,125 works by 1,235 artists that were offered ... except for *Fountain* by the unknown R. Mutt. It was rejected on grounds that Duchamp rebutted, through his proxy Beatrice Wood, in a defense titled "The Richard Mutt Case," published in the May issue of their short-lived magazine *The Blind Man*. It reads in full:

*They say any artist paying six dollars may exhibit.  
Mr Richard Mutt sent in a fountain. Without discussion this article disappeared and never was exhibited.  
What were the grounds for refusing Mr Mutt's fountain:-  
1 Some contended it was immoral, vulgar.  
2 Others, it was plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing.  
Now Mr Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bathtub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' show windows.  
Whether Mr Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object.  
As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges.*

The principal questions here—of immorality and utility, of originality and intentionality—are contested in art to this day. So, too, are the related problems of "choice," that is, of art as a process of nomination by the authority of the artist. Were the readymades art because Duchamp declared them to be, or were they "based on a reaction of visual indifference, a total absence of good or bad taste, a complete anaesthesia," as he argued much later, and so a challenge to such authority? Never shown in its initial guise, *Fountain* was suspended in time, its questions deferred to later moments. In this way it became one of the most influential objects in twentieth-century art well after the fact.

In the dominant tradition of bourgeois aesthetics from the Enlightenment to the present, art cannot be utilitarian because its value depends on its autonomy, on its "purposiveness without purpose" (in the famous phrase of the philosopher Immanuel Kant), precisely on its uselessness. In this tradition, to use art is almost nihilistic—a point that Duchamp dramatized in another note from 1913 where he proposed to "use a Rembrandt as an



5 • Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917 (1964 replica)

Readymade: porcelain, 36 x 48 x 61 (14½ x 18½ x 24)

ironing-board." In this regard the readymade may be only a gesture of bourgeois radicality; as the German critic Theodor Adorno once remarked (as though he had the Rembrandt ironing-board in mind): "It would border on anarchism to revoke the reification of a great work of art in the spirit of immediate use-values." This is the great difference between the critiques of the institution of art advanced by Duchamp and Tatlin, which is also to say, the great difference between the contexts in which they worked. In bourgeois Paris and New York, Duchamp could only attack the institution of autonomous art, sometimes dandyishly, sometimes nihilistically, while in revolutionary Russia, Tatlin could hope, at least for a time, to see this institution transformed. Like the dandy Charles Baudelaire and the engaged Gustave Courbet in mid-nineteenth-century France, Duchamp and Tatlin posed two complementary models of the artist: the ambivalent consumer who seeks to rename art within a horizon of a commodity culture versus the active producer who seeks to reposition art vis-à-vis industrial production within a horizon of Communist revolution. What others would make of these possibilities, within their own historical limits, is a most important story in twentieth-century art. HF

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Kazimir Malevich shows his Suprematist canvases at the “0.10” exhibition in Petrograd, thus bringing the Russian Formalist concepts of art and literature into alignment.

**W**hen Aleksei Kruchenikh's (1886–1968) *Zaumnaya gniga* appeared in Moscow in 1915, little distinguished its content from that of a dozen previous books of his poems illustrated by one of his avant-garde artist-friends, including Kazimir Malevich and, from 1913, his own wife Olga Rozanova (1886–1918). Although Rozanova was already one of the most inventive participants in the Suprematist movement launched by Malevich in 1915, her illustrations for *Zaumnaya gniga* belonged to an earlier phase of the Russian avant-garde, called “neoprimitivist,” during which the idiom of early Cubism was grafted onto the Russian *lubki* (popular broadsides, usually woodprints, whose folkloric tradition goes back to the early seventeenth century).

The title itself, *Zaumnaya gniga*, would not have surprised any follower of Kruchenikh's activity, or that of any other “Cubo-Futurist” poet (as he and his friends called themselves at the time): one could translate it as *Transrational Boog* (*boog*, not *book*—the typo is intended, as the neologism *gniga* is an obvious deformation of *kniga* [book]). In the “transrational” tongue invented by Kruchenikh and his peers, which was aimed at “defying reason” and at freeing the word from the common rules of language, it was indeed appropriate that a book should become just a boog, a combination of letters whose indeterminate meaning would be the sheer product of associations in the mind of the reader. Kruchenikh's phonetic verses, devoid of any direct connection to a referent (“*Dyr bul shchyl/ubeshchur/skum/vy so bu/r lez*”), had been one of the rallying points of the Russian avant-garde ever since he had officially launched the “concept” of *zaum* (“beyond reason”) in 1913 (and even before that, in 1912, with the deliberately outrageous publication of *Slap in the Face of Public Taste*, a collective poetic almanac coauthored with David Burliuk, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Velemir Khlebnikov).

Rozanova's illustration for the cover of *Zaumnaya gniga*, however, was not typical in this context (it could easily be mistaken for a product of the not-yet-born Dada): it is a collage consisting of the silhouette of a heart (cut out of red paper) onto which a real button has been glued. Besides those of the artist and her husband, a third name adorns the cover, that of an apprentice *zaum* poet, Alyagrov, who contributed two texts to the volume, his first (and last) publication under this pseudonym.

The fact that Alyagrov was none other than the very young Roman Jakobson, who, fresh out of high school, had just founded the Moscow Linguistic Circle (he was later to become one of the founders of structuralism), may come as a surprise. But even more is in store: even though Jakobson's lifelong passion for language stemmed from his early interest in poetry (notably that of Stéphane Mallarmé, whom he was translating at the age of twelve), his real inspiration had come from painters—and particularly from Malevich, with whom he had planned a trip to Paris just before World War I. The trip was canceled, but weekly visits with Malevich to the Shchukin Collection, host of so many Cubist masterpieces, buttressed Jakobson's firm belief that the relationships between signs are more significant than their potential connection to a referent. It is necessary to underline the nonidentity of the sign and the object, as Jakobson kept repeating all his life, because “without contradiction there is no mobility of concepts, no mobility of signs, and the relationship between concept and sign becomes automatized.”

### The concepts of Russian Formalism

Along with Opozay (the Society of Poetical Language), established in Petrograd in 1916 (of which Jakobson was also a member), the Moscow Linguistic Circle became one of the two birthplaces of the school of literary criticism known as Russian Formalism (the label was coined by enemies, as is often the case: it presupposes a dichotomy between form and content, the very opposition that the Russian Formalists wanted most to annul, as did their fellow *zaum* poets). Right from the start, the issue at stake seems to have been: “What is it that makes a work literary; what is literariness as such?”

The question was polemical, directed against almost any trend of literary studies at the time: against the Symbolists, for whom the text was a transparent vehicle for a transcendent image; against the positivists and the psychologists, for whom the biography of the writer or his putative intention were the determining factors; and against the sociologists, for whom the truth of a literary text was to be found in the historical context of its formation and the political-ideological content it conveyed. For the Formalists, the literariness of a text was a product of its structure, from the phonetical level to the syntactic, from the microsemantic unit of the word to that of

the plot. The text for them was an organized whole, whose elements and devices had first to be analyzed, almost in a chemical fashion ("isolated and laid bare just as they are in a Cubist painting," as Jakobson wrote) before anything could be said of its signification.

In his "Art as Device" (1917), Viktor Shklovsky, an important member of Opoyaz, formulated one of the first concepts of Formalist literary analysis: *ostranenie*, or "making strange." Long exploited by *zaum* poets, *ostranenie* best marks the early convergence of views between Formalist critics and avant-garde poets and painters, most particularly their common opposition to a conception of language that reduces it to its pure value as instrument: for communication, for narration, for teaching, and so on. It is to be noted that their shared credo yielded unprecedented collaborations: not only were the Formalist critics the strongest defenders of *zaum* poetry, but also both Jakobson and Shklovsky were ardent apologists of Malevich's Suprematism; and if Malevich designed the set and costumes for Kruchenikh's opera *Victory over the Sun*, he also wrote *zaum* poems throughout his life. The real source of this parallel was the belief on the part of painter and critic alike in the power of art to renew perception. For the Formalist critic this meant showing how an author's use of language differs from our ordinary use, how commonsense language is "made strange" within the text; Shklovsky called such a critical move one of laying bare the aesthetic "device." For the painter this meant "de-automatizing" vision so as to confront the viewer with the fact that pictorial signs are not transparent to their referents but have an existence of their own, that they are "palpable," as Jakobson would say.

### Malevich's Suprematism: the zero of painting

After a quick-paced autodidact education through all the previous "isms" of modern art—from Symbolism to Impressionism, Post-impressionism, Cubism, and Futurism—Malevich attempted to create a *zaum* brand of painting. He first focused on a particular aspect that had been overlooked in the collage aesthetic of Synthetic Cubism, the discrepancy of scale and style it allows. Thus, in *Cow and Violin* (1913), a small and realistic profile of a cow, as if lifted from a children's encyclopedia, is painted over the much larger image of a violin, itself superimposed over a concatenation of geometric color planes. Soon after, Malevich deemed the "transrational" absurdity of these juxtapositions insufficient if he were to attain, in a Formalist fashion, the "pictorial" as such—which he called "the zero of painting."

He ended up his *zaum* phase with two types of experiments (later pursued by his numerous followers) that were destined to push the very notion against which he was struggling—that of the transparency of the pictorial language, essential in any mimetic conception of painting—to its limit. One of these experiments consisted of the simple inscription of a sentence, or a title, in place of the representation of the objects it named. There are several of these nominalist propositions that never went beyond the stage of

drawing, such as the notation "Fight on the Boulevard" hastily jotted down and framed on a piece of paper. The second of these last *zaum* attempts consisted in the collage of actual whole objects, such as a thermometer or a postage stamp, transforming the picture itself into an envelope, as in *Warrior of the First Division, Moscow* from 1914 [1]. In both cases (nominalist inscription or readymade objects), the ironical emphasis is on the tautology: the only purely transparent sign is that which refers to itself word for word, object for object. The shirt button in Rozanova's cover for *Zaumnaya gniga* probably refers to Malevich's assemblage, but also to reliefs by Ivan Puni (1892–1956), another of Malevich's followers (for example, *Relief with Plate* of 1919). Puni's painting *Baths* (1915), even combines assemblage and nominalism, being at once the sign-board for a public bathhouse (thus an object) and the inscription of the word "bath."

But rather than the aesthetic disjunctions of collage, it is the large, undivided planes of color that are most striking in Malevich's works such as *Warrior of the First Division, Moscow* or *Composition with Mona Lisa* (1914), in which the only figurative element, a reproduction of Leonardo's painting, is blocked out in red. And it is these color planes that Malevich will "isolate" in giving birth to his own version of abstraction, which he called Suprematism. The founding moment of Suprematism occurred in December 1915, at the "0.10" exhibition in Petrograd (subtitled "The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings," the show owes its name to the fact that its ten participants—including Vladimir



1 • Kazimir Malevich, *Warrior of the First Division, Moscow*, 1914  
Oil and collage on canvas, 53.6 × 44.8 (21½ × 17½)

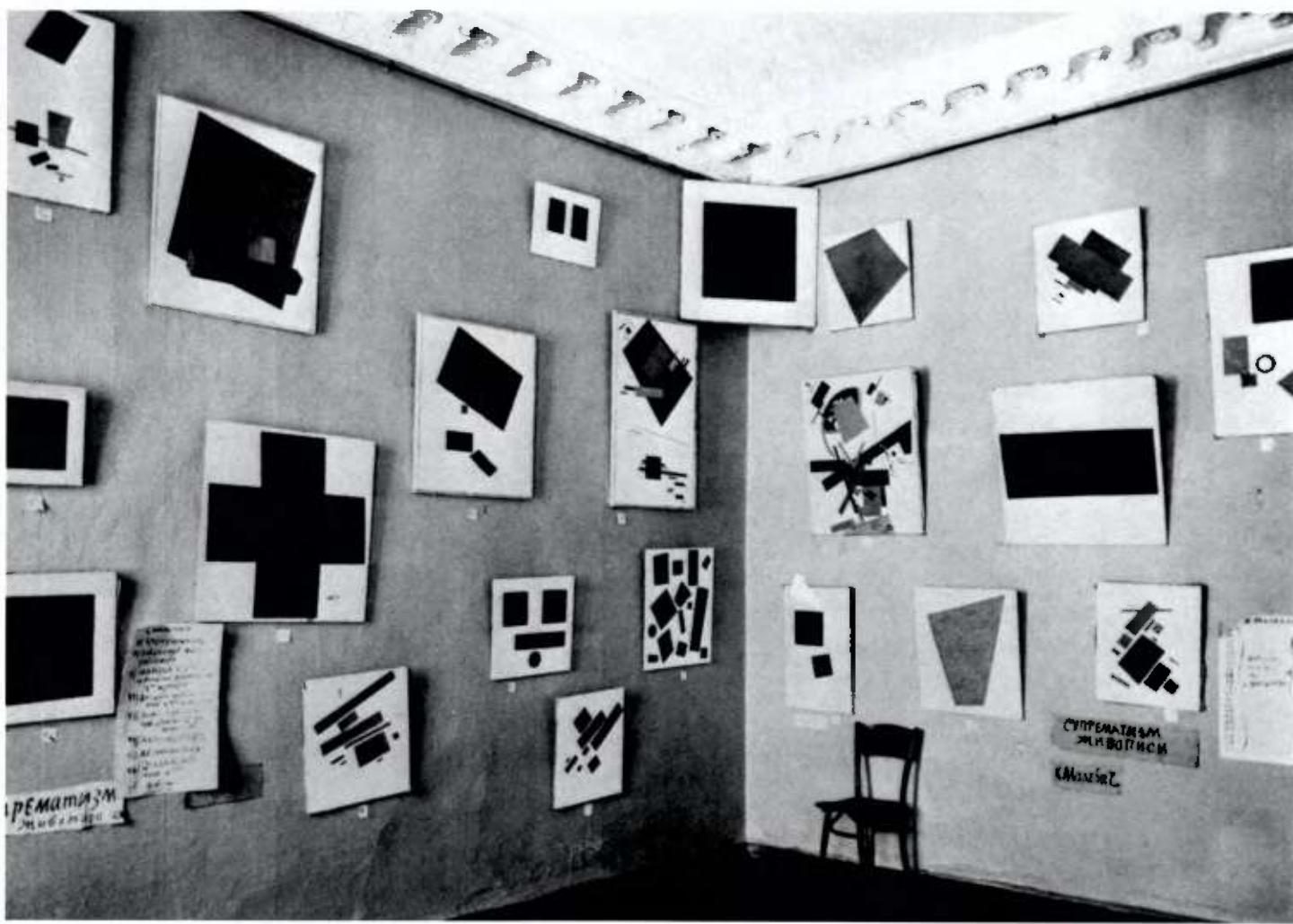
- ▲ Tatlin, who showed his first corner counter-relief there—were all seeking to determine the “zero degree,” the irreducible core, the essential minimum of painting or of sculpture).
- Thus, almost half a century before Clement Greenberg, Malevich posited that the “zero” condition of painting in the culture of his time is that it is flat and delimited. From this critical reduction there stems Malevich’s emphasis on the textural quality of his surfaces, his attention to painterly facture, but also his predilection for the figure of the square, a form long conceived, as its Latin name attests, as the result of one of the simplest geometrical acts of delimitation (*quadrum* means both “square” and “frame”). And from this identification of the figure of the square with the ground of the picture itself—in Malevich’s *Black Square*, for example, which hovered over his other works at “0.10,” parodying the placement of icons in traditional Russian houses [2]—there developed in ■ Malevich’s work the very inquiry into what Michael Fried, writing in 1965 about Frank Stella’s black paintings, would call “deductive structure” (in which the internal organization of the picture—the placement and morphology of its figures—is deducted from, and thus an indexical sign of, the shape and proportions of its support). Malevich’s 1915 *Black Cross*, his *Four Squares* (one of the first

regular grids of twentieth-century art), and many other “noncompositions” presented at “0.10” are indexical paintings; that is, the division of the picture’s surface, the marks it received, are not determined by the artist’s “inner life” or mood (as was the case for Kandinsky’s abstract paintings), but by the logic of the “zero”—they refer directly to the material ground of the picture itself, which they map.

### Making strange with color

Malevich was not a positivist (he always stuck to an antirationalist point of view that brought him, especially in his late, post-revolutionary texts, close to a mystical position). Even in the most “deductive” of his canvases, he always made sure that his squares were slightly skewed so that (by virtue of the *ostranenie*) one would notice their stark simplicity and read them as stubbornly “one” (both unique and whole) rather than identifying them as geometric figures. For what mattered most to him, as he kept repeating, was “intuition.”

One of the surest routes to attain this nonverbal, nonarticulate mode of communication in painting was color, the sheer expanse of undivided planes of saturated pigment. Malevich’s passion for



2 • A view of the “0.10” exhibition in Petrograd, 1915

Malevich’s *Black Square* can be seen in the corner of the room above his other paintings.

▲ 1914, 1921b    ● 1942a, 1960b    ■ 1958

▲ 1906, 1913

color played a major role in his rapid evolution from Cubism to abstraction, as did the works of Matisse, also discovered in the ▲ Shchukin Collection. But despite his enthusiasm for the French master's *ostranenie* tactics of using arbitrary color, Malevich quickly came to the conclusion (via his apprenticeship in the "analytical" mode of thinking pertaining to Cubism) that color would never be "isolated" and perceived as such (that is, it would never reign "supreme") without first being freed from any determination of a subject matter other than its own radiance.

And this desire to explore "color" as such, to expose the "zero" of color, also led Malevich to take leave of the deductive structure. For next to the *Black Square* or the *Red Square* [3], which was exhibited under the ironic, *zaum* title of *Peasant Woman: Suprematism* (it is now subtitled *Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions*), one could see many pictures on the walls of "0.10" in which rectangles of all sizes and of various colors floated on a white background. For a brief period, these paintings led to what Malevich would later call "aerial suprematism," works he would himself severely criticize for their return to illusionism and their quite direct allusion to a cosmic imagery as though one were viewing Earth from outer space [4].

- It was the sixties American artist Donald Judd, one of the harshest critics of illusionism in painting, and always ready to point out how much of it still remained in the works of the pioneers of abstraction and their followers of the twenties and thirties, who was the first to reinscribe these agitated paintings into the theoretical framework of the Formalist (*ostranenie*) logic. Reviewing a Malevich retrospective exhibition in 1974, Judd noted that in these canvases colors do not "combine; they can only make a set of three or any two in the way that three bricks make a set." Those sets, writes Judd, "are not harmonic, do not make a further overall color or tone." In other words, the color relationships are not compositional. The allusion to bricks, to the "one thing next to the other" of Minimalism, is very much to the point. But colors are not random either: they assert their independence from the whole via their fragmentary groupings into clusters, preventing any perceptual organization of the shapes into a gestaltist order (and allowing for clashing, almost "kitsch" juxtapositions, such as red and pink).

After zero ...

By 1917–18, as the ideological directions of the October Revolution were making increasing demands on the artists of the Russian avant-garde—the only artistic group to have given it support from the start—Malevich found it increasingly difficult to justify his pictorial activity ideologically. His own political inclinations, close to anarchism, which he saw as perfectly congruent with his aesthetics, were not of great help after the Bolsheviks' repression of an anarchist revolt at Kronstadt in 1918. His momentary farewell to painting constitutes one of the borderline experiences of twentieth-century art, the moment when the "zero" is almost tangible—there, on the canvas. The works in question are several pictures in which a



3 • Kazimir Malevich, *Red Square (Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions)*, 1915  
Oil on canvas, 53 × 53 (20½ × 20½)



4 • Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematist Construction*, 1915–16  
Oil on canvas, 86 × 70 (34½ × 27½)

"white" form (slightly off-white, to be more precise) glides, at the threshold of visibility, on the white expanse of the canvas [5]. Displaying almost nothing but the smallest differentiation of tone, and the sensual marks of the brush-stroke, sometimes these "white-on-white" pictures were even exhibited on a white ceiling, thus emphasizing their own potential dissolution, as white squares themselves, into the architectural space.

Malevich was enlisted in several cultural and agitprop tasks after the Revolution (from planning new museum collections to designing posters), but his most sustained activity was as a pedagogue. In 1919, having dislodged Chagall as head of the Popular Art Institute in Vitebsk, and having secured the help of the much younger El Lissitzky (1890–1941), he founded the Unovis school (the Russian acronym for "Affirmers of the New Art"). The pictorial production of his pupils, most of them in their teens, was derivative at best. How odd it is to imagine the unheated Unovis classrooms full of paintings of bouncing red squares, in the midst of a huge economic crisis, civil war, and famine! But it was there that Malevich began to develop, with his students, his conception of architecture, which he would actively pursue at the Institute for the Study of the Culture of Contemporary Art of Leningrad (or Ginkhuk), of which he was appointed director in 1922. As there was no question of actual building, architecture was approached as a language, much as Malevich had analyzed the constituents of painting: What would be the zero in architecture? Where would architecture go if it were devoid of function? The results of his inquiry, models of ideal cities and dwellings called *arkhitektoniki*, with their multiplication of cantilevers and their questioning of the classical opposition of post and lintel, were to have an immediate impact on the emerging International Style in architecture and town-planning (particularly

after their publication, through El Lissitzky, in several European publications in the mid-twenties).

While abstract painting, *zaum* poetry, and Formalist criticism, now deemed bourgeois and elitist, increasingly became the target of political censorship in Soviet Russia, architectural research, even as utopian as that of Malevich and his followers, remained relatively free. But soon after the death of Lenin (in 1924) cultural repression began to close down on all spheres of cultural activity, and even Malevich's *arkhitektoniki* had to pay tribute to the heroic, neoclassical proportions demanded by Stalin's watchdogs. Malevich, still teaching (to a thinning student body) and devoting vast energy to writing (most of it unpublished at that time), started painting again in the late twenties. But because abstraction was now almost a political crime, he became engaged in the very strange activity of running through his own pictorial evolution in reverse, going back not only to Cubo-Futurism but also as far as Impressionism, yet consistently antedating this belated production as if it were from his youth. This manifest fraud, puzzling to the historians, is in keeping with the modernist creed of his quest for the zero: like Mondrian, Malevich thought that each art had to define its own essence by eliminating those conventions deemed unnecessary and, in this evolutionary march, each work of art was to be a step beyond the preceding one—which means that each was assigned a proper date on this progression. A flashback is always possible within this logic, but it would have been morally wrong to present something which could (and should) have been done in 1912 as dating from 1928. (Similarly, when around 1920 Mondrian was forced to paint flowers for economic reasons, he made sure to adorn these "commercial" works with his signature of around the turn of the century.)

The last works by Malevich, however, from the early thirties, are not antedated. Crude pastiches of Renaissance portraits in harsh colors, but often bearing a tiny Suprematist emblem (the geometric ornaments of a belt or a hat), these paintings are replete with irony. Unlike, say, a de Chirico, Malevich is not welcoming here the "return to order." But condemned to figuration and to a mimetic conception of painting against which he had fought all his life, he is "making strange" the very practice of portraiture by giving a sense of the historical distance denied by his censors between the epoch of genuine portrait-making and his own. YAB

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5 • Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematist Painting (White on White)*, 1918  
Oil on canvas, 79.3 x 79.3 (31 x 31)

▲ 1926, 1928a, 1928b

▲ 1934a ■ 1913, 1917a, 1944a ■ 1909, 1919, 1924

# 1916<sub>a</sub>

In Zurich, the international movement of Dada is launched in a double reaction to the catastrophe of World War I and the provocations of Futurism and Expressionism.

Dada encompassed a wide range of practices, politics, and places, so it could hardly be coherent even if it wanted to be, which it did not: most of its participants viewed any coherence, any order at all, with derision (legend has it that the word "Dada" was picked at random from a German-French dictionary). This anarchic assault on all artistic convention caught fire quickly. Despite its short life—by the early twenties it was either burned out or subsumed into Surrealism in France and ▲ Neue Sachlichkeit in Germany—it had no fewer than six major bases of operation: Zurich, New York, Paris, Berlin, Cologne, and

Hanover, which were connected, intermittently, by ambitious impresarios (Tristan Tzara, for example), nomadic artists (such as ▲ Francis Picabia), and international journals (see box). Born in double reaction to the catastrophe of World War I and the provocations of Futurism and Expressionism, Dada took direct aim at bourgeois culture, which it blamed for the butchery of the war. In many ways, however, this culture was already dead for Dada, and Dada rose to dance on its grave (Hugo Ball, a principal figure in the Zurich group, once defined Dada as a cross between a "harlequinade" and a "requiem mass"). In short, the Dadaists pledged to



1 • Hugo Ball in his "Magical Bishop" costume, at the Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich, June 1916



2 • Marcel Janco, Mask, c. 1919  
Paper, cardboard, string, gouache, and pastel, 45 × 22 × 5 (17½ × 8½ × 2)

attack all norms, even incipient ones of their own ("Dada is Anti-Dada" was a favorite refrain); in Zurich, they did so through especially outlandish performances, exhibitions, and publications.

### A farce of nothingness

The international group of poets, painters, and filmmakers drawn to neutral Switzerland before or during the war included the Germans Ball (1886–1927), Emmy Hennings (1885–1948), Richard Huelsenbeck (1892–1974), and Hans Richter (1888–1976), the Romanians Tzara (1896–1963) and Marcel Janco (1895–1984), the Alsatian Hans Arp, the Swiss Sophie Taeuber, and the Swede Viking Eggeling (1880–1925). Zurich was a principal refuge for other vanguards too: James Joyce lived there for a time, as did Vladimir Lenin, who lodged diagonally across the street from the Cabaret Voltaire that served as Dada headquarters. Named after the great French satirist of the eighteenth century (author of *Candide*, an attack on the idiocies of his own age), the Cabaret was founded on February 5, 1916, as a venue for a vaudevillian mockery of "the ideals of culture and of art." "That is our *Candide* against the times," Ball wrote in his extraordinary diary, *Flight Out of Time*. "People act as if nothing had happened, [as if] all this civilized carnage [were] a triumph." The Dadaists aimed to act out this crisis in a performative chaos of their own, one pledged "to draw attention, across the barriers of war and nationalism, to the few independent spirits who live for other ideals" (Ball). Surrounded by Expressionist posters and primitivist pictures by Janco and Richter, these provocateurs recited contradictory manifestos (both Futurist and Expressionist), poems in French, German, and Russian (that is, in languages on different sides of the war), and quasi-African chants; they also contrived concerts with typewriters, kettledrums, rakes, and pot covers. "Total pandemonium" is how Arp described the Cabaret Voltaire in retrospect: "The people around us are shouting, laughing, and gesticulating. Our replies are sighs of love, volleys of hiccups, poems, moos, and miaowing of medieval Bruitists. Tzara is wiggling his behind like the belly of an Oriental dancer. Janco is playing an invisible violin and bowing and scraping. Madam Hennings, with a Madonna face, is doing the splits. Huelsenbeck is banging away nonstop on the great drum, with Ball accompanying him on the piano pale as a chalky ghost. We were given the honorary title of Nihilists."

Yet the Dadaists were not only nihilists. Although they acted out the dislocations of exile (the name "Tristan Tzara," the pseudonym of Sami Rosenstock, suggests "sad in country"), they also formed a community of artists committed to internationalist politics and universal languages (Richter and Eggeling hoped that abstract film might qualify as one). They could be affirmative as well as destructive in spirit, redemptive as well as regressive in posture; for Ball the term "Dada" held all these associations together: "In Romanian Dada means yes yes, in French a hobby horse. To Germans it is an indication of idiotic naïveté and of a

preoccupation with procreation and the baby carriage." Anarchic impulses were also mixed with mystical leanings, especially in the Dadaist relation to language. Like the Futurist Marinetti, Ball worked to release language from conventional syntax and semantics into raw sound (the Hanover Dadaist Kurt Schwitters worked along similar lines). Yet the Dadaist interest in sound poetry diverged sharply from the Futurist embrace of nonrational expression: in his "words-in-freedom" the militarist Marinetti worked to plunge language into a bodily matrix of the senses—to reforge it as force—while the pacifist Ball sought to empty language not only of conventional sense but also of the instrumental reason that had underwritten the mass carnage of the war. "A line of poetry is a chance to get rid of all the filth that clings to this accursed language," Ball wrote. "Every word that is spoken and sung here says at least this one thing: that this humiliated age has not succeeded in winning our respect." Even as Ball worked to shatter language, however, he also sought to recover the word as "logos," to transform language into so many "magical complex images."

The short life of the Cabaret Voltaire ended abruptly on June 23, 1916, with a legendary performance by Ball [1], recounted here in *Flight Out of Time*:

*My legs were in a cylinder of shiny blue cardboard, which came up to my hips so that I looked like an obelisk. Over it I wore a huge coat collar cut out of cardboard, scarlet inside and gold outside.... I also wore a high, blue-and-white-striped witch doctor's hat.... I was carried onto the stage in the dark and began slowly and solemnly: "gadji beri bimba/ glandridi lauli lonni cadori/ gadjama bim beri glassala/ glandridi glassala tuffm i zimbrabim/ blassa galassasa tuffm i zimbrabim...." ... Then I noticed that my voice had no choice but to take on the ancient cadence of priestly lamentation, that style of liturgical singing that wails in all the Catholic churches of East and West.... For a moment it seemed as if there were a pale, bewildered face in my Cubist mask, that half-frightened, half-curious face of a ten-year-old boy, trembling and hanging avidly on the priest's words in the requiems and high masses in his home parish.... Bathed in sweat, I was carried down off the stage like a magical bishop.*

In the performance Ball is part shaman, part priest, but he is also a child once again entranced by ritual magic. This "playground for crazy emotions" witnessed other such performances with fantastic costumes and bizarre masks, often contrived for the occasion by Janco [2]; Sophie Taeuber contributed theatrical props and dance pieces as well. "The motive power of these masks was irresistibly conveyed to us," Ball remarked of the masks, which he regarded as modern equivalents of those in ancient Greek and Japanese theater. "[They] simply demanded that their wearers start to move in a tragic-absurd dance."

In part, Ball saw Dada as an avant-garde rite of possession and exorcism. The Dadaist "suffers from the dissonances [of the world] to the point of self-disintegration.... [He] fights against the agony

and the death throes of this age." In effect, Ball regarded the Dadaist as a traumatic mime who assumes the dire conditions of war, revolt, and exile, and exacerbates them in the form of a buffoonish parody. "What we call Dada is a farce of nothingness in which all the higher questions are involved," he remarked less than two weeks before his Magical Bishop performance, "a gladiator's gesture, a play with shabby leftovers." Here Dada mimes dissonance and destruction in order to purge them somehow, or at least to transform such shock into a shield, an immunological antidote that retains a strong dose of fear and loathing. "The horror of our time, the paralyzing background of events, is made visible," Ball once commented of the Janco masks; and of the poetry of Huelsenbeck he had this to say: "The Gorgon's head of a boundless terror smiles out of the fantastic destruction."

Exhausted, Ball left Zurich soon after his performance (eventually to return to the Church), and Tzara took over as prime instigator of Zurich Dada. Tzara was the "natural antithesis of Ball," Richter once remarked, as dandyish in his stance of disgust as Ball was desperate in his acting out of trauma. His model as avant-garde impresario was Marinetti: Tzara not only stressed the Futurist aspects of Dada but also orchestrated Dada much as Marinetti had Futurism—with manifestos, a journal, even a gallery. In a self-contradictory development, Zurich Dada thus became less a chaotic mix of other styles than an artistic movement of its own. In the third issue of *Dada* (1918), Tzara published the "Dada Manifesto," which put Dada on the map of European avant-gardes; it also attracted Picabia from New York, and together he and Tzara prepared the Dadaist campaign in Paris that was to follow the war. When the war did end, so, effectively, did Zurich Dada, as refugees were free to move once again.

### Sense and senselessness

"Dada is for the senseless," Arp once wrote, "which doesn't mean nonsense." This is an important distinction for Dadaist abstraction as practiced by Arp and Taeuber, the key artists of the second phase of Zurich Dada. While other Dadaists, such as Tzara and Picabia, claimed that Dada intends nothing (except perhaps nothingness), Arp and Taeuber suggested that it can mean almost anything at all. "Dada is as senseless as nature," Arp continued; "Dada is for infinite sense and definite means." That is, it is as full of meaning, as infinite in sense, as nature is—or indeed as empty. Yet how can a work be at once replete and null, infinite and definite? Consider the many reliefs Arp produced in his Dada years (and after): constructed out of different pieces of painted wood bolted together, they are abstract compositions that are nonetheless suggestive of biomorphic forms (human, animal, plant) [3]. In this way, they are specific, almost referential (as his titles often suggest—a torso, a bird, etc.), even as they are also metamorphic, open in association.

Arp and Taeuber met in 1915 in Zurich, where Taeuber taught textile design at the School of Applied Arts. More exactly, they met

in November 1915 at the Tanner Gallery, where, along with two Dutch friends (Otto and Adya van Rees), Arp had a show of tapestries and collages. "These works are constructed with lines, surfaces, shapes, and colors," Arp wrote at the time, as if to underscore that they are resolutely abstract, not concerned either with the play of signification, as entertained in Cubist collages (which he did know), or with "the truth to materials," as proposed in early Constructivist experiments (which he did not). His abstractions have another aim: "They try to transcend the human and attain the infinite and eternal. They are a denial of human egotism." This anti-individualism became a central principle for Arp and Taeuber: first and last, they pledged their abstract work against the "egotism" that had caused the war.

This position guided Arp and Taeuber in several respects. First, it made them skeptical of easel painting, which was too individualistic in production and reception ("we regarded [it] as characteristic of a pretentious and conceited world"). Second, it led them to collaborate, especially on collaged and woven pieces, which were sometimes designated "duo," in a way that also challenged individual authorship [4]. Third, the stance against "egotism" inclined Arp and Taeuber to the grid (they were among the first to use it so directly). Implicit in the composition of



3 • Hans Arp, *Torso, Navel*, 1915  
Wood. 66 x 43.2 x 10.2 (26 x 17 x 4)

## Dada journals

The group of artists and poets who gravitated toward Zurich at the outbreak of World War I immediately started *Cabaret Voltaire* (1916), the journal through which Dada was able to spread throughout Europe and into North America. If art is understood by psychoanalysis as sublimatory—a way of rising above the animal instincts that form the underbelly of the psyche—Dada saw itself as desublimatory—scoffing at the spiritual ambitions of poetry and painting. In his short history of the movement, Richard Huelsenbeck wrote, “The German *dichter* [poet] is the typical dope.... He does not understand what a gigantic humbug the world has made of the ‘spirit’.”

By 1917, *Dada*, edited by Tristan Tzara, was also being published in Zurich. *Dadaco*, an anthology with Dada works of art, such as photomontages by George Grosz, soon followed. That the very word “*dada*” was provocative is heralded by an article in *Dadaco* which begins: “Was ist *dada*? Eine Kunst? Eine Philosophie? Eine Politick? Eine Feuerversicherung? Oder: Staatsreligion. Ist *dada* wirkliche Energie? Oder ist es Garnichts, d.h. alles?” (What is *dada*? An art? A philosophy? A politics? A fire insurance policy Or: Official religion? Is *dada* truly energy? Or is it nothing at all, i.e., everything?)

The Dada movement in the United States soon resulted in Man Ray’s *Ridgefield Gazook*, published from 1915, as well as *New York Dada*, the periodical he produced with Marcel Duchamp. The international character of Dada journals is further illustrated by Kurt Schwitters’s *Merz* in Hanover and Francis Picabia’s *391*, the latter published out of Barcelona. But in France, *La Nouvelle Revue Française* resumed publication in 1919 (after having been suppressed during the war) by accusing the “new school” of nonsense symptomatized by the “indefinite repetition of the mystical syllables ‘dada dadada dada da.’” The French novelist André Gide joined the debate with an article announcing: “The day the word Dada was found, there was nothing left to do. Everything written subsequently seemed to me a bit beside the point.... Nothing was up to it: DADA. These two syllables had accomplished that ‘sonorous inanity,’ an absolute of meaninglessness.”

Indeed, in Gide’s novel *The Counterfeiters* (1926), the villain Strouvilhou imagines what a Dada journal should be when he says, “If I edit a review, it will be in order to prick bladders—in order to demonetize fine feelings, and those promissory notes which go by the name of *words*.” In the first issue, he announces (with the Duchamp collage *L.H.O.O.Q.* in mind), there will be “a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*, with a pair of mustaches stuck on to her face.” It is this linking of abstraction and nonsense that is associated, in Gide’s narrative, with the emptying out of the sign’s meaning: “If we manage our affairs well,” says Strouvilhou, “I don’t ask for more than two years before a future poet will think himself dishonored if anyone can understand a word of what he says. All sense, all meaning will be considered anti-poetical. Illogicality shall be our guiding star.”

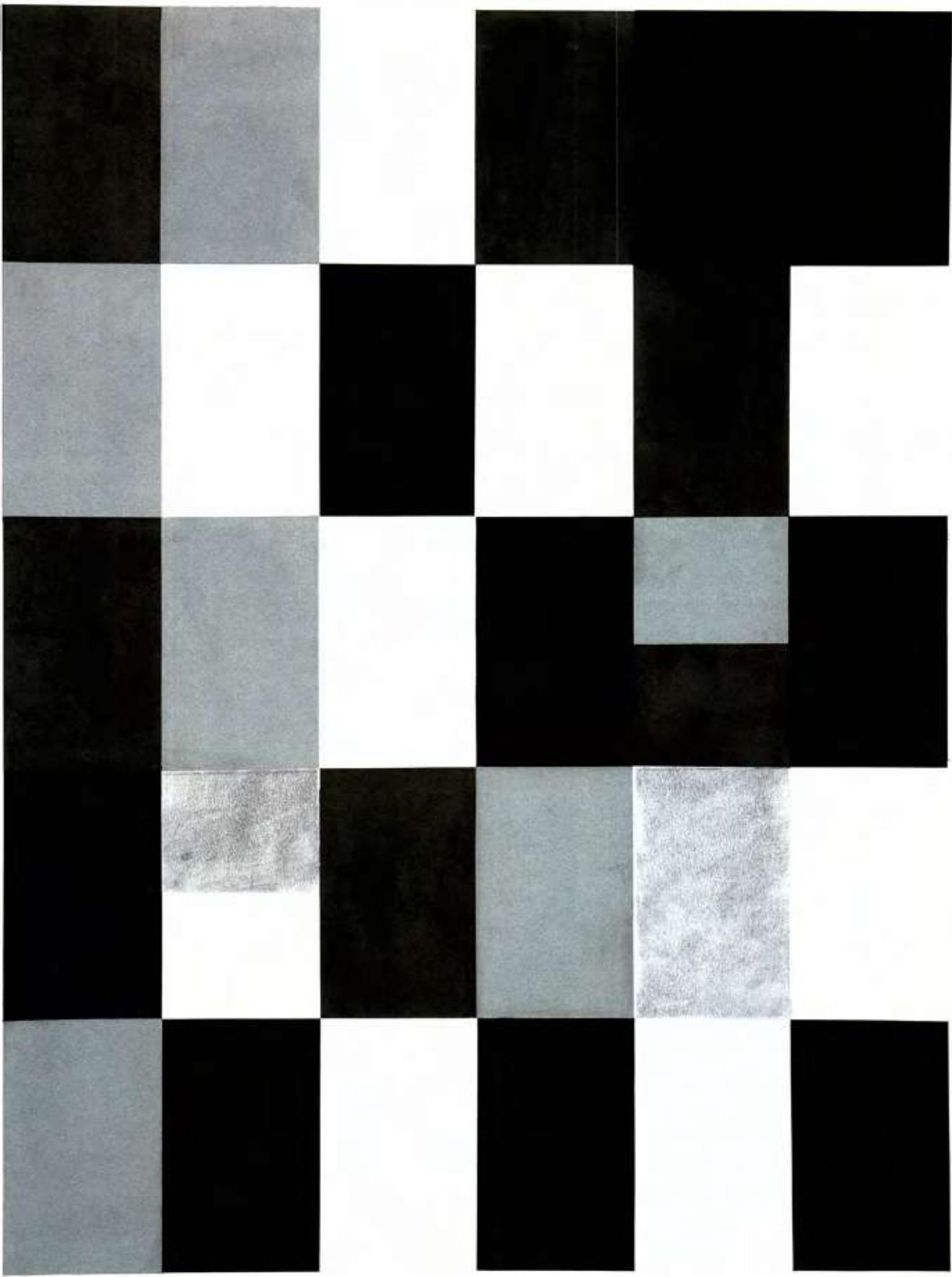
the collaged works and intrinsic to the support of the woven works, the grid is a given order that informs these works, again in an anti-autographic manner; the evocation of ornamental patterning here also puts artistic individuation into doubt. Finally, this position prompted them to experiment with quasi-automatist procedures. Already in 1914 Arp had produced small embroideries in wool, with geometric or curvilinear shapes oriented on the horizontal or the vertical. Like the woven works made by Taeuber a few years later, these works are not only repetitive in process but sometimes symmetrical in form; this too makes them appear almost authorless, as though they were elaborated by the medium or the pattern alone.

▲ Arp experimented with aleatory techniques too, as in his famous collages of 1916–17 that consist of rectangular pieces of paper “arranged according to the laws of chance.” However, this phrase was a later addition to the titles (Arp attached it sometime after 1930, in the milieu of Surrealism), and chance is hardly the opposite of control in these works: individual elements and overall composition are calculated enough. This is also true of his quasi-automatist drawings of 1915–20, where initial marks in pencil often appear under or alongside the main figures in ink [5]. For Arp, chance could signal the individual as much as control did (for his collages he soon substituted a paper cutter for scissors, which “all too readily betrayed the life of the hand”), and he remained ambivalent about the aleatory.

## An art of silence

For Arp and Taeuber, abstraction was not only anti-individualist in spirit but also antisemantic in aim. “All these works were drawn from the simplest forms,” Arp wrote; they are “realities, pure and independent, with no meaning.” However, this “art of silence” (as he called it) is not simply negative; rather, it involves a deconstructive play with opposites, for the abstractions of Arp and Taeuber are not quite single or double in authorship, not quite preconceived or aleatory in process, and not quite ordered or random in composition, nor are they obviously aesthetic or utilitarian in orientation, or fine or applied as art. They possess just enough of one term to put the other in doubt—just enough order not to appear random, just enough aesthetic interest not to be taken as utilitarian, and so on. This neutral structure frustrates our usual model of meaning based on binaries, and points to another logic. Seen in this way, then, the “art of silence” of Arp and Taeuber is indeed against meaning and interpretation, but in a way that aims to open up both. “Once you are neither this nor that, then you are all things,” Meister Eckhart, the medieval German theologian, once wrote. This thought was dear to Arp, and it might be taken as the motto of these abstractions in general.

Such a suspension of opposites is also at work in the Arp woodcuts of 1916–20 and the Taeuber objects of 1916–18. As in the embroideries, the shapes in the woodcuts are often repeated, and they, too, hesitate between the representational and the abstract:



4 • Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber, *Untitled (Duo-Collage)*, 1918

Collage of papers, board, and silver leaf on paperboard, 82 × 62 (32 1/16 × 24 7/16)



5 • Hans Arp, *Dada*, c. 1920

Ink and pencil on paper, 26.7 x 20.8 (10½ x 8⅓)

some recall patterns in ornament based on vases and flowers, while others resemble figures with crowns or collars such as kings or clergymen. On the one hand, then, these forms are entirely conventional—in fact so banal as to appear devoid of significance; whereas, on the other, they evoke emblems of political authority or suggest a religious meaning. Here the null–full tension in the Arp and Taeuber abstractions is most extreme: empty shapes that also connote auratic signs of power (crests, scepters), bathetic patterns that also suggest, as Arp says, “meditations, mandalas, signposts.”

The Taeuber objects are like the Arp woodcuts elaborated in the round. They, too, are representational yet abstract, utilitarian yet aesthetic, even ritualistic (of the four extant objects, two are subtitled *Dada Bowl* and *Powder Box* and two are called *Amphora* and *Chalice*), crafted by hand yet all but unmarked (turned on the lathe, they are smooth in texture and uniform in paint), and so on. In short, these objects are also “neither this nor that,” and in this ambiguity they not only oppose the traditional categories of sculpture, such as the figure and the monument, but also differ from the new models of object-making of the time, such as the readymade, the construction, and the fetish.

So why turn crowns into dingbats, as Arp does in his woodcuts, or chalices into thingamajigs, as Taeuber does in her objects? Why render empty of sense what otherwise seems replete with significance? Again, a core belief of Dada, especially in Zurich, was that the world war had exposed, once and for all, the utter corruption of bourgeois civilization, of its language in particular—a complete crisis in the symbolic order with ramifications that were at once political, social, religious, and artistic. As we have seen, the insistence on meaninglessness in Dada, on a voiding of sense in its art, writing, and performance, can be understood as an excessive acting-out, a bathetic exacerbation, of this general state of affairs. At the same time, this voiding was also a purging of a civilization become barbaric: “These years,” Arp wrote in retrospect, “affected us like a purification, like spiritual exercises.” This purification concerned language above all, visual as well as verbal, which was to be broken up and/or stripped down to a zero degree.

However, if meaning was to be voided in a first moment, it called out for renewal in a second moment, with the collapse of the old sense somehow troped as an opening to a new sense. Such is the stake of the doubleness in the Arp and Taeuber abstractions that oscillate between too much meaning and none at all. In his poetry in particular, Arp sometimes seems to reprise a mythical origin of language, like a Dadaist Adam rising from the ruins of the war to name the world anew. This scene recalls the explosion of signification at the dawn of man once imagined by Claude Lévi-Strauss. “Language can only have risen all at once,” Lévi-Strauss writes in an essay on his fellow anthropologist, Marcel Mauss. “Things cannot have begun to signify gradually. In the wake of [this] transformation … a shift occurred from a stage when nothing had a meaning to a stage when everything had meaning.” In this hypothetical moment, Lévi-Strauss argues, there is a surplus of signification, a non-fit between signifiers and signifieds,

such that a signifier might float free as “a simple form, or to be more accurate, a symbol in its pure state, therefore liable to take on any symbolic content whatever.” Such, according to Lévi-Strauss, was the Polynesian term *mana* in the relevant writings of Mauss. “Dada” is a *mana* word too, and there are many *mana* forms in Arp and Taeuber, such as “the navel” in his reliefs or “the cloud” in his poetry or indeed any of her objects. HF

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# 1916<sub>b</sub>

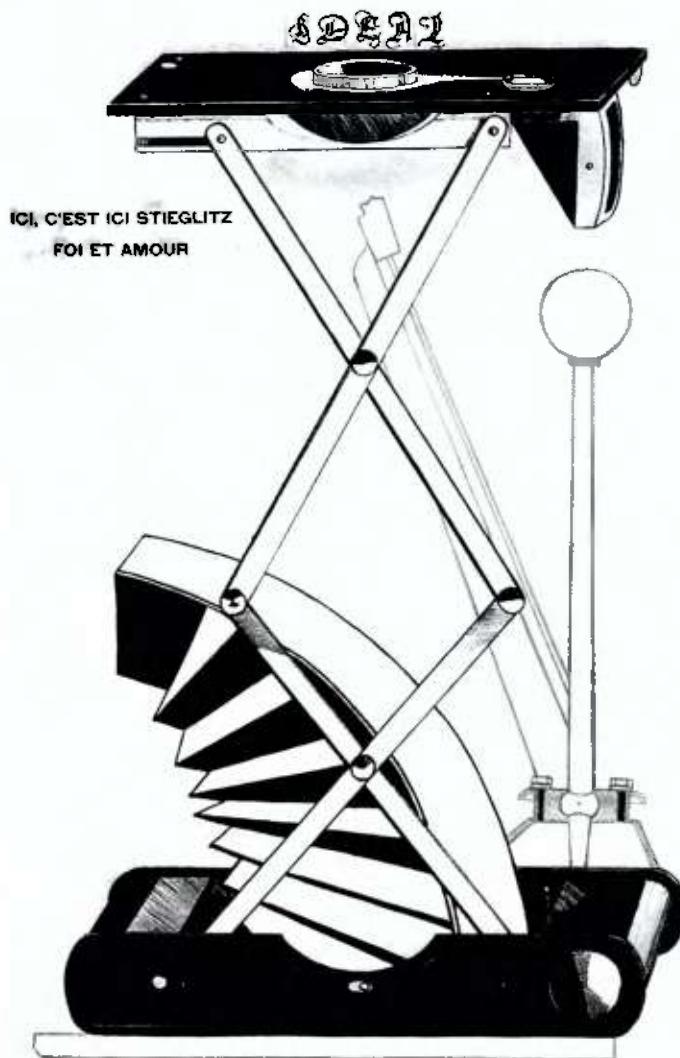
Paul Strand enters the pages of Alfred Stieglitz's magazine *Camera Work*: the American avant-garde forms itself around a complex relationship between photography and the other arts.

That Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) should have been portrayed by Francis Picabia in 1915 in the form of a camera [1] would have surprised no one in the world of avant-garde art, certainly not in New York, but not in Paris either. For by 1915, Stieglitz's magazine *Camera Work* (published from 1903) was famous on both sides of the Atlantic, and his gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, having changed its name in 1908 from the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession to simply 291, had mounted major exhibitions of Matisse (1908, 1910, and 1912), Picasso (1911, 1914, and 1915), Brancusi (1914), and Picabia (1915).

Nonetheless, several contradictions crisscross the "face" of Stieglitz's portrait. For one thing, the Dada spirit of the mechanomorphic form has nothing to do with Stieglitz's own aesthetic convictions; his belief in American values such as sincerity, honesty, and innocence clash as much as possible with Picabia's ironic rendering of the human subject as a machine. And as a continuation of this, Stieglitz's commitment to authenticity, taking the form, as it did, of truth to the nature of a given medium, had placed him at direct odds with the photographic practice of his day. The result was that from 1911, 291 no longer exhibited camera-based work (the one exception being Stieglitz's own exhibition in 1913 to coincide with the Armory Show). In Stieglitz's eyes, that is, modernism and photography had, distressingly, become antithetical.

It was only when the young Paul Strand (1890–1976) presented Stieglitz with the photographs he had made in 1916 that the elder man could see the vindication of his own position. For he viewed Strand's work as a demonstration that the values of modernism and those of "straight photography" could utterly fuse on the surface of a single print. Accordingly, Stieglitz decided to hold an exhibition of Strand's photographs at 291 and to revive *Camera Work*, which had been languishing since January 1915. In October 1916, he brought out issue number 48, and in June 1917 he ended the project with number 49/50. Both issues were intended as monuments to Strand and to a renewed sense of photography's having definitively joined an authentic modernism. With this assessment in place, Stieglitz ended his entrepreneurship on behalf of the avant-garde and rede-voted himself to his own practice of photography.

The peculiar zigzag of this trajectory had begun in Berlin, where Stieglitz had enrolled as an engineering student in 1882. A course



1 • Francis Picabia, *Ici, c'est ici Stieglitz*, 1915  
Pen and red ink on paper, 75.9 × 50.8 (29½ × 20)

in photochemistry introduced the young American to photography, a medium he took to immediately, although he had had no previous training in art. "I went to photography really a free soul," he later explained. "There was no short cut, no foolproof photographing—no 'art world' in photography. I started with the real A.B.C."

By 1889, Stieglitz had made *Sun Rays—Paula—Berlin* [2], a work that in its sharpness of detail was far away from the idiom that had settled over all aesthetically ambitious photography in the late nineteenth century and into the first decade of the twentieth. Called "Pictorialist," this photography had bet the future of the medium on aping the features of painting and was thus involved in various effects of blurring (soft focus, greased lenses) and even handwork ("drawing" on the negatives with gum bichromate) to manipulate the final image as much as possible.

