

## PART I

# THE REGIME OF AUTHENTICITY

The threshold between Classicism and modernity . . . had been definitely crossed when words ceased to intersect with representations and to provide a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of things. At the beginning of nineteenth century, they rediscovered their ancient, enigmatic density; though not in order to restore the curve of the world which had harboured them during the Renaissance, nor in order to mingle with things in a circular system of signs.<sup>1</sup>

Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (1966)

Modernity is a polemical tradition which displaces the tradition of the moment, whatever it happens to be, but an instant later yields its place to still another tradition which in turn is a momentary manifestation of modernity. Modernity is never itself; it is always *the other*. The modern is characterized not only by novelty but by otherness. A bizarre tradition and the tradition of the bizarre, modernity is condemned to pluralism. . .<sup>2</sup>

Octavio Paz, *Los hijos del limo* (1974)



# The Modernity of Modernism

## The Tradition of the New

Understood as a question, the subtitle to Kirk Varnedoe's book *A Fine Disregard* (1990) poses a problem that may appear puzzling: What Makes Modern Art Modern.<sup>3</sup> Remarkably, what Varnedoe has made it his task to explain has not just been taken for granted but appears to be a contradiction in purely semantic terms—for if modern art is not modern, what is it? Put briefly, the answer as developed in Varnedoe's study is based on the idea that the very modernity of modern art (and implicitly of modernism) lies in a decision by certain artists to rethink the traditional goals and methods of visual art in a manner that was only made possible by the changes to social and cultural systems that took place in the late nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In a nutshell, the modernity of modernism is to be found in the striving of the individual to remodel the rules of tradition and produce something radically new within the framework of that same tradition. This explanation may seem entirely plausible, but it remains far less perplexing than the formulation of the problem itself: the very modernism of modernity as a matter taken for granted, a premise rather than an open question.

Kirk Varnedoe's account has recourse to a theme that has been central both to the avant-garde discourse of the twentieth century and the historiography of that period: the relationship of visual art to the modern and the new. In *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), Theodore Adorno describes how this relationship has become burdened by an element of compulsion or of an almost a priori necessity:

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Yet since the mid nineteenth century and the rise of high capitalism, the category of the new has been central, though admittedly in conjunction with the question whether anything new had ever existed. Since that moment no artwork has succeeded that rebuffed the ever fluctuating concept of the modern.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of modernism itself involves a radicalisation of this theme: a movement that not only stands in a specific relation to the modern, but which by its very nature affirms the new without reserve, attempting at any cost to go beyond the utmost boundaries of modernity in this process of affirmation. In this context, Ezra Pound's celebrated battle-cry 'Make it new!' may be understood as both a condensation and a radicalisation of the demand for contemporaneity that the realist avant-garde of the late nineteenth century sought to impose on art ('il faut être de son temps'). Obviously, this insistence on newness and contemporaneity had not only a descriptive, but also a powerfully normative aspect. Sooner or later, however, this cross-boundary pursuit of perpetual newness was bound to find itself in an uncomfortable position, as the change was interpreted in relation to history. This apparently paradoxical situation has been aptly described by Harold Rosenberg when referring to 'the tradition of the new'.

If Pound's and Rosenberg's formulations are placed side by side, an interesting dislocation is revealed in which the aesthetics and identity of the avant-garde have become a norm for historical classification. Furthermore, when the dates of these phrases are compared, 1934 and 1959, respectively, a period of time is marked out that would in many ways come to redefine modern art.<sup>6</sup> Certain definitive changes can also be detected during this period in the use of a concept such as modernism when applied to the way in which modern art is defined.

According to Matei Calinescu, the concept of modernism was first used relatively recently, during the 1920s, as a collective term for various radical, at first literary and subsequently artistic, movements.<sup>7</sup> The term modernism is conspicuous by its absence from the period before the Second World War, irrespective of whether art criticism, manifestos or historicist writings about modern art are being studied. It would prove much more useful at a later

stage: towards the end of the 1930s, when an epochal concept was required as part of the intensifying efforts to chart, distinguish, evaluate and classify historically the hodgepodge of various avant-garde movements that had arisen from the late nineteenth century onwards. Modernism would provide the term required to circumscribe these heterogeneous movements, managing to inject an element of uniformity into their radical disunity, while also putting it in relation to modern life. Attempts to chart the terrain in this way had also been made as part of the art history and exhibition activity of the early nineteenth century, but then it was more a matter of establishing and legitimising new movements ('-isms') in relation to one another, to history and to contemporary society. The need to produce an overall map did not, in fact, become topical until later: once avant-garde art had become increasingly institutionalised as part of the cultural life of Europe and the United States. A further change both in meaning and usage can be identified a few decades later, from the end of the 1970s onwards, when the concept of modernism was used as a collective term for the art and aesthetics that had just been declared anathema and which postmodernists wanted both to transcend and negate.

The decisive change in this regard is not to be found in the historicisation of the avant-garde during this period, but in the shifting of the position of the avant-garde from the margins to the centre of discourse: with the normalisation of the logic of perpetual change that would now define contemporary cultural life. The historical interpretation of modern art—and the interpretation of modernism *as* modern art—thus constitutes both a historically transient category and an understanding from which our own self-image has developed in one way or another, positively or negatively. The image of the dominant position of modernism in the art and visual culture of modernity still provides a matrix for what is considered historically normal in the art history of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup>

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The relationship between modernism and modernity has been characterised in general terms by many authors. One example is

the historian Louis Dupeux, who thinks that modernism amounts to ‘the systematic valuation’ (la valorisation systématique) of modernity.<sup>9</sup> A similar formulation can be found in the work of Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, who write that modernism involves ‘the deliberate reflection’ on modernity.<sup>10</sup> These formulations may appear entirely plausible, but they are nevertheless too vague to provide any kind of answer as to the nature of the relationship. Nor do they succeed in identifying anything typical about modernist art in comparison with other aesthetic approaches; instead, they presuppose a connection that is at once too general and too specific to be characterised: general in the sense of self-evident and specific in that it can only be described on the basis of each individual example (in the form of particular statements or works of art.)

Marshall Berman, on the other hand, manages to be considerably more detailed when describing the connection between modernity and modernism in *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*:

To be modern, I said, is to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one’s world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: to be part of a universe in which all that is solid melts into air. To be a modernist is to make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom, to make its rhythms one’s own, to move within its currents in search of the forms of reality, of beauty, of freedom, of justice, that its fervid and perilous flow allows.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout this work, Berman succeeds in highlighting the significance of contradiction in the modern and within modernism, as, in particular, in his quoting of Marx’s celebrated phrase in the title. He describes the link between base and superstructure from a historically materialist viewpoint as a multifaceted and occasionally contradictory dialectical process. It is the paradoxical unity, the risk, the transformation, and the pain and the dangers, too, that are focused on, while ‘the maelstrom of continual dissolution’ evokes bold, energetic, almost futuristically charged images and metaphors. Rather than present us with the humdrum greyness of the everyday in modern society, its routinisation of social life and increasing alienation, Berman’s account paints a picture of heroic

struggle and confusion in which the individual launches himself unflinchingly into the maelstrom of dissolution of futurity.

Although this perspective is somewhat modified in the rest of his presentation, (particularly when describing Robert Mose's planning/devastation of the Bronx as an image of the more brutal and technocratic aspects of modernism), the idea of modernism itself retains its heroic nimbus. It still conveys, in his eyes, a creative, radical and even revolutionary potential that needs to be affirmed—despite all the evils that can be attributed to the process of modernisation. This condensed account succeeds in situating the various forms of the word modern in a self-evident and transparent relation to one another: modernity, modernisation, modernism. A value judgement is also being made here, in which the capacity for relating to the modern in a particular way—of 'being modern'—is a positive characteristic on the part of a group or an individual living in the modern world. For Berman, modernism as a collective term encompasses rather more than a particular aesthetic canon; although, particular linguistic qualities and artistic devices are considered in terms of an essential value and thus given a privileged relation to the contemporary: modernism is not primarily presented as a style but as a *zeitgeist* in the old and idealistic sense of the word.

This judgement can no doubt be traced back to Charles Baudelaire's description of the specific aesthetic value of contemporary art in 'Le peintre de la vie moderne' (1863), where the ephemeral aspects of the contemporary world are seen as a specific quality of the art of the modern period:

By 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable. Every old master has had his own modernity; the great majority of fine portraits that have come down to us from former generations are clothed in the costume of their own period. They are perfectly harmonious, because everything – from costume and coiffure down to gesture, glance and smile (for each age has a deportment, a glance and a smile of its own) – everything, I say, combines to form a completely viable whole. This transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so rapid, must on no account be despised or dispensed with. . . . Woe to him who studies the

antique for anything else but pure art, logic and general method! By steeping himself too thoroughly in it, he will lose all memory of the present; he will renounce the rights and privileges offered by circumstance – for almost all our originality comes from the seal which Time imprints on our sensations.<sup>12</sup>

It is a total immersion in the present, which is described by Baudelaire as the essential task of contemporary art (whose fate is inevitably to become part of history and thus lose its most crucial quality). Part of Baudelaire's argument may, of course, derive from the very ancient and long-established notion of the superiority of one's own time over the past: that because we stand on the shoulders of giants, we can see further than they could. But he emphasises the specific beauty of the contemporary (of the present) without necessarily rejecting the efforts of previous ages to find general (eternal) beauty. What he is actually formulating is a paradoxical relationship between the transient and the eternal, which does not involve a simple polemic against tradition, but rather an analysis of the contemporary that serves as an exhortation to establish a dynamic connection with history.

Baudelaire's definition entails a revaluation of the dynamic variability of modern society, which also introduced a new sense of time and a different way of reflecting on the particular identity of contemporary society in relation to the past. But where Baudelaire highlights a diffuse phenomenon in his own society as reflecting a comprehensive change, Berman affirms instead the entrenchment of that phenomenon in a particular aesthetic canon. These authors also speak to us from two diametrically opposed historical positions. Between these texts lie not only just over a century of changes in aesthetic pronouncements and historical selections, but more importantly a normalisation of a certain kind of pronouncement and selection. For it is, of course, not as simple a matter as Charles Harrison, for example, would have us believe: that modernist art theory has proved better able at capturing the concepts and views that have turned out to be definitive of modern artistic practice.<sup>13</sup> Once modernist art theory is afforded this privileged position, what it actually does is establish the preconditions for what may be understood and defined as modern art.



The concept of modernity that emerges here is not only multi-valent, but also applied in a wealth of diverse and, occasionally, contradictory areas of usage in which it fulfils different functions. In order to illustrate the complexity of these interconnections, Fredric Jameson has distinguished two distinct uses and meanings of the concept of modernity: one linguistic and one epochal.<sup>14</sup> In the former sense, the concept has an ostensive function, identifying a phenomenon as modern. Here the concept remains constant in terms of form but completely empty in terms of content, like a personal pronoun alternating between different tenses and individuals, like the 'I' that is used by different people in a conversation and identifies the particular person using it. The phenomena of his contemporary world Baudelaire would so enthusiastically describe as modern belong nowadays to history; the characteristics I attribute to the modernity of my own time are contradicted by other interpretations and selections. In an academic context, this process of exclusion and inclusion involves both the choice of an interpretative horizon and an affiliation to a subject area: an art historian will presumably emphasise different matters than a sociologist or an economist. In the second sense, which could be said to be a function of the first, the concept of modernity is used to characterise a particular age or epoch.<sup>15</sup> The concept of modernity is usually considered to encompass a historical period that had its beginnings in post-feudal Europe and is therefore associated with industrialisation and technological change, with the advent of a capitalist commodity market and a systematic division of labour, with continually increasing economic growth and the trans-national flow of money and information, with the rise of the bourgeoisie as the dominant social class and the establishment of the nation state, with the philosophy of the Enlightenment and the scientific revolutions that introduced a greater degree of rationalisation and a demystification of existence, with a greater differentiation of the functions of society as reflected in new forms of administration, jurisprudence and the exercise of power, with urbanisation and the establishment of new patterns of social life.

Together all these shifting uses and attributes may be condensed into a single historical perspective in which a particular historical change (modernisation) is combined with a new intellectual

orientation (the Enlightenment) and in which the formulation of a post-traditional world view is interwoven with an emancipatory idea of human liberation. A number of key tropes can thus be discerned connecting the various, divergent theories about modernity that were produced in the twentieth century; all of these tropes may be traced back to the idea that modernity is not just a concept or a representation, but is also, or perhaps above all, a narrative category. What this tells us is that knowledge *about* the modern has also been produced *in* the modern, an apparently banal statement that succeeds nevertheless in highlighting the close connection between descriptive and normative criteria—between the production of knowledge and of ideology—because the formulation of the contemporary is crucial to the formation of the political.<sup>16</sup> Fredric Jameson has described this relationship in particularly apt fashion:

‘Modernity’ then, as a trope, is itself a sign of modernity as such. The very concept of modernity, then, is itself modern, and dramatizes its own claims. Or to put it the other way around, we may say that what passes for a theory of modernity in all the writers we have mentioned is itself little more than the projection of its own rhetorical structure onto the themes and content in question; the theory of modernity is little more than a projection of the trope itself.<sup>17</sup>

The essential aspect of this argument is that the descriptive identification also encompasses a meta-level, which is not only based on a particular judgement, but also follows a set dramaturgy. This means, first, that a hyper-complex and boundless context is reduced to a limited set of themes, and second, this thematic arrangement is based on a narrative structure, on various rhetorical figures and on images and metaphors that are more or less integrated. Put simply, it involves discursive representations that condense a vast and contradictory context into a comprehensible (and ideologically effective) form, into images that have been produced, translated, projected and reproduced in every conceivable context. This is a process that has no space for deviations and doubt but which seeks to shape history with regard both to the needs of the current age and to the aims of the future.

This could be said to be the standard version of the modern narrative of modernity; it is a version of the story that produces a relatively coherent image of modernity. What Berman is attempting to bring to light is its critical and even revolutionary potential—a way of thinking and being that blows apart the standardised image. Contradiction is a crucial factor in this enterprise and one that must be continually affirmed and renewed in order to wrest the modern project away from the technocrats of modernisation. The problem with his account is not so much its heroic ambitions for contemporary society but the way it establishes a horizon for historical analysis *from within* modernity as an overarching system. Contradiction becomes an ideological weapon, rather than a tool, for illuminating and analysing the premises of his own historiography: the words modernity and modernism are used as a means of defending particular ideological and existential values rather than as the starting point for an analysis of the premises of established historiography. But to describe or analyse this context *from without*—so as to demonstrate both its rhetoric and which tropes it takes for granted—is no easy task. Even if we accept the idea that we could be said today to stand outside modernity and are thus capable of observing its beginning and end, its factual preconditions and ideological tropes, every aspect of this modernity has served to create the very foundations on which our own age, our own ideological narratives and historical blind spots have been constructed.

A good place for such an investigation to begin might be to take Octavio Paz at his word when he asserts that modernity is always another, all the values, functions and forms of experience, that is, which arise between and beyond all its apparently obvious and clearly defined attributes. We might formulate a strategy in this regard that has certain similarities with a Derridean deconstruction: where Jameson distinguishes modernity as a trope formulated in and by the modern, Paz points out the necessity of discovering and investigating the cracks in this undifferentiated image. Instead of simply adding together a series of attributes in order to produce an apparently objective and factual equation of the modern, we could choose, like Zygmunt Bauman, to describe modernity as something more than a general pluralism, as something that is

fundamentally ambivalent. According to Bauman, ambivalence is a normal phenomenon of linguistic practice and has its origins in one of the key functions of language: naming or classifying. Classification is an act of inclusion and exclusion that divides the world in two, thus creating a stable structure of binary polarities. Ambivalence may be understood as a by-product of this process, a bugbear that directs attention to phenomena and values outside the range and norms of the system and, in so doing, demonstrates its arbitrary and unstable nature:

Ambivalence, the possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category, is a language-specific disorder: a failure of the naming (segregating) function that language is meant to perform. The main symptom of disorder is the acute discomfort we feel when we are unable to read the situation properly and to choose between alternative actions.<sup>18</sup>

Because the goal of rational modernity is to create a stable and symmetrical order within all its practices and areas of operation, every form of ambivalence presents a threat that has to be eliminated. But as no language provides an unambiguous and stable structure, ambivalence cannot, in Bauman's view, be eliminated—on the contrary, it appears to be a fundamental attribute of all linguistic construction and communication. If modernity is considered as a discursively produced phenomenon, ambivalence would constitute a basic component of its defining characteristics and classification: a persistent ontological fault line running through the forms of experience and representation that the modern has given rise to.

