

## PART III

# TRANSFORMATION/TRANSMEDIA/ TRANSFUSION

*Gropius wrote a book on grain silos,  
Le Corbusier one on aeroplanes,  
And Charlotte Perriand brought a new object to the  
office every morning;  
But today we collect ads.<sup>1</sup>*

Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson,  
'But Today We Collect Ads' (1956)

[T]he work itself functions as a general sign and it is normal that it should represent an institutional category of the civilization of the Sign. The Text, on the contrary, practices the infinite deferment of the signified, is dilatory; its field is that of the signifier and the signifier must not be conceived of as 'the first stage of meaning', its material vestibule, but, in complete opposition to this, as its deferred action. Similarly, the infinity of the signifier refers not to some idea of the ineffable (the unnamed signified) but to that of a playing. . .<sup>2</sup>

Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text' (1971)



# Realities Around and Underneath the Sign

## Approaches in Post-war Visual Cultures

A photograph of a television set in a fastidiously furnished room—the image is a 1958 advertising poster for Philips, showing an interior whose furnishings and subdued colours evoke an unmistakable sense of the fifties.

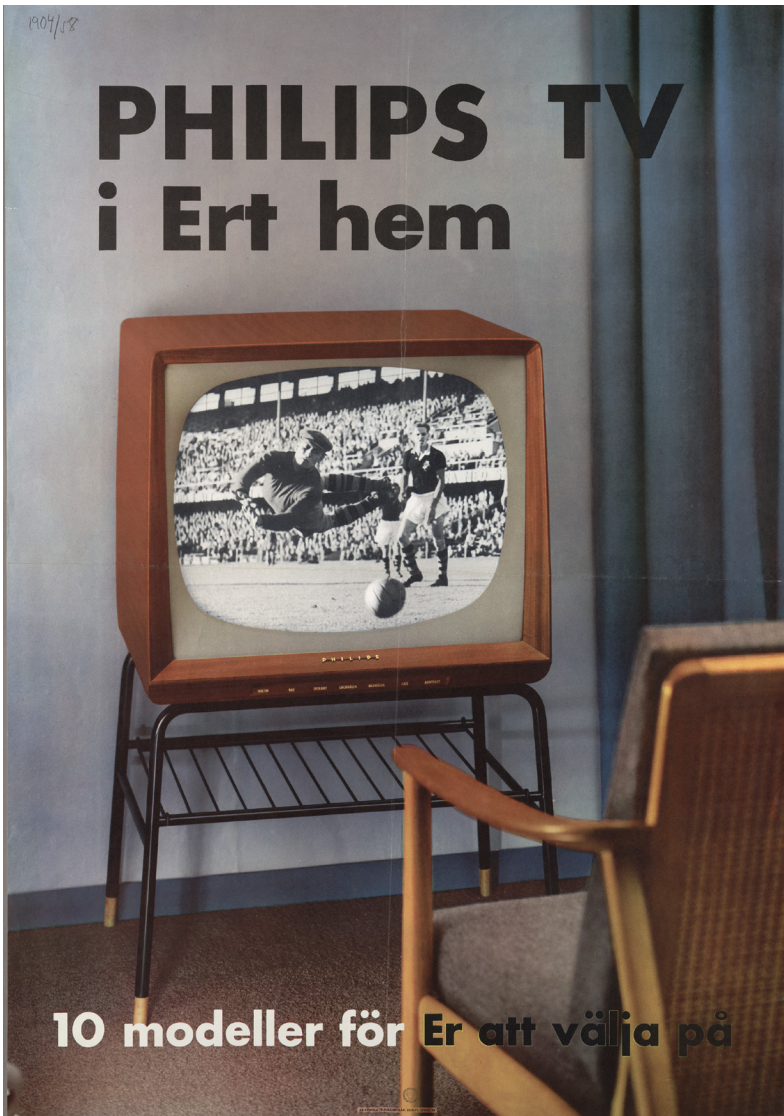
The selection of paints and materials in shades of blue and grey contrasting with light-coloured wood and black metal seems both carefully coordinated and in tune with the times. The light shines at an angle from behind, as if thrown by a ceiling lamp. Like every other advertising image, the primary function is to sell a product. At the heart of the image is a television set. Its centrality is emphasised by the way the restricted depth of field places the focus on the set, while making the room and foreground appear more diffuse. The sharpness of the television picture, a rather crucial part of the sales pitch, tells us that this is a photomontage. A game of football is being played. The dramatic quality of the image on the screen (will it be a goal?) is clearly being contrasted with the cosiness and emptiness of the domestic setting (come in and sit yourself down). And unmistakable is perhaps the most astonishing function of the new medium: you can watch the whole world from your living room—if you buy a television.

This image may not seem particularly radical in design terms when compared with many other examples of late 1950s advertising, but that does not mean it lacks interest. It depicts what was, at the time, an extremely modern home with cutting edge

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**Figure 7.** Advertising poster for Philips TV, 1958, Photo and copyright: The National Library of Sweden, License: CC BY-NC-ND.

technology blending seamlessly into the everyday environment. No longer concealed in a bulky cupboard with shutters, a model that was still available, the television set—a trim, modern piece of furniture in wood and steel—demonstrates its function for all to see. The home is fairly anonymous, without any distinct social markers: it is the home of anyone and everyone who wants to keep in step with the contemporary world. It is not only the domestic setting that is modern, but also the rhetoric of the advert.

The text fills a vital function in this image. It is written in the same font as the Philips logo. The message is worded as a personal address, stressing notions of home and freedom of choice, in addition to the trademark. The function of the text could be described as providing an anchorage of the image, to use Roland Barthes' term: it defines the genre of the image and identifies its component parts; it indicates how it should be read and the correct level for interpretation. Considered as a whole, however, the rhetoric of the image amounts to something considerably more powerful. Instead of stating explicitly 'Buy Philips TV', the tacit message is woven into a complex totality of different visual and verbal codes, within which the indirect but personal form of address plays a key role. What is being offered is not just the chance to buy a particular television set, but also the chance to acquire a modern lifestyle, the underlying message being that the product is an integral part of that acquisition. An interlinked chain of connotations permeates the image: modernity, topicality, technology, cleanness, security, hygiene, light, living standards. This chain of connotations is entirely consistent with the values that characterised the normative structure of post-war European society, with the addition that this particular value (Philips television) is not automatically provided but has to be bought in store. The rhetoric is based around the offer of an opportunity and a choice: this may not be what your home looks like, but it could be. The modernity of the rhetoric lies in that it not only wants to persuade viewers to buy a particular product, but also it also aims to get them to convince themselves of the necessity of purchasing it.

As a reflection of a characteristic 1950s home, the advert is somewhat deceptive: this is not what most people's homes actually looked like. But one of the most important functions of

advertising is not to reproduce (passively) already-existing norms and ideas but (actively) to influence and change them to some extent, to generate positive values around a product.<sup>3</sup> Modernity is being promoted here as a sales pitch, linking new technology with modern furnishings and, implicitly, with modern living standards. Although the advertisement creates a distorted picture of the domestic setting typical of the period, the gulf between historical reality and the heightened setting also makes visible a key function of the message of the image: the reproduction of an ideal. Here, the modern is not being portrayed as a utopia of advanced technology but instead as a cosy reality, as a blend of modernity and normality.

A number of different perspectives on the modernity of the post-war period converge in this image. The most obvious is the increased importance of technology, although the issue here is not technological discoveries and innovations as such but their introduction and effect within and upon broader strata of the population. A stabilised and steadily growing economy was leading to higher living standards and creating ever-greater scope for private consumption; this allowed both older and more recent innovations to be made available to larger and larger swathes of the population. As a result of the growth in demand, there was an expansion of supply and increasing competition, both of which were evident in almost every sector of the economy. Technology should be interpreted here in relation to a larger social, economic and political context, as clearly exemplified in the rapid diffusion of television through post-war society and the enormous impact it made.<sup>4</sup> Seen from a different perspective, this also involved a change in the nature of the news and advertising media. Here, the advertising image reflects both developments in photography (colour images) and improved reproduction techniques and the breakthrough of the televisual medium and the increasing importance of advertising.

These developments did not distinguish the post-war period from the early history of modernism in any fundamental sense. From the beginning of industrialism, various forms of pictorial codes and representations aimed at a broad audience had emerged in which technological innovations combined with new social and

cultural patterns to change visual communication in a comprehensive manner. But the process occurred significantly more rapidly during the 1950s, and its impact on the individual appeared much greater as a result. This was a quantitative change that also entailed a qualitative one when considered as a whole. The visual landscape was transformed not only by new buildings, but also by illuminations, shop windows, advertising, logos, symbols and posters. Various forms of advertising acquired greater importance as a result, as did the design of goods and packaging. These changes not only introduced more advanced forms of communication between originator and recipient, but also they meant that the functional and exchange values of goods coalesced to a greater extent with their 'sign value'.<sup>5</sup> The expansion of the media altered the way images were used in both the public and private spheres, and this created in turn new patterns of consumption and communication.

The interconnections between technology, economics, ideology and visual culture appear to be obvious here. Indeed, during the 1960s and 1970s, cultural critics and various academic disciplines increasingly focused their attention on the comprehensive nature of this change. One key example is the characterisation by Marshall McLuhan of the media as 'extensions of Man'—the notion that the technological revolution within the media was of crucial significance for the way human beings perceive both themselves and the world around them, and this applied to television in particular: 'What electric implosion or contraction has done inter-personally and inter-nationally, the TV image does intra-personally and intra-sensuously'.<sup>6</sup> This example provides a potent demonstration of McLuhan's thesis on the reciprocal relationship of technology and society: when a new technology emerges in a particular society, it also contributes to defining that society irrespective of whether the technology is print or television.

McLuhan's inspired formulation of this relationship was also interpreted more critically, as for example by Hans Magnus Enzensberger, who described the interconnections between technology, economics, ideology and culture with the term 'the consciousness industry'.<sup>7</sup> According to Enzensberger, the explosive development of this industry after the Second World War could be

seen as a new phase following from the exploitation of raw materials by industrialism, a phase in which the power structure of a society is determined by whoever controls both financial capital and the intellectual capital of the consciousness industry. In the mid-1970s, McLuhan's analysis also provided the foundation to some extent for Jean Baudrillard's description of how the worldview of the urban individual after the Second World War was increasingly constituted by a hyper-real play of signs, in which the boundary between immediate and mediated experience, between the real and the simulated, appeared to implode.<sup>8</sup> Both McLuhan and Baudrillard saw technology not as an isolated force of production (in the Marxist sense) but as a medium and, as such, one that was of crucial significance for the change in human consciousness. Both also perceived how technology in their contemporary periods had introduced a radical turning point in the way human beings related to the world around them, such that its medium/mediation is the reality we can understand and participate in. A rhetoric is being formulated that stipulates not only that the world *can* be observed in your living room, but also that the world *is* what you observe in your living room.

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A key aspect of the changes in visual culture after the Second World War was the constitution of a strict relationship between the art world and the world around it, in the sense that it focused to such a considerable extent on the work's transcendence of the surrounding world through the agency of the originator and the creative process. When considered in terms of the requirement for medium specificity, this transcendence involved an ever-more explicit exclusion of large parts of the contemporary social, political and medial culture. The institutionalisation of modernism, therefore, also entailed the establishment of an aesthetic of disparity.

It may seem odd that this aesthetic acquired such a dominant position in the 1950s. It became established at a time of heightened visual modernity, when the codes and forms of the visual cultures had been subject to an expansion, without historical parallel, in advertising, television, film, logos, the daily and weekly press, comics, record covers, product design and posters. This was



the social context that Guy Debord described as ‘the society of spectacles’.<sup>9</sup> Irrespective of whether one shares this rather misanthropic form of conspiracy thinking, it provides an apt description of the condensed visual and communicative codes that characterise the urban landscapes of modernity and of the post-war period in particular in Western Europe and the United States. And in the midst of this enormous visual transformation and expansion, at the heart of the burgeoning and variegated forest of signs, conventions, codes and signals, advanced modern art was presented as a more or less isolated preserve—more clearly, perhaps, during the post-war period than at any previous time.

This aesthetic of disparity is not a new phenomenon as such but simply a consequence of the mechanics of the modern art world (a system with the capacity to produce value by making distinctions) and of its basic form of legitimation (authenticity). What is evident during the 1950s, however, is that two types of distinction were emphasised as being of definitive importance in the contemporary art world: between Art and art and between art and the rest of the world. This aesthetic did not, of course, constitute an entirely uniform theory; its foundations lay in a cluster of theories, whose least common denominator was the axiom concerning the authenticity of the work of art (of the form/of the symbol) and its ontological boundary towards the outside world. And this applied irrespective of whether the work/form was shown in isolation in a gallery, as public adornment in an urban space or as part of a larger environmental design. The potential relation between the world of art and other worlds was seen as a one-way communication from art to the outside world but never, in principle, in the other direction.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the most paradoxical aspect of the aesthetic of disparity, superficially at least, is its preoccupation with oil painting as the primary medium of modern art. It would be legitimate here to refer to the transformation of an ancient institution so that it could survive into the modern era. A number of crises in painting run through the whole history of modernity in parallel with a progressive accentuation of the key importance of the medium, particularly within the theory and historiography of modernism. Oil painting in traditional terms could no longer be defended as a

form of representation in the modern era: from Paul Delaroche's declaration of the death of painting after Daguerre's public presentation of photography in 1839, followed by a series of similar declarations (listing various causes of death) from within the various forms of the modernist avant-garde of the twentieth century and on to the postmodernist variant (based on different theoretical premises) of the same theme.<sup>11</sup> A return to the comparison between the prognoses for contemporary art put forward by Walter Benjamin and Clement Greenberg at the end of the 1930s, which offered two diametrically opposed interpretations of the meaning of this crisis, provides us with a telling example. Note how the latter's accentuation of the primacy of painting precisely because of its ambivalent, and therefore potentially critical, relationship with the technology of the modern era ensured its place as the privileged interpretation.

If the institutionalisation of modernism (and the premise of the significance of oil painting) is considered from a longer historical perspective, this process is neither an unusual or remarkable one; rather, it is a fairly self-evident function of the fact that a particular group acting within a discursive context will acquire the interpretive privilege through its control of key representations and institutions. It is, in fact, this alteration of the political, cultural and institutional landscape that lays the foundation for the creation of a new discursive order to reproduce and normalize a specific image of modern art and to establish the boundaries for what is possible and legitimate within the discourse. An interesting diagnosis of the relationship between authentic art and popular culture within this order was provided by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their ferocious settling of accounts with what they called 'the culture industry' in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1947):

Light art has accompanied serious art as its shadow. It is the social bad conscience of serious art. The truth which the latter could not apprehend because of its social premises gives the former an appearance of objective justification. The split between them is itself the truth: it expresses at least the negativity of the culture which is the sum of both spheres. The antithesis can be reconciled least of all by absorbing light art into serious or vice versa. That, however, is what the culture industry attempts. The eccentricity of the

circus, the peep show, or the brothel in relation to society is as embarrassing to it as that of Schönberg and Karl Kraus.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the fact that their diagnosis is a swingeing critique of the state of affairs in Western capitalist society, written in exile in Los Angeles in the final phase of the Second World War, their identification of a necessary boundary between the authentic and the popular provides a telling portrayal of the aesthetic of disparity that was established after the war in the institutions of the art world. An apparently paradoxical pattern of centrifugal and centripetal forces at work in the post-war art world can be discerned here: an increasingly specialised, closed and metaphysical aesthetic was promoted to an ever-expanding mass audience in ever more sectors within the field of officially sanctioned culture, and as part of which, the avant-garde art world was increasingly becoming an integrated part of the cultural industry of modern society. Adorno and Horkheimer were no doubt correct in maintaining that the split was the truth but in a rather different way than they intended: the split was presented as a normative order within a field; whereas, the two fields separated by the split were actually being incorporated within the system of norms of the established cultural sphere.

What the order described here actually calls to mind is the bipolar opposition of the Cold War: the creation of a boundary between two opposed camps that refused to acknowledge the existence of a third. In a maxim that would subsequently become celebrated, the American artist Ad Reinhardt summed up the essence of this aesthetic of disparity: ‘The one thing to say about Art is that it is one thing. Art is art-as-art and everything else is everything else.’<sup>13</sup> This deliberately tautological and rather thought-provoking definition presents the work of art as entirely concrete in the sense of being autonomous, as a sign whose ontology, value and meanings cannot be related to anything outside itself. The distinction is not dialectical in the sense that it leads on to a synthesis; instead, it establishes absolute boundaries for the space—the value sphere, the art world, the economy of signs—within which the dialectic can be enacted. Ad Reinhardt’s radical dramatisation of the interface between art and the world around

it leads to a conceptual endpoint that he could only relate to by repeating the same subject matter and the same aesthetic and intellectual gesture throughout the last years of his life: producing image after image whose rectangular surfaces had been meticulously painted with a black cross on a black background.<sup>14</sup>

This rather extreme radicalisation of an idea involved pushing it towards a limit, however, where the parameters of its own logic were transgressed and it became inverted. In his reinterpretation of Reinhardt's strategy, Joseph Kosuth produced equally meticulously executed pictures of a black square on which various definitions drawn from dictionaries were depicted. In this way, a path was opened out through the image from the lowest circle of hermetic distinction. The projection of text onto image also served to expose the closed aesthetic to critical and metalinguistic illumination, which reveals that the absolute criteria of distinction here are, in fact, arbitrary. Kosuth's strategy also introduced a threat from within to the polarisation between Art and the surrounding world by grafting a third element—an outsider—on to the territory of Art that would, in the long term, pose a much greater threat to the absolute boundary than the enemy ever could.

This strategy was not unique but may be considered part of a pattern within—or, if you prefer, a function of—the aesthetic of disparity and its drive to refine the essence of every medium (on the basis of a particular and predetermined logic). This led to a situation in which each thesis at its most refined was predestined, in the words of John Perreault, to give birth to its own antithesis:

Paradoxically, the closer an artist gets to the mythological “essence” of his particular medium the faster the medium becomes something else. Frank Stella's shaped-canvas becomes a kind of flat sculpture for the wall. Cage's “music” becomes theatre. Concretist poems become graphic art. Prose becomes poetry or music. Film becomes a kind of projected painting. Architecture as it tries more and more to be simply architecture becomes sculpture. And sculpture as it strives for “sculptureness” becomes architecture or merely interior design. This paradoxical “media transportation” indicates perhaps that just as there is no ideal gameness that relates all Games, there is no ideal art or essence of painting or sculpture, no “nature”.<sup>15</sup>

The strategy in question is of key importance because it demonstrates a trend in post-war modernism that, as a result of its introspective linguistic critique, reached paradoxically outwards to encompass areas that were taboo. And in the modernist discourse that would be aimed, above all, at the refinement of each and every concept; this absolute focus on the medium-specific, the self-reflexive and the primacy of the visual surface inevitably meant that its opposite was put in play. This apparently paradoxical motion—inward to the core and then on outward through the core—is a trope that many critics and historians have drawn attention to. In the work of Michael Fried, it served as the definitive argument in what were, ultimately, his attempts to delegitimize minimalism.<sup>16</sup> The same motion has been used in the work of critics such as Rosalind Krauss and Hal Foster to explain the transition from modernism to postmodernism in terms of certain artists exceeding the bounds of the possible in the idioms and aesthetics of modernism as a result of their refinement of a particular logic.<sup>17</sup> What we are referring to here is a general aspect of the logic that Thierry de Duve described in the transition from painting to the readymade in the 1910s, where the search for absolute purity in the work of artists such as Malevitch, Kupka and Mondrian led inevitably to the zero point of painting—a transition that would, in the long term, provide the impetus for Marcel Duchamp's transgression of the very boundaries of the idiom.<sup>18</sup>

My point is not, however, to identify one transgressive act as a critical juncture in the modern history of the visual arts, but to demonstrate how this particular movement can be interpreted as part of a historical continuity, as a function of the modernist language game that is almost inevitably inscribed in a dialectic, rather than linear, process and, furthermore, to show that this dialectic extends beyond the absolute boundaries and schematic classifications on which the historiography of modernism is based.

### **The Reactivation of an Old Relationship**

In his introduction to *New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940–1970*, the major retrospective exhibition held at the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art in 1970, Henry Geldzahler

insisted that Pop Art was only a transitory episode in the art history of the post-war period, whose real importance—apart from a few significant *oeuvres* at the beginning of the 1960s—was that it repaid, so to speak, the debt owed by art to visual mass culture.<sup>19</sup> The notion that there should ever have been a debt to repay makes this a particularly interesting observation. It is a way of considering the matter that completely inverts the relationship for which Clement Greenberg and Theodor Adorno, each in their own way, had argued so persuasively and which few representatives of leading art institutions would have even recognised only a few years before.

At much the same time, Richard Hamilton, who was one of the artists to make a serious attempt to introduce mass culture as visual material in his art at the end of the 1950s, described this peculiar state of affairs as follows:

The surprising thing is that it took until the mid-fifties for artists to realise that the visual world had been altered by the mass media and changed dramatically enough to make it worth looking at again in terms of painting. Magazines, movies, TV, newspapers and comics for that matter, assume great importance when we consider the percentage of positively directed visual time they occupy in our society.<sup>20</sup>

Although this description may be accurate, it needs to be modified to some extent. As we have seen, there is a long tradition underpinning the distinction between Art and other visual cultures that had been institutionalised in academic discourse. But we have also seen that the distinction between high and low was far from clear in the aesthetic practices of early modernism. On the contrary, as Thomas Crow has maintained, the problematic but intensive exchange between both these levels can be seen as a characteristic and constant feature of the aesthetics of the avant-garde, from Manet's 'Olympia' onwards.<sup>21</sup> The interaction between modernism and modernity served in this regard to establish an ambivalent relationship between art and the world around it, with the idea of Art's autonomy and distinctiveness in relation to the surrounding culture making possible the interpretation of its specific position within that culture. But Hamilton is no doubt right that an

intensification of the exchange between popular and elite cultures did characterise parts of the visual arts of the late 1950s, albeit on the periphery of the art world. In some surveys this phenomenon is sometimes reduced to no more than an additional branch on the genealogical tree of the metanarrative, to a mere change of style (with Pop Art replacing Abstract Expressionism), but one that would nevertheless provide a major stumbling block to many of those writing about the development of modern art during the 1950s as a linear progression towards abstraction as a universal idiom, an inner necessity or the logic of history.

One aspect of this change in perspective was a radical reformulation of the function and boundaries of the serious visual arts, without the abolition of any fixing of those boundaries as a result. Another involved the establishment of a different relation to the historical models of the avant-garde. When considered as a whole, this meant that a shift in discursive—the interpretive privilege—was taking place. A situation emerged in which the dialectic was no longer isolated within a specifically defined field but was also oriented outwards, and thus involved various outsiders from the world beyond the sanctified precincts of Art: popular culture, the mass media, product design, handicraft and other forms of applied art. This could, but need not, be interpreted as modernism being challenged and its boundaries breached. Instead of referring to a critical juncture, the new phenomenon might be considered a reactivation of some of the aesthetic and medial strategies of the avant-garde that had been excluded from the historical narrative of modernism following the Second World War, with this change of position occurring initially at least within the framework of the order of modernist discourse.

It is important that the introspective, structural and linguistic elements of this change are borne in mind as they tend to get lost in the projections by the cross-boundary art genres of everyday objects, hybrid forms, popular cultural references and spectacular stagings. The problem resembles to a considerable degree that which confronted Picasso when executing *Guitar and Wine Glass*: how to operate at the dividing line between an introverted (symbolic) linguistic critique and an expansive (futurist) cult of the contemporary without renouncing either side. This is an issue

Robert Rauschenberg touched on in a subsequently celebrated pronouncement published in connection with the exhibition *Sixteen Americans* held at MoMA in 1959:

Any incentive to paint is as good as any other. There is no poor subject. . . . Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in the gap between the two.) A pair of socks is no less suitable to make a painting with than wood, nails, turpentine, oil and fabric. A canvas is never empty.<sup>22</sup>

This statement describes in a nutshell how the relationship between modernity and art has been dealt with, transformed and rediscovered time after time since Baudelaire's day: the modern notion of beauty is focused at a point between the eternal and the transience of the everyday. The split that Theodor Adorno and Clement Greenberg took for granted as an absolute constant emerges as arbitrary in Rauschenberg's words, or perhaps rather as a fruitful position from which the artist is obliged to relate to two incompatible areas, each of which, ultimately, can never be attained.

But even though this issue already had one hundred years of history behind it by the end of the 1950s, each individual artist's interpretation of the problem would, of course, be determined by his or her particular situation. Where Baudelaire described Constantin Guy's depictions of different individuals as representatives of the social types of the modern era, where Picasso employed the fractured syntax of the music-hall theatre and newspaper references as allusions to the existence of the surrounding world and as a means to experiment with figurative language, Rauschenberg made objects, images and texts from the everyday world—topical, public, controversial, banal, extravagant, discarded, private, obsolete, forgotten—into the material for new aesthetic experiences. These were entities that functioned simultaneously as slices of contemporary modernity and as archaeological excavations of conscious and unconscious segments of modern experience.

Although the problem that confronted Rauschenberg is reminiscent of the one Picasso faced, the two problems are not identical.<sup>23</sup> It is not the image of a linear tradition that is relevant here, but the understanding of how a specific problem is established



and transformed by a great many pivotal moments in history. The historical dimension in particular serves as an important dividing line, with the very idea of the tradition of the new creating a sense of alienation and a reference point to which every artist and generation of artists after the Second World War has had to relate. And yet it is at this very point that one can see how extraordinarily challenging in historical terms—and rhetorically awkward—the introduction of new art forms has proved within the parameters of avant-garde discourse, whose *raison d'être* is not only a countercultural position, but also the formulation of a direction towards/away from: into the future, away from history. What is evident is that this problematic issue was dealt with in a number of different ways and with varying degrees of success during the post-war period and that the extent to which it was successfully tackled proved to be a decisive factor in establishing a position in the field.

Two exhibitions exemplify this. Held in New York at the beginning of the 1960s, both attracted attention at the time; although, they were accorded extremely different levels of significance. In the summer and autumn of 1960, *New Form—New Media* was shown in two versions at the Martha Jackson Gallery. It presented the work of a motley collection of some seventy artists from the United States and Europe and showed contemporary and historical examples alongside one another in two sections, with the aim of throwing into international and historical relief what was described as a new American art form: assemblage, junk-art, happenings, environments, ready-mades, collages.<sup>24</sup> In the catalogue, Lawrence Alloway describes the existence of a historical link between Neo-Dadaism and the Dadaist and Futurist traditions that was reflected, all their differences notwithstanding, in an essential accord, namely their dependence on the urban environment and their close connection to popular culture.<sup>25</sup> Allan Kaprow emphasised the untidiness, the unfinished surface, the impression of immediacy and the indifference to traditional concepts of beauty as common denominators.<sup>26</sup> Although the overall impression of the selection and content of the exhibition as presented in Alloway's and Kaprow's texts was of confronting the viewer with a new form of art that deviated in aesthetic terms from the then-current

norms pertaining to serious Art, this was nevertheless anaesthetic with obvious historical references.

The raw, amorphous and perhaps offensive idiom the exhibition displayed did not in itself constitute a generic difference from the set of technical, aesthetic and medial connections on which the interpretation of Abstract Expressionism and informal art was frequently based. It would hardly have posed a problem, in terms solely of theory and form, to show one of Willem de Kooning's pictures of women from the mid-1950s as part of the exhibition. But an inclusion of this kind would have erased one of the exhibition's most important rhetorical distinctions: between established and independent culture.

This rhetoric was largely concerned with social distinctions, rather than purely aesthetic ones; the primacy of the latter would have made the explicit historical connections the source of legitimacy for the contemporary works. But this use of history would have laid the exhibition open to the kind of criticism that rejected assemblage art as a mere plagiarism of long-since exhausted gestures (the negative implication of the term 'neo-Dada').<sup>27</sup> Or, as Thomas Hess put it, the new forms of art amounted to no more than a collection of romantic souvenirs from the barricades (the street, history).<sup>28</sup>

Another major thematic exhibition of new trends in contemporary art was shown two years later in November 1962: *The New Realists* at the Sidney Janis Gallery.<sup>29</sup> It comprised an international selection, including artists from France, Italy, Great Britain, Sweden and the United States. American artists predominated in numerical terms but were, for the most part, represented not by the relatively well-known (and in some cases already established) neo-Dadaists but by a younger generation of artists, such as Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist, Steven Segal, Andy Warhol and Tom Wesselmann.<sup>30</sup> This exhibition created a different context from the one held at Martha Jackson Gallery. In part, this was a matter of the location (the Sidney Janis Gallery was one of the most established galleries in New York and represented the elite of the Abstract Expressionists), in part it involved the visual style of American Pop Art (far removed from any possible accusation as to romantic souvenirs); above all, however, the change had to do with a difference in rhetoric: a new *avant-gardiste* front

line was defined here, whose historical context was constituted not by a vanished modernist past but by international and domestic New Realism and neo-Dadaism.

In his foreword, Sidney Janis referred to a historical transformation, with New Realism supplanting Abstract Expressionism in the role of principal pacemaker in the contemporary art world.<sup>31</sup> John Ashbery described New Realism as a transgression of the causality of historical relationships; his point being that Dadaism, in its time, had reactivated a trend that had always existed in art and that New Realism was currently creating a situation in which the images and objects of everyday life could be employed without serving as metaphors.<sup>32</sup> That interpretive construct national→international→universal was evidently once more in play and utilised here in a context that set out a clear demarcation from both Abstract Expressionism and causal historical comparisons. In this respect, the selection drew attention to a new internationalism, with the United States most definitely in the vanguard as a result of the aggressively visual style of Pop Art.<sup>33</sup>

The signals sent out by the exhibition were summarised most trenchantly in the exclamation by the *New York Times* critic Brian O'Doherty that “Pop” goes the new art! and by Harold Rosenberg's phrase in *The New Yorker* that the exhibition had struck the art world of New York ‘like an earthquake.’<sup>34</sup> After a meeting of the Abstract Expressionists who were associated with the Sidney Janis Gallery, Philip Guston, William Baziotés, Robert Motherwell, Adolph Gottlieb and Mark Rothko decided to leave the gallery with only Willem de Kooning choosing to stay. Their fury could, as Calvin Tomkins has pointed out, be readily understood: after decades of hard work to reach a position of legitimacy and a relatively stable income, everything they stood for—the serious, autonomous, spiritual, existential—appeared to have been turned upside-down in the course of a single evening at the opening of the show.<sup>35</sup> The exhibition thus achieved what every avant-garde must: to define clear boundaries while simultaneously identifying something new. But unlike most of the previous manifestations of the avant-garde in history, this was accorded a form of institutional legitimacy almost immediately: first through a symposium at the Museum of Modern Art in mid-December,

at which a number of leading critics and curators discussed the meaning and content of the new art, and subsequently as a result of a series of exhibitions of Pop Art held throughout the United States and Europe.<sup>36</sup>

The key aspect of *The New Realists*—and what distinguishes it from previous exhibitions—was that it made evident a new context, both in rhetorical and real terms. Although this context could be inscribed in a historical continuity, history here was not a static backdrop of linguistic expressions and stylistic props but served, instead, as a legitimising subtext whose orientation pointed forward toward an aesthetic context in the contemporary world. The relation between past and present appears, in fact, to be an extraordinarily—boomerang-like—dynamic that has proved important both for artistic production and the rhetorical legitimisation of that production and, subsequently, for its historical interpretation. Once again, the historical pivot is in action here; where artists such as Picasso or Duchamp had established certain pictorial incentives in a particular period, these had now been dislocated by artists such as Rauschenberg or Warhol, and this had, in turn, given rise to various artistic and theoretical reinterpretations of history. The postmodern semiotic readings of Cubism by Rosalind Krauss, Jeffrey Weiss and Yve-Alain Bois would, in fact, be all but inconceivable without this dislocation.

Even specialised surveys suffer under the yoke of the obligatory classifications, with particular categories, such as Pop Art, being described in terms of their birth, rise, maturity, descent and inheritance on the basis of an evolutionist and anthropomorphic narrative.<sup>37</sup> The key issue here, however, is not the abstraction from empirical data, which is, of course, essential to any historical interpretation, but its implementation: a far-reaching, complex and contradictory process is reduced to a number of fixed categories that are defined in turn in relation to a nucleus of *oeuvres*/works. A label, such as ‘Pop Art’, serves in this system as a term covering all the possible phenomena that have some kind of connection with a particular stylistic idiom, with proximity to that nucleus constituting a crucial criterion for the art-historical importance of the phenomena. In her 1966 survey *Pop Art*, Lucy Lippard listed only five artists as forming part of the core—The New York

Five—who were presented on a falling scale in terms of the degree to which their work was in accord with the principles of Pop Art: Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Tom Wesselmann, James Rosenquist and Claes Oldenburg.<sup>38</sup> These then defined retroactively a specific order in which other artists could be included or from which they could be excluded, depending on the degree of stylistic similarity.<sup>39</sup> Related artistic works in other countries were inevitably deported to the periphery—as precursors, variants, copies, deviations—irrespective of the extent to which they fit into the paradigm set out by the category's coordinates.

The interpretation of individual *oeuvres* was similarly adapted to and determined by the internal logic of the categories. As, for example, at the beginning of the 1960s when Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg ceased to be classified as Neo-Dada or as an odd variant of second generation Abstract Expressionism and were labelled instead as pre-Pop, with certain qualities and features of their art becoming emphasised at the cost of others in order to make it better suited to the definition of Pop Art and its narrative.<sup>40</sup> What we are dealing with here is a self-perpetuating category that reduces both the overarching context and the individual *oeuvre*.

This does not, of course, mean that we should simply abandon the term Pop Art completely; it is of both historical and historiographical relevance. An analysis of this concept can provide a powerful indication of the significance of the categories in the establishment of a particular perspective, the drawing up of a chart and the normalisation of a selection. Indeed, the term Pop Art demonstrates a particularly interesting history of changes to artistic and historical reception and production: from its introduction (the end of the 1950s), its cultural transposition and establishment (1962–63), its rapid institutional sanction (1963–64) and historicisation (1965–68) to its historical revision (late 1970s and onwards).<sup>41</sup> A similar—and no doubt, interesting—historical account could also be written about the other stylistic and epochal terms of the 1950s and 1960s, but the problem remains: how are we to name the transformation within the order of modernist discourse that took place during this period? And how should we actually understand the role played by Pop Art in that transformation?

This is a question that has elicited different responses over the last four decades. One example is found in Henry Geldzahler's previously cited catalogue essay for *New York Painting and Sculpture 1940-1970*, held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1970:

It seems today that Pop Art was an episode, an interesting one that has left its mark on the decade, and will continue to affect the future, but not a major modern movement which continues to spawn new artists. In fact, just about everything new and original in Pop Art was stated by a few artists in the first years of its existence. Since then no artists of first importance have been recruited and no second generation has come along.<sup>42</sup>

A quite different assessment is provided by Rosalind Krauss in her lecture to a symposium on 'Theories of Art after Minimalism and Pop' at Dia Art Foundation 1987:

[W]e are deluding ourselves if we think that we are dealing with a period of art that succeeds or comes after pop. For as far as we are concerned there has been no "after pop"; its terms, no matter how third-hand, no matter how degraded or sad, have been rehearsed and re-rehearsed throughout almost everything that has happened within dominant aesthetic practice in the past two decades.<sup>43</sup>

How are we to understand the fact that two individuals, who both possess such a thorough knowledge of the contemporary art world, can arrive at such different viewpoints? One explanation may be the different dates at which these assessments were made; perhaps the significance of Pop Art was not as obvious in 1970 as in 1987. Another, and in my view more likely, explanation is that they are not talking about the same thing. One would, after all, quite simply have to agree with Geldzahler that Pop Art as a style had already seen its heyday by the mid-1960s. Neither does Krauss contradict this; on the contrary, there is an air of resignation in her words at all the different varieties and hybrids that have evolved and been promoted in the art world ever since. But what she actually seems to be referring to is not a stylistic concept but a discursive order: the fact that the change of the rules provoked by Pop Art was still (in 1987) a dominant issue in the order of the discourse.

If the transformation we have referred to here was largely a matter of establishing a new relationship between art and the world around it, the question is not so much how this relationship was expressed directly in the image, but how it influenced language, roles and definitions within the discourse of the visual arts. Just as modernism cannot be seen as a direct or essential artistic translation of modernity, Pop Art cannot simply be understood by analogy to mass culture. In my view, what is interesting about both instances is what happens in their mediation: between the present and the past, between high and low, between visual language and adjacent linguistic systems—between the art world and other segments of society.

### Trespassing on Common Culture

A remarkable exhibition opened at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London on 9 August 1956 entitled *This is Tomorrow*. The exhibition had been initially intended to serve as an exposé of British Constructivism; however, it subsequently encompassed trends that were more cross-boundary in media terms.<sup>44</sup> It was made up of twelve pavilions in which different groups had created separate interiors, installations and hangs that alluded in various ways to the futuristic theme of the exhibition. This theme was further underlined in the press release, which emphasised the diversity of the exhibition, ranging from orthodox abstract order to extravagant games with the various signs, images and objects of mass culture.<sup>45</sup> The fact that the exhibition was opened by a full-scale model of Robby the Robot (from the film *Fantastic Planet*) only served to enhance the spectacular nature of this compilation and provoked countless newspaper headlines and considerable public interest.<sup>46</sup>

The visitor was steered through a labyrinthine installation of twelve separate variations on the futuristic theme that, when taken together, presented a fragmentary and contradictory vision of the future. In a press release, Lawrence Alloway, who was in charge of publicity for the exhibition, described the aim of the show as demonstrating the various ways architects, painters, sculptors and other visual artists could collaborate to create

interrelated works.<sup>47</sup> It also formed part of the ongoing debate in the twentieth century on the relationship of the various forms of art to architecture and the environment, while also providing a rather radical (for its time) cross-boundary approach to the possibility of a fusion of different media and professional skills.

The aims of the exhibition met with an interesting and fairly well-informed contemporary reception, although its mixed composition and rebellious attitude were variously dismissed as a rehash of the glory days of the Bauhaus and of Dadaism in the 1920s. Pierre Rouve, for example, adjudged what he perceived to be the twofold front the exhibition was attempting to erect against both realism and modernism a failure in that it was too dependent on both Dadaist gestures and formalist models.<sup>48</sup> In more recent decades, however, much of the formalist and Dadaist duality has been missing from the received image of the show inasmuch as only one of the pavilions has entered the history books: that of Richard Hamilton, John McHale and John Voelker. On display was a remarkable mixture of the high and the low—collages of films and media, a full-length portrait of Marilyn Monroe, a jukebox, a four-metre-high image of Robby the Robot, perspective projections and reconstructions of Marcel Duchamp's rotoreliefs—in a setting that called to mind a mixture of an ethnographic museum and an amusement park. As exemplified in this pavilion, the exhibition has gone down in history as the first manifestation of Pop Art.

But the really interesting thing about *This is Tomorrow* is that it provided an anthology of some of the various possible approaches to contemporary visual culture and to that of 'tomorrow' found in the mid-1950s, on the borderland between Art and environment, and very much outside the accepted art-historical categories. It also took an approach to the reception of visitors that was distinctly different from accepted practice, which had institutionalised the white cube as the ultimate representative space of modern art. This was made explicit in the press release: 'Visitors are not expected to merely look at pictures on the walls or sculptures on stands. Visitors are invited to enter strange houses, corridors and mazes. This is modern art to entertain people, modern art as a game people will want to play.'<sup>49</sup> Modern art—and the



presentation of modern art—were thus being characterised as an interactive game rather than in terms of the isolation of the individual work for elevated, aesthetic contemplation.

If a single theme is to be posthumously identified as crucial to the exhibition, this would have to be the mediation of various linguistic, social and technological systems as visual forms of expression. The exhibition was organised by individuals who were associated with a small and only loosely connected set within the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) called the Independent Group. This group was formed in 1952 and consisted of individuals operating in many different fields: Richard Hamilton (industrial designer, visual artist), John McHale (graphic designer), Eduardo and Freda Paolozzi (visual artists), Nigel Henderson (photographer), Reynes Bantam and Lawrence Alloway (art critics), Richard Lannoy (gallery assistant), Alison and Peter Smithson (architects). The aim of its meetings, seminars and exhibitions was to examine the whole range of representations that characterised society, culture and ‘the consciousness industry’ in post-war Great Britain: mass media, comic albums, advertising, design, trademarks and logos, science fiction and pulp-fiction, systems of communication and technology, architecture and town planning, social interactions, the visual arts and art history.<sup>50</sup> This enterprise involved a kind of ambivalent archaeology of the then-contemporary world, in which the surface of mass culture appeared to be at least as important as the social unconscious and in which an ironic detachment was coupled with undisguised fascination. The aims of the group were, as Lynne Cooke has observed, not to produce art but to analyse and visualise different types of contexts and processes.<sup>51</sup> In this perspective, their efforts should, perhaps, best be understood as ancestral to the visual culture studies of recent decades. *This is Tomorrow* then becomes part of a larger pattern rather than serving simply as a model for the Pop Art of the early 1960s.

The positioning of the exhibition in art history, as an early prototype of Pop Art, is frequently underlined (and illustrated) by Richard Hamilton’s collage *Just What Is It That Makes Today’s Homes So Different, So Appealing?* (1956). This collage served as one of the posters for the exhibition and was also reproduced in

the catalogue. When placed beside a work by one of the American pop artists from the beginning of the 1960s, the correspondences can be striking (at least if they are compared as though based on photographs of the same scale), and, indeed, this image has been canonised as ‘the first Pop Artwork’ in many contexts.<sup>52</sup> The connection is emphasised in particular in Lawrence Alloway’s introduction, as well as in the subsequent historicisation of the term Pop Art, in which some of the activities of the Independent Group were reformulated as an aesthetic programme.<sup>53</sup> But a stylistic comparison of this kind conceals a number of fundamental differences between Hamilton’s poster and later Pop Art. One might observe to begin with that this is a very small picture (26 x 25 cm), entirely lacking the visual impact of the often enormous canvases of American Pop Art. If it is related to anything in the art history of the twentieth century, it would be the German Dadaist photo-montage of the 1920s, and yet even that comparison misses the mark. For, despite the absurd heaping together of references and visual signs, the aim of Hamilton’s collage is not, fundamentally, the creation of antiaesthetic or poetic values but the provision of information. He was not working from an idea about paradoxical metaphors or dynamic composition; instead, he saw the image as a visual form of exhibition index in which a number of words or phenomena had to be included: man, woman, humanity, food, newspapers, cinema, TV, telephone, comics (picture information), words (textual information), tape recording (aural information), cars, domestic appliances, space.<sup>54</sup> These phenomena were put together with a dry humour such that the sheer pleasure of the play with perspectives and references could work in tandem with the aim of conveying as clearly as possible the theme of the exhibition as a whole.

The way the image heightens and concentrates the phenomena and visual codes it presents appears, however, to clash with the futuristic theme of the exhibition. It bears comparison here with the advertising image for Philips TV of the same period. Hamilton’s collage not only contains quotations from contemporary advertising, but also it is obviously based on a comprehensive analysis of the codes and rhetorical devices of contemporary commercial culture. Here, too, we are dealing with a form of presentation

that thematises and makes display of a distinct notion of modernity, but, unlike in the Philips image, this value has not been provided with a veil of normality. The setting is actually distorted in a rather obvious way that alienates what is familiar without concealing the identification of its own visual rhetoric. In this respect, the alienation of the familiar would seem to be one of the most important informative aims of the image. This was a deliberate strategy on the part of (the industrial designer) Hamilton, as he believed that the future could only be conceptualised by an expansion of the visual experience of the present.<sup>55</sup> Seen in this light, rather than functioning as a stylistic model for a new art form, Hamilton's collage emerges as an allegory of the contemporary culture of consumption and its ideals and as a visual index of the attitudes and intellectual frames of reference that characterised the Independent Group—at once curious, affirmative, ironical and critical. The polemic against the preoccupation of historical modernism with technical innovations, functional structures and the fetishisation of more attractive everyday goods is all too evident here: the future is to be found in what surrounds us, in what is used up and discarded, which has hitherto been all but ignored by the representatives of elite culture.

The point of identifying this connection is to make it possible to see the operations of the Independent Group as an aspect of a larger shift in interest that took place in the modern discourse of the visual arts. Although not the accepted focus of the group's sphere of ideas, contemporary radical visual art did, of course, play a very important part. But, here, the basis for the reception of contemporary Art was not exclusivity but the perspective of mass culture. A few years after the exhibition, Lawrence Alloway put forward a definition of this perspective in 'The Long Front of Culture' (1959):

Acceptance of the mass media entails a shift in our notion of what culture is. Instead of reserving the word for the highest artefacts and the noblest thoughts of history's top ten, it needs to be used more widely as the description of "what a society does". Then, unique oil paintings and highly personal poems as well as mass-distributed films and group-aimed magazines can be placed within a continuum rather than frozen in layers in a pyramid. . . . Acceptance of

the media on some such basis, as entries in a descriptive account of society's communication, is related to modern arrangements of knowledge in non-hierarchic forms . . . The mass media are crucial in this general extension of interpretation outwards from the museum and library into the crowded world.<sup>56</sup>

The approach set out above is based on the social and communicative functions of culture, with interpretation playing a dual role: the understanding of sophisticated art within the framework of mass culture and the establishment of a nonhierarchical aesthetic based on a continuity between mass culture and elite culture. This could also be said to apply in large part to *This is Tomorrow*, which was, moreover, put together within the framework of an established and serious institution (the ICA).<sup>57</sup>

Hal Foster has analysed this interface between cultural and linguistic spheres in connection with Richard Hamilton's visual art (its overlapping of commercial and modernist representational styles, and between verbal and visual codes) in terms of a new regulatory apparatus or a new symbolic order, transcending the horizons of industrial society and formalist aesthetics.<sup>58</sup> It is this point that is of such particular interest: the reception (within the Independent Group) opened up, as it were, new sections of the archive (history/the present) that, in their turn, shifted the focus and laid new foundations for the production of art. This involved a way of using information from a set of different fields not simply as visual material in images but as a means of employing knowledge to reformulate the visual and conceptual codes of modern art. Although their projects and methods differed in other respects, this approach provided a common denominator for both Hamilton and Rauschenberg. Here is the point at which the surrounding world reenters art at the same time linguistic critique and the relation to history are reactivated. The point, in both cases, is nevertheless dependent on the grid in which it is set: the field called art.

This shift does not, as it turns out, actually contradict Ad Reinhardt's precept 'Art is art-as-art and everything else is everything else.' Lawrence Alloway's definition of a continuity between elite culture and mass culture and all the different variants of this formulation over the last fifty years have not led to an implosion

of the value sphere of the visual arts. Irrespective of the extent to which this activity was legitimised by a form of rhetoric that undermined the difference between art and everything else, it was the transformation in question that was crucial: of the surrounding world in the social and linguistic space of the visual arts, of the social and linguistic space of the visual arts by the reestablishment of a connection to the world around them.

What this shift highlights is the problematic nature of one of the parts of Ad Reinhardt's formula, namely 'as-art'. For this part of the phrase would—entirely counter to Ad Reinhardt's intention—emerge as being vulnerable to extremely diverse interpretations that have established a somewhat different order in the discursive practice of the modern visual arts.

# Open Aesthetics

## Paradigmatic Reinterpretations

In his study *Opera aperta* (1962), Umberto Eco analyses a trend in post-war music, literature and the visual arts that has brought about a radical reformulation, in his view, of the perception of the work of art and its communicative function. What is new is an interest in open, variable and (deliberately) incomplete structures that leave some of the constituent factors of the work free to be supplemented either by the executor, by the viewer or by chance:

This difference can be formulated in elementary terms as follows: a classical composition, whether it be a Bach fugue, Verdi's *Aïda*, or Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, posits an assemblage of sound units which the composer arranged in a closed, well-defined manner before presenting it to the listener. He converted his idea into conventional symbols which more or less oblige the eventual performer to reproduce the format devised by the composer himself, whereas the new musical works . . . reject the definitive, concluded message and multiply the formal possibilities of the distribution of their elements. They appeal to the initiative of the individual performer, and hence they offer themselves not as finite works which prescribe specific repetition along given structural coordinates but as "open" works, which are brought to their conclusion by the performer at the same time as he experiences them on an aesthetic plane.<sup>59</sup>

The traditional view of the work as a structurally closed/completed organic whole was being challenged here. The open work, in Eco's sense, involves the inscription of a multiplicity of alternatives within the structure of the work such that its openness is both

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communicative and structural in nature. This also entails changes to the fundamental criteria that govern the interpretation of the work by the executor, encompassing both variations in the aesthetic character of the piece (tempo, dynamic, emphases) and its structural framework and form. Eco exemplifies this new category of works with compositions, such as Karl Heinz Stockhausen's *Klavierstück XI* of 1956, which consists of nineteen groups of notes and the interpreter is free to determine the internal arrangement according to which the sequence should be played. It is the dimension of choice, and the open structure in particular, that constitutes the new type of work and distinguishes it from previous traditions in which the work was considered to be an organic whole whose structure was fixed by the score.

Experiments with variability were not an entirely new invention in the 1950s and can actually be traced far back into the past. It was at this time, however, that the open form became of central importance to various composers in different parts of the world. Among those who went furthest in terms of variability and the dismantling of the structure of the work as a whole was John Cage. One of his early principles was to break with both the harmonics of the Western tradition and twelve-tone serial music in order to experiment with different types of sound in rhythmic sequences where time was the structuring factor.<sup>60</sup> Initially, it was the prepared piano, which emphasises the percussive mechanics of the piano, that served as the typical instrument for these endeavours, whose most radical implication was, in principle, any sound at all could be used in a composition. Perhaps Cage's clearest declaration of intent is found in the celebrated piece 4'33 of 1952 (partly inspired by the silence in Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings*), whose three movements consist of a single notation: *tacet*. As a result, all the ambient sounds in the venue became incorporated in the piece, without any hierarchies operating between them. In this instance, it was not only the soloist who participated in the variability of the piece, but also the audience and the space to a considerable extent.

However, it would be a mistake to refer to an absence of structure, because the framework of the composition was precisely specified: the duration (four minutes and thirty-three seconds),

the division into three movements (which it was up to the interpreter to mark in some way) and the space (the concert venue). The structure—and aesthetic—Cage was attempting to demonstrate was one that made possible an opening up of the score and the performed work, and that could involve any and all kinds of sounds, such that the world would pass through the work, so to speak, allowing the audience to become aware of their environment by employing a different form of attention and sensibility. Cage's aesthetic with its radical emphasis on the importance of the accidental for the work differs in many ways from the considerably stricter structure of a composer such as Stockhausen. And Cage's exploration of the possibilities of time and silence also took the idea of the open work beyond Eco's modified communicative sequence (originator→work→interpreter) to create a situation in which the work was no longer to be understood as an autonomous and uniform structure but as a communicative process outside the direct control of the originator. For Cage, silence and chance meant that the composer had to abandon the idea of his own intentions in relation to the work in order to accentuate its particular quality of indeterminacy.<sup>61</sup>

Instead of understanding the work as a specified hierarchical structure with a fixed centre, Cage employed a metaphor from the natural world to demonstrate the possibility of an open structure that transcends all hierarchies: a person studying a leaf cannot determine a particular viewpoint from which the constitution or essence of the leaf can be defined.<sup>62</sup> It is interesting to note how this organic metaphor is employed to contravene the notion of the work as an organic whole: the structure of the work is no longer seen as developing out of a predetermined centre; the work no longer appears to be a transcendence of the presence of the originator; the work no longer has any set boundaries but can (and must) change over time. There can be no doubt that here we have arrived at a point in twentieth century Western aesthetics where the premises of the regime of the authentic are being seriously challenged. The reason that this challenge should occur, become possible even, within the aesthetic/ideological context of the 1950s was because, in contrast to the utilitarian visions of the Soviet Constructivists, it did not entail abandoning Art as an



autonomous sphere (for it to be subordinated to society's forces of production) but involved, instead, a change to the linguistic systems and discursive framework (the art world) of serious art.

Umberto Eco (who never mentions Cage by name) does not deal with these revolutionary aspects in his study but takes as his paradigmatic examples of the new open type of work contemporary European composers (Stockhausen, Boulez, Pousseur) and a somewhat older European literary tradition (Joyce, Mallarmé, Brecht). In these instances, variability was not a matter of abandoning a view of the work as an organic whole but of focusing instead on works whose structural coordinates were, although variable, based on a predetermined set of permutations within an overall framework. This becomes all the more apparent when Eco broadens the discussion of the open work to include the visual arts as well. In the latter case, he refers exclusively to (European) *art informel* whose openness was considered to exist primarily on a communicative level:

This sort of painting is, therefore, still a form of communication, a passage from an intention to a reception. And even if the reception is left open – because the intention itself was open, aiming at a plural communication – it is nevertheless the end of an act of communication which, like every act of information, depends on the disposition and the organization of a certain form. Understood in this sense, the “informal” is a rejection of classical forms with univocal directions but not a rejection of that form which is the fundamental condition of communication. The example of the informal, like any open work, does not proclaim the death of form; rather, it proposes a new, more flexible version of it – *form as a field of possibilities*.<sup>63</sup>

According to Eco, informal art is open because it encompasses a greater number of interpretive possibilities. In a work by Jackson Pollock or Jean Fautrier, the spontaneous and arbitrary execution means that the structure of the painting cannot be perceived as conveying meaning in itself but demands a dialectical relationship with the viewer. This communicative and semantic openness served, as we have seen, as a crucial aspect of the understanding and legitimation of contemporary avant-garde art after the Second World War, which was open in principle to a pattern of

interpretation that was both cultural and countercultural. Eco, for his part, observes that the interpretation of contemporary nonfigurative art must necessarily be ambivalent and that this semantic ambivalence is transformed into a fundamental criterion for a new category of artworks (open works).

This was not an entirely original innovation on Eco's part but should be seen as a codification of ideas that were circulating in the art world of the time. European informal art in particular was interpreted by some critics in considerably more radical terms than is apparent from the classification and downgrading of this kind of art in more recent times as market-oriented and as mannered high-modernism. A similar argument can be found in the lecture given by Marcel Duchamp at the Convention of the American Federation of Arts in Houston in 1958 entitled 'The Creative Act'. There, he maintained that the act of artistic creation had two principal poles, those of the artist and the viewer, that were both of equal importance for a work to come into being. This meant that he did not consider the work as finished once the artist had signed it, but rather its existence, in terms of its aesthetic meaning, entailed an uncompleted historical process:

The creative act takes another aspect when the spectator experiences the phenomenon of transmutation; through the change from inert matter into a work of art, an actual transubstantiation has taken place, and the role of the spectator is to determine the weight of the work on the aesthetic scale. All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.<sup>64</sup>

Duchamp is thus placing production and reception on an equal footing in the presentation of the work of art as an aesthetic object. This text also reflects a somewhat Romantic idea of interpretation as transubstantiation: a ritual transformation of substances, such as the wine and the bread into the blood and body of Christ as part of Holy Communion. This idea recurs somewhat later in Ulf Linde's analysis of Duchamp's *The Large Glass* 'La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même': by an odd coincidence (a draught),

the world of the bachelors (the viewers) can be connected with that of the bride (the artist's) in an upward movement (a transubstantiation) straight through two horizontal glass structures (the bride's clothes, the work of art). The work does not emerge as a work of art until the moment the viewer succeeds in establishing a connection, when he or she is capable 'of permeating it with his or her own life without demanding higher truths'.<sup>65</sup>

Today, some forty years later, these ideas of the polyvalence of meaning and the significance of reception seem not only familiar concepts, but also as forming two of the accepted postulates in the contemporary discussion of interpretive theory. It may, nevertheless, appear somewhat remarkable that Umberto Eco should employ *art informel*, and Abstract Expressionism in particular, as examples of what this new type of art might mean. For this was the very period in which completely different forms of art were being established that deliberately employed communicative openness as a starting point for cross-boundary medial experimentation. What may appear today as a confusing use of categories may, itself, be an interesting example of how possible contexts, transgressions and shifts can be formulated before these categories become fixed in the historical record.

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A significant example of what continuity and historical cross-fertilisation could mean in practice—subsequent historical categorisations notwithstanding—can be found in Allan Kaprow's article 'The Legacy of Jackson Pollock', published in *Art News* in 1958. He maintained that while Pollock may have created wonderful paintings, in so doing he also succeeded in eradicating painting by violating the boundaries of the genre: in the use of his technique (drip-painting instead of brushstroke), by exceeding the formal framework of painting (all-over-ness instead of the organic whole of the planar image) and by the enormous scale and spatial structure of the paintings that blurred the boundary between the space of the painting and that of the viewer. The real inheritance left by Jackson Pollock was not that he established a certain style or a specific aesthetic approach but that he identified (indirectly) a new route for the visual arts that could take them beyond painting:

Pollock, as I see him, left us at the point where we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our every-day life, either our bodies clothes, rooms, or, if need to be, the vastness of Forty-Second Street. Not satisfied with the *suggestion* through paint of our other senses, we shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movements, people, odors, touch. Objects of every sort are materials for the new art . . . Pollock's near destruction of this tradition [of painting] may well be a return to the point where art is more actively involved in ritual, magic and life than we have known it in our recent past.<sup>66</sup>

This provides an interesting insight into the way the problem of modern art was reformulated during the second half of the 1950s, when the categorisation of various movements and approaches had not yet been fixed. In his own artistic practice, Kaprow moved from a direct interpretation of Pollock's working method (action-collage) to the use of the gallery space as a means of expression (environment). When he showed his spatial installations, he realised that each visitor both influenced and became part of the artwork, with the result that the experience of an installation involved something other and greater than simply a communication of visual impressions:

We simply enter it, are surrounded by it, become part of it, passively or actively according to our talents for 'engagement', in much the same way that we have moved *out* of the totality of the street or our home where we also played a part.<sup>67</sup>

This led Kaprow to engage more actively with the development of forms that could transcend the boundaries between artistic media as well as those between the viewer and the work (happenings).<sup>68</sup> A link to painting can still be found, albeit at a metaphorical level, in *18 happenings in 6 parts*, which was staged at the Reuben Gallery in New York in 1959: in one scene, an artist is sitting on a red chair; he lights and blows out nineteen matches; he gets up slowly, without making any gestures, in order to move over to each of the four laminated walls in front of which containers of paint and brushes have been placed and 'solemnly paint'.<sup>69</sup> This could be seen as an at once ironic, symbolic and utterly concrete representation of the change in the status of painting, from being

the essential form of expression to becoming one sign among all the others in the cross-boundary and wide-open reference system of the visual arts.

Although, as Benjamin Buchloh has pointed out, Kaprow's declaration of the death of the tradition of painting because of Pollock was based on a twofold misconception: on the one hand, it involved an overestimation (that would subsequently be reproduced in countless historical surveys) of the significance of the stylistic and medial rupture, while on the other, his focus on the magical and ritual functions of art meant that he considered these categories transhistorical and universal (which would have implied a continuity with aspects of the aesthetics of Abstract Expressionism).<sup>70</sup> In contrast with Buchloh, I consider the first misconception to be the more important. It manages to situate in historical terms both the context in which an open aesthetic emerged and the polysemous diversity that was the hallmark of the art scene of the 1960s. At much the same time that happenings, Pop Art and Minimalism were being treated as serious trends within contemporary art, Pollock was being posthumously canonised, Barnett Newman and Ad Reinhardt were being taken seriously as artists, Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell and Willem de Kooning were continuing their successful careers and a new wave of radicalised abstract art (colour field, hard edge, post-painterly abstraction, op-art, shaped canvas) was being established, all of which meant that a critic, such as Clement Greenberg, could acquire renewed topicality. This was not solely an American phenomenon; the same pattern was repeated in Western Europe. The rather modest introduction of Neo-Dadaism and Pop Art at *documenta III* in 1964 and their relaunch on a much larger scale at *documenta IV* in 1968 occurred against a background that accorded equal prominence to contemporary nonfigurative painting.<sup>71</sup> Instead of accepting Kaprow's interpretation of Pollack uncritically, we could see it as forming part of the process of legitimisation of a radical alternative that existed on the fringes of New York's established art world at the end of the 1950s and had profound effects on the European art scene by the mid-1960s.

In this respect, Kaprow's own artistic process calls to mind that of many other American artists of the same period, for whom

John Cage's lectures at the New School of Social Research in New York provided the nexus for various intermedial experiments.<sup>72</sup> Cage's class was, however, only part of a network of artists, dancers, musicians, actors and writers who participated in one another's performances, attended one another's openings and, most importantly, exchanged ideas between the different artistic genres in every conceivable direction.<sup>73</sup> It was this medial cross-fertilisation in particular that provided a radical antithesis to the powerful medium-specific trend of the art world of the late 1950s. If Clement Greenberg's type of exclusionary criteria could be said to characterise the established end of the American art world in the late 1950s, the process of redefining traditional forms of art became a fundamental criterion of the subcultural context, one of whose cornerstones was provided by Cage's inclusive and open aesthetic.

This medial cross-fertilisation also altered the way in which history was read. Knowledge of the Dadaist tradition was, of course, significant in this regard, both as a catalyst and as an example of the existence of other sources and alternative strains within modernism. It also helped to shape the situation in which a radical reevaluation of the particular significance of Marcel Duchamp for twentieth-century art took place.<sup>74</sup> His *oeuvre* was interpreted in a manner that transcended the historical context (and, on occasion, even his own wishes) and led to the emergence of a reactivated and, to some extent at least, new image of Duchamp. John Cage has described at some point his way of seeing Duchamp's *The Large Glass*; this does not involve a historical reconstruction or an intrusive close reading (as exemplified in the interpretations by André Breton and Ulf Linde) but a form of observation whose lack of pretension reveals an entirely different horizon of interpretation:

Looking at the Large Glass, the thing that I like so much is that I can focus my attention wherever I wish. It helps me to blur the distinction between art and life and produces a kind of silence in the work itself. There is nothing in it that requires me to look in one place or another, in fact, requires me to look at all. I can look through it to the world beyond. . . . So he's telling us something

that we perhaps haven't yet learned, when we speak as we do so glibly of the blurring of the distinction between art and life. Or perhaps he's bringing us back to Thoreau: yes and no are lies.<sup>75</sup>

Sometimes this attitude has been considered an eclectic, uncritical or unoriginal recycling of historical sources, such as in the dismissal of the cross-boundary experimentation of the late 1950s with the pejorative label of Neo-Dada in the critical writing of Thomas Hess and others, or, as in the work of Peter Bürger, as the rejection of the workings of the neo-avantgarde as a market-oriented institutionalisation and aestheticisation of the institution-critical (and fundamentally anti-aesthetic) attitude of the historical avant-garde.<sup>76</sup> In its polemical eagerness to present a situation as black and white, this kind of dismissal ignores the complexity of the process in which the redefinition of a discursive order can both activate and be activated by a historiographic reformulation. It was not the change to historical knowledge itself that was crucial to the establishment of an open aesthetic but the real and active reinterpretation of this knowledge that took place in artistic and theoretical practice. Seen in this light, the historical avant-garde emerges as a far more complex, contradictory and ambivalent source than the institutionalisation of the post-war period and the historiography of modernism would have it appear. If the late 1950s is to be considered a critical juncture in the history of modern art, which seems appropriate in many ways, the change involved is one that occurs as part of a continuity.

But even if the subcultural arts circles of New York at this time displayed a multiplicity and a concentration without parallel in the contemporary world, their cross-boundary ambitions were far from unique. Quite the opposite, as similar activities could be witnessed elsewhere in the United States, Europe and other parts of the world, with artists seeking in various ways and (initially) independently of one another to discover new forms while also searching for alternative historical sources and attempting to define different aesthetic problems. And it is in this particular regard that Umberto Eco's argument becomes of serious interest in relation to the visual arts. Moreover, the distinctions he draws can be

made considerably more useful for our purposes if their scope is broadened from the definition of a new type of work (the open artwork) to the identification of a fundamental change in aesthetic approach (the open aesthetic). The point of this operation is to make possible a discussion of underlying attitudes, rather than a comparison based on form or stylistic similarity, so as to explicitly transcend an essentialist view of the work as a closed structure of meaning and encompass all artistic media, while also describing an international phenomenon irrespective of the formation of national schools, derivations of influences, normative examples and distinctions between the centre and the periphery.

The aim here is not to establish a new historical category for the inclusion and exclusion of ideas, works and names. It is, rather, to identify and clarify an underlying context: to interpret and understand a number of disparate historical phenomena, documents, images and other representations on the basis of what might be described as a specific discursive order. The open aesthetic does not entail a definitive historical rupture in this respect but rather a shift of the focus within the discourse of modernity. What this opens up is, in fact, the 'as' which precedes 'art' in Ad Reinhardt's phrase—a displacement of the conceivable boundaries within which artistic practice and interpretation are possible and legitimate. This open 'as' serves to characterise a change in attitude, which affects both the way the work is seen (as artwork), its meaning as a work of art and the relationship of the originator as well as the observer to the work. This is a shift that may be described in the words of Hal Foster as a transition from emphasising the work as quality to understanding it as interest.<sup>77</sup> That is, it is a shift away from a focus on normative critique, presence and essence in order to move beyond established (stylistic, aesthetic, medial) categories and to emphasise the communicative situation of the work. This does not mean that the extremely disparate contexts the open aesthetic describes lacked norms in the form of discursive rules for the possible and acceptable, but rather that those norms were not to be derived from a fixed, essentialist or teleological relation to the specific nature of the medium, the logic of history or the authentic style of the individual.



## The Play of Opposites

American theatre and dance historian Sally Banes' book *Greenwich Village 1963* (1993) is that unusual thing: a monograph of a single year as observed from a single place. The reason she chose this particular geographic and temporal location was its crucial importance, in her view, to an entirely new direction in the cultural life of the United States:

In 1963 what we now call the Sixties began. For political historians that year is memorable for the nuclear test ban treaty, the historic civil rights March on Washington, U.S. help in overthrowing the Diem government in Vietnam and the increase of American advisers there twentyfold, President John F. Kennedy's visit to the Berlin Wall, the deepening Sino-Soviet split, and the assassination in Dallas, among other events. But in 1963 another kind of history and another kind of politics were being made, in Greenwich Village, New York City. This was a political history that had nothing to do with the states, governments, or armies, or with public resistance. It had, instead, to do with art and its role in American life. For it was not only the policymakers in Washington who were shaping American postwar culture, but also, importantly, groups of individuals setting forth models of daily life for a generation – gently loosening the social and cultural fabric by merging private and public life, work and play, art and ordinary experience. . . . There was a feeling – so unlike the early 1990s – that all things were possible. . .and permitted.<sup>78</sup>

This might be thought a flagrant example of the kind of revolutionary dramaturgy we referred to earlier, with a pivotal moment being fixed upon as the introduction to an era. But Banes' book is more interesting than that. What she actually does is break up traditional types of linear and/or evolutionist narratives by allowing a multiplicity of diverse periods, contradictory styles and ambivalent attitudes to intersect at a singular, albeit composite, focus. The focal point she describes could be considered the culmination of a process over many years in the art and cultural worlds of New York in which forms of expression that had operated as subcultural manifestations in relation to the established culture, remaining in hiding as it were, were gradually rising to

the surface and increasingly coming to define the discursive order of cultural life.

A counterpart in the art world to Banes' list is the extraordinarily rapid impact of Pop Art on New York and the United States at the end of 1962 and during 1963. This much discussed period can be read to advantage through Banes' study, particularly in order to restore to Pop Art a feature it later lost as a result, for the most part, of its institutional internalisation: its close connection with a subcultural scene and with a diverse arrangement of social, political, sexual, aesthetic and medial groups. Pop Art may be considered a product of this cultural melting-pot, whose once so-obviously transgressive tendencies had both social and aesthetic aspects. Susan Sontag attempted to convey something along these lines in 'Notes On Camp' (1964), whose argument recreates the historical backdrop vital to an understanding of how alien Pop Art and its specific sensibility must once have appeared to its contemporaries before it was fixed, classified and made the object of theory as an idea.<sup>79</sup>

An interesting aspect of this institutional transformation of living culture is that it expresses a relationship of a more general kind between two different interpretive positions: the way in which a phenomenon occurs within a particular temporal and discursive framework and then undergoes a transformation when that framework is exchanged, for example, when an object is shifted from serving a particular contextual function to becoming a museum exhibit. The issue may also be formulated directly with reference to the work of art, in which case it concerns the relation between the signifier and the signified: what happens, that is, to the surrounding world when it is transformed, manipulated and encapsulated within the borders of the work. Although this is an ancient and incredibly complex question within the history of art, it emerged in various ways as an issue of acute importance for many of the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century, when it was sometimes formulated in terms of an attempt to bridge the divide between art and life. This divide has taken on an almost metaphorical significance at times, with the prescription for bridging it set out in diametrically opposed ways: from a metaphysical conviction of the immediate communicative capacity of the image

(Kandinsky) to the idea of abandoning the individual work in favour of a universal form of plastic representation (Mondrian).<sup>80</sup> The issue may already have been overlaid by the beginning of the 1960s, but the solutions proposed by Cage, Rauschenberg or Warhol were radically different from those provided by any of the artists practising in Europe of the 1910s.

It is not only the change itself that is interesting, but also the problematic issues with which the open aesthetic confronts the interpreter. How, for example, should one interpret the sounds that happen to occur in a particular performance of John Cage's 4'33'? Can such a question even be put in relation to this work? Are we not, in fact, confronted in this instance with an aesthetic that in its most radical extension makes any interpretive activity impossible?

The answer to these questions is fundamentally semiotic in nature and concerns whether it is even possible to distinguish a particular phenomenon as a sign, whether a sound, a movement or a material item or sediment when inscribed into a particular conventional space (the art world, the work of art) is transformed from substance into form, thus becoming a sign that can be interpreted. But even if the problem is rarely as complicated as in the case of 4'33', it is nevertheless one the viewer is forced to confront in relation to large parts of the work created by arts practitioners from the 1960s onwards. The interesting question here is not whether something is a work of art, but how meaning is generated within the framework of the open aesthetic and how meanings may be transformed by institutional relocations.

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When Öyvind Fahlström's *Dr. Schweitzer's Last Mission* (1964–66) was shown for the first time at the Venice Biennale of 1966, it attracted a great deal of international attention. Fahlström was among the preliminary favourites for the major painting prize (Premio Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri), which was ultimately awarded to the Argentinian Julio Le Parc. The work had been produced for display at the institution that had established itself in the post-war period as the foremost international shop-window of the art world and, hence, as the gatekeeper for

the established order of the discourse. It was bought that same year by the gallery owner Sidney Janis in New York, who sold it to Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 1970. It would be futile to attempt to distinguish between sensibility and concept when faced with a work that was so evidently produced within the framework of the established institutions of the art world, because the sensibility of the open aesthetic had become the very concept the institutions of the art world were busy producing and reproducing at this time.

It is the very normality of the Venice Biennale of 1966 that is so interesting here in that it demonstrates that a significant change had taken place on the international art scene and that the open aesthetic had become a self-evident part of the institutionalised establishment. The exhibition lacked even a vestige of the heroism that characterised other aspects of the turbulent political and cultural history of the 1960s, such as the legendary Biennales held in 1964 and 1968.<sup>81</sup> In a similar vein, *Dr. Schweitzer's Last Mission* could be said to represent a type of structure, concept and aesthetic that was normal for the more radical end of the institutional and economic structure of the art world—the part that ended up in the history books. Although the position adopted by Fahlström's works at this time makes them typical of the serious art of the 1960s, this does not mean they are mediocre or uninteresting, quite the contrary. Indeed, *Dr. Schweitzer's Last Mission* provides a striking example of the aesthetic and linguistic interface that encompassed large parts of the visual arts of the 1960s.

The work is made up of 68 parts in different materials that are hung in a three-dimensional space. The relationships between the visual elements are not fixed but determined by the person responsible for the exhibition, which means that the design of the work can (and should) vary between each display. The 68 painted elements of the work are hung in a clearly defined area that should indicate its spatial extent. The viewer was originally supposed to be able to move freely within this real space, but this is no longer permitted today. The structure of the work is not predetermined, and the fixed (hard) shapes of the visual elements have pronounced contours, which makes them appear to be discrete signs in the syntax of a pictorial language.

A peculiar relationship to several of the components that are of traditional importance in the history of art may be discerned here. First, Fahlström did not execute the workmanship himself but delegated it to the artist, and his then-wife, Barbro Östlihn—a circumstance that was openly declared initially but subsequently toned down.<sup>82</sup> Second, the space of the work seems most peculiar. The various pictorial elements are set within a frame that constitutes a fixed temporal situation; they are parts of a narrative (although a fragmentary one) and therefore also encompass an element of time. This means that they exist at once as a space, a narrative and a relationship between part and whole. *Dr. Schweitzer's Last Mission* is not fundamentally different from the paintings of previous eras in this regard. But the fact that the dividing line between the pictorial space and the space of the viewer is blurred makes the medial identity of the work less than clear. Can this be called painting at all? Yes, if it is the artist who says it is. In structural terms, however, this is a painting located in the borderlands between painting, the multiple and the installation that simultaneously challenges and extends the specific boundaries of the medium.

In terms of its scale and subject matter, the work could be described as a modern variant of history painting—*une grande machine* (a great machine)—however, that evidently produces a very different history than the allegorical stagings of academic discourse. Fahlström's particular status as artist and critic should be taken into consideration when attempting to understand this approach. From the beginning of the 1950s, he had been a driving force in Swedish cultural life in terms of introducing new types of visual art, literature, poetry, music and film. At the same time that Umberto Eco was publishing *Opera aperta*, Öyvind Fahlström was summarising a number of cross-medial features he believed he could discern in the radical art of the day: the participation of the observer in the execution of the work; the ever increasing importance of chance; a nonnormative and value-relative approach to art; open and unfinished forms; a nonhierarchical approach to material, methods and genres; an anti-symbolic and antiexpressionist view of objects as physical and visual facts.<sup>83</sup> Although Fahlström could never match Eco in terms of analytic acuity, he

clearly possessed an unusual overview of the front line of contemporary culture, as well as an ability to transform his theoretical and empirical insights into images. Indeed, *Dr. Schweitzer's Last Mission* appears almost to be a visual manifesto of the changes in the aesthetic position of contemporary painting. To borrow Craig Owen's specifically postmodern definition of allegory—the superimposition of texts, the fragments, the movement outward from the work, the active role of the viewer—*Dr. Schweitzer's Last Mission* could be said to constitute an allegorical reflection on the contemporary period and its art.<sup>84</sup> One layer of meaning refers to a peculiar hodgepodge of allusions to espionage, surveillance, violence, the Cold War balance of power and other more quotidian aspects of high and mass culture, while another seems to speak of the possibilities of painting as an artistic medium.

The corollary of this twofold perspective is that the individual pictorial elements are, of course, important for the understanding of the work. The question is simply in what way they are important. Several years before, Fahlström had described in the essay 'Manipulating the World' (1962) how he conceived of the way in which the pictorial elements would function in variable paintings:

These elements, while materially fixed, achieve their character-identity only when they are put together; their character changes with each new arrangement. The arrangement grows out of a combination of the rules (the chance factor) and my intentions, and is shown in a "score" or "scenario" (in the form of drawings, photographs or small paintings). The isolated elements are thus not paintings, but machinery to make paintings. Picture organ. The finished picture stands somewhere on the intersection of paintings, games (type Monopoly and war games) and puppet theatre.<sup>85</sup>

What is being established here is a structure that appears to make traditional hermeneutics implode: should you manage to extricate yourself from the forest of individual pictorial elements and the almost endless permutations of references, meanings, cross-references and connotations, you discover that the structure as a whole has been changed by a new hang. And yet this artwork, like every other, can be interpreted. The ambivalence between the apparent and the concealed, the familiar and the unknown, is

actually a fundamental aesthetic principle in Fahlström's work, particularly when fairly simple pictorial elements, which a contemporary viewer would presumably have been able to identify immediately, are contrasted with mysterious combinations of fragments and transformations of the familiar. The combination of a great diversity of discrete pictorial elements with the existence of an explanatory text—*Minnesanteckningar (till 'Dr.Schweitzers sista uppdrag')* [*Memoranda (to 'Dr Schweitzer's Last Mission')*] of 1964—could be seen as actually inviting a close reading: together, they serve to encourage an iconographic interpretation. The arrangement makes for an almost embarrassing correspondence with Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass* and its relationship to the Green Box.<sup>86</sup>

In Jean-François Chevrier's view, the various pictorial elements in Fahlström's work may be seen as conventional character types that possess the obvious meaning of hieroglyphs (in which a hand means a hand).<sup>87</sup> While the comparison is interesting, the conclusion drawn seems peculiar to say the least. In hieroglyphic script, each sign can convey a multiplicity of meanings both on its own and in relation to other signs. These meanings are, however, determined by a conventional set of rules, which gives the script a linear syntax that can be translated into other written languages. Since premodern times, hieroglyphs have also been associated with occult knowledge and mysticism, and it is this aspect of tradition that makes the comparison interesting: allowing the original cultural significance of the character types to be transformed into different, alien and possibly hidden meanings. Instead of functioning as hieroglyphs (signs in a conventional written language), the pictorial elements allude to the hieroglyphic (with its mystical connotations in Western cultural history). A work such as *Dr. Schweitzer's Last Mission* is one that both opens and closes itself at the same time.

An illustrative example is provided by the pictorial element that serves as a key to understanding the title of the work. Here we have a portrait of Fahlström that can be put together with a picture representing a scene (inscribed in the silhouette of a woman) in which the weeping doctor and missionary, Albert Schweitzer, looks up at the night sky and a passing rocket (or missile). The

iconicity of the individual visual signs does not constitute a problem here; a little historical knowledge makes it possible to identify the various individuals and objects. But how is one to interpret the individual pictorial elements and their variable reciprocal relationships in particular? It has been pointed out that here, as in several other parts of the work, it is possible to see how various elements have been put together as pairs of opposites that are based on similarity and/or paradoxes.<sup>88</sup> An example is provided by the contour line between the two detachable pictorial elements. They form the silhouette of a woman who is kissing a man and, at the same time, a portrait of the artist. Together, they create a scenario full of mystery. The dividing line connotes both closeness and separation. How are we to understand the scene of a weeping Dr Schweitzer? Is he a witness to truth—a good man who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952—weeping over the arms race or the madness of the modern age? Or is he an outdated remnant of the old colonial order bemoaning the changes taking place in the present? And what does he have to do with Fahlström, who is looking at us while being kissed by a woman who has been reduced to a silhouette? Should we understand the way the artist gazes at us in terms of an established convention by which an individual in a historical scene gazes out of the pictorial space in order to establish a connection with the viewer? In that case, the gaze would seem to be encouraging the viewer to reflect on something. The question then is what should we reflect on?

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Naturally, more general themes could be attributed to the various images. The iconic significance of each individual pictorial element cannot, however, be related to a fixed iconographic scheme.<sup>89</sup> The open structure actually communicates nothing more than its own situation, which is that of being a situation: the artist who leaves the work unfinished, the work that establishes a structure of meaning that highlights the establishment by the work of structures of meaning, the viewer who tries in vain to decipher a final and inherent meaning.

Fahlström wrote about this state of affairs in a 1961 article in which he characterised the concrete poetry of the day, which can



also be read as a draft of his own poetics: ‘The basic mistrust of symbolism (allegorical and surrealist alike) leads to an affinity for everyday materials and subjects, worn banalities lacking in overtones. . . .’<sup>90</sup> A fundamental tenet of Fahlström’s poetics is to avoid providing any kind of key. Applied to the visual arts (to *Dr. Schweitzer’s Last Mission*), this provides an explanation of a possible way of reading that goes beyond those established by art-critical and art-historical praxis during the twentieth century: at once iconography and formalism and an existential, sympathetic interpretation (*Einfühlung*). At this point, any notion of the work as an organic whole, of the idiom as a complete and nonreducible structure, of the subject as a linear narrative and its signs as representations of a coherent world-image, seems to disintegrate. Fahlström’s use of images, texts and objects calls that of Rauschenberg to mind inasmuch as they both simultaneously separate and link together material with the aim of displacing accustomed conventions so as to create a polysemous field of association. The very argument used by Branden Joseph to describe the strictly iconographic interpretation of Rauschenberg’s work as meaningless also appears to apply to Fahlström’s work. While it would not be impossible to establish an iconographic scheme, a scheme of that kind could be established at any point and have any direction.<sup>91</sup> Here it is the absence of a key that emerges as a crucial insight into how to understand this poetics and the ways of reading it (a leaf possesses no absolute and privileged viewpoint from which it can be defined and understood).<sup>92</sup>

The iconographic interpretation of Fahlström’s work may, in fact, be seen to fulfil a twofold function: it draws attention to particular meaning-saturated fields of association as a result of its strongly logocentric tendency to fix a specific meaning, while simultaneously demonstrating the openness of that meaning by failing to connect together the individual signs into a uniform programme. For the viewer who refuses to take up the challenge of a close reading posed by the work, the arbitrariness of its meaning and its subversive potential remain concealed under the noncommittal surface of the visual spectacle. This pursuit of a poetics based on a way of reading that transcends both form and content could be compared with changes in other artistic media of the

same period. An example Fahlström himself often referred to was so-called Concrete Poetry.<sup>93</sup>

Öyvind Fahlström described the new function of poetry in his manifesto *Hätilaragulprfåtskilaben. Manifest förkonkretpoesi* (1954):

Poetry is not only for analysis; it is also structure. Not just structure with the emphasis on expression of ideas, but also concrete structure. Let's say good-bye to all systematic or spontaneous depiction of private psychological, contemporary cultural or universal problems. Words are symbols, of course, but that's no reason why poetry shouldn't be experienced and *written* on the basis of *language as concrete matter*.<sup>94</sup>

Here, language is no longer seen as a conventional system of references (to the objects, ideas, feelings and perceptions of the surrounding world) but as linguistic material to play with: unexpected new word formations in order to evoke new associations, systematic reductions of words and sentences in order to expose new structural connections, distortions of words and syntax, experiments with the sonic qualities of words and with visual and typographically embellished interweavings of words and sentences in complex ideograms (sound-image-poems). In a work such as *Dr. Schweitzer's Last Mission*, Fahlström can be seen to be actively employing a poetics derived from the concrete poetry and abstract sign painting (significations) of the 1950s, a poetics that he had transformed in the variable paintings of the 1960s with their explicit iconic references to the surrounding world.<sup>95</sup> Even though the aesthetic devices and referentiality of the sign had changed, the code remained the same, so to speak.

The concrete aspect of this poetics is reminiscent of the efforts of many other artists, poets, composers and writers at this time. An example can be found in John Cage's description of Robert Rauschenberg's combine-paintings, with particular reference to the use/reuse of objects and motifs:

This is not a composition. It is a place where things are, as a table or as a town seen from the air: any one of them could be removed and another come into its place through circumstances analogous

to birth and death, travel, housecleaning, or cluttering. . . . There is no more subject in a *combine* than there is in a page from a newspaper. Each thing that is there is a subject. It is a situation involving multiplicity. . . . Of course there are objects. . . . And object is fact, not symbol.<sup>96</sup>

Everything on the canvas, from the concrete objects to the paint, appears to be physical and material facts, recorded and selected in order to be used in a specific context (a work of art). A very different approach to painting and the image is being described here that is strongly reminiscent of Leo Steinberg's concept of the flatbed picture plane: a place that no longer takes its orientation from that of the upright human body but is organised instead as a horizontal surface filled with objects, signs and images, whose reference is not to (natural, optical) perception but to a (cultural, interpretive) co-ordination and confrontation of information with signification.<sup>97</sup> The paradigmatic model would be the groaning desk rather than the open transparent window or the vertical opaque surface of the nonfigurative image. Irrespective of whether the canvas then hangs on a wall or lies on the floor (or is transformed into an installation or a happening), this way of organising and reading the work appears to be radically different from that of older traditions, a way of reading that is neither illusory nor symbolic.

A similar nonsymbolic and nonpsychological aesthetic is also found among the practitioners of the *nouveau roman*, such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, who wrote in the foreword to *Dans le labyrinthe* (1959)

Yet the reality in question is a strictly material one; that is, it is subject to no allegorical interpretation. The reader is therefore requested to see in it only the objects, actions, words, and events which are described, without attempting to give them either more or less meaning than in his own life, or his own death.<sup>98</sup>

The long descriptions of passages of time, objects and interiors that Robbe-Grillet presents have no symbolic or metaphorical function but serve instead as an inventory of the sensory perceptions the narrator receives from a particular place and time. Roland Barthes has also described this aesthetic in the following terms:

The novel becomes a direct experience of man's surroundings, without this man's being able to fall back on psychology, a metaphysic, or psychoanalysis in order to approach the objective milieu he discovers. The novel here is no longer of a chthonic, infernal order, it is terrestrial: it teaches us to look at the world no longer with the eyes of a confessor, a physician, or of God – all significant hypostases of the classical novelist – but with the eyes of a man walking in his city with no other horizon but the spectacle before him, no other power than of his own eyes.<sup>99</sup>

The horizon of the narrative is the observation of a passage of time by an individual human being at ground level that offers no possibility of an overarching understanding of its logic or causal connections. There is an explicit aversion in the *nouveau roman* towards any kind of transcendent humanism, towards all finished metaphysical or psychological constructions. The world and its objects are not presented through sentimental or anecdotal fiction, by means of mysticism or riddles; they are neither absurd nor meaningful. The structure of the narrative in the work of an author such as Robbe-Grillet resembles a construction that simulates the experience of the various aimless moments of the everyday, without reference to any privileged and hierarchical viewpoint but in which the viewer is given an active, co-creative role, rather than passively receiving a finished presentation of the world.<sup>100</sup>

It is, however, not necessarily the depiction of everyday life—in the sense of observable, true-to-life references to the surrounding world—that is important here but, rather, the view taken of the concrete function and value of language/matter. Neither does this involve some naive form of realism but a metarealism that highlights the descriptive or interpretive activity itself (on the part of the artist and the viewer), instead of providing a simple inclusion and or description of the individual objects, images and signs located in the work.

Examples of similar aesthetic motives can be found in a range of artistic genres at this time. A nonfigurative artist such as Frank Stella may be considered a counterpart to Rauschenberg. In the mid-1960s, Stella characterised his own art and aesthetics as follows: 'My painting is based on the fact that only what can be

seen there *is* there. It really is an object. . . . [Y]ou can see the whole idea without any confusion. . . . What you see is what you see.<sup>101</sup> A statement of this kind may appear on first reading to be a noncommittal and all but mystifying tautology in imitation of Ad Reinhardt. But the attitude it reveals is one that is prepared to take the focus of modernism (and Abstract Expressionism in particular) on the visual beyond the boundary of the material: paint and idiom are no longer seen as conveying anything (a content) apart from their own physical existence; the composition (the balancing of shapes) has been discarded in favour of a presentation of a symmetrical pattern, and the originality of the brushstroke has been abandoned in favour of a neutral application of industrial pigment to an untreated canvas. The pigment and the canvas emerge as concrete and real objects in the concrete and real physical space of the viewer. This is, in other words, an aesthetic that transgresses an earlier modernist nonfigurative tradition (in terms of both its metaphysical implications and its belief in the work as an organic whole) while pointing forward to some of the movements of the 1960s (the visual facticity of Pop Art and the material objectivity of Minimalism). Absent as well is any trend towards representative vision.

The point of referring to all these highly diverse examples is not to indicate the existence of an implicit programme or a least common denominator for all the different art forms of the 1960s. Rather, it is to demonstrate the considerable extent to which what we have referred to as the open aesthetic involves the multivalent transformation of visual signs in movement through the context called art: the dual aspect of the goat as physical object and linguistic sign in Rauschenberg's *Monogram*; the viscosity and materiality of paint and canvas in Stella's paintings of the early 1960s. We are confronted here, perhaps more clearly than anywhere else, with a realisation that the interpretation of the visual arts also has to transcend appearance and stylistic criteria. In the case of *Dr. Schweitzer's Last Mission*, realism has as much to do with form (the variable and spatial structure of the work) as content (the references to the surrounding world). For this is painting that has, as Pontus Hultén put it, 'abandoned the wall' and been transformed into 'theatre, games, psychodrama'.<sup>102</sup> Or to put it

another way: painting whose realism serves as the concrete existence of the work and of its interaction with the viewer in a real space-time. The absence of a key here is not a metaphor for freedom in general or an escape manoeuvre from responsibility but a crucial means of understanding the content and function of the piece. Having served as a fixed and inherent meaning, content now emerges as an indication of one fragmentary context among many others to which the text can be related. The meaning of the work is altered as a result, from encompassing the content of the sign to pointing out its function.

The interpretation of *Dr. Schweitzer's Last Mission* is not aimed at deciphering what the work means but at an attempt to understand how it means. In my view, this is the truly radical content of Fahlström's piece; this is what it encourages us to contemplate. The particular dialectic between the presence of boundaries and the transgression of boundaries can be considered one of the fundamental subjects of *Dr. Schweitzer's Last Mission*. The existence of a certain traditional order is a precondition for playing with the rules and boundaries of the medium. Similarly, the openness of meaning also appears to be a game that presupposes the existence of a traditional view that holds that meaning is fixed as essential and intrinsic in every work of art. Several years previously, Fahlström had formulated an ideal (based on contemporary concrete poetry and aleatory music) that radicalised the remnants of traditional composition still to be found in the visual arts:

The open form: one prefers an imperfection of form, a more or less consciously incomplete, unsurveyable and unforeseeable form, fluid and present, as opposed to the anecdotal/thematic/aphoristic form, which piles up past moments like steps to perceived goals, peripetia and climaxes. A form that does not mark a beginning or an end and that can be entered and exited at any time and place.<sup>103</sup>

The open structure is intimately connected with the communicative and meaning-generative aspects of the work, with the relation to the viewer being one of the work's constituent factors. Seen in this light, *Dr. Schweitzer's Last Mission* emerges as a dramatisation of the changing view of the ontology and meaning-function of the work of art at this time, as a staging of the artwork as

a meaning-producing machine, in which the traditionally static structures of form and pictorial space are transformed at a metaphorical level into an open space of meaning—into an arena of possibilities and possible readings—in which the viewer is able to move, both figuratively and literally, searching for connections and associations, choosing the direction of travel and selecting focal points, but never fixing either a stable relationship between the parts and the whole or an accepted core of meaning.

However, the structure that Fahlström establishes is far too strict and far too compelling simply to be characterised by an expression as vague as ‘an arena of possibilities’. At issue is rather a game of opposites. It is no accident that he refers to games and games theory on many different occasions. A game implies the existence of a set of rules and the necessity of interaction, which indeed appear to be two key themes in his work. And yet even this particular combination may also seem much too static to describe the radically variable elements in Fahlström’s work. The crucial aspect of the reference to rules here is not the fixing of a set of rules as such but the dialectic between the establishment of those rules and their dissolution. An example is provided by one of his earlier paintings, *Performing K.K. no. 2 (Sunday Edition)* of 1963–64. In this work, he took George Harriman’s comic character ‘KrazyKat’ as his starting point and transformed the already absurd storyline into a subversive and almost hallucinogenic narrative structure. Fahlström appears to have transferred the structure of his earlier nonfigurative sign paintings to one of the most regulated genres of the visual arts in modern society: the comic. A crash, a dislocation, occurs here between two different logical systems, with the image operating in the field of tension between a particular fundamental structure (a conventional understanding of the linear structure of the narrative) and the dissolution of the structure (in execution and interpretation).

In a 1966 article, Fahlström described how the relationship between the freedom provided by the variation and manipulation of the components exists in direct proportion to the rigidity of the rules and the invariability of the components.<sup>104</sup> At issue here is an aesthetic that is far removed from free association, amorphous form-experiments and spontaneity. In this context, the word ‘game’ means a combination of rules and interaction.

This combination was formulated by Fahlström in a way that suggests that the work/sign could have both an aesthetic and a political dimension. In a situation in which every structure, every convention and every rule appear to be arbitrary, they can—to the extent the possibility is conceived of—be changed or manipulated. This is not, however, a matter of creating art for political purposes or as a form of agitation but about setting up instead a potentially subversive linguistic approach that has been arrived at through the various experiments of modernism. As in previously cited examples, it is the direction that is crucial here: the movement through linguistic analysis, through the examples of history, in order to arrive at life through the image.

A mediation of this kind also serves to illuminate the hierarchical structure existing between the value sphere of the visual arts and other cultural domains. Benjamin Buchloh has described this unequal relationship as a double negation that is institutionally inscribed in the concept of the art:

Every time the avant-garde appropriates elements from the discourse of low, folk, or mass culture, it publicly denounces its own elitist isolation and the obsolescence of its inherited production procedures. Ultimately, each such instance of “bridging the gap between art and life”, as Robert Rauschenberg famously put it, only reaffirms the stability of the division because it remains within the context of high art. Each act of cultural appropriation, therefore, constructs a simulacrum of double negation, denying the validity of individual and original production, yet denying equally the relevance of the specific context and function of the work’s own practice.<sup>105</sup>

Buchloh’s analysis is entirely correct in describing a movement that values the destination of the individual element rather than its origin, such that the grafting onto the artwork of the surrounding world leads inexorably to a transformation. This is a function, as it were, of the kind of semiotic formation of meaning that the art world makes possible, in which every fragment of the outside world constitutes undifferentiated substance until it undergoes transformation in the work of art and becomes form.

But the occasionally radical use of visual material within the open aesthetic cannot be described as unambiguously as Buchloh



would have it in terms of visual and semantic colonisation. The transformation constitutes a zone of its own on the boundary between the art world and the wider one, with the fragments left dangling between them. The angora goat in Rauschenberg's *Monogram* is transformed into a visual sign in this work, while also retaining something of its origins (the angora goat and the stuffed angora goat, respectively). The selection of visual elements is of major significance because the transformation works in both directions. This becomes particularly clear in a work such as *Monogram* because the goat occupies such a prominent visual place; indeed, within the art world's system of norms its goatness was once perceived as an extraordinarily aggressive sign. Here, as in the previous history of modernism, the circulation of signs involves a multiplication of voices and a multiplication of meaningful contexts.

The movement we are referring to here both opens up and closes down the possible production of meaning and value in the world of art and in the wider world. It may be entirely correct, as Buchloh writes, that this process takes place within the framework of Art as its institutional and authoritative focal point. Nevertheless, a distinction must be drawn between the movement taking place in the present (and actively challenging the validity of the distinction) and the historicisation of that movement, in which the provocative gesture is archived and codified together with other similar gestures and where the potential connection between serious art and popular culture is transformed into a purely art-historical context. In complete contrast with what Buchloh writes, Rauschenberg denies the very possibility of bridging the gulf between art and life. And it is for this very reason that he realises the necessity for operating in this breach.

This seems to be one of the clearest formulations of the artist's linguistic and existential dilemma in the modern era of differentiation and fragmentation, in which the boundary to a once natural unity has been forever breached with no possibility of return. It is a formulation that seems to confirm that Art *is* art as art (and that everything else is everything else) while also expressing disbelief that the artist will ever be able to (re)gain access to that unity. Authentic art—like authentic life—appears to be a beautiful but fragile illusion to which we are continually drawn back but

which vanishes as soon as someone reaches out a hand to grasp it. Rauschenberg's phrase conveys not a trace of nostalgia but rather the reverse: an active desire to explore this particular divide. While he quite clearly commits a form of violence against the origin and meaning of the individual objects and pictorial fragments, so, too, do every interpretation and every quotation. As I see it, the ethical dilemma is not to be found in the forms of appropriation that constitute artistic practice but rather in the tendency of the historiography of the post-war period to read this practice in terms of much more rigid narratives and structures of meaning. To point out once again the gulf between art and life, and to reemphasise its value, would be to revitalise the subversive and transgressive values that the avant-garde once produced, irrespective of whether we are referring to European art of the 1910s or American art of the 1960s.

As in Octavio Paz's definition of modernity, art never appears as itself in this context but always as another. And to the extent that the idea of this gulf has been realised and institutionalised as a discursive order, art, like modernity, is condemned to pluralism. This is the radical interpretation, as it were, of Rauschenberg's definition and of modernism as the aesthetic of openness.

The open aesthetic does not, in practice, entail a break with the self-reflexive and self-critical aesthetic of modernism. The realism of a work by Cage, Rauschenberg, Stella, Fahlström or Robbe-Grillet only exists in the sense that the surrounding world has re-entered the centre of the work through a filter of linguistic forms and historical reflections; this involves language, medium, memory, convention and history just as much as the world outside the work. But unlike the theories of early modernism, the open aesthetic provides an approach that distrusts the romantic view of the symbol, of organic unity and essential expression, whether these apply to the ontological status of the sign or to the communicative function of the work. The metalevel actualised here and in many other places in the visual arts of the 1960s could, in fact, be considered to have been a precondition of the comprehensive aesthetic dislocation within the discourse of the visual arts. The phenomenon could be likened to the growing historiographic interest that always seems to surround shifts in the discursive order of the historical and aesthetic disciplines: in order to go beyond the boundary of the

possible and legitimate, that boundary (its historical and theoretical determinants) has to be made visible and analysed.

The transgression of these parameters may be considered in light of the much more radical shift from work to frame that Craig Owens has described as a key aspect of the transition from modernism to postmodernism:

Rather, postmodernism approaches the empty space left by the author's disappearance from a different perspective, one which brings to light a number of questions that modernism, with its exclusive focus on the work of art and its "creator", either ignored or repressed: Where do exchanges between readers and viewers take place? Who is free to define, manipulate and, ultimately, to benefit from the codes and conventions of cultural production? These questions shift attention away from the work and its producer and onto its *frame* – the first by focusing on the *location* in which the work of art is encountered; the second, by insisting on the *social* nature of artistic production and reception.<sup>106</sup>

Fahlström's work and his aesthetic may be seen as a historical symptom of such a major shift; however, this misses a crucial point: these transgressions entail a dislocation within and throughout the order of modernist discourse. At issue here are an artistic practice and an aesthetic attitude that clearly diverge from certain fundamental values in the theoretical canon of the modernist narrative and that (to some extent) violate the boundaries of what was previously referred to as the regime of authenticity. Under consideration here are various expressions and representations of an attitude that could be described as a post-romantic modernism. This is what the emphasis of the open aesthetic on the communicative function of language and the shift from work to frame during the 1950s and 1960s meant—a shift that subsequently led to a number of theoretical and discursive changes that might very well be characterised as a postmodern condition).

## Endgame

Instead of considering medial critique (modernism) and institutional critique (avant-garde, postmodernism) as different in kind,

as some theoreticians have done, both practices could be recognised as two sides of the same coin: a linguistic critique that is fundamentally to do with communication and relates in various ways (antithetically and synthetically) to an institutionalised social context. This was the insight that compelled an art critic such as Arthur Danto to begin theorising on the meaning of the art world and of aesthetic identification after viewing and attempting to understand Andy Warhol's Brillo-boxes in 1964. The basic problem in this regard is no different from that of the reception of Picasso's work in 1912 or Pollock's in 1948, apart from the fact that Warhol (to some extent) and Fahlström (to a considerable extent) formulated the problem of language/discourse at a highly conscious level. In Fahlström's case, the course taken by the dialectic of the work moves through a thorough exploration of the grammar of the visual language in order to expand far beyond any notion of a closed framework. And yet it seems all the more essential to make that framework—its boundaries—visible in order to understand and analyse the meaning of the space that makes this movement possible or, in other words, the discursive space that *Dr. Schweitzer's Last Mission* seems to identify by means of its complex structure and that also provides this work with its particular sign function as art.

If we return at this point to the comparison previously drawn between Clement Greenberg and Walter Benjamin, a reversal has evidently taken place. The (avant-garde) aesthetic of disparity that Greenberg championed from the end of the 1930s became the possible narrative for modern art in the political, social and economic context of the post-war period, in contrast with Benjamin's thesis on the profound change to the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. However, the discursive order that made one statement possible but not the other has shifted since that time. Detached from its original political connotations, Benjamin's text has been recoded as a possible interpretation of the pluralism and cross-boundary artistic practices of recent decades. Particularly, his idea that the aura of the work of art (the very idea of the aura of the work of art) had been abandoned because the mass (re-)production provided by film and photography has become widespread within and without the art world. It would not be

farfetched to maintain that today the photographic code has replaced painting as the predominant sign system of the art world. But does this mean that we now find ourselves beyond the reach of the regime of authenticity—that it is no longer possible to make a distinction between Art and art?

It is quite clear at a theoretical level that this particular distinction has come in for massive criticism and, ultimately, been delegitimated, both in the practices of the visual arts and those of art criticism and philosophy. However, it would be naive to regard pluralism as a value-nihilist state purely on the basis of a changed theoretical position. Despite the fact that the distinctions and positions of the art world have undergone various radical changes during recent decades, and despite the fact that the structure of the system itself has become extraordinarily more complex, its practitioners still find themselves within a particular institutional and economic framework that converts, distributes and accumulates various types of values—aesthetic, symbolic, ideological and economic. The circulation of capital and values within this domain depends as much today as ever before on the power and capacity to make distinctions.

The complicated machinery that Pierre Bourdieu describes in *Les règles de l'art* and elsewhere has not broken down in any sense, but the pattern of movement and the distinctions operating in this field are shaped and formulated in a somewhat different way today. Within the framework of this machinery, the idea of the authentic in both the descriptive and normative senses of the word still appears to be a central value. A more radical alteration of this state of affairs would presumably require not only a number of critical philosophical and artistic deconstructions, but also a completely different institutional and economic system.

And it is here that we return to the point where we began: wonderment at the alienated effect evoked by Thomas Struth's photographs. This effect is, in large part, based on the peculiar activity the image dramatises as photograph and as work of art: that people and societies, now more so than ever before, place such a high value on the idea of Art and the transformations that take place within the world of art that they are prepared to invest enormous quantities of money and time to make this activity

possible. This activity is one that also involves a most peculiar encounter between different types of quantifications. A building that cost hundreds of millions to erect and maintain is visited annually by hundreds of thousands of people who look at images and objects whose collective value reaches into the billions. In this building, the images are hung individually so that each visitor can encounter a unique work (a work the artist considered himself at one time to be one with) in order to contemplate its singular meaning and the personal address it makes. Unfettered mass distribution and isolated unicity are the simultaneous hallmarks of the situation. The space stipulates a real encounter with a physical object, whose transformation into Art and Meaning occurs in an entirely different symbolic or ritual sphere—to the extent, that is, that anyone still believes it is possible for transformation to take place (literally and figuratively) at all.

This situation brings to mind the space Michel Foucault described with the term heterotopia: a kind of place that exists in the midst of society but which is regulated on the basis of different perceptions than those governing the rest of society; it is completely real and yet unreal at the same time.<sup>107</sup> The cemetery is one such space, as are the theatre, the park, the library, the cinema—and the museum. The heterotopic place brings together different spaces and attitudes that are mutually incompatible; it embraces different perceptions of time, implying a system of openings and closures that both isolate the functions of the space and relate them to the surrounding world. Foucault likens this type of place to a mirror in which I am observing an image of myself in a placeless place:

From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself: I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass this virtual point which is over there.<sup>108</sup>

Thomas Struth's photographs convey something of this strange feeling of finding oneself dangling in the discontinuity between different moments of time and different levels of reality. The distancing effect of the photograph makes it possible for us to observe observation, but that effect is also at work in the fact that a work of art is making visible the constitution and existence of art in modern society. What Thomas Struth is doing is demonstrating the romantic foundations of the white cube: that moment in which the sublime content of the work is meant to be conveyed to the viewer directly and immediately. And he portrays this moment in a manner that recalls the rhetorical apparatus a Romantic such as Caspar David Friedrich initiated in his work by showing a number of individuals who turn their backs on us, the viewers, in order to observe the sublime for themselves.

This may be understood not only as an ironic game with conventions and traditions, but also as an allegory of how the linguistic and epistemological gulf that characterised the visual arts of the modern era also characterises our own age. The presentation of Jackson Pollock's painting in the neutral space of the museum presupposes an individual experience of the aura and sublime effect of the authentic work. And yet Struth's images could also be said to perform a deconstruction of this unarticulated context by portraying it in a piece that is both a clinical form of documentation and an aestheticising artwork—a work that serves as a sign of the impossibility of an origin of the sign or of the fixing of its meaning, a sign that demonstrates how the search for the meaning of the sign always leads on to another sign and never to anything originally signified. In this context, Thomas Struth's image can be seen as a sign that stages a radical deconstruction of the possible authenticity of the sign/the work of art.

While this interpretation may be legitimate, it would appear to be a particularly pessimistic proposition about the communicative function and value of the visual arts (and, by extension, of human language). Although what seems truly remarkable in light of such radical scepticism is the actual existence of any communicative function and value. What Thomas Struth's picture is bringing to the fore is, in fact, that problematic section of Ad Reinhardt's formula 'Art is art as art and everything else is everything else': the

phrase that designates something 'as art'. Poststructuralist scepticism could be described in this regard as a form of secularisation and emancipation. Art, like every other value and every other meaning, cannot be understood as something simply god-given but rather as a social construction, at once utterly real and unconditionally unreal. The hopeful aspect of this situation is that an understanding of this part is being established that transcends the authoritative sanction of the unified modernist narrative, whose formula has been dissolved and fragmented in such a way that the definition of modern art has reacquired that once so open question mark.

This is also a key implication of a differentiation of the canon: to make it possible to revisit an *oeuvre*, such as that of Jackson Pollock's, from outside the singular narrative of modernism and, perhaps, even to believe in it once again. Although this would involve a diametrically opposed form of belief to the truths mediated by the theory and historiography of modernism—a belief characterised not by historical necessity or blind faith in the authenticity of the work but by a deep ambivalence between absence and meaning.



## Endnotes

1. Alison & Peter Smithson, "But Today We Collect Ads", *Ark*, November 1956: 18, p. 49.
2. Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text" (1971), *Image, Music, Text*, (transl. Stephen Heath), London 1977, p. 158.
3. Kjell Nowak & Gunnar Andrén, *Reklam och samhällsförändring. Variation och konstans i svenska populärpressannonser 1950–1975*, Kulturindikatorer svensk i symbolmiljö 1945–1975: rapport nr. 3, Lund 1981, pp. 12–23.
4. The advent of television took place in stages: principles developed in the late nineteenth century found application in a range of inventions during the early twentieth century that made possible the construction of apparatuses for the transmission and reception of images by the end of the 1920s. The British Broadcasting Corporation began transmissions on a regular basis by 1936, while transmission on a smaller scale were also initiated in other European countries and the United States at the end of the 1930s. But it was not until after the Second World War that television became a mass medium when nationwide networks of transmitter stations were constructed in a large number of countries. The development and expansion of television may also be considered to have taken place in direct relation to the economic development of the various countries and, therefore, with the ability of the population to invest in what were fairly expensive apparatuses (for an exhaustive history of the development of the medium of television, see R. W. Burns, *Television. An International History of the Formative Years*, History of Technology Series 22, London 1998).
5. Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society. Myths and Structures*, (transl. Chris Turner), London 1998 (1970), pp. 76–78.
6. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*, New York 1965 (1964), p. 322.
7. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *The Consciousness Industry. On Literature, Politics, and the Media*, (transl. John Simon), New York 1974 (1962), p. 4. The term 'consciousness industry' may be

considered an extension of Theodor Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's critical concepts of the culture industry and enlightenment as mass deception.

8. Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, (transl. Ian Hamilton Grant), London 1995 (1976), pp. 70–76.

9. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, (transl. Ken Knabb), London 2005 (1967).

10. This is the substance of a discussion conducted within relatively radical modernist circles during large parts of the twentieth century that, superficially at least, was about the relationship of free art to applied art and architecture, but, at a deeper level, concerned the fundamental grammar of modern form—irrespective of medium. Although an aesthetic of this kind seemed to cross the boundaries between various media, it actually involved coordination through specialization with questions of form, function and aesthetics being raised within separate spheres that were assumed to exist at a remove from the rest of society and from the expanding medial and mass culture.

11. An interesting and, in its time, extraordinarily significant analysis of this subject is found in Crimp 1995 (1993), pp. 84–105. For an analysis of Paul Delaroche's declaration and various historical misconceptions about its significance, see Stephen Bann, *Parallel Lines. Printmakers, Painters and Photographers in Nineteenth-Century France*, New Haven/London 2001, pp. 104–109.

12. Max Horkheimer & Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, (transl. Edmund Jephcott), Stanford 2002 (1947), pp. 107–108.

13. Ad Reinhardt, "Art as Art" (1962), in Barbara Rose (ed.), *Art-as-Art. The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1991 (1975), p. 53.

14. In the mid-1950s, Ad Reinhardt set out twelve technical rules for contemporary art. These may be considered a manifesto for his own version of the aesthetics of disparity as a radicalisation of modernism's tradition of defining itself by establishing taboos: no textures, no brushwork or calligraphy, no sketches or drawings, no forms, no design, no colours, no light, no space, no time, no size or scale,

no movement, no object, no subject, no matter, no symbols, images or signs (from Ad Reinhardt, "Twelve Rules for a New Academy" (1957), in Rose, pp. 205–206). But unlike the taboos of early modernism that were aimed at the academic and realist traditions, Ad Reinhardt's target was the tradition of historical modernism. His list was thus concerned with the refinement of modernism through self-criticism.

15. John Perreault, "Minimal Abstracts" (1967), in Gregory Battcock (ed.), *Minimal Art. A Critical Anthology*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1995 (1968), p. 262.

16. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" (1967), *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*, Chicago/London 1998, p. 148–172.

17. See e.g. Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" (1979), *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 1991 (1985), p. 287, and Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real. The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 1996, pp. 53–54.

18. Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism. On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, (transl. Dana Polan with the author), Minneapolis/Oxford 1991 (1984), pp. 154–163.

19. Geldzahler, p. 37.

20. Richard Hamilton, "Roy Lichtenstein", *Studio International*, vol. 175, 1968: January, p. 23.

21. Crow, 1996, p. 3.

22. Robert Rauschenberg, "Statement", *Sixteen Americans*, Museum of Modern Art, New York 1959, p. 58.

23. In his 1963 introduction to the *Robert Rauschenberg* catalogue at the Jewish Museum in New York, Alan R. Solomon linked Rauschenberg's work to that of Picasso ("Robert Rauschenberg", in Steven Henry Madoff (ed.), *Pop Art. A Critical History*, The Documents of Twentieth Century Art, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1997, pp. 20–21). However, Solomon's argument was based on the premise that Rauschenberg could not be directly linked to the antiaesthetics of Dadaism, and this led him to overemphasise the

correspondences between Rauschenberg's combine-painting and Picasso's collage.

24. Martha Jackson, "Foreword", *New Form – New Media*, Martha Jackson Gallery, New York 1960, (unpag.). The exhibition was a collaboration between several different galleries, and the contemporary artists shown included George Brecht, John Chamberlain, Bruce Conner, Jim Dine, Jean Dubuffet, Dan Flavin, Red Grooms, Robert Indiana, Jasper Johns, Allan Kaprow, Yves Klein, Louis Nevelson, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, Richard Stankiewicz, Antonio Tapies, Bob Withman, while those in the historical section included Hans Arp, Alberto Burri, Alexander Calder, Joseph Cornell, Henry Moore and Kurt Schwitters.

25. Lawrence Alloway, "Junk Culture as Tradition", *New Form – New Media*, unpaginated.

26. Allan Kaprow, "Some Observations on Contemporary Art", *New Form – New Media*, unpaginated.

27. The same could be said of the first thematic survey of American and European neo-Dadaism that was displayed in the exhibition *The Art of Assemblage* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1961. While this exhibition attracted a great deal of attention, its aim—of mounting a historical exposé—resulted in the new art being situated, once again, in a strictly historical context. This was important for the legitimation of new forms of art and the dissemination of information (about the present and the past), but the exhibition failed to provide any rhetorically applicable context in which to view that present.

28. Thomas B. Hess, "Mixed Mediums for a Soft Revolution", *Art News*, vol. 59, Summer 1960: 4, p. 62.

29. This exhibition may be considered a companion piece to *Le Nouveau Réalisme à Paris et à New York* at the Galerie Rive Droite in Paris in 1961, although there were differences in both the selection and the rhetoric of the two shows that would later prove significant. As the title indicates, the latter was an exhibition focused on the group of artists known as the *Realistes Nouveaux*, who had been grouped together the previous year under a manifesto by the critic Pierre Restany and who had been absent from Martha

Jackson's show. The aim was to show similar radical trends on both sides of the Atlantic: with France being represented by such artists as Arman, César, Raymond Hains, Yves Klein, Niki de Saint-Phalle and Jean Tinguely and with the United States being represented by Lee Bontecou, John Chamberlain, Vardea Chryssa, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and Richard Stankiewicz. In his foreword to the catalogue, Restany presents a report on the situation of contemporary art that bears the stamp of the ideas in his New Realist manifesto, where a new feeling for nature and for the world around us has led to the development of an art that attempts to examine in an immediate way the urban landscapes of the present, its industrial products, mechanical methods of production and popular culture (Pierre Restany, "La réalité dépasse la fiction", *Le Nouveau Réalisme à Paris et à New York*, Galerie Rive Droite, Paris 1961, unpag.). This new sensibility is presented as an existential and universal undercurrent in the contemporary avant-garde (irrespective of nationality)—a notion underlined by placing side by side the works of French and American artists based on their visual correspondences. Similarly, in *New Form – New Media*, the exhibition's combination of continuity (with an older Romantic tradition) and newness (an almost sociological approach to the surrounding world) served as an attempt to explain and legitimise/legitimate the present in terms of history, although the selection was aimed to a far greater extent at what was then contemporary and its possible future importance. The problem here was that although this offered an effective rhetorical approach, the institutionalised French art world was too inflexible to respond to it (see Boyer, 1995, pp. 117–138).

30. See *New Realists*, Sidney Janis Gallery, New York 1 November – 1 December 1962, unpaginated. The artists taking part were (from Great Britain) Peter Blake, John Latham, Peter Philips; (from France) Arman, Christo, Raymond Hains, Yves Klein, Martial Raysse, Daniel Spoerri, Jean Tinguely; (from Italy) Enrico Baj, Gianfranco Baruchello, Tano Festa, Mimmo Rotella, Mario Schifano; (from Sweden) ÖyvindFahlström, P. O. Ultvedt; (from the United States) Peter Agostini, Jim Dine, Robert Indiana, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Moskowitz, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist, Steven Segal, Harold Stevenson, Wayne Thiebaud, Andy Warhol and Tom Wesselmann.

31. Sidney Janis, "On the Theme of the Exhibition", *New Realists*, unpaginated.

32. John Ashbery, "The New Realists", *New Realists*, unpaginated.

33. The difference between American and European art was noted by the participating French artists, in particular, who were extraordinarily upset at being presented side by side with their American colleagues, which made their own art seem a great deal more dated, conventional and traditional and thus incapable of pointing the way forward (see Altshuler, 1994, pp. 215–218).

34. Brian O'Doherty, "'Pop' goes the New Art", *The New York Times*, 4 November 1962, Section 2, p. 23; Harold Rosenberg, "The Art Galleries: The Game of Illusion", *The New Yorker*, 24 November 1962, p. 162.

35. Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall. Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time*, Harmondsworth 1981 (1980), p. 185.

36. See "A Symposium on Pop Art", in Madoff, pp. 65–81. Peter Selz (curator, MoMA), Henry Geldzahler (curator, The Metropolitan Museum of Art), Hilton Kramer (art critic), Dore Ashton (art critic), Leo Steinberg (art critic, art historian) and Stanely Kunitz (poet, art and literary critic) took part in the symposium held at MoMA on 13 December 1962, when a front line was clearly staked out between those who defended Pop Art (Geldzahler, Steinberg) and those who rejected it outright (Kramer, Kunitz), with Ashton and Selz (the latter in the role of moderator and host) adopting a more neutral position between the two. For a description of the rapidity of the triumph of Pop Art as seen through ten key exhibitions, see Constance W. Glenn, "American Pop Art: Inventing the Myth", in Marco Livingstone (ed.), *Pop Art*, Royal Academy of Arts, London 1991, pp. 30–39.

37. Marco Livingstone's standard work *Pop Art. A Continuing History* (London 1990), which frames this movement under the headings of Pre-pop, Foundations, Classic, Maturity and Legacy, provides a clear example of this. In essence, a traditional evolutionist scheme of art history is being applied here, which means that the same type of narrative is used to determine the presentation of Hellenism, the Baroque and Pop Art.

38. Lucy R. Lippard, *Pop Art*, London 2004 (1966), p 69.

39. One obvious example is provided by Madoff's anthology *Pop Art. A Critical History* (1997), in which the contributions are subdivided under headings such as Pre-Pop: American Precursors, English Currents, Focus: The Major Artists (Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Rosenquist, Warhol) and From Center to Periphery: Other Figures. Reproduced from the work of Lucy Lippard, this pattern, rather than losing its force, subsequently remained fixed, as is made clear by the selections presented in survey literature, such as Marco Livingstone's *Pop Art. A Continuing History* (1990), and in specialist studies, such as Hal Foster's *The Return of the Real* (1996), where a single artist, such as Andy Warhol, is used essentially to represent the entire phenomenon of Pop Art.

40. The concept of Neo-Dada was used for the first time in 1957 by Robert Rosenblum in a review of a group exhibition at the Leo Castelli Gallery (see Kirk Varnedoe, *Jasper Johns. A Retrospective*, Museum of Modern Art, New York 1996, p. 386, note 112). For the negative implications of the term Neo-Dada, see Susan Hapgood, Maurice Berger & Jill Johnston, *Neo-Dada. Redefining Art 1958–1962*, The American Federation of Arts, New York 1994, pp. 11–12. For what would prove to be—in historical terms—a highly influential critical intervention against Neo-Dadaism (Jasper Johns, first and foremost) and the lack of originality in its banal approach to history, see Thomas B. Hess, “In Praise of Folly”, *Art News*, vol. 58, Mars 1959: 1, p. 60. Irrespective of the various premises underpinning this critique, it can be traced back to the insidious use of the prefix ‘neo’ linked to a historical phenomenon (Dadaism/avant-garde): in making something new by virtue of the past, a cardinal sin is committed against the temporal orientation of avant-garde logic; this requires that the new emerges from the contemporary and thus, at a rhetorical level, turns its back on the past. An example of the way in which this art could, theoretically, be incorporated within (and rejected by) Abstract Expressionism is provided by Clement Greenberg's “After Abstract Expressionism” (1962), *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4: *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, (ed. John O'Brian), Chicago/London 1993 (1986), pp. 126–127, where Greenberg describes a trend in American and European nonfigurative art that he

calls homeless representations, lingering figurative and illusory elements, that is, with Jasper John's art being described as the swansong of this trend: as a beautiful but doomed finale. The term pre-pop was introduced in a different context in which Pop Art was celebrated and classified as a new contemporary idiom, with Rauschenberg and Johns being considered its forerunners because, while they had obvious links with Pop Art, they could not be included within it. Segregating classifications and distinctions of this kind were already being made in American art criticism in 1962–1963, when Pop Art was rapidly becoming a phenomenon that was impossible to ignore; the term pre-pop, however, was more usually employed with the aim of establishing a diachronic context. Initially, this was in the exhibitions and survey works that dealt with Pop Art as a historical phenomenon. One example is Lucy Lippard, who uses the term to distinguish Pop Art from previous attempts to reproduce popular cultural references in art (see Lippard, p. 75); another would be its use in order both to establish a historical connection with an older form of modernism and to isolate Pop Art as a distinct new stylistic and historical category (e.g., Livingstone, 1990, pp. 9–11), in which artists such as Johns, Rauschenberg and Larry Rivers are accorded a kind of transitional position between the traditional and the new.

41. The term Pop Art is usually said to have been introduced by Lawrence Alloway, either in 1954 (without a source being indicated) or in 1958 in the article "The Arts and the Mass Media" (*Architectural Design & Construction*, February 1958, pp. 84–85.), but it was not, in fact, used here. The term was, however, evidently current in the circles of the Independent Group in London at the end of the 1950s and can be found, for example, in a subsequently frequently published letter from Richard Hamilton to Peter and Alison Smithson of 1957 (see Madoff, pp. 5–6). The term took on a renewed, if slightly altered, topicality in the New York art world at the end of 1962, when a new international phenomenon was celebrated in the exhibition *New Realists* at the Sidney Janis Gallery, New York (1/11–1/12 1962), which showed work by artists from England, France, Italy, the United States and Sweden, who were grouped together by John Ashbury in his foreword on the basis of their shared interest in everyday objects. The term Pop Art had not yet become



established, and the initial conceptual confusion felt by the New York art world is clearly evident in the article by Barbara Rose “The New Realists, Neo-Dada, Le nouveau réalisme, Pop Art, The New Vulgarians, Common Object Painting, Know-nothing genre” (*Art International*, vol. VII, January 1963: 1, pp. 22–28). In December 1962 “A Symposium on Pop Art” concerning the rapid emergence of this phenomenon was held at MoMA, while the first survey exhibitions of Pop Art were held in museums shortly afterwards: Walter Hopp’s *The New Painting of Common Objects*, Pasadena Museum of Art (25/9–19/10 1962) in the United States; and, in Europe, Alan Solomon’s *The Popular Image*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (24/10–23/11 1963) and Pontus Hultén’s *Amerikansk popkonst*, ModernaMuseet, Stockholm (29/2–12/4 1964). The first monographs on Pop Art were published a year or so later, e.g. John Rublowsky, *Pop Art*, New York 1965, Mario Amaya, *Pop as Art*, London 1965, and Lucy Lippard’s *Pop Art of 1966*, which was long considered the standard work on the movement. That same year, the institutional and historical position of Pop Art was consolidated at the 33rd Venice Biennale, as it would be again two years later at Documenta IV, Kassel in 1968 (a state of affairs that was strongly criticised in the powerfully politicised cultural climate of that year). The Pop Art phenomenon took on a new topicality towards the end of the 1970s as a critical tool for the interpretation of the contemporary scene (see e.g. Andreas Huyssen, “The Cultural Politics of Pop”, *New German Critique*, vol. 4, Winter 1975, pp. 77–98) and, subsequently, when the early work of Andy Warhol, in particular, was considered by certain theorists to define the core of the aesthetics of Pop Art and its relation to postmodernism, as for example in Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” (1981), in Foster 2002, p. 127–144) and (where it is treated much more thoroughly in theoretical and historical terms) in Hal Foster’s *The Return of the Real*, 1996, pp. 127–168.

42. Geldzahler, p. 37.

43. Rosalind Krauss, “Theories of Art after Minimalism and Pop”, in Hal Foster (ed.), *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, no. 1, Dia Art Foundation, Seattle 1987, p. 60.

44. For a description of the origins (and a plan) of this exhibition, see Graham Whitman, “This is Tomorrow: Genesis of an Exhibition”, *Modern Dreams. The Rise and Fall of Pop*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 1988, pp. 35–39.
45. Collaborative exhibition of painters, sculptors and architects: Draft proposals”, Whitechapel Art Gallery Archives, London, WAG/EXH/2/45/1.
46. In an internal report compiled while the exhibition was ongoing, Lawrence Alloway wrote that visitor numbers for “This is Tomorrow” were reaching 1,000 people a day, the highest figure seen at the Whitechapel Art Gallery after the end of the War, apart from for the major Turner exhibition of 1951, and that the exhibition had attracted a great deal of attention in the press, newsreels and on television, including a forty minute feature on the BBC (see “Progress report”, Whitechapel Art Gallery Archives, London, WAG/EXH/2/45/1).
47. Lawrence Alloway, “Robot opens exhibition on design in the future”, *This is Tomorrow*, Immediate Release at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, 8th August – 9th September 1956, unpaginated, Whitechapel Art Gallery Archives, London, WAG/EXH/2/45/1.
48. Pierre Rouve, “Divorce of Two Minds”, *Art News and Review*, 18 August 1956, p. 17.
49. Lawrence Alloway, “Robot opens exhibition on design in the future”, *This is Tomorrow*, Immediate Release at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, 8th August – 9th September 1956, unpaginated, Whitechapel Art Gallery Archives, London, WAG/EXH/2/45/1.
50. See Brian Wallis, “Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow: The Independent Group and Popular Culture”, in *Modern Dreams*, 1988, pp. 9–17.
51. Lynne Cooke, “The Independent Group: British and American Pop Art”, in Varnedoe & Gopnik, p. 200.
52. One example is Edward Lucie-Smith who writes, in an article intended as a survey of Pop Art, that it is “generally accepted” that Hamilton’s collage is the “first truly Pop Art work” (Edward Lucie-Smith, “Pop Art”, in Nikos Stangos, *Concepts of Modern Art*, London 1983 (1974), p. 225).

53. See e.g. Lawrence Alloway, "The Development of British Pop", in Lippard 2004, pp. 27–66. For a critical historiography of the Independent Group, see Anne Massey & Penny Sparke, "The Myth of the Independent Group", *Block*, no. 10, 1985, pp. 48–56.
54. Richard Hamilton, "Man, Machine, Motion" (1955), *Collected Words 1953–81*, London 1982, p. 24.
55. See statement by Richard Hamilton in the catalogue to *This is Tomorrow*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London 1956, unpaginated.
56. Lawrence Alloway, "The Long Front of Culture" (1959), in *Modern Dreams*, p. 31.
57. For an analysis of the complex significance of the role played by the Institute of Contemporary Arts as stimulus, environment, meeting place and (in terms of the modernist and evolutionist credo of Herbert Read) as the antithesis of the Independent Group, see Anne Massey, "The Independent Group: Towards a Redefinition", *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 79, no. 1009, April 1987, pp. 232–242.
58. Hal Foster, "On the First Pop Age", *New Left Review*, vol. 44, no. 19, Jan-Feb 2003, pp. 93–112.
59. Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, (transl. Anna Cancogni), Cambridge (Mass.) 1989 (1962), pp. 2–3.
60. See e.g. David Revill, *The Roaring Silence. John Cage: a Life*, New York 1992, p. 62 and *passim*.
61. See John Cage, "Indeterminacy", *Silence. Lectures and Writings by John Cage*, London/Hanover (N.E.) 1998 (1961), pp. 260–273, and Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, New York 1988 (1987), pp. 188–189.
62. Revill, p. 189.
63. Eco, pp. 102–103.
64. Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act" (1958), in Gregory Battcock (ed.), *The New Art. A Critical Anthology*, New York 1966, pp. 25–26.
65. Ulf Linde, *Spejare. En essä om konst*, Göteborg 1984 (1960), p. 68. See also Walter Hopps, Ulf Linde & Arturo Schwartz, *Marcel Duchamp. Ready-mades etc., 1913–1964*, Paris 1964.; Hans Hayden,

“Contradicting Codes”, *Konsthistorisk tidskrift*, vol 81, Issue 3, September 2012, pp. 166–171.

66. Kaprow, 1958, p. 56.

67. Allan Kaprow, “Notes on the Creation of a Total Art”, *Allan Kaprow*, The Hansa Gallery, 25/11–13/12 1958, New York 1958, unpaginated.

68. Allan Kaprow, “A Statement”, in Michael Kirby, *Happenings. An Illustrated Anthology*, New York 1965, p. 46.

69. Allan Kaprow, “18 happenings in 6 parts / the script”, in Kirby, p. 55.

70. Benjamin Buchloh, “Andy Warhol’s One-Dimensional Art: 1956–1966”, in Kynaston McShine (ed.), *Andy Warhol: A Retrospective*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1989, pp. 44–45.

71. See *documenta 4: Internationale Ausstellung, 27 Juni bis 6 Oktober 1968*, Kassel 1968. For an analysis of the problems that putting together this combination of different idioms posed for the arrangers, see Kimpel, pp. 274–279.

72. See Bruce Altshuler, “The Cage Class”, in *FluxAttitudes*, Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center, Buffalo 1991, pp. 17–23. Although, formally, it was experimental composition that Cage taught between 1956 and 1960, his lectures also served as a forum for information and discussion about new forms of aesthetics and alternative (read: Dadaist and Surrealist) historical sources, at which students of different genres could participate on equal terms. Among the more celebrated students were, in addition to Kaprow, several of the artists who subsequently became prominent within Fluxus, such as George Brecht, Dick Higgins and George Maciunas. Perhaps the key lesson to be drawn from Cage’s teachings was a way of approaching aesthetic and philosophical problems no matter what the traditions and discursive frames of reference of different artistic genres.

73. See.g.. Barbara Haskell, *Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance 1958–1964*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 1984, pp. 22–23.

74. The change in reception within the visual arts was much more pronounced in the United States than in Europe. The growth in

interest in the United States in Dadaism and in Marcel Duchamp, in particular, can be explained in terms of the dissemination of historical knowledge to which various exhibitions and publications all contributed. As early as 1936, MoMA had mounted its major thematic exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, which helped to some extent to put these movements on the map of modernism's historical sources and (its then) contemporary possibilities. Of course, it was also of key importance that many of the leading practitioners of Surrealism were living in exile in New York during the war years (although contacts with the local American art world appear to have been sporadic). After the Second World War, Robert Motherwell published an anthology of English translations of the texts of Dadaism (*The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, *The Documents of Modern Art*, no. 8, New York 1951) that proved to be a vital source of knowledge about its aesthetics for the post-war art world (for an analysis of the post-war reception of Dadaism and the importance of Motherwell's anthology, see Maria Müller, *Aspekte der Dada-Rezeption*, Essen 1987, pp. 21–24). By then, Duchamp had long been living in New York and his works were accorded ever greater prominence during the 1950s. The Sidney Janis Gallery (in New York) mounted a series of smaller exhibitions of Duchamp's work between 1952 and 1959. From 1954, Walter Arensberg's major collection of Duchamp's works was permanently on display at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Three years later, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum of Art in New York mounted a retrospective exhibition of the work of the three Duchamp brothers. Two years after that, Robert Lebel published the first monograph on Duchamp in both French and English (*Sur Marcel Duchamp/On Marcel Duchamp*, Paris 1959). A considerable amount of space was also devoted to Duchamp in William Seitz's exhibition *The Art of Assemblage* at MoMA in 1961, which provided a comprehensive historical exposé of an alternative strand in the art history of the twentieth century. It would not be until 1964, however, that Duchamp was accorded (with his approval) a first retrospective museum exhibition, at the Pasadena Museum of Art, commissioned by Walter Hopps. By this time, however, his name and work had become public property on both sides of the Atlantic. The point of this enumeration is not to highlight a sequence of events that caused the rediscovery and subsequent fame of an artist, but to

show the significance that the connections between historical knowledge, the accessibility of the works and a changed theoretical context had on the reception and reinterpretation of Duchamp. This is not a matter of history proving him right, but of a changed theoretical and visual discourse that meant his works could serve as paradigmatic examples in a larger institutionalised setting.

75. John Cage, in Kostelanetz, pp. 179–180.

76. Bürger, p. 58. His negative attitude towards the neo-avantgarde as a phenomenon is motivated by an ideologically-critical (Marxist) approach to the institutionalisation of modern art as a phenomenon, in that he considers it to be the essential task of modern art, irrespective of its medium and idiom, in the capitalist system to establish a countercultural position that is critical of institutions. It is interesting to note how this line of argument resembles the condemnations of Pop Art and Neo-Realism made by some of the champions of Abstract Expressionism, albeit from the exactly opposite ideological direction. Gilbert Sorrentino's dispute with the new art in "Kitsch into Art: The New Realism" (1962) is one example; in this article, Sorrentino launched a ferocious attack on the art being introduced by the *New Realists* exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York in 1962 and rejected Neo-Dadaism as a feeble, commercial and regressive fashion phenomenon whose primary aim was to rub up the uncultivated middle class the right way and that had abolished the essential boundary between Art and kitsch (Madoff, pp. 47–55). In doing so, Neo-Dadaism violated the specifically antiaesthetic aims of original Dadaism and set itself against the development of authentic (Abstract Expressionist) art and the tackling of real issues.

77. Foster, 1996, p. 46.

78. Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963. Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body*, Durham/London 1993, pp. 1–3.

79. Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp" (1964), *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, New York 2009 (1966), p. 276.

80. Wassily Kandinsky likens the effect of colour on the human soul to a piano, at which the artist (the hand) influences the observer's eye (the hammer) by using a colour (a key) and transports the soul to the intended vibration (the strings of the piano). This

immediate communication constitutes what he calls ‘the principle of inner necessity’, through which life is realised in art (Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, (transl. Michael Sadler), New York 1977 (1911), p. 26). A much less specific and instrumental association between art and life is found in the work of Piet Mondrian. Although all the different artistic genres have clearly been developed from their specific preconditions, as Mondrian states in his pivotal essay “Le Neo-Plasticisme: Principe général de l'équivalence plastique” (1920), the goal of the New Art (irrespective of medium) is to create a union of all the genres that is based on a universal harmonic concord: that of the underlying laws that constitute the totality of existence, which make it possible for human beings to be universal as individuals (“Neo-Plasticism: the General Principle of Plastic Equivalence”, in Harry Holzman & Martin S. James, (ed. and transl.), *The New Art – The New Life. The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*, London 1986, pp. 137–151). Direct communication between artist and observer via the work was not the issue here but rather that the authenticity of the work corresponded to the universal harmony found in both the being of the artist and that of the observer.

81. The first of these dates alludes, of course, to Robert Rauschenberg’s tumultuous winning of the major painting prize. The controversial aspect of his victory was that it signalled a symbolic shift on many levels, of which the French, in particular, were all too aware: an American had been awarded the highest prize for the first time and for art that so clearly deviated from institutionalised modernism in general and from the great French tradition in particular (see e.g., Willi Bongard, “When Rauschenberg Won the Biennale”, *Studio International*, vol. 175, June 1968, pp. 288–289; Laurie J. Monahan, “Cultural Cartography: American Designs at the 1964 Venice Biennale”, in Guilbaut, 1990, pp. 369–416; Tomkins, , pp. 1–11; Boyer, 1995, pp. 189–202). Four years later, the Biennale was so shaken by protests and riots in the wake of the student rebellions throughout Europe that it failed to open. The protests were not simply to do with a conflict over interpretive privilege within the value sphere of the visual arts but a much broader ideological and social conflict that affected large parts of the artistic and cultural life of Western Europe, both directly and indirectly.

82. See Öyvind Fahlström, “Det extatiska huset”, *Konstrevy*, vol. 42, 1966: 4, pp. 152–155, pp 191–192. In contrast with Andy Warhol’s dramatic version of his transgression of the norms of craft skills and individual brushwork that obtained within the regime of authenticity—by emphasising the silkscreen technique’s mechanical application of paint to a surface and by his (over-)emphasis of the role of his assistants in the production of the image—the collaboration between Fahlström and Östlihn was presented instead as a purely practical arrangement. This was an arrangement that was subsequently overlooked and largely forgotten (see Annika Öhrner, *Barbro Östlihn och New York. Konstens rum och möjligheter* (Diss. Uppsala 2010), Göteborg/Stockholm 2010, pp. 126–133).

83. Öyvind Fahlström, “Bris”, *Rondo* 1961: 3, p. 26.

84. See Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism. Part I-II” (1980b), *Beyond Recognition. Representation, Power, and Culture* (eds. Scott Byron, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman & Jane Weinstock), Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1997 (1992), pp. 52–113.

85. Öyvind Fahlström, “Manipulating the World”, (1962/1964), in *Öyvind Fahlström. Another Space for Painting*, Museud’ArtContemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona 2000, p. 170.

86. In contrast with the fragmentary notes in Marcel Duchamp’s *Green Box* (RoseSélavy, *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*, Paris 1934), Öyvind Fahlström’s checklist contains somewhat clearer instructions for the reader/interpreter, particularly in terms of the playing-rules that set out how the various parts are to be deployed (see Öyvind Fahlström, *Minneslista (till ”Dr.Schweizerssistaupdrag”)*, Stockholm 1964, p. 1). This is, however, a set of instructions that alludes to parlour games rather than constituting a separate game of its own: the aim is to combine various divergent words and word combinations in order to open up unexpected patterns of association, rather than to serve as a conventional game.

87. Jean-François Chevrier, “Another Space for Painting: Concrete Lyricism and Geopoetics”, *ÖyvindFahlström. Another Space for Painting*, Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona 2000, p. 9.



88. From a draft of Lars Hjelmstedt's as yet unpublished dissertation "Tid – Tecken – Spel. Aspekter på Öyvind Fahlströms konst" (Konstvetenskapliga institutionen vid Uppsala universitet). In my interpretation of Fahlström, I am greatly indebted to Hjelmstedt, who is indisputably one of the leading experts on Fahlström's art and whose conversation and dissertation have over the years introduced me to this remarkable *oeuvre*. Hjelmstedt has always been extraordinarily generous in sharing his ideas, writings and sources. My interpretation is, however, based (in part at least) on different premises than those of Hjelmstedt.

89. Lars Hjelmstedt, "Kraftzacken och språkspiralen. Om Öyvind Fahlströms significationsteori", *Ord och bild*, vol. 107, 1998: 1–2, p. 102.

90. Fahlström, 1961, p. 24 and p. 26. Quotations from *Öyvind Fahlström. Another Space for Painting*, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona 2000, p. 118.

91. Branden W. Joseph, *Random Order. Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avantgarde*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 2003, p. 162. The absence of concealed symbolism and iconographic programmes in Rauschenberg's visual art had already been noted at the end of the 1950s and has become an art-critical commonplace ever since (see e.g., Nicolas Calas, "ContiNuance. On the Possibilities of a New Kind of symbolism in Recent American Art", *Art News*, vol. 57, February 1957: 10, pp. 38–39).

92. In this respect, the argument may recall that deployed by Susan Sontag in her celebrated essay "Against Interpretation" (1964), in which she rejects any system for the analysis of images—particularly those systems that analyse the contents of images (iconography), thus displaying "an overt contempt for appearances" and so amounting to "the revenge of the intellect upon the world" (Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation" (1964), *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, London 2009 (1966), pp. 6–7). Despite *Dr. Schweitzer* being made up of a multiplicity of representative images, its contents seem just as open to the subjective understanding of the viewer—or just as abstract—as a painting by Jackson Pollock. There is a crucial

difference, however, that also puts Fahlström's poetics beyond the reach of Sontag's attack on interpretation: it is not interpretation *per se* or its inward movement towards the work that he is opposed to. On the contrary, he uses this very convention to examine the conventional boundaries within which this movement becomes possible. And, to counter Sontag, an iconographic or structural close-reading could also obviously be said to contribute to enriching our understanding of the areas of association the artist was working with.

93. A comprehensive collection of examples of Concrete Poetry (in a broad sense) with an exhaustive introduction is available in Mary Ellen Solt (ed.), *Concrete Poetry: a World View*, Bloomington (Ind.)/London 1968. Variants of this form of poetry emerged in different places around the world after the Second World War; its roots can be traced back both to the Symbolists, such as Mallarmé and Rimbaud, and to the onomatopoeic poetry of Dada and Futurism. At the beginning of the 1950s, the pioneers of Concrete Poetry were the Swiss Eugen Gomringer, the Brazilian Noigandres Group and the Lettriste group in France.

94. Öyvind Fahlström, "Hätilaragulpr fåtskilaben. Manifesto for Concrete Poetry" (1954), in *ÖyvindFahlström. Another Space for Painting*, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona 2000, p. 51.

95. See Teddy Hultberg, *ÖyvindFahlström on the Air – Manipulation the World*, Stockholm 1999, p. 150.

96. Cage (1961), 1998, pp. 99, 101 and 108.

97. Leo Steinberg, "Other Criteria" (1968), *Other Criteria. Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, London/Oxford/New York 1975 (1972), pp. 82–91.

98. Alain Robbe-Grillet, *In the Labyrinth*, (transl. Richard Howard), New York 1994 (1959), p. 140.

99. Roland Barthes, "Literal Literature" (1954), *Critical Essays*, (transl. Richard Howard), Evanston (Ill.) 2000 (1964), pp. 23–24.

100. Alain Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel. Essays on Fiction* (transl. Richard Howard), Evanston (Ill.) 1996 (1963), p. 156.

101. As quoted in Bruce Glaser, “Questions to Stella and Judd”, *Art News*, vol. 65, Sep. 66: 5, pp. 58–59.
102. Pontus Hultén, *Öyvind Fahlström, Svezia*, XXXIII Biennale di Venezia, Stockholm 1966, unpaginated.
103. Fahlström, 1961, p. 26. As quoted in *Öyvind Fahlström. Another Space for Painting*, Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona 2000, p. 118.
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