Focusing instead on "the real A.B.C." of photography, *Sun Rays—Paula—Berlin* not only mobilizes a strict realism to separate itself from Pictorialism's simulation of "art," but also produces something of an inventory of the values and mechanisms inherent to the medium itself. One of these mechanisms is the brute fact of the photomechanical, by which light enters the camera through a shutter to make a permanent trace on the sensitive emulsion of the negative. Bodily forth this light as a sequence of rays falling across the field in a striated pattern of dark and light, *Sun Rays* also identifies the opened windows through which sunlight streams into the darkened room (or *camera*) with the camera's shutter.

None of this would be remarkably different from the various Impressionist attempts to present the light on which their technique depended as the very subject of a given painting were it not for the concatenation of images pictured inside the room itself. For there the photomechanical's relation to mechanical reproduction—to the multiple duplication and serialization of the image—is dramatized, as the young woman writing at the table bends her head toward a framed portrait (possibly of herself) that we identify as a photograph, since above her on the wall we see its exact duplicate flanked by two landscapes betraying their own identity as photographs in their similar condition as identical twins. And this fact of reproducibility set up inside the image of *Paula* rebounds, by implication, onto *Paula* itself, so that at some later point in the series it, too, could take up residence on that same wall. In this sense, *Paula* is a display of Chinese boxes, a demonstration of the reproducible as a potentially infinite series of the same.

### Stieglitz forms the Photo-Secession

Nothing could be further from the values Stieglitz encountered in the photographic magazines and exhibitions occurring both in Europe and in the America to which he returned in 1890. Joining the New York Camera Club, Stieglitz had no choice but to take up arms for Pictorialism rather than against it, since it was only in the hands of certain of its practitioners (such as Clarence White ▲ [1871–1925] and Edward J. Steichen [1879–1973]) that photography was being taken seriously as a valid means of artistic expression. From 1897 Stieglitz began to edit *Camera Notes* as a forum for the Pictorialist group he supported against the vigorous opposition of the more conservative members of the New York Camera Club, which had recently merged with the Society of Amateur Photographers to form the Camera Club of New York,

### The Armory Show

On February 15, 1913, an exhibition sponsored by the Association of American Painters and Sculptors opened at the armory quartering the 69th Regiment of the National Guard in New York City. Baptized "The Armory Show," the intention of its organizers was to bring the most advanced European art to the consciousness of American artists, who would be tested by showing alongside the work of their counterparts from across the Atlantic. The effort to find such work took the show's impresarios, Arthur B. Davies and Walt Kuhn, associates of the most noticeable wing of the American avant-garde—a group of realist painters called The Eight (Stieglitz's more radical 291 operation was known mostly to insiders)—all around Europe. For the developing international avant-garde exhibition circuit now included the "Sonderbund International" in Cologne, Roger Fry's "Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition" in London, as well as shows at The Hague, Amsterdam, Berlin, Munich, and Paris, where Gertrude Stein and other Americans-in-residence gave Davies and Kuhn access to dealers such as Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler and Ambroise Vollard, or artists like Constantin Brancusi, Marcel Duchamp, and Odilon Redon.

Outrage against the exhibition's 420 works, expressed by the press, mounted quickly during the month of the show's duration, bringing record crowds (a total of 88,000) to the Armory. Famous sneers at Brancusi's *Mlle Pogany* ("a hard-boiled egg balanced on a cube of sugar"), at Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* ("explosion in a shingle factory"), at Henri Matisse's *Blue Nude* ("leering effrontery") set part of the tone. But the other part was fixed by the leap in taste among American artists and collectors who experienced the assembled work as a revelation. Thus, while the newspaper headline in the *Sun* ironically signaled the exhibition's departure as good riddance—"Cubists Migrate, Thousands Mourn"—the success of the show, which had also toured Chicago and Boston, inaugurated a clamor for advanced art, which would now be hosted at department stores, art societies, and private galleries (between 1913 and 1918 there were almost 250 such exhibitions). Another immediate effect was the repeal of the fifteen percent import duty on art less than twenty years old, a legal battle led by lawyer and collector John Quinn. It was this that permitted European art to enter the States, but it also set the stage for the notorious customs case over the entry of Brancusi's *Bird in Space* in 1927, in which modernism's very status as art became a legal issue.

the magazine's sponsor. In 1902, on the pattern of other avant-garde "secessions," this group resigned from the Club and constituted itself as "The Photo-Secession," led by Stieglitz, who inaugurated *Camera Work* as its editorial arm in 1903 and, with the encouragement and assistance of Steichen, opened "The Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession" in 1905.

Soon, however, Stieglitz's natural antipathy to Pictorialist manipulation and his belief instead that photographic excellence must arise from a "straight" approach to the medium, opened a rift



2 • Alfred Stieglitz, *Sun Rays—Paula—Berlin*, 1889

Silver-gelatin print, 22 x 16.2 (8 ½ x 6 ½)

between himself and his Photo-Secession confreres. Confessing to Steichen that he could not see enough strong work coming from photographic quarters to fill the gallery, Stieglitz relied on the younger man, by now installed in Paris, to supply the gallery with serious work, by which the two agreed that the choice must necessarily shift from photography to modernist painting and sculpture.

- ▲ Beginning with the Rodin drawings that Steichen picked out in 1908, the selections came to be increasingly influenced by far more adventurous tastes, whether they were those of Leo and Gertrude
- Stein or those of the American organizers of the 1913 Armory Show who had been scouring Europe for examples of the most advanced work. Thus Stieglitz's commitment to straight photography progressively synchronized itself with a belief in Cubism and African art rather than with the late Symbolist values of Pictorialism celebrated by and through Steichen's portrait of Rodin.

Indeed, nothing could offer a greater contrast than Steichen's *Rodin and The Thinker* [3] and Stieglitz's *The Steerage* [4]: the former, a willing sacrifice of detail to the dramatic conflation of silhouetted profiles (the sculptor's confronting the hunched contour of his own *Thinker*) against the blurred features of Rodin's *Victor Hugo*, which, godlike, constitutes the enigmatic background; the latter, a devastatingly sharp play of forms. Captured from the upper deck of an ocean liner, *The Steerage* peers down into the jumble of human forms separated visually from the parade of bourgeois passengers above it by the bright diagonal of a gangplank. The separation of classes could not, thus, be more forcefully maintained even while the photograph's even-handed mechanical viewing, which holds everything in the same focus, produces a redistribution of "wealth" over the surface of the image, such redistribution given a formal translation in the rhyming of ovals (the straw hats, the sunlit caps, the boat's funnels) over the surface of the print.

It would be this principle of rhyming, but now emptied of its social content and, almost, of any recognizable content whatsoever,



3 • Edward Steichen, *Rodin and The Thinker*, 1902

Gum-bichromate print

▲ 1900b ● 1907



4 • Alfred Stieglitz, *The Steerage*, 1907

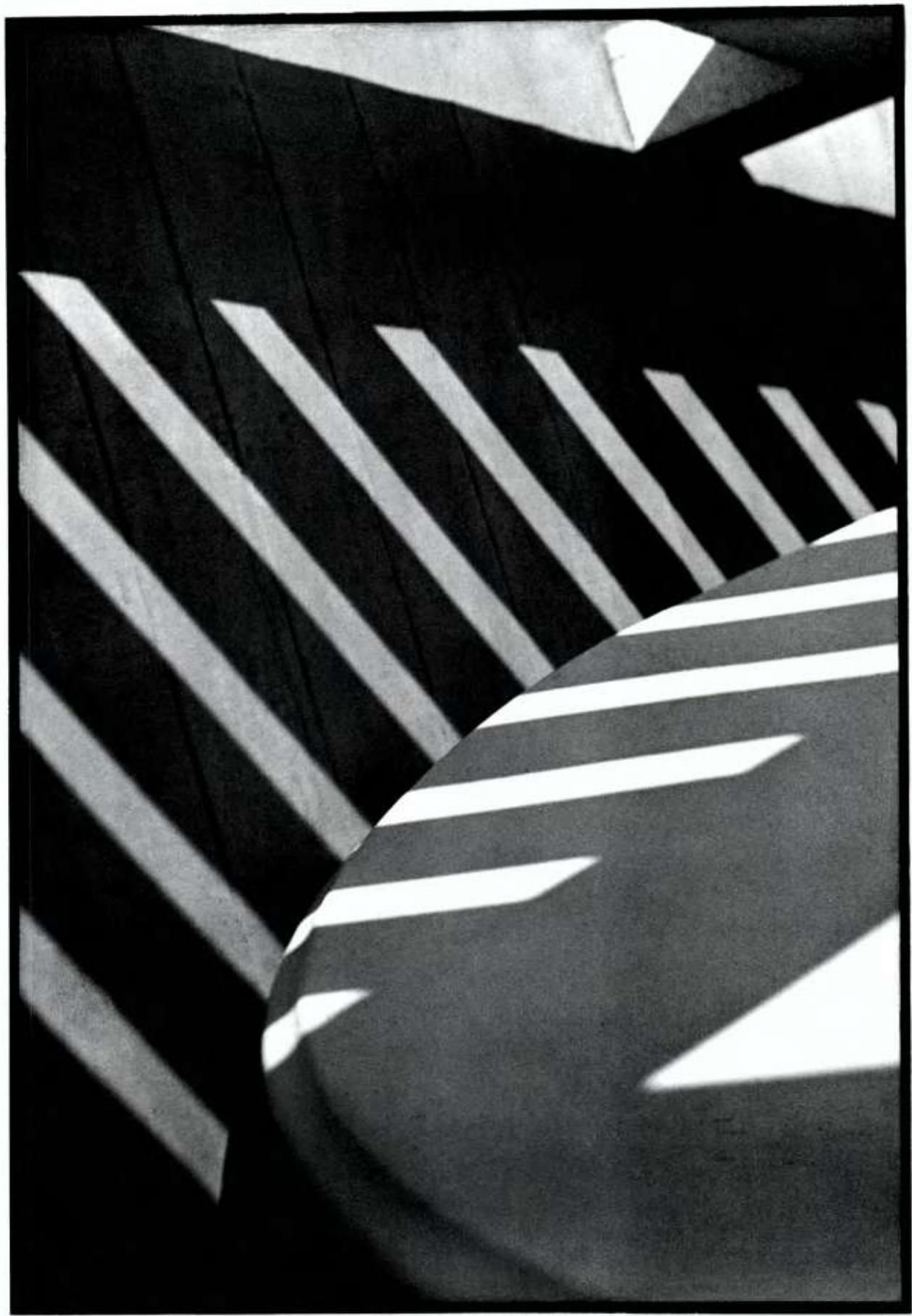
Photogravure, 33.5 x 26.5 (13 1/4 x 10 1/4)

1910-1919

that Stieglitz would find in the work that Strand produced in the summer of 1916, after having experimented with Pictorialism for a number of years. Whether it was *Abstraction, Bowls* or *Abstraction, Porch Shadows, Twin Lakes, Connecticut* [5], Strand so controlled the play of light that a deep ambiguity settled over the image—as concave confused itself with convex, or vertical field with horizontal—without yielding anything of the relentless sharpness of the photographic as such. Indeed Strand's photographic "abstraction" did not seem to depend on pushing toward the unrecognizability of the objects photographed. The experience of being startled by a kind of hyper-vision—vision ratcheted into a focus beyond any normal type of seeing—that outdistanced the mere registration of this or that object could be found in Strand's presentation of lowly things such as *The White Fence* (1916), a line of pickets seen against a darkened yard.

The jolt delivered to Stieglitz by Strand's photography was reinforced by his growing sense of conviction that modernism itself was no longer the exclusive property of Europe. And, indeed, at the same moment when he encountered Strand's new work he had another revelation, in the form of the series of drawings by ▲ Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986) called *Lines and Spaces in Charcoal*, which had been passed to him by a friend, and which he exhibited in 1916 as well. The abstract watercolors that O'Keeffe went on to make in 1917, flooded as they were with a kind of pure luminosity, constituted the final exhibition at 291.

▲ 1927c



1910-1919

5 • Paul Strand, *Abstraction, Porch Shadows, Twin Lakes, Connecticut*, 1916

Silver-platinum print, 32.8 x 24.4 (12 1/8 x 9 5/8)

By 1918 Stieglitz had set off on a new phase of his life and his art. Living now with O'Keeffe and spending his summers with her at Lake George, New York, he turned with a new intensity to photography. In certain instances he seemed bent on outdoing Strand in the dazzling purity of a photographic kind of "hypervision." But in other parts of his work he returned to the kind of investigation he had opened in *Sun Rays—Paula—Berlin*, namely the naked answer to the question "What is a photograph?"

### The abstraction of the cut

Coming most radically in the form of a series of cloud pictures that Stieglitz made between 1923 and 1931, called *Equivalents* [6], the answer to this question was now struck by the drive toward unity that one finds in many modernist responses to the same kind of ontological question—"What is \_\_\_\_\_?"—responses, when posed for the medium of painting, for instance, that take the form of the monochrome, the grid, the image placed serially, etc. Stieglitz's answer now focuses on the nature of the cut or the crop: the photograph is something necessarily cut away from a larger whole. In being punched out of the continuous fabric of the heavens, any *Equivalent* displays itself as a naked function of the cut, not simply because the sky is vast and the photograph is only a tiny part of it, but also because the sky is essentially not composed. Like Duchamp's ▲readymades, these pictures do not attempt to discover fortuitous compositional relationships in an otherwise indifferent object; rather, the cut operates holistically on every part of the image at once, resonating within it the single message that it has been radically moved from one context to another through the single act of being cut away, dislocated, detached.

This detachment of cutting the image away from its ground (in this case, the sky) is then redoubled within the photograph as its resultant image produces a sense in us as viewers that we have been vertiginously cut away from our own "grounds." For the disorientation caused by the verticality of the clouds as they rise upward along the image in sharp slivers results in our not understanding what is up and what is down, or why this photograph that seems to be so much of the world should not contain the most primitive element of our relationship to that world, namely our sense of orientation, our rootedness to the Earth.

In unmooring, or ungrounding, these photographs, Stieglitz naturally enough omits any indication of Earth or horizon from the image. Thus, on a literal level, the *Equivalents* float free. But what they lose literally, they parody formally, since many of the images are strongly vectored (that is, given a sense of direction), light zones abruptly bordering dark ones, producing an axis, like the separation of light and dark achieved by the horizon line that organizes our own relation to the Earth. Yet this formal echo of our natural horizon is taken up in the work only to be denied by being transformed into the uninhabitable verticality of the clouds.

At this moment, then, the cut or crop became Stieglitz's way of emphasizing photography's absolute and essential transposition



6 • Alfred Stieglitz, *Equivalent*, c. 1927

Silver-gelatin print, 9.2 x 11.7 (3 5/8 x 4 5/8)

1910-1919

of reality; essential not because the photographic image is unlike reality in being flat, or black and white, or small, but because as a set of marks on paper traced by light, it is shown to have no more "natural" an orientation to the axial directions of the real world than do those marks in a book we know as writing. It is in this "equivalence" that "straight" photography and modernism effortlessly join hands. RK

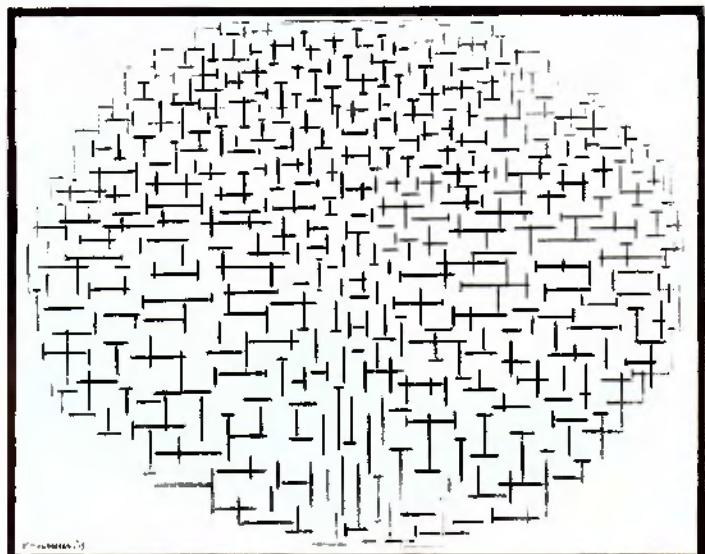
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After two years of intense research, Piet Mondrian breaks through to abstraction and goes on to invent Neoplasticism.

**W**hen, in July 1914, Piet Mondrian returned to Holland for a family visit, his sojourn was caught up in the events of World War I, keeping him away from Paris for five long years. If he had originally moved to the French capital in early 1912 with one goal in mind, it was that of mastering Cubism. Unaware, however, of the movement's recent redirection in relation to its innovative use of collage, with all its consequences for the status of the representational sign, Mondrian wound the clock back to the summer of 1910. At that particular moment in Cubism's history, both Picasso and Braque, having found themselves on the verge of painting totally abstract grids, had recoiled. First reintroducing snippets of referentiality into their pictures (such as the tie and mustache in Picasso's *Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, they soon added lettering, flush with the picture plane, that aimed to make everything else in the painting look three-dimensional by comparison, thus ensuring that the representational character of the picture be at least hinted at.

Reading this Analytical Cubism through the lens of fin de siècle Symbolism mixed with Theosophy (an occultist and syncretic doctrine that combined various Eastern and Western religions and philosophies, highly popular in Europe at the turn of the century), Mondrian quickly became aware that just what Picasso and Braque feared most (abstraction and flatness) was precisely what he was searching for, since that would accord with the category of "the universal" that was central to his own belief system. Adopting a frontal point of view, Mondrian found a way of translating his favorite motifs (first trees and then architecture—most notably, in 1914, blank walls uncovered by the demolition of adjacent buildings) into a more orthogonally rigorous version of the Cubist grid. Through this means, what he called an image's *particularity* is overcome and spatial illusion is replaced by "truth," by the opposition of vertical and horizontal that is the "immutable" essence of all things. The method is infallible, Mondrian thought at the time: everything can be reduced to a common denominator; every figure can be digitalized into a pattern of horizontal versus vertical units and thus disseminated across the surface; and all hierarchy (thus all centrality) can be abolished. The picture's function now becomes the revelation of the world's underlying structure, understood as a reservoir of binary oppositions; but further, and more

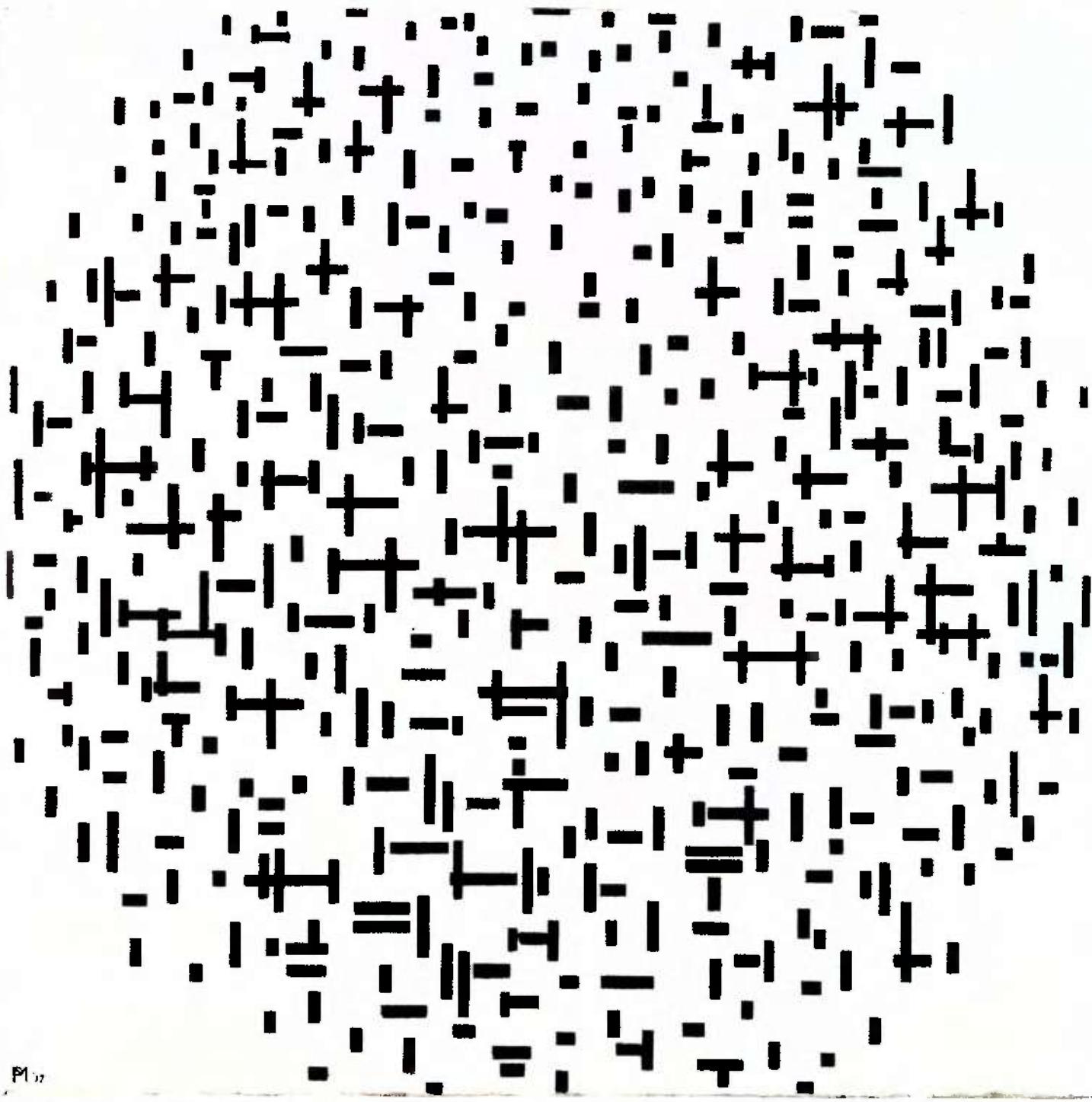


1 • Piet Mondrian, *Composition 10 in Zwart Wit* (Composition No. 10 in Black and White), 1915  
Oil on canvas, 85 × 108 (33 1/2 × 42 1/2)

important, it is also to show how these oppositions can neutralize one another into a timeless equilibrium.

It was at this juncture, in 1914, that Mondrian went back to Holland, where, unlike his isolated situation in France, he had a considerable following, for beginning in 1908 he had turned away from Dutch naturalism, embraced modernism, and immediately risen to the head of the local avant-garde. Joining his old Theosophist friends in his usual summer haunt—the artists' colony of Domburg—he attempted to apply his digitalizing technique to the motifs he had painted in various Postimpressionist styles—the small Gothic church, the sea, the piers—before having left for Paris. Only two paintings would result from this group of studies (one in 1915, *Composition No. 10 in Black and White* [1], better known by its nickname *Pier and Ocean*; the other, *Composition 1916*), but together they mark a sea change.

One of the most important factors in this shift was Mondrian's exposure to the philosophy of Hegel, which helped him break away from the inherently static character of digitalization and the neo-Platonic notion of essential truths to be disclosed behind a world of illusions. For if Hegel's Theory of Dialectics is grounded in opposi-



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2 • Piet Mondrian, *Compositie in lijn* (Composition in Line), 1916/17

Oil on canvas, 108 × 108 (42½ × 42½)

tions, it does not seek their neutralization. On the contrary, it is a dynamic system moved by tensions, by contradiction. Mondrian's lifelong motto coined at that time—"each element is determined by its contrary"—stems directly from Hegel. The issue is no longer the translating (or, since it is a matter of establishing a set of arbitrary signs that will turn the real world into a form of code, a better term would be *transcoding*) of the visible world into a geometric pattern, but rather the enactment on canvas of the laws of dialectics that govern the world, visible or not.

Though both *Composition No. 10 in Black and White* and *Composition 1916* were based on drawings that had refined the digitalizing method, these canvases now forsook it, abandoning as well the overall symmetry that had resulted from the process (from now on symmetry would be banned from Mondrian's work). In the "plus/minus" drawings that led to the first of these two paintings, Mondrian explored the cruciform structure resulting from the vertical intrusion of the pier as seen from above into the horizontality of reflections on the sea. But rather than the cruciform itself, what we

see in the painting is its simultaneous gestation and dissolution—something perfectly caught by Theo van Doesburg (1883–1931) when he wrote about the work in a review that its “methodical construction embodies ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being.’” And although almost immediately after completing it, Mondrian would judge *Composition 1916* severely for its too-strong emphasis on one direction in particular (the vertical), all references to the church facade have been suppressed in the work: it is no longer the spectacle of the world that is transposed but the elements of the art of painting itself that are digitalized—line, color, plane, each reduced to a basic cipher. Though Mondrian would never entirely forgo his original spiritualist position, his art now became, and would remain, one of the most elaborate explorations of the materiality of painting itself, an analysis of its signifiers. This dialectical jump from extreme idealism to extreme materialism is a common feature in the evolution of many early pioneers of abstraction.

Mondrian’s principle of reduction is that of maximal tension: a straight line is but a “tensed curve.” The same argument goes for surfaces (the flatter, the tenser) and was soon to apply to color. That Mondrian would wait four more years (until 1920) before adopting the triad of the pure primaries (red, yellow, and blue, used alongside black, gray, and white) should not mask the fact that he already knew at this point that it was the inevitable consequence of his logic. He had first to purge himself entirely of the idea, derived from Goethe, of color as the matter that sullies the purity (read spirituality) of light—this was the last vestige of representation to go, perhaps because its mimetic character, coated in symbolism, was harder to detect. But this delay did not prevent Mondrian, when he started work on *Composition in Line* [2] in mid-1916, from taking the plunge into pure abstraction.

Once freed from any referential obligation, Mondrian’s work evolved at breakneck speed. *Composition in Line*, finished in early 1917, radicalizes the dynamism of the two previous works, accentuating the tension between an originary randomness and a purported nonhierarchical order. But with it Mondrian realized that a major component of the pictorial language still remained somewhat passive in his work. For, though the figure itself, utterly dispersed by and absorbed within the grid, is now so thoroughly atomized that it is bound to remain a virtuality—each cluster of linear units competing for attention—the white ground behind these black or dark-gray lines is not yet fully “tensed.” It is optically activated by the geometrical relations that virtually interconnect the discrete elements of the picture, but in itself it remains an empty space waiting to be filled with a figure—and this, Mondrian now understood, would stop only if the ground ceases to exist as ground. Which is to say that the opposition between figure and ground—the very condition of representation—had to be abolished if an aesthetic program of pure abstraction were to be fulfilled. It was to finding means of achieving this that Mondrian devoted the years from 1917 to 1920.

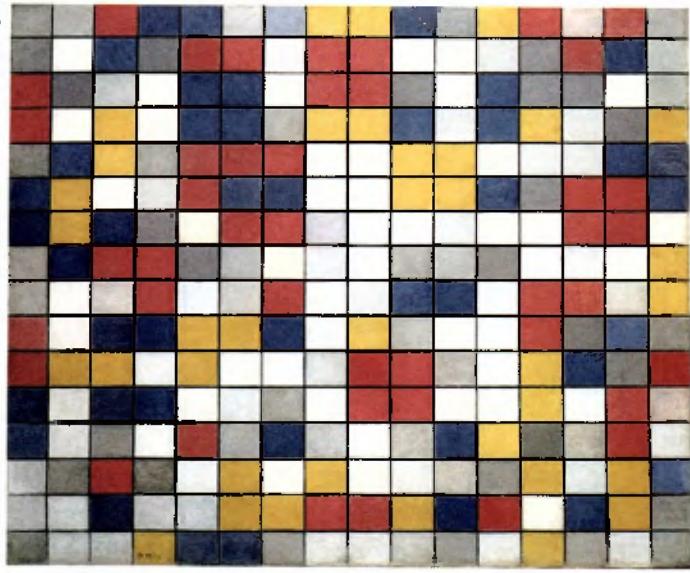
In a series of canvases immediately following *Composition in Line*, Mondrian eliminated all superimposition of planes. In the

first of these paintings, lateral extension is conceived as an antidote to atmospheric illusion, but soon Mondrian realized that floating color planes, appearing as though they were going to glide sideways out of the picture, still presuppose the neutrality of the ground. Gradually aligning the colored rectangles, and, most importantly, ending up this series by dividing the interstitial space itself into rectangles of various shades of white, he thereby eliminated the very notion of passive interstice.

The final step in this rapid march toward the abolition of the ground as ground would be the modular grid, which Mondrian explored in nine canvases dating from 1918 and 1919. In using the proportions of the canvas as the basis of its division into regular units, Mondrian came to terms with a deductive structure that suppresses, in principle, any projection of an a priori image onto the surface. There is no difference between ground and nonground (or, to put it another way, the ground is the figure, the field is the image). The whole surface of the canvas has again become a grid, but this grid is no longer a Cubist scaffolding built up in empty space, since every zone of the canvas is now transformed into a commensurable rectangular unit.

This does not mean, however, that every unit is of equal weight: throughout this series of modular canvases, which comprises his first four so-called “diamond” paintings, Mondrian never abandoned an opposition between marked (through a greater thickness of the “contour,” or through color) and unmarked units. This may come as a surprise were it not for Mondrian’s Hegelianism: a dynamic tension must lie at the core of any work, which is what an even grid would automatically disallow. (It is precisely because the allover continuity of a regular grid annuls the pathos of tension that a painter such as Ad Reinhardt, and scores of Minimalist artists after him, had such a predilection for this form.) So in Mondrian’s least compositional works, the poorly nicknamed *Checkerboard Composition with Dark Colors* and *Checkerboard Composition with Light Colors* [3], there is a sense of struggle between the “objective” data of the operating module and the “subjective” play of the color distribution. In order for the “universal” to manifest itself, a zest of “particularity” must still be factored in—at least for the time being.

These two paintings are the last of the kind. As soon as he finished them, in the spring of 1919, Mondrian returned to Paris, utterly confident that with his modular grids he had just discovered the ultimate answer to most pictorial problems facing artists in the wake of Cubism. But the atmosphere had changed in the French capital, as exemplified by Picasso’s exhibition of neoclassical works. This surely helped Mondrian realize that the absolute “elimination of the particular” was a utopian dream, and thus that the solution of the modular grid, for all its radicality, was, if not a red herring, at least ahead of its time—something for the distant future perhaps, when conditions of perception would have changed, but something that no one would be able to grasp in the present situation. Furthermore, Mondrian began to realize that the modular grid did not accord with his own theories and beliefs: in that such grids are based on repetition (for Mondrian, there was



3 • Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Grid 9: Checkerboard Composition with Light Colors*, 1919  
Oil on canvas, 86 × 106 (33½ × 41¾)

no difference between the repetitive rhythm of a machine and that of the seasons), and because reticulation (division into a network of squares engenders illusionistic optical effect (all illusions are feats of nature), he felt that they doubly contradicted his theoretical ban on the “natural.”

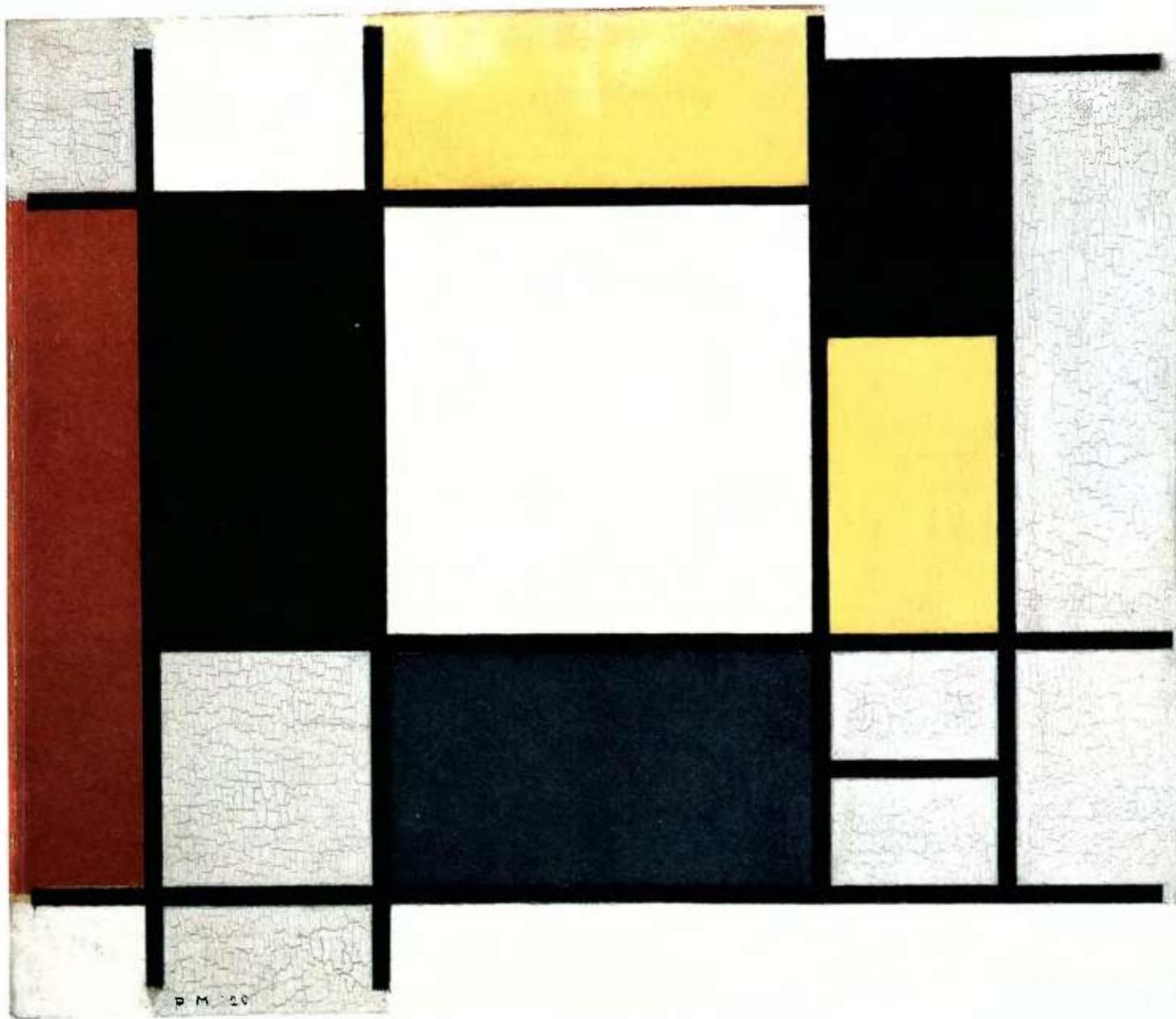
### The invention of Neoplasticism

By the end of 1920, Mondrian’s mature style, which he called “Neoplasticism,” was in place. Its invention was the result of an intense period of work during which Mondrian gradually eradicated modularity. The difficult goal he now set himself was to reintroduce composition without restoring the hierarchical opposition of figure and ground. The path he chose drew from the same logic that had given birth to his regular grids, but now in reverse. The new equilibrium would not be based on the promise of an equalization of all units but on their dissonance. Optical illusions would now be eliminated entirely, not only the effects of visual flicker induced by the clustering of black lines at the intersections of the grids but even, in the end, the very possibility of color contrasts: color planes cease to be adjacent and, from now on, they are more often than not displaced to the painting’s periphery. There is no more opposition between figure and ground here than in the modular grids, but now each unit, clearly differentiated (it is at this point that the primary colors appear), aims at destroying the centrality of all others.

*Composition with Yellow, Red, Black, Blue, and Gray* [4], the first Neoplastic painting proper, demonstrates the efficiency of Mondrian’s new method. Although the balancing logic of the painting had called for a large central square, we do not perceive it as such. In this pictorial language, with its hostility to the idea of the gestalt (or form understood as the separation of figure from its background), nothing, not even an easily recognized shape (rectangle, square)

placed on the axis of symmetry, must get the lion’s share of attention. From now on, each Neoplastic painting would be a microcosmic model, a practico-theoretical object in which the destructive powers of dialectical thought are tested each time anew. *Each time anew* needs to be emphasized here, for unlike most painters in the tradition of geometrical abstract art, Mondrian never worked according to a formula—there is never anything predetermined in his compositions, each conceived, in dialectical fashion, as an improvement over its predecessor, and each geared toward the same goal: creating in itself a new kind of equilibrium, an equilibrium in tension, in which each element would be endowed with the maximal energy, and which he exposed in terms very similar to those used after the war by military strategists when advocating the theory of deterrence (Mutual Assured Destruction).

The years immediately following the advent of Neoplasticism would be Mondrian’s most productive (one fifth of his Neoplastic output was painted from the end of 1920 to mid-1923). He did not work exactly in series, but he returned over and over to three compositional types that he would transform as he pressed on—the most minute change in one area necessitating a complete reformulation of the whole canvas, a fact made all the more patent by the drastic paring down of Mondrian’s pictorial vocabulary, now limited to planes of primary colors and to elements of ‘non-colors’ (black lines, white planes and, albeit rarely, gray ones). Those three compositional types, very different from each other, were based on the idea that an element seemingly poised to dominate the canvas had to be undermined by the combined actions of all the other elements (these dominating features could be a large square or near-square in its central area, as in the first Neoplastic painting just discussed; or two lines bisecting the painting, also close to the central area; or a large “open” plane, colored or not, in one of its corners, limited on two of its sides by the edges of the canvas). And just as the radical limitation to his pictorial vocabulary was a direct consequence of his principle of “dynamic equilibrium” (a concept he would formulate only in the thirties), the number of elements present in one single work could also be reduced in order to augment each element’s share of the tension. In the barest of all his works, *Lozenge Composition with Two Lines* of 1931 [5], two black lines of unequal width, one vertical and the other horizontal, traverse a square white surface placed on its tip, and cross not far from its lower left border. The work is so simple in appearance that the origin of its gripping tautness is hard to discern at first: the “crossing,” contrary to what one is tempted to believe (precisely by the habits of perception that Mondrian’s art never cease to combat), is *not* symmetrically disposed along an oblique axis that would divide the canvas into two parts mirroring each other. It is only *nearly* so. The four white planes are different—maximal difference in the case of the tiny triangle at lower left and the large pentagon that covers the largest expanse of the canvas, and minimal difference in the case of the two irregular quadrangles at both sides of the painting. This latter, almost imperceptible difference, as well as that of the width of the black



4 • Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Yellow, Red, Black, Blue, and Gray*, 1920

Oil on canvas, 51.5 x 61 (20 1/4 x 24)

bars, is what subliminally annuls the potentially static resolve of symmetry and sets the painting into motion. None of Mondrian's colleagues would have dared come so close to symmetry—in itself an absolute taboo in his art—because none would have been as confident that it could be simultaneously, or rather dialectically, courted and undermined.

#### "A surrogate of the whole"

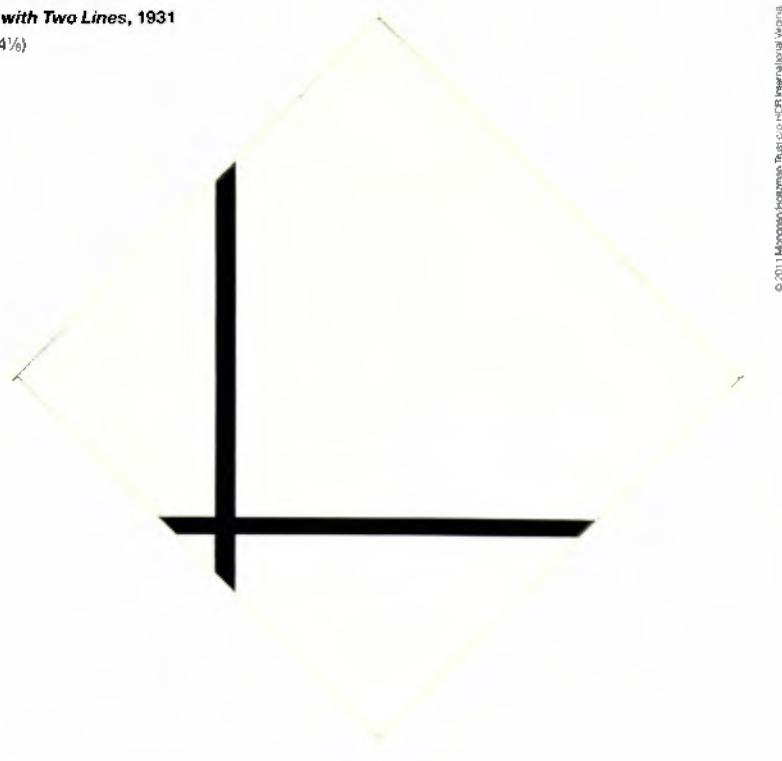
A lot has been written on Mondrian's so-called "lozenge" paintings (there were sixteen of them spanning his whole career as an abstract painter, from 1918 to 1944; he himself called them *tableaux losangiques*, a clumsy French neologism he created, and they were often called "diamond" by art historians, although neither term is

appropriate since they are actually square canvases positioned on one of their tips). The main point discussed in the literature is their paradoxical nature with regard to the opposition between extension and limitation. Though Mondrian continually stressed that his canvases were autonomous paintings, independent from the architectural setting that would eventually host them, each complete in itself as a microcosm, he seemed at first sight in these *losangiques* works to be advocating a virtual extension of the composition into the surrounding space—or, more precisely, implying that they were fragments of a whole, slivers of an invisible yet all-encompassing orthogonal grid that they would be revealing to us. That idea, notoriously put forward by the painter Max Bill in the fifties and later by art historian Meyer Schapiro, seemed to be in accordance with the call for a unification of painting and architecture that was a crucial

▲ 192Ba, 1937b, 1947a, 1959e, 1967c

5 • Piet Mondrian, *Lozenge Composition with Two Lines*, 1931

Oil on canvas, diagonals 112 × 112 (44½ × 44½)



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▲ rallying cry for the members of the De Stijl movement (of which Mondrian was a prominent member from 1917 to 1924), and with Mondrian's own utopia of a future dissolution of art into the environment. But no matter how seductive the matching of Mondrian's "losangique" format and his ideas about architecture might seem, the link is based on a double misunderstanding—of the works themselves and of the theory.

Contrary to what one might believe, Mondrian always insisted that the Neoplastic canvas was a closed totality, a "surrogate of the whole," as he loved to say, and thus necessarily contrasting with its (chaotic, natural, "undetermined") environment, wherever it would be placed—until, that is, modern architecture had evolved to the point when it could effortlessly integrate his art because it would share its general principles; but that point, he kept warning, was some way off in the future. The idea that his canvases, in underlining by themselves the "disharmony" of their surroundings, could function as a kind of accelerator in the progress of humankind toward its vision of an abstract built environment even precedes the formation of Neoplasticism (it first appears in 1917 in his writings); but as Mondrian devoted more and more thoughts to the issue of architecture throughout the twenties, this view gradually became a mantra, culminating in his 1927 essay "The Home—Street—City." In the present condition of architecture and urbanism, Mondrian stated, the best a Neoplastic artist can do is to adjust the interior space of his studio to the aesthetic rigor of his paintings, hoping that this homeopathic dose of Neoplasticism injected into the built environment would in time induce a transformation of the whole house (adjusting to the Neoplastic studio in the same manner as the studio had adjusted to the Neoplastic paintings it contained), then that the same process

would spread to the whole street, then to the city, then ... to the world at large. Mondrian firmly clung to his utopian belief in such a chain reaction, hence the considerable energy he devoted, from 1920 to his death, to the constant transformation of his working and living space into a "chromo-plastic environment" whose walls were covered with colored pieces of cardboard, their number, size, and position changing in sync with the evolution of his art. (This work in progress, particularly the studio/apartment Mondrian occupied from 1921 to 1936 at the 26 rue du Départ in Paris, became a staple of the European avant-garde, visited by countless artists on whom it had a profound impact—the most famous example being Alexander Calder, who credited his conversion to abstraction to such a visit in October 1930).

The utopia sounds naive today, but Mondrian himself knew full well that it was far-fetched, which is why he had a more immediate goal for his paintings, entrusting them with a role they had to perform even in the most hostile environment: their linear grids would not virtually extend into the architectural space, but each picture would nevertheless be endowed with an expansive force; it would "irradiate in space," and, in doing so, "correct" the ugliness around it; it would be a bundle of energy so powerful that it would visually control the room in which it was hung. YAB

#### FURTHER READING

- Carel Blotkamp, *Mondrian: The Art of Destruction* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994)  
Yve-Alain Bois, "The De Stijl Idea." *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990)  
Piet Mondrian, *The New Art—The New Life* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co, 1986)  
Yve-Alain Bois, Joop Joosten, and Angelica Rudenstine, *Piet Mondrian* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1994)  
Joop Joosten and Robert P. Welsh, *Piet Mondrian*, catalogue raisonné, 2 vols (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998)

In October 1917, the journal *De Stijl* is launched by Theo van Doesburg in the small Dutch town of Leiden. It appears monthly until 1922, after which publication is irregular. The last issue dates from 1932 as a posthumous homage to van Doesburg shortly after his death in a Swiss sanatorium.

1910-1919 **T**here are three ways of defining De Stijl, and all three were used by Theo van Doesburg in a 1927 retrospective article on the movement: (1) as a *journal*, (2) as a *group* of artists assembled around this journal, and (3) as an *idea* shared by members of this group. The first definition is the most convenient, for it is derived from a definite corpus. It is undeniable that the journal is the most prominent incarnation of the movement: its reputation as the first ever periodical devoted to abstraction in art is well deserved. Furthermore, it was the major link between group members, who were geographically dispersed and, in some cases, never actually met. Yet the very eclecticism of the journal, its openness to all aspects of the European avant-garde, could lead one to doubt that De Stijl had any specific identity as a movement. According to this definition, everything that appeared in *De Stijl* is "De Stijl." But to rank the Dadaists Hugo Ball, Hans Arp, and Hans Richter, the Italian Futurist Gino Severini, the Russian Constructivist El Lissitzky, and the sculptor Constantin Brancusi among De Stijl's "main collaborators," as van Doesburg does in 1927, not to mention the inclusion of Aldo Camini and I. K. Bonset (that is, van Doesburg himself under a Futurist and a Dadaist guise), is to miss what constituted the group's strength and unity.

Indeed, it is the second definition—De Stijl as a group—that is the most commonly accepted. It establishes a simple hierarchy, based on historical precedence, between a handful of Dutch founding fathers and a heteroclit detachment of cosmopolitan new recruits who joined at various times to fill the gaps left by defecting members. Generally speaking, the founding fathers are those who signed the *First Manifesto* of De Stijl, published in November 1918: • the painters Piet Mondrian and the Hungarian Vilmos Huszár, the architects Jan Wils and Robert van't Hoff, the Belgian sculptor Georges Vantongerloo, the poet Antony Kok, and of course van Doesburg, the *homme-orchestre*, the only real link between the group members and the mainspring of the movement. To those names, one must add those of the painter Bart van der Leck (who had already left De Stijl before the publication of this manifesto) and the architects Gerrit Rietveld and J. J. P. Oud (the former had not yet joined the group, although he had produced an unpainted version of the *Red and Blue Chair*, which—in its painted form—was to become the landmark of the movement; the latter never

signed any collective text). For their part, the new recruits, with the exception of the architect Cornelis van Eesteren, all pursued careers independently from De Stijl and were only briefly associated with the movement when it was already approaching the end of its course. For example, the American musician Georges Antheil; the creators of reliefs César Domela and Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart; the architect and sculptor Frederick Kiesler; and the industrial designer Werner Gräff. But despite its usefulness, this second definition turns out to be only slightly more precise than the first, based as it is on what seems to be a purely circumstantial criterion of inclusion. It cannot explain, for example, van der Leck's defection from the movement in its first year, or Wils's and van't Hoff's in the second, Oud's in the fourth, Huszár's and Vantongerloo's in the fifth, and finally Mondrian's in 1925.

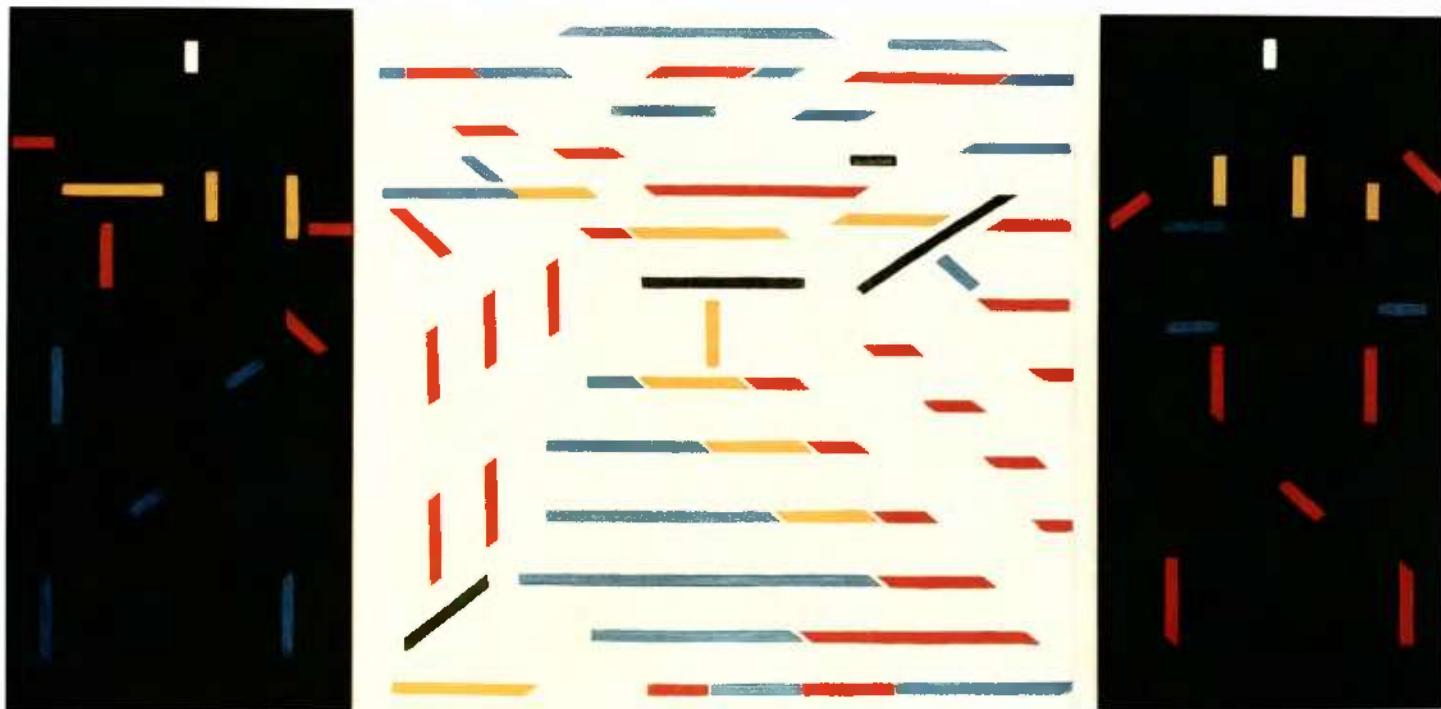
There remains therefore the third definition, De Stijl as an *idea*: "It is from the De Stijl idea that the De Stijl movement gradually developed," wrote van Doesburg in his retrospective article. Although this definition seems the vaguest of the three, it turns out, by its conceptual nature (as opposed to the empirical character of the other two), to be the most restrictive. What follows is a brief presentation of this "idea."

### The principle of De Stijl

De Stijl was a typically modernist movement, whose theory was grounded on those two ideological pillars of modernism: historicism and essentialism. Historicism because it conceived of its production as the logical culmination of the art of the past, and because it prophesized in quasi-Hegelian terms the inevitable dissolution of art into an all-encompassing sphere ("life" or "the environment"). Essentialism because the motor of this slow historical process was an *ontological quest*: each art was to "realize" its own "nature" by purging itself of everything that was not specific to it, by revealing its materials and codes, and in doing so by working toward the institution of a "universal plastic language." None of this was particularly original, although De Stijl's formulation of this modernist theory developed quite early on. The specificity of De Stijl lies elsewhere: in the idea that a single generative principle might apply to all the arts without compromising

▲ 1909, 1916a, 1920, 1921b, 1926, 1927b

● 1917a, 1944a



1 • Bart van der Leck, *Composition 1916, No. 4 (Mine Triptych)*, 1916

Oil on canvas, 110 × 220 (43½ × 86⅓)

their integrity, and moreover, that it is only on the basis of such a principle that the autonomy of each art can be secured.

Although this principle was never explicitly formulated by any of the movement's members, it involved two operations one could call *elementarization* and *integration*. *Elementarization* is the analysis of each practice into discrete components, and the reduction of these components to a few irreducible elements. *Integration* is the exhaustive articulation of those elements into a syntactically indivisible, nonhierarchical whole. The second operation rests upon a structural principle (like the phonemes of verbal language, the visual elements are meaningful only through their differences from one another). This principle is a totalizing one: no element is more important than any other, and none must escape integration. The mode of articulation stemming from this principle is not ▲ additive (as in Minimalism, for example) but exponential (hence De Stijl's rejection of repetition). A perfect example of elementarization-cum-integration is provided by the logo of De Stijl itself: as Michael White noted, the letters were "composed from disjointed blocks and avoided any previous typographic association."

This general principle rapidly displaced the ontological question—"What is the essence of painting / architecture?"—by prompting artists to consider the question of delimitation, of what distinguishes a work of art from its context. As a result, all of the De Stijl painters were interested in the frame and the polyptych format: *Composition 1916, No. 4* by van der Leck (known as the *Mine Triptych*) [1], for example. The logic of this shift goes something like this: as a constitutive element of every form of artistic practice, the limit (frame, boundary, edge, base) must itself be both *elementarized* and *integrated*; but its integration will remain incomplete as long as

the inside and the outside (which the limit articulates) lack a common denominator, that is, as long as the outside itself has not also been subject to the same treatment. Thus, De Stijl's environmental utopia, however naive it may seem today, was no mere ideological dream, but a corollary of the movement's general principle.

#### A system of oppositions

De Stijl was initially a congregation of painters, which architects later joined, and it was the painters who laid the foundation for De Stijl's "general principle." Although only Mondrian managed to fully translate this principle into practice, with the elaboration of ▲ his Neoplasticism from 1920 on, both van der Leck and Huszár contributed to its formulation. It is known that van der Leck was the first to *elementarize* color (Mondrian credited his own use of the primary colors to him), but he was never able to achieve the *integration* of all the elements of his canvases. As "abstract" as some of his paintings may seem, he never relinquished an illusionistic conception of space. The white ground behaves like a neutral zone, an empty container that exists before the inscription of forms. Thus it is not surprising that van der Leck left the movement in 1918 to "return" to figuration: once the other painters had solved the problem of the ground, van der Leck found that he no longer spoke the same language.

As for Huszár, a handful of compositions—among them, the 1917 cover design for the first issue of *De Stijl* [2] and a 1919 canvas entitled *Hammer and Saw* (the only painting ever to be reproduced in color in *De Stijl*)—reveal his one pictorial contribution to the movement, namely the *elementarization* of the ground, or rather of



MAANDBLAD VOOR DE MODERNE BEELDENDE VAKKEN  
REDACTIE THEO VAN DOESBURG MET MEDEWERKING VAN VOORNAME BINNEN- EN BUITENLANDSCHE KUNSTENAARS. UITGAVE X. HARMS TIEPEN TE DELFT IN 1917.

2 • Vilmos Huszár, cover of *De Stijl*, vol. 1, no. 1, October 1917

Letterpress on paper. 26 x 19 (10½ x 7½)

the figure-ground relationship, which he reduced to a binary opposition. Unfortunately, he stopped there and after a brief attempt at using the modular grid at the same time as Mondrian was exploring it (none of these works by Huszár survive), he went back to the illusionistic conception of space of Bart van der Leck that he had emulated earlier.

▲ Having assimilated the lessons of Cubism while in Paris in 1912–14, Mondrian was faster than the others to resolve the question of abstraction, thus he was able to devote all of his attention to the issue of *integration*. His first concern, after the choice for primary colors, was to unite figure and ground into an inseparable entity. Suffice it to say that he rid his pictorial vocabulary of the “neutral ground” only after he had used a modular grid in nine of his canvases (1918–19). Though this device allowed him to solve an essential opposition not considered by others in De Stijl—that of color/noncolor—he found it regressive because it was based on repetition and privileged only one type of relationship between the various parts of the painting (univocal engendering). Back in Paris by mid-1919, he spent the next year and a half ridding the canvas of the regular grid: the first truly Neoplastic painting dates from the end of 1920.

Van Doesburg, on the contrary, needed the grid throughout his life; for him it constituted a guarantee against the arbitrariness of the composition. Despite appearances and despite his formulations that sometimes bear “mathematical” pretensions, van Doesburg remained paralyzed by the question of abstraction: if a composition must be “abstract,” it had to be “justified” by “mathematical” computations, its geometrical configuration had to be *motivated*. Before he arrived at the grid formula (through his work in decorative art, especially stained-glass windows), this obsession made him hesitate between the pictorial system of Huszár and that of van der Leck. Then it led him to a concern with the stylization of natural motifs (a portrait, a still life, a dancer, or even a cow). He even tried to apply this type of “explanation” to his grid compositions (as in the absurd presentation he made, in 1919, of his *Composition in Dissonance as an abstraction from “a young woman in the artist’s studio”*).

But this was a false trail, for if van Doesburg was seduced by the system of the grid, it was, in opposition to Mondrian, for its *projective* nature (his grids are generally nonmodular—that is, their planes are not modules whose proportion is generated by that of the canvas; they are applied *onto* the picture plane, whose material characteristics are of no importance). The projective, *a priori* nature of van Doesburg’s grids throws some light on the famous quarrel about “Elementarism” (the extremely inappropriate word chosen by van Doesburg to label his introduction of the oblique into the formal vocabulary of Neoplasticism in 1925, as in his *Contra-composition XVI in dissonances*, for example) that led Mondrian to leave De Stijl. But if Mondrian rejected van Doesburg’s “improvement,” as the latter referred to it, it was not so much because it disregarded the formal rule of orthogonality (which he had broken in his own “lozenge” canvases) than because in a single stroke it destroyed the movement’s efforts to achieve a total *integration* of all the elements of the painting. For as they glide over the surface of the canvas, van Doesburg’s diagonals re-establish a distance between the imaginary moving surface they inhabit and the picture plane onto which they are applied, and we find ourselves once again before van der Leck’s illusionist space. For an evolutionist like Mondrian, it was as if the clock had been turned back eight years. In short, van Doesburg’s achievement in painting did not partake of the general principle of elementarization and integration that characterizes De Stijl. However, there are two areas in which he did work more efficiently toward the elaboration of this principle: that of the *interior* as art and that of *architecture*.

The importance given to the interior by the De Stijl artists stems both from their questioning of the limits of painting and from their distrust of the traditional notion of applied art. The common view of De Stijl as a movement that applied a formal solution to what is now referred to as “design” is erroneous: decorative art did not interest the De Stijl artists, with the temporary exception, in the case of van Doesburg and Huszár, of stained glass. If the arts were to remain faithful to the principle of De Stijl, then they could not simply be applied to each other, but would have to join together to

create an indivisible whole. The stakes were considerable, and almost all of the movement's internal quarrels resulted from a power struggle between painters and architects over this issue. The invention of the interior as a hybrid art form was not easy; as Nancy Troy has shown, it developed in two theoretical movements.

### The interior as art form

The first movement: only when an art has defined the limits of its own field, when it has achieved the greatest possible degree of autonomy and discovered the artistic means specific to itself—that is, through a process of self-definition and differentiation from the other arts—will it discover what it has in common with another art form. This common denominator is what allows for the combination of the arts, for their integration. Thus the members of De Stijl thought that architecture and painting could go hand-in-hand because they share one basic element, that of planarity (of the wall and of the picture plane). Van der Leck is particularly eloquent on this score, but the idea is to be found as well in texts by Oud, Mondrian, and van Doesburg during the first year of *De Stijl*'s publication. From this first movement stems the totality of van der Leck's mostly unrealized interior coloristic projects, the first interiors of Huszár and van Doesburg, Mondrian's Paris studio and his *Projet de Salon pour Madame B..., à Dresden* of 1926. These works share a conception of architecture as static: each room is treated in isolation, as a sum of faces, a six-sided box, which is explicable by the fact that in each case the artist was working within the confines of an already existing architecture.

The second movement is the consequence of a collaborative enterprise turned sour, the first genuine collaboration between a De Stijl painter and architect—that is, van Doesburg and Oud's

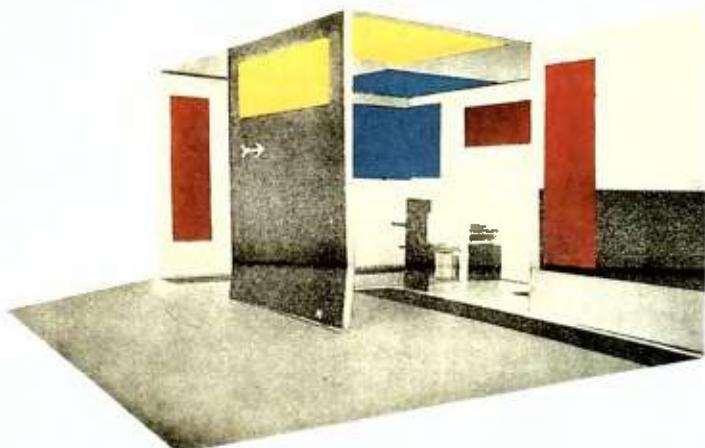
teamwork for the De Vonk vacation house of 1917 (at Noordwijkerhout), and later for the Spangen housing complex at Rotterdam (1918–21). If this collaboration resulted in creative divorce (Oud refusing the last coloristic projects of van Doesburg for Spangen), it is because, despite van Doesburg's attempt to integrate color into architecture (throughout each building, both inside and out, doors and windows are conceived according to a contrapuntal color sequence), the conventional massiveness of the architecture led the painter to plan his color scheme independently from the structure. This scheme was conceived in relation to the entire building, the wall no longer being the basic unit, and in opposition therefore to individual architectural elements. There is a paradox here: it was precisely because Oud's symmetrical, repetitive architecture was absolutely antithetical to the principle of De Stijl that van Doesburg was drawn to invent a type of negative integration based on the visual abolition of architecture by painting.

"Architecture joins together, binds—painting loosens, unbinds," van Doesburg wrote in 1918. Thus, the "Elementalist" oblique—which appears for the first time in a 1923 van Doesburg color study for a "University Hall" by van Eesteren [3]; again a year later in van Doesburg's design for a "flower room" in the Villa Mallet-Stevens in Hyères; and finally, on a grand scale, in the 1928 Café Aubette in Strasbourg—is each time launched as an attack against a preexisting architectural situation. While the oblique contradicted De Stijl's *integration* principle within the realm of painting, it fulfilled that principle in the new domain of the abstract interior. There, it is not "applied," rather, it is an element with a function (ironically, an antifunctionalist one), that of the camouflage of the building's horizontal/vertical skeleton (its "natural," anatomical aspect). Such camouflage was, for van Doesburg, absolutely necessary if the interior was to work as an abstract, nonhierarchical whole.



3 • Theo van Doesburg, *Project for a University in Amsterdam-Sud*, 1922

Pencil, gouache, and collage on card, 64 × 146 (25½ × 57½)



4 • Vilmos Huszár and Gerrit Rietveld, *Spatial Color Composition for an Exhibition*, Berlin, 1923, from *L'Architecture vivante*, Autumn 1924

But the oblique was not the only solution to this new integrative task, as Huszár and Rietveld demonstrated in their extraordinary Berlin Pavilion of 1923 [4]: the articulation of architectural surfaces (walls, floor, ceiling) could itself be *elementarized* by using the corner as a visual agent of spatial continuity. In this interior, colored planes painted on the walls do not stop where the wall surfaces meet, but overlap, continue around the corner, creating a kind of spatial displacement and obliging the spectator to spin his body or gaze around. Not only had painting solved a purely architectural problem—circulation in space—but, given that the architectural space was not preexisting, this project of a pavilion marked the birth of De Stijl architecture proper.

## De Stijl architecture

De Stijl's contribution to architecture is *quantitatively* far less important than what is generally believed: the two little houses Robert van't Hoff built in 1916 (before the foundation of the movement) are amiable and talented pastiches of Wright; Jan Wils's constructions flirt somewhat with Art Deco; as for Oud, his most interesting architectural work, executed after he had broken with van Doesburg, partakes much more of the Neue Sachlichkeit than of De Stijl (one could even say that its functionalism annuls whatever superficial features it might have of De Stijl's idiom). In fact, De Stijl's architectural contribution consists only of the projects exhibited by van Doesburg and van Eesteren in 1923 in the Galerie de l'Effort Moderne in Paris, directed by Léonce Rosenberg, and the work of Gerrit Rietveld. Regarding the former, an argument over attribution initiated by van Eesteren has confused the issue. Attribution here is the wrong question: what is essential is that there is a striking formal difference between the first project (an elegant *hôtel particulier* that anticipates the International Style by several years) and the last two (a *maison particulière* and a *maison d'artiste*). For the difference is the direct consequence of the intervention not of the painter (who worked on all three), but of *painting*: the model of the first project is white, the last two are polychrome. The starting-point of those last projects was indeed the possibility of conceiving simultaneously their coloristic and spatial articulation. And van Doesburg's inflated yet enigmatic claim that, in these projects, color becomes "construction material" is not simply rhetorical: it is color indeed that allowed the wall surface as such to be *elementarized*, culminating in the invention of a new architectural element—the indivisible unit of the *screen*. As van Doesburg demonstrates in the groundbreaking axonometric "analytical" drawings he made for the show [5], the screen combines two contradictory visual functions (in profile, it appears like a vanishing line; frontally,



5 • Theo van Doesburg, *Architectural Analysis Counter-Construction*, 1923  
Pnt enhanced with gouache, 51.5 x 61 (20 1/4 x 24)

▲ 1925b

it is a plane that blocks spatial recession), and this contradiction promotes the visual interpenetration of volumes and the fluidity of their articulation. Thus, the desire to integrate painting and architecture, to establish a perfect coincidence between the basic elements of painting (the color planes) and architecture (the wall), led to a major architectural discovery—walls, floor, ceiling as surfaces without thickness, which can be duplicated or unfolded like screens and made to slide past one another in space.

Van Doesburg was not mistaken when he claimed that Rietveld's Schröder House (1924) was the only building to have realized the principles laid down in the last two projects for Rosenberg, with the proviso that the screen is used there in a much more extensive way, for Rietveld managed to *elementarize* that which had remained a *bête noire* for van Doesburg: the building's frame itself. The Rosenberg projects treat the frame from a constructive perspective (for which van Eesteren claims responsibility). That is, the frame is still treated as "natural," anatomical, motivated, and above all, functional. While the elementarization of the wall surface had led van Doesburg and van Eesteren to make intensive use of overhanging horizontal planes (the cantilever is one of the most distinctive formal features of the projects), Rietveld's invention was

to subvert, most of the time by a minimal transformation, the opposition supporting/supported upon which every constructive frame is based. The Schröder House is full of inversions that pervert the functionalist ethic of modernist architecture, the most famous of which being the corner window that, once opened, violently disrupts the structural axis constituted by the intersection of two walls. Rietveld's furniture is based on the same model: in the famous *Red and Blue Chair* (6), for example, one of the vertical elements is both supporting (it bears the armrest) and supported (it hangs off the ground). Be it architecture or furniture, Rietveld understood his works as pieces of sculpture, as independent objects in charge of "separating, limiting and bringing into a human scale a part of unlimited space," as he wrote in 1957. This is in direct opposition to the texts on the interior in the early numbers of *De Stijl*, which focused on architecture as closure. With Rietveld, everything is deployed in such a way as to flatten our intellectual desire to dismantle his pieces of furniture or architecture into their component parts; but we would learn nothing from this operation (probably not even how to reassemble the parts), for the uniqueness of his work resides in the articulation of these elements, in their integration. YAB

#### FURTHER READING

- Nancy Troy, *The De Stijl Environment* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983)  
Carel Blotkamp et al., *De Stijl: The Formative Years* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986)  
Michael White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003)  
Hans L. C. Jaffé (ed.), *De Stijl* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1970)  
Gladys Fabre and Doris Wintgens Hötte (eds), *Van Doesburg and the International Avant-Garde* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009)



6 • Gerrit Rietveld, *Red and Blue Chair*, 1917–18

Painted wood, 86 × 64 × 68 (33½ × 25½ × 26¾)

Marcel Duchamp paints *Tu m'*: his last ever painting summarizes the departures undertaken in his work, such as the use of chance, the promotion of the readymade, and photography's status as an "index."

Marcel Duchamp had landed in New York in 1915 still awash in the celebrity of his *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2* 1912, the most notorious painting of the 1913 ▲ Armory Show. Whether it was as "A Rude Descending a Staircase," or as "An Explosion in a Shingle Factory" (to echo the popular press), this Cubist picture, having set up a beachhead for avant-gardism in the New World, had secured a welcome for its author among the art patrons and collectors in and around Manhattan—figures such as Walter Arensberg, the Stettheimer sisters, and Katherine Dreier. It is not surprising, then, that Dreier should have asked Duchamp, in 1918, to make a long, friezelike painting to go over the bookcases in her library, something like the commission for decorative panels that Hamilton Easter Field had given to Picasso in 1910. What is surprising is that Duchamp should have accepted it.

For by the time of his arrival in America, Duchamp had abandoned working in oils; and the ambitious picture over which he was to begin laboring in 1915, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (also known as the *Large Glass*), was not, technically speaking, a painting [1]. Supported on trestles in the tiny apartment that Arensberg lent to Duchamp, it was in fact two very large panes of glass to which designs of a highly enigmatic kind were applied by a variety of curious means: dust that had settled on the work during months of inactivity was carefully "fixed" in certain places; or shapes of lead and stretches of wire were glued to its surface; or again, silvering was adhered in a given area and then carefully scratched away so as to leave a tracery of mirrored line. Although the execution was meticulous when actually carried out, Duchamp worked on it only sporadically—the piece was completed in 1923. Indeed, he spent as much time creating the conceptual climate for the work through the mass of notes he jotted down, some as early as 1911, others dating to 1915, which he later published collectively as *The Green Box* (1934).

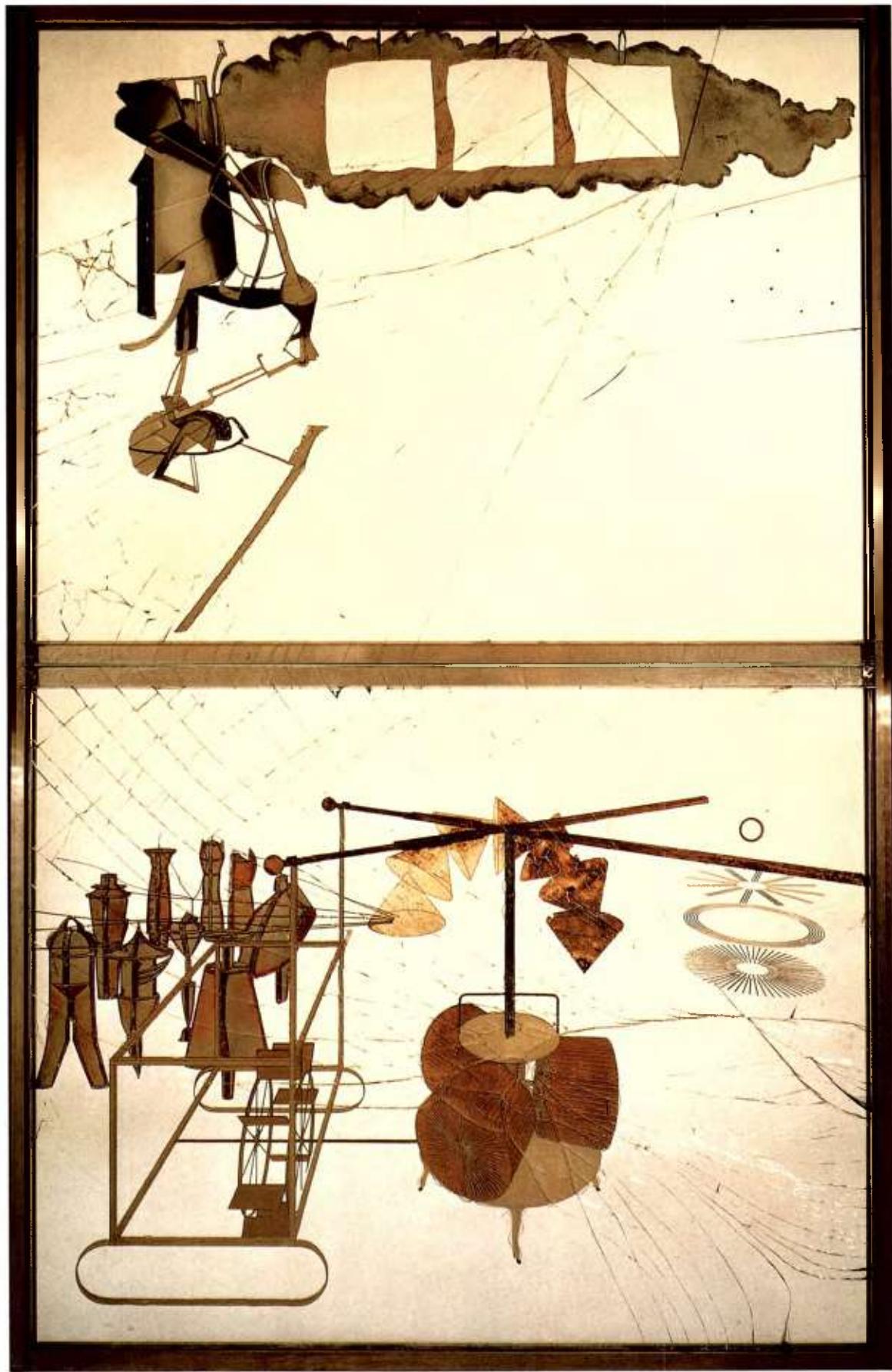
The note labeled "Preface," and thus accorded some sort of authority over the various ideas generated for the *Large Glass*, is written as a strange syllogism. "Given," it starts, "[1] the waterfall, [2] the illuminating gas, we shall determine the conditions of the instantaneous State of Rest ... of a succession of different facts ..."; such "instantaneous State of Rest" being equivalent, it tells us in an

appendix to the note, to "the expression extra-rapid." Now, if this "Preface" gives us any clues to what Duchamp thought he was doing in the place of painting, they are in the terms *instantaneous* (in French *instantané*—the word, if used as a noun, for snapshot) and *extra-rapid*. For in 1914 Duchamp had "published" a group of fifteen notes dealing with his ideas about art by placing the replicated scraps of paper in boxes normally containing photographic glass plates, the advanced technical capacities of which were indicated by the boxes' labels "extra-rapid" or "extra-rapid exposure."

If at first it might seem counterintuitive to think of *The Bride Stripped Bare* as a photograph—so imposing, intricate, and, to use Duchamp's own expression, "allegorical appearing" is it relative to the tiny scale and documentary straightforwardness of a snapshot—we have nonetheless to keep two things in mind. The first is the intense "realism" of the objects suspended within the glass, not only because of their sense of solidity but also because of the strong single-point perspective used to delineate them (and by implication, the space that contains them). The second is the impenetrability of the "allegory" itself, expressed on the one hand by the mechanical contraption housing the bachelors and, on the other, by the metallic shells and amorphous cloud of the bride.

You push the button ...

In the years before Duchamp's "Notes" were published the only key to this mysterious narrative was the work's long but somehow noncommittal title, more a statement of fact—a bride is stripped by her (?) bachelors—than an explanation of meaning. Even after their publication, however, the mystery has not lifted but only burgeoned into more and more elaborate decipherings: "the stripping of the bride is an allegory of courtly love"; "the stripping is a kind of alchemical purification—base matter turning into spirit"; "the stripping is our access to the fourth dimension"; etc. As each of these explanations leads to no definitive "solution" but only back to the brute fact of the objects' sitting in the solidity of their "realistic" presentation, we encounter a feature of photography that connects the two aspects of the glass: its verism and its mute resistance to interpretation. For photographs do not bind their interpretive text into themselves the way paintings with their compositional protocols are



1 • Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915–23

Oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, and dust on two sheets of glass panels, 276.9 x 175.9 (109 1/4 x 69 1/4)

1910–1919

able to do. Rather, stenciled directly off reality, the photograph is a manifestation of fact which often depends on an added text—such as the newspaper caption—for its explanation.

Addressing photography itself as a structural problem, in the ▲ early sixties the French critic and semiologist Roland Barthes called this basic feature of photography its condition of being “a message without a code.” Barthes thereby contrasted the nature of the photographic sign with signs of different types: pictures or maps, say, or words. Insofar as words emerge from a background of systematized language with its own grammatical rules and its own lexical compendium, these particular signs belong to a highly coded system. Moreover, it is only from within that system that meaning attaches to them, since they neither look like the thing to which they refer (the way pictures do) nor are literally caused by it (the way footprints are), and so their relationship to meaning is purely arbitrary and thus conventional; and to mark their distinction from other types of signs, semiologists call them *symbols*.

Pictures, on the other hand, are given the name *icon*, since they relate to their referents not by convention but through the axis of resemblance. Nonetheless, they, too, are able to be composed or manipulated so as to incorporate coded meanings: national colors, for example, or the seating arrangement through which we recognize the Last Supper.

It is the last of the three types of sign, the *index*, that resists coding altogether, since it cannot be internally reorganized or rearranged. This is because the index is literally *caused* by its referent and thus has a blocklike connection to it: like the weather vane pushed into a certain direction by the wind, or the fever induced in the body by microbes, or the circles left on tables by cold glasses, or the patterns etched in the sand by the outgoing tide. Thus, if photography is a message without a code, this puts it in a class with footprints and medical symptoms, and distances it from the Sistine Chapel ceiling, no matter how resemblant (or iconic) a photograph might also be. The fact that it is a photochemically produced trace—the index of the object to which the light-sensitive medium was exposed—is what counts for the semiologist.

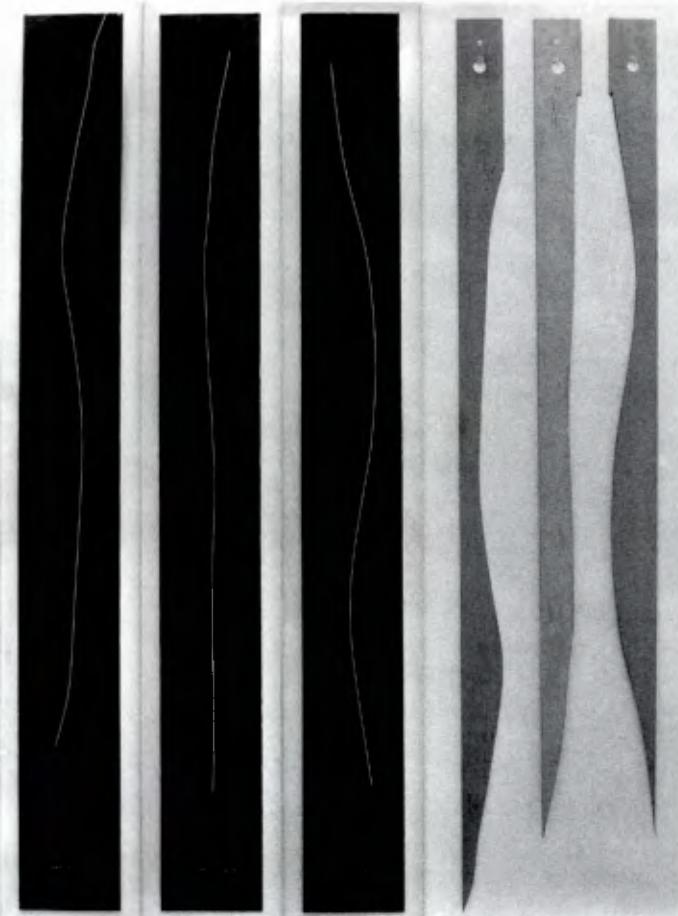
It seems also to have been what counted for Duchamp. For across the field of *The Bride Stripped Bare* the index finds multiple repetitions. Not only are the seven conical forms of the “sieves” (that part of the bachelor machine in which male desire is condensed) corporealized by fixing the amount of dust that fell on the glass over the course of several months (an index of time passing), but the nine “shots” (the rays of desire that actually penetrate into the bride’s realm) are traces of where matches fired from a toy cannon hit the surface. Or again, the three “draft pistons” (openings in the cloudlike shape appended to the bride) are shapes obtained by suspending a square of fabric in front of an open window, thrice photographing its deformations caused by the wind, and then using the profiles registered on the resultant prints as stencils from which to transfer the shapes to the glass.

Procedurally, the execution of the “pistons” follows that of the *Three Standard Stoppages* [2], an earlier work Duchamp made by

dropping three meter-long strings from the height of one meter onto a surface on which the entirely chance configuration of each was fixed, all three then being used to cut stencils that would serve as very curious “yardsticks” indeed, since each one has a different profile and results in a different length. To this artisanally wrought operation of chance, the “pistons” merely added the more mechanical intervention of the camera’s shutter and the photographic print.

But the *Three Standard Stoppages* underscore the sense in which the index—the unique trace or precipitate of an event or, in this case, of a chance occurrence—in being “a message without a code,” is resistant to language. For language depends on its signs (for example, its words) remaining stable over the many instances of their repetition. Even though a given context may reconfigure the connotation or even the *meaning* (or signified) of a word, its form (or signifier) must be the same for each iteration of it. This is even more nakedly true for units of measure—such as feet and inches—in which both signifier and signified must remain constant from one context to another. Duchamp’s ironically non-“standard” yardstick, which changes its length from instance to instance, thus defies the coding that gives measurement its precision and its meaning.

A note from *The Green Box* explicitly connects the two systems—linguistic and numerical—by imagining what Duchamp calls “prime words”: “Conditions of a language: the search for ‘prime words’ (‘divisible’ only by themselves and by unity).”



2 • Marcel Duchamp, *Three Standard Stoppages*, 1913–14

Thread, glue, and paint on glass panels in a wooden box, 28.2 x 129.2 x 22.7 (11 1/4 x 50 7/8 x 9)

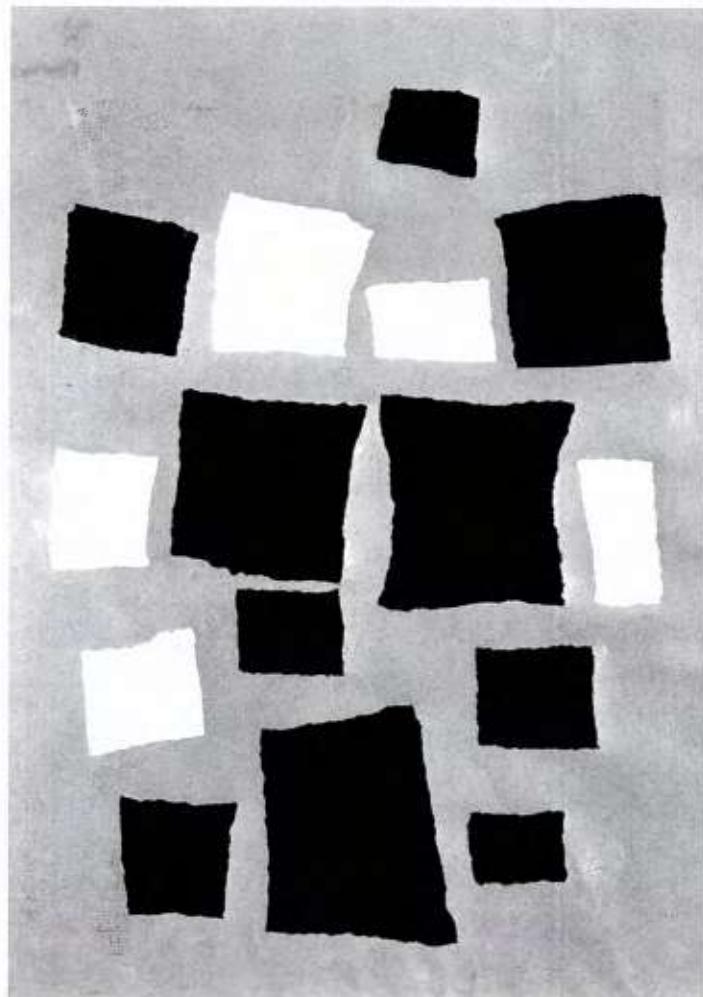
The impossibility of the prime number's entering into numerical relations with the rest of the arithmetic system—being divisible by other numbers or dividing itself into them—is thus explicitly related to a kind of linguistic sign that resists the “combinatory function of language”—the rules that allow either a small set of sounds to be recombined into the huge set of words that make up a vocabulary, or that permit the combination of these words into infinite numbers of sentences. The “prime word” can be thought of, rather, as an index lodged inside the system of language, a marker of a specific event, as when a child is baptized with a proper name—which thus belongs uniquely to that child—or when I point my finger toward something and say “this,” thus naming (but only for the specific instance of my pointing) a particular object: this book, this apple, this chair.

### Panorama of the index

If we started out, then, by seeing the *Large Glass* through the model of the photograph, what we quickly begin to realize is that for Duchamp the photographic category is, in turn, folded into the far more generalized model of the index, which can be visual (snapshots, for instance, but also smoke, fingerprints, etc.) or verbal (“this,” “here,” “today”). Further, we also realize that the index implies not just a shift in the traditional type of sign employed by the visual artist (from iconic to indexical) but also a deep change in artistic procedure. For the index, insofar as it marks the trace of an event, can be the precipitate of a chance occurrence, as in the deformations recorded by the *Large Glass*'s “draft pistons.” Indeed, Duchamp explicitly referred to the *Three Standard Stoppages* as “canned chance.” But chance, of course, rules out the traditional artist's desire to compose his or her work, to prepare it step by step. And in abrogating composition, the use of chance also nullifies the idea of skill that had always been associated with the very definition of the artist. Embracing something far more like (and even more radical than) Kodak's photographic slogan “You push the button, we do the rest,” Duchamp's use of chance both mechanizes the making of the work (the artist is like a camera, thus depersonalized) and deskills it (nothing, not even a camera, is needed).

The possibilities of Duchamp's recourse to chance were quickly seized on by others who were also interested in strategies for undoing the role of composition in the making of the work. One of these was Hans Arp, the Dada artist, who some time around 1915 began to make collages by tearing up pieces of paper and dropping them onto a waiting surface [3]. Another was Francis Picabia, who threw ink at a page to make a formless splotch which he called *The Blessed Virgin* (1920). In producing this blasphemous conjunction of meaningless sign and sacred formula, however, Picabia was going beyond Arp's procedural implementation of chance to participate in Duchamp's extension of it into the realm of meaning—or rather a short circuit in the field of meaning.

Another of Duchamp's notes from *The Green Box* pulls chance, photography, and linguistic emptiness all together. Called “Specifi-



3 • Hans Arp, *Collage of Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance*, 1916–17  
Collage of colored papers, 48.6 x 34.6 (19 1/4 x 13 1/2)

1910–1919

cation for Readymades,” it declares that the readymade will be whatever object the artist stumbles on at a moment he or she pretermines. Calling this a kind of rendezvous or encounter, the note compares it with a snapshot (the indexical recording of the event) but also says that it is “like a speech pronounced on no matter what occasion but at such and such an hour,” which is to say, a linguistic event whose mechanized inappropriateness renders it meaningless.

If we have seen that Duchamp's notes often pull together various strands of the index's implications, this tendency to synthesize is nowhere more in evidence than in his valedictory painting made for Katherine Dreier. For *Tu m'* [4], a kind of résumé of Duchamp's post-Cubist production, is a panorama of the index in its many forms. Several of his readymades—the *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) and the *Hat Rack* (1916)—themselves the index or trace of the rendezvous through which Duchamp encountered them, are projected onto the canvas as cast shadows (another form of index). The *Three Standard Stoppages* appear both in depicted form and as a series of profiles traced from their stencils. The finicky representation of a pointing hand, its index finger extended toward the right side of the work as if to designate the hat rack with the gesture “this,” opens onto the verbal form of the index that is finally invoked in the work's title: *Tu m'* (“You \_\_\_\_\_ [to] me”).



4 • Marcel Duchamp, *Tu m'*, 1918

Oil and graphite on canvas, with bottle-washing brush, safety pins, nut and bolt, 69.9 x 311.8 (27½ x 122½)

Just as *this* or *that* are indexical words connected with a referent only within the temporary context of a given act of pointing, so the personal pronouns *you* and *I* are similarly indexical, connecting to their referent in the shifting context of a given speech event. For it is only the one who says "I" who fills the pronoun at the moment of saying it, during which time his or her interlocutor is named as "you," although becoming "I" in turn, by taking up the other side of the conversation. It is because the signified of the personal pronouns shifts in this way—naming now one participant in a colloquy, now the other—that linguists have called these indexical kinds of words "shifters."

What does it mean, however, that in *Tu m'* Duchamp invokes the two sides of the colloquy at once, as though he were mixing up linguistic decorum by occupying both poles himself?

"You \_\_\_\_\_[to] me"? Could this relate to yet another note from *The Green Box* which consists of a little sketch for the *Large Glass* with the feminine bride in the upper register labeled **MAR** (for *mariée*) and the masculine bachelors in the lower one labeled **CEL** (for *célibataires*). Put together, of course, these two syllables produce the "Marcel" by which Duchamp names himself, although strangely split and doubled as would be the case with *Tu m'*.

If the iconic mode of representation had significantly changed in the move from naturalism to modernist forms such as Cubism or Fauvism, and if the single-point perspective of the earlier system had been under attack by the destruction of perspective involved in modernism, nonetheless within iconic representation certain things remain constant. One of these is the assumption of a unified subject or viewer as the one who makes contact with the image.



5 • Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette* (Beautiful Breath, Veil Water), 1921

Perfume bottle with collage label inside oval violet cardboard box, 16.3 x 11.2 (6½ x 4½)



Rrose Sélavy

One of the sketches Duchamp drew for the *Large Glass* and published in the *Green Box* shows the double field of the work with the upper area labeled "MAR" (short for *mariée* [bride]) and the lower one "CEL" (short for *célibataires* [bachelors]). With this personal identification with the protagonists of the *Glass*, (MAR + CEL = Marcel) Duchamp thought about assuming a feminine persona. As he told his interviewer, Pierre Cabanne:

Cabanne: *Rrose Sélavy was born in 1920, I think.*

Duchamp: *In effect, I wanted to change my identity, and the*

Perspective had specifically located this viewer in its plotting of a precise vantage point. But both Cubism and Fauvism, by finding other means to unify the pictorial space, also address themselves to a unified human subject: the viewer / interpreter of the work.

The final implication of Duchamp's removal of his field of operations from the iconic to the indexical sign becomes clear in this context. For beyond its marking a break with "picturing" and a rejection of "skill," beyond its displacement of meaning from repeatable code to unique event, the index's aspect as shifter has implications for the status of the subject, of the one who says "I," in this case Duchamp "himself." For as the subject of the vast self-portrait assembled by *Tu m'*, Duchamp declares himself a disjunctive, fractured subject, split axially into the two facing poles of pronominal space, even as he would split himself sexually into the two opposite poles of gender in the many photographic self-

*first idea that came to me was to take a Jewish name ... I didn't find a Jewish name that I especially liked, or that tempted me, and suddenly I had an idea: why not change sex? It was much simpler. So the name Rrose Sélavy came from that ...*

Cabanne: *You went so far in your sex change as to have yourself photographed dressed as a woman.*

Duchamp: *It was Man Ray who did the photograph ...*

Having stopped work on the *Glass* in 1923, Duchamp transferred his artistic enterprise to this new character and had business cards printed up giving his name and profession as "Rrose Sélavy, Precision Oculist." The works he went on to make as "oculist" were machines with turning optical disks—the *Rotary Demisphere* and the *Rotoreliefs*—as well as films, such as *Anemic Cinema*.

There is a way to understand Rrose Sélavy's enterprise as the undermining of the Kantian aesthetic system in which the work of art opens onto a collective visual space acknowledging, in effect, the simultaneity of points of view of all the spectators who are gathered to see it, a multiplicity whose appreciation for the work speaks with, as Kant would say, the universal voice. On the contrary, Duchamp's "precision optics" were, like the holes in the door of his installation *Etant données*, available to only one viewer at a time. Organized as optical illusions, they were clearly the solitary visual projection of the viewer placed in the right vector to experience them. As the *Rotoreliefs*—a set of printed cards—revolved like visual records on a phonograph turntable, their designs of slightly skewed concentric circles spiral to burgeon outward like a balloon inflating and then to reverse themselves into an inward, sucking movement. Some appeared like eyes or breasts, trembling in a phantom space; another sported a goldfish that seemed to be swimming in a basin whose plug had been pulled, so that the fish was being sucked down the drain. In this sense, Duchamp's switch to Rrose and her activities marks a turn from an interest in the mechanical (the Bachelor Machine, the Chocolate Grinder) to a concern for the optical.

1910-1919

portraits he would make while in drag and sign "Rrose Sélavy" (5). Taking up Rimbaud's "je est un autre" ("I am an other"), Duchamp's shattering of subjectivity was perhaps his most radical act. RK

#### FURTHER READING

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# 1919

Pablo Picasso has his first solo exhibition in Paris in thirteen years: the onset of pastiche in his work coincides with a widespread antimodernist reaction.

When Wilhelm Uhde, the German collector and dealer of French avant-garde art, entered the Paul Rosenberg Gallery in 1919, he was stunned. Instead of the powerful style he had witnessed Picasso developing in the years leading up to the outbreak of World War I—first Analytical Cubism, a major example of which was Picasso's 1910 portrait of Uhde himself, then collage, and finally "Synthetic Cubism" (the form that collage took when rendered in oil paint on canvas)—Uhde was confronted with a strange mixture.

On the one hand there were neoclassical portraits, redolent of the manner of Ingres, Corot, late Renoir, indeed the whole panoply of nineteenth-century French artists influenced by the classical tradition, all the way from Greek and Roman antiquity up through the Renaissance and into the work of seventeenth-century French painters such as Poussin [1]. On the other hand there were Cubist still lifes, but now of a compromised form: impregnated with vistas of deep space, prettified by a decorative palette of pinks and cerulean blues. Uhde remembers:

*I found myself in the presence of a huge portrait in what is known as the Ingres manner; the conventionality, the sobriety of the attitude seemed studied, and it seemed to be repressing some pathetic secret.... What was the meaning of this and the other pictures I saw on that occasion? Were they but an interlude, a gesture—splendid but without significance ...?*

Wanting to see what he viewed as Picasso's self-betrayal as merely a parenthesis, the momentary flagging of his true creative energies, Uhde nonetheless had suspicions that the artist had capitulated to something more sinister, to the fear inspired by the xenophobia unleashed by French nationalism during the war, a hatred of everything foreign that had already manifested itself in a prewar cultural campaign in which Cubism was linked with the approaching enemy and affixed with the label "*boche*" ("kraut"). Accordingly, Uhde continues his speculations on the cause of what he has seen:

*Or was it that at this time when men were ruled by hate ... [Picasso] felt that innumerable people were pointing their fingers at him, reproaching him with having strong German sympathies and accusing him of being secretly in connivance with the*

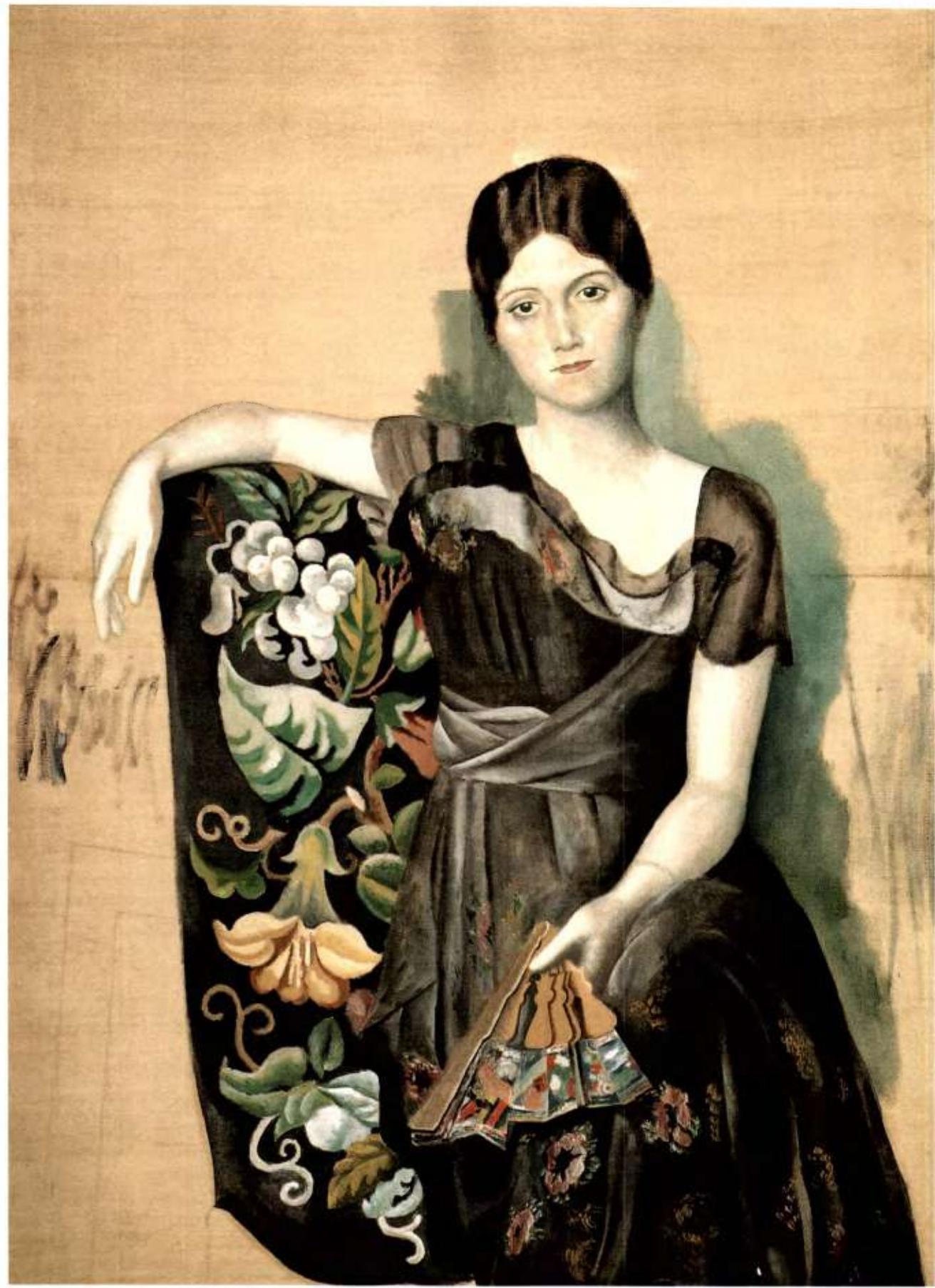
*enemy?... Was he trying definitely to range himself on the French side, and did these pictures attest to the torment of his soul?*

Among the many things that emerge from this scene, the two most obvious concern the enormity of the break that Uhde sensed in Picasso's art and, given this, his conviction that its explanation had to be found in a cause outside the inner logic of the work itself.

Uhde has since been joined by many historians in seeking this explanation, even though not all of them agree with him about the nature of this external cause. Yet for the ones who side with Uhde in looking to politics for an answer, that explanation is linked to the *rappel à l'ordre* (return to order), a widespread postwar reaction against what was seen as the avant-garde's promotion of anarchic and antihumanist expressive means and an embrace instead of a classicism worthy of the French ("Mediterranean") tradition.

Was Picasso, the avant-garde leader, now following in the wake of this massive "return," his ship unable to hold its own against the flood tide of historical reaction? To some scholars the actual date of Picasso's conversion makes the postwar *rappel à l'ordre* dubious as an explanation. For Picasso had already begun to embrace a classical style during the war, as, for example, in his 1915 portrait drawings of Max Jacob [2] and Ambroise Vollard. So, instead, these scholars look to the circumstances of Picasso's personal life. They cite his isolation, with close artistic allies like Braque and Apollinaire away at the front, and Eva Gouel, the companion of his prewar years, dying of cancer; they mention his growing restlessness with a Cubist style that had become increasingly formulaic and, in the hands of lesser followers, banal; they see his excitement at being swept up in the glamour of the Ballets Russes, with its eccentric personnel such as Sergei Diaghilev, its elegant ballerinas, and its glittering clientele; finally, they see his succumbing to the charms of Olga Koklova, the dancer in the corps of the Ballets Russes whom Picasso would marry in 1918 and whom he would allow to integrate him into that world of wealth and pleasure for which the avant-garde was just another form of *chic*.

But if these two explanations—one sociopolitical, the other biographical—are at odds with each other, they agree about looking for the reason for this change outside the limits of Picasso's actual work. In this they share a common understanding about the nature of causal explanation. As a consequence they are opposed to another



1 • Pablo Picasso, *Olga Picasso in an Armchair*, 1917 (detail)

Oil on canvas, 130 x 88.8 (51 1/4 x 35)

position, which insists that the postwar manner can be logically deduced from Cubism itself and thus, like the growth of an organism, its genetic coding is entirely internal to it and more or less impervious to external factors. The principle that this side sees at work—internal to Cubism itself—is collage: the grafting of heterogeneous material onto the formerly homogeneous surface of the work of art. If collage could paste matchbooks and calling cards, wallpaper swatches, and newsprint onto the field of Cubism, they reason, why cannot this practice be extended to the grafting of a whole range of “extraneous” styles onto the unfolding oeuvre, so that Poussin will be redone in the manner of archaic Greek sculpture, or the realist compositions of the seventeenth-century painter Le Nain will be presented through the gay confetti of Seurat’s pointillism? Ultimately, the defenders of

this position argue, there is no need to explain the change in Picasso, since nothing in fact changes; the collage principle remains the same—only the “extraneous” matter shifts a little.

### Contextualists versus internalists

The radical division between these two camps of scholars brings us face to face with the issue of historical method. The contextual explanation sets itself against the theory of the internally determined growth of the creative individual, each position feeling the other is blind to certain facts. The contextualists, for example, see the other side as refusing to face up to the reactionary content unleashed by neoclassicism and the need to find the source of such



Sergei Diaghilev (1872–1929) and the Ballets Russes

In the late nineteenth century, German composer Richard Wagner theorized the achievement he hoped his operatic theatre would realize under the term *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This idea of a “total work of the arts” meant the coordination of all the senses—sound, spectacle, narrative—into a single continuity. The antimodernism of Wagner’s position lay in its negation of the idea of a given work’s obligation to reveal the boundaries of its own medium and to seek its own possibility of meaning within those boundaries. Wagner never achieved a true *Gesamtkunstwerk*, however; it was left to another form of musical theater and another impresario from another country to do so. During the first half of the twentieth century, Sergei Diaghilev, Russian director of the Ballets Russes, wove together the full range of avant-garde talent into a sumptuous fabric of visual spectacle: his composers ranged from Igor Stravinsky and Erik Satie to Darius Milhaud and Georges Auric; his choreographers were Massine and Nijinsky; his set and costume designers were Picasso, Georges Braque, and Fernand Léger, among others.

Writer Jean Cocteau describes the meeting he arranged in 1919 between Diaghilev and Picasso in order to convince the latter to collaborate on Cocteau’s own ballet *Parade*:

*I understood that there existed in Paris an artistic Right and an artistic Left, which were ignorant or disdainful of each other for no valid reasons and which it was perfectly possible to bring together. It was a question of converting Diaghilev to modern painting, and the modern painters, especially Picasso, to the sumptuous, decorative esthetic of the ballet: of coaxing the Cubists out of their isolation, persuading them to abandon their hermetic Montmartre folklore of pipes, packages of tobacco, guitars, and old newspapers ... the discovery of a middle-of-the-road solution attuned to the taste for luxury and pleasure, of the revived cult of French “clarity” that was springing up in Paris even before the war ... such was the history of Parade.*

The “sumptuous, decorative aesthetic,” to which Cocteau refers was a gorgeous Art Nouveau texture, as bejeweled and gilded as any Tiffany lamp or oriental interior. For *Parade*, Picasso and Satie were to defy the Ballets Russes’s usual designer Léon Bakst’s drive toward Orientalist splendor, substituting the ascetic drabness of Cubist sets and costumes and unleashing the sounds of typewriters and popular ditties on the appalled audience, which responded by hurling insults at the stage: “*métèques*,” [half-breeds] and “*boches*” [krauts]. Cocteau, who prided himself on his fashionableness and his understanding of the high cultural taste for occasional slumming, had as his motto: “You have to know just how far you can go too far.” But in *Parade* he and Diaghilev had apparently gone too far and the audience, along with the ballet’s sponsors—the Comtesse de Chabillon, the Comtesse de Chavigné, and the Comtesse de Beaumont—could not wait to tell them so.

Ballet companies now considered themselves heir to the ambitions of the artistic avant-garde. One in particular was the Ballets Suédois, whose director, Rolf de Maré, turned to Francis Picabia for the design of the set for *Relâche* (1924), a title that was itself a snub to its audience since it meant “performance canceled.” Picabia’s set consisted of over three hundred automobile headlights trained out toward the audience and turned on in unison at the end of one of the acts in a blinding, bedazzling, sadistic fury.

reaction; the internalists see themselves vindicated by the early date of Picasso's move, showing that it must be motivated by something native to his creative will and unproblematically continuous with his previous concerns with Cubism.

The positivist historians among us (or the positivist impulses within each of us) would like to cut the knot of this argument by coming up with a document that will solve the debate: a letter by Picasso, for example, or a statement in an interview in which he says what this change in style meant to him or what he intended by it. However, there rarely is such a thing in relation to Picasso (or to most other artists for that matter), and even in the few instances where it does exist, we *still* have to interpret it. In this case, for example, Picasso seems to have sided with the internalists when in response to the Swiss conductor Ernest Ansermet's question, put to him in Rome in 1917, about why he engaged simultaneously in two totally opposite styles (Cubism and neoclassicism), Picasso merely quipped: "Can't you see? The results are the same!"

But there are art historians who cannot accept this answer, seeming as it does to act out its own blindness to the difference between modernism and pastiche, or between authenticity and fraudulence. Modernist art, of which Cubism was a fundamental example, stakes its claim to authenticity on its progressive uncovering of the structural and material (and thus objectively demonstrable) realities of a given artistic medium; while pastiche—the flagrant imitation by one artist

of the style of another—shrugs off this notion of an inner pictorial logic to be revealed, one that puts certain options out of bounds, and maintains instead that every option is open to the creative spirit. Thus Cubism and the pastiche of neoclassicism cannot be "the same," and we should rephrase our historical problem by asking what could have made Picasso, as early as 1915, imagine that they were?

At this point it is important to realize that a fight had already begun, just before the war, over the legacy of Cubism, which is to say, over the future that Cubism itself had made possible. On the one hand there were artists—such as Piet Mondrian, or Robert Delaunay, ▲ or František Kupka (or in Russia, Kazimir Malevich)—who believed that this legacy was pure abstraction, the next logical move after the ascetically reduced grid of the Analytical Cubism of 1911–12. • On the other, there were those, such as Marcel Duchamp and (briefly) Francis Picabia, who saw Cubism opening up to the mechanization of art in an obvious extension of collage into the readymade. Picabia's own development of Cubism in this latter direction took the form of what he called "mechanomorphs," industrial objects (such as spark plugs or turbine parts or cameras) coldly rendered by means of mechanical drawing and declared to be portraits (whether of the ■ photographer Alfred Stieglitz, the critic Marius de Zayas, or "a young American girl in a state of nudity" [3]). The date of most of this output, interestingly enough, was 1915, and it appeared in the magazine *291*, which Picasso would certainly have seen.

Now, if these two options were what the avant-garde saw as the logical next step of Cubism, they were not the possibilities that Picasso himself found acceptable as the fate of "his" brainchild. Always vociferously against abstraction, he was also opposed to any mechanization of seeing (as in, according to some, photography) or of making (as in the readymade).

Thus, if the precise onset of Picasso's embrace of classicism—1915—argues against the externalist notion of cause and for the idea of something internal to the work, that same date opens up an internalist explanation that, far from repressing the antimodernist, reactionary form of his pastiche, will explain both its continuousness with Cubism *and* its total break with it. For the summer of 1915 confronted Picasso with Cubism's own logical consequences in the form of Picabia's published, mechanomorphic portraits: mechanically drawn, coldly impersonal, readymade. But in styling his own rejection of such consequences as neoclassicism, Picasso embarked on a strange campaign of portraiture of his own, in which he began to churn out image after image, each startlingly like the other in pose, lighting, treatment, scale, and, in particular, the handling of line, which, bizarrely invariant and graphically insensitive, seemed to be produced more as an act of tracing than as a record of seeing [4].

It is possible, even preferable, then, to describe Picasso's neoclassicism with the exact same words as were used for Picabia's mechanomorphs: mechanically drawn, coldly impersonal, ready-made. There is no reason why classicism might not be adopted as a strategy to rise above the industrial level of the mass-produced object, which the readymade extolled and in which abstract painting and sculpture participated in their own way by adopting the principle of



2 • Pablo Picasso, *Max Jacob*, 1915

Pencil on paper, 33 × 25 (13 × 9 7/8)

PORTRAIT  
D'UNE JEUNE FILLE AMÉRICaine  
DANS L'ÉTAT DE NUDITé



F. Picabia  
5 Janvier 1915  
New York

3 • Francis Picabia, *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité*  
(*Portrait of a Young American Girl in the State of Nudity*), 1915

Reproduced in 291, nos 5/6, July/August 1915

serial production, for example, or by lowering the level of technical skill needed to execute the forms. But in Picasso's deployment of it the strategy backfires. For in his hands classicism ends by repeating those very same features of the position he despised, a position—we have to repeat—that was being claimed as continuous with Cubism, *inside* it as it were, rather than coming from the outside.

#### Other models of history

There is a naive belief that historical explanations are simply a record of the facts that the historian extracts from the archive. But facts need to be organized, analyzed, weighted, interrogated; and to do this all historians (consciously or not) have recourse to an underlying model that gives shape to the facts. We have seen the contextualists'

model assuming, with greater or lesser sophistication, that cultural expression will be the effect of causes external to what the aesthetic sphere (erroneously) promotes as the "autonomy" of its own site of production. We have also seen the internalists cutting their model to the shape of an independent organism—whether that be the creative will of the artist or the coherent development of an artistic tradition.

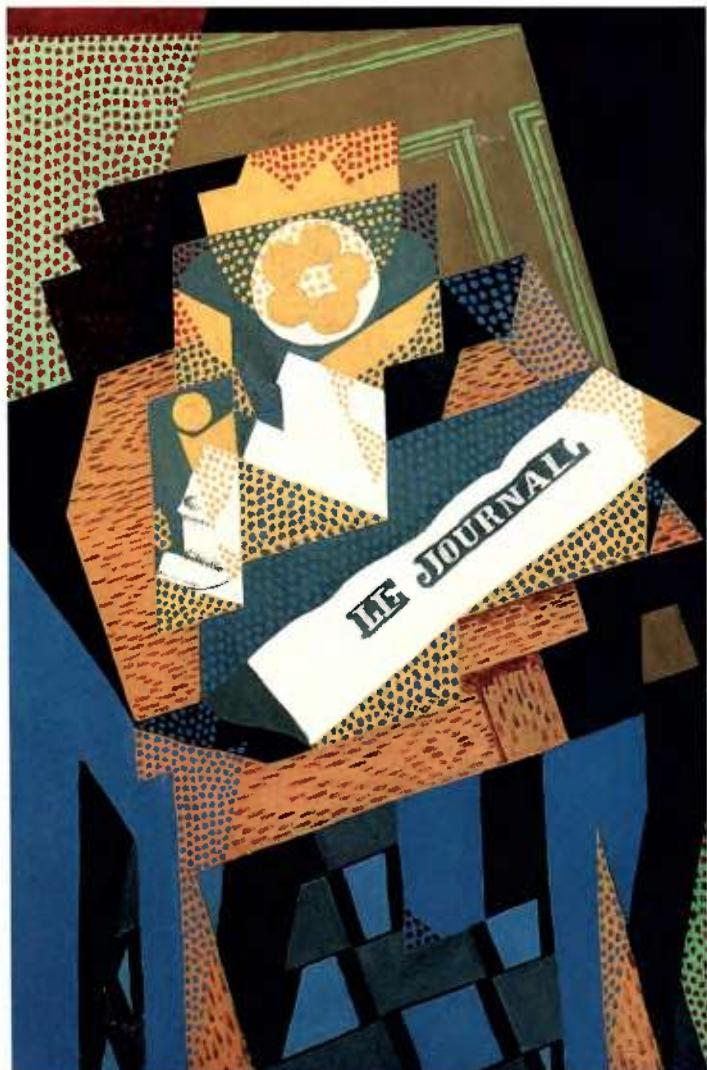
The case we might call "Picasso-pastiche" suggests the usefulness of another model, one most clearly outlined by Freud in the psychoanalytic theories he was developing right at this moment. This model, which Freud called "reaction-formation," was meant to describe a curious transformation of repressed urges, a transformation that seemed to deny those low, libidinally charged impulses by substituting for them something that was their exact opposite: behavior that was "high," laudable, upright, proper. But this opposite, Freud points out, is in fact a way of continuing the prohibited behavior by smuggling it in under its cleaned-up, sublimated guise. The anal personality transforms the explosive urge toward dirtiness into the retentive features of obsessive thrift or conscientiousness; the infantile masturbator ends by being a compulsive hand-washer, whose gestures of stroking and rubbing carry on the earlier desires under a newly acceptable (albeit out-of-control) form. Further, says Freud, reaction-formation carries with it a "secondary gain." Not only is the subject able, furtively, to carry on his or her impulses, but now this behavior becomes socially commendable.



4 • Pablo Picasso, *Igor Stravinsky*, 1920  
Lead pencil, charcoal, 61.5 x 48.2 (24 1/4 x 19)

There are two advantages of using reaction-formation as a model for Picasso-pastiche. First, it explains the dialectical connection—which is to say, the togetherness in opposition—between Cubism and its neoclassical “other.” Second, it produces a structure that helps to account for the shape of many other antimodernist practices throughout the century, including the *rappel à l'ordre* ▲ production, but also reactionary painting from Giorgio de Chirico to later Picabia. It shows, that is, the degree to which those antimodernisms are themselves conditioned by exactly those features in the modernist work they wish to repudiate and repress.

To the cases of de Chirico and Picabia (as well as that of *pittura metafisica*), one must add that of Juan Gris, Picasso's fellow Spaniard, who emigrated to Paris in 1906, encountered Picasso, and soon devoted himself to Cubism. His *Portrait of Picasso* (1912) manifests his understanding of the new style as a matter of imposing a geometric grid over a relatively realistic representation so as to splinter its contours and fragment its volumes. Instead of the orthogonal grid favored by Picasso and Braque, Gris adopted a diagonal one, which implied the receding lines of the perspective Cubism had abandoned.



5 • Juan Gris, *Newspaper and Fruit Dish*, 1916

Oil on canvas, 92 × 60 (36 1/4 × 23 5/8)

### Rappel à l'ordre

The *rappel à l'ordre* issued a call for a return to the presumed classical roots of French art, in the course of which its proponents opened an attack on Cubism. The beginnings of this return are assigned various dates, a late one being the 1923 essay by Jean Cocteau "Le Rappel à l'Ordre," a much earlier one being *Après le Cubisme*, published in 1918 by the painter Amédée Ozenfant and the architect Charles-Édouard Jeanneret. But what all these calls to order have in common is the idea that the prewar period was defined by chaos, by a decadent sensuality that needed to be replaced by the purity of classical rationalism, and by the barbarization of French culture by German influences. In fact, Ozenfant and Jeanneret called on artists to focus on the golden section and other ideas of classical proportion, making it possible for there to be a "new Pythagoras." "Science and great Art have the common ideal of generalizing," they wrote. Arguing that if "The Greeks triumphed over the Barbarians" it was because they sought intellectual beauty beneath sensory beauty.

Two versions of this classicism are represented by these two tracts, however. The first, Purism, has a modern, streamlined look, and speaks the language of science and of general laws, such as proportion. It argues that the artist-designer should dedicate himself to industry, producing for it the generalized types associated with classical forms. The second has a reactionary, Old Master character and recycles the themes and genres of the neoclassical art it wishes to revive. The mother-and-child theme became a preferred one—taken up by former Cubists such as Gino Severini as well as modified ones such as Albert Gleizes—as did the tradition of the *commedia dell'arte*. Severini's clowns and harlequins, painted in the early twenties in the hard outlines and licked surfaces of the most academicized classicism, are determined examples of the latter.

The broken strokes of paint that Gris employs in his portrait reflects Analytical Cubism's own stippled surfaces, as does Gris's palette, which is limited to the muted colors of the painter's modeling and shading of volume. This stippled surface soon yielded to a far more enameled one paralleling metallic forms. The hardened surfaces of Gris's style during the teens echo Picabia's concern with the mechanomorph, the world seen as a collection of industrially wrought mechanical parts. And Gris's style gravitated to the industrially wrought aesthetic surface as well. In his *Newspaper and Fruit Dish* (5), textures such as wood-graining and reflected light are translated into the repetitive, mechanical language of commercial illustration. Gris himself thought of this hardened, aloof manner as a form of classicism, and it was in this way that Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, the greatest contemporary interpreter of Cubism, also read his work. RK

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- 186 1920 The Dada Fair is held in Berlin: the polarization of avant-garde culture and cultural traditions leads to a politicization of artistic practices and the emergence of photomontage as a new medium. BB
- 192 1921a With *Three Musicians*, Pablo Picasso enlists the classicism of Nicolas Poussin in the development of Synthetic Cubism, the reigning style of postwar modernism. RK
- 198 1921b The members of the Moscow Institute of Artistic Culture define Constructivism as a logical practice responding to the demands of a new collective society. YAB  
box • Soviet institutions YAB
- 204 1922 Hans Prinzhorn publishes *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*: the "art of the insane" is explored in the work of Paul Klee and Max Ernst. HF
- 209 1923 The Bauhaus, the most influential school of modernist art and design in the twentieth century, holds its first public exhibition in Weimar, Germany. HF
- 214 1924 André Breton publishes the first issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, establishing the terms of Surrealist aesthetics. RK  
box • Surrealist journals RK

- 220** 1925a While the Art Deco exhibition in Paris makes official the birth of modern kitsch, Le Corbusier's machine aesthetics becomes the bad dream of modernism and Aleksandr Rodchenko's Workers' Club advocates a new relationship between men and objects. **YAB**  
**box • Black Deco** **RK**
- 228** 1925b Curator Gustav F. Hartlaub organizes the first exhibition of Neue Sachlichkeit painting at the Kunsthalle, Mannheim: a variation of the international tendencies of the *rappel à l'ordre*, this new "magic realism" signals the end of Expressionism and Dada practices in Germany. **BB**
- 232** 1925c Oskar Schlemmer publishes "The Theater of the Bauhaus," presenting the mannequin and the automaton as models of the modern performer; other artists, especially women involved in Dada, explore the allegorical potential of the doll and the puppet. **HF**
- 238** 1925d On May 3, a public screening of avant-garde cinema titled "The Absolute Film" is held in Berlin: on the program are experimental works by Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, Walter Ruttmann, and Fernand Léger that continue the project of abstraction by filmic means. **HF**
- 244** 1926 El Lissitzky's *Demonstration Room* and Kurt Schwitters's *Merzbau* are installed in Hanover, Germany: the architecture of the museum as archive and the allegory of modernist space as melancholia are dialectically conceived by the Constructivist and the Dadaist. **BB**
- 248** 1927a After working as a commercial artist in Brussels, René Magritte joins the Surrealist movement in Paris, where his art plays on the idioms of advertising and the ambiguities of language and representation. **RK**
- 252** 1927b Constantin Brancusi produces a stainless-steel cast of *The Newborn*: his sculpture unleashes a battle between models of high art and industrial production, brought to a head in the US trial over his *Bird in Space*. **RK**
- 256** 1927c Charles Sheeler is commissioned by Ford to document its new River Rouge plant: North American modernists develop a lyrical relation to the machine age, which Georgia O'Keeffe extends to the natural world. **HF**  
**box • MoMA and Alfred H. Barr, Jr.** **HF**
- 262** 1928a The publication of "Unism in Painting" by Władysław Stzremiński, followed in 1931 by a book on sculpture he coauthored with Katarzyna Kobro, *The Composition of Space*, marks the apogee of the internationalization of Constructivism. **YAB**
- 268** 1928b The publication of *Die neue Typographie* by Jan Tschichold confirms the impact of the Soviet avant-garde's production on book design and advertisement in capitalist Western European countries, and ratifies the emergence of an international style. **YAB**
- 274** 1929 The "Film und Foto" exhibition, organized by the Deutscher Werkbund and held in Stuttgart from May 18 to July 7, displays a spectrum of international photographic practices and debates: the exhibition demarcates a climax in twentieth-century photography and marks the emergence of a new critical theory and historiography of the medium. **BB**

# 1920

The Dada Fair is held in Berlin: the polarization of avant-garde culture and cultural traditions leads to a politicization of artistic practices and the emergence of photomontage as a new medium.

The Dada Fair held in June 1920 at Dr. Otto Burchard's gallery in Berlin was the first public appearance of the group of artists—diverse in both project and origin—who came to constitute the official Berlin Dada movement. The fact that the event was announced as a fair rather than as an exhibition signals that from the very outset its parody of the display of commodities, whether at the level of window design or of large commercial presentations, emphasized the Dadaists' intention to radically transform both the structure of exhibitions and the art objects within them [1].

Some of the central objects of the fair—specifically Hannah Höch's (1889–1978) *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Beer Belly of the Weimar Republic* [2], Raoul Hausmann's (1886–1971) *Tatlin at Home* (1920) and *Mechanical Head (Spirit of the Age)* [3], and the collaborative contributions of George Grosz (1893–1959) and John Heartfield (Helmut Herzfelde) (1891–1968)—indicate the diversity of strategies employed by the newly defined group. In contact with the work of both the Italian Futurists and the Soviet avant-garde, Berlin Dada situated itself at the intersection of a critical revision of traditional modernism, on the one hand, and a manifest embracing of the new synthesis of avant-garde art with technology on the other. But more specifically, Berlin Dada also stood in radical opposition to the local avant-garde, namely the hegemonic model of German Expressionism. It was Expressionism's ethos, with its universalizing humanitarian aims, and its practice, with its fervent attempt to fuse spirituality and abstraction, that came under scrutiny and devastating critique at the hands of the Dadaists.

## Dada: distraction and destruction

Under the impact of World War I, in which Expressionism had played the fateful and ultimately failed role of trying to appeal to the supposedly universal terms of human existence, Dada explicitly positioned itself against this aspiration for artistic practice. This stance has erroneously appeared to many to be a form of nihilism, but what needs to be stressed instead is the positive nature of Dada's critique. Against Expressionism's effort to fuse the aesthetic and the spiritual, Dada constructed a model of antiaesthetics; against the attempt to claim universality for human experience by assimilating

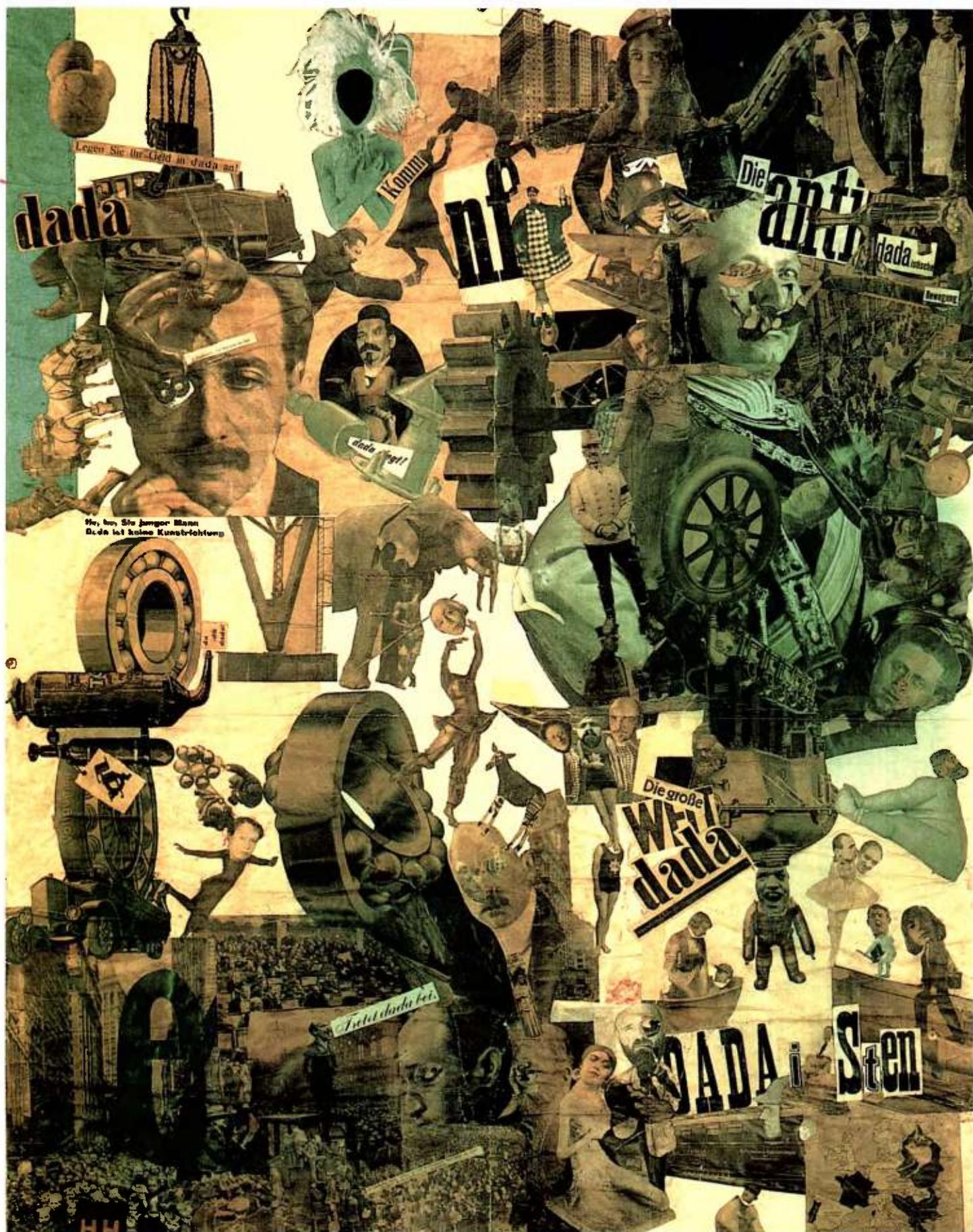


▲ 1920 • First International Dada Fair at Kunstsalon Dr. Otto Burchard, Berlin, June 1920

the aesthetic to the mystical, Dada emphasized extreme forms of political secularization of artistic practice.

Several of the Berlin Dada group rallied to the left, identifying with the aims of the Communist Party to the degree, in the cases of Heartfield and Grosz, of becoming members of the Party when it was founded in Germany in 1919. From that perspective it is important to recognize that Berlin Dada is an explicitly politicized avant-garde project previously unknown in the German context. However, this project's axis ranges from a critique of bourgeois concepts of high art to a model for activist propaganda and from embracing French examples of earlier proto-Dada practices—such as Duchamp's and Picabia's—to the systematic development of montage techniques intended to undermine the emerging mass-cultural power of the Weimar publication industry.

The simultaneity of objects, textures, printed matter, and surfaces to which Heartfield and Grosz relate in their initial work from 1918 (no longer extant) clearly has a precursor in Cubism. But this earliest photomontage work to come out of Berlin is explicitly conceived of as a mockery of Cubism's aestheticized, apolitical approach to the emerging power of mass-cultural imagery. In 1919, immediately following this parody of Picasso's



2 • Hannah Höch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Beer Belly of the Weimar Republic*, c. 1919

Collage, 114 x 89.8 (44 1/2 x 35 1/2)



3 • Raoul Hausmann, *Mechanical Head (Spirit of The Age)*, c. 1920  
Wood, leather, aluminum, brass, and board, 32.5 × 21 × 20 (12 1/4 × 8 1/4 × 7 1/2)

form of collage, Heartfield, Hausmann, Höch, and Grosz—jointly and collaboratively—developed their first photomontage projects [4].

These were paralleled in the Soviet Union by the simultaneous development of photomontage by Gustav Klutsis and Aleksandr Rodchenko. Although both sides claim to have invented the medium, photomontage had been developed as early as the 1890s as a commercial technique for the design of advertising. In fact, in their first text on the montage, Hausmann and Höch refer to populist models for combining and transforming images as their inspiration, and identify the picture postcards soldiers sent home from the Front as the examples from which they took their cues.

One of the key works of 1919 is Höch's *Cut with the Kitchen Knife ... in which the full range of technical and strategic ambiguities that would form the project of photomontage is apparent. From an iconically rendered narrative to a purely structural deployment of textual material, the possibilities established in Höch's work would become the axis of a dialectic operation within photomontage itself. In *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* ... the iconic narrative consists of a detailed inventory of key figures from the public world of the Weimar Republic. These move from political figures such as Friedrich Ebert, the Social Democratic President who had been responsible for the murders of members of the Spartakist Bund,*

specifically Rosa Luxemburg (1870–1919) and Karl Liebknecht (1871–1919), at the hands of his Minister of the Interior, Gustav Noske (who is depicted by Heartfield in a later photomontage as well), to figures of the cultural world such as Albert Einstein, Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945), and the dancer Niddy Impekoven. All of these are disseminated across the field of the work according to a nonhierarchical, noncompositional, and aleatory principle of distribution, mingled with a variety of textual fragments that often invoke the nonsensical syllables "da-da." According to Huelsenbeck's claim, "dada" was found by inserting a knife into the pages of a dictionary; other origin stories for the term "dada" have ▲ been given, for example by the Cabaret Voltaire Dadaists.

But whether in the context of the Weimar Republic or in that of the Soviet Union, what links Heartfield, Grosz, Höch, and Hausmann on the one hand, and Rodchenko and Klutsis on the other, is first of all, the discovery of the photographic permeation of the visual world as a result of the emergence of the mass-cultural distribution of photographic images. Secondly, both groups participate in a nonsemantic production of meaning intended to destroy visual and textual homogeneity, to emphasize the materiality of the signifier over a presumed universal legibility of either the textual or iconic signified, and to stress the rupture and discontinuity of temporal and spatial forms of experience. The critical impulse behind this alogical attack on the very fabric of legibility was the intention to dismantle the mythical representations promoted by the mass-cultural production of commodity imagery and advertising. Lastly, photomontage represents the shared desire to construct a new type of art object, one that is ephemeral, one that has no claim either to innate worth or transhistorical value, one that is instead located within the perspective of intervention and rupture. This defines the political dimension of the photomontage practitioners' decision to stage artistic practice within the very medium of mass-cultural representation rather than outside or in opposition to it, as was the



4 • George Grosz and John Heartfield, *Life and Activity in Universal City at 12.05 midday, 1919*  
Photomontage, dimensions unknown

case in abstract art's attempt to retreat into the values specific to the mediums of painting or sculpture. These strategies link both groups' activities around 1919.

### From photomontage to new narratives

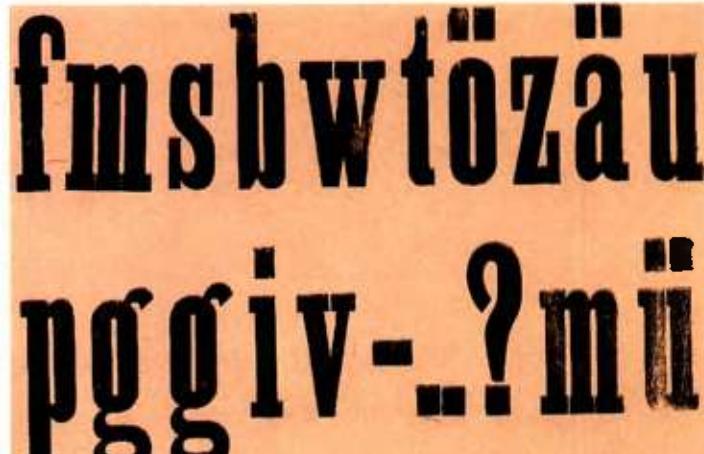
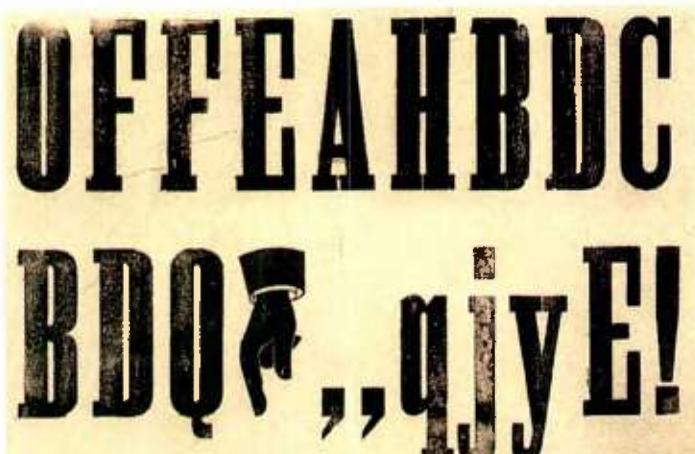
As photomontage developed in Weimar Germany its range of options led its practitioners in various directions. In Hausmann's case the emphasis was increasingly textual with the verbal sign dismantled into graphic and phonetic fragments [5], whereas in Höch's work the focus on photographic imagery eventually displaced the structural separations that characterize the disjunction of textual elements. This was in favor of an increasingly homogeneous type of photomontage in which only two or three fragments are used to form peculiarly enigmatic figures.

John Heartfield, a third member of the original Berlin Dada group, quickly moved away from what he came to criticize as the "avant-gardist" dimension of the aestheticizing photomontage model, whose nonsensical or anomic qualities he rejected in favor of a new type of photomontage of communicative action. In this new form, photomontage was meant to reach an emerging working-class audience within what the Left hoped would become a proletarian public sphere. Those audiences are directly addressed through a strategy in which all former montage techniques are inverted: disjunction is replaced by narrative; the discontinuity of textures, surfaces, and materials is replaced by an artificially constructed homogeneity that is the result of Heartfield's careful airbrushing techniques; extreme forms of the fragmentation of language that isolated the grapheme or the phoneme are abandoned in favor of the insertion of captions whose function is to construct a revelation that will take a dialectical form. This type of commentary, which operates through the sudden juxtaposition of different types of historical and political information, is similar to what Bertolt Brecht subsequently developed in his own theatrical montage technique which, like Heartfield's work, was intended as an initiation to dialectics.

Heartfield's work also implicitly criticized early Berlin photomontage for having resulted in a set of singular objects that in the end possessed the status of traditional works of art just like any other individual work on paper or on canvas. Heartfield's attempt to create a work within the emerging proletarian public sphere, however, was specifically meant to alter the distribution form of photomontage by making it the vehicle of a printed medium and thus a mass-cultural tool.

The triggering moment in Heartfield's development was his encounter with Willi Münzenberg, who hired Heartfield to become the major designer of the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, the Communist Party organ founded in opposition to the old-style illustrated press. The *AIZ*, as it came to be called, specifically aimed to challenge the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, which had achieved a circulation ranging in the hundreds of thousands and could legitimately be called one of the first examples of mass media, serving as the model for subsequent magazines such as *Life* or *Paris Match*. The *AIZ* was thus conceived as a mass-cultural counterculture.

Until his departure from Berlin after the Nazis' takeover of the government in 1933, Heartfield did most of his work for the *AIZ*, or as covers for books published by his brother Weiland Herzfelde and his Malik-Verlag publishing company. A typical example of his shift from the Berlin Dada photomontage aesthetic, as represented by Höch and Hausmann, would be Heartfield's *The Face of Fascism*, his cover illustration for *Italy in Chains*, published in 1928 by the Communist Party. Although juxtaposition, rupture, fracturing, and fragmentation are still operative here, they are so forged into a new coherence as to be able to serve different purposes altogether. Mussolini's head is fused with a skull that penetrates it from within and the vignettes that surround it work, on the right-hand side, to fuse images of victims of violence with the representation of dignitaries of the Pope and the Catholic Church and on the left, to fuse the top-hatted bourgeois capitalist with the armed Fascist street gangs. This technique of fusion was the alternative to what Heartfield criticized as the construction of





6 • John Heartfield, *The Meaning of the Hitler Salute: Little Man Asks for Big Gifts. Motto: Millions Stand Behind Me!*, 1932  
Photomontage, 38 x 27 (15 x 10 1/4)

mere nonsensical juxtapositions that generated rupture and shock but carried no political orientation, no countertruth, no moment of sudden revelation.

The fusion of opposites in Heartfield's work in 1928, five years before the rise of the Nazi Party, is particularly astonishing since it indicates the degree to which certain intellectuals were fully aware of the increasing threat to bourgeois institutions and democratic politics and were fully apprised of the need to locate cultural projects within strategies of opposition and resistance. This is even more evident in two of the images that Heartfield designed for the *AIZ* in 1932, portraying the Chairman of the German National Socialist Party, Adolf Hitler, a year before his election to become Chancellor in 1933. In each image, Hitler is depicted as a puppet, a hollow, artificial figure who executes the interests of capital. In the first, *Adolf—the Superman. Swallows Gold and Spouts Junk*, Hitler's body is shown in X-ray with a swastika in place of his heart, an Iron Cross instead of a liver, and his vertebrae made of gold coins, clearly framing the political argument that it was the German entrepreneurial class that was financing the Nazi Party in order to avert and eventually liquidate a proletarian revolution that had been initiated by the formation of the first Communist Party on German territory in 1919. The second, *The Meaning of the Hitler Salute: Little Man*

*Asks for Big Gifts. Motto: Millions Stand Behind Me!* [6], makes this point even more manifest in that Hitler is presented as a miniature figure standing in front of a huge, anonymous "fat cat" figure of a man passing a bundle of bank notes into the little man's raised arm and hand, thereby producing an ironic rereading of the "Hitler salute." Extremely simplified, grotesque, comical, and therefore all the more stunning, this form of argument was meant to clarify the otherwise inscrutable political and economic links that attracted big business to the leader of German fascism, seen as a counterforce and as a violent form of oppressing Socialist and Communist tendencies within the Weimar Republic. The assumption that *AIZ*, whose circulation at that time reached 350,000, would have a propagandistic effect turned out to be false since large numbers of the working class who had formerly voted Communist would vote for the Nazi Party in 1933, thereby dealing a final blow to the leftist aspirations of the Weimar Republic.

Unsurprisingly, Heartfield was one of the first artists to be prosecuted by the Gestapo after Hitler's rise to power. In 1933 he left for ▲ Prague, where his polemical, didactic, and propagandistic efforts against Hitler's regime were so widespread that Hitler intervened with the Czech government to order the closure of Heartfield's exhibitions in Prague.

#### From semiosis to communicative action

In the parallel evolution of photomontage within the Weimar and Soviet contexts, the changes that emerged around 1925 were aimed at transforming the original strategies. The techniques of alogical shock, of the nonsensical destruction of meaning, of the self-referential foregrounding of the graphic and phonetic dimension of language through an emphasis on fragmentation were now recast so as to be repositioned within the radical project of creating a proletarian public sphere. If by the mid-twenties a key cultural project of the avant-gardes was the transformation of audiences, this in turn required a return to the instrumentalized forms of language and image, where visual recognition and readability are paramount. The type of photomontage that Heartfield and Klutsis went on to produce now focused on the values of information and communication. The alogism, the shock, and the rupture of the previous work were discarded as so many bourgeois, avant-gardist jokes; its antiart position was seen as simply performing an act of shadow-boxing with the bourgeois public sphere and a model of culture that had long since been surpassed. The specific task that was now assigned to photomontage was no longer the destruction of painting and sculpture or culture as a separate, autonomous sphere; its task now was to provide mass audiences with images of didactic information and politicization.

One such example comes from a series of photomontages and posters Klutsis made between 1928 and 1930 [7], in which the metonymy of a raised hand is used as an emblem of political participation and a key image of the actual representation of the masses in the voting process. Substituting a part of the body for the whole,

the hand clearly "stands for" the subject who raises it, just as the single hand, within the boundaries of which a multitude of other such hands can be seen, "stands for" the unity of purpose produced by a single representative who can speak for a massive electorate. Variations on the image with different textual inscriptions were used for several purposes: one for a call to participate in the election of the Soviets; in another version for an appeal to women to become active in the Soviets through their own vote. The metonymy of the hand as a sign of physical, perceptual, and political participation in the collective process is a central example of how photomontage's initial strategy of cropping and fragmentation had been transformed by this time.

With the means of photomontage, Heartfield and Klutsis therefore became the first members of the avant-garde to invoke propaganda as an artistic model. Almost all discussions of twentieth-century art have shunned this term, since it is seen as being in direct opposition to the modernist definition of the work of art. The term *propaganda* implies manipulation, politicization, and a pure instrumentality that heralds the destruction of subjectivity. Yet Heartfield's and Klutsis's practice intervened in the very institutions and forms of distribution that had heretofore defined what artistic practice can be. By contrast, they sought the

transformation of an aesthetic of the single object into one lodged in the mass-cultural distribution of the printed magazine, and a shift from the privileged spectator to the participatory masses then emerging through the industrial revolution of the Soviet Union or the changing industrial conditions in Weimar Germany. It was those aspirations that formed the actual structures and historical framework within which the formation of an aesthetic of a proletarian public sphere should be addressed. Propaganda as a counterform to the existing forms of ever-intensifying mass-cultural propaganda, namely advertising, clearly has to be recognized as a deliberate project undertaken by the Dada and Soviet avant-gardes to abolish the contradictions still maintained by the bourgeois vanguardist model of a pure, abstract opposition to the existing forms of mass culture. BB

#### FURTHER READING

- Hanne Bergius, *Das Lachen Dadas* (The Dada Laughter) (Giessen: Anabas Verlag, 1989)  
Hanne Bergius, *Montage und Metamechanik: Dada Berlin* (Berlin: Gebrüder Mann Verlag, 2000)  
Brigid Doherty, "The Work of Art and the Problem of Politics in Berlin Dada," in Leah Dickerman (ed.), "Dada," special issue, October, no. 105, Summer 2003  
Brigid Doherty, "We are all Neurasthenics, or the trauma of Dada Montage," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 24, no. 1, Fall 1997  
Leah Dickerman (ed.), *Dada* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2005)



7 • Gustav Klutsis, *Let us Fulfill the Plan of the Great Projects*, 1930

Lithograph poster, dimensions unknown

With *Three Musicians*, Pablo Picasso enlists the classicism of Nicolas Poussin in the development of Synthetic Cubism, the reigning style of postwar modernism.

Among the many formal inventions of Cubist collage was that of the figure-ground reversal: the visual snap of an advancing, uppermost plane that suddenly recedes into the background behind another plane before returning in an instant toward the top. This back-and-forth often created an oscillation between solid and void, as when the white sound-hole ▲ of Pablo Picasso's *Guitar, Sheet Music, and Glass* of 1912, sitting atop its underlying wallpaper ground, visually retreats to a position beneath the ground to produce the strong illusion of a hole burrowing into depth. The effect is even more apparent in his *Bottle of Vieux Marc* of the following year, where the silhouetted wine glass submerged behind *Le Journal* pushes upward to the newspaper's very level as a result of the decorative, toquelike shape of its liquid contents. This shuffling between above and below, with the ambiguous placement it creates, produces the visual effect of tonal modeling: the experience of a volume's convexity advancing and receding from protrusion above the surface to recession beneath it. The shimmer of figure-ground reversal thus stimulates an optical illusion that reproduces the very shading ● and shallow depth of the little canted facet-planes of Analytical Cubism, but by more economic means.

If collage had displaced Analytical Cubism to gain access to the simplified shapes of recognizable objects, Synthetic Cubism now displaces collage itself with even more simplified planes that adopt the patterns of product logos and the slick typographical look of modern advertising. Yet, in the formal operation of collage's figure-ground reversal, these simplified Synthetic planes are nevertheless able to sustain the pictorial effects of spatial analysis.

#### The return of the repressed

As though this premonition of depth were not enough to introduce an illusionistic space, the symmetry of the Cubist collages of 1912 and 1913—their central spine of bottles and violins flanked by silhouettes of guitars and glasses—suggested also the symmetrical form of classical compositions. Nicolas Poussin's *Et in Arcadia Ego* of 1637–8 is one celebrated example that demonstrates how such compositions were used in classical art to convey

not only the effect of pictorial space but also a sense of visual storytelling. The painting distributes two pairs of idealized shepherds on either side of a tomb in a three-part scene in an attempt to give the impression of a mythological narrative from antiquity. This tripartite structure became one of the building blocks of history painting, the tradition of pictorial representation as the telling of a succession of famous battles, coronations, oaths, and burials.

But in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the byword of the newly emergent modernism was an emphatic “No!” to such academic conventions, and its formal breakthroughs set forth from this rejection of narrative: Édouard Manet's spatial compression left no dramatic stage available; and Impressionism's flattening of the picture plane by its close-valued haze of color made landscape evanesce. All of these innovations were precedents for the way the Cubist grid reduced “narrative” to nothing more than a self-referential iteration of the material facts of the painting: its rectangular shape; its lateral spread; its literal flatness. Cubism thus carried on the silence enforced by early modernism. Carried it on, that is, until the Synthetic Cubism of the postwar period suddenly adopted the speech of classical compositions such as Poussin's.

Picasso's *Three Musicians* [1] not only follows *Et in Arcadia Ego*'s tripartite composition, it also produces its own illusion of space through the now familiar reversal of figure and ground. On the left, the Pierrot's white legs emerge as figure only to retreat under the protrusion of lap and tabletop to become the background to the table's advancing leg. The figures' arms reach forward to grasp their instruments (clarinet, guitar) as though they were the black borders on a printed card, advancing from the edge of a plane onto which another reading calls them back again. In the case of the Pierrot, this is the pattern of the indigo mask of the Harlequin (the central musician) attached to the Pierrot's lower face and torso to form an advancing figure that makes the white surplice of the Pierrot withdraw into a background. The complex figure of the indigo plane is visually joined to the vertical stripe bifurcating the habit of the monk on the right, as well as implicitly connecting with the leftmost angle below the Pierrot's legs to create both a figure and a ground floating above the planes



1 • Pablo Picasso, *Three Musicians*, 1921

Oil on canvas, 200.7 × 222.9 (79 × 87½)

of the musicians. But another surface surrounds both the indigo figure/ground and the trio of musicians; this is the brown backdrop of the actors' stage—an ambience that was challenged by the indigo's figure, which it now in turn challenges at every interstice between the forms (particularly the brown smudge covering the Harlequin's face immediately below his mask). The indigo figure flipping back and forth into its supporting ground performs this reversal constantly. With the decorative striations of their costumes, especially so of the quilted suit of the Harlequin, the nearly grey monochrome of Analytical Cubist painting has retreated behind the strong colors and symmetries of this postwar Cubism, now named Synthetic.

The entry of Poussinesque classicism into Cubist space was extended in this mid-twenties Synthetic turn by Picasso's frequent representations of the painter and model in the studio. Giving each participant in this narrative of aesthetic creation its own domain, the paintings divide into the familiar tripartite composition to display artist on one side, model on the other, with canvas at the center, as in *Painter and Model* of 1928 [2]. Not content with merely choreographing the triplet within the studio, Picasso also stages the act of representing, as the model's profile appears on the canvas surface as if her very shadow were being cast upon it—just as the shadow of one of the shepherds appears on the side of the tomb in *Et in Arcadia Ego*.



2 • Pablo Picasso, *Painter and Model*, 1928

Oil on canvas, 129.8 × 163 (51½ × 64½)

But Picasso did not need to separate the participants in his narrative of the act of creation to represent artist, canvas, and model individually. In his earlier 1915 *Harlequin* [3], he overlaid the three in true Synthetic style, which he was then just beginning to develop. The painter represents himself as Harlequin in his diamond-patterned suit, his head superimposed on a geometric background that forms his arm and easel. Curvilinear shapes are cut out of this background to suggest the shape of the artist's palette, so the arm that grasps it catches the painter in his very "act." Representation continues in the white square on the right-hand side of the painting, suggesting a canvas onto which a pale shadow of the model is faintly cast. The three levels fluctuate between themselves so that now artist, now palette, now canvas is figure to the others' ground.



3 • Pablo Picasso, *Harlequin*, 1915

Oil on canvas, 183.5 × 105 (72½ × 41½)



4 • Georges Braque, *The Gray Table*, 1930

Oil and sand on canvas, 145 × 76 (57½ × 69½)



5 • Juan Gris, *Harlequin with Guitar*, 1919

Oil on canvas, 116 x 89 (45 1/2 x 35)

Unsurprisingly, Picasso's *Harlequin* solution provided the pattern for Georges Braque's own postwar Synthetic practice and throughout the twenties. Reprising the composition of a figure holding a lute or other stringed instrument that he had exploited in *The Portuguese*, Braque suggests the figure's body as a shadow, itself most often the surface of a table [4]. Against this shadow, the familiar elements of Cubist still life are supported: newspaper, guitar, fruit bowl. Juan Gris, too, took up this impacted version of artist/canvas/model in his *Harlequin with Guitar* of 1919 [5]. The Harlequin's guitar and shadow enact the same premonition of artist's palette as in Picasso's; canvas appears in the canted rectangle below the figure's right arm, and the model seems to cast her shadow in the profile of the figure's face. If the studio-of-the-artist might be a contracted form of narrative, it nonetheless prolongs the modernist determination to portray the operations of the medium itself: the work of creation; the limits of representation; the elements of the aesthetic medium.

As we have seen, the two compositional types that emerge in Picasso's postwar Synthetic Cubism either divide the canvas into thirds, as in *Three Musicians*, or superimpose the elements into the interlace of figure/ground, as in the *Harlequin*. In his own adoption of the Synthetic style, Fernand Léger made use of both solutions.

### Scenes from the life of Bohemia

Cubism was a constant restaging of still life. The familiar objects positioned on the café table by the Analytical style were resituated by the Synthetic variant to the artist's garret. This attic space was the shabby domain at the heart of "Bohemia," the mythic urban quarter where artists gathered alongside other unconventional types to flaunt the hardship of creation and their precarious existence on the social margins. Picasso placed several postwar still lifes in such a setting, with walls and ceiling sloping toward a dormer window that opens onto rooftops and sky. Ironwork balconies are rhymed with fretted wooden panels below tables to compress the space of the room—to void it.

The location of the still life inside a private room thus links early twentieth-century Cubism with the domestic interiors of seventeenth-century Dutch painting. Art historians have seen these sumptuous works as the proud display of middle-class wealth, with their owners commissioning painters to depict the valuable possessions they had amassed from around the world. The support for this luxuriant ostentation was the circulation of capital necessary to the development of the bourgeois individual, the prototype of the democratic subject. The artist's garret is thus the legatee of this idea of the free individual; and the myth of Bohemia—the land of aesthetic freedom—grew up around it.

In *Picasso and Truth*, T. J. Clark argues that World War I condemned Bohemia to death, bringing an end both to its restless creator and to the liberated individual subject who inhabited the garrets of la Bohème. Indeed, with Braque and Apollinaire stationed at the front in the early years of the war, Picasso's entourage had been emptied out of Paris. The latter's death in 1918 came as a severe blow to Picasso, who was later invited to make a sculptural monument in memory of his friend. His proposal got as far as sketches and several two-foot-high iron-rod maquettes he produced in 1928 with Julio González—"outline drawings in space," as Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler called them. The open lattice work of the proposed sculpture, with its contours of oval body and triangulated arms reaching forward to grasp the rectangle of a canvas, repeated elements of the 1915 *Harlequin*, itself a representation of the artist in the studio. In this way, the transparency and forms of this memorial to Apollinaire mourned also for the garrets of Paris and their Bohemian inhabitants.

The monument relates to an answer that art historians offer to the puzzle posed by the eclipse of early Analytical Cubism with the onset of the Synthetic period in Picasso's work. According to this explanation, Picasso is seen to have been impatient with the sycophants of Cubism, with their endless guitars on pedestal tables, fruit bowls, pipes, and tobacco pouches, leaching the stringency out of the style's power to shock. In his hands, however, Cubism had lost none of its ability to cause controversy. The monument committee rejected his designs as too abstract for a memorial and it remained unrealized for four decades. Had it been completed and installed as intended, it would at least have been able to commemorate another Parisian Bohemia, one teeming with cafés and nightclubs, studios and dancers, including the half-nude Josephine Baker, who was then mesmerizing audiences with her intoxicating and scandalous show.

6 • Fernand Léger, *The City*, 1919

Oil on canvas, 231.1 x 298.4 (91 x 117 1/2)

His explorations of the urban environment of Paris, as in *The City* of 1919 [6], converted billboards and street signs into the figure-ground oscillation, with stenciled lettering and the bifurcated auras of street lights producing both the staccato of urban confusion and the shallow depth of the Analytical Cubist canvas. But in his "Breakfast" paintings, he adopted the tripartite structure. Perhaps it was his preference for the full-blown forms ▲ of the classical nude that led to this choice, as in *Three Women* (*Le Grand Déjeuner*) of 1921, where each figure is declared as independent, removed from her ground by the sharp contrast between the contour of shoulder and forearm against the couch behind her. This particular painting also signals a story from classical antiquity that had been explored by painters and sculptors from at least the Renaissance, centuries before Cubism: the Three Graces. In visual depictions of this tale from Greek mythology, the three daughters of the god Zeus—said to represent beauty, charm, and joy—are displayed in the round and often nude. The subject allowed artists to present the naked female figure from several angles by

rotating the model's body 360° before the viewer. Léger's *Breakfast* enacts this theme with the right-hand nude in the frontal position, the left-hand model on her side, and the central figure displaying her back. Picasso himself adopted the motif of the Three Graces in his 1925 *Three Dancers*, giving yet one more instance of how the interweave of the *Harlequin's* figure-ground reversal allows Synthetic Cubism to enter narrative and vice versa. Yet if the Three Graces open Cubism to the space of classical myth, they also open it onto another form of narrative altogether: that of time.

#### The story of the fourth dimension

The Analytical phase of Cubism has sometimes been referred to as "hermetic," so insular had the splintering of physical forms become that to distinguish forehead from face or chin from neck had become nigh impossible for untrained eyes. The supporters of Cubism felt it incumbent to explain this fractured style of representation as a collective response to the novelty of modern