Elsewhere, Bauman has described this ambivalence of modernity as a split between ability (what I may do) and wanting (what I wish to be done), which has brought about a state of permanent disharmony.<sup>19</sup> This rift may also be considered to be a function of the intersection of these two heterogeneous patterns of movement, the dynamic of continual change and novelty as opposed to the equilibrium of rational order and the system. Attempts to eliminate ambivalence of this kind—by reproducing, for example, the idea of a uniform and consistently rational modernity—would involve not only a normalisation of particular selections

and evaluations, but also a potential threat to modernity's fundamental, cross-boundary dynamic. This idea of uniformity may be countered by a motley and contradictory combination of scepticism and deferral of a more philosophical and epistemological kind, a combination that has frequently been dismissed as the product of nostalgia or of lingering premodern forms of experience.

One of the most resolute and simultaneously heart-wrenching examples of a stance that is critical of both modernity and progress is found in Walter Benjamin's posthumously published *Geschichtphilosophische Thesen* (1940), where he inscribes his doubts about the present and the future in a painting by Paul Klee:

A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.<sup>20</sup>

This short text contains an array of suggestive metaphors: from the eyes of the angel (the gaze of the historian) and the storm out of Paradise (the development of history) to ruins that form a veritable Tower of Babel (the ultimate consequences of this development). What Benjamin is formulating here is an attitude critical of civilisation that is particularly reminiscent of the Primitivist trope, which characterised so many of the various avante-garde movements of the early twentieth century. In opposition to the maelstrom of change, the storm of progress emerges as an alternative image of how historical change has driven human beings further and further away from their original condition while also driving the Enlightenment ever further away from the original

idea of the liberating and life-affirming force of rational thinking. The melancholy and despair evoked by the Biblical metaphors are, of course, connected with the real-life circumstances in which Benjamin found himself: fleeing from the German Nazi-regime, whose war machine at that time seemed impossible to stop, while deeply disillusioned at Stalin's betrayal of world communism in the signing of the nonaggression pact with Hitler. This pessimism was not restricted to the acute situation that obtained at the beginning of the 1940s but encompassed the developmental process of history as a whole in that it considered change and progress to be a story of continually repeated catastrophes. It is in this context that he would impose a fundamental moral requirement on historiography: not to pass on blindly the history of the victor, but to allow the depiction of the past to become a commemoration and rehabilitation of the victims of the triumphal march of the generals and of 'development'.

This lack of trust in progress might well have been shared by anyone who managed to live through the years immediately following the war in the bombed-out metropolises of Europe. The political, social and economic problems confronting the countries affected were enormous, and this would be particularly true following the Second World War. The image of growing piles of ruined buildings was no metaphor but an extremely tangible form of reality for millions of people. They were also faced with the moral and existential reevaluation forced on them by the Holocaust and the mass destruction created by modern warfare. How could the image of the modern project as a process of perpetual progress and liberation be sustained when it seemed that it was this very progress that had forced human beings into the most extreme forms of barbarism? And what was the role of the individual in this process of development; what moral responsibility could be laid on him or her? Modernisation and the idea of progress contained within themselves consequences that were as unavoidable as they were appalling, or so it might seem.

Voices critical of progress and development are therefore to be found within the modern; there is, in fact, a long tradition of such critical voices, which includes several of the greatest thinkers and

interpreters of modernity (Marx, Weber, Nietzsche, Spengler). It should nevertheless be pointed out that the fundamental value inscribed in the image of modern society, particularly after the Second World War, was created not through doubt and criticism of various kinds but primarily by trust in the emancipatory potential of technology, social planning and science. This would be particularly evident when the chaos and crises of the late 1940s transformed into the powerful economic recovery of the 1950s, the period when the welfare state would increasingly become a reality in Western Europe and the US. In the ideological context of the Cold War, the real threat was not provided by a vague internal enemy (the negative consequences of modernism), but by a very specific external one (the expansion of the Soviet empire). This was also a period in which private consumption was continually growing, while various innovations in technology and the media made it possible to travel and to acquire information, culture and entertainment on a far greater scale than ever before. Although the notion of progress might be subject to criticism in a particular context, the growing rise in living standards appeared to demonstrate its incontrovertible validity in another. In antithesis to the criticism of civilisation, a growing sense of trust in the rationality and inherent reasonableness of science and democratic society became established now that political reforms and a socially adapted market economy appeared to create better conditions for the freedom and existence of the individual than ever before in history. In consequence, criticism was not aimed at the idea of enlightenment in itself, but against what was seen as the utopian and metaphysical delusions of totalitarian ideologies.

It would appear, therefore, that a new need was felt in the post-war period to employ a genuinely or supposedly rational form of scientific analysis as a foundation not only for the understanding of society, but also for its planning, which inevitably involved other sciences, such as economics, political science, urban studies, psychology, mathematics. And this would also have applied, of course, to other disciplines and discourses that treated or analysed modernity in various ways. What was problematic here, however, was both the choice of perspective and the selection of the level of

abstraction. Even though different sciences could provide a diversity of viewpoints in the analysis of modernity, in many cases this involved the taking for granted of certain categories and premises in the transfer between different disciplines.

In order to focus on the ambivalences of modernity and modernism in this context, fault lines have to be made visible that, in many ways, run entirely counter to the values and identities that are reproduced within the modern. It is, therefore, of crucial importance that any such interpretation should encompass a description of not only what modernity means, but also of how and in which contexts its normative values have been produced.

## **True and False Modernity**

The analogy drawn by Marshall Berman between modernity and modernism may appear both more specific and more normative than an unconsidered view of the relationship as being obvious or unproblematic (modernism as a conscious form of reflection or a systematic evaluation of modernity). And yet both these viewpoints are actually embedded within each other to the extent that the explicitly formulated notion is simply a codification of something that would otherwise be taken for granted. However, when manifestos, specialist studies, monographs, essays, surveys and other texts are read anew with this relationship in mind, a particular pattern emerges that makes the analogy manifest, albeit in various ways and with dissimilar aims. And if it is the origins of the analogy that are being sought, they can also be discovered in some of the manifestos, programmatic writings and statements of the avant-garde.

The most celebrated are, of course, the Futurist paeans to the speed, harshness and mutability of the modern age. Or as the 'Manifesto dei pittori futuristi' of 1910, devised by Umberto Boccioni and signed by Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla and Giovanni Severini, has it,

Comrades! We declare that the triumphant progress of science has brought about changes in humanity so profound as to dig an abyss between the docile slaves of the past and us who are confident in



the shining splendor of the future. . . . The only living art is that which finds its distinctive features within the environment that surrounds it. Just as our forbears took the subject of art from the religious atmosphere that enveloped them, so we must draw inspiration from the tangible miracles of contemporary life, from the iron network of speed which winds around the earth. . . . Waiting to contribute to the necessary renovation of all artistic expression, we resolutely declare war on all those artists and institutions that, even when disguised with a false costume of modernity, remain trapped in tradition, academicism, and above all a repugnant mental laziness.<sup>21</sup>

Even though all these ideas may be familiar from the modernist canon—the notion that there is an absolute gulf separating the present and the past—the phrase referring to a false modernity is noteworthy. This can only be taken to mean that these Futurist painters were claiming to be creating in their art a true modernity, a language and a value that have their origins in the changes occurring in the contemporary world and are, therefore, authentically in relation to the essence of modernity.

The bombast and self-glorifying rhetoric of the Futurists might appear to be a rather facile example, an unintended parody almost of the attempts by the avant-garde to legitimize their art to their contemporaries. But if one disregards the rhetorical façade, an intellectual construct becomes apparent that recurs in a range of similar contexts and in which the modernity of a particular artist's work is presented as the ultimate criterion of its legitimacy: why something appears as it does and why it has to look that way as a matter of necessity. While it would of course be possible to stick to the old ways, art that is striving for authenticity and to be in harmony with its own age must embody the changes of the modern age.

And yet it is striking how seldom explicit analogies were formulated in the discourse of the historical avant-garde between the work of a particular artist and the modernity of his or her contemporary world. The main reason presumably being that the analogy runs counter to one of the key tropes of the avant-garde: the individuality and autonomy of art and the artist. Instead, the key argument in the avant-garde manifestos was the formulation

and legitimation of the modernity of new art by means of negations. This was reflected in a continually recurring antagonism toward the art of previous ages, the dominant culture of the contemporary world and tradition as such. It also involved, as Theodor Adorno put it, establishing more or less specific registers of taboos that could not be transgressed. As a result, the definition of the art a particular artist practised was, equally, a definition of what was no longer possible:

Art is modern when, by its mode of experience and as the expression of the crisis of experience, it absorbs what industrialization has developed under the given relations of production. This involves a negative canon, a set of prohibitions against what the modern has disavowed in terms of experience and technique; and such determinate negation is virtually the canon of what is to be done. That this modernity is more than a vague *Zeitgeist* or being cleverly up to date depends on the liberation of the forces of production.<sup>22</sup>

The cultural identity of the avant-garde is expressed here through a demarcation of the limits of aesthetic and social autonomy in relation to the bourgeois normality of the modern age. Adorno, indeed, asserts that modernism, unlike previous artistic practice, not only negates preceding aesthetic forms, but also the very tradition *per se*, which serves to integrate, in a manner of speaking, the pursuit of change by bourgeois modernity within artistic practice.<sup>23</sup> Modernism could be seen in this context as a mainly negative trend, which—like Walter Benjamin’s angel—observes and illuminates the misery of modernity and whose form of representation could even be described as a kind of anti-modernity.<sup>24</sup> But this negative dialectic should be interpreted, rather, as a form of antagonism towards the aspects of bourgeois culture, which failed to keep pace with the dynamic changes of the modern age. It is in this sense that Boccioni’s remark about false modernity becomes so important: it marks the point at which a descriptive statement is transformed into a normative identification.

Instead, it is in the historical interpretation and legitimation of avant-garde art that the analogy between modernity and modernism has come to play a crucial role. Its practitioners, in

contrast, were more preoccupied with the detail of describing and explaining their aesthetic starting points and artistic devices and, above all, with their contempt for the conventions of bourgeois modernity. Both the use of the term modernity and the need it fulfilled may be seen as a symptom of the shift in the status of the avant-garde: from marginalisation, autonomy and antagonism to acceptance, historicisation and institutionalisation. Two general phenomena can be distinguished in relation to the changing circumstances in the Western democracies during the twentieth century. On the one hand, the 1920s and the 1930s witnessed the gradual acceptance and institutionalisation of various avant-garde movements (when the notion of the avant-garde began to be formulated in terms of modernism); on the other, modernism became a more or less standard way of describing modern art *per se* in the decade following the end of the Second World War. A particular paradigmatic image of the nature of modernism and modern art is thus being constituted during this period. Although this image obviously encompassed a number of divergent interpretations, it would nevertheless define a distinct horizon for what was both possible and legitimate. And it is as part of this process that the analogy becomes necessary.

What this also demonstrates is the necessity of making a distinction between the concepts of the avant-garde and modernism. Although not (as some have done) in order to distinguish a different essential content, but because the use and meaning of both terms have different histories. While the concepts may not be considered synonymous, there is a tangible proximity, historically speaking, between the phenomena both terms are usually associated with.<sup>25</sup> When this closeness is borne in mind, the history of modernism and the avant-garde emerges as a perpetual conflict or crisis within the modern. The most esoteric movements within the avant-garde and those most critical of civilisation may also be understood in this light—as a utopian pursuit of a different form of modernity: a new order and a new human being which could transcend the established culture of the West.<sup>26</sup>

Here we have the contours of a specific historical process: a concept is introduced at a certain point because it meets a particular need; the concept is then widely disseminated through

various institutions; certain interpretations are privileged and a somewhat simplified image of a complex historical situation becomes established (essential developmental perspectives and analogies, canonical selections and collections of examples, a process of exclusion and inclusions). The temporal (historical) change in function and value must also, of course, be taken into account, because it marks a number of different historical positions that determine the relevance and significance of both the aesthetic criteria and the theoretical legitimacy of a particular interpretation. Seen from an art historical perspective, the establishment of a discursive and epistemological boundary between the modern and the postmodern is of particular relevance here as it allows for a degree of distance from the object of research (in this case, modernism). Instead of understanding this boundary line as separating the criteria deemed legitimate and illegitimate aesthetic in one's own contemporary period, it may be used to differentiate a number of historical situations in which descriptions of the contemporaneity of particular periods have taken place. This is an issue that calls for both a historical and a historiographic perspective.

## Metaphoric Displacements

When modernism is understood to be a direct and simple reflection of modernity, the image in the mirror appears distorted. However, like Renato Poggiolo, we could also view modernism as an exceptionally polysemous reflection of and on the distortions of modernity:

[T]he nature of modernism in general is anything but timid, moderate, or discreet; it naturally leads to exaggeration and disequilibrium and must even be defined as an unconscious parody of modernity, an involuntary caricature. Modernism leads up to, and beyond the extreme limits, in the modern spirit which is most vain, frivolous, fleeting, and ephemeral.<sup>27</sup>

At issue here is an experience of distortion—as both reflection and judgement—which is expressed, in particular, in the negative rhetoric of contempt for tradition and the criticism of civilisation. Matei Calinescu, for his part, has attempted to explain this phenomenon

by maintaining the existence of two modernities: one connotes a stage in the history of Western culture and is associated with scientific and technological progress; the other is an aesthetic concept (the avant-garde).<sup>28</sup> These two modernities appear to be locked in a dialectical struggle, continually repelling and attracting one another, the former rationalist and competitive, the latter critical and focused on demystifying the established values of the former.

Literary modernism, to take one quick example, is thus both modern and antimodern: modern in its commitment to innovation, in its rejection of the authority of tradition, in its experimentalism; antimodern in its dismissal of the dogma of progress, in its critique of rationality, in its sense that modern civilization has brought about the loss of something precious, the dissolution of a great integrative paradigm, the fragmentation of what once was a mighty unity. To go beyond the all-too-obvious conceptual difficulties raised by the vocabulary of modernity, I have spoken metaphorically of the “faces” of a constitutively double – dual, ambiguous, and duplicitous – modernity.<sup>29</sup>

The problem of the essentialist connotations of the analogy remains, however, in these negative or contradictory explanations. And yet the possibility emerges, in Calinescu’s argument, of an entirely different interpretation of the relation between modernity and modernism in that he succeeds in demonstrating a multiplicity of aesthetic forms of representation not only *of* but *within* the modern, which is explicitly alluded to in his title: *Five Faces of Modernity*. Included among the faces of modernity here are areas that clearly lie outside the self-image of modernism, such as kitsch (the antithesis of modernism) and postmodernism (the transcendence of modernism). This makes it possible to describe the various artistic manifestations of modernism as a continuous, critical, parodic, antithetical, serious and contradictory process of evaluating a particular contemporary period—without having to understand the problem on the basis of a direct analogy, a specific consciousness, an inherent meaning, a particular view of the world or an essential spirit of the times.

In order to make this argument more specific, we might consider an individual work with the following question in mind:



**Figure 1.** Pablo Picasso, *Guitar and Wine Glass*, 1912, collage and charcoal on board, 47,9 x 36,5 cm, Collection of the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Bequest of Marion Koogler McNay, 1950.11. Copyright: Succession Picasso, License CC BY-NC-ND.

what would such a proposition about the ambivalence of modernity mean in practice? Pablo Picasso's *Guitar and Wine Glass* of 1912 may serve our purpose in this regard.



This collage may be said to be one of the standard examples of modernist art. While there is no doubt that it is a modernist work (in terms of current linguistic usage), the interesting question concerns the different ways in which it is modern.

The picture is apparently simple. Various visual elements have been assembled on a surface covered by fairly ordinary patterned wallpaper: cut-out pieces of paper, a fragment from a newspaper, part of a music score and the drawing of a glass. The pieces of paper have been shaped and composed into what might be perceived as an iconic sign for a guitar (its throat, frame, sound-hole, and the indication of overall volume provided by the shading). This was one of Picasso's first *papier collés* and may be inscribed, in historical terms, in a multiplicity of different contexts: in a tradition of still-life painting, in relation to Cezanne's aesthetics, as part of Cubism's transitional phase, as belonging to the period in which modernism became definitively established, at the beginning of the collage tradition and so on. The selection of this particular image as representative of the change in stylistic and linguistic conventions brought about by modernism is, of course, not a matter of chance. On the contrary, it could be said to reproduce a very widely held view of Cubism as the principle hub and engine of modern art, whose idiom has come to be seen as identical with the idiom of modernism and whose centrifugal power would influence, in one way or another, almost the entirety of the remaining art of the twentieth century (or rather: the modernist art of that century).<sup>30</sup>

When describing Picasso's Cubist phase, John Berger locates its aesthetic in a larger context of alterations to the circumstances of production and living conditions, of technological innovations and a new form of scientific thinking, and in a period (prior to the First World War) when these enormous changes—modernity—were still capable of instilling people with hope: they were painting 'the good omens of the modern world'.<sup>31</sup> Berger's thesis is that during his Cubist phase Picasso was working in harmony with the revolutionising (or revolutionary) potential of modernity, while in his later career he lost this essential connection and became the victim of his own myth. What the Cubists were painting was, therefore, not simply the good omens of the modern world,

but above all the original, progressive and emancipatory core of modernity.

But in order to avoid the evolutionist (and/or) nostalgic notion that underpins both the assertion that Cubism was a crucial phase in the history of modernism and that its function was to reflect the lost progressiveness of modernity, the idiom of Cubism could be said instead to concentrate and condense a new form of linguistic analysis and examination that would prove to be one of the major themes of modernism. While Picasso's collage may seem unproblematic to us because it forms part of such a familiar art historical context, his contemporaries would have perceived it as extremely strange. To describe the picture simply as a modern representative of the tradition of the still-life genre would, of course, be to miss its most obvious attribute: the way it plays with the iconicity of its subject matter. Guillaume Apollinaire would describe Cubist painting as follows:

If painters still observe nature, they no longer imitate it, and they carefully avoid the representation of natural scenes observed directly and reconstituted through study. Modern art rejects all the means of pleasing that were employed by the greatest artists of the past: the perfect representation of the human figure, voluptuous nudes, carefully finished details, etc. . . . The young painters of the avant-garde schools, then, wish to do pure painting. Theirs is an entirely new plastic art. It is only at its beginnings, and it is not yet as abstract as it would like to be. The new painters are in a sense mathematicians without knowing it, but they have not yet abandoned nature, and they examine it painterly. A Picasso studies an object the way a surgeon dissects a corpse.<sup>32</sup>

All forms of idealism, naturalism and good taste were being abandoned here as part of an assertion that the painter's sole task was to create an entirely new plastic art—an art whose purity was to be found in its formulation of an immanent linguistic logic, transcending any reference to the surrounding world or to tradition. And to the extent that a relation to the surrounding world might still exist ('art is not yet as abstract as it would like to be'), this should involve an almost scientific examination of objects on the



basis of the laws of geometry. The apparent verisimilitude generated by the meticulous rendering of detail in realist art was to be replaced by a higher degree of truth. The simile between Picasso and a surgeon evokes the radical nature of an art in which the artist has cut away all unnecessary props and is fully engaged on forcing his way into the objects that remain. The simile also signals a logic of change, because it involves a metaphor and not a factual description—Picasso analyses his motifs the way a surgeon does (objectively, impartially, unsentimentally, accurately), and this leads him to find an entirely new truth that is no longer based on a tradition of interpreting the knowledge and language of past ages.

The question that remains, however, is what the collage's specific form of representation actually means. A whole array of answers have been provided in response: that it is a technique for further accentuating the surface of the painting (Clement Greenberg); that it is the logical consequence of the Cubist view of the work as an autonomous, self-reflexive and constructed object (John Golding); that it is a way of problematising the relationship between the internal logic of the pictorial surface and the depiction of objects from the surrounding world (William Seitz).<sup>33</sup> All these interpretations inscribe collage as a passage in the development of the medium-specific aesthetic of avant-garde art, in which the subject matter appears to serve primarily as a temporary and, in itself, not particularly significant starting point for the formal study. These interpretations were, moreover, formulated in a period (between 1959 and 1961) when the abstract and self-referential criteria of visual art appeared to be definitive both of the understanding of contemporary art and of the history of modern art as such. Seen in this light, Picasso's collage would serve as an example of modern art's very deliberate transformation of both subject matter and tradition, in which the primacy of form and pictorial surface would increasingly come to inhabit the centre ground—in which the quality of the image as surface is, to use Greenberg's words, a more or less direct function of that altered view of history, which can be called modernity.

To inscribe this transformation directly into an analogy between modernism and modernity without further delimitation would, however, miss an important point, namely, that the issue of the modernity of contemporary art has itself been subject to a number of historical changes that occurred between Baudelaire's writing and the questions raised by Cubism. By 1912, reference to the modernity of visual art was distinctly old hat, an echo for the most part of the attempts made in the previous century by realist and impressionist art to break free from the conventions of the academy. It was at this time, however, that the issue of modernity and the representation of the modern in pictorial art were to assume an entirely new relevance. Two definitive turns took place that pushed in diametrically opposed directions: on the one hand, the inheritance of the symbolism of the 1880s and its intensified interest in the linguistic function of visual art and, on the other, a new interpretation (not to say distortion) of Baudelaire's old notion of 'modernité' as embodied in the Futurists' heralding of the modern age.

The linguistic turn meant that the focus was directed at visual art as an examination of the relationship between inner and outer worlds, where the key issue was the nature of the visual sign and its reference to the object.<sup>34</sup> Large parts of the renewed interest in 'the primeval' and 'the primitive' and the associated move away from the social iconography of modern life at the dawn of the twentieth century can be traced to this turn.<sup>35</sup> One consequence would be that more traditional motifs became essential in the most advanced avant-garde art of the period: recurring depictions of mountain landscapes (Cezanne), views of the German countryside (Kirchner), silent Algerian landscapes (Matisse) or monotonous series of still lifes (Picasso). The Futurist turn did not involve stylistic influences from the Futurists, but rather the desire to inject something of the dynamism of modern life into fine art. The first Futurist exhibition in Paris at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune in 1912 met with considerable suspicion; what was seen as the Futurists' preoccupation with the content of art—and as a result their incomplete emancipation from the academic tradition—would be the crucial factor in explaining its negative reception

by the avant-garde.<sup>36</sup> This was a sin against the pictorial logic described earlier: within the context of Cubism, the picture was not intended to be a reconstruction of an anecdotal fact but a construction of a new, pictorial fact.<sup>37</sup> However, there was also some ambivalence towards the radical stance of the Futurists, as many perceived it to be, which meant that while their art could be dismissed, their ideas could not. A key example is provided by the change in Apollinaire's attitude to Futurism when he proved quick to realise how their ideas could be transformed to form part of that general pursuit of lyrical and abstract dynamism he referred to as 'Orphism'.<sup>38</sup> Although this movement, which encompassed several of the leading artists of the French avant-garde, derived its energy from the dynamics of the surrounding world, it transformed these impressions into a purely visual (non-figurative, non-allegorical) representation.

The modernity of *Guitar and Wine Glass* may be understood in terms of the work being situated at the intersection of these two turns. Even though Picasso, too, was strongly antipathetic to Futurism, there was an ambivalent streak to his distaste.<sup>39</sup> The issue of the pictorial subject was not quite such a taboo matter for him, because he never accepted Apollinaire's evolutionist thesis that advanced art should pursue abstraction. The subject of the work, he maintained, is always a 'source of interest' for the individual with the eyes to see it and a mind open to his or her surroundings.<sup>40</sup> The Italian Futurists had presumably touched on a sensitive point for the French avant-garde of the time: its self-referential involvement with the formal or expressive problems of pictorial art as transcending the dynamic and transient impressions of the urban environment. The problem was how to reestablish the relationship between art and society, to combine in a sense the internal and external criteria of the work without renouncing one side or the other. Theodor Adorno has described this as a source of tension in modern art: 'The unsolved antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of form. This, not the insertion of objective elements, defines the relation of art to society.'<sup>41</sup> The issue would also appear to have been an acute problem for Picasso at this time, a dilemma to which the collage technique provided a particular solution.

If we choose to look beyond the generic constraints imposed by the term still-life, it becomes clear that the pictorial elements in *Guitar and Wine Glass* do not represent only objects and environments; neither do they constitute simply an examination of the representative nature of visual art. The work appears, instead, to dramatise representation itself: the relationship of the score to the music; the relationship of written language both to events and to the medium itself (the Crimean war, the daily newspapers); the relationship of the pieces of paper to the iconicity of the objects and the relationship of the drawing to the glass itself and to the medium-specific type of representation (a Cubist picture of a glass). This interplay of signs is made possible by a linguistic peculiarity of the collage technique: that the sign is both a representation and identical with the referent. In his study *Painting as Model* (1990), Yve-Alain Bois draws parallels between this linguistic and sign-oriented change in Cubism and the state of linguistic research at the time. The point of his interpretation is not to demonstrate any direct influences between art and linguistics, but to attempt to shed light on how the interpretation of certain African masks (primarily from Gabon, Liberia and the Ivory Coast) would lead to a similar realisation of the arbitrary nature of the visual sign:

The syntax is “arbitrary” in that it no longer relies on anatomical knowledge, and therefore on the pictorial illusionism that always springs from this knowledge (the face and hair can be separated in two equal volumes, disposed on one side and the other of a cylindrical neck – an example to which we can add the protuberant quality of the Grebo mask’s eyes). The vocabulary is arbitrary and, in consequence, extends to infinity because the sculptural elements no longer have need of any direct resemblance to their referent. A cowry can represent an eye, but a nail can fill the same function. From this second type of arbitrariness unfolds the third (that of materials), as well as a complete range of methods that we might now call metaphoric displacements.<sup>42</sup>

The mutations and metaphoric displacements of the signs are not simply a form of playing with the rules, but rather a kind of perception (albeit an intuitive one) in which the function of the sign and its variation within a particular context appear more

important than its morphology. What is crucial is not that Picasso allowed himself to be inspired by the formal vocabulary of African or Iberian masks as a kind of naive gesture that was both critical of civilisation and in praise of the 'primitive', but that he was able to interpret this art as a means of redefining the sign function of the picture.

The question might be asked at this point what *Guitar and Wine Glass* actually represents? It might seem redundant as the subject matter is indicated in the title: a guitar, a sheet of music and a glass. But the key issue here is not simply what the subject is, but what it does. Observe the accumulation of objects against the background in the upper half of the work, and, after a while, the pattern no longer appears to be a form of superficial decoration (a wallpaper), but a faceted roof. A similar illusion emerges in the lower half of the image. Here, the image of flat paper fragments against a level surface is contrasted with the image of objects in space. In *The Picasso Papers* (1998), Rosalind Krauss has described what she calls the 'polyphonic spaces' of collage and its 'circulation of signs' when referring to Bakhtin's interpretation of the dialogic function in Dostoevsky's poetics.<sup>43</sup> Applied to *Guitar and Wine Glass*, this is an evocative characterisation of how each pictorial fragment and each voice are doubled and then split up in a game played with the interpretation of the sign and its referentiality. The perception of the work oscillates between surface and depth, between facticity and transparency, while the function of particular pictorial elements shifts in similar fashion between what is immediately observable and what is hermetically abstract.

The pictorial elements do not, however, refer simply to a number of objects that just happened to be at hand in Picasso's studio; they also provide clear connotations to a specific context. They appear to be poetic and transient reflections of the world and life outside the frame, while also serving as a more specific index of the kind of environment (a café or a bar), which still served, for the most part, as the social arena of the avant-garde at the time. Apollinaire was among the first to interpret Braque and Picasso's use of letters and textual fragments directly in relation to the symbols, signs and advertisements of the urban visual environment,

which he saw as having such an important role to play in modern art.<sup>44</sup>

Jeffrey Weiss has described this relationship in terms of an intricate game between sign and referent, which he locates more specifically in the rise of the music hall. This was an extraordinary, ostentatious, ironic and ultramodern form of entertainment, a mix of seriousness and superficiality, which many of the representatives of the avant-garde were very interested in both attending and observing. In analysing the role played by daily newspapers, Weiss takes as his starting point one of the central elements of music hall: allusion. *Le Jou* represents both a specific newspaper and the medium of the press as such; the fragmented word is at the same time a pun on the French word for play (both game and theatre) and an allusion to the actor's change of costume and character in accordance with the dictates of the role.<sup>45</sup> Here the circulation of signs serves not just as a game with the phonetic qualities of words, as in Mallarmé, but as a means of referring to modern life as it is lived in the world.

The point, however, is not the illustrative effect of the visual references or that this mundane and apparently banal form of entertainment is inscribed in the hermetic language of Cubism; it is, instead, that music hall's particular mixture of different motifs, genres and languages—in which various events and tableaux are jumbled together in a succession of fragments rather than in a coherent linear narrative—provided a model for the syntax of the collage. And, crucially, it is through this encounter that the inward motion of symbolism (towards the fundamental qualities of language) is turned outwards (towards the dynamism of modern life). The collage did not simply provide a new set of rules to play by; it was by its very nature a form of playing with the rules.

Interpreted in this way, the subject matter of Picasso's collage would refer both to the world around it and to its own language system: a fateful leakage, so to speak, is occurring both between different sign systems and between the picture and the surrounding world. The work oscillates between several levels of meaning as a result, in which the various voices are duplicated and where fleeting but profound encounters take place between art (between

genres, composition, the formal logic of Cubism) and the wider world (allusions, the collage fragments) and where none of the levels can be understood without reference to any of the others. This interplay of unstable references and directions is, however, made to cohere within the strict uniformity of the composition. The work should not, therefore, be described as dissonant, but as contrapuntal, with each reference, each voice and each point of view being disciplined by the harmony of the whole. Its unity might best be compared to a force field in which the movement of the individual particles is kept in equilibrium while nevertheless remaining visible *as* motion in its stillness, to borrow Adorno's phrase.<sup>46</sup>

This is also a key point for understanding the metaphorical displacements of the collage: as an interplay between the affirmation and the denial of every outward and inward movement. Although the discipline of the composition and its generic connotations serve to anchor it in an ancient tradition that is far removed from the noisy, urban and futuristic modernity of the music hall, the metaphorical displacements and the manner in which the collage plays with arbitrary signs radically violate the rules of the same tradition at the same time. This allows the play—the game—with signs, motifs and allusion to operate within the framework of the serious (of Art), while the logic on which that framework is structured is simultaneously being redefined.

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Picasso's *Guitar and Wine Glass* provides an example of how modernism's centrifugal and centripetal forces are able, paradoxically, to collaborate in one and the same work: the collage refers both inwards and outwards, forwards and backwards in time. This is also a crucial aspect of its modernity. The work appears to radicalise the particular ambivalence of Baudelaire's definition of the modernity of modern art as 'the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable.' It is modernity itself that constitutes the particular polyvalent coding of the transient and the eternal in this collage, in which the artist's reflection on this paradoxical situation



necessitates a continual reexamination of its pictorial language. The circulation of signs in the subject matter may be seen in this light not only as a possible solution to the problem of relating the internal linguistic game of art to an external reality, but also as a metaphor for the alteration in the conditions and displaced function of the artistic process.



**Figure 2.** Johann Heinrich Füssli, *The Artist's Despair Before the Grandeur of Ancient Ruin*, 1778/80, red chalk and brown wash on paper, 42 x 35,2 cm, Kunsthau Zürich, Wikimedia Commons, License CC-o (Public Domain) [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Johann\\_Heinrich\\_F%C3%BCssli\\_013.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Johann_Heinrich_F%C3%BCssli_013.jpg).



This is not, however, an exclusive or unique attribute of the art of modernism, but a much larger phenomenon and one that Linda Nochlin has aptly described in terms of the sense of distance, nostalgia and fragmentation expressed in Johann Heinrich Fuseli's *Der Künstler verzweifeln vor der Grösse der antiken Trümmer*: the artist is not simply portraying himself as being overwhelmed by the dignity of antiquity, but also as being crushed by the ruins as a symbol of the contemporary world's loss of wholeness and coherence.<sup>47</sup>

The discrepancy in size between the hand and foot of the Emperor Constantine and the artist is interpreted as a metaphor for modernity's relation to antiquity and to the increasing fragmentation of the artist's own age. This relation is, however, not simply one of longing and nostalgic tragedy: 'Out of this loss is constructed the Modern itself. In a certain sense, Fuseli has constructed a distinctively *modern* view of antiquity-as-loss – a view, a "crop", that will constitute the essence of representational modernism'.<sup>48</sup> My point here is not to compare fragmentation as such as a device in Fuseli and in Picasso (even though this is an interesting subject), but to understand the issue of the modernity of visual art as a conscious process of reflection at finding oneself irretrievably lost on the other side of the boundary to the past (the premodern). At issue is a position capable of encompassing both nostalgia and futurism and of shedding new light on the question of the linguistic nature of the visual. Precisely because it presented a change in the function of the sign, Picasso's collage may also be understood in this context: providing one possible answer to the question that had been posed as early as the end of the eighteenth century as to the possibility or impossibility of the truth and authenticity of the sign—it is an answer, however, based on entirely different aesthetic, social and intellectual premises. Picasso sheds no tears over his fragments, setting them in motion instead as a springboard from which to raise new questions about the possibilities of visual art.

Lastly, Picasso's posture in this regard might also be considered in terms of Charles Baudelaire's designation of the particular point at which the contemporary and the past intersect, where the work transcends both history and the present—which would subsequently be identified as the paradoxical condition of modern

art. In the 1910s, however, this would not by any means have been an obvious posture for an avant-garde artist to adopt, whose identity would, in many cases, be characterised by a desire to cast off all that belonged to the past and to arrive at a point of departure, which signalled a new direction forward. With reference to Nietzsche, Paul de Man has described how this form of progressive striving has, as a matter of necessity, consciously or unconsciously, entered into a pact with history:

Modernity and history relate to each other in a curiously contradictory way that goes beyond antithesis or opposition. If history is not to become sheer regression or paralysis, it depends on modernity for its duration and renewal; but modernity cannot assert itself without being swallowed up and reintegrated into a regressive historical process.<sup>49</sup>

One aspect of this remarkable pact is, as we have seen, that the pursuit of modernity has a very long history. Another is that the changeable logic of modernity also brings with it an accumulation of yesterday's news: an archive, if you like, of artifacts, which may be ordered—and always will be ordered—according to a historical chronology. What de Man means, rather, is that the creative process contains both original and reflective elements and, as part of this process, the writer (or the artist) inevitably functions in his text as both actor and observer. In order to cross the boundaries separating us from the past, one would presumably have to possess a memory in which every text emerges in relief against the historical context of previous texts. The polysemous relationship between history and modernity is thus already inscribed in the production of every single work of art, even though it may not necessarily constitute a conscious part of the self-image and intentions of the modern artist.

What this interpretation of artistic modernity offers is the understanding that modernism constitutes a vital part of the visual culture of modernity, although in a rather different sense than the one-sided insistence of the analogy on a progressive forward/outward movement. It also runs counter to the analogy's implicit definition of modernism *as* the modern art. It would be useful at this point to return to Matei Calinescu's argument concerning the

various faces of modernity, as this provides a form of differentiation that points not only to the multiplicity of forms of aesthetic expression and values existing within the modern, but also to a means of overcoming the orientation imposed by the analogy towards realistic definitions and the consequent normative identification of what constitutes the essential form of representation of the modern age and of modern art.

The issue here is the need to pay serious attention to what is fragmentary in the representation of the contemporary and the historical and to understand the differences between representations as symptoms both of an increased differentiation within the world of art and of a profound crisis in the perception of the authenticity of the sign. The fragment sets up a structure that is capable of taking ambivalence seriously; it leads to a provisional selection of detail and, possibly, to an open question mark, rather than to an all-embracing system whose answers are followed by an authoritative full stop.<sup>50</sup> This is, in my view, perhaps the most important consequence of Octavio Paz's notion that modernity is condemned to pluralism.

# Conflicting Truths

## The Antithesis of Modernism

There is a remarkable illustration by Henri Meyer in the September 1883 issue of *Le Journal Illustré* that depicts an interior from the Triennale exhibition held in Paris in the same year, in which hang portraits of the most famous of the participating artists.<sup>51</sup>

At that time, the Triennale was the only official art exhibition held in France, the government having previously awarded control of the Salon to artistic organizations that were independent of the Académie des Beaux-Arts. This was a change of no little consequence. Since the eighteenth century, the Salon had been both the real and symbolic site for the public demonstration of the operations of the Academy—and for the more or less critical reception of its work.<sup>52</sup> This shift would mark a new era of public competition within the art world: the Salon was the first recurring, publicly accessible exhibition of contemporary art in Europe and proved, as such, to be one of the most popular public events in Paris.<sup>53</sup>

The Salon provided a spectacle without any real peer in the visual culture of the period, filling a number of the halls of the Louvre (and later the Palais de l'Industrie) with thousands of paintings and sculptures, colorful depictions of mythological and historical subjects, portraits, genre paintings and still lifes.<sup>54</sup> The context in which the Salon functioned would appear to have been a complex one in which the financial and social interests of the artists were dependent on the willingness of the Academy and the authorities to show aesthetic representations they deemed

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**Figure 3.** Henri Meyer, *Le Triennal. Le Grand Salon Carré avec les portraits des peintres et des sculpteurs principaux*, illustration in *Le Journal Illustré*, sept. 30, Paris 1883, Photo and copyright: Uppsala University Library, License CC-o CC BY-NC-ND.

acceptable. Its public nature made the Salon into a kind of index of the various possible and acceptable positions within the art world: controlling the Salon during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was tantamount, therefore, to controlling a major part of the official art world. And this control had slowly but surely been passing into the hands of individuals who either had no entrenched position in the official institutions or were directly opposed to them. The introduction of the Triennale can therefore be described as a last (though ultimately stillborn) attempt on the part of the conservative forces within the Academy to retain power and influence in a changing art world.

But Henri Meyer's illustration also bears witness to the artists who formed the establishment at this time: William-Adolphe Bouguereau, Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier, Jean-Léon Gérôme, Jean-Jacques Henner, Alexandre Cabanel, Jules Lefebvre, Léon Bonnat, Paul Baudry, Henry Lévy. These are the names of powerful and influential individuals who are today all but forgotten and whose works have either become invisible to art history as

a whole or may, conceivably, still be studied with a kind of appalled delight as part of that cabinet of curiosities usually and disparagingly termed 'Salon art'. Of interest here, however, is that this art forms a key part of the visual culture of modernity, which not only existed in parallel with the early history of modernism, but also dominated the art world of that time. What separates 'us' from 'them' is not just modernism's history of radical experimentation, its insistence on the need for reconsideration and revision and on making a fresh start, but also an extensive process of normalization, which has rendered invisible large parts of the historical context within which modernism became established.

In 'The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism' (1980), Craig Owens describes how modernism may be understood in a historical context as a parenthesis between the different conceptions of the allegorical image in classicism and in postmodernism; this theory also helps to explain the taboo placed on allegorical aesthetics by modernism.<sup>55</sup> Although Owen's aim was polemical (and by now, perhaps, somewhat dated) the distinction itself is interesting because it appears to isolate an age or epoch with a distinct beginning and end, in which the contours of an idea that has otherwise appeared diffuse can be more clearly distinguished by means of thematic interpretations clearly situated outside the period in question. The outlines can be discerned here of a fundamental shift that started with Romanticism and encompassed a change in the way the formation of meaning, interpretation and historiography functioned: a reinterpretation of the very nature of the artistic image (the work of art as expression/essence), its forms of representation (how and to what the sign refers) and also its interpretation (the development of a formalist tradition). This is a change, moreover, that extends far beyond the context of the avant-garde and which, in the twentieth century, has come to affect large parts of the modern discourse on visual art.

Baudelaire's definition of modernity, to take one example, can be understood within this framework. His formulation of modernity as 'the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable' may be considered a symptom of a fundamental change in the way the nature

and function of art were seen during the nineteenth century, a change which found its own catchy formulation in Realism's demand that art should be of its own time ('il faut être de son temps'), instead of reproducing (and possibly revitalising) the ideals of previous ages.<sup>56</sup> A fundamental idea was emerging here that would transcend the ideals and definitions of the academic code. 'To be of one's own time' also meant a change in the way the work of art was seen: a shift, in metaphorical terms, from serving as a reflection of a metaphysical ideal (truth/beauty) that could be appraised using an external yardstick to becoming a creation that embodied the truth and could only be judged on the basis of its own premises. As a result, an alternative discursive order became established in the art world of the West during the nineteenth century, which was characterised by notions of creativity, uniqueness, originality, authenticity and integrity. As we have seen, this order arose in antithesis to bourgeois modernity in general and to academic discourse in particular; its hallmarks were variation, individuality and pluralism, as opposed to the continuity, generality and traditionalism of the academic code.

But is it at all possible in such a disparate and pluralist context to refer to an order? This cannot, of course, be done in the same way as would apply within academic discourse—as a more or less established matrix of possible interpretations and actions—but rather as a network in which the ideals serve as its nodes, all of which seem to be connected, all of which presuppose one another and so constitute the boundaries for what is possible within the discourse. These ideals may be gathered together under the overall concept of the regime of authenticity. Authenticity is understood here, in the words of Jürgen Habermas, as a fundamental form of legitimation: a basic idea that, ultimately, legitimates each disparate (although approved) activity within a discourse.<sup>57</sup> This form of legitimation might be said to constitute the internal code that creates a factual or fictitious continuity—a distinct narrative—by means of the unstable and mutable context that developed alongside academic discourse: as an antithesis to its notion of ideal beauty.

Although this antithetical relationship would characterise the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to a considerable

extent, the former of its two poles—the academic—has largely vanished from history. It is remarkable that the academic discourse that was so dominant in its time has ceded the field and been erased, more or less, from art historical awareness, like a sunken continent or an unconscious layer whose fragments and splinters occasionally rise to the surface as the remnants of the nightmare of modernity's unhappy and meticulously repressed childhood. What this demonstrates is how one discursive practice (the *avant-garde*) becomes defined in opposition to another and then, once an interpretive privilege under the heading of modernism has been established, excludes it.

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The increasing significance accorded to modernism and its subsequent acceptance and eventual dominance of the art world of the West should not, of course, be described simply in terms of a conflict between two opposed viewpoints, as a battlefield from which one of the parties emerged triumphant. Instead, this was a wide-ranging historical process whose contours are much less clearly defined, but which nevertheless involved the establishment of one particular way of seeing as opposed to another and which at a certain point acquired the right to privilege its interpretation and could thus make its own position the self-evident one. For the most part, this is not a process that can be read about in the survey literature or even in specialist studies, but one that requires some effort even to discern.

One way of shedding light on a process of this kind is to trace its roots back to a time when that interpretive privilege had not yet been acquired, when a particular statement could not be presented as self-evident but had to be formulated in opposition to the other: when the thesis could still be seen in relief against its explicit antithesis. The relevant question as far as this work is concerned is, therefore, when and how modernism acquired its interpretive privilege within the discourse of the visual arts. When did its aesthetic and historical position emerge as the natural and self-evident precondition for any statement about modern art? In order to answer this question, the primary antithesis of the



self-image of the avant-garde needs to be isolated and its various historical strata have to be examined in a manner that might be likened to an archaeological process of excavation.

A useful starting-point is provided by Richard Wrigley's *The Origins of French Art Criticism* (1993) in which he identifies the reaction against the academic tradition as a crucial aspect of the way art history has come to define the tradition of modern art:

Art-Historical accounts of eighteenth and nineteenth-century European art have been overwhelmingly predisposed to seek out and celebrate innovation. In such progressive narratives, longer-term continuities of art practice and their associated habits of thought are included only as a necessary but *retardataire* evil.<sup>58</sup>

Here, Wrigley has put his finger on a key point not only for the twentieth-century understanding of its own contemporary art, but also for its interpretation of previous epochs. A whole range of celebrated examples can be found for what this reappraisal meant in terms of bringing historical figures to light who had previously been overlooked or marginalised (as in the transformation of Francesco Goya into 'Goya'), but what is important here is that the process of reevaluation also risks obscuring significant historical relations and connections. In consequence, the image of the art of the modern age has, in many instances, been so refined and simplified as to diminish the significance of the academic tradition entirely. This tradition has become a diabolic antithesis that is invoked whenever someone has to be scared off by the appalling alternative to the hermetic and abstruse experiments of contemporary art.

This view has, in fact, continually reappeared as a fundamental tenet throughout the entire history of modernism, while also being handed down as a constitutive element of the identity of both modernism and the avant-garde. At the beginning of the 1960s, the American art critic Thomas B. Hess described the extraordinarily negative connotations of the academic tradition in the art criticism and art history of the twentieth century as follows:

Academy, Academic, Academism (or Academicism) – these words mean “bad” in the conversations of the art community, much

worse than “pretty” or “decorative” or even “sentimental” – they are about as dirty as polysyllables can get. They do not refer to a category, like “Neo-Classic” or “Cubist”, which are tags on rather specific, more or less homogeneous, bodies of material, but rather indicate areas where something unsettling has gone on, in any time, in any place.<sup>59</sup>

Not just bad, therefore, but about as bad as it is possible to be! Hess’ comment may seem exaggerated but is, to all intents and purposes, an accurate description of the value modernism assigned to art of this kind. The same view is reflected, for example, in Clement Greenberg’s characterisation of the official painting of the nineteenth century in his influential essay ‘Towards a Newer Laocoon’ (1940):

There have been academies before, but for the first time we have academism. Painting enjoyed a revival of activity in 19th century France such as had not been seen since the 16th century, and academism could produce such good painters as Corot and Theodore Rousseau, and even Daumier – yet in spite of this the academicians sank painting to the level that was in some respect an all-time low. The name of this low is Vernet, Gérôme, Leighton, Watts, Moreau, Böcklin, the Pre-Raphaelites, etc., etc.<sup>60</sup>

Greenberg’s analysis produces an interesting (and, for him, rhetorically necessary) conflation of academy and academism so that what had been the neutral name for a certain type of institution was transformed into a highly charged term of abuse. The distinction involves not only a change in taste, but also a radical redefinition of what art is and should be. This preoccupation with criteria pertaining to the innovative, creative and original aspects of art developed out of an opposition and would reproduce, in turn, the image of a cleavage running through the art world of the most recent centuries. This is explicitly described in Lionello Venturi’s *History of Art Criticism* (1936), where the author describes how an abyss had opened up between the accommodating, eclectic and reactionary art of the academy and that of the avant-garde, the authentic expression of the progressive and creative spirit of the age.<sup>61</sup>

A similar separation can be found a decade or two earlier in Clive Bell’s essay collection *Art* (1914). In what is an extremely

summary historical presentation of Western art, Bell shows how the gradual decline of art during the eighteenth century would, in the course of the subsequent one, generate a complete collapse of all aesthetic values to the extent that the visual arts could be all but declared dead—during the heyday of the academic doctrine that is. According to Bell, the artefacts produced under the name of official art during this period fall entirely outside any conceivable definition of art:

But the mass of painting and sculpture had sunk to something that no intelligent and cultivated person would dream of calling art. . . . It is not until what is still official painting and sculpture and architecture gets itself accepted as a substitute for art, that we can say for certain that the long slope that began with the Byzantine primitives is ended. But when we have reached this point we know that we can sink no lower. . . . Except stray artists and odd amateurs, you may say that in the middle of the nineteenth century art had ceased to exist. That is the importance of the official and academic art of that age: it shows us that we have touched the bottom.<sup>62</sup>

Bell's work was, it should be said, produced in a context in which the avant-garde scene had still to be legitimated theoretically and historically in opposition to an official artistic tradition, which may go some way to explain the pitilessness of his judgements. Both Bell and Greenberg describe the academic tradition as constituting the aesthetic ruins from which the authentic art of the avant-garde arises. In both instances, history is used to distinguish an authentic artistic trend from a tradition of pictorial creation under the aegis of the official academies and salons, which was as perfunctory as it was superficial. The wheat can, therefore, be sifted from the chaff and the artists who proved essential to the development of (modernist) history distinguished from those who constituted both a degenerate species and a blind alley—despite that fact that they were all operating largely within the same historical and institutional context.

This kind of historiography emerges in its turn from the programmatic writings and manifestos of the avant-garde itself, where the front against the established art world was defined above all by a savage criticism of everything the art academies represented.

This may be seen, almost without exception, as the other side of the manifestos' rhetoric: the indispensability of their own form of modernity is asserted in terms of the equally unconditional necessity of the destruction of the academic ideal. One example among the many available is found in Wassily Kandinsky's *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1911), where, in the opening paragraph, he presents his assessment of the retrospective tendency that characterised the canonisation of Ancient Greece by the academic tradition:

Efforts to revive the art-principles of the past will at best produce an art that is still-born. It is impossible for us to live and feel, as did the ancient Greeks. In the same way those who strive to follow the Greek methods in sculpture achieve only a similarity of form, the work remaining soulless for all time. Such imitation is mere aping. Externally the monkey completely resembles a human being; he will sit holding a book in front of his nose, and turn over the pages with a thoughtful aspect, but his actions have for him no real meaning.<sup>63</sup>

According to Kandinsky, the error of academic doctrine lies in that it made the repetition of the past—of a dead language—into its very core, with the effect that the empty gesture became the rule at the cost of losing touch with the contemporary world and the ruin of artistic authenticity. The apparently paradoxical consequence is that academic art in its search to recapture eternal verities through the past simply recreated an external appearance without any engagement with the trans-historical necessity/truth that characterises all authentic art in every age and culture. Kandinsky is enrolling himself here in an established tradition critical of academic art, which can be traced at least as far back as the romantic movements of the early nineteenth century.<sup>64</sup> Kandinsky's description of the simultaneous and paradoxical relationship of artistic modernity to the transience of the present and the eternity of the historical mediates an insight that had, in principle, already been expressed by Charles Baudelaire in 'Le peintre de la vie moderne', even if there is a vast gulf between Baudelaire and Kandinsky's interpretations of how this relationship might best be manifested in artistic practice. The necessity of a connection between modern

art and the contemporary world, and thus to the immanent workings of history, appears to have been a key issue in the entire tradition of implacable criticism of academic discourse. It is, moreover, on this point that the crucial distinction between academism and modernity is drawn.

This journey back in time helps to reveal not only a critical context, but also a change in the position from which criticism was formulated, as the antagonistic attitude of the avant-garde was gradually codified by radical art criticism and the judgements and selections made by such art critics were incorporated over time, surprisingly fast, within the historiography of the visual arts. Another index of this change may be found, for example, by studying how art-historical survey literature treated the visual arts of the late nineteenth century. From around the turn of that century and into the 1930s, although academic discourse is mentioned in the image mediated, it increasingly appears as a decadent phenomenon, the last outgrowth of an already withering branch of the development of art.<sup>65</sup> After the Second World War, academic discourse more or less disappears from the historical picture and an evolutionist trend emerges instead in which each work, each artist and each grouping is legitimated in terms of the significance of their influence on future generations.<sup>66</sup>

The logic of change Harold Rosenberg so aptly characterized as 'the tradition of the new' would thus become an authoritative description of modern art in general. The process of rendering the academic art of the late nineteenth century invisible had finally been normalised by this point, while what once constituted a marginal area for critical attention had been transformed into the mainstream of history.

This does not, of course, mean that art history underwent a process of radicalisation during the twentieth century, increasingly embracing the aesthetic ideals of the avant-garde. Rather it is a function of what Hans Belting described as the late nineteenth century separation of art history (as a university discipline) from art criticism, which meant that the former no longer constituted an authoritative or autonomous voice in the interpretation and conceptualisation of modern art and was obliged to place its trust in the gradual reevaluation of the avant-garde by the art

world.<sup>67</sup> What were once radical and antagonist positions would in this instance become entirely internalized and institutionalized over time. The reason for this was that the normative study of the art historical disciplines was so extensively directed at ancient art. For the interpretation, evaluation and historiography of the contemporary—when this became necessary in teaching, for example, or in the production of survey literature—art history was more or less obliged to call on expertise in the field, on modernism's own historiography in effect.

If a narrower definition of the historical framework for this process is desired, the decades immediately prior to and following the Second World War can be considered to be a first breakpoint. It was then that modernist art was incorporated and institutionalized within the established system of cultural norms in Western Europe and the United States—as an aspect of the unified rational and progressive modernity, which at that time became a cornerstone of the ideological structure of the modern welfare state. There is a chronological agreement at this point between the establishment of a particular unified image of modernity and a similarly unified image of modernism as the essential artistic form of modernity. It is also at this time that the separation between modern art and academic art became so self-evident that it no longer needed to be made explicit and salon art would finally be hidden away in the cellars and storerooms of the major museums. The other breakpoint can be traced back to the end of the 1960s when theoretical and ideological perspectives were formulated within a range of different fields that sought to go beyond the established understanding of modernism and modernity.

The dialectic between both these breakpoints can be observed in a multiplicity of areas, the art world in particular, in which the formulation of postmodernism was based largely on the negating of the values that had been accentuated by post-war modernism. Let me provide a single example here that may also serve as a coda to this archaeological excavation. This is the American art critic Hilton Kramer's violent reaction to the altered display of late nineteenth century European art at the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1980 (as a result of a donation by André Meyer), in which a more unorthodox selection was exhibited:

It is the destiny of corpses, after all, to remain buried, and salon painting was found to be very dead indeed. But nowadays there is no art so dead that an art historian cannot be found to detect some simulacrum of life in its mouldering remains. In the last decade, there has, in fact, arisen in the scholarly world a powerful sub-profession that specializes in these lugubrious disinterments. . . . So long as the modernist movement was understood to be thriving, there could be no question about a revival of painters like Gérôme or Bouguereau. Modernism exerted a moral as well as an aesthetic authority that precluded such a development. But the demise of modernism has left us with few, if any, defences against the incursions of debased taste. . . . What we are given in the beautiful *André Meyer Galleries* is the first comprehensive account of the 19th century from a post-modernist point of view in one of our major museums.<sup>68</sup>

The intentions of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (an institution which might very well have been accused of being culturally conservative rather than postmodern in any more radical sense) in showing this selection are not the object of discussion here, but rather the impertinence of the museum at even entertaining the idea of showing ‘the dead’ alongside ‘the living’—under one and the same roof. The crime committed by the curators would appear to have been a kind of cultural necrophilia, the bare fact of the presence of these dug-up and mouldering corpses being enough to sully the truth of deathless Art.

It would, of course, be easy to incorporate Kramer’s verdict within the tradition discussed above. However, my point is not to extend further the unbroken chain of academic criticism, but rather to identify a historical threshold: the fact that by this time the need was felt once more to mount a rhetorical defence both of modernism and of good taste. The true crime committed by the curators involved was that they had acted as historians, and their selection, deliberate or not, had made visible the standard (i.e., the invisible) presuppositions of established historiography. What so upsets Kramer is, fundamentally, that the discourse he has been operating so unselfconsciously within is being questioned from without and that a theoretical and temporary boundary for the scope of modernist discourse is being established. If Clive Bell’s

censure was motivated by the attempts (on his part and by others) to establish an interpretive privilege, Kramer's statement corresponds to that point in the story when this privilege has been lost. Modernism's paradigmatic criteria for judgement and selection were being transformed from a tacit presupposition into the object of debate, a debate, moreover, in which all parties were obliged to present openly their arguments and their underlying reasons.

Hilton Kramer's real position (and that of modernism) in 1980 therefore corresponds more closely with that of the academic establishment at the time of the Triennale a hundred years earlier. What these interconnections also demonstrate is that the various historical positions of the pictorial arts within the visual culture of modernism involve a conflict, not simply between different aesthetic ideals, but also between different kinds of truth, and that each acceptable formulation of truth actually takes place in a particular and delimited space.

## A Space of Transformations

Paul Oskar Kristeller has described how a modern system that encompassed the various artistic genres developed in the mid-eighteenth century. Although the function and definition of art in this system were still linked to a much older tradition, they nevertheless displayed a number of specifically new features.<sup>69</sup> In this study, he reinterprets the implications of the old *paragone* debate and shows how the continual process of comparison between the various art genres during the first half of the eighteenth century led to a gradual change in the content of the traditional concept of the liberal arts. This shift was codified in Abbé Batteaux's formulation of the term the fine arts (*les beaux arts*) in 1749 and in Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* of 1750. Not only were the fine arts seen as sharing an essential definition and a set of values, which meant they could be considered in relation to one another, they were also understood as a category separate from other realms of human experience and knowledge. According to Kristeller, Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790) was a key text in this context. Partly because it was the first study in



which aesthetics and art theory were treated as an integral part of an advanced philosophical system, and partly because the different genres of art were presented as separate forms of experience while aesthetic judgement was also considered to be a specifically subjective perception beyond any practical function.<sup>70</sup>

However, unless grounded in institutional practice, these distinctions would in themselves be of limited importance. It is, nevertheless, possible to see how they are linked together in time with an extensive change in the social and institutional structure of aesthetics and the visual arts, which would result in their codification both through the establishment of particular aesthetic disciplines at many of the universities of Europe and through the publication of encyclopaedias and specialist tracts that served to reproduce the system.<sup>71</sup> The considerable significance the new system of the arts would actually acquire reflected the fact that it bore such an obvious relationship to social, political and artistic contexts and practices: it became definitive of the constitution of the identity of artists in the modern era and for the specific function of art in modern society. It is, however, necessary to distinguish between the subjective perception of aesthetic judgement and the specific social and ideological functions that the visual arts also established. What these two aspects of the modern system of the visual arts actually make clear is that, on the one hand, the work of art was increasingly seen as an autonomous value (that an autonomous category of Art was being established) and, on the other, that an ever-more-specialised institutional apparatus for the administration and circulation of this value was being organised.

A number of structural shifts took place at the end of the nineteenth century whose effect as a whole was to constitute the art world as a somewhat different type of discursive space than before. One such shift can be observed in the power and significance of the official institutions: it was at this time that the art museum took on ever-greater importance as a setter of norms in the art world, while the university increasingly took over the role of the art academy as the producer of art theory (of rules for the definition and interpretation of art).<sup>72</sup> Another major shift saw the art world gradually become secularised, despite the continuing significance of the church as both actor and commissioning body throughout

the nineteenth century. As part of a further change, the role of the state became defined much more clearly in relation to an evolving bourgeois public sphere, in which both the official institutions and a private sector simultaneously acquired greater significance for the financial and social situation of the artist, primarily in the major European metropolises and capitals.<sup>73</sup> The historian Daniel M. Fox has characterised this state of affairs as follows:

At the end of the eighteenth century patronage came from the middle class as well as the aristocracy. Painting had a social function: as decoration, an index of sophistication and prestige, a luxury to be enjoyed aesthetically or materially and as an investment of potential financial value. Perhaps for the first time in the history of art men were painting more often in anticipation of a market than on commissions. By the end of the nineteenth century, government buildings, town halls, and public squares were full of paintings and statues. The artists who received these commissions were the men who had captured the market by best anticipating the taste of the members of official committees.<sup>74</sup>

What makes this description so interesting is that it reveals the ambiguous situation of the art world within the bourgeois public realm: on the one hand, a process of individualisation through private initiatives was occurring in which the position of the artist as subject was increasingly transformed from an employee with craft skills (and with varying degrees of classical education) into an individual market-orientated *Artiste*; on the other, the organs of the state were taking on an ever-greater role in the institutionalisation of the art world. The dynamic within this system had a major effect on the aesthetic foundations of the visual arts and on the institutional structure of the art world. The modern art world could be said to have evolved in the tension between both these areas, in which changes in art, ideals and identities were matched by various movements between the public and the private spheres.

This meant that the ties connecting the arts to the church, the aristocracy and the court that had existed previously were gradually transformed into a form of representation and commodity within a general public sphere. This is, of course, not the same as saying that visual art had previously lacked public functions; what

it indicates, rather, is a shift occurring on several levels, where the previous functional values of art are increasingly differentiated and specialised such that the functional value comes largely to be overshadowed by purely aesthetic ones. Kant's distinction of aesthetic experience from other forms of experience and knowledge may be understood as part of this comprehensive institutional and social dislocation. While artistic practice was not obviously transformed overnight, discussion of art was increasingly determined by partially different theoretical and discursive premises. It also meant that a similar institutional infrastructure would be established in a majority of European states during the nineteenth century. This would make it possible to produce and maintain a more or less coherent system of codes, norms and ideals—a hierarchical and normative order that laid down the boundaries for the possible and legitimate production of meaning and value in the art world. The art world was establishing a particular and distinctive logic that would set the norms for the definition of art and the boundaries for its interpretation. Reference may be made here to “a specific discursive practice”, to borrow a phrase from Foucault, a set of written or unwritten rules, which, in a given period and in a given social, economic, geographical and linguistic circle, determine the conditions for various kinds of statements, representations and actions.<sup>75</sup> This practice takes place at specific institutionalised sites that constitute the nodal points, so to speak, of the discourse and where the order stipulated by the archive is codified, put into practice and demonstrated.

In order to describe this relationship in greater detail, let us return to the fundamental issue of the differentiation in modern society of different spheres of value. In terms of the scale and speed of change, the modern epoch would seem exceptional in this regard as well: with changes occurring to many aspects of human existence within the course of a single generation. In many instances, this involves a gradual process of change within already existing institutions, which are assigned either partially or entirely new meanings and functions. This process of differentiation can be seen both as the result of the new requirements of industrialised urban society and as a function of a rational view of knowledge and social life. In his *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981),

Jürgen Habermas has described how Max Weber understood the process of differentiation in terms of a lost wholeness, such that what were formerly coherent spheres were split into more or less distinct sectors and areas of operation with specific functions and forms of legitimation.<sup>76</sup> Weber contrasts science and art here with the value sphere of ethics and shows how they mediate their specific claims to universal validity through the fundamental order of their own spheres. This would mean that the modern subject is capable of adopting different fundamental attitudes to various parts of the same world, all of which may be described as rational in relation to their specific organising principles.

Working with Weber's distinction, Habermas has portrayed cultural modernity as consisting of three autonomous fields with varying kinds of legitimacy: science (truth), morality (normative law) and art (authenticity and beauty).<sup>77</sup> The separation of the spheres does not mean that visual art can be understood and interpreted in a context that transcends society, economy and politics. On the contrary, it serves to indicate how a sphere that manifests its own autonomous logic may nevertheless be inscribed within a social and political space.<sup>78</sup> Habermas' distinction identifies two determining factors for how visual art functions in the modern world: differentiation leads, on the one hand, to the development of a heterogeneous context of dissimilar spheres or discursive structures while, on the other, the production of knowledge and value within each and every one of these spheres does not constitute a cumulative, universal and uniform process, but rather a paradigmatic one.<sup>79</sup> At issue here is the development of different systems of norms, rather than the existence of fully autonomous spheres. The establishment of particular epistemological, theoretical and social regulatory systems thus creates a particular order or horizon of understanding, which influences and, in many instances, determines the production of knowledge and values in each of the various spheres, and it is the power of the discursive framework itself that sets the limits for which statements and representations are possible within a specific sphere.

Even if this admittedly general (not to say generalising) proposition needs to be interpreted in terms of specific historical, cultural and national situations, it serves to indicate the development

of relatively autonomous spheres within various social sectors that demonstrate more or less distinct patterns and regularities. It would be possible, for example, to describe how the value sphere of the visual arts in Europe and elsewhere during the second half of the nineteenth century established not only a particular institutional order, but also a particular kind of space for the transformations that took place. At a fundamental level, this involves what Arthur Danto portrayed in 'The Artworld' (1964) as the manner in which the art world defines and regulates each object produced or incorporated in this context by means specifically identifying something as a work of art, which he refers to as 'the *is* of artistic identification'.<sup>80</sup> Here we have a space that opens on one side to a wealth of interpretations that would otherwise not have been possible (everything that a particular sign may signify in the art world), while the horizon of meaning, in contrast, closes off this space by defining the category that both makes possible and sets limits to every interpretation (art/the art world). This idea, when transferred to the sphere of the visual arts, appears to furnish a key insight into both the art world and how various kinds of interpretation and transformation function within this world: what was recently a bottle rack has now become a work of art, the mirror in an allegorical representation of *veritas* is also a symbol for the reflection of light/the truth, et cetera.

The archive, however, not only regulates what is possible within this space—what may exist at all, on what conditions and within which horizons of meaning—but also how values and meanings may be related to the surrounding social world. In contrast to what certain theoreticians have sought to make valid, the autonomy of art must be perceived as relative. This open/closed space might best be described in terms of an economy of signs: a system for regulating symbolic transactions that possess a relative autonomy in relation to the society around them. Autonomy is relative because the transactions of information, meaning and value that take place in this economy of signs are always reversible and compatible with the world around them: they can move in opposing directions from, and are (in certain respects) consistent with, one another. What happens within the confines of the art world is, therefore, not a game that is completely without any kind of

obligations whatever, but an activity that—together with other kinds of sign economies—interacts with the surrounding world and constructs a particular image of reality. Ultimately, an appropriately sanctioned aesthetic value may not only affect the wider society but may always be exchanged for hard cash. The fact that the notion of an artistic avant-garde should have shown itself to be so productive was the primary test that determined it was possible for the modern system of the arts to be applied in full in an always-changing capitalist (and to varying degrees democratic) world order. The parenthesis between classicism and postmodernism described by Craig Owens is actually only a part of a far more complicated and profound social and institutional change.

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According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word authentic is derived from the Greek *authentikos* and embraces a range of different meanings:

Of authority, authoritative . . . Legally valid, having legal force . . . Entitled to acceptance or belief, as being in accordance with fact, or as stating fact; reliable, trustworthy, of established credit . . . Original, first-hand, prototypical; as opposed to *copied* . . . Real, actual, genuine . . . Really proceeding from its reputed source or author; of undisputed origin'. . . <sup>81</sup>

These various levels of meaning all relate to how truth and certainty can be attained and demonstrated in a context where this is not obvious, in order to constitute an authoritative interpretation of something in a particular situation. The concept establishes both a distinction and a certain direction between two or more phenomena, one of which can only be considered authentic in relation to something else. An authentic document can (in contrast to a dubious one) be traced back with certainty to a particular event or individual and serves, by virtue of its authenticity, as proof or evidence of something: the wording of a peace treaty, for example, whether a painting was really executed by the individual whose signature it bears, or the extent to which it is a matter beyond any reasonable doubt that a particular person carried out a murder. The manner of determining the authenticity of a

document varies but is always directed at testing and eliminating any conceivable doubt. It is in this sense that the concept of authenticity has acquired key importance in a range of fields—in the historical sciences in particular—as an interface to the true (in the sense of the term within the natural sciences, mathematics or metaphysics).

But when Jürgen Habermas calls attention to authenticity as a fundamental criterion for the legitimation of art in the modern world, he is, of course, referring to a phenomenon that extends far beyond the determination of the genuineness and historical reliability of a document. Ultimately, it provides a principle with which to underpin the nominalism that characterises those aspects of the modern art world to do with constant change and the way in which the individual artist serves as the yardstick of his or her own work. This should not, however, be taken to mean that the word authenticity was used or played any significant role in the historical discourses under discussion. Instead, the concept can be used today as an instrument with which to identify ideas and ideals that have emerged in the course of historical interpretation as being of key importance in a particular historical and discursive context. The cluster of different meanings to which the concept of authenticity relates can be derived from its two-fold root: truth and origin. This duality points to specific differences in relation and direction: what something is authentic in relation to. Different levels of meaning in the concept of authenticity may be identified here: the authenticity of the work in relation to time/change (true modernity), in relation to the autonomous, self-reflexive subject (the originator), in relation to form and language (the work as an organic whole), and in relation to history (the work's developmental logic and/or place in a canon of authentic works).

Primarily as a function of modernity's altered view of history, reflexivity and subjectivity, the crucial relationship has become the one that establishes an authoritative connection between truth and origin, between the work and the originator. Within this horizon, an authentic work of art can mean a genuine and a unique expression both of the artist's subject and, as a direct consequence, of the contemporary world as interpreted by this subject. Or, in the terms used by Rosalind Krauss, the self as origin

makes possible the idea of an experience of the contemporary as absolutely pure and uncontaminated by a past weighed down by tradition, which forms the basis for the claim made by the avant-garde of the need for change and originality.<sup>82</sup> In this context, authenticity has to do with how a certain understanding is established within a social and intellectual community that regulates the relation of the work both to a specific origin and to the wider world. The notion of origin is transformed here from a purely descriptive statement (X executed this work) to a normative interpretation (this work is an essential expression of X and his/her contemporary world). Alternatively, the descriptive horizon might be said instead to merge with the normative as two inseparable parts of a fundamental value: the idea of the inherent truth of the work of art. When referring to an origin, this would, therefore, mean keeping these two levels apart in order to analyse wherein the subjective dimension of this authenticity lies. And even though this transformation may be interpreted from an array of different perspectives—ranging from the work of art as an individual or existential expression to the work of art as a product on the market—it signals a change both in the perception of what art means and how the function of art is defined in the modern world. Here, art, irrespective of the medium, has become an almost symbolic representation of the idea of the reflexivity of the modern subject.

This understanding comes close to what Jacques Derrida has described in another context as a metaphysics of presence: the ancient idea that the linguistic or visual sign always possesses a given centre of meaning, which, ultimately, can be traced back to the presence of an absolute origin, which has served as the foundation for what he calls the tradition of Western metaphysics:

Its matrix . . . is the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence – *eidōs*, *archè*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth.<sup>83</sup>

Derrida derives this view from the logocentric hierarchy between speech and writing, which served as one of the cornerstones of



this tradition from Plato to Saussure and onwards, in which the former is always privileged at the cost of the latter owing to its greater proximity to the origin (the referent). A written text is always marked by a greater degree of distance to its origin because it can be read and reproduced independently of (in the absence of) the referent. Whereas articulated speech involves a primary sign whose absolute origin is its referent, writing serves instead as a supplement or a secondary sign—a sign of the sign.<sup>84</sup> In this tradition of ideas, the subject constitutes not only the origin of the sign and the immanent centre to which all parts of the system (language, utterance, image) can be traced back, but also that which transgresses the boundaries of the system—the subject who speaks exists prior to and, in principle, independently of language.

Now it may, of course, be objected that what Derrida is describing is an ancient tradition of ideas primarily derived from a philosophical context that has nothing specifically to do with the changes in the way art was seen during the latter part of the nineteenth century to which we are referring here. Another fundamental difference between the linguistic distinction (speech/writing) and the praxis of the visual arts is that the latter appears to lack any counterpart to speech—that the whole content of the visual arts is writing and, therefore, consists of secondary signs. Derrida's distinction nevertheless helps to pinpoint an important aspect of the change of the form of legitimation under discussion here, and at least two dimensions of this change can be distinguished that involve a metaphysics of presence. First, there is the change in the perception of the nature of art, which took place at the end of the eighteenth century when the ontology of the work was interpreted by analogy to botany as an organic whole.<sup>85</sup> Second, there is the change in the evaluation of the linguistic function of the visual arts, which led, during the nineteenth century, to an increasing emphasis on the autonomy and intrinsic value of the graphic sign as both form and content.

The central importance accorded discussion of the creative act in the theoretical formulations of both romanticism and modernism can be traced back to a perception that the genesis of the work appears to be a creative process that originates in the unconscious of the individual, rather than a rational consummation of a

complete idea. A revaluation of the function of the sketch and individual brushwork as factors of significance in the finished work would become increasingly evident as a result. In some instances this process would lead in the twentieth century to a view that the interpretation of handwriting, graffiti and the brushstroke could serve as the royal road to an understanding of the aesthetic essence and source (the subject) of the work. From such a perspective, the image would only emerge as writing at the moment it becomes a signifier, which means that at least one level of the artistic sign (below its referential and iconic layer) would share with speech the claim to originality.

There was, however, considerable interest in the artist as individual within academic discourse as well, an interest that verged at times on a cult of original genius to which the view of the originator as the absolute source of the work was, naturally, a far from alien idea. The relevant difference had more to do with an alteration in the centre of gravity: a dislocation rather than a change in meaning, which brought with it a considerably greater emphasis on the significance of presence/authenticity for the existence of the work as a work of art. And it was the accentuation of this particular aspect of the concept of authenticity that is of interest here: the extent to which the development of a field of competition within this discourse also entailed a change in the form of legitimation such that the artist and the individual qualities of art were emphasised in an entirely different way—in theory, in practice and on the market.

One example of this initially gradual but eventually distinct change is provided by the growing importance of the sketch. While the sketch also played a very significant part in understanding the creation of art in academic discourse, it was not, in itself, an acceptable final aim for the finished work.<sup>86</sup> Winckelmann's celebrated advice to the artist to 'sketch with fire, and execute with phlegm' bears witness to this, but it also highlights the division between these two elements, which reflects, in turn, the distinction discussed earlier between craft and theory in the academic code. The function of the sketch within the academic system was utilitarian rather than aesthetic: the sketch was considered to be a preliminary stage in the artistic process, or an embryo from which

the trained eye could determine the potential of the finished work at competitions.<sup>87</sup> The specific qualities (warmth, individuality, spontaneity, originality) of the sketch in the introductory stages of the creative process may have been clearly perceived, but, as Albert Boime pointed out, these qualities were not seen as definitive, or even acceptable, aesthetic criteria for the finished work of art:

The Artist's verve had to be governed by his judgement, and ultimately his spontaneity had to be modified by ethical thought. To achieve this content, a work demanded reflection and finish; the casual brush technique of the sketch required an austere drawing in the translation, appropriate to the norm of classical themes. . . . Throughout the history of the Academy, the generative phase was identified with idiosyncratic genius and originality, while the executive phase was identified with skill and scientific ability. Critics rightly observed the polarization of the two stages, the one often operating to the detriment of the other. But in the mind of the Academician the two stages balanced each other; impulse and free hand were checked by careful control and reflection.<sup>88</sup>

The gradual revaluation of the intrinsic value of the sketch and of the significance of free brushwork that took place during the beginning of the nineteenth century thus involved a shift in the underlying aesthetic criteria. It also led to an ongoing art-critical discussion of the relationship between the sketch and the finished work (a discussion which, in France at least, would also signal the establishment of more less officially sanctioned artistic positions outside the influence of the Academy).

To consider, as Boime does, the particular importance assigned to the sketch as the point at which an academic tradition would continue within the discourse of modernism is, therefore, partially correct, although a statement of this kind neglects the evident shifts this interest would undergo. While it is possible to maintain that the accentuation of artistic genius, indeed its mythogenesis, can be traced at least as far back as Ancient Greece, the mythologisation of the artist that occurred during the Renaissance and afterwards introduced a different emphasis, as a kind of emancipation of the divine act of creation. This satisfied a variety of aims, one of which has survived into the modern age: the promotion

of the social status of the artist and of art.<sup>89</sup> The emphasis in romanticism, and subsequently modernism, on the value of individual expression and originality as being of crucial importance did not, therefore, constitute a break with this tradition, but rather it served to lend greater weight to a mystical and quasi-religious narrative of emancipation surrounding the identity of the artist. Instead, the key change that took place was the way the originator was identified as/through the work, which led to a new and fundamentally different interest in the specific qualities of the sketch and, by extension, of the spontaneous brushstroke.

One of the most extreme and influential formulations of this value can be found in Harold Rosenberg's article 'The American Action Painters' (1952), in which he describes how the new art cannot be understood as an image in the traditional sense, but as an event:

The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter. . . . The act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artist's existence.<sup>90</sup>

According to Rosenberg, the painting as act cannot be distinguished from the biographical facts of the artist's life. The brushstrokes thus become traces: indexical signs not just of the vitality and transience of the creative act but, above all, of the presence and the transcendence of an artist and a sensibility in the painting. This formulation can be inscribed in a historical process in which the very spontaneity of the sketch as expressed in its brushwork would be transformed into a fundamental transcendent and aesthetic criterion for the appraisal of the finished work. But this revaluation would also introduce a new form of representation. Rosalind Krauss describes, for example, how Claude Monet's work was praised by certain critics for the qualities of immediacy and spontaneity his brushstrokes conveyed while, in fact, the pictorial staging of this spontaneity might require several weeks to achieve.<sup>91</sup> What this demonstrates is how the brushstroke served not only as an indexical sign of the action of the artist, but also as an iconic representation of a particular quality—the spontaneity

of the creative process—irrespective of whether the work took two weeks or two seconds to execute.

Even though this quality may be considered an ancient tradition in the art of the West, Harold Rosenberg's formulation and the works of Willem de Kooning or Jackson Pollock were, of course, concerned with a radically different practice than would have been possible or desirable for painters such as Eugène Delacroix or Claude Monet. The brushstroke itself would become charged in the context of Abstract Expressionism (as a result of Rosenberg's extraordinary significance as an art critic) with an aesthetic and existential import that extended far beyond the notions of contemporaneity, spontaneity and originality cherished by the Romantic and Impressionist traditions.<sup>92</sup> We can see the principle of the pivot at work here, where a difference in degree (a gradual change in the interpretation and evaluation of the graphic sign) over time becomes a difference in kind, one that, on certain key points, represents a diametrically opposed view of the ontology and aesthetic value of the work.

## The Mirror and the Lamp

The development of a value sphere specific to the visual arts during the nineteenth century should not be seen simply in terms of an empty discursive practice. On the contrary, this sphere would be characterised by continual conflict and revolt, as any art-historical survey can testify. But the accepted narrative in which the academic ideal was excluded from the 1850s onwards and replaced by an unbroken line of (proto-) modernist pioneers starting with Courbet may appear somewhat insubstantial and one-dimensional. The academic ideal would be replaced by the narrative of modern art. And yet what happens if we fail to take the exclusion of academic art seriously and put together, instead, an interpretation that considers the academic and avant-garde discourses as two historical aspects of modernity's possible forms of representation? In order to provide at least one possible answer to this extraordinarily wide-ranging question, let us start with a single example from outside the modernist canon: Jules Lefebvre's painting *La Vérité* (Truth) dated 1870.



**Figure 4.** Jules Lefebvre, *La vérité*, 1870, oil on canvas, 110 x 226 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Photo and copyright: Reunion des musées nationaux/IBL, Wikimedia Commons, License CC-o (Public Domain) [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La\\_V%C3%A9rit%C3%A9,\\_par\\_Jules\\_Joseph\\_Lefebvre.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_V%C3%A9rit%C3%A9,_par_Jules_Joseph_Lefebvre.jpg).

This painting has been chosen because of its considerable oddness. I first saw it in a book by the Swedish historian of ideas Sven-Eric Liedman and was dumbfounded when he described the painting as a representation of Truth holding a light bulb.<sup>93</sup> I showed the picture to various colleagues who reacted in different ways, from aversion, pure and simple, to gales of laughter. I felt, nevertheless, that Lefebvre's picture was saying something essential, something that might be able to deepen a historical understanding of the art and visual culture of modernity.

What are we actually looking at here? The representation is in keeping with an established convention that can be found exemplified in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1593), where Truth is personified by a (partially) naked woman holding the sun in her right hand, a book and a quill in her left, with her right foot placed on a globe of the world.<sup>94</sup> She is naked because simplicity is natural to her, and the sun lends her the joy of clarity; she is the strongest of all the things of this world and, therefore, has the globe (i.e., the world) beneath her foot. This pictorial formula both recurs and is transformed in many subsequent representations of Veritas in which the source of light, for example, may change from a burning torch to a mirror that reflects the light, although not all the other attributes need be present.<sup>95</sup> Lefebvre's work complies with this basic scheme, and his image satisfied all the technical and aesthetic requirements established by the discourse of academic painting,

The mixture of heightened idealism and eroticised nakedness may seem comical to us; this was the very combination that would give Salon art such a poor reputation as being pompous, vulgar, pornographic and bad theatre, rather than authentic art. If Lefebvre's painting seems comical to us today, its comedy may perhaps be found primarily in the date of its genesis: the viewer of today would in all likelihood expect quite a different portrayal of truth in a picture produced in 1870. It was created when Courbet's thematic claims to truth were yesterday's news, five years after Manet caused a scandal at the Salon with *Olympia*, at a time when books, periodicals and newspapers were increasingly furnished with documented illustrations, when the Impressionists were first formulating the necessity for optical truth in their paintings and when photography was being established as the pencil of



nature, particularly in the genre of portraiture and in various scientific and documentary contexts. As far as the official academic art world of Paris was concerned, however, the truth claims of the Realists and the Impressionists (not to mention those of the photographers) were delusions that had nothing to do with Fine Art. But this difference in interpretation has more to do with a difference in the historical perspective of our own time: the extent to which we understand Lefebvre's image in the light of its modernity or its traditionalism, the extent to which we can see beyond the stylistic categories of historicism in order to understand the difference that actually exists between this image and previous classical representations. The painting was, in fact, much praised by the artist's contemporaries when exhibited at the Salon of 1870, where it received the Jury's prize, and it was bought the following year by the Musée du Luxembourg, the most prestigious museum of contemporary art at the time.<sup>96</sup>

If we leave all aesthetic considerations aside and take this painting seriously, as was apparently done when it was first shown, we might begin by asking ourselves what kind of truth the title of the work refers to. The image has been interpreted as an allegory for the new conceptual universe of the Enlightenment, with the mirror reflecting the naked light of Truth that would 'drive lies and shadows out of the world'.<sup>97</sup> Such an interpretation of the allegory would, however, seem rather odd because the Enlightenment and science are being portrayed through a mythologizing motive, while the primary claim to legitimacy of modern science is its criticism of myth. Neither, apparently, can Lefebvre's painting be said to be making a claim for truth in the sense of being a naturalistic depiction, complying as it does with a convention that the visual arts should portray ideal beauty. The female figure is, to use Kenneth Clarke's distinction, not naked but nude, dressed in art.<sup>98</sup> If the mirror of the goddess of truth is reflecting the light of truth, the composition and the representation of the female body reflect a particular notion of the absolute truth content of ideal beauty. This does not mean that Veritas is a stylised form: she appears to be an individual, although endowed with classical or classicist features, both in the design of the body and the face. This would also apply to the composition as a whole, whose chiaroscuro testifies to a kinship with a painterly tradition,



rather than the linear approach of the rigid neo-Classicism of the early nineteenth century. The interplay of light and shadow creates the illusion of a three-dimensional space in which it is the body of the goddess and her reflection of the Light (in her person and in the mirror) that are accentuated.

Irrespective of what stylistic connections one chooses to make, this is a painting that could justly be accused of being traditional—and one that, in its traditionalism, points to a different kind of concept of truth than the one embraced by the natural sciences of the late nineteenth century. Interpreted in this way, the painting would appear to be an allegory almost of the classical tradition's definition of both truth and beauty, in which light had a crucial symbolic significance. One example of the way in which this ideal could be expressed is found in the work of the librarian and theologian Antonio Ludovico Muratori, who wrote these words at the beginning of the eighteenth century:

Beauty, which delights and moves us with its sweetness, is nothing other than the radiant light of truth. This light is revealed in brevity, or clarity, or evidence, or force, or novelty, or honesty, or utility, or magnificence, or proportion, or arrangement, or verisimilitude, or in the virtues which may accompany truth.<sup>99</sup>

Aesthetic beauty is intimately linked to truth in this definition because it corresponds to and reflects a divine world of ideas beyond the imperfect and transient appearance of the material world.<sup>100</sup> The mirror may be said to have served as a general metaphor in classical doctrine, both for an ineluctable distance from the ideal (the light or the source of the light) and for the materialisation of the ideal through the reflecting process of art. A similar connection between light, beauty and truth was made at the end of the eighteenth century in the work of Friedrich Schiller, for whom art, while not serving as a surrogate for science or philosophy, nevertheless signified a particular form of knowledge in the service of human enlightenment:

Even before Truth's triumphant light can penetrate the recesses of the human heart, the poet's imagination will intercept its rays, and the peaks of humanity will be radiant while the dews of night still linger in the valley.<sup>101</sup>

In Lefebvre's painting, this classical (and possibly pre-Romantic) conception of Truth and Beauty is directly represented in the subject and should not be confused with a scientific, positivist concept of truth. Here, the mirror has become a metaphor for the capacity of the work of art to reflect the light of Beauty/Truth like a mirror.

The idealism that characterised academic aesthetics also entailed the canonisation of a particular historical ideal: classical Greek art. The art of the ancient world was considered so important in that it was believed to provide the best guide as to how such an idealised portrayal of reality should appear and how the artist, on the basis of a meticulous study of this art, might find a path to the understanding of the beautiful form behind nature's endless supply of accidental variations and defects. It would be a mistake, however, to see academic doctrine simply as the expression of a particular artistic style. It was rather an institutionalisation of an ancient art tradition in the theory of art of using an image to make visible an idea: the ideal truth behind the objects of the sensory world.<sup>102</sup> In artistic practice, what the interpretation of this idea involved was a clarification or refinement of the theory of selection, in which the nature study was combined with a particular conception of ideal forms. Studying at an academy of art involved a systematic initiation into the discursive order of academic doctrine, in which the rationality of the modern age was interwoven with (a particular interpretation of) a very ancient ideal.<sup>103</sup> The process of legitimation through science and philosophy allowed both aspects to emerge as the two sides of an underlying truth.

The art academies would thus appear to have been intellectual rather than practical institutions (in ideal terms at least), whose aim was to teach art as a form of knowledge through the disciplining of drawing and the sign, but not through the practical skills of painting or sculpture.<sup>104</sup> This form of knowledge also made possible the classification and evaluation of the type of subject matter on the basis of the established hierarchy of genres, which, at a superficial level, provided a system for the assessment of different types of subject matter while also serving at a fundamental level as a matrix for interpretation and debate.<sup>105</sup> The hierarchy

of genres also defined relative criteria for the appraisal of every type of genre, which also entailed a division into different types of art.<sup>106</sup> Despite the existence of this strictly rational order, there was an obvious discrepancy between the representation of the ideal, as prescribed by the regulations of academic discourse, and the pragmatism that frequently characterised its application. For even if practical skills were variously described as secondary in relation to theory (idea), it was a key tenet that both aspects had to be woven together in order to perfect the work.<sup>107</sup> The production of the mature artist was, and was supposed to be, an interpretation whose hallmarks were his (or more rarely, her) temperament and genius.<sup>108</sup> And because the value sphere in which this interpretation was produced must be considered partially autonomous, neither the academic ideal, nor its aesthetic practice may be understood as absolute, ahistorical norms, but rather as an approach that was gradually adapted to a changing social situation.

It may be observed in this regard that although the changes undergone by the hierarchy of genres, despite its continued considerable significance during the nineteenth century, had some extent to do with alterations to the political landscape, they were primarily the outcome of the development of a bourgeois public sphere and its transformation of the social structure of society. This meant, furthermore, that the dividing line between the genres (and for what was acceptable) was constantly shifting during this period. History painting increasingly became the province of erotic fantasies or bloody dramas inscribed in historical or mythological tableaux. This particular shift can perhaps be more readily interpreted on the basis of the increased importance of the bourgeois public sphere and its need for sensory realism, greater historical detail and subjects that fired the imagination, rather than for an abstract scheme of ideal beauty.

The significance of the ambivalence manifested in Lefebvre's mythological motif applies not only to single artwork or a particular individual, but also it also reflects a crisis phenomenon, what might be described as a linguistic and ontological insecurity in the art world of the late nineteenth century. The unintended comic effect of the image may be more revealing of our own one-sided

relation to this culture than any failure on the part of the academic tradition.

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Although Jules Lefebvre's *La Vérité* can be interpreted both in terms of its traditionalism and its modernity, it is not my aim to assert or cultivate either one or the other. The issue, rather, is to understand how these two perspectives point to an unresolved ambivalence in the art world of the late nineteenth century Europe, where neither the rational concept of truth cherished by science or the metaphysical notion cherished by idealism could be taken for granted.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Max Weber characterised modernity in terms of rationalisation and disenchantment: the definitions provided by the enlightenment/modernity of knowledge, the human being and society had not only proven superior to those provided by the traditional connections to the church and an older social structure, those very connections were also being called into question on a more systematic basis for the first time.<sup>109</sup> As a result of this shift, social actions and theories about the world could increasingly acquire legitimacy through the application of a rational and secularised form of knowledge, in which the world could no longer be understood as a unity whose ultimate ontological foundation was constituted by religion or by mystical forces. At the same time, however, modernity should not be seen as a uniform movement away from the forms of experience of the past, even though the traditional significance for society of religion and the church had been undermined, they were not necessarily in a state of opposition to the modern. Neither did rationalisation mean the same thing in every value sphere, but it should be seen as an overarching process that led to a range of different contexts being incorporated and institutionalised within the framework of the modern now that religion had come to constitute a separate value sphere and the church was seen as merely one institution among others.<sup>110</sup>

So how should we understand the effects of this multivalent process of disenchantment on the art world? Even though the reception of antiquity constituted a key part of academic doctrine, a

fundamental precept of that doctrine was the distinction between the ancient world and the contemporary one. The abilities of the artists of ancient Greece were likened to those of someone speaking their native tongue; whereas, modern artists had to acquire this extinct foreign language by artificial means.<sup>111</sup> The metaphor of a dead language also tells us something interesting about the emancipation of idealist art during the nineteenth century: the dualistic representation of the relation between the world and the world of ideas was extinct. Applied to Jules Lefebvre's *La Vérité*, this idea might be understood in terms of the painting representing the uncertainty of the contemporary world when confronted with the tradition of classical art and of the idealist nude, rather than as expressing Truth or reflecting it in itself. Although the greatness of that tradition remained undimmed at this point and it was still seen as providing a guiding light for the contemporary world, the cleavage between the idealism of the classical tradition and the materialism of the modern age inevitably entailed an awareness of loss.<sup>112</sup>

Historical reflection on greater awareness of change in the ahistorical notion of beauty had been a feature of the aesthetic discourse of the recent past. Friedrich von Schiller, for example, described the phenomenon in *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (1795) as a consequence of the process of civilisation, in which progress had fractured the organic unity between feeling and reason that had still existed in Ancient Greece.<sup>113</sup> This fundamentally nostalgic view was to characterise the work of many theorists during the second half of the eighteenth century and reached its most significant formulation in Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (1764). For Winckelmann, the authority of the ancient Greeks was founded on favourable external factors, such as climate, nature and constitution, all of which had created the circumstances that endowed the character of the ancient Greeks with a superior notion of truth in life and in art.<sup>114</sup> The concept of truth involved was, however, not relative or culturally determined, but absolute and universal; it was the inner essence of things and in tune with a God-given harmony, which could be recreated by the artist as 'ein aus der Material durchs Feuer gezogener Geist'.<sup>115</sup> Although the artist of

the modern age had to strive to comprehend this harmony and portray it in his art, he could hardly be expected to succeed as well as the ancient Greeks.

There was, however, considerable variation in the kind and degree of authority accorded the art of antiquity. The entire problem complex may be inscribed in the debate between the ancient and the modern, which had been going on since the seventeenth century. Matei Calinescu has described how the modern camp assigned a normative role to the ancients in terms of the ideal of beauty, while assuming that the contemporary world was superior to all past epochs in terms of rational argument and religion.<sup>116</sup> What this discussion reveals, however, is a growing insight into the peculiarity of the modern age during the nineteenth century, when an increasing degree of historical awareness could lead both to nostalgia and a belief in progress. A particular aesthetic trend could, after all, not be legitimated solely on the basis of utilitarian rational argument, but had to be weighed in the balance with notions of morality and beauty. A chasm was opening in this regard, as well between the aesthetic and epistemological functions of art, to the extent that fewer and fewer people viewed the world of ideas as a divine and transcendental order, even though idealist doctrine still clung on to legitimacy by dint of convention and tradition.

For Schiller, art offered a unique opportunity to bridge this chasm by conveying a sense of harmonious equilibrium between reason and feeling, which the viewer was able to perceive intuitively through aesthetic contemplation.<sup>117</sup> Schiller's approach may be considered a version of the modern belief that art—precisely because it now comprised a semiautonomous sphere within modern society—transcended the general trend towards fragmentation and alienation. This was a view that became largely institutionalised through the academic system of the early nineteenth century, a view in which the dualism of classical art would be overshadowed by confidence in the quintessential nature of art, which was an emancipated belief in the capacity of aesthetics to mediate an understanding of a unity of existence that was both hidden and lost.

One indication of this comprehensive social, epistemological and linguistic turn is the change in the reception of Ancient

Greece and Rome during the second half of the eighteenth century when the notion of antiquity as a natural order was replaced by the image (or myth) of antiquity as both a rhetorical trope and a code that clearly marked the historical difference between us (the moderns) and them (the ancients).<sup>118</sup> A similar change in the reception of the antique world during the Enlightenment has been characterised by Maiken Umbach in terms of an ambivalent process of mediation and deliberate detachment:

It is true that archaeological excavations in this period opened up new perspectives on classical culture. Yet paradoxically, the more enthusiastic eighteenth-century writers became about the physical contact with the classical world, the more remote this world also became. What has so often and somewhat confusingly been dubbed 'neo'-classicism was rarely an exercise in recreating the classical world in a literal sense. Ancient Rome and Greece became an 'other'; they were remembered in quotation marks. Classical notions of order and reason quoted them, retold them – and turned them into fiction. These fictions were ambiguous and multiple – and in this multiplicity lies the 'modernity' (or post modernity) of the Enlightenment.<sup>119</sup>

As Umbach indicates, this altered awareness was not only a defining characteristic of the neo-classical and academic reception of antiquity, it also provided a foundation for ideas that would, in the long term, lead beyond academic doctrine and the dualism of allegorical aesthetics towards a Romantic view of the authenticity of the work of art, its organic unity and mythical origins. And, later even, towards a series of Utopian models (the avant-garde) that would overtrump, overthrow and replace one another at an ever increasing pace. Though the language may have become extinct, it still retains its relevance, albeit in a new form, because art is capable of *re-presenting* that lost unity, of conveying the idea of ideal beauty as part of the mutable, fragmented and materialist way of life of the modern age. It is here, too, that the foundations were laid for the way in which modern art would be formulated within academic discourse.

The element of the modern in the neo-Classicist view of contemporary art did not, of course, entail a potential revolution; it

was more a matter of a gradual shift that occurred as a response to the institutionalisation of a change in the way time and history were seen. Although the debate/dialectic between the moderns and the ancients is longstanding, at issue here was a new type of awareness, a historic shift, which became the impetus for notions of the demystification of the contemporary world that understood it in terms of a fundamental social and linguistic loss (of unity and natural connection). I would maintain that the idea of this shift has had far greater significance than simply providing the spur for various forms of early nineteenth century nostalgia. Rather, it has served ever since as a fundamental premise for the various aesthetic, functional and ontological formulations of the visual arts and for their position in modern society.

Meyer Howard Abrams has described how the shift from classicism to what is called romanticism can also be deciphered from changes in the metaphors used to describe the ontology of the work of art at the beginning of the nineteenth century: increasingly, it was the expressive value of the work (the work as lamp) that was accentuated, rather than, as before, its imitative function (the work as mirror). The light was seen, therefore, as emanating, so to speak, directly from the work of art, while the truth of the work was increasingly considered to be a reflection of its originality and authenticity, rather than its capacity to reflect the objects of the surrounding world or an abstract ideal.<sup>120</sup> A gradual change in emphasis, selection and focus may thus be perceived that would, by extension, herald a decisive difference in the way art was seen:

Even though the characteristic patterns of romantic theory were new, many of its constituent parts are to be found, variously developed, in earlier writers. By shifting the focus and selecting the examples, we can readily show that romantic aesthetics was no less an instance of continuity than of revolution in intellectual history. In the course of the eighteenth century, some elements of the traditional poetics were attenuated or dropped, while others were expanded and variously augmented; ideas which had been central became marginal, and marginal ideas became central; new terms and distinctions were introduced; until, by gradual stages, a reversal was brought about in the prevailing orientation of aesthetic thinking.<sup>121</sup>



Not only did this change in metaphors involve the use of new images to describe a particular phenomenon (a work of art), it was also a symptom of a more profound change in the way the nature of art and its manner of representation were understood.

The combination of a gradual and radical change might be described in metaphorical terms as a historical pivot: that point at which the conditions for the production and interpretation of art undergo a shift by a number of degrees. Initially, this shift would only involve small-scale deviations from a prevailing ideal, but, over time, it would lead to an entirely different perception of art and of the foundation for its legitimacy.<sup>122</sup> The kind of change referred to here could also be described as a dispersed historical process that would produce a deep-seated and substantial change in the course of several decades: the establishment of an alternative paradigm for the understanding of what art is and how art should be perceived.

It is within the extensive context of effects created as part of this shift that a broad range of phenomena may be understood, ranging from the traditionalism of academic art and the condemnation of traditionalism as such by the Futurists, from Romantic notions of the authentic expression of the subject to the Postmodernist dramatisation of the thesis on the death of the subject. In all cases, this involves ideas about a radical position on the other side of the boundary to something that had either existed before or been taken for granted, about the way in which the loss of something that had previously seemed self-evident would provide the impetus for new ways of formulating a particular artistic practice. What is at issue here is not a linear tradition, but the existence of a specifically modern premise—a shared intellectual construct—which would give rise in various theoretical and social contexts to a range of different interpretations and patterns of reaction that, taken as a whole, serves to characterise what might be called the episteme of modern art.

\* \* \* \*

The question nevertheless remains, what is Veritas actually holding in her hand? Although convention tells us that it has to be a mirror, it has also been suggested that she is grasping a light

bulb.<sup>123</sup> The fact that the painting was produced in 1870—nine years before Edison’s patent of the incandescent bulb—would make this truly remarkable. In itself, however, this would not refute the attribution, because there had been ideas about electric light and indeed demonstrations of it throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>124</sup> But no contemporary or subsequent description of the picture mentions anything about a light bulb.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, it would have been unthinkable, in principle, for a painting that was not only accepted by the Salon jury but also awarded a medal to have so punctured the academic ideal as to incorporate a modern and worldly detail such as a light bulb in a mythological subject. The absence of naturalistic, individualistic and material signs was the very foundation of the increased importance accorded the nude at the end of the 1860s, in which the academic tradition’s synthesis of idealism and abstraction was considered to demonstrate a value that transcended the triviality of modern life (and the potentially pornographic connotations of the subject matter).<sup>126</sup> The crossover between the general and the specific would seem, in fact, to have been at once a risky, subversive and pleasurable zone in the academic art of the late nineteenth century.

But even if the proposed attribution is not correct, this does not make it irrelevant. For there can be no doubt that a connection exists between the pictorial formula and iconography of Lefebvre’s work and various attempts to establish visual codes to do with electricity and electric light a decade or so later. In her fascinating book *When Old Technologies Were New* (1988), Carolyn Marvin describes the visual culture that developed in tandem with the electrification of modern society during the 1880s and 1890s, when the problem was not just a matter of making visual a new (and rather abstract) technology to the general public, but also (for a particular social group of experts) of displaying knowledge and authority in the form of dramatic demonstrations:

In the perceived novelty of its high-drama public role, the electric light also expressed the sense of unlimited potential that was a staple of nineteenth-century discourse about the future of electricity. For if electricity was the star of the nineteenth-century show, its most publicly visible and exciting agent was certainly the electric

light. It was present in exhibitions, fairs, city streets, department stores, and recreation areas. It was physically and symbolically associated with whatever was already monumental and spectacular. It appeared in grand displays, processions, buildings and performances. It borrowed from every established or dramatic cultural self-promotion.<sup>127</sup>

Although electric light proved a spectacular event in itself, its merits were not only demonstrated in practical demonstrations, but also as extravagant displays in the form of stellar constellations, illuminated bunting, fountains lit up with coloured light, signal lamps, illuminated department store fronts, projections on clouds, light in the shape of emblematic figures, and so on. The use of light in public demonstrations of this kind formed a significant part of the visual culture into which this technology was inscribed. It may be observed here how the visualisations and metaphors employed in both the specialist and popular press to describe the new technology were extremely varied and oscillated between diametrically opposed connotative poles: from apocalypse, utopia or magic to rational science and the utilitarian pragmatism of the everyday.

However, this culture and, indeed, the use of the new technology as a whole involved a form of translation between new signs and codes, on the one hand, and older conventions, on the other, which meant that the discourse that developed around electricity as a technology and as a mass medium only became possible within certain accepted cultural and social systems of norms.<sup>128</sup> The same pictorial formula on which Lefebvre's painting was based also recurred in images that alluded more directly to electricity and electric light and were produced for popular, commercial and private contexts. One example is provided by a photograph from 1883 of Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt as 'The Electric Light'.

Wearing an evening gown, the woman in the picture is holding aloft an electric bulb. The motif would appear to be a direct translation of Lefebvre's formula, albeit rather more clumsily executed. Any direct application of the classicist nude would have been impossible in terms of the conventions of this particular medium (photography): such a photograph would definitely have



**Figure 5.** José Maria Mora, *Vanderbilt Ball*, Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt as the electric light, March 26 1883, fotografi, The New York Historical Society, New York (Department of Prints, Photographs, and Architecture Collections: Costume Ball Photographs Collection, PR-223, Series V, Box 3, Folder 34), Photo: The New York Historical Society, Wikimedia Commons, Licence CC-o (Public Domain) [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mrs\\_Vanderbilt\\_ElectricLight.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mrs_Vanderbilt_ElectricLight.jpg).

crossed the boundary to the pornographic. It is difficult to determine the particular aims of this photograph, but considering that the model belonged to the very summit of New York's social and financial elite, it may reasonably be supposed that the image was intended as a fashionable and/or humorous tableau for private consumption. The really interesting aspect from our point of view, however, involves paying attention to what the translation and transformation of the motif are actually doing: combining the classical ideal of truth with one that is scientific and technological; light-as-truth is being transformed into electricity-as-truth.

This combination of convention and innovation would presumably have been a key incentive for the commercial companies that had invested in the new technology and were keen to convert it into cash by selling it to the general public. As described by David E. Nye, the crucial issue for electric companies was to be able to dramatise the superior benefits of their own products while simultaneously downplaying the utopian/apocalyptic connotations. By placing an electric bulb in a traditional, premodern environment, the technology was presented as harmless and in keeping with tradition.<sup>129</sup>

A variation on this theme can be found in the trademark of the German electrical company AEG from 1884, in which the attributes of Truth are combined with those of Fortune, and the resultant goddess is seen holding an incandescent bulb.<sup>130</sup>

A company such as AEG would appear to have felt the need to transpose a widespread but diffuse perception of this extraordinary novelty into a traditional and, therefore, more comprehensible figure. The combination of visual codes gave rise, however, to a particular communication problem in that the emblem had to mediate a specific iconography while remaining comprehensible to anyone not versed in iconographic and allegorical matters. The same kind of competence is, in principle, at issue here as was essential, in Arthur Danto's view, for creating an aesthetic identification in the art world of the 1960s. But the problem is both a more ancient and more wide-ranging one in that it applies not only to the confused visitors confronted with Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes at the Stable Gallery in New York in 1964, but also, and in a more general sense, to the art world that was constituted





**Figure 6.** Anonymous, Trademark of Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft (AEG), Germany, 1894, Photo and copyright: The Archives of the National Museum of Science and Technology, Stockholm, License: CC BY-NC-ND.

as an autonomous value sphere during the nineteenth century and to the broader visual culture that was oriented towards the general public. A new need was emerging to mediate the codes of the visual arts to the public as a whole, while greater competence was being required of that same audience at deciphering various forms

of visual communication (from official art to different kinds of advertisements, trademarks, labels, items of political propaganda, etc). To a target group that was either entirely or partially unfamiliar with allegorical matters, the trademark delivered a more general connotation of the union of the old and the new, in which a mythological figure of some kind is seated on a wheel (modern communications), which rests on a globe of the world (world dominion, universality), while holding a light bulb (modern technology). To be on the safe side, the goddess of light is also strategically draped in cloth to prevent uninformed observers from confusing the different and distinct connotations of nudity. The way of reading inscribed here is allusive rather than descriptive, with the text serving both as an anchorage (leading potential interpretations in a particular direction) and as a relay (shifting the category of the motif from the field of art to that of the trademark).<sup>131</sup>

Unlike this commercial and popular cultural use of the convention, Lefebvre's picture served an entirely different function, in which two aspects that were both typical and definitive of the artistic practice of academic discourse could be said to converge: the interplay between doctrinaire and rational classification and the necessity of individual interpretation and pragmatism. What becomes apparent here is that the hierarchy of genres operated within a field whose boundaries were explicitly defined against other fields, a field in which the Fine Art that Lefebvre's painting exemplified was regulated and assessed on the basis of quite different norms than those governing the applied art represented in this instance by AEG's trademark. AEG, for its part, was able to profit from what was conventional in academic visual culture as a source of a particular value. But it also tells something else, namely that neither of these images—or categories of image—can be considered in isolation from a much more extensive process of social change.

Certain mythical and religious views were, as we have seen, included in the differentiated repertoire of both compatible and contradictory contexts found within the modern. Demystification in this regard should, therefore, be understood as a more complicated process than the differentiation of particular activities and

values to specific domains. Various generally disseminated ideas of the consequences of the scientific revolution could even be considered to constitute a new and secularised form of mythology.<sup>132</sup> Within the bourgeois public sphere, modernisation was the economic and financial prerequisite for the new social life of the middle class. That life would, however, be characterised by an ambivalence between the upholding of traditional social hierarchies and moral values and an almost blind, spellbound even, trust in the future potential of science and the process of modernisation. However, as Carolyn Marvin has shown, the boundary between science and myth was much less clearly defined in the late nineteenth century than it is today:

Although an express mission of science was to kill magic and myth, electrical experts were deeply implicated in the production of both. . . . The occasional appearance of sensational stories about the occult at the fringes of scientific and professional literature was usually legitimized by the suggestion that science was absorbing and taking over disreputable magical modes and replacing them with benign scientific ones. Stories of this kind dramatized the heroic encounter with the unknown, and the contest of power against power. As in any thrilling story, the plot of scientific proof and verification revealed what was authentic and legitimate in the eternal drama between good and evil.<sup>133</sup>

Here we see emerging the outlines of a position that would encompass an almost mystical faith in the material rationality of science, on the one hand, and a merger of occult and rational criteria and narratives in the public understanding of scientific innovation on the other. This extraordinarily ambivalent situation (which was in no way unique to the turn of the century) was, to some extent, a reflection of the sheer pace of change. Although political power structures can be swiftly altered and new technology may rapidly change the conditions of everyday life, changes within social structures and thought patterns usually occur much more slowly.<sup>134</sup> Various forms of mysticism, tradition and convention seem to have been entirely necessary criteria for the social context in which the public understanding of scientific innovations took place in the decades either side of the turn of the century. This



would also serve to explain, in part, the shifting function of the visual arts in this period.

As Jonathan Crary has so convincingly demonstrated, the nineteenth century can be described in terms of a comprehensive change both in the organisation of visual forms and in the position of the observing subject; this change would, in turn, entail the development of new technologies, instances of social control, fields of knowledge and forms of linguistic representation:

Rather than stressing the separation between art and science in the nineteenth century, it is important to see how they were both part of the single interlocking field of knowledge and practice. The same knowledge that allowed the increasing rationalization and control of the human subject in terms of new institutional and economic requirements was also a condition for new experiments in visual representation. Thus I want to delineate an observing subject who was both a product of and at the same time constitutive of modernity in the nineteenth century. Very generally, what happens to the observer in the nineteenth century is a process of modernization; he or she is made adequate to a constellation of new events, forces, and institutions that together are loosely and perhaps tautologically definable as 'modernity'.<sup>135</sup>

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the fixed and stable visual regime on which both classical art and visual technologies, such as the *camera obscura*, depended was broken up. The varying foundations of visual truth on which it was based (idealist and scientific, respectively) were not only called into question by alternative ideas, but also were challenged and outmanoeuvred over time by a spectrum of various interchangeable and mutable visual values and forms of experience. The reception of the photographic image as a visual medium at the time of its breakthrough provides a striking example: the photograph was understood and promoted both as a spectacular technical innovation and, through the references it made, as a more highly evolved form of older visual media (graphic art, drawing).

From this perspective, a comparison of Jules Lefebvre's painting, the photograph of Mrs Cornelius Vanderbilt and AEG's trademark would have to involve not only the identification of various

metaphors for truth or various media and image genres, but also the understanding of an intellectual and experiential context that meant these diverse forms of representation would all become possible within the framework of the modern. This shift also had an influence on the change in the visual language and types of representation of the academic visual arts. As Linda Nochlin has pointed out, the superficiality of academic art and the dissolution of the hierarchy of genres reflected not only the poor taste of the middle class and its passion for the spectacular and the sentimental, but also the more detailed knowledge and altered view of history introduced by the science of the modern era:

As the treatment of historical subjects became more factual and mundane towards the mid-century, so the chronological range available to artists was expanded. The limits of time itself were being gradually pushed back from Archibald Ussher's judicious starting-point in 4004 B.C. The fluid relativism of a perpetually revised scientific hypothesis replaced the story of Creation and the metaphysical absolute it implied. History and value, history and faith, which had been inseparable since the earliest creation myths and integrated in the doctrine of the Christian Church, were irremediably torn asunder by the Higher Criticism and the New Geology. What was left was history as the facts, in a vast landscape extending from the mists of prehistoric times to the Comtean precincts of present-day experience.<sup>136</sup>

In light of this change, it is possible to see Lefebvre's painting as located at the crossroads between different conventions for the artistic representation of objects and abstract ideas, where a scientific ideal of truth comes up against an aesthetic one and where various forms of legitimation are simultaneously at work within the modern. In which case, the painting would not be a peculiar exception, but extremely representative of large parts of the visual world of the nineteenth century. However, this overall change in the organisation of visual forms should not, in my view, be considered solely as a coherent continuity, but must also be read and understood within the framework of every type of discursive practice. The ambivalent quality of the work of an artist such as Lefebvre actually involved a state of tension within the value sphere specific to the visual arts, a tension that was the hallmark

of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: while incapable of being considered in isolation from the wider social world, it nevertheless developed a particular pattern of inflection based on the order that regulated the definition and discussion of art within established discourse.

We only have to move a few decades forward to study how this intricate interplay between tradition and modernity is expressed in quite different ways in a form of visual art that made the same claims to ultimate value that the academic had done, but which embraced a diametrically opposed concept of truth. One such example is Sonia Delaunay's painting *Prismes électriques* of 1914. By this time, even though the technological innovation of electric lighting had already reached the living rooms of town-dwellers, it was considered sufficiently new to appear both evocative and dynamic. Consequently, this form of light also served as an appropriate starting-point for an avant-garde that was attempting to capture and transpose the dynamism of the modern age in its pictures.

Stanley Baron describes an episode when the Delaunay couple, while walking along the Boulevard Saint-Michel in Paris that same year, found themselves amazed at the newly installed electric lights.<sup>137</sup> It was that impression that impelled Sonia Delaunay to start work on a set of sketches in which she attempted to capture the dynamism of that light by gradually reducing all the incidental, figurative elements in the street scene in order to distil from it an abstract composition of circles in shining colours. It was not only the mythologisation of the academic tradition that was being excluded as part of this compositional process, but also the social iconography of realism and impressionism: visual art was no longer intended simply to depict modern life; it had to be true, in itself, to the modern. Delaunay's painting is an attempt to portray the perception of electric light directly in the language of images: two circular coloured prisms, both separate and interconnected while expanding across the surface of the image like an optical distillation of the transformations of energy and matter. The composition of the colour field is based on Michel Eugène Chevreul's theories about the interaction of simultaneously contrasting colours, with the aim of evoking the perception of the visual effect of light.

While the picture obviously exists in relation to the realist tradition and to Claude Monet's attempts, for example, to depict a particular light at a particular time and place, Delaunay's painting is making more general claims: light is not being depicted solely as an effect, but is being employed equally as a metaphor for the energy-saturated and kaleidoscopic dynamism of modern life. In its pursuit of a radical present, the painting is deliberately turning its back on the tradition and the attitude to life that had given rise to both Lefebvre's painting and AEG's trademark.

What this comparison demonstrates first and foremost are two diametrically dissimilar forms of representation. John Berