

PART II

THE NORMALISATION OF THE AVANT-GARDE

The rise and fall of modernism does not . . . simply tell us something of what we have become. It does, in a way, but it also tells us how we have come to understand or interpret ourselves, and so it introduces a question as well as a historical event. The question concerns the potential fragility or distortion of the narratives that generate these “grand categories”.¹

Robert B. Pippin, *Modernism as a
Philosophical Problem* (1991)

Benjamin’s “aura” may wither away in the age of mechanical reproduction but authenticity remains. What is made more explicit, more transparent, by the so-called “dematerialization” of the object, is that *the production of authenticity requires more than an author for the object; it exacts the “truth” of the authorial discourse.*²

Mary Kelly, ‘Re-viewing Modernist Criticism’ (1981)

The Struggle for Interpretive Privilege

Complex Settings

Distinguishing the particular moment or event that constitutes a definitive turning point is a problem in many historical accounts. Frequently, the attempt to pinpoint the exact cause and date of comprehensive and complex changes appears to be essential to the analysis and, on occasion, even its goal. The need to distinguish such critical junctures is linked to some extent at least to the desire to explain a complex phenomenon by means of a coherent and effective account whose linear structure requires a fixed beginning and end. An event derived from empirical historical data that exemplifies in startling fashion something whose impact extends far beyond its factual determinants is fixed on—and transformed into—a metaphor with an extraordinary rhetorical force. Such widely disseminated mythical notions as the birth of Renaissance Man with Petrarch's ascent of Mont Ventoux in 1335, the beginning of the modern era with the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, and the start of the First World War with the shots in Sarajevo in 1914 may be considered to form part of this intellectual pattern. Charles Jenck's description of the death of modern architecture with the demolition of Minoru Yamasaki's 'Pruitt-Igoe Housing' in St. Louis on 15 July 1972 at 3.32 pm could also serve as an extreme (and, it must be hoped, ironic) example.³

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A revolutionary or apocalyptic narrative of this kind risks, however, becoming a violation of history by historiography, with the need for simplification and distillation excluding more gradual processes and interconnections that are inevitably polysemous and harder to understand. The problem is one that is ever-present in this study as well. How is one to distinguish and describe the institutionalisation of modernism as a distinct historical phenomenon without falling into the trap of the revolutionary narrative? The simple, if rather unoriginal, answer—although the appropriate one in my view—is to emphasise that aspect of the phenomenon to do with process in order to compose a story that develops out of a number of different but reciprocally determined fragments, perspectives and nodal points, rather than as a linear structure with a fixed beginning and end. To risk abandoning the effectiveness of the revolutionary narrative in favour of an attempt to formulate a connection between continuity and discontinuity is of crucial importance here. To that end, I would like to highlight two different periods that were of decisive importance for the process under discussion: the 1930s until the Second World War and the post-war period until the second half of the 1950s.

This process should not, however, be seen as a straightforward chronological course of events that encompassed the gradual acceptance of modernism and was only interrupted by World War Two. As stages in this process, the pre- and post-war periods were quite different in kind, while the experience of both the war and the terror practised by the dictatorships clearly played a significant role in the institutionalisation that took place in the post-war period. That difference may, of course, be described solely as an aesthetic matter, but it can also be understood in political terms. In *After the Great Divide* (1986), Andreas Huyssen has analysed how the divide reconfigured the relationship between the avant-garde and mass culture and how, under the influence of the general political situation of the 1930s, it generated a need for an elitist and exclusive cultural discourse:

I would suggest that the primary place of what I am calling the great divide was the age of Stalin and Hitler when the threat of totalitarian control over all culture forged a variety of defensive

strategies meant to protect high culture in general, not just modernism. Thus conservative culture critics such as Ortega y Gasset argued that high culture needed to be protected from the “revolt of the masses”. Left critics like Adorno insisted that genuine art resist its incorporation into the capitalist culture industry which he defined as the total administration of culture from above. And even Lukács, the left critic of modernism *par excellence*, developed his theory of high bourgeois realism not in unison with but in antagonism to the Zhdanovist dogma of socialist realism and its deadly practice of censorship.⁴

The gradual institutionalisation of the avant-garde served, in other words, as a link between the decades before and after the Second World War. However, the situation in the post-war period was qualitatively different in that the historical avant-garde was no longer presented as a marginal phenomenon but as the unquestioned art-form of the twentieth century. This multifaceted process involved not only a codification of the avant-garde as modernism and the widespread inculcation of the essential difference between Art and popular culture, but also a greater emphasis on the development of modernism *qua* the development of modern art. The course of this process, its rhetoric and gradual shifts, is crucial to understanding the institutionalisation of modernism. Before analysing the process of institutionalisation in the post-war period, I begin by setting out two different perspectives on the situation of modernism and modern art during the second half of the 1930s. The first is based on one of the last major world exhibitions before the outbreak of war, the second on two minor texts published on the margins of the established culture.

The *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* held in Paris in 1937 has gone down in history, perhaps primarily, as a symbolic showdown between the two major European dictatorships. Like two menacing monoliths, the pavilions of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany stood facing each other at the very centre of the Fair, between the Eiffel Tower and the Palais de Chaillot. In the light of subsequent history, the image

of their location opposite one another has been considered an omen of the dreadful acts of war that would characterise the relationship between these countries a few years later. The German and Soviet pavilions were, in fact, constructed at the very time negotiations were being conducted to create a nonaggression pact between the two states.⁵ Such posthumous symbolism, however, also encompassed the small, and in terms of its relation to those of the other two countries, somewhat overshadowed, Spanish pavilion. Represented here by the Republican side, Spain, which had been so afflicted by civil war, was making its final international appearance before Franco's seizure of power and had chosen to show a painting that has become the stuff of legend for many reasons: Pablo Picasso's 'Guernica'. In this scenario, what history later proved one of the most important art-political tropes of the post-war period—modernism as the symbolic champion of liberty in the face of repression and dictatorship—was manifested in a single painting.

The extensive exhibitions of historical and modern art mounted by France, the host nation, have been all but eclipsed by this fateful and dramatic image. Nonetheless, the fair provides a number of interesting clues to the situation of modernism prior to the outbreak of war. The most prestigious exhibition, *Chefs-d'œuvre de l'Art Français*, was arranged by the French state and shown at the Palais de Tokio. It comprised some 1300 works of art and objects spanning two millennia of French art history, concluding with the Impressionist and post-Impressionist painting of the late nineteenth century. The show emphasised the great tradition of French art and its universal and authoritative value with nationalist bravura.⁶ Attention had been drawn during the planning phase to the fact that this comprehensive exposé came to a stop just before the contemporary period, and this led the government to arrange an additional art exhibition in the Petit Palais entitled *Les Maîtres de l'Art Indépendant, 1895–1937*, which was made up of over 1500 works. Shown here—and with the emphasis on the movements based on Fauvism and Cubism—were works that eventually came to be seen as constituting the accepted canon of modernist art, although now the majority of the 117 chosen artists are not considered to form part of the representative and canonical selection of modernism.⁷

In the entrance hall, the visitor encountered a pair of sculptures by Emile-Antoine Bourdelle and a large collection of plaster-casts and bronzes by Charles Despiau (52 works) and Mateo Hernandez (26 works). He or she then proceeded around an inner circle of galleries, which alternated the showing of works by a group or by a single artist. Those apostrophised as modern masters, inasmuch as they were accorded a room of their own with space for 30 or so works, included Maurice de Vlaminck, André Derain, Georges Rouault, Maurice Denis and Pierre Bonnard, while Henri Matisse (61 works) and Aristide Maillol (60 works) were accorded one large and three smaller halls, respectively. Having toured the inner galleries, visitors found themselves in a room in one of the wings, where some relatively radical works, or perhaps ones that were simply harder to categorise, were on show. The artists on display here included Auguste Herbin, Jacques Villon, Francis Picabia, Giorgio de Chirico, Gino Severini, Max Ernst, Chaim Soutine and Marc Chagall. From this room, the visitor was then led into an outer sequence of galleries made up of somewhat smaller halls in which the leading names of Cubism were exhibited: Roger de la Fresnaye, Georges Braque, André Lothe, Fernand Léger, Maria Blanchard, Pablo Picasso, Juan Gris, Ossip Zadkine, Henri Laurens and Jacques Lipchitz. The tour was not simply an innocent stroll through the world of modern art; it involved a carefully calculated and normative choreography of the visitor's route: from the post-Impressionist and Fauvist traditions toward more or less experimental variants of Cubism. Movements, that is, which could all be inscribed within the great School of France.

Although its selection was also geared towards French art, the rhetoric of *Les Maîtres* was of a very different kind to that of *Chefs d'œuvre*. In the former exhibition, Paris was asserting its cosmopolitan character as a city by highlighting the independence of the modernist tradition from the official establishment. This was emphasized even more clearly at the exhibition *Origines et développement de l'art international*, mounted at the Jeu de Paume, which described the development of the international avant-garde in terms of various movements (Fauvism, Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Constructivism, Abstraction), while accentuating the

significance of Primitivism for modern art in particular. Taken together, the exhibitions and the various national pavilions provided what would have been at the time an unequalled opportunity to acquaint oneself with modernism in all its guises.

It was *Chefs d'œuvre* and *Les Maîtres*, however, that jointly established a paradigm for the national programme of France at the World Fair. Despite their obvious differences, a continuity between the exhibitions can be discerned on a more abstract level: at the point where the two selections meet in the late nineteenth century. The compatibility of the two chronologies made it possible to assert the existence of an evolutionary trend that underlined the importance of France in various ways for the development of art in general and modern art in particular. This meeting point could also be described in terms of continuities: with the older canon representing the continuity of tradition, while the contemporary selection revealed a continuity of individualism. James Herbert has described this complex interplay as stemming from two different standpoints, both of which tended to marginalize the academic tradition:

Where the Chefs-d'œuvre de l'Art Français gave no real play to the old chestnut about the battle between hackneyed academic technique and fresh artistic innovation – indeed, its defenders tended to discount the importance of the Academy in the development of true French art over the centuries – the chief organizer of the *Les Maîtres de l'Art Indépendant* resuscitated that distinction in order to declare the city of Paris the defender of novel and important work produced since 1895.⁸

By this time, the academic tradition had disappeared from both the official version of the art history of the modern age and the somewhat less official one as well. To point to the disappearance of the Académie des Beaux-Arts from the historical narrative of modern art is not, however, the same as saying that its role as an institutional centre of power in the French art world had been played out; rather, academic discourse had for various reasons been gradually excluded from the historiographic record. This took place at the same time various forms of modernist art were becoming an increasingly accepted part of the official art world, a

state of affairs emphasised by the architecture and exhibitions of art on display in many of the other national pavilions.

The open functionalist building and exclusively modernist art of the Spanish pavilion was not, however, representative of the rest of Europe: although modernism had been accepted, it was not the dominant element on show at the World Fair. The works chosen for exhibition in *Les Maîtres* provoked fierce criticism from politically conservative circles and from what was at that time the still influential academic establishment. In their view, the one-sided apostrophe of modernism was tantamount to a betrayal of the fundamental values represented by the noble French tradition.⁹ In this respect, the particular selections made for these two exhibitions could also be seen as a key indicator of the way in which the French state was apparently unwilling to engage with the complexity and potentially subversive nature of modern art; whereas, the city of Paris considered *avantgardiste* contemporary art and cultural life to be one of the most important components of its identity.

While the avant-garde as a phenomenon may have been considered a positive symbolic value, this should not be taken to mean that this value encompassed all parts of the avant-garde subculture. After all, the works selected for *Les Maîtres* excluded not only academic art, but also the more ideologically and aesthetically aggressive (not to say transgressive) movements within modernism: Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism. The exclusion of Surrealism in particular sent an unmistakable signal in the arena of art politics, because this movement was a vital and high-profile force on the contemporary French art scene.¹⁰ These movements were not entirely censored, however: they could be included in an international event but not serve as representations of the great French tradition. Although the clearly official nature of this signal might be considered a failure for the Surrealist movement, it was entirely in keeping with the anti-bourgeois attitude of André Breton and his compatriots, an attitude on display in Paris just a few months after the closure of the World Fair at the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* in 1938.¹¹

The increasing acceptance of the art and theory of modernism did not amount to its integration as a self-evident component of

the normative political and cultural structures of the western democracies in the years leading up to the outbreak of war. Like open and democratic society as a whole, modernism was confronted with the immediate and very real threat posed by the two totalitarian blocks. The exposed position of the Spanish pavilion was a metaphor not just for the heroism of modern art, but also for the reality of the political situation.

It was this particular state of affairs that provided the background to Walter Benjamin's 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit' (1936) and Clement Greenberg's 'Avantgarde and Kitsch' (1939). Both essays were written from ideological standpoints informed by a Marxist analysis of society and culture, and both may be considered reactions to what many perceived to be an acute crisis in the cultural life of the time. This was a crisis with political and aesthetic consequences and one that came about as a result of changes in the nature of the perceived threats, domestic and foreign. The external and most tangible threat was the triumphal progress of European fascism and Nazism, but another kind of threat existed, too, from within the mechanisms of capitalist society, which meant that the avant-garde had to legitimate and reformulate its art in line with a changed social reality. The problem both these essays describe was the risk of eradication facing the tradition of progressive art as it had existed to this time. But their respective solutions to the problem appeared to be diametrically opposed.

Benjamin describes how the techniques of reproduction in the modern age, photography and film in particular, have introduced a potentially subversive and substantive change in the perception of the unique nature of the work of art, of its aura, which in turn calls into question its traditional authority and authenticity.¹² This change is linked to a transformation in the social and perceptual patterns of the modern age, as part of which, perception has increasingly shifted from the observation of the unique to a sense of the similar. The sacrosanct connection of the aura and a unique here and now has been replaced by a secularised function, everywhere and everywhen as it were. In this situation, film appears to be a much more relevant medium than the ancient art of the easel:

Magician and surgeon compare to painter and cameraman. The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web. There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law. Thus for contemporary man the representation of reality by the film is incomparably more significant than that of the painter, since it offers, precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment. And that is what one is entitled to ask from a work of art.¹³

Unlike the unique work of art, film (like the mechanical reproduction of images) offers a social context of collective consumption, a new form of social participation that has to be affirmed by progressive forces but is continually under threat from the manipulations of fascism and capitalism. The metaphor of the magician and surgeon is used by Benjamin to highlight the need for a radical break with tradition in particular, as the definition of modern art can no longer be contained within the regime of authenticity. Although he cites Dadaism as an example of painting still being able to fulfil a function even within this changed situation, that function, as he sees it, requires an acceptance of the necessity of the technology of reproduction if it is to respond to the changing needs of the modern age. The Dadaist artist, therefore, deliberately obliterates one of the key characteristics of the tradition, (the aura of the work), by 'branding' his work as 'a reproduction' by dint of its 'means of production.'¹⁴

Clement Greenberg, too, was fully aware of these altered circumstances. As we saw earlier, he describes the avant-garde as a specific territory within cultural life. He saw it as the only area, in fact, that remains unaffected by the harmful consequences of modernisation and still characterised by an authentic form of expression.¹⁵ It is in this sense that the history of the avant-garde can be described as a kind of critical awareness, a function almost of modernity's progressive and emancipating tradition of ideas. Greenberg draws a distinction here between the educated elite (which supports progressive culture) and the great masses (which have always been indifferent to it); this parallels his most

important distinction between the avant-garde and kitsch. For Greenberg, the difference between these domains was not just a difference of degree, between good and bad art, but a distinction in kind: whereas avant-garde art imitates artistic processes, kitsch imitates their effects.¹⁶ The avant-garde, defined as the higher critical awareness of bourgeois culture, must constitute a preserve set off from the rest of the culture, in which the efforts made by artists to investigate the specific preconditions of their own media inevitably result in an art that is cut off from the society around it and the unpredictable chaos of popular culture. An interesting conflation also occurs in Greenberg's text when the description of the historical situation shifts to the contemporary scene: this concerns the adaptation of the superficial and rigid eclecticism of the academic tradition to the demands of the market and modernisation and its transformation into an equally false and mechanical version of the parasitisation of the forms of the living culture perpetrated by industrial popular culture.¹⁷

Greenberg is entirely in agreement with Benjamin that the new ways of using images introduced by popular culture constitute a threat to authentic art. This is not a situation Greenberg embraces, however. He focuses instead on the essential duties of the elites in relation to modern society: the educated economic elite has to shoulder its responsibility and support the tiny elite of artists who are still working beyond the influence of capitalist culture and its dumbing-down of key values. Advanced avant-garde art can only be identified by its qualities as a unique work of art and by its capacity to reflect critically on the conditions of its own medium. His view of modern art actually involves an even greater emphasis on the necessity of authenticity.

Benjamin's and Greenberg's essays represent two possible approaches to the state and future development of the contemporary visual arts at the end of the 1930s. These two texts could hardly be more dissimilar in the way they formulate the problem: where the former expands the domain of the visual arts so as to abolish the boundary between different media and between Art and art, the latter shrinks the definition of avant-garde art to an extremely restricted area within visual culture, drawing clear distinctions between it and both other media and mass culture. Although neither

essay was widely read in its own time, both have since emerged as key texts in the art debate of the twentieth century. In terms of their reception in the last few decades, Walter Benjamin's essay is considered to be one of the most important historical documents concerning a change in the perception of art and one that still possesses an astonishing and almost prophetic topicality for the art world of today. Clement Greenberg's text, in contrast, serves as one of the key documents for an approach to aesthetics and history from which postmodernist theorists have been keen to distance themselves. How are we then to explain that in the period contemporary with these essays, particularly after the end of the Second World War, it was Greenberg's type of response that was considered to have real significance rather than Benjamin's?

It would be easy to respond to this question using the narratives of modernism itself to the effect that Benjamin was before his time or history has proved him right. But if we refrain from this kind of naive mythologizing, we can see instead that his version of events failed to fit in to the political, social and aesthetic process of change that the art world was undergoing in the middle of the twentieth century. The approaches of Benjamin and Greenberg correspond to two powerful trends in the art world and visual culture of that time, which might be called critical utilitarianism and autonomous individualism, respectively. These trends reflected two diametrically opposed attitudes to the function of the visual arts in modern society that could not be contained within the same institutional framework.

In his analysis of the political function of the visual arts, Benjamin made a telling distinction between Fascism's 'aestheticisation of political life' and the response of Communism, which was to 'politicise art'.¹⁸ His analysis is based on a vision as to how art should be integrated into modern socialist society as a clearly defined function of its workings, not simply as a tool for the powers that be, but because of its critical potential for the enlightenment and activation of the masses. Here Benjamin is radicalising and developing further an aspect of the progressive utilitarianism of the Russian avant-garde in the years following the Revolution, whose manifestos called for the casting off of all forms of bourgeois culture and Art in what we have described as one of the most

radical attempts to break away from the regime of authenticity. In terms of *realpolitik*, the problem with Benjamin's view was that it presupposed a situation in which art had been institutionalised within the socialist state; whereas, that same state had, in fact, liquidated critical utilitarianism. Benjamin's essay was published two years after Socialist Realism had been made the official doctrine of the Soviet Union and in the same year that the Moscow show trials were first held. Apart from its political and historical drawbacks, it also failed to conform to every legitimate form of political discourse in the bipolar structure that obtained after the Second World War, and, within which, critical utilitarianism in the Benjamin mould seemed to be an ideological formulation of modern art whose time had passed and that no one could possibly support.

In contrast, Greenberg's view appeared to be entirely in keeping with the political landscape of the post-war West. Far from presupposing a subversive Utopian vision, it amounted, instead, to an apology for the individualised and autonomous existence of high art in capitalist society. And these were the very aspects that proved crucial to the institutionalisation and normalisation of the avant-garde in Western Europe and the United States. There was an additional element in his essay that turned out to be of decisive importance for this process: it established a link between the contemporary world and the historical one. According to this interpretative matrix, the once radical and revolutionary avant-garde could be adapted to the already existing institutional structure of the art world: it was depoliticised, made to fit within a chronology and its ideological connotations were partially realigned in terms of freedom and individualism (as opposed to antagonism, activism and collectivism). Even though radical art might still be perceived as difficult, offensive and politically questionable, the idea of the autonomy of the work of art so long cherished by the avant-garde now served a new ideological purpose: to legitimate a particular type of action and representation in a purely aesthetic context, cut off from any obvious political connection.

The aesthetics of disparity that developed as a defence against various repressive regimes during the 1930s thus emerges as the model applied in the West during the post-war period: a disparity

that concerned not only the relationship between Art and mass culture, but also the Cold War bipolar structure of two antithetical ideological systems. This was also the context in which the cluster of aesthetic social and ideological concepts of the historical avant-garde was labelled (and thus transformed into) modernism.

There can be no question that the process of institutionalisation and normalisation modernism underwent after the Second World War saw modern art assume a new ideological function in the West, with the result that one type of definition became possible, while another did not. In this context, ideological does not necessarily mean 'false consciousness' but should be understood rather as a 'socially necessary illusion' and as an 'interaction between philosophical theories and political power'.¹⁹ A new form of socially necessary illusion was needed to make possible the problematic encounter between culture and counterculture—an encounter in which certain accepted ideas were legitimated, generalised and historicised, while others were excluded. In this respect, the World Fair held in Paris in 1937 signalled, as did the essays by Benjamin and Greenberg, a distinct historical shift in the situation of modern art, both within the domains of established culture and within the avant-garde. The nature of this shift must be understood to make possible an interpretation of the institutionalisation of modernism in the political and social context of the post-war period and the Cold War.

Although the notion of the avant-garde of modern art was, of course, not abandoned, the social function and descriptive significance of the term—as characterising a countercultural identity within contemporary discourse—were largely transformed into a historicising narrative of the heroic and tragic alienation of modern art. The myth of the artist as a misunderstood genius, struggling to create his or her own truth in the face of the ignorance of the surrounding world, became a central trope in the popularisation of the historical avant-garde in particular. This trope has been described by Donald Preziosi as crucial not only to the ideological formulation of the identity of modernism in public contexts, but also to interpretive practice in art criticism and art history as a whole. He exemplifies this state of affairs with reference to the 1956 film *Lust for Life* about the life and work of Vincent van Gogh:

The artist-hero . . . is also revealed as a filter or aesthetic mediator, refracting the prose of the world into poetry; he is a distillator of the Essential from the world in which we live. In this refractive regime, the artwork is framed as a record or a trace of the artist's originality and individuality. Indeed, the film indicates that the measurable difference or distance between painted image and encatalyzing scene is isomorphic with the artist's degree of difference from the mundane world of the ordinary mortal – an iconic sign of artistic genius. As that distance changes, so too does that genius change and grow. Vincent's life is presented as a journey of growth from realism to naturalism to abstraction: a quest for the essential or higher reality increasingly different from the ordinary.²⁰

This is an extremely condensed, and perhaps somewhat exaggerated, description of the process entailed in the post-war normalisation of the art and culture of the avant-garde in which the genre (popular artist biographies), the originator (a vast Hollywood production) and the intercultural identification (Kirk Douglas *is* Vincent van Gogh) constitute a circulation of levels of meaning to a much broader target group. The date of the production of the film and of its premiere are indicative both of this state of affairs and the way in which key aspects of what constituted the ideology of modernism at this time had become public property. However, what is really interesting here is the paradoxical meeting between elite culture and popular culture. This film about van Gogh brought about a popular-cultural dissemination of certain modernist myths at the same time that modernism was being legitimated as an aesthetic of disparity, whose boundaries were clearly defined in opposition to the cultural industry.

This example is also rather telling in relation to the difficulty involved in incorporating the countercultural identities of the avant-garde within the dominant culture's system of norms. This triumph of the avant-garde was not, according to Serge Guilbaut, a total or even particularly popular victory, but amounted rather to a 'typical avant-garde victory, that is to say, fragile and ambiguous, since it was constantly threatened by opposing tendencies in the world of art.'²¹ There was, in fact, a fierce debate after the end of the Second World War about how the relation between art and society could and should be perceived, with particular reference to the function

of modernist art in modern society. While this debate took place all over the world, its nature was, of course, determined by the specific situation that characterised each particular domain, ranging from the ideology of individual political parties to more general issues to do with modernity, democracy, tradition and humanism.

The Criteria of Normalisation

An exhibition entitled *documenta* opened in the West German city of Kassel on 15 July 1955. This exhibition was inaugurated slightly more than two months after the Allied occupation officially came to an end and the Federal Republic became a fully sovereign state. The choice of location was not a matter of chance. Kassel had been one of the cities worst affected by Allied bombing raids.²² The former capital of the kingdom of Westphalia was situated at the centre of Germany and had also been chosen because it could represent any German city, a fairly important, but by no means exceptional, industrial town in the state of Hessen. Undergoing reconstruction on an extensive scale at the time, Kassel had a certain historical importance but lacked any symbolic resonance with the Third Reich. With the drawing of the new boundary between the two Germanies, it had also acquired a new political significance as an outpost to the East, because it lay only 30 kilometres from the border with the GDR.²³ The exhibition was mounted in the bomb-damaged Museum Fridericianum, which had not yet been restored.

The driving force behind the exhibition was Arnold Bode; he was assisted by a committee made up of representatives from government and industry, as well as individuals with art-historical and museal expertise. *Documenta's* patron was the West German president Theodor Heuss, and it was organised in collaboration with an honorary committee made up of prominent West German politicians and envoys from the Western nations.²⁴ In addition to West Germany, the participating countries were France, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Great Britain and the United States. *Documenta* thus became a national demonstration—sanctioned at the highest level—of the reestablishment of the ties between Germany and the Western democracies.

The exhibition comprised 570 works by 148 artists and was divided into two levels: history and the present. The ideologue behind this form of presentation was the art historian Werner Haftmann, who had published a comprehensive historical survey of twentieth-century modernist painting in the preceding year.²⁵ The focus of the show was an exhaustive survey of the tradition of modernism in art and architecture, to which a smaller exhibition of contemporary, especially nonfigurative, art was added.

Documenta may have been a temporary exhibition, but it highlighted many aspects of the problems facing the modern art museum. The exhibition was also entitled ‘the Museum of One Hundred Days’; a label that has served to define it ever since: creating, as it did, an institutional framework for the presentation and interpretation of modern art by virtue of its sheer scale and its authoritative interpretation of the relationship between the contemporary and the historical. Although not aimed at creating a permanent collection, the selection—the temporary collection—made a significant impact on the contemporary art world and its perception of the historical. The various *documenta* exhibitions, like the biennales in Venice and São Paulo, have come to be seen as an index of how different trends succeed one another and how ideological positions become established within the institutionalised awareness of modern art.

It was no coincidence that the exhibition acquired this particular structure. The historical section was not simply an art-historical survey but, in its particular context, made reference to *Entartete Kunst*, the peripatetic exhibition mounted by the Nazi regime that opened in Munich in 1937.²⁶ *Documenta* could be seen as a means of reclaiming history, and as a result of its officially sanctioned status, the exhibition came to exemplify the way art and culture were viewed by the new German democracy. Wilhelm Lehmbruck’s sculpture ‘Knieende’ (1911), for instance, was given a prominent location; it was the same sculpture the Nazis had been so keen to ridicule eighteen years earlier.²⁷ Great pains were taken, however, to ensure that the exhibition did not take on the stamp of official doctrine. Screens with photographs of the participating artists were set up in the exhibition halls, as if to display the individual behind the work. This could be seen as

a direct response to the demonisation of the modern artist by the Third Reich: he would be on show here as a heroic figure and an autonomous agent who, despite difficult or even inhuman circumstances, had created the masterworks of our time.

Two contrasting but synergistic interpretive matrices in modernism's own historiography were being fixed in place here: on the one hand, a historical understanding of the development of modern art as an evolutionary process governed by an immanent logic and, on the other, an accentuation of the responsiveness, initiative and energy of the individual in modern society. A fundamental paradox may be perceived in this bipartite matrix with the supra-individual, contextless and incomprehensible nature of progress appearing to conflict with the reflexive individuality of modernity. Furthermore, a state of tension between both these narrative starting points—evolutionism and individualism, respectively—characterises large parts of modernist historiography.

But the emphasis on the creativity of the individual was not without risks of its own. This notion comes close, after all, to what modernism's most vehement critics had once used as a springboard for discrediting or entirely eliminating avantgardiste counterculture: the artist as a Bohemian and a transgressor of boundaries, outside the norms of society but in touch with areas beyond the normal or the natural or, to put it another way, the myth of the modern artist as a genius bordering on madness, who possesses the capacity to establish a mystical connection to the primeval, primitive sources that have been lost in modern civilisation. This is the context in which Walter Grasskamp described the interest in primitivism, exoticism and the art of the sick as the 'perilous sources' of modernism.²⁸ The prime example of this entire area of concern—and its watershed—was *Entartete Kunst*, which made direct comparisons between radical modernism and photographs of deformed human beings, images created by the mentally ill and works from primitive cultures, all with the aim of demonstrating the decline of modern art and decadence of the modern artist. The comparisons drawn by the Nazis should, however, be considered the culmination of a long process of heaping suspicion on modern art.²⁹

The problem that arose for the champions of modernism after the war was how to deal with these associations with the irrational.

A connection with those perilous sources was something many artists and critics were keen to embrace, but it was that very connection that risked reactivating the suspicions of the general public towards what might be perceived as humbug or incomprehensible ravings. In the case of *documenta*, this also involved taking a stand in relation to recent history. One of Haftmann's fundamental theses, which existed as a subtext in 1955 but would characterise the next *documenta* of 1959 to a much more considerable extent, was that abstraction served as a *lingua franca* of the visual arts.³⁰ This made it possible to interpret contemporary art on the basis of the same universal explanatory model—irrespective of individual, national or cultural peculiarities—as a distinctive mode of existential expression for the modern age. But the formalist and existential model also had a diachronic dimension. In addition to the screens displaying artists' photographs at *documenta* 1955, there were others showing art from all four corners of the world and from all of history. Therefore, modern art was linked at an abstract level to history, with the result that modern art's potential aesthetically and politically subversive content was transferred to a world of formal, universal and archaicising correspondences that went beyond any historically and culturally specific context, transcending time and place.³¹

Two ideological tropes can be discerned behind these trends in the presentation of the exhibition: individualism and evolutionism. Whereas the accentuation of the individual involved rehabilitating the identity of the modern artist, the evolutionist trend was concerned with neutralising the dubious ideological and potentially revolutionary associations of modern art. The spatial borders these images were provided with contributed further to this neutralisation inasmuch as the white walls and the aestheticising hang asserted the autonomy of the individual work and its purely visual qualities—the price being that every link to the surrounding world appeared to have been sundered.

At *documenta*, this form of presentation had an obvious ideological function: reestablishing modernism/history and demonstrating the freedom of movement (intellectual and physical) of the individual in the Western democracies. It also called attention to the need for a democratic state to engage not only with

art that was contemporary, but also with that of the avant-garde. Although the exhibition may be seen as an official legitimisation of modernism, it also involved an aestheticisation of the position of the avant-garde, with every manifest or latent form of political connotation being dressed up in art. A number of fundamental ideological values were presented here that continually recur (although in different ways) in the artistic discourse of the western world after the Second World War: restoration, individuality, freedom and modernity. And the form this took clearly coincided with the cultural and political goals of the federal chancellor Konrad Adenauer and the policy of the victorious powers: to reestablish both the political and economic system and the structure of the cultural values of the democratic state, so as to integrate the German Federal Republic into the Western democratic hemisphere.³² In a nutshell, the avant-garde had to be depoliticised if it were to be made useful for political ends.³³

While the process of normalisation may be considered global in extent within the Western (or non-Communist) hemisphere, its nature and effects varied between different nations and regions. Although the bipolar structure of the Cold War provided a similar stimulus for the association of modernism with individuality, freedom and modernity in all the Western countries, culturally specific differences could be concealed in the interpretation of these values. Irrespective of the regionally and culturally determined variations, it was the story of the victor that was being written here. Worth noting in this regard is the extraordinary efficiency with which the modern institutions carried out their classification: one and the same historical scheme appeared to lie behind a multiplicity of different reproductions, thus establishing a genealogy of modernism that effectively ruled out ambivalence of any kind through various forms of exclusion and neutralisation.

This shift was not, however, unquestioned, and it did not take place over a single night. Just as we saw in the development of modernism and the time frames concerned, it involved the combination of a diffuse process with a critical juncture. Neither did this process of normalisation take place in silence: it was the subject of much debate after World War Two, particularly within the circles of avant-garde art itself. An example from the beginning

of the 1960s is found in German cultural critic Hans Magnus Enzensberger's description of what he called the dilemma or self-contradiction of the avant-garde:

Every avant-garde of today spells repetition, deception, or self-deception. The movement as a doctrinairely conceived collective, as invented fifty or thirty years ago for the purpose of shattering the resistance of a compact society, did not survive the historic conditions that elicited it. Conspiring in the name of the arts is only possible when they are being suppressed. An avant-garde that suffers itself to be furthered by the state has forfeited its rights. . . . It deals in a future that does not belong to it. Its moment is regression. The avant-garde has become its opposite: anachronism.³⁴

It is true that the problem he was formulating applied to the legitimacy of radical art in his own time. And the dilemma could be said to have been that of the state as much as that of the avant-garde: the difficulty faced by the latter in legitimating its newly acquired position can be linked with the problem confronting various authorities in legitimating an art that, in essence, rejected the very legitimacy of the authorities in question. Enzensberger was not, however, the first—and certainly not the last—to make this observation about the dilemma of the avant-garde. In fact, the idea of the problematic position of the avant-garde, its death and possible resurrection, was a recurrent trope in the diagnoses by the art world of its own contemporary period ever since the 1960s.

Another example is provided by the literary critic Leslie Fielder, who referred to the death of the literary avant-garde at the beginning of the 1960s, although not in terms of loss or a necessary resurrection, but rather as a natural part of a progression in which the antagonistic strategies of yesterday become a form of entertainment for the middle class, with the result that any attempt to resist the establishment through new ways of violating taboos is almost immediately transformed into the kitsch of the cultural industry. William Burroughs' desert island is transformed into a densely populated suburb.³⁵

To radical parts of the American art world in particular, the avant-garde appeared to be an antiquated historical remnant of

a Europe that had vanished, an irrelevant anachronism as far as contemporary artistic practice was concerned. In 'Notes on Camp', Susan Sontag provides a telling description of how various types of social, sexual and aesthetic subcultures transgress the boundaries that separate them from one another and from the various levels (high as well as low) of the normative culture in a way that appears almost to exclude the very idea of an avantgardiste and openly antagonistic counterculture.³⁶ The interpretive horizon established by postmodernism at the end of the 1970s was clearly associated with the trope about the death of the avantgarde: the idea of a radical pluralism appearing to have replaced the idea of an antagonistic avant-garde as the leading trope of the narrative of contemporary art. At the same time, several of the leading actors of the art world attempted in various ways to define other forms of (neo-)avantgardiste positions so that the potential for contemporary art to criticise institutions not be entirely lost in the economic, institutional and mass-medial expansion of the market-oriented ideologies.³⁷

The fact that the issue remained so obviously topical in the 1980s and 1990s is one of the clearest indicators of how comprehensive the significance the notion of modernism as institution and narrative has been for the interpretation of modern and contemporary art. In this context, the dilemma of the avant-garde appears to be a dilemma of critical categories and historical narratives: the extent to which the interpretation of the contemporary period is still determined by the discursive criteria of modernism. The issue also has much to tell us about the extraordinarily crucial role played by the notions of antagonism and critical alienation in the modernist conception of modern art. An artist or critic of the 1850s would presumably have been utterly astonished by the entire discussion. It also raises a number of additional questions. In particular, how are we to understand what happens when representatives of the most critical margins of the culture move in towards the heartlands of the official institutions and establish themselves there? This is, of course, a matter that has been the subject of countless analyses and theories, but how is this movement and the kind of institutional change involved to be understood from a historical perspective?

The Issue of the Function of Modern Art

Just as it did before the war, the reaction against modernism occurred at both ends of the political spectrum in the post-war period. The principal demand made by the Marxist camp as a whole was that art be committed, but what this meant in practice depended on the particular degree of ideological orthodoxy. Europe's Communist parties, which were intimately linked to the Soviet Union at the time, advocated the subordination of art to the directive on Socialist Realism. This viewpoint naturally met with greater sympathy in countries where the Communists benefited from a considerable measure of popular support, such as in France and Italy. The artistic doctrines of the Communist Party in France provided a powerful and controversial alternative stance, not only as a result of the party's significant status among French opinion-makers, but also because after the war a number of well-known artists and intellectuals such as Pablo Picasso, Fernand Léger and Jean-Paul Sartre had allied themselves with the Communist Party (the PCF) to varying degrees. The problem was, however, that after 1948, the French Communist party chose increasingly to follow the official Soviet party line, which meant that Socialist Realism became an absolute aesthetic doctrine as far as the art world was concerned. An artist such as André Fougeron, who has been more or less forgotten, was lauded in these circles as a modern master. In contrast, the idea of creating a contemporary social modernist art as championed by Léger, in particular, was roundly condemned.³⁸

For less dogmatic Marxists, however, the requirement that art be committed did not necessarily imply criticism of modernism as such. One significant example is Jean-Paul Sartre, who summarised his view of the relationship between commitment and freedom on the part of the writer or the artist in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (1947):

Thus, whether he is an essayist, a pamphleteer, a satirist, or a novelist, whether he speaks only of individual passions or whether he attacks the social order, the writer, a free man addressing free men, has only one subject – freedom. . . . Thus, however you might have come to it, whatever opinions you might have professed, literature

throws you into battle. Writing is a certain way of wanting freedom; once you have begun, you are committed, willy-nilly.³⁹

But this description, which out of context might have been taken from simply any bourgeois or ecclesiastical text, reveals its ideological (Marxist) stance somewhat later when Sartre maintains that '*actual* literature can only realize its full *essence* in a classless society'.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, there is a yawning gulf between Sartre and the more dogmatic defenders of Socialist Realism. He makes no direct requirement of the writer or artist to adapt his language and idiom according to any fixed political dogma; neither does the artist, in his view, have to be in the vanguard of the struggle to make socialism victorious or subordinate his work to this one overriding goal. Instead, he understands the political function of literature to be dependent on the social context in which it is inscribed. The strict adherence of the European Communist parties to the Moscow line meant, however, that the appeal of their alternative artistic approach was extremely limited: Socialist Realism was scarcely an acceptable option for the majority of Europe's more progressive artists during the post-war period.

There was a very different reaction to both modernity and modernism from the champions of conservative values. Art academies, such as the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris and the Royal Academy of Arts in London, still maintained an extremely conservative, anti-modernist stance, which was not without influence on contemporary cultural life. Furthermore, modernism continued to be regarded in conservative, church and political circles as ideologically and politically suspect. The symbolic position a defender of freedom assigned to modernism in certain contexts was portrayed by them as a particularly dangerous lie, because they considered its aesthetic and world view to have arisen from the same nihilistic quagmire as the ideas of the revolutionary and authoritarian regimes.⁴¹

In the United States, the questionable ideological connotations of the avant-garde led to a ferocious dispute about the country's official cultural policy. This was exemplified in 1948 when the Institute of Modern Art in Boston abandoned its previously modernist-oriented exhibition policy and published an officially

anti-modernist statement. It was modernism's obscure, arcane and extremist tendencies that were objected to. The museum was intent on emphasising a humanist middle way: a position that Serge Guilbaut has shown to have been impossible in practice in the extraordinarily fraught and politicised climate of the debate for and against modernism.⁴² The political overtones of this polemic were further heightened at the beginning of the 1950s by the anticommunist campaigns waged by Senator Joseph McCarthy that led to the notion of what was American or un-American, determining both what was possible in the discourse of the visual arts and the capacity of the political establishment to provide financial support for contemporary art. To advocate radical modernism in such a situation meant having to walk a veritable rhetorical tight-rope, as we shall see.

The European debate followed a somewhat different pattern. Within conservative and ecclesiastical antimodernist circles, modernist art was portrayed as expressing a complete lack of respect for humanism, tradition and established norms on the part of individuals and society. Pope Pius XI had condemned the use of modernist art in the building of churches as early as 1932, and the Catholic church, which took an unfavourable view of both the deformation of human and religious figures and the absence of narratives in art, reiterated its condemnation after the Second World War, when abstract and nonfigurative motifs were used in some instances in the decoration of churches.⁴³ Although this negative attitude towards modernism was far from universally prevalent, it served to articulate the scepticism that had long characterised the Catholic sphere. Both the religious and political opposition to modernism could thus be said to have aesthetic, ideological and ethical origins.

One of the most controversial examples of this antimodernist rhetoric was Hans Sedlmayr's *Verlust der Mitte*, published in 1948.⁴⁴ In this work, the author describes modern art as a symptom of a disease with which modern society has infected culture: a falling away from the path of truth and eternal values. Sedlmayr considered it his task as a historian to present a diagnosis of this spiritually deadly affliction. He portrays a historical course of events, beginning in the French revolution and culminating in

the modernist art of the contemporary world, in which mankind, society and art have lost their meaning, their essential centre. A culture that had once been so coherent has splintered into fragments: modernist art merely reflects the chaos and dissolution, the inhuman isolation and alienation modern life has brought with it. Modernism patently distorts the perception of human nature in his view, which results in a demonisation of the human being; all these -isms express the same fundamental decline in their affirmation of chaos, disease and fragmentation. Modernism is a path that leads away from everything worthy of the name of art and spirituality; it is an art of the devil.⁴⁵

Sedlmayr's almost apocalyptic vision of how modernity inevitably leads to the decline of civilisation can no doubt be inscribed in that shared intellectual construct we touched on earlier concerning the relationship of the modern age to tradition (antiquity), but it also bears witness to the more specific influence of Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1922), a work that was highly controversial in its time.⁴⁶ In Sedlmayr's argument, the historical analysis of modernity is interwoven with a normative, and ahistorical, evaluation of the eternal nature of true art. But his own position, as an Austrian who was only too ready to put his services at the disposal of the Nazi German forces of occupation, renders his arguments if not empty, then at least dubious.⁴⁷ He completely fails to mention the attempts to solve the problem of the loss of the centre in the modern era that had been made only a few years earlier as part of the cultural and political practices of the Third Reich. Neither does he hesitate to compare modernism with a mental illness, even if he hastens to add that this is not the same as saying that modernist artists are mentally ill.⁴⁸ Implicit in his diagnosis is an *a priori* thesis that permits no deviation: all the artistic utterances of modernism are and have to be symptoms of the fundamental illness of society (modernity).

Sedlmayr's proposed way out of this state of affairs and his prognosis for the future are, however, much vaguer than his diagnosis of contemporary society. One problem is the contradictory character of his approach, as it is based on an evolutionist explanatory model, on the one hand, while resembling, on the other, some basic features of a superficially Marxist reflection theory:

Art should evolve towards an ever-greater degree of ideal beauty but is inevitably dragged down to the very opposite of such an ideal as it reflects the insanity of contemporary Western society. Such an approach results not only in an inferior historiography, but also undermines any form of active intervention, unless one is willing and capable of changing the direction of contemporary social conditions as a whole. Human beings appear locked in the iron cage of the modern era with no means of extricating themselves. Unlike the various alternative proposals and programmes that have had an actual impact (against all the odds in some cases) on modern cultural life—from William Morris' critique of the design culture of the nineteenth century to Clement Greenberg's defence of the avant-garde—Sedlmayr fails to start from a concrete formulation of the problem. His sweeping rejection of both modern art and modern society was little more than a gesture of resignation. As the crisis of modern art was perceived in terms of an essentially spiritual crisis by this devout Catholic, any change could only be brought about, in his view, through a renewal of the spiritual climate and of religious art.⁴⁹ But what would a renewal of this kind be like? The book provides no guidelines of any kind in this respect and comes across instead as an agonized and bitter elegy to a degenerate present that is fundamentally and irretrievably lost.

Sedlmayr's work resulted in an extensive debate that demonstrated the existence of significant groups in the Western democracies that shared his doubts—or rather his despair—about the contemporary world and were explicitly opposed to the normalisation process of modernism. But the problem for the forces of reaction from both the Marxist and the conservative camps was that they lacked any viable, or even conceivable, visual codes in the cultural policy climate that developed after the war. Moreover, the effects of recent history, which had witnessed the elimination of the avant-garde by Nazi Germany, and the contemporary political situation created by the Cold War meant that the privilege of defining the problem had slipped away from the antimodernist forces.

As a counterweight to works such as Sedlmayr's historiography, Werner Haftman wrote what was, in its time, the most

comprehensive history of modernism, published in 1954 under the title *Malerei im 20. Jahrhundert*. Haftmann's survey started with Impressionism in the 1870s and worked its way through all the -isms of the twentieth century, right up to the author's own time. The chronological pattern is reminiscent of the historicisation of modernism in the interwar years as presented in survey works and exhibitions, such as the scheme Alfred Barr employed to organise *Cubism and Abstract Art* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1936 or the linear sequence Christian Zevros set out in *Histoire de l'art contemporain* in 1938.⁵⁰ The number of subjects, topics, questions and cross-references is so large in Haftmann's work, however, that its structure has been broken down into a series of interrelated essays, whose reading may seem at times like a labyrinthine journey through a wild and untamed landscape. But it is the same issue that formed the basis of Sedlmayr's work—modernity entailed a fundamental change in the way human beings perceived reality—that allows both the overall structure and the individual analyses to cohere.

This notion, however, meets with a completely different response in Haftmann's work, whose rhetoric inverts Sedlmayr's alienation from the modern era by putting modernism in a clearly defined relationship with history:

Modern painting is indeed the most striking expression of the universal process by which one cultural epoch with a long history yields its place to another. It bears witness to the decline of an old conception of reality and the emergence of a new one. The view of the world that is being superseded today is that which was first shaped by the early Florentine masters with their naïve enthusiasm for the concrete reality of the visible world, which they set out to define.⁵¹

Instead of reinforcing nostalgia and bitter lament, the notion of the decline of the old culture and its art is transformed here into a progressive argument in favour of the relevance and value of modernist art. Although the rapid shifts of the modern age may appear alienating, and although modern art can seem obscure and strange, this is nothing new in itself. The reference to the Italian Renaissance in particular is, of course, no accident but a

calculated way of linking the once revolutionary potential of the most elevated and classical of epochs to the freshness and originality of contemporary art. Then, as now, art can be understood as a reflection of the way the wider culture perceives the world, and this is what makes modernist art so significant today: it is an authentic expression of its own time and demonstrates the way in which the perspectives of ages past have been replaced by new ones. To cling to antiquated aesthetic ideals amounts to not only a false and fundamentally reactionary form of nostalgia, but also a refusal to see the changed reality of the contemporary world and its future direction.

And yet, even though it presented an impartial historical analysis and an alternative interpretation, the publication of Werner Haftmann's book formed only an indirect argument within an ongoing debate. His art-historical arguments gained a much greater public hearing the following year when he organised *documenta* together with Arnold Bode—an exhibition whose selection has been described as an illustration almost of Haftmann's survey work.⁵² Indeed, this show made a much more explicit contribution to the debate—and one whose message could not fail to be heard. What it exemplifies so strikingly is that it was not the approaches and actions of various individuals that were of crucial significance for the changed status of modernism after the war, but the response of official institutions and public bodies. Because the originator in this case was the state and not a number of subcultural groups at the margins of the bourgeois public sphere, *documenta* signalled very clearly that a new order had been established.

This example also demonstrates something else; namely, the frontline had shifted by this time. It no longer separated the defenders of tradition and innovation, respectively, but was now drawn between east and west. The bipolar structure of the Cold War established a matrix for interpretation, understanding and evaluation that transcended every interest or conflict in specific areas of activity, a matrix to which the normalisation of modernism may largely be related. However, the Cold War was not in itself the sole cause of this process. The Second World War should be considered a far more important cause of the rapid course of events that took place during the post-war period. It was then that

all the energy dammed up by the war, which had proved such a fatal setback to the normalisation of modernism already initiated during the 1930s, was liberated. Moreover, the increasingly reactionary tone of American domestic politics was quite clearly an attempt to uphold aesthetic, cultural and ideological values that were in direct conflict with the theory and ideology of modernism. What the Cold War context demonstrates was the possibility of legitimating the avant-garde by means of a rhetoric that inscribed these phenomena in specific ideological images.

The Aesthetic and Ideological Criteria of Normalisation

The Dictates of the Antitheses: The Cold War Cultural System

Jürgen Habermas has characterised a fundamental change within the public life of the early twentieth century as a paradoxical interplay between the state and civil society, with society becoming increasingly ‘statified’, while the state was being ‘societalised’ to an ever greater degree.⁵³ According to Habermas, the cause of this change lay in an escalating need for state regulation within the private realm at the same time that social issues were increasingly becoming an issue for the state. When applied to the art world, this abstract formula can be understood in terms of a more obvious interaction between the private and public sectors, determined in particular by the establishment and expansion of the radical art world and its supporters. In contrast with the image of constant flux evoked in analyses of the cultural field, such as those of Pierre Bourdieu, what Habermas makes apparent is how official institutions, in public or private ownership, become increasingly important as norm-constructing actors in the contemporary radical or avantgardiste art world.

The new official and institutional interest in modernist art after the War had ramifications beyond cultural policy; it also served ideological, political and symbolic functions: for the ideological entrenchment of the modern democracies in a rational and progressively-oriented modernity, for enhancing the image of a particular nation as progressive and open, for the restoration of value structures and historical connections that had been crushed by

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repressive regimes, for establishing a democratic alternative to the dictatorships in Eastern Europe. While none of these causes need exclude any of the others, national and regional differences in the rhetoric relating to the establishment of the modern art museums and their exhibition programmes can be clearly identified. We are not invoking a turning point that was uniform and universal when referring to the normalisation of modernism, but pointing rather to a diffuse process with considerable regional differences. One country can, however, be singled out as playing a key role in the post-war international art world, a role, moreover, that would be of crucial importance in historical terms for the process of normalisation: the United States of America.

Before we consider the details of how this process was legitimated in several different contexts, it may be worth attempting to provide a backdrop to the cultural life of Western Europe and the US after the Second World War and how the Cold War created a potent incentive for the Western powers to define a more distinct cultural policy. This subject has all but become an art historical genre of its own ever since Serge Guilbaut published *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* in 1983, and it is aptly summarised in his subtitle 'Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War'. Guilbaut's book in particular, albeit in tandem with many other works within this genre, has unquestionably served to enrich our understanding of the complexities of art history and cultural policy in the post-war period.⁵⁴ However, the intense focus on the dynamics of the Cold War by some experts and authors has established what is, in my view, a rather determinist and conspiratorial narrative whose subtext appears concerned with delegitimising Abstract Expressionism as no more than an instrument of—or conceivably the invention of—the American intelligence service. Another recurring trope in this genre is how and when New York took over the role of international art centre from Paris. Although this, too, is an interesting question, it is only of secondary relevance to this study. My starting point is understanding how the rhetorical function of avant-garde art in a geopolitical context became a crucial impetus for its institutionalisation after the Second World War.

Obviously, the Cold War was of major significance in this regard as well. The escalation of the confrontation between the US

and the Soviet Union after 1945 meant that it was vitally important for both sides to maintain the intactness of their respective hemispheres. Reconstruction and the military balance of power were considered issues of vital importance from political, economic and military perspectives, as well as social and cultural ones.⁵⁵ The ideologised nature of the situation led to the active involvement of both the Soviet and American sides in ensuring that the border between the two systems was not a grey zone, but a clearly demarcated frontline so that all global conflicts would be interpreted within the framework of the bipolar structure of the Cold War.⁵⁶ The rhetorical logic of the structure calls to mind Zygmunt Bauman's description of modernity's system of segregating and classifying the world: a structure that acknowledges the existence of thesis and antithesis, of friends and enemies, but not of a third category outside the system—it refuses to recognise the existence of the Stranger.⁵⁷ In the structure of the Cold War, the Stranger not only posed a threat to the entire set-up, but also risked undermining the efforts of the two blocs to gain absolute legitimacy within their respective spheres.⁵⁸ The polarity between the US and the Soviet Union consolidated a way of thinking that could be applied in almost every different context: political, economic, cultural and military.

At one level, this involves the major discursive field Friedrich Engels once called ideological powers: the reproduction of norms by public institutions. More specifically, it also concerns the need at a particular historical stage to produce condensed, uniform and normative ideas about, and in, a complex and ambivalent situation so that it could be simplified, explained and mediated to the public in the form of concentrated ideological representations. These reproductions ranged from obvious ideological manifestos to vaguer notions, images and metaphors. It is this discursive production of ideological images that is of interest here, images that, irrespective of whether they were produced in the East or West, could be said to inhabit the borderland between interpretations of a real situation and mystical illusions. The Western images served as the very real boundaries for the representation and interpretation by the official art world of both history and the present.

One example of an interpretive approach of this kind can be found in the work of Stephen Kotkin, who has described the socialist society that developed in Russia after the 1917 revolution as an ideological model that, while highly flexible in many practical respects, was based on the absolute tenet that socialism was the radical antithesis of capitalism.⁵⁹ The ideological stance of the Bolsheviks brought with it a tendency to make their own thesis universal, with every single truth having to be based on a correct (scientific) analysis of the aims of history. While their analyses, and political orientation, were frequently subject to change, the Communist party had an absolute monopoly over every analysis and every change. This fundamental principle of anti-Capitalism interlaced all the various processes and details of society and life as a whole, with the habits and behavioural patterns of the individual considered just as significant as the planning of economics, politics and the various social institutions:

The story of socialism was nearly indistinguishable from the story of people's lives, a merged personal and societal allegory of progress, social justice, and overcoming adversity – in short, a fable of a new person and a new civilization, distinct because it was not capitalist, distinct because it was better than capitalism.⁶⁰

The politicisation of the Soviet state entailed extraordinarily extensive efforts to create a new social identity and a comprehensive model for perceiving and conceptualising the world that would encompass all the different parts of society, from culture and the mass media to the teaching of Marxist-Leninism at the very beginning of school. This was a system for the total political indoctrination of society, which involved a colossal attempt to force people to learn to speak—and think—Bolshevik, as Kotkin puts it.⁶¹

The art world was, of course, also integrated into this system of blanket control. After the revolution, a range of interpretations and definitions existed of what the art of the socialist state should be, from an academic classicism to various forms of Constructivism and Futurism. By the beginning of the 1930s, it had become increasingly obvious that the state favoured the realist and classicist wings. The bringing together of all the various artistic institutions under the aegis of the Union of Artists in 1932

was a crucial step towards subordinating all cultural activities to party control.⁶² The institutional structure was further centralised after the Second World War when all art affairs were brought under the control of the Soviet Council of Ministers and administered by a hierarchical structure of central and local committees. A central Soviet art academy was founded in Moscow in 1947 that became the long arm of the regime in the art world, as it assumed responsibility for education, exhibitions, commissions and prizes.⁶³ The post-war Soviet art world was completely dominated by official institutions and quite beyond the reach of any critical margin; neither was there any real possibility for disseminating alternative forms of representation within a private sector—other than in extreme secrecy.

After intensive discussions among Soviet cultural workers and party functionaries at the beginning of the 1930s, the necessity of Socialist Realism was officially proclaimed in a speech by Stalin's cultural commissar and subsequently Politburo member Andrei Zhdanov at the first Soviet Writers' Congress in 1934.⁶⁴ Socialist Realism was not simply a matter of a specific idiom; it was also a method and a concept for the way the visual arts were to function in society: as the engineers of human souls, artists and writers were to refashion the mentality of the people in the spirit of socialism. The artist was supposed to describe reality in its revolutionary development, which meant a break with the individualised and unrealistic romanticism of earlier periods and which heralded the beginning of a new kind of revolutionary romanticism that was a source of inspiration while remaining firmly rooted in the material basis of real life. The visual arts' repertoire of stylistic devices and methods was thus combined with a determination of its function based on the decree prescribing realist form and socialist content: the visual arts were to be figurative and narrative in epic fashion and their content should reflect and praise the political goals of the party.⁶⁵ As Boris Groys has suggested, Stalin's arts policy could in fact be understood as a radicalisation and transformation of the basic tenet of the constructivist avant-garde: art should both represent and become part of the changed lifestyle and circumstances of the new man in the overall aesthetic-political plan of the Soviet state.⁶⁶ The aesthetic was to be totally subordinate to

the political, and if the political leadership judged that the aesthetic was failing to fulfil its function, it would have to be made to conform to the goals of policy. To this end, aesthetic parameters were developed that defined acceptable visual language for the arts in various contexts—a specific aesthetic code—that was largely aimed at developing the propaganda value, clarity, legibility and rhetorical power of art as an antithesis to the ‘cosmopolitanism’ and ‘formalism’ of Western modernism.⁶⁷

In reality, the situation for artists and intellectuals in Eastern Europe differed between each country, and it was also a situation that changed over time. As recent research has emphasized, this situation was tremendously complex: the cultural production behind the iron curtain could embrace both Socialist Realism and modernism, but it cannot be understood only as a reflection of ideals derived from the Soviet Union, nor merely as peripheral and unmatched attempts to imitate modernist movements in the West.⁶⁸ However, the logic of the Cold War demanded—on both sides—an idea of two separate and fundamentally different systems and cultural expressions. The intimacy of the connection between political and cultural discourses within a single dominant hegemonic order marked an essential difference between Soviet and Eastern European cultural life on the one hand and that of America and Western Europe on the other. However, the bipolar structure of the Cold War also created a new need for the US to coordinate different representations within the framework of a single overarching ideological ideal. For the culture of post-war America, the result was both continuity and change in this regard: ideas and identities that had developed and become established earlier in the twentieth century became more clearly defined while also acquiring new or partially new meanings.

The increasing need for greater clarity in defining the front-line against the Soviets created one very particular problem: how could a society characterised by a pluralist approach construct a clear and coherent alternative to the distinctiveness of Soviet discourse without abandoning the democratic freedoms and multiplicity that were the very cornerstone of the Western way? With the lessons of President Woodrow Wilson’s failures after the First World War in mind, the goal of the Truman administration was

to establish a new stability in the period immediately following the end of the Second World War by setting up a variety of institutions aimed at creating an open global market and foreign policy order. Truman, however, was being pressured not only by the growing geopolitical ambitions of the Soviet Union, but also by domestic opinion, particularly from a Congress that was under the control of the Republicans. A significant measure of political freedom of manoeuvre could be achieved by creating a situation that linked the foreign and domestic policy issues closely together while also associating the problem of the reconstruction and stability of Western Europe with an increasingly pronounced anti-Communist rhetoric. The historian Richard Freeland has described how a series of actions were initiated between 1947 and 1948 with the aim of mobilising the American public so as to create this freedom of manoeuvre by rhetorical and political means.⁶⁹ Various measures were targeted specifically at oppositional individuals and groups, actively linking the issue of freedom with the question of loyalty. Freedom was not to be understood as an absolute civil right but must always be interpreted within the framework of patriotic loyalty to the political interests of the US. A specific myth of what it meant to be American—a uniform and ideologised image—had to be established as an integral part of the post-war ideological discourse of the United States. And because the Cold War was a symbolic war to a very considerable extent, propaganda was its foremost weapon. The cultural sphere, too, would have to be extensively mobilised as part of the production and reproduction of this myth.

And yet it would be mistaken to see the Cold War as the sole cause of the changes in American cultural and social life after the Second World War. The historian Alan Brinkley has shown how a wealth of different factors interacted to bring about these developments: the unparalleled degree of economic growth above all, the ideological assurance that unfettered capitalism was the best means of achieving a just society, the importance of the expanding middle class and its increasingly homogeneous self-identity. In tandem with the bipolar structure of the Cold War, these factors clearly made the creation of an illusion of unity in the ethnic, political and social heterogeneity of American society essential:

The architects of the Cold War came to view a diverse and rapidly changing world through the prism of a simple ideological lens, smoothing out the rough spots and seeing a uniformity of beliefs and goals that did not in fact exist. The architects of post-war middle-class culture looked at a diverse and rapidly changing society in the United States through a similarly limited and self-referential perspective. They constructed and came to believe in an image of a world that did not exist.⁷⁰

The disjunction between these official images and the perceived commonplace reality of American citizens also provides a key to understanding the differences between the American and Soviet discourses. Although American ideology was repressive at times and sought to limit the freedom of thought and action of the citizenry, it would, of course, have been impossible for a democratic state to establish a distinct doctrine for cultural policy in the same way as had been done in the Soviet Union. The existence of a sub- and countercultural critical margin could, in fact, be considered a distinguishing feature of American and Western European culture, even though the official image that prevailed during the Cold War served to underpin and strengthen conservative ideas within a range of areas.⁷¹ The political and cultural discourses of the West were not based on a single hegemonic perspective despite the obvious attempts by various reactionary groups, particularly in the US, to influence and restrict public debate.

The pluralism of American society did, however, pose many kinds of dilemmas for successive administrations that had to create a clearly defined line against an enemy able to produce an image without any cracks and without any critical opposition. The constitutional and institutional structure of the United States was entirely different in kind. Prior to 1965, there was no single authority in the US with responsibility for art affairs, neither was there any federal budget for such matters, although both the Department of the Interior and the intelligence services considered them part of their own area of interest.⁷² In contrast with the extraordinarily top-down and centralised structure of the art and cultural spheres of the Soviet Union in the 1940s and 1950s, the American authorities had to rely on various private institutions, social networks and secret contacts. The degree of awareness that

an open and democratic society had to impose certain limits on the conduct of psychological warfare also varied considerably within different administrative and security organisations.⁷³ There was quite simply no consensus in the political debate about what foreign and cultural policy direction the US should follow.

The American response to the ideological and cultural agenda of the Soviet Union and the massive resistance to avant-garde and 'un-American' art from influential parts of the political establishment may be seen as constituting two major fields of force in the official promotion and normalisation of modernism, irrespective of whether the aim was to spread a particular type of culture or to use the latter for political ends.

This state of affairs made it essential to employ elaborate strategies within fields where explicit diktats would have been impossible. The opposition to modern art and culture in general and to avant-garde movements in particular within large parts of the political sector meant that contacts had to be more or less secret both to maintain the liberal notion of a free art world and to produce an alternative image to that presented by the authoritarian cultural policy of the Soviet Union. The key institution in this context was the Museum of Modern Art and its International Council.⁷⁴ The ownership structure of MoMA—in the form of a private foundation—in combination with the membership of its board made it the centre of a remarkable and influential network of contacts that consisted of individuals in key positions in American politics, the security services and trade and industry.⁷⁵ MoMA was, therefore, linked by professional and social ties to the pragmatic forces in American politics that wanted to retain the ideological offensive as well as to an internationally oriented cultural policy. With financial aid from private funds and the partially concealed backing of the American Department of the Interior, MoMA launched its international programme for artistic exchanges with other countries in 1952. It was also responsible for American participation at various international art events, such as the biennales held in Venice and São Paulo.⁷⁶

Employing and exporting visual art for propaganda purposes naturally posed a particular dilemma for a democratic nation. For one thing, direct indoctrination was likely to be counterproductive

and would not be taken seriously by European intellectuals. For another, visual art and art exhibitions, no matter how wide-ranging, constituted a rather blunt propaganda weapon when compared with the public dissemination of popular culture through the daily and weekly press, comics, popular music, advertising, radio, television, film. And although modernism was established within the framework of the cultural policy of the United States and the Western European states, nonfigurative art as such proved to be an extremely diffuse instrument of propaganda in comparison with Socialist Realism: just where exactly in a painting by Jackson Pollock could freedom and democracy be seen?

The Production of Identity as *Realpolitik*

A key issue for the ideological function of every art genre and mass medium is the relation between rhetorical clarity and critical autonomy. The role of the visual arts in the democratic states was not primarily a matter of images but rather their use and involved an ideologised context for the interpretation of works of art, rather than explicit presentations of an ideological content in particular works. Here, as in so many other respects, the Cold War created an intricate and very peculiar logic for the interpretation of matters both large and small.

The position of 'leading nation of the free world' that the US attempted to occupy after the end of the Second World War required not only extensive economic and military spending, but also the investment of cultural and intellectual capital. Within the art world, this was a struggle that could be said to have been waged on several different fronts: against the Soviet Union primarily, but also against the art and cultural life of old Europe (France in particular) and against the reactionary tendencies of domestic opinion. If a powerful alternative to the Eastern bloc was to be successfully promoted, it would have to be legitimated both within the cultural spheres of the European states and to opinion at home. The key to the success of the international establishment of the American art world as a vital centre of the arts—and to the successful dissemination of the image of American art by the authorities after the Second World War—was not primarily

a matter of conspiracies or the promotion of particular artistic idioms, it had to do instead with the establishment of a dynamic institutional structure whose principal strengths lay in its flexibility, its financial position and the mobility it afforded between the private and the public spheres. The part played by Europe in this game was not one of passive submission it had more to do with a shared interest on the part of certain key actors in disseminating the image of modernist art—and nonfigurative art in particular—as the free world’s response to Socialist Realism.⁷⁷ A rich and varied artistic life developed in several different places in Europe after the War, which meant that the post-war European art scene also had a significant role to play in the normalisation process of modernism.

An important aspect of this process was the necessity of legitimating and reproducing specific values with which modern art could be associated. However, as we saw earlier, this also brought a two-pronged dilemma: for the dominant culture in having to embrace parts of a counterculture as a bearer of its norms and for the avant-garde, which would lose its *raison d’être*, its countercultural position, as a result. The problem was not entirely confined to the post-war period but may be understood in historical terms, at least in part, as a process involving the gradual establishment and consecration of the various avant-garde movements. What was different about post-war normalisation was that it did not simply entail a gradual and retroactive form of acceptance; it actively involved the institutionalisation and official sanctioning of certain values peculiar to the avant-garde.

This process was freighted with different ideological values in different nations and was legitimated by them in different ways. As we have seen, *documenta* served as an extraordinarily significant paradigmatic manifestation of modernist art in West Germany, a country whose historical situation created an entirely different impetus for the normalisation of modernism than that of the US. A central theme of this exhibition was the issue of the restoration of the democratic system of values and the creation of a national identity within the framework of that system. And yet German official art policy could also be described—as Benjamin Buchloh has done—as being determined by a collective political

and psychological loss of memory.⁷⁸ When considered in these terms, the years between 1933 and 1945 emerge not as a period that had been the object of systematic analysis and description but rather as a gulf across which restoration formed a bridge to a recent history (parts of the progressive culture of the Weimar republic, in particular) that could serve as a sounding board for the new democratic republic.

The issue of restoration also played a crucial role in France after the war. Although the situation here was less chaotic than in Germany once hostilities had ended, the nation had nevertheless been wounded economically, socially and culturally.⁷⁹ The country's problem of cultural restoration took on a different ideological connotation than in the German Federal Republic. The making of extensive cultural policy initiatives was also made more difficult by political instability and the weakness of France's economic position.⁸⁰ There was, however, a pronounced awareness on all political sides of the importance of culture for social life and national identity. This was particularly evident in the efforts made as part of French art and cultural policy during both the Fourth and Fifth Republics that revolved around the same symbolic theme permeating so much of French post-war policy as a whole: affirming the role of the nation as a great power in political, military and cultural terms, while keeping up the image that the continuity of the great French tradition had never been broken. What was reestablished was, in essence, the same image that was promoted by the World Fair held in Paris in 1937; although, now the French government played a much more active part in the mediation and legitimisation of modern art.

An example is provided by the exhibition programme of the Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne, which emerged after the war as the central institution and the major actor in the official French art world.⁸¹ Its hallmark throughout the post-war period was an emphasis on the Frenchness of the development of modern art.⁸² The contemporary art it promoted was in the main the work of those artists active within what was known as the Nouvelle Ecole de Paris, such as Jean Bazaine, Roger Bissière, Alfred Manessier and Bernard Buffet. This could be referred to as a kind of modernist *juste-milieu* painting, whose primary significance lay in that

it codified key values of official French cultural policy in purely iconographic terms, thus creating continuity with tradition. The aim of the museum was not to exhibit what was local or national but to set for the international art world a standard whose national character may to a very large extent be considered both nationalist and universalist.

This is not to say that French art or the Parisian art world after the Second World War lacked vitality or dynamism. On the contrary, the 1950s were an extremely lively period in the areas of art and art debate. Alternatives to the official line were provided by less formal networks that linked together galleries, periodicals and private art schools and in which a new generation of artists and critics could operate.⁸³ It is evident, nonetheless, that the establishment of a particular image of the relationship between French contemporary art and historical national development occurred as an interaction between the public and private sectors: through coverage by the mass media, as a result of the reports by leading critics and their assessments, by means of exhibitions at private galleries, and through the publication of survey works and monographs. A measure of change, dynamism and mobility within the institutional structure of the official art scene should also be taken into account; this created greater scope for various types of nonfigurative art during the 1950s, particularly those works that went under the name of *abstrait chaude* (lyrical abstraction) or *art informel*.⁸⁴ Although it is clear that the discursive practice of the visual arts in France, as in the rest of the Western world, was shaped by an interplay between the private and public spheres, the existence of much stricter boundaries between the two than in America, for instance, made the French art world exceptional, with the French government all but entirely in control of international exchanges and presentations.⁸⁵

However, it would be a mistake to interpret this situation as though the image of France as a cultural great power had been turned into nothing more than illusion. As Kathryn Boyer has shown, the French government devoted significant financial resources to retaining the initiative at both the national and international levels. The French authorities also proved successful at disseminating the image of a continuous French tradition on the

international art scene. The official international art programme was organised by the Association Française d'Action Artistique, which managed to arrange an average of twenty-two exhibitions per year between 1949 and 1965 that toured various places all over the world.⁸⁶ Although these exhibitions were made up of both older and more recent French art, the emphasis was on the older material, and among the exhibitions of twentieth-century art that were shown, there was a marked preponderance from the first half of the century when the Fauvist and Cubist traditions were dominant.⁸⁷ One of the association's most important commissions was organising the French pavilions at the prestigious biennales held in Venice and São Paulo. The arts policy of the French state met with great success at these events, and France was able to assure its international position by winning the top prizes at these biennial exhibitions on an annual basis during the 1950s.⁸⁸ It is evident, moreover, that the Venice Biennale in particular was characterised by a retrospective spirit in the years following the Second World War that was demonstrated in thematic displays of early modernism and also influenced the awarding of its prizes.⁸⁹

The problem of restoration played a subordinate role in the US, which meant that American rhetoric was formulated in somewhat different terms. The issue here was not a matter of establishing an image of an unbroken tradition but of asserting the dynamism and progressive modernity of American culture. The nucleus of this rhetoric involved the reproduction of an image of the vitality of American art, with the aim of gaining acceptance for it and ensuring its power to convince in contexts beyond direct American control. But the American self-image had to be adapted in order to be successfully exported and legitimated in a European intellectual milieu. Serge Guilbaut has described the necessary adaptation as occurring in two stages: first, from nationalism to internationalism and second, from internationalism to universalism.⁹⁰ Establishing a position within an international context involved getting rid of the stamp of provincialism that had marked the (socially committed) art of the 1930s. Once the required level had been reached, where the leading role of Paris was beyond dispute, an aesthetic approach based on values specific to American

art had to be formulated, and these values had to be perceived as universally applicable.⁹¹ What the French were keen to portray as a natural and self-evident continuity involved a kind of representation based on exactly the same shared intellectual construct that certain actors within the American art world were simultaneously attempting to establish for their own ends. For the most part, this struggle over interpretive privilege could be said to have been a struggle over the right to define what was universal.

The reproduction of this new self-image was quite clearly one aspect of the larger process of the production of national identity at this time, while also forming part of a greater plan, as some have maintained, directed by the powers that be to export American culture to the wider world. Although if there were a plan, it could only have been successfully enacted owing to an aspect of the situation that appears to have been more random and difficult to control: the export of the new cultural self-image of the US began at the same time the domestic avant-garde (the New York School) was making great advances and entering its productive heyday. The US was at this time definitely capable of manifesting a level of artistic production fully comparable with that of any European nation, although it lacked breadth and the deep historical roots found in France in particular. The war years had led to an exodus of leading European figures to the United States in the art field as well, just as the American art world was establishing what was to some extent a new institutional structure.⁹² But the absence in the US of a dynamic cultural tradition of modernist art brought with it specific problems for this process of legitimation. Unlike France, there was no cosmopolitan and bohemian avant-garde to point to as a historical marker of national identity. On the contrary, this very type of identity—and its politically subversive, cosmopolitan and, therefore, ‘un-American’ values—seemed highly suspect to large parts of the political and cultural establishment. Bringing together culture with subculture proved more problematic in the US than in most European countries.

A solution that proved viable was formulated by Alfred Barr, when describing the symbolic role of modern art in his brief survey *What is Modern Painting* (1943): ‘[T]he work of art is a symbol, a visible symbol of the human spirit in its search for truth, for

freedom and for perfection.’⁹³ In the context of its time, this was a defence of the freedom of art against the oppression of Stalin and Hitler, although in the political context of the post-war period, the same argument could be used against both the cultural policy of the Eastern bloc and conservative opinion at home. At the height of McCarthyism, Barr formulated a defence of modern art as the expression of a free democratic society in more explicit terms in ‘Is Modern Art Communistic?’ (1952) when he asserted that the conformity and lack of freedom represented by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union reflected the particular intolerance of these regimes to the creativity, freedom and individuality of modern art.⁹⁴ The fundamental theme of both these essays was that the artist serves as a symbolic representative whose art and identity, even though they may exceed the boundaries of the acceptable according to the social and moral codes of everyday life, must be understood and accepted by any society that calls itself free.

By assigning to modernist art an extraordinary symbolic significance, not as a representation of sound American values but as a litmus test of how free and democratic a society actually is, Alfred Barr was, in fact, employing, and inverting, the very rhetoric adopted by reactionary opinion in order to suppress the avant-garde. He was evidently aware of the need for counterreactionary arguments in the debate on modern art with just as much aggression and force as the opposing side could ever mobilise.

What was also evident in the US was the development of an image of a particularly American synthesis of historical modernism, an art that even though it could be located in a historical context was nevertheless genuinely modern. Moreover, a particular set of values was being identified as typical of American art: violent, spontaneous, new, vital, big, brutal, unfinished.⁹⁵ Hence, it was viewed as different from the art of France, which was described as weak, conservative, feeble, cultivated, mannered and charming. This rhetoric, with its peculiar gender-stereotyped metaphors, presents a snapshot of what Laura Cottingham has tellingly described as ‘the masculine imperative’ of modernism.⁹⁶ The image it produced was of American culture offering a revitalising, masculine energy capable of injecting new life into the old, stagnant and feminised cultural tradition of Europe. An obvious example

is provided by the mythologising approach at this time to Jackson Pollock—as a representative of the contemporary modern artist—in both the art world and in the public sphere.⁹⁷ This mythologising served to inscribe the contemporary artist in a historic context of the heroic but misunderstood geniuses of modern art, albeit with the crucial rhetorical difference that genius was now accepted and legitimated by the system of norms that pertained in the democratic states. In its particular political context, this rhetoric appeared essential to distinguish what was specifically American from an alien and politically subversive European heritage. The myths of Romanticism were readopted, as it were, and refashioned into a progressive and aggressive narrative of the genuinely modern, the genuinely American.

This rhetoric did not, however, bring any automatic benefits to American artists in terms of support, sales of work and financial gain, other than ensuring their ability to operate on a public stage. During the post-war period, the New York art world consisted of fairly loosely connected networks of artists, critics, collectors and intellectuals who set up particular social milieux and who embraced similar aesthetic approaches and issues.⁹⁸ There is no sense in which the group known as the New York School was a favoured elite of artistic functionaries in the service of the state, although a great deal of space was subsequently devoted to them in the international programme of MoMA.⁹⁹ Neither was it a question of culture being integrated into the official political discourse, as was the case in the Eastern bloc in particular, but also to some extent in the official art world of France. As Serge Guilbaut has shown, the production of value and meaning by the American art market was based right from the outset, and to a much greater extent, on ideas and identities that had become established among critics, gallery-owners and artists in the avant-garde art scene of New York. These were later subsumed within an overarching symbolic representation whose subject was modern art in a free and democratic society.

As we have seen, a crucial aspect of the rhetoric of normalisation has to do with the individualisation of works of art, and this led to the avant-garde being understood as consisting of a number of individuals with personal visions, rather than as a collective

counterculture. Abstract Expressionism possessed a specific quality in this regard, which meant it could be used as part of a wider geopolitical rhetoric. As so interestingly described by the secret service agent Donald Jameson,

We recognized that this was the kind of art that had nothing to do with socialist realism, and made [S]ocialist [R]ealism look even more stylized and more rigid and confined than it was. And that relationship was used in some exhibits.¹⁰⁰

According to this argument, the freedom in a painting by Jackson Pollock lay in its stylistic differences from Socialist Realism; this is not then a matter of iconographic identification but rather a rhetorical use of the painting (and the particular phenomenon of Abstract Expressionism) in a larger political context.

There is a strange irony to this rhetorical game in that the Soviet approach to art was defined as an antithesis to the capitalist view; whereas, the American rhetoric provided an antithesis to this antithesis, as it were. This was a calculated strategy on the part of America and Western Europe that intended to allow them to make use of representations from the private art and cultural worlds as part of their official rhetoric. But in order to do so, a very peculiar interpretive model had to be applied.

The Model of Indirect and Symbolic Interpretation

The rhetorical individualisation of the avant-garde was of decisive importance for the process of normalisation beyond the borders of the United States as well. At *documenta* 1955, the various ideological connotations of the historical avant-garde were neutralised by the concept of a supra-individual formal evolution in which the struggle for freedom of the individual as such was emphasised (irrespective of his or her personal deviations in political or social terms) as a vital symbol of the open and democratic society. The notion that the value sphere of the visual arts constituted an isolated preserve clearly set off from the surrounding world was interwoven into this approach. This necessitated the depoliticisation of modern art in order to be able to use it politically and the recoding of avant-garde art as a private form of expression

without any representative function beyond its own aesthetic existence. The problem lay in defining parameters for the interpretation of nonfigurative art capable of satisfying both sides: allowing art to retain (the semblance of) its avantgardiste legitimacy while ensuring that it appeared to be a legitimate representation of the cultural norm systems of the Western democracies.

This was not a question of various authorities acting repressively when it came to selection and interpretation, as in Abstract Expression serving as a representation of the ideology of the Cold War or the decreeing of a direct prohibition of certain kinds of interpretation, but involved instead the overlaying of different contexts for the interpretation of contemporary art. And, as previously mentioned, this was a transformation that first took place in the art world. The isolationist viewpoint was expressed most explicitly by Clement Greenberg, who wrote in 'Avantgarde and Kitsch' (1939) that avant-garde art had to cut itself off from society and create a distinct separation between itself and the arenas of politics and popular culture: a culture that was vital, progressive and advanced had to be a culture of disparity. Greenberg was far from alone in promoting an approach of this kind. More existentialist-minded or psychoanalytically oriented critics and historians, such as Harold Rosenberg, the German Werner Haftmann, the Englishman Herbert Read and the Frenchman Michael Tapié also emphasised—independently of one another—individual expression as a manifestation of 'personal mythology', 'inner necessity', 'metaphysical anguish' and 'universal creativity' that transcended the confines of the contemporary political and social worlds.¹⁰¹ A general and universalising intellectual construct may be seen to underpin these mutually differing positions and diverse definitions that served to distinguish modern art from other social and intellectual spheres and whose rhetoric and scope extended, in principle, beyond specific national contexts.

How did this shared intellectual construct actually function in practice in the interpretation of a particular *oeuvre* or an individual image? An example that can shed light on this question is the promotion of Jean Fautrier. His breakthrough came with a series of paintings called *Les otages* (The Hostages), which were begun in 1943 and shown for the first time at the Galerie René

Drouin after the end of the war in 1945. The peculiar technique he employed attracted much attention. The paintings were executed in a series of different layers and types of material: on a piece of paper thinly painted in earth colours, Fautrier built up a thick cake of distemper and gypsum at the centre of the painting. Drawn around the coarsely applied painting materials was an amorphous outline that suggested the shape of a human face. In context, this outline creates not only the shape of a head, but also an illusion of volume in relation to the background that accentuates the plasticity of the colour elements and their function as symbols of incarnation. Fautrier scratched and painted a number of strokes, cutting through the outline and the paint, which may be interpreted in many ways but are, in context, highly suggestive of extreme violence: a face being demolished by a series of slashes and cut into pieces. Or was this simply an example of the deformation of the surrounding world by modern art? The question, in the context of the post-war period, was how these images were actually to be understood.

In *Un art autre* (1952), Michel Tapié declared that the value of Fautrier's work and of *art informel* lay in that it transposed the viewer to a situation that could not be understood by traditional yardsticks. He or she was forced by the enigmatic quality of the image into new existential considerations beyond the norms and truth claims of convention.¹⁰² André Malraux, however, who took part in the Resistance movement with Fautrier, saw a more obvious association between the subject matter and a specific historical situation: 'Les otages' served as 'hieroglyphs of grief', as ideograms of the horrors of war, portrayed in a way that conveyed an immediate experience beyond language.¹⁰³ This much more specific interpretation was based on the allusion in the title of the series to oppression and to the associations with violence evoked by the demolished face, in which the colours not only accentuate a difference between its various parts, but also conjure up an image of greenish decomposition and of a devastating blood-drenched wound. Serge Guilbaut has provided an account of the way in which these and similar interpretations situated Fautrier and other practitioners of *art informel* in a specific context:

Fautrier took a very gruesome topic, one quite literally unrepresentable: the Holocaust. His task was ambitious but quite difficult if he cared not to exploit and sentimentalize such a painful topic. . . . Fautrier, who painted extraordinary powerful dead rabbits à la “Soutine” before the war, found, with the horror of the camps still very present, a way to talk about the unspeakable by withdrawing from direct discourse and replacing it with allusions, connotations. The physical, painful, difficult constructions of layers of transparent, thin papers on the canvas, the pulverization of white paint, the transformation of painting material, became a metaphor for the suffering many still felt in France. . . . What is special in Fautrier is that he makes these connotations barely visible, transforms them, buries them under an avalanche of technical virtuosités. We are here at the edge of the Inform, at the edge of figuration, when the drawing, the image, when the corpse, the stump, the flattened face, all in an advanced state of decomposition, tend to subside, to be transformed into soil, into *matière* (matter). But this one is of course an archeological *matière*, with signs of history buried in it, in order to jolt the casual viewer into recalling elements themselves buried in one’s memory.¹⁰⁴

The key problem in both these interpretations touches on the question of representation or, rather, on a borderland of representation. For how could what was essentially unportrayable (the Holocaust) ever be portrayed? And how could the portrayal of such a subject be legitimated in an artistic context (*art informel*) that repudiated not only the realist tradition, but also the very idea of the representative function of the visual arts? This problem resembles the one that confronted Picasso in his efforts to combine the expansive movement of Futurism with Symbolism’s introspective preoccupation with the language of pictorial art; it could be said to lie at the very heart of the entirety of the modernist discourse of the twentieth century. For Fautrier’s part, the answer lay in the absence of conventional representations of a subject or theme, which meant that the image operates in the disjunction between the apparent and the possible by employing metaphors, allusions, connotations and associations.

Although the interpretation was still based on a preunderstanding (the historically specific horizon of the interpreter), the work, as such, continued to remain open to a multiplicity of differing

interpretations. The limited, though nevertheless extant, iconic sign functions of the image and the title, in particular, obviously provided a measure of guidance. Had Fautrier given his series of hostage pictures a more neutral title ('nr 1' to 'nr 33', for example) the horizon of interpretation would in all likelihood have been different. But an interpretation that treats the title seriously comes up against the question: is the subject here—in a quite literal sense—a realistic representation of the formation of a wound as a result of external violence? In that case, its significance would be fixed to a particular historical experience: the factual outcome of being a hostage of the Nazi occupation forces and/or their fellow-travellers. Or is it rather a matter of also understanding the image as a metaphor of the split in personality caused by the individual having to adapt to the demands of the occupying forces and, therefore, by a form of internal violence? The theme of the hostage would also then describe the condition of internal exile and the complex of lies, collaboration, submission and oblivion in which so many people found themselves while suffering oppression. And can the latter interpretation be said to represent not only the experience of the horrors of war, but also to evoke (on a deeper metaphorical level) a more universal image of the alienation and the sense of fragmented identity that so characterise modern society? Or is it the case instead that Fautrier's paintings should be seen as a continuation of the great French tradition, with their exquisite handling of light and materials being understood as a modern version of the sensibility of a Chardin or a Watteau? Is this actually a form of art suited to the drawing-room walls of the comfortably-off middle classes?

The communicative and linguistic problems posed by Fautrier's hostage pictures are typical in many regards of the way modernism, and the radical art of the post-war period in particular, is able to refer to the external world. A more explicitly realistic representation of the subject matter could not have been legitimated within avant-garde discourse but would have been consigned to the non-position of Socialist Realism or the trivial art and kitsch culture of the bourgeoisie. A picture entirely lacking any form of mimetic representation could, it is true, have been interpreted indirectly or on a metaphorical level as a statement critical of civilisation, but

it would then have lost any connection at all to the surrounding world in terms of its subject matter. This demonstrates how the visual arts are characterised by a multifaceted discursive logic at a particular time and in a specific social and political situation. However, the very vagueness of Fautrier's critique of civilisation could also be identified as one of the factors that made it possible to subsume modernist art within the dominant system of cultural norms: it was not explicitly antagonistic to the ideological norms of the society that surrounded it, neither was it a call to political activism, but it involved, in most cases, an individual reaction to a particular situation. It is possible to refer here to forms of absence and alienation that were different from those that characterised the avant-garde of the early twentieth century in a new era, whose hallmarks were a tangible sense of trauma, the extinction of utopias and the impossibility of collective experience. The key words in this regard are individualism and doubt, in contrast to the collectivism and antagonism of the historical avant-garde.

In fact the absence of any explicitly political and propagandist content was a precondition for any use of modernist art as propaganda, because the acceptance of the avant-garde served as a rhetorical device for freedom and individualism, which meant its idiom could serve as an antithesis to Socialist Realism and because it would have been impossible in the art worlds of the Western nations to employ propaganda directly and still be taken seriously. The same goes for American Abstract Expressionism to a very considerable extent. Jackson Pollock may serve as an example of the difficulty involved in fixing any obvious or even possible meaning, which explains the very diverse metaphorical interpretations of his paintings that have been produced over the years: as a Gothic, morbid, extreme and supremely American exponent of the medium-specific efforts of modern art (Clement Greenberg); as an example of the attempts of Communism to infiltrate American society and create chaos within it (George Dondero); as a portrait of the complex social and psychological situation of the modern urban man (Rudolf Arnheim); as a means by which contemporary art could free itself from the material constraints of painting and develop art as process rather object (Allan Kaprow).¹⁰⁵

Kirk Varnedoe has described how Pollock's works constitute a historical turning point in the history of modern art, because his work always involved oppositions in a way that made any definitive assignment of meaning impossible, thus illustrating the openness of aesthetic interpretation.¹⁰⁶ But in my view, this both exaggerates and diminishes the significance of Pollock's contribution. It exaggerates in the sense that neither Jackson Pollock, nor American Abstract Expressionism as such can be put forward as the sole exponents of this openness; informal art and the critical debate in Europe played at least as important a role in the establishment of the post-war changes in the definition of art and interpretation. And it diminishes because the ramifications of this issue extended far beyond matters of aesthetics or philosophy. For if it is not possible to say where in a painting by Jackson Pollock or Jean Fautrier freedom and democracy are being expressed, neither is it possible to say where their potentially transgressive or politically subversive message lies.

The deliberately radical opening-up of the possible interpretive horizons of the work that informal and Abstract Expressionist art introduced had implications that were aesthetic, political and social. It was not only the meaning of the work that seemed vague, arbitrary and subjective in this light, but also its ideological position. The strategy that was characteristic of the established institutions in their interpretation of avant-garde art could be called the model of indirect and symbolic interpretation. This meant that the propaganda value of the visual arts in the West was to be found on a more subtle level, with the paintings and exhibitions playing a subordinate role: it was the demonstration of the place of avant-garde art in the norm systems of the free world instead that was crucial. And this is a key point for the process of normalisation, because what is being institutionalised here is a context for the understanding of modern art that is, in essence, open to both a cultural and a countercultural pattern of interpretation at one and the same time.

The Modernist Metanarrative

Between History and the Present

The establishment of modernism in the system of cultural norms of the Western world and the new role of New York as the centre of the art world are largely bound up with questions of power, of ideological representations and of interpretive privilege. This situation was, in essence, not unlike that of the late eighteenth century when the academic system expanded and Paris increasingly eclipsed Rome as the most vital city on the art scene. In both cases, these shifts determined the circumstances of contemporary artists and the historiography of later generations. For here, as ever, it is the victor who writes the history.

The American artist Mark Tansey has produced a wonderfully ironic painting of the triumph of American art over the French, entitled *The Triumph of the New York School* (1984). The work was executed as a traditional academic historical painting—with obvious Socialist Realist features—in terms of its subject matter and idiom as well as its vast scale. At the centre of the picture, André Breton is being obliged to sign the treaty of surrender in front of Clement Greenberg. Behind Breton stand the aging representatives of the once mighty French avant-garde; visible on the American side are the exponents of Abstract Expressionism.¹⁰⁷ Note, too, the difference between the equipment of the two sides, with the French troops apparently reliant on their cavalry, while the Americans have access to modern tanks. The subject of the work is, in other words, the outright victory of modernity over tradition, portrayed in the traditional academic style. The

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backdrop against which the treaty of surrender is signed is a panoramic view of the landscape—the art world—that has been laid waste by the battles.

This is at once a penetrating, problematic and disquieting rendering of the historical image. The irony in Tansey's painting is directed not so much at the representatives of Abstract Expressionism as at the historiographic view, which accentuates both the masculine metaphors of the battlefield and the conspiratorial metaphors associated with espionage in portraying how a particular view of art became established. The cultural logic of the Cold War does, of course, provide an essential context for understanding the normalisation of modernist art after the Second World War. But the context created by more local and national social and aesthetic considerations that serve to define a range of specific situations in which individual artists operated and expressed themselves is just as crucial. In this way, a much more multifaceted complex of factors is revealed than those suggested by the signing of a treaty of surrender. What Tansey's picture, like much of the research on this subject produced in recent years, fails to say is that the real victory was not won on the battlefield but in the historiography.

Another image should be introduced here as a supplement to Mark Tansey's painting: a little drawing by Alfred Barr from 1941.¹⁰⁸ He called it 'Torpedo moving through time', and it outlines a diagram for an ideal permanent collection at the Museum of Modern Art. The drawing was part of an argument in an ongoing debate about whether MoMA would build its own permanent collection or if the museum should serve as a transit museum and a branch of Metropolitan Museum of Art.¹⁰⁹ What Barr tried to accomplish was to give a graphic form to the idea that MoMA must be built around a permanent collection that would constitute a canon of international modern art as well as a historical foundation for contemporary art and design. The upper torpedo is drawn along a time-axis reaching far back into the historical past and is almost entirely dominated by the French traditions. Once the torpedo in the lower part of the image has moved forward nine years, a new and much more uniform pattern emerges. Jacketed in the French and European tradition, the torpedo is now

equipped with a high-explosive warhead consisting of American contemporary art.

The martial metaphor obviously implies that this is something more than a schematic image of an ideal museum collection: it demonstrates both that a shift in the American awareness of the front line of contemporary art had taken place at this time, with Barr considering that the US had taken over the initiative, and that MoMA should be more actively engaged in supporting this change. But it also demonstrates something far more important: the existence of a focal point between the historical and the contemporary, around which the gradual shifts in art taking place in the present create new historical perspectives and patterns. For, on one level, the institutionalisation of modernism after the Second World War brought about a radical change in the practice of the individual artist, such that every formulation of the new was already inscribed in tradition from the outset.

Institution and Narration

The post-war period is portrayed in art-historical handbooks as a time when a new generation of artists emerged. A generation characterised by various aesthetic movements and -isms: Abstract Expressionism, *art informel*, Cobra, Tachisme, Action Painting, *art autre*, *art concret*, Color Field Painting. The story told here is of the establishment of new forms of nonfigurative and abstract art on both sides of the Atlantic that became a key part of the prevailing value system of the official art world. At the same time, the history of modernism was also being written in the form of exhibitions and texts of different kinds and with various levels of ambition: from the megaexhibitions (the biennales held in Venice and São Paulo, *documenta* in Kassel) and ambitious historical surveys presented at the major museums to minor retrospective exhibitions at private galleries; from historical and theoretical specialist studies and general handbooks to reviews, newspaper articles and pamphlets. This took place in parallel with a comprehensive institutional change in the art scene of the Western world that saw an increasing number of galleries and magazines promoting radical modernist art to an ever-larger audience. At the same time, the

pioneers of the historical avant-garde were being appointed to positions at the leading art schools and academies in Europe and the US, whose students were now able to acquire knowledge about the theory and practice of the historical avant-garde first-hand.

An enormous and continually expanding amount of propositions and statements were being produced about modernism both past and present. This expansion can be described in both qualitative and quantitative terms, as exemplified in Diana Crane's in-depth study of the New York art world of the period:

During the fifties and sixties, the New York art world could be described as an extensive social network in which many participants performed more than one role: artists served as critics; critics as curators and vice versa; art editors as curators; curators as collectors; and curators as trustees of museums and as backers of art galleries. Groups of artists were linked to groups of sponsors or "constituencies" whose members were able to obtain a sense of new developments and trends through their participation in this network.¹¹⁰

Many other critics and historians have described this complicated interplay of roles and the changing of roles within the art world as social networks, such as Irvin Sandler who, in *American Art of the Sixties*, characterises the New York art scene in terms of a number of coteries that functioned as distinct, although not *per se* closed, groups, each of which was defined by a specific orientation.¹¹¹ What is perhaps most interesting about such an analysis is that it points to a degree of mobility in the field that was both social and intellectual.

Although the jostling for position might lead to refinements of artistic style and aesthetic statement, these positions were far from as rigid as the posthumous categorisations of art history. The result of this flexible and complex system was that both the private and public sectors were able to play an active role in the economic make-up of the art world, as Diane Crane has shown:

Beginning in the middle sixties, federal and state governments, corporations and foundations began to give more support to the arts in general. For example, support for the arts by the National Endowment for the Arts, which was created in 1965, increased

from \$1.8 million in 1966 to \$131 million in 1983. Corporate spending increased from \$22 million to \$436 million. Support by all the state governments increased from \$2.7 million in 1966 to \$125 million in 1983, while foundation support increased from \$38 million in 1966 to \$349 million in 1982. Museums received the largest share of both corporate, federal and state funds.¹¹²

This economic expansion is, of course, only one index among many of a complicated process of institutionalisation in which the distribution of capital had not only a financial aspect but also major social and symbolic dimensions. And although Crane provides a fairly stereotypical description of how the impact of this expansion affected the establishment of different styles, she has a point in that idioms and aesthetic approaches can also be inscribed and analysed in this economic and social context. And, given this context, the promotion, evaluation and interpretation of a particular artistic trend can never be considered innocuous or refer solely to a sphere of exclusively aesthetic considerations.

Although Diane Crane's study reflects the circumstances of the American art world in the main, the model of unrivalled expansion and of a complex pattern of interaction between the private and the public spheres can also be applied to Europe and other areas within the Western hemisphere. We can recognise a type of rhetoric at work here that we encountered earlier, one in which the regional, the arbitrary and the hierarchical have been embedded in a notion of the universal. It is an idea whose origins clearly lie in a European (and Eurocentric) canon of aesthetic, ideological and epistemological representations irrespective of how this canon would subsequently be transformed and expanded.

From the 1980s onwards in particular, this expansion has led to an increasingly evident globalisation of the art world. This has been portrayed on occasion as no more than the incorporation of new territories within that world, with its growing expansion into a worldwide network. But just as the promotion of a particular type of art cannot be described as an innocuous or purely aesthetic matter, neither should the globalisation of the art world be understood as an evolution of a flat (nonhierarchical) structure. As Charlotte Bydler has shown in *The Global Art World, inc.* (2004), the art world should be seen as both a horizontal

network and a hierarchical categorisation of various institutions and centres. A limited number of professional actors operate in this world who are able to set the agenda as a result of their access to key institutions across a range of core nations and are, therefore, also able to define what is possible within the discourse; these actors shape the idea of the globalisation of art on the basis of institutions, languages and a history of European origin.¹¹³ The rhetoric surrounding the phenomenon of globalisation is reminiscent of that which underpinned ideas about modernisation, with the centrifugal motion outward from an inner nucleus leading to both the universal and the global being defined on the basis of a norm, a canon and an interpretive horizon, all of which originate in a particular geographic and historical position. And although Bydler is describing the situation at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and even though this structure has become extraordinarily more complex and the ways of regulating and defining the discourse of the order ever more subtle, and thus harder to analyse, mechanisms that were in operation in the European art world from the end of the nineteenth century can clearly be recognised.

The expansion under discussion here has, in any case, meant that a wealth of different styles, media and aesthetic approaches have been established and presented within key institutions. And yet it is also clear that the art world of Western Europe and America, until the end of the 1950s at least, was, as we have seen, characterised by a rather one-sided—not to say doctrinaire—interpretation of the meaning of modernism in aesthetic, medial and historiographic terms. At a more overarching level, what normalisation means in this context is the establishment of an interpretive privilege, such that the position of modern art shifted from being challenged to being possible and, ultimately, to constituting the only apparent possibility—the historically normal.

A key institution in this regard is the museum of modern and contemporary art. This type of museum was not an innovation purely of the twentieth century but can be traced back to the establishment of the Musée du Luxembourg by the French state in 1818, which served as an annex to the Musée du Louvre. The relationship between these museums, known as the Louvre-Luxembourg

system, meant that works were deposited in the collections of the contemporary museum until the centenary of the artist's birth had been reached, when they were either transferred to the central collection of the Louvre or, in the case of those works that were no longer considered of major significance, were sent to museums and institutions in the provinces.¹¹⁴ The flexibility of this system made it initially appear ideal for several of the twentieth century's museums of modern art. However, it is precisely because this system was not implemented that it is possible to refer to the modern museums that were set up in the middle of the twentieth century as constituting a new type of museum. This new museum combined to some extent the functions of the Musée du Luxembourg and the Salon in nineteenth-century Paris, serving as a normative and sanctioned arena for contemporary art while establishing a similarly normative and sanctioned historical collection.

The international prototypes for this kind of museum were the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1929/1939) and the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris (1939/1947). The way these two institutions operated was, however, rather different. While the latter represented the continuity of the modern museums with the official art world of the nineteenth century as a result of its conservative, hierarchical and centralising approach, the unrivalled collections and the progressive and historically informed exhibition programme of the former meant that it would become the paradigm for the modern art museum as a new type of institution. The causes behind the emergence of this new type of museum could, of course, vary, ranging from a pragmatic realisation of the lack of scope for modern art in major art historical collections or a reactionary aspiration to be able to separate the great tradition from the decadence of the contemporary to a more aggressive pursuit of a specific site at which to present and study the art of the present and its history. This shift and the process of establishment may be understood in general terms as reflecting the institutional change introduced by modernity, as part of which, older institutions continued operating but with somewhat altered functions and a different basis of legitimation. There could thus be continuity between premodern and modern institutions, with the particular transformation of their significance and function

serving as an index of their new roles and grounds of legitimation. The expansion of modern art museums around the world after the Second World War meant that this type of institution not only assumed the normative functions of the Academy, but also helped to shape the understanding of modern art and its history to a considerable extent.

The creation of the museum for modern art involved the establishment not only of a new type of museum, but also of a particular narrative structure in the post-war public sphere that served as a normalised matrix for the interpretation of contemporary art and its recent history. The historical selection was defined with such a degree of specificity that the word modern combined a period of time (the twentieth century) with a particular aesthetic trend (modernism).¹¹⁵ In the modern epochal museum, a specific and all-inclusive historical interpretive matrix was devised and entrenched that every other form of representation had to relate to and be measured against: antimodernism, regional variants and deviations, postmodernism. A pattern of interaction between narrative and institution emerges here that served as a code for the historically normal.

To assert that the modern museum formed a narrative specific to itself might seem to be a massive exaggeration, because a range of different narratives and interpretations were demonstrably in evidence in the post-war period: the Tate Gallery was not telling exactly the same story as the Museum of Modern Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum was not the same as the Musée National d'Art Moderne, the Stedelijk Museum was not the same as the Hamburger Kunsthalle, Moderna Museet was not the same as the Louisiana Museum for Moderne Kunst, and so on. And if the various survey works covering the art history of the twentieth century published from the mid-1950s onwards are also taken into account, then an even greater range of variation becomes evident.

But it is possible to refer to the existence of a common pattern behind these variations, which can appear so self-evident and internalised it may be difficult to pick out. Carol Duncan has

described the uniformity of the selections and narratives of the modern museums, in Europe as well as in the USA, as a function of their task of presenting generally accepted values and forms of knowledge to the public.¹¹⁶ She distinguishes a hierarchy among different museums in this respect with the Museum of Modern Art providing the paradigm, not only in terms of the composition and presentation of its collection, but also in terms of the standard narrative of modernism. This narrative is not, however, presented solely by museums of modern art around the world, but also in various texts, articles, books and survey literature. It also provides the foundation for an oral mediation of the history of modern art in the teaching carried out in art schools and at university. There can be no disputing the fact that the standard narrative of modernism now serves as the normalised matrix for the understanding of modern art.

As the fundamental problem in this regard is the understanding of the normal as a historically specific construction, one way forward would be to compare the normalised account with other narratives produced about twentieth-century art. The universal history of art might be compared, for example, with its regional and national variants. Or a comparison might be drawn, as James Elkins has done, between the narratives and selections presented by survey literature published in Western Europe and the US with their counterparts in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.¹¹⁷ One significant example is the nine-volume Soviet work *Vseobsjtjaja istorija iskusstv* (The Universal History of Art), which was published by the Institute for the Theory and History of the Visual Arts at the Art Academy in Moscow in 1956.¹¹⁸ Both in terms of narrative and selection, the earlier parts resemble what has become the standard version in the major surveys published in the West during the twentieth century, but a deviation starts to emerge in the seventh volume in the treatment of nineteenth-century art—what are considered to be the origins of the modern period, that is. Instead of one great line emerging from the development of French art, the narrative is structured around various national schools, with the emphasis placed on Russia and Eastern Europe. It may, of course, be objected that Elkins exaggerates the unusual nature of this type of structure, which actually has historical

precedents and which is interesting precisely because it demonstrates a kind of narrative that preceded the now-established evolutionary progression from romanticism/realism to modernism.¹¹⁹ The seventh volume describes the developments in art during the nineteenth century in the capitalist countries, structured according to national schools and applying an inclusive global perspective in which all the continents are represented, while the eighth and final volume deals with the corresponding developments in the socialist countries, with a considerable emphasis on the Soviet Union.

The historical account and the selection provided in *Vseobsjtjaja istorija iskusstv* not only portray a different twentieth century and a different modern art to the one presented by Western European and American survey works, they also reveal, as Elkins emphasises, an interesting structural agreement:

The gaps are complementary: “our” texts, nominally unbiased, are sometimes perfect casts of Eastern models. . . . The Russian “universal history” shows with uncanny exactitude how America’s apparently nonjudgmental survey texts are not only deeply biased towards the West (we knew that) but are in parts virtually capitalist manifestoes, excluding each and every one of the movements that the Russian text includes.¹²⁰

The two different narratives thus provide a specialised example of the discursive logic of the Cold War: an art-historical microcosm that is more or less directly related to the macrocosmic structures of the official ideologies. But Elkins misses a crucial aspect when describing these two opposed but complementary structures: the Soviet survey work actually devotes a whole volume of over 900 pages to capitalist art. This is an inclusive approach almost entirely absent from the Western European and American surveys, and one is forced to ask oneself why that should be the case. The answer obviously has nothing to do with a greater willingness on the part of the post-Stalinist regime to permit the publication of alternative opinions in the public sphere. It should be remembered that this project was launched by the Soviet art academy at a time when all the bodies representing the art world had been centralised in a rigid hierarchical structure under the direct control of the Party, so it can hardly be a question of a mistake or of a

particular volume managing to slip through the net of the censor without the authorities reacting. *Vseobsjtjaja istorija iskusstv* represented the official view of the history of art in a way that was quite different from any corresponding work or collection in the West. So why then was the enemy included in this picture?

One possible answer could be drawn from what has been said previously in this study. As we have seen, the normalisation of modernism in the US and parts of Western Europe was dependant on the putatively nonpolitical function of art, which meant that the deideologisation of the avant-garde was essential if it was to be used for ideological ends; this was made possible by the application of what I have called the model of indirect and symbolic interpretation. This allowed for an interpretation of the visual arts that was simultaneously cultural and countercultural, with the result that certain fundamental tropes—freedom, individuality, authenticity, modernity, universality—could be used for the legitimation of radical art by both camps. The situation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was the exact opposite. One of the basic principles of Socialist Realism was that the visual arts were subordinate to the control of the party and they formed part of the fabric of the Socialist state. The function of art was clear: every representation could and had to be interpreted on the basis of an explicit political context (the doctrine of realistic form and socialist content). And because the dialectic of materialism formed the scientific foundation of this approach, a particular synthesis had to be formulated in relation to any given antithesis. This led to a narrative structure that is entirely different from that of the West, with triumphing over its antithesis (capitalism) providing the immanent driving force of history, although in so doing it necessarily demonstrates the existence of its antithesis in the historiography of art as well (modernism).

And yet the dialectic is more complicated than that. For if one surveys the selection of images in the volume dealing with the art of the capitalist countries, one finds reproduced both a familiar modernist canon and a different image that affords considerable scope for a more socially critical, realistic and, possibly Socialist, art. Although Jackson Pollock, Mark Tobey, Robert Motherwell and Franz Kline appear in the chapter on art and architecture

in the US, Abstract Expressionism does not exactly dominate the presentation; it gets seven lines in a chapter of just over thirty pages. What does dominate is the Social Realism of the interwar years and artists such as George Bellows, Kent Rockwell, Robert Minor, William Gropper, Andrew Wyeth, Alton Pickens and Ben Shan. The text starts by drawing a distinction between two trends in American society that are mutually opposed: the democratic humanism of progressive realism is set against the official, reactionary, 'late-bourgeois' culture of decadence.¹²¹ This distinction provides the matrix on which the interpretation of every artistic and architectural creation is then based. As part of this scheme, Abstract Expressionism inevitably falls within the latter category as the style that embodies those artist-charlatans who shamelessly, and quite literally, are making a fast buck out of the sensation-seeking American public. Although artists such as Pollock and Kline are concerned with developing the appearance of existential and authentic expression in their work, this does not reflect anything real in practice, apart from the decline of bourgeois culture.¹²²

The rhetoric of this presentation makes two antithetical positions—one of which is rejected—admirably clear, but it also identifies a trend of critical, popular and progressive culture within the stronghold of capitalism that may represent a potential for revolutionary change among the peoples of capitalist countries. The volume on capitalist art does not constitute an end in itself as part of the historical presentation but fulfils its particular function only when considered in relation to the concluding volume on Socialist art. The latter volume's appendix of illustrations ends with a lithograph from Cuba portraying the people's militia on the march; this individual portrayal could be interpreted in the light of the larger image mediated by the work as a whole of the triumphal march of Socialist Realism into the future.

So what do these parallel historical narratives tell us that we did not already know: that two different ideological systems produced apparently incompatible narratives at a particular time? What the comparison sheds light on in particular are their respective ideological and rhetorical starting points, the structures, tropes, techniques and narratives that are presented in each account as the historically normal and have been concealed to a greater or lesser

extent. This applies especially to the putatively open, impartial and universal criteria of the Western form of historiography, in which the notion of modernism as modern art is a premise that has been taken for granted rather than an evaluation. Moreover, a form of historiography is involved in both cases that has had an enormous influence on assumptions about the present. This is particularly true of the modern museums—both the Eastern and Western varieties—which have become the key institution for the intersection of history’s diachronic line with the synchronous field of the contemporary period.

The place where these movements come together is not an innocuous position, for this is the very point where the struggle for interpretive privilege is waged unceasingly both by history and the present. It is also at this point that the issue of which historical image is produced becomes decisive in determining what form of contemporary art is legitimate and possible. Here, interpretation is not so much a matter of a number of individual statements based on different personal preferences, but rather a pattern for what may be legitimately formulated as part of the discourse.

Alfred Barr’s Diagram

The narrative pattern of modernism could be likened to a matrix for legitimate statements that extends both beyond and below individual narratives and constitutes their tacit foundation. Although this kind of proposition is all well and good at a sufficiently abstract level, the issue here is its implications in more concrete terms. Instead of setting out a wealth of different examples drawn from exhibitions, catalogues, survey works, specialist studies and monographs from Western Europe and the US, I propose to concentrate on a single one: the exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1936 and Alfred Barr’s schematic rendering of the development of abstract art that was published on the front cover of the catalogue.

The exhibition comprised over 400 works in various media that filled all four storeys of the museum’s then temporary premises on 53rd Street: painting, sculpture, photography, architecture,

furniture, posters, stage sets, typography and film. Most of the space was, however, given over to painting and sculpture, with the greater part of these works being made up of loans from European collections. *Cubism and Abstract Art* formed part of an ambitious attempt by Alfred Barr to chart and present the history of modern art up to the present day; it was followed somewhat later by a companion exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (1936–37).¹²³ These exhibitions not only provided two of the most comprehensive surveys of the various movements and history of modernism, but also came to be seen after the Second World War as a paradigmatic formulation of modern art.¹²⁴

One of the factors contributing to their importance was they made no attempt to avoid the radical and potentially subversive aspects of modernism. They presented what was at that time a clearly defined picture of the trends considered significant, even though Barr expressly stated that the aim was to present a historical study in ‘a retrospective’ rather than ‘a controversial spirit’.¹²⁵ However, taken together, the exhibitions created a public and critical commotion that laid bare the existence of a yawning gulf between the avant-garde and the US public of the period, and it also contributed in no small measure to the proliferation of myths surrounding ‘misunderstood modernism’.¹²⁶ Although it may not have been the first or the largest of its kind, what made *Cubism and Abstract Art* such a special exhibition was its character of an art-historical genealogy in which history was placed in an active relationship with the present. This difference also emerges from a comparison with *Les Maîtres de l’Art Indépendant* at the 1937 Paris World Fair. Where the French exhibition focused on a number of significant individuals, in *Cubism and Abstract Art*, the individual was subordinated to the historical process. The concept was made abundantly clear by the cover of the catalogue, which was adorned with Alfred Barr’s controversial diagram of the development of abstract art.

This image had a decisive influence on the way the history of modern art has been viewed in the post-war period and proved far more influential than the exhibition itself—or any other exhibition, for that matter. Its significance lies not in its didactic aim of providing the public with an introduction to the course of

art history, but rather in the way it formulates a developmental logic of the history of modernism in more general terms. Sibyl Gordon Kantor's meticulous biography of Alfred Barr reveals that he had two crucial qualifications for producing this diagram. He had been thoroughly schooled in art history at Harvard and Princeton, where, through his teacher and mentor Charles Rufus Morey, he became acquainted with what was at the time the most advanced research in formalism, in the work of Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin in particular.¹²⁷ As part of his preparations for his dissertation, he set off on an extensive European study trip in 1927–28 that took him to London, Amsterdam, Dessau, Berlin, Moscow, Paris and other places. There, Barr came in contact with some of the leading and most progressive representatives of European modernism, especially at the Bauhaus and its Russian counterpart VKhUTEMAS. This allowed him to acquire a rather unusually comprehensive grasp of the range and radicalism of modernism, not only in the visual arts and architecture, but also in other media. As a result, the idea of modernism as a coherent, supra-individual and transnational epochal style would be of crucial importance for Barr.¹²⁸ And it was this synthesis of first-hand information and historical analysis that served as the bedrock of the exhibition and which gave Barr's notion of (modernism as) modern art such a wide-ranging and enduring import. For this flow-chart of the development of abstract art, with its various interconnections, interrelationships and influences, also provided a formulation of the main direction of modern art: an evolution towards an ever purer and increasingly visual (medium-specific, self-reflexive) idiom.

The starting-point for the diagram was specific and, at that point, controversial: the Post-impressionism of the late nineteenth century, with the emphasis on Cézanne, Gauguin, van Gogh and Seurat.¹²⁹ Also displayed in the diagram are five rectangles of developmental influences outside the self-enclosed universe of the visual arts of the Western world that may be brought together under the headings of primitivism (Japanese prints, the art of the Middle East and 'negro sculpture') and modernity (the machine aesthetic and modern architecture).¹³⁰ The rectangles are differentiated graphically from the structure of the diagram, and their contents

appear as isolated monads of underlying influences; whereas, the various stylistic movements are bounded by open semi-circles, which suggest that they constitute distinct but integrated components of the system as an organic whole. Apart from the abstract effects of the rectangles, the development appears to be a perfectly isolated evolutionary sequence in which a veritable hodgepodge of movements and trends pours out of the sources of Syntheticism and Post-impressionism. Cubism occupies a central place, indicated by the size of the font, and leads on to the trends, which form geometrical abstract art. To the left of the main Cubist channel, all the influences of the late nineteenth century run together into Fauvism, which in turn leads on to an alternative line towards nongeometrical abstract art. Barr himself emphasised that the two strains making up contemporary abstract art (the biomorphic and the geometric) were refinements of the late nineteenth century trends towards subjectivism (van Gogh, Gauguin) and objectivism (Cézanne, Seurat), respectively.¹³¹ This allows one to detect a further level of abstraction in the diagram, consisting of two ideal straight lines below the confusion of various individual movements and styles. As Michael Auping has insightfully pointed out, this systematic approach appears to be a mirror image of the two tendencies in human consciousness, localised in the left and right hemispheres, respectively, of the brain: emotional creativity and rational logic.¹³²

The diagram can be difficult to analyse today because it seems so familiar. Few who have taken a foundation course in art history or read a handbook on twentieth-century art can have avoided having this diagram and its underlying tropes imprinted on their awareness: the main movements, the various influences and interrelationships, the autonomy and inherent essentialism of the developmental process, creative originality its ultimate driving force. And yet it was a historical accident that made Barr's diagram so applicable and, therefore, so significant: its description of two different trends towards abstraction appears to be an almost prophetic account of the post-war situation and the issues it faced.

A somewhat peculiar aspect of the selection of the diagram, which may not appear obvious at first, is that Barr chose to include so many movements in the process instead of refining it by

highlighting one or two significant strains (the route, for example, from Cubism through Orphism, Purism, Supremacism and Constructivism to the then contemporary Concrete Art). What he formulated instead was the pursuit of abstraction as an underlying impulse—a *Kunstwollen*, as it were—in modern art that, like the preoccupation of the Florentine Renaissance with the doctrines of perspective and proportion, was manifested everywhere and had occurred time after time.¹³³ This pursuit emerged as an essential form of expression that lay behind modernism's medley of movements, practices and idioms. At the same time, the thematic approach of the exhibition became a means of charting, characterising and presenting modernism as a whole to the American public. In this respect, the diagram served as a blueprint, or a concealed matrix, not just for the development of abstract art, but also for the understanding of modern art as a whole.¹³⁴

Barr himself could hardly be said to possess any exclusive copyright to this narrative or its fundamental criteria. The major significance of the diagram lies rather in the way it codifies and systematises theoretical propositions and identities that were produced by the historical avant-garde. It bears comparison with the curious text published in 1925 by El Lissitzky and Hans Arp under the title *Die Kunstisten 1924–1914*. This was not a historical survey in the accepted sense but a selection of movements, artists, quotations and images that began in the contemporary period and led backwards, while a line was simultaneously being drawn in graphic terms from 1924 into the future where a question mark was waiting.¹³⁵ The aim of bringing together the historical and the contemporary at a rhetorical question mark about the future course of modern art could be interpreted as providing a form of guidance for the general public, as a historical legitimisation of contemporary radical art and as the creation of a genealogy within avant-garde discourse. The book also clearly demonstrates the level of historical awareness to be found in the avant-garde at this time and how the variety of -isms could be presented in a chronological sequence in order to distinguish a general development that transcended individual styles. While Barr, for his part, does not deviate noticeably from this catalogue of -isms and, indeed, formulates what is in many respects the same image of the

situation of modern art, he does so not as an artist or critic but as an art historian.¹³⁶ It is here, too, that a major difference lies, specifically in an institutional context: where El Lissitzky and Hans Arp were attempting to formulate a historical context within and for avant-garde discourse as a private initiative, Barr was speaking from his position as the head of a public art museum. His proposition was inscribed, in other words, as a legitimate representation in the context constituted by the official exhibitionary complex.

There is an additional similarity between Barr's diagram and *Die Kunstismen* that is crucial: they both make generalisations that transcend the national and the culturally specific. Although the nationalities of the artists were indicated in the catalogue to *Cubism and Abstract Art*, this information had no bearing on the image of a universal development that the diagram presented. To this end, movements and artists with a more local impact were excluded, as were works that were created before or after those deemed of significance to the major evolutionary line.¹³⁷ Barr was not, however, describing a determinist development; instead, every artist was faced with a choice: whether he or she wanted to be part of the progressive, forward movement of the modern era or to stand outside it.¹³⁸ Evident here are the two diverse and paradoxically interacting interpretive matrices referred to in relation to the historiography of *documenta* held in Kassel in 1955: the understanding of the development of modern art as both a supra-individual, essentialist process and a narrative about the autonomous efficacy and capacity for reflection of the individual in modern society. These two narrative structures might appear essentially opposed to one another, but it is in fact more a matter of the one determining the other. While the development of modern art could be understood as supra-individual, it was dependent on the choice of the individual, because as we all know, there are different kinds of choices, heroic as well as cowardly ones. In the political context of the post-war period, the individual artist could, as we have seen, be presented as a symbolic representative of the free man, the corollary being that the very existence of a real freedom of choice—and the creative action of the individual in this situation—was the factor that led art (and society) forward.

To refer in this instance to a range of different narratives and tropes, or like Carol Duncan to distinguish a standard modernist narrative, would be to miss the point to some extent.¹³⁹ For it is possible, in my view, to distinguish a more fundamental pattern that links together the various normative attributes and the individual narratives; this pattern establishes the standard, so to speak, behind the standard narrative. This pattern involves a narrative of the art world and history that is not primarily concerned with the experiences and statements of the individual, but it provides instead an underlying matrix that defines the parameters for the possible within every particular interpretation. While the pattern under discussion takes the form of a narrative, it functions rather as a metanarrative.¹⁴⁰

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The normalisation of the modernist metanarrative could be described in terms of a number of stages, in which the typical (modernism as a vital movement in the discourse) becomes presented over time as the ideal type (modernism defines the discourse), only to be transformed a few years later into an archetypal assumption (modernism's definition of the discourse as an underlying presupposition). As an archetype, this notion remains below the surface; it need not be legitimated and explained in terms of its historical premises but has become instead a self-evident premise on which to base the understanding of the visual culture of modernity. And it is as an archetype that the notion of the modernity of modernism is also introduced at this point as a self-evident premise in the interpretation of modern art: modernism is no longer just a crucial part of the visual culture of modernity, modernism *is* the modern.

This change brought with it both an expansion and restriction of the field and range of avant-garde visual culture. A key trope, formulated in various ways in the programmes of movements such as Bauhaus, De Stijl and VKhUTEMAS, was that the visual arts have to be abandoned as an autonomous value sphere in favour of an all-inclusive and socially integrated environmental design. In *Painting as Model* (1990), Yve-Alain Bois has interpreted these efforts in relation to the view of history taken by the modernist movements, and by De Stijl in particular:

De Stijl was a typically modernist movement, whose theory was grounded on those two ideological pillars of modernism, historicism and essentialism. On historicism, because on the one hand De Stijl conceived of its production as the logical culmination of the art of the past, and on the other because it prophesied in quasi-Hegelian terms the inevitable dissolution of art into an all-encompassing sphere (“life” or “the environment”). On 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.¹⁴¹

These two pillars also serve as the basis of Barr’s programme—both for the exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* and for MoMA as an institution—as evidenced in its inclusive approach, in which a wealth of different media were represented, and its formalist focus on, and understanding of, the development of the various media as linear and autonomous processes. Barr had learnt the lesson of Bauhaus in this regard: every medium has to be developed according to its particular characteristics, while all media start from the same basic course in the aesthetics of form. And yet this is also the very point at which the disparate clusters of forms and movements of the historical avant-garde are circumscribed, classified and legitimated as modern art—and by extension as modernism. The open-ended question mark of the fragmentary image is being transformed into the definitive full stop of the historicising system.

Barr’s diagram should not, however, be seen as the absolute origin of the historiography of the post-war period. Instead, through its codification and systematisation of certain aspects of the theory, practice and historiography of the historical avant-garde, it provides a condensed and explanatory image of how the history of modern art can be written. Its entrenchment in the identity of the avant-garde is of crucial importance in this regard, because it was the actors of the art world itself who wrote the history of modern art after the war. Moreover, the diagram does not simply

constitute a specific image or narrative but should be considered rather as a manifestation of a particular discursive order. In this regard, it needs to be read in relation to the purely physical presentation and staging of the modernist programme by the modern museums after the Second World War. This staging not only involved the placing of artefacts of different kinds in an alien context, but also the recoding and incorporation of artefacts as material and discursive objects within the specific sign system of the modern art museum: the white cube.

In *The Power of Display* (1998), Mary Anne Staniszewski has convincingly described how revolutionary Barr's exhibition praxis actually was; this may be difficult to understand today because it has set the pattern for the normal to such a considerable extent. He abandoned the remaining vestiges of the Salon-hang with its tightly-packed collections of pictures and placed each work at eye level against a neutral background, with the works being hung in chronological sequences that emphasised their individuality and unicity, while also situating them in an overarching ahistorical and timeless unity.¹⁴² The point is not, however, as Staniszewski maintains, that this exhibition aesthetic constitutes a decontextualisation but rather that it introduced a recontextualisation through the creation of a new set of relationships in which the unique visual and aesthetic qualities of the work were emphasised while the object was simultaneously liberated from its historic, cultural and medial connotations. In 'Inside the White Cube' (1976), Brian O'Doherty describes how the modern exhibition space also constitutes not only part of the modernist aesthetic, but also of its particular ways of reading and its historiography:

The history of modernism is intimately framed by that space; or rather the history of modern art can be correlated with changes in that space and in the way we see it. We have now reached a point where we see not the art but the space first. . . . An image comes to mind of a white, ideal space that, more than any single picture, may be the archetypical image of twentieth century art; it clarifies itself through a process of historical inevitability usually attached to the art it contains. . . . The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself. This gives the space a presence possessed by other spaces where conventions are

preserved through a closed system of values. Some of the sanctity of the church, the formality of the courtroom, the mystique of the experimental laboratory joins with chic design to produce a unique chamber of esthetics.¹⁴³

The objection I would make to one aspect of Doherty's account is that what is peculiar to the white cube is not that it appears obvious to an observer but that it demonstrates a remarkable combination of being entirely visible and completely invisible at the same time. However, the crucial point is his identification of this apparently neutral space as a primary discursive technology for the constitution of meaning and value. The white cube serves at one and the same time as the material and immaterial surface of the modernist institution: the space in which the possible transformations of the art world occur and are legitimated and where the parameters for the interpretation of contemporary art are determined.¹⁴⁴

In this sense, the white cube could be said to constitute the fundamental parergon of the modernist aesthetic: an aspect of the discursive order that is both invisible and fully observable and which, to the extent that it is detected at all, can be construed from the structure of the space and the forms of presentation. This bears comparison with Michel Foucault's description of the way rooms in eighteenth century schools were structured as 'the internal discourse of the institution', the ideas, that is, about children's sexuality that lay behind the particular differentiation of spaces and functions.¹⁴⁵ And yet the white cube and the modern museum, as the institutionalised spaces of modernism, amount to something other and something more than a mere differentiation of function. They provide, as Brian O'Doherty maintains, a frame for the interpretation of historical and contemporary art.

One obvious example is the way in which different media were incorporated in the exhibition on *Cubism and Abstract Art*; despite the use of informative texts and documentary photographs, all the images, texts and objects were fully integrated within the aestheticising and evolutionist matrix of the diagram.¹⁴⁶ The price for being able to include such a broad spectrum of different media in the collections of MoMA was that every object, irrespective

of its genre or original function, was selected and interpreted on the basis of the same template: aesthetic artefacts in the neutral white cube of the museum. As Douglas Crisp points out in *On the Museum's Ruins* (1993), this did not just mean that revolutionising or revolutionary movements in the history of modernism were tamed, but that what were in medial terms cross-boundary projects, such as those of Soviet Constructivism and German Dadaism, whose various experiments with montage, live performances, new sculptural materials, product design and spatial installations were intended to transcend the conventions of the traditional concept of art, were fitted into and classified in the separate medial compartments they had been attempting to demolish: painting, sculpture, photography, design and architecture.¹⁴⁷ Here, the once so revolutionary idea of a visual culture that participates in the social and political transformation of modern life—transcending the medial and aesthetic boundaries of bourgeois society—is neutralised and adapted to an autonomous abstract order, beyond the reach of the turbulence of the political and social world and its occasionally violent upheavals.

The relationship between modernism and modernity was not a means in this instance to situate the artefact in its historical context or to provide a stimulus to critical analysis of the institutionalised order of the different media; it formed a tacit precondition for the authenticity of modern art. This could be considered perhaps the most radical and definitely the most significant innovation of the formalist aesthetic. During the first half of the twentieth century, formalism developed from one of the leading ideas of studio discussion and the discourses of art education into an essential, although never dominant, tendency in the discourses of the artistic manifesto and of art criticism, and, ultimately, from the 1930s onwards, into a key starting point for the presentation and interpretation of historical and contemporary modern art in the modern museum. The modernist metanarrative thus emerges from, and transforms, perceptions, identities, theories and forms of legitimation that became established in the discourse of the avant-garde but is, as a result of its institutional base, far more wide-ranging and authoritative than the individual representations of that discourse. For unlike the narrative structure set up

by the formation of an individual or professional identity, the metanarrative operates primarily in historiography, without itself becoming the object of historical study, with various individual statements being woven together while being simultaneously adapted to an overarching interpretive matrix.

Such underlying patterns can no doubt be discerned in all kinds of narratives and statements. The existence of metanarratives need not be understood as something suspect or conspiratorial. There is, however, one aspect of this underlying interpretive matrix that is extremely problematic, and that is its invisibility. It is actively at work in the writing of history but presented as natural. In this sense, the modernist metanarrative calls to mind Roland Barthes' definition of myth as a secondary semiological system (a metalanguage), which begins at the point an already extant linguistic meaning comes to an end.¹⁴⁸ The myth is, in other words, a distinct narrative form that, irrespective of substance and content, constitutes a certain way of reading and produces a particular kind of understanding:

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact. . . . In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes the world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves.¹⁴⁹

Myth thus creates an understanding based on a particular pre-understanding, but nevertheless it transcends this by excluding part of the meaning and by transforming a historically specific import into a statement of a universal kind, presenting the historically specific as the natural, that is. An obvious example is the white cube, which parades itself quite openly in public while nevertheless remaining hidden by its putatively neutral and innocuous universality. Its existence has to be pointed out if the viewer

is to discover what has been right in front of him or her the whole time as an unquestioned and natural background to the exhibition. And its existence has to be problematised and historicised in order to understand that this neutrality is actually permeated by aesthetic, social and ideological norms: a metanarrative that defines the discursive order in which every single object acquires its legitimacy and meaning.

The metanarrative cannot, of course, be compared with myths in the general sense, even though a set of myths has been produced within its field (about artists, art works, creativity, presence, originality, alienation, the transgression of boundaries). But unlike the retrospective nature of myth, the metanarrative points forward and should therefore be understood as both an ideological and an epistemological narrative, a formulation of the world that encompasses a range of different ideas and representations but produces a specific order whose evaluations and selections are presented as self-evident, neutral and universal and which actively excludes or obscures competing forms of thought.¹⁵⁰ In this regard, it functions as an underlying framework that is taken for granted rather than as an explicitly articulated norm.

Like Fredric Jameson, one could interpret modernism as a periodising category whose metanarrative serves as a spectral and allegorical subtext that incorporates the individual work and determines the parameters for its possible meanings.¹⁵¹ We are faced here with a reflexive relationship that is both the end of its own teleological explanation and yet remains open-ended towards the objects that can be included, with the selection serving as the subtext and the subtext representing a narrative about the *telos* of progress and history. A context is thus established in which the fragmentary and contradictory elements of history are integrated within a coherent and unified system. This discursive system is manifested both by the neutral exhibition space and the linear narrative, and it defines a specific course through modern art that leaves no room for question marks or alternative routes.

Endnotes

1. Robert B. Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem. On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture*, Oxford/Cambridge (Mass.) 1991, p. 45.
2. Mary Kelly, "Re-viewing Modernist Criticism" (1981), in Brian Wallis (ed.), *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, New York 1984, p. 95.
3. Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, London 1987 (1977), p. 9.
4. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide. Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Bloomington/Indianapolis 1986, p. 197.
5. See Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China*, (Trans. Robert Chandler), London 1990, p. ix.
6. James D. Herbert, *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition*, Ithaca/London 1998, p. 87.
7. The reconstruction that follows is based on the catalogue for the exhibition *Les Maîtres de l'Art Indépendant, 1895-1937*, Paris 1937. Concerning the selection of artworks, see also Dawn Ades, "Paris 1937. Art and Power of Nations", *Art and Power. Europe Under the Dictators 1930-45*, Hayward Gallery 1995-1996, London 1995, p. 59. The criterion on which this selection was based was that the artists in question should either be French citizens or they should have lived and worked in France for a long time.
8. Herbert, p. 100.
9. *Ibid*, p. 103.
10. *Ibid*, p. 124.
11. For a brief survey of the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, see Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition. New Art in the 20th Century*, New York 1994, pp. 116-135.
12. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), *Illuminations* (ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn), London 1999 (1955), p. 215.

13. Ibid, pp. 227–228.
14. Ibid, p. 231.
15. Greenberg (1939), 1988 a, p. 22.
16. Ibid, p. 17.
17. Ibid, p. 10.
18. Benjamin (1936), 1999, p. 235.
19. Terry Eagleton, *Ideology. An Introduction*, London/New York 1996 (1991), pp. 2 and 6.
20. Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History. Meditations on a Coy Science*, New Haven/London 1989, p. 22.
21. Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art. Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, Chicago/London 1983, p. 3.
22. See Harald Kimpel, *Documenta. Mythos und Wirklichkeit*, Köln 1997, pp. 94–95. On the night of 22 October 1943, 83% of the city's housing and 63% of its industry were destroyed in a massive bombing raid. In 1939, Kassel had a population of 216,000 inhabitants, by the end of the war, this had shrunk to only 71,000.
23. Ibid, p. 128.
24. *Documenta. Kunst des XX. Jahrhunderts*, München 1955, unpaginated (p. 5). The foreign delegates included the ambassadors of France, the United States and Great Britain, and the Swedish envoy Herr Kumlin.
25. Werner Haftmann, *Malerei im 20. Jahrhundert*, München 1954.
26. This exhibition, which comprised over 650 works, was shown in eleven cities from 1937 to 1941 and attracted around 1.2 million visitors. Some of the works would subsequently end up in the hands of highly placed party functionaries who made them part of their own collections, some were offered at auctions at which collectors and museums from all over the world made acquisitions. What works were left were finally burnt in a manner reminiscent of the book-burnings of 1933. For an in-depth analysis and documentation

of these exhibitions and their political context, see Stephanie Barron (ed.), *Degenerate Art. The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, New York 1991 and Walter Grasskamp, “Degenerate Art and Documenta I: Modernism Ostracized and Disarmed”, in Daniel J. Sherman & Irit Rogoff (eds.), *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, London 1994, pp. 163–194. The double standard revealed by the fact that some of the works were included in private Nazi collections speaks volumes about the real political and rhetorical function of the exhibitions (and the bonfires of art): rather than being concerned primarily with the establishment of aesthetic norms, the aim was to use avant-garde art in a fairly simple and populist fashion as a cautionary tale on the degenerate culture of the Weimar period that was targeted at domestic opinion. And if Joseph Goebbels actually felt a certain sympathy for German Expressionism or Herman Göring appropriated a couple of works by Gauguin was completely irrelevant as long as this remained a private matter and was kept outside the sphere of political rhetoric.

27. See Hans Belting, *Art History after Modernism*, Chicago/London 2003 (1995), p. 39.

28. Grasskamp, pp. 168–169.

29. See John M. MacGregor, *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane*, Princeton 1989, pp. 161–163 and pp. 238–239.

30. Kimpel, pp. 258–274.

31. This approach characterised almost every survey exhibition and handbook about modernism after the Second World War. One example can be found in Herbert Read’s *The Philosophy of Modern Art* (London 1951, p. 13), where he asserted that there was no art form from the cave paintings of the Palaeolithic period to contemporary Constructivism that could not be derived from Man’s universal, biological and predestined creativity. Another, and at the time, incredibly influential example was André Malraux’ *Psychologie de l’art. Le musée imaginaire*, in which he maintained that photography and the new and more sophisticated techniques of reproduction were throwing wide the doors to a museum of the imagination that would allow images from various times and places to be compared

and so facilitate a new understanding of their stylistic equivalency (Malraux, *The Psychology of Art. Museum without Walls*, (Trans. Stuart Gilbert), New York 1949 (1947), p. 24). So the formal analogies were more to do with stirring the imaginative capacity and associations of the viewer rather than engaging his or her historical and contextual knowledge. While based on a formalist/psychologising model, the approach set up in this way went beyond the classification, chronology and teleology of traditional handbooks and seemed at certain points to amount to a free intertextual flow of images.

32. Dennis L. Bark & David R. Gress, *A History of West Germany. Vol. I: From Shadow to Substance 1945–1963*, Oxford/Cambridge (Mass.) 1989, pp. 248–250.

33. Guilbaut, 1983, p. 143.

34. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *The Consciousness Industry. On Literature, Politics, and the Media*, (Trans. John Simon), New York 1974 (1962), pp. 40–41.

35. Leslie Fiedler, “The Death of the Literary Avant-Garde” (1964), *The Collected Essays of Leslie Fiedler*, vol. II, New York 1971, p. 459.

36. See Susan Sontag, “Notes on Camp” (1964), *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, New York 2009 (1966), pp. 275–293.

37. An important example is the attempt by Jean-François Lyotard to establish the postmodern as an intellectual and ideological position in opposition to the market-oriented anything-goes realism of contemporary eclecticism. This involved demarcating a boundary to the modernist on the one hand, while establishing a continuity with (certain aspects) of history on the other; his response to the question of the implications of this position is formulated as a paradox: ‘A work can be modern only if it is first postmodern. Thus understood, postmodernism is not modernism at its end, but in a nascent state, and this state is recurrent.’ (Jean-François Lyotard, “An answer to the question, What is the Postmodern?” (1982), in *The Postmodern Explained*, Minneapolis 1997 (1988), p. 13). A position that was similarly critical of institutions was adopted by the editorial committee of the periodical *October* during the 1980s and 1990s. For Hal Foster and Benjamin Buchloh, the neo-Marxist interpretation of

postmodernism as institutional critique meant that the established use of the concept of the avant-garde could be redeployed not only to define a potentially radical position in the field, but also as a means of identifying certain artistic practices as radical in both aesthetic and political terms, practices that could be distinguished from the manipulations of visual culture by the consciousness industry while nevertheless defining a certain historical continuity with (a selection from) the visual logic of early modernism. In this regard, both Foster and Buchloh were attempting to surmount Peter Bürger's exclusively negative assessment of the NeoDadaism and Pop Art of the post-war period by bringing about a reinterpretation of the concept of the *neo-avantgarde*. In their work, this concept has come to mark a radical boundary within the pluralist domain of contemporary art by describing various artistic strategies as being the antitheses of what are perceived as uncritical, market-driven, commodity-fetishised and reactionary trends in the contemporary world (see e.g., Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real. The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 1996, in particular the essays 'Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avantgarde?', pp. 1–32, and 'The Art of Cynical Reason', pp. 99–124, and Benjamin Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry. Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 2000, pp. xxiv–xxv). The concept of the neo-avantgarde functions here as a mediating historical link between a selection of the trends of the early twentieth century (Dadaism and Constructivism in particular) and a more restrictive selection of the art of the present, where the emphasis is on the possibility of a countercultural, institution-critical and transgressive attitude that is simultaneously within and outside the established institutional order. In order to legitimate a genealogy of this kind, Bürger's definition of the *neo-avantgarde* (as an aestheticisation of the subversive attitude of the historical avant-garde) has to be repudiated in favour of a definition that allows us to realise how the radical art of the 1960s was actively engaged with a historical context and how this has also brought about a transformation of the institutional-critical position in our own time (Foster, 1996, p. 4).

38. Serge Guilbaut, "Postwar Painting Games: The Rough and the Slick", *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris and*

Montreal 1945–1964, (ed. Serge Guilbaut), Cambridge (Mass.)/London 1990, p. 43 ff.

39. Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, (Trans. Bernard Frechtman), Cambridge (Mass.) 1988 (1947), pp. 68–69.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

41. This type of criticism was a potent force, particularly in the cultural life of West Germany, which found itself obliged in various ways to process, interpret and understand the barbarism that had been unleashed by its own society (see Hermann Glaser, *Kulturgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Bd. 2: Zwischen Grundgesetz und Grosser Koalition 1949–1967*, München/Wien 1986, pp. 263–266).

42. Serge Guilbaut, “The Frightening Freedom of the Brush: The Boston Institute of Contemporary Art and Modern Art” (1985), in Marcia Pointon (ed.), *Art Apart. Art Institutions and Ideology Across England and North America*, Manchester/New York 1994, pp. 233–234. Guilbaut describes how its manifesto and subsequent change of name from Institute of Modern Art to the more neutral Institute of Contemporary Art were an attempt to establish a liberal middle course between the modernist and conservative camps. These efforts were, however, immediately identified by both sides as a movement away from liberalism and towards conservatism. The same applied to the exhibition ‘American Painting in Our Century’ in 1949, which was immediately kidnapped by conservative actors and enrolled in the campaign against modernism as being un-American, foreign, subversive and potentially Communist (pp. 238–241).

43. See Helen Fuchs, *Glasmåleri, modernitet och modernism. Studier i glasmåleriets (konst)historia*, (Diss. Lunds universitet 2005), Lund 2005, pp. 101–118 for a discussion about various positions within the Catholic church in relation to modernist and abstract art.

44. Hans Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte. Die bildende Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts als Symbol der Zeit*, Salzburg 1948.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

46. There are a number of interesting points of agreement between Sedlmayr’s account and the critique of Enlightenment that Max

Horkeimer and Theodor Adorno formulated in their *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1947), even though they were working from diametrically opposed ideological positions. Their analyses of the causes of the decline of the modern era also diverge: where Sedlmayr sees fragmentation as the root of all evil, Horkheimer and Adorno consider that the Enlightenment and modernity become totalitarian as a result of their pursuit of uniformity. Moreover, for Adorno, the authentic (modernist) work of art appeared to remain virgin territory within the modern; whereas, for Sedlmayr, the only conceivable (though scarcely credible) salvation lay in the one healthy vein still accessible in our time: the omnipresent longing for wholeness.

47. Hans Sedlmayr held the position of professor of art history at the Technische Hochschule in Vienna from 1936 to 1945, at the Ludwig Maximilian Universität in Munich from 1952 to 1963 and at the University of Salzburg from 1963 to 1969. He became a member of the Austrian Nazi party as early as 1932, while it was still illegal to do so, and several years before the *Anschluss*. There are certainly points of contact between Sedlmayr's critique of culture and modernity and some of the cultural policy doctrines of Nazism, particularly where the aggressive description of the decline of modern art comes close to the notion that contemporary culture is degenerate. There are no explicit links made in Sedlmayr's book between this phenomenon and ethnic or racial causative factors, which would have made the book impossible to publish in Austria only three years after the end of the war. Instead, the decline is described in the more general terms of a critique of civilisation. The generality of its approach no doubt meant that *Verlust der Mitte* could play a crucial role in the post-war cultural debate; that very quality, however, also allows it to be considered in many ways as a typical representative of the antimodernism of the time. For a discussion of Sedlmayr's role in the art world of Nazi Germany, see Jonathan Petropoulos, *The Faustian Bargain. The Art World in Nazi Germany*, New York 2000, pp. 169 and 204; Friedrich Stadler, "The Emigration and Exile of Austrian Intellectuals" *The Cultural Exodus of Austrian* (eds. Friedrich Stadler & Peter Weibel), New York 1995, pp. 14–26.

48. Sedlmayr, pp. 165–168.

49. Ibid, p. 242.

50. See Alfred Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1936 (the catalogue cover) and Christian Zevros, *Histoire de l'art contemporain*, Paris 1938. Both of these are based largely on the same chronology of various -isms presented in schematic form, from the pioneers of Post-impressionism via Fauvism and Cubism to the present. It is worth noting that both accord considerable space to Marcel Duchamp, even though his ready-mades were excluded.

51. Werner Haftmann, *Painting in the Twentieth Century. Vol. 1: An Analysis of the Artists and Their Work*, (Trans. Ralph Manheim), New York 1976 (1965), p 10.

52. Kimpel, p. 258.

53. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, (Trans. Thomas Burger & Frederick Lawrence), Cambridge (Mass.), 1989 (1962), pp. 141–143.

54. In a brief historical survey, Nancy Jachec describes how this research can be divided from the beginning of the 1970s into three generations that deal with this theme from rather different angles of approach (“Transatlantic Cultural Politics in the late 1950s: the Leaders and Specialists Grant Program”, *Art History*, vol. 26, Sept. 2003: 4, pp. 533 and 552, n. 1–3).

55. At the end of the Second World War there was good reason on all sides to fear a global economic depression similar to the one that had convulsed Europe following the First World War. American policy was therefore primarily oriented towards establishing structures for an open world economy based on the free exchange of goods, capital and technology (Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power. National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War*, Stanford 1992, p. 16). Under the leadership of both Truman and Eisenhower, the US conducted an active and expansionist European policy whose goal was to reconstruct the free world around American leadership. The European Recovery Program (known as the Marshall Plan) was put into effect between 1948 and 1952 to counteract the chaos of the situation in Europe. This plan entailed

making enormous loans to several Western European states and, in tandem with political, social and economic reforms, laid the foundations for a remarkable economic recovery during the 1950s. The US set up various monetary and financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund; it also initiated the GATT agreement, a multilateral treaty that proved to be of great importance for the control of tariffs and international trade. The Truman administration made full use of its very powerful position after the war to ensure that a regulatory apparatus for international contacts was in place that would function irrespective of the various bilateral agreements in existence and despite the protectionist efforts of individual states. The attempts made by the US to ensure the economic, political and military stability of Western Europe may be understood in this context, as may the scale of American influence over this new order. But the provisions of the Marshall Plan were also offset by American demands that were both economic and political in nature and increasingly tied improved trade to the issue of military support (for an analysis of these links, see Leffler, pp. 182–219). These requirements covered issues as diverse as the abolition by the recipient countries of protectionist import regulations, the integration of Germany into the western hemisphere and the need to exclude national Communist parties from direct participation in government (Jean-Pierre Rioux, *The Fourth Republic 1944–1958*, (Trans. Godfrey Rogers), Cambridge 1987 (1980/1983), p. 134). The former meant that the European market was opened up to American goods, while the latter facilitated the forming of a stable front against the East, particularly in France and Italy where the Communist parties enjoyed powerful popular support. In parallel with the Marshall Plan, the official American foreign policy stance promoted in 1947 and known as the Truman Doctrine involved a more general and long-term plan of action to maintain the independence of the nations of the West and acquired an institutional framework with the founding of NATO in 1948. The rhetoric underpinning this doctrine served to further entrench the image of a new world order that was based on a fundamental conflict between two incompatible ideological systems (John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1947*, New York/London 1972, p. 317). With the formation of Cominform in 1947, the Soviet Union was able to

exert a much firmer grip on its Eastern European satellites, with the result that the circumstances of political, social and cultural life were, to all intents and purposes, dictated by Moscow and the Eastern sphere was moulded into a monolithic bloc (see Fernando Claudin, *The Communist Movement. From Comintern to Cominform*, (Trans. Brian Pearce & Francis MacDonagh), Harmondsworth 1975 (1970), pp. 466–467. In practice, the Cominform ceased to function after the death of Stalin, and its military and foreign policy roles were assumed by the Warsaw Pact in 1955.

56. Richard Crockatt, *The Fifty Years War. The United States and the Soviet Union in World Politics, 1941–1991*, London/New York 1995, p. 75.

57. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 53–55.

58. Attempts were made to establish viable positions outside the bipolar system of the Cold War, such as the Bandung Conference in 1955 at which some Afro-Asian countries that had recently gained their independence from their respective colonial masters attempted to set up an independent group outside the conflict between East and West and beyond the influence of the Northern hemisphere (that of the US and Europe) under the name of the Third World, a term that had been coined a few years earlier. But every such attempt was almost immediately redefined within the overarching order of the bipolar system (see Cary Fraser, “An American Dilemma. Race and Realpolitik in the American Response to the Bandung Conference 1955”, in Brenda Gayle Plummer (ed.) *Window of Freedom. Race, Civil Rights and Foreign Affairs 1945–1988*, Chapel Hill 2003, pp. 120–124).

59. Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain. Stalinism as a Civilization*, Berkley 1995, p. 152.

60. *Ibid*, p. 360.

61. *Ibid*, pp. 180–181 and pp. 226–236.

62. Boris Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin. Die gesplattene Kultur in der Sowjetunion*, (translated from Russian by Gabriele Leupold), München/Wien 1996 (1988), p. 39. The party and the state were thus able to acquire a concerted grip not only on culture, but also

on the entirety of the industrial, economic and social structure of Soviet society. The proclamation of the first Stalinist Five-Year-Plan entailed the abolition of the previously formulated New Economic Policy and, in practice, of every form of critical margin, whether this involved separate and mutually competing organisations and schools or the private art market. The party took an even firmer grip on the art world in 1936 with the formation of the KPDI, the Committee for Art Affairs (see Matthew Cullerne Brown, *Socialist Realist Painting*, New Haven/London 1998, p. 220). This gradual process may be considered from the perspective of Igor Golomstock's description of the way various totalitarian regimes have shared a fundamentally similar attitude towards the function of art in society; he portrays this as a seizure of power in five stages: (1) the state declares that art and cultural affairs as a whole constitute an ideological weapon and a resource in the struggle for power, (2) the state acquires a monopoly over the art world of the country, (3) the state sets up a comprehensive apparatus for the control of the art world, (4) the state selects one among the various artistic movements still in existence to be given official sanction, and (5) the state declares war against all the alternative trends and forms of representation (Golomstock, p. xiii).

63. Brown, p. 226. The Academy of Arts of the USSR was structured along the lines of the Russian Imperial Academy of Arts, which was established in 1757 and abolished in 1918. The organisational model for control over the art world was thus derived from the academic systems of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although with the major difference that the Soviet model possessed an absolute hegemony over all forms of representation, making critical margins and alternative approaches impossible.

64. Andrei Zhdanov, "Soviet Literature – The Richest in Ideas. The Most Advanced Literature" (1934), in H. G. Scott (ed.), *Soviet Writers Congress 1934. The Debate on Socialist Realism and Modernism*, London 1977 (1935), pp. 15–24. Zhdanov began his speech by praising the incomparable superiority of the Soviet state in all areas of society, the cultural in particular, stating that no previous epoch in history had come close to matching the level achieved by Soviet culture. Taking Stalin's definition of the writer as the engineer of human souls as his watchword, Zhdanov went on to say that the specific task of

art, like every other social sector, was to serve the Socialist state. There was, however, one problem: literature and art had not yet come close to fulfilling their potential and could not be said to be properly serving the state. Zhdanov was among those who were closest to Stalin at the head of the party. He played a major role in the Great Purge from 1936 to 1938 and, as governor of Leningrad, he organised the defence of the city against the German troops during the Second World War; he was also one of the figures behind the setting up of Cominform in 1947. His speech bore the stamp of an officially sanctioned doctrine and was followed by a series of condemnations of anti-Soviet (cosmopolitan) and aesthetically subversive (formalist) modernism.

65. Brown, p. 141.

66. Groys, pp. 42–43.

67. It is in this light that the relatively extensive range of the praxis of Socialist Realism—from delicate realistic depictions of everyday life to bombastic neo-Baroque tableaux of heroic achievements by the party and hagiographic portraits of the Leader—may best be understood. The rhetorical function of Socialist Realism meant that art had to be both evocative and easily understood in terms of form and content. And it was here, too, that the interpretive element and freedom of movement that the code of Socialist Realism nevertheless made possible could be found, because the universally applicable and objective character of the ideology had to be portrayed in a way that was subjectively convincing (Groys, p. 61). In every type of subject matter, artists were supposed to be guided by specific content criteria whose key categories were *partiinnost* (the realisation of the leading role of the Communist party in all areas) and *ideinnost* (the introduction of new ideas and ideological content), followed by *narodnost* (popular and national support) and *klassovost* (class consciousness) (see David Elliott, *Art and Power. Europe Under the Dictators 1930–45*, Hayward Gallery 1995–1996, London 1995, p. 187). The common denominator for all the various parts of this praxis was, however, that it both could and *had* to be interpreted in a political context.

68. See for instance Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta. Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe 1945–1989*, (transl. Anna Brzyski), London 2009 (2005).

69. Various loyalty programmes were coordinated with campaigns to create a specific climate of opinion. There was a particular focus on the prime importance of education as a means of fostering a profound patriotic insight into the personal responsibility incumbent on every individual in the open, but continually threatened, democratic system (see Richard M. Freeland, *The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism. Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics and International Security, 1946–1948*, New York/London 1985 (1970), pp. 201–245. In March 1947, nine days after launching the idea of the Truman Doctrine in a speech to Congress, President Truman gave the order for a new initiative aimed at eliminating disloyal public employees, known as the Federal Employee Loyalty Program. As part of this programme, a series of campaigns were conducted in various fields, intended to establish officially sanctioned parameters for acceptable political activities. The attorney general published a list of subversive organisations, while new rules governing the conduct of public employees were also devised. Membership in, or any form of association with, these organisations disqualified an individual from employment within federal or local government and could lead to the dismissal of those already employed, which made it extremely risky in practice for a public employee to express any deviation from the officially determined political course. New and stricter regulations covering immigration were another measure that was introduced, and the authorities were given greater powers to deport subversive elements. These efforts even went so far as to attempt to initiate a loyalty programme for the press; however, this initiative encountered such resistance that it was withdrawn. Unreliable reporters could, on the other hand, be denied exit visas, and a codified system for what information could be communicated to the mass media was set up. The Freedom Train was sent around the country in 1947 as a representation of all these efforts in symbolic form. A combination of a museum of the history of the US and a campaign for greater patriotism, this train visited hundreds of communities. Freeland shows how all these measures meant that Truman was able to recapture the initiative in a number of fields where the Republicans would otherwise have carried the day, thus creating the freedom of manoeuvre in foreign policy he required (for the approval of the Marshall Plan in particular). However, they also laid the ground for the politically

charged climate of opinion that Senator Joseph McCarthy successfully exploited a few years later for his campaigns.

70. Alan Brinkley, “The Illusion of Unity in Cold War Culture”, Peter J. Kuznick & James Gilbert (eds.), *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, Washington/London 2001, p. 72.

71. This applies to movements ranging from civil rights to women’s rights to the sexual equality of homosexuals in the form of the early homophile groups to literary and artistic subcultures. Despite the fact these movements developed in a repressive environment, they were able to claim legitimacy precisely because they could invoke the focus of official rhetoric on the freedom of the individual in contrast to Stalinist oppression (see Joanne Meyerowitz, “Sex, Gender, and the Cold War Language of Reform”, in Peter J. Kuznick & James Gilbert (eds.), *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, Washington/London 2001, p. 117).

72. Kathryn Boyer, *Political Promotion and Institutional Patronage. How New York Displaced Paris as the Center of Contemporary Art, c:a 1955–1968*, (Diss. University of Kansas 1994), UMI Dissertation Services, Michigan 1995, pp. 51–52.

73. See Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War. The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*, New York 2000 (1999), pp. 148–153.

74. Jachec, p. 536.

75. Eva Cockcroft, “Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War” (1974), *Pollock and After. The Critical Debate*, (ed. Francis Frascina), London 1985, pp. 126–133. At this point, the members of MoMA’s board of trustees included individuals such as Porter A. McCray (who worked during the war for the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs and who was made responsible for MoMA’s international programme in 1952), Thomas W. Braden (Secretary of MoMA’s governing body from 1948 to 1949, and from 1951, he was responsible for the cultural activities of the CIA) and, most importantly, its president Nelson Rockefeller (coordinator of the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Chairman of the Board of Chase Manhattan Bank and son of Abby Rockefeller, one of MoMA’s original donors).

76. Saunders, pp. 262–263.

77. Jachec, pp. 550–551.

78. Benjamin Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry. Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 2000, p. xx.

79. The domestic political life scene in post-war France was dominated by three parties of roughly equal strength: the Socialists, Communists and Conservatives. The constitution was not, however, designed to aid the formation of stable governments, and twenty or so governments were formed during the existence of the Fourth Republic, which lasted from 1946 to 1958. France was able to recover economically with the help of the Marshall Plan, although at nothing like the pace of West Germany. Accepting American financial help was by no means an uncomplicated process in France, which was fully determined to reestablish its sense of national identity and its place among the great powers. One obvious price it had to pay for this financial support—and a condition of American aid—was the exclusion of the Communist party from the coalition government of 1947 (at that time it was the largest party in France with over 30% of the votes), (Rioux, p. 134). The chaotic nature of the domestic political situation pushed France into an extremely unstable position at the end of the 1950s, and this led to the creation of a new constitution. The Fifth Republic was proclaimed in 1958 and gave the president a much stronger power base. Charles de Gaulle won the first presidential election of the new republic and emerged as the strong man of France. Three issues dominated France's relations with the rest of the world at this point: European integration (the creation of a common market), the country's increasingly apparent intention to play an independent role in the conflict between East and West (a national defence and foreign policy course that culminated in the withdrawal from NATO in 1966) and the dissolution of its colonial empire (in which the Algerian crisis played a major role in terms of both domestic and cultural politics).

80. The importance of Paris for the international art market also diminished at this time particularly because of tax legislation that

did not favour the donation of art to public institutions, unlike the American system in which loans and donations gave rise to substantial tax reductions (Boyer, 1995, pp. 92–93). The situation in France was also affected by restrictive export rules and by the state regulation of the art trade that awarded a monopoly to particular auction houses. But the country still preserved a significant potential in this regard: the art market was extremely active once more at the end of the 1940s and eclipsed New York in terms of price. This state of affairs, however, gradually changed during the 1950s when economic growth created increasingly favourable circumstances for the American art world (Michael D. Plante, ‘*The Second Occupation*’. *American Expatriate Painter and the Reception of American Art in Paris 1946–1958*, (Diss. Brown University 1992), UMI Dissertation Services, p. 454).

81. The Musée National d’Art Moderne (MNAM) was inaugurated in 1939 and housed in the Palais de Tokyo. Although a certain amount of exhibition activity did take place during the war, it did not begin presenting regular exhibitions until 1947 (Catherine Lawless (ed.), *Musée national d’art moderne. Historique et mode d’emploi*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris 1986, p. 87). It then assumed the position of France’s official museum for contemporary art, which had been previously been held by the Musée de Luxembourg (1818–1886) and the Musée de l’Orangerie, respectively, for French art and by the Jeu de Paume (1886–1939) for international work (see Boyer, 1995, pp. 118–119). Essentially MNAM represented the officially sanctioned attitude to contemporary art, and its collections were organised on the basis of the so-called Louvre-Luxembourg system from the outset (Plante, p. 130). The exhibition programme of MNAM after the end of the war clearly signalled that the French state had abandoned the academic discourse of art for good (Eustathia P. Costopopolus, “Musée National d’Art Moderne”, in Virginia Jackson (ed.), *Art Museums of the World*, New York/London 1987, p. 294).

82. The collection of the Musée National d’Art Moderne was largely comprised of art that derived from the Fauvist and Cubist traditions (Laure de Buzon-Vallet, “L’Ecole de Paris. Élément d’une enquête”, *Paris-Paris. Création en France: 1937–1957*, Centre national d’art et de culture Georges Pompidou, Paris 1981, p. 252). In his

reconstruction of the collections at MNAM, Sylvain Lecombe has shown what this programme looked like in practice (*La peinture en France au lendemain de la seconde guerre mondiale: 1944-53*, Paris 1979). Although one of the museum's rooms was assigned to Surrealism, that movement's place in the hang as a whole was extremely peripheral. There was no space at all allocated to movements that had developed outside Paris. Although devoting an entire room to Picasso was not a problem because he had worked in Paris throughout his career, which could be said to have developed within a French tradition, not the slightest interest was shown in acquiring works for display by artists such as Mondrian or Kandinsky. Michael Plante goes so far as to maintain that official art policy lacked any sort of coherent vision or understanding of contemporary art beyond its nationalist credo (Plante, p. 129).

83. Harry Bellet, "1943-1959: des galleries", *Cimaise*, vol. 36, no. 199, 1989, p. 25.

84. At the beginning of the 1950s, a split occurred among the advocates of nonfigurative art between what were known as *abstrait froid* (geometric abstraction) and *abstrait chaude* (nongeometric abstraction) (see Plante, p. 158). The Salon des Réalistes Nouvelles had its roots in the nonfigurative art of the interwar years and was formed in 1939 from the circle surrounding the group Abstraction-Création, which, in its turn, had come into being as a merger of the previous Cercle et Carré and Art concret groups. There was an evident set of historical and social interrelationships underpinning the tradition of geometric abstract art. The Salon succeeded in establishing abstract art in the Paris art world by mounting extensive thematic exhibitions: *Art abstrait, concret, constructivisme, non figuratif* was shown in 1946 and consisted of 384 works; exhibitions of more than 600 works were subsequently shown annually and included not only French and European, but also American art. The latter trend, whose more radical variants are usually referred to as *art brut* or *art informel*, was centred around the Galleri René Drouin and the Studio Paul Facchetti. The growing significance of *art informel* was reflected in the increasing criticism of the impersonal idiom of concrete art and of its roots in a Utopian rhetoric of the 1930s. The critic Michael Tapié played a key role in the promotion and expansion of this movement, and his

approach went far beyond the national and retrospective pathos of the official art world: he was among the first to include American abstract expressionism in his exhibitions and considered Surrealism and Dadaism in particular as the foremost (or even the only) historical influences on contemporary art (Plante, pp. 318–319 and pp. 323–324). Tapié's vision was, then, not about continuity, tradition and the formation of national schools but much closer in fact to Werner Haftmann's thesis that nonfigurative and informal art was a response to a universal need on the part of the contemporary individual.

85. Boyer, 1995, pp. 80–86. In practice, it was a very small circle of individuals drawn from the political and cultural spheres, who were closely connected and often bound together by ties from their time in the Resistance, that determined official art policy in France.

86. Kathryn Boyer, "Association Française d'Action Artistique and the School of Paris", *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift*, vol. 70, 2001: 3, p. 159.

87. Kathryn Boyer provides an almost tragicomic description of the discrepancy between the image created by the exhibition policy of the AFAA and the reality of contemporary art (see Boyer, 2001, p. 161). Even in exhibitions whose theme was contemporary art, such as 'Peinture Française Contemporaine' (Yugoslavia, 1952), the emphasis was on the traditional: of the 61 artists whose work made up the exhibition, 49 were in the age range 50–80, and 13 of the artists exhibited were actually dead. The selection for this exhibition was not a bizarre exception but rather the rule.

88. *Ibid*, p. 165.

89. In the decade following the end of the war, the Gold Medal for Painting of the Venice Biennale (the Premio Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri) was consistently awarded to the pioneers of early modernism: George Braque in 1948; Henri Matisse in 1950; Raoul Dufy in 1952; Max Ernst in 1954; Jacques Villon in 1956 (Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale 1895–1968. From Salon to Goldfish Bowl*, London 1969, p. 137). At the time they received their awards, the average age of these artists was 73, and although they were officially awarded their medals for new work, they were long past their heyday. Rather younger artists were awarded the prize at

the biennales immediately afterwards: Osvaldo Licini in 1958; Jean Fautrier and Hans Hartung in 1960 and Alfred Manessier in 1962. This goes to show both that the jury thought it was vital to demonstrate the newly acquired official legitimacy of modernism and that the Ecole de Paris was still capable of asserting the continued centrality of its role in the international art world, even when *art informel* was increasingly made part of the equation at the end of the 1950s (a trend that would be even more clearly delineated at documenta II in 1959). It was at this point that a particular shift in meaning took place in the perception of *art informel* with the result that an artist such as Fautrier was transformed from an *avantgardiste* critic of civilisation into a representative of the French Tradition.

90. Guilbaut, 1983, pp. 174–175.

91. Mention should be made here of three influential voices that were characteristic of this change: Harold Rosenberg, who thought that political developments had undermined the distinctive cosmopolitan character of Paris and forced French culture into an increasing degree of national chauvinism (Harold Rosenberg, “The Fall of Paris” (1940), 1982, pp. 209–220); Clement Greenberg, in whose view European culture had collapsed as a result of political crises and the social foundation of its radicalism had been lost (Clement Greenberg, “The Decline of Cubism” (1948), *The Collected Essays and Criticism, vol. 2: Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, (ed. John O’Brian), Chicago/London 1988 b (1986), pp. 211–215); and Barnett Newman, who in ‘The Sublime is Now’ (1948) felt that the European avant-garde had lost touch with the essential aims of modern art as a result of its ties to tradition (Barnett Newman, “The Sublime is Now” (1948), *Barnett Newman. Selected Writings and Interviews*, (ed. John P. O’Neill), Berkeley/Los Angeles 1992 (1990), p. 173). Although the theses of these three writers were formulated from different starting points, they share a common trope: the decline of French and European art. And, in the work of Greenberg and Newman, that trope led to another: the historic task incumbent on American art of spearheading progressive developments.

92. Henry Geldzahler describes what he considers to be some of the factors crucial to the revitalisation of American art after the Second World War: the major museums (MoMA, in particular); the

immigration of leading European modernist artists (the Surrealists, in particular) and the setting up by the Roosevelt administration of the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s (which provided artists with a degree of financial security, established new networks of contacts and gave them a partial sense at least of belonging to society) (see Henry Geldzahler, *New York Painting and Sculpture 1940–1970*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1970, pp. 17–18).

93. Alfred H. Barr, *What is Modern Painting?*, Introductory Series to the Modern Arts, Museum of Modern Art, New York 1952 (1943), p. 5.

94. Alfred H. Barr, “Is Modern Art Communist?” (1952), in Irving Sandler & Amy Newman (eds.), *Defining Modern Art. Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr Jr.*, New York 1986, p. 214.

95. Guilbaut, 1983, p. 176.

96. See Laura Cottingham, “The Masculine Imperative: High Modern, Postmodern” (1994), *Seeing Through the Seventies. Essays on Feminism and Art*, Amsterdam 2002 (2000), pp. 47–71.

97. With the presentation of Pollock on two pages in full colour in the issue of the magazine *Life* dated 8 August 1949, a serious attempt was being made to introduce modern art to its readership (at that time counted in the millions). The headline of the article employed a phrase of Clement Greenberg’s from 1945 but turned it into a question: ‘Is he the greatest living painter in the USA?’ (see Clement Greenberg, “Review of Exhibitions of Mondrian, Kandinsky, and Pollock; of the Annual Exhibition of the American Abstract Artists; and of the Exhibition *European Artists in America*” (1945), 1988 b, p. 16, in which Pollock was described as ‘the greatest painter of his generation and perhaps the greatest to emerge after Miró’). Despite the slightly ironic tone of the *Life* article, it largely reproduced the myth of the modern artist as a rebel in the service of freedom at the heart of American society. It was in this context that a range of mythical masculine values were assigned to Pollock’s work in particular and to American painting in general and which Andrew Perchuk characterises as a ‘masquerade of masculinity’ that was based on a number of masculine archetypes characteristic of the post-war United States: the

rebel, the tortured soul, the alcoholic, mother-fixation, phallus worship. (Andrew Perchuk, "Pollock and Postwar Masculinity", in *The Masculine Masquerade. Masculinity and Representation*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1995, p. 31). Although these myths could be located in a more historical context of the shifting identities of the avant-garde, what is interesting is how well they fit in with the interpretive matrix applied by both specialists and popular culture to the modern artist. The prime example of the former category is the simultaneously esoteric and rebellious stance underlying Harold Rosenberg's term action painting (see Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters" (1952), 1982, pp. 23-39). Another, and considerably more ambivalent, dissemination of Pollock's images in popular-cultural contexts is found in the fashion photographs by Cecil Beaton that used Pollock's paintings as a backdrop in the March issue of *Vogue* in 1951: even though the vast readership of the magazine could obviously not be ignored, the context in which the images were presented lent a decorative and feminine quality to the paintings of Pollock that would have been anathema to the avant-garde art world of the time.

98. For a description of this milieu, see e.g. Irving Sandler, *The New York School. The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties*, New York 1978, pp. 1-45, and Dore Ashton, *The New York School. A Cultural Reckoning*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford 1992 (1972), pp. 164-208. During the 1940s and 1950s, American artists were as dependent as they had previously been on the private sphere's networks of galleries, critics, patrons and social contacts. The New York art scene was on the whole extremely stratified, from the fashionable and influential uptown galleries to the 10th Street alternative scene of small cooperative galleries, but these boundaries were not fixed, and there was considerable interaction between different strata. The established galleries in New York that focused on contemporary avant-garde art in the 1940s and 50s included the Samuel Kootz Gallery, the Sidney Janis Gallery, the Egan Gallery, the Stable Gallery, the Betty Parsons Gallery and the Leo Castelli Gallery (see Geldzahler, p. 19). The alternative galleries were important as meeting places and also served as hothouses nurturing the new artists and movements who might in time move uptown (see Joellen Bard, *Tenth Street Days. The Co-ops of the 50's*, The Association of Artist-Run Galleries, New York 1977,

p. iii). They were also situated in the neighbourhood where several established artists had their studios, which created social and aesthetic interaction between different groups, established and not. The artists, collectors, gallery-owners and curators also moved freely between these different strata, which facilitated an exchange of critical ideas and social contacts that encompassed both the private and public spheres. Moreover, New York's artists possessed a form of capital that eclipsed the art scenes of every other city: access to the superior collections of international and American modernist art in its museums (see Plante, p. 39). The specialist niches of the different museums also complemented one another. MoMA possessed an unrivalled collection of European modernism, the Museum of Non-Objective Art focused on Abstract art outside Paris (German, Russian, Dutch) and the Whitney Museum of American Art focused on American art.

99. This is a common perception whose origins are found in Eva Cockcroft's article 'Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War' in *Artforum* 1974, where she maintained that the politics of the Cold War were the direct cause of the establishment of Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s (Cockcroft, p. 126). However, when the exhibitions exported to Europe as part of MoMA's international programme are considered, they were not exclusively made up of Abstract Expressionism, but also included other less experimental movements that attracted less publicity at that time. This is also borne out by one of the first peripatetic exhibitions under the auspices of the MoMA International Program, *Twelve Contemporary American Painters and Sculptors*. This was a presentation of contemporary trends in American art that opened at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris and was then shown in a range of European cities between 1953 and 1954, including Stockholm. The Swedish catalogue to the same exhibition *Tolv nutida amerikanska målare och skulptörer* (Liljevalchs konsthall, exhib. catalog. nr. 206, Stockholm 1953) makes clear that the show focused on figurative art by artists such as Edward Hopper, Ben Shan and Stuart Davis, while sculptures by Alexander Calder and David Smith were also exhibited, as were a few paintings by Arshile Gorky and Jackson Pollock. And even if artists from The New York School appeared with increasing frequency in MoMA's international exhibitions from the mid-'50s

onwards (reaching their high point in the major retrospective exhibition *Jackson Pollock 1912–1956*, which toured Europe from 1958 to 1959), this need not indicate anything more conspiratorial than the fact that these artists were deemed increasingly significant in the American art world during the same period and that Abstract Expressionism was also regarded with greater interest in Europe as a result of the growth in importance of European *art informel* at the time. The appearance of being biased in favour of a particular style or school in the exhibitions that were sent abroad would also surely have undermined their most crucial ideological value: the progressive image of individualism and freedom.

100. Saunders, p. 260. The statement is drawn from an interview with Jameson carried out by Saunders in 1994.

101. See Rosenberg, (1952), 1982, p. 31; Haftmann, pp. 434–435; Read, 1951, p. 13, and Read, 1974 (1959), p. 222; Michel Tapié, *Un Art autre*, Paris 1952, unpag. (text page 33).

102. Tapié, unpag. (text pages 33–34).

103. André Malraux, “Les otages” (1945), *Oeuvres complètes IV : Écrits sur l’art I*, Paris 2004, pp. 1199–1200.

104. Guilbaut, 1990, pp. 56–59.

105. See Greenberg, “The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture” (1947), 1988 b, p. 166; the attacks by the Republican Congressman George Dondero on Pollock and Abstract Expressionism made at the end of the 1940s are quoted in Saunders, p. 253 f.; Rudolf Arnheim, “Accident and The Necessity of Art”, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 16, September 1957: 1, p. 30; Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock”, *Art News*, vol. 57, October 1958: 6, p. 56.

106. Kirk Varnedoe, “Comet: Jackson Pollock’s Life and Work”, *Jackson Pollock*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1998, p. 17.

107. In Arthur Danto, *Mark Tansey: Visions and Revisions*, New York 1992, p. 136, a key is provided that reveals the names of those represented by the various figures: with Salvador Dalí, Henri Rousseau, Juan Gris, Guillaume Apollinaire, André Derain, Henri Matisse, Pierre Bonnard,

Fernand Léger, Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp and André Breton on the French side and Joseph Cornell, Jackson Pollock, Arshile Gorky, Clement Greenberg, Barnett Newman, Ad Reinhardt, David Smith, Willem de Kooning, Harold Rosenberg, Mark Rothko and Robert Motherwell on the American side.

108. See The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York, Alfred H. Barr Jr. Papers, 9a: 15.

109. For a detailed account of the discussions about MoMA's collections in the 1930s and 1940s, see Kirk Varnedoe, "The Evolving Torpedo: Changing Ideas of the Collection of Painting and Sculpture of the Museum of Modern Art", *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: Continuity and Change*, New York 1995, pp. 12–73.

110. Diana Crane, *The Transformation of the Avant-Garde. The New York Art World, 1940–1985*, Chicago/London 1987, pp. 34–35.

111. See Irvin Sandler, *American Art of the Sixties*, New York 1988, pp. 105–123.

112. Crane, p. 6.

113. Charlotte Bydler, *The Global Art World, Inc. On the Globalization of Contemporary Art*, (Diss. Uppsala universitet 2004), Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Figura Nova Series 32, Uppsala 2004, pp. 32–36.

114. Costopopulus, p. 293.

115. One indication of the powerful connotations of the adjective modern is the controversy surrounding the change of name undergone by The Institute of Modern Art in Boston in 1948 to the (then) more neutral sounding The Institute of Contemporary Art (see Guilbaut 1994, pp. 233–234).

116. Duncan, p. 103.

117. James Elkins, *Stories of Art*, New York/London 2002, pp. 89–97.

118. Like Elkins, I have studied this work in the German translation published in the GDR at the beginning of the 1970s, see Ulrich Kuhirt (ed.), *Allgemeine Geschichte der Kunst VII, Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts: Kapitalistische Länder*, Leipzig 1972 (1965),

and *Allgemeine Geschichte der Kunst VIII, Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts: Socialistische Länder*, Leipzig 1970 (1966). Unlike the original Russian publication, this edition was published in eight volumes. I have been unable to compare the two editions, although in light of the changes undergone by the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellite states after the death of Stalin, it seems obvious that certain revisions must have been carried out, particularly in the field of art and architecture. This is not simply a matter of the emergence of new and different examples, but rather that art and architecture, in particular, were de-Stalinised at the end of the 1950s, and various local variants of Socialist Functionalism were developed (see Anders Åman, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin Era. An Aspect of Cold War History*, Cambridge (Mass) 1992 (1987), pp. 211–229).

119. See e.g., Richard Müller, *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert: I-III*, München 1893–94, which is structured around national schools and also places great emphasis on domestic art (in this instance the German tradition).

120. Elkins, p. 97.

121. A. D. Tjegodadzjev, “Die Kunst der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika“, in *Allgemeine Geschichte der Kunst VII, Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts: Kapitalistische Länder*, Leipzig 1972 (1965), p. 427.

122. *Ibid.*, p. 433.

123. See Alfred Barr (ed.), *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, Museum of Modern Art, New York 1947 (1936).

124. The MoMA exhibitions were not, however, unprecedented; *Sonderbund: Internationale Kunstausstellung* in Cologne in 1912 and *The Armory Show* held in New York the following year were two exhibitions that, in terms of their scale, eclipsed the surveys presented by MoMA. With its 634 works, the *Sonderbund* exhibition was probably the most comprehensive exposé to that point of the various movements of modern art and the development of its tradition from van Gogh, Cézanne, Munch, Gauguin and Signac (Dirk Teuber, ‘Die Ausstellungen im Spiegel der Kölner Presse’, in Wulf Herzogenrath

(ed.), *Frühe Kölner Kunstausstellungen. Sonderbund 1912, Werkbund 1914, Pressa USSR 1928*, Köln 1981, p. 151). The Armory Show of 1913 with its nearly 1200 works was almost twice as large (Milton W. Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show*, New York 1988 (1963), p. 42). But it lacked the same focus on the modernist tradition and was made up of *juste-milieu* and academic art.

125. Barr, 1936, p. 9.

126. In *The Museum of Modern Art. The First Ten Years* (New York 1943, pp. 57–59). A. Conger Goodyear describes the negative critical response and how *Cubism and Abstract Art* was preceded by a controversy involving the American customs authorities who refused to allow nonfigurative sculpture to enter the country because it conflicted with their definition of sculpture as works of art. Barr, himself, writes about conservative American opinion in the catalogue, exemplifying it with the alternative editions of posters for the *Pressa* exhibition held in Cologne in 1928 that were distributed in Europe and the US: the former being highly stylised and Constructivist in its design, while the latter was considerably more conventional (Barr, 1936, p. 10). Although *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (strangely enough) did not run into difficulties with customs, it was condemned by a largely unanimous body of critics. Other opinion-forming organisations also criticised this exhibition for reasons that ranged from its being a Communist conspiracy to it representing merely humbug and madness.

127. Sibyl Gordon Kantor describes how, through Morey, Barr learnt methods for incorporating disparate and complex historical material within schematic models that were organised on the basis of stylistic development (*Alfred H. Barr Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 2002, pp. 19–26).

128. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

129. Their crucial significance for modern art had already been emphasised in Barr's first exhibition at MoMA, in which he traced various influences forward in time, so that the art of van Gogh, for example, was presented as the archetype of expressionism (Alfred Barr, *First Loan Exhibition: Cézanne, Gauguin, van Gogh, Seurat*, Museum of Modern Art, New York 1929, p. 18).

130. The influence on modern art of the machine aesthetic and primitivism, respectively, were among the themes chosen by Barr for his unfinished doctoral dissertation (Kantor, p. 147).

131. Barr, 1936, p. 19.

132. Michael Auping, "Fields, Planes, Systems: Geometric Abstract Painting in America Since 1945", *Abstraction – Geometry – Painting. Selected Geometric Abstract Painting in America Since 1945*, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo 1989, New York 1989, pp. 14–15. According to Auping, the two trends distinguished by Barr have their direct origin in Wilhelm Worringer's polarisation of the visual arts into two primary tendencies: logic, order/structure (Abstraktion) and feeling/transgression (Einführung); in its day, this polarisation proved enormously influential among art historians, art critics and artists. These are linked in the final chapter with what Worringer considered to be two fundamental veins running through contemporary art: immanence and transcendence (see Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einführung, Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*, München 1921 (1908), pp. 161–179).

133. Barr, 1936, p. 11.

134. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that the line of text placed below the scheme in the first edition (which was worded the Development of Abstract Art) was absent in subsequent editions of the catalogue (cf. the editions of 1936 and 1966).

135. El Lissitzky & Hans Arp, *Die Kunstisten – Les Ismes de L'art – The Isms of Art 1924–1914*, Baden 1990 (1925), p. 1.

136. The greatest difference in terms of the selection lies in Barr's emphasis on Fauvism and Orphism (not referred to in *Die Kunstisten*) and in his tracing of the historical roots back to the late nineteenth century, whereas modern art is seen by El Lissitzky and Arp as a contemporary phenomenon to a greater extent.

137. Barr, 1936, p. 9.

138. From a historiographic perspective, this combination of determinism and individualism would appear to resemble the problem that confronted Alois Riegl when formulating his notion that every era is governed by a particular *Kunstwollen*: how is one to

understand the unique and ingenious features of a work if all art is governed by an underlying, culturally determined developmental process? The answer he provided in *Das holländische Gruppenporträt* was that while the actions of the individual are determined by the surrounding environment, a choice is nevertheless always available within specific parameters. These parameters are not, however, static but undergo change depending on cross-cultural connections and the results of individual efforts, such that the most significant art is that which succeeds in moving development forward and thus fulfils the *Kunstwollen* of its time. One example is Rembrandt, who unmistakably formed part of the long Dutch tradition in his late group portraits but succeeded nevertheless in infusing that same tradition with new vigour through his contacts with Italy and as a result of his genius (Alois Riegl, *The Group Portraiture of Holland*, (Trans. Evelyn M. Kain & David Britt), Los Angeles 1999 (1902), pp. 253–254).

139. Duncan, p. 103.

140. In *La condition postmoderne*, Jean-François Lyotard employed the concept of metanarratives (*meta écrits*) in order to identify and deconstruct the ideological narratives that, in his view, underlie modernity's all-inclusive production of knowledge and meaning; here, it is the Enlightenment ideas of a continual evolution of reason and a belief in the direct significance of the accumulation of knowledge for human emancipation, in particular, that are metanarratives used to legitimise specific social, political and economic interests (Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report of Knowledge* (Trans. Geoff Bennington & Brian Massumi), Minneapolis 1993 (1979), pp. xxiv-xxv). Confidence in these major narratives has, however, been eroded, and they need to be replaced, according to Lyotard, by a more fragmentary, relativistic and antitotalitarian understanding of the world based on local language games. My use of the term is, however, both more specific and less polemical than Lyotard's. The aim here is to identify and analyse critically an underlying structure, not to question the necessity of ideological frameworks. This divergence is not simply a matter of political conviction, but also of an epistemological doubt as to whether it is even possible to avoid employing some form of metanarrative in the writing of history.

141. Bois, 1995, p. 102.

142. Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display. A History of the Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1998, pp. 62–66.
143. Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Santa Monica/San Francisco 1986, p. 14 (originally published as three separate articles in *Artforum* in 1976).
144. For a historical presentation and analysis of this context, see Malin Hedlin Hayden, *Out of Minimalism: The Referential Cube. Contextualising Sculptures by Anthony Gormley, Anish Kapoor and Rachel Whiteread*, (Diss. Uppsala universitet 2003), Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Figura Nova Series 29, Uppsala 2003, pp. 59–71.
145. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Vol 1: An introduction*, (Trans. Robert Hurley), London 1990 (1976), p. 28.
146. Staniszewski, p. 74.
147. Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 1995 (1993), pp. 263–269.
148. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, (Trans. Anette Lavers), London 1973 (1957), pp. 114–115.
149. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
150. Eagleton, pp. 5–6.
151. Jameson, 2002, p. 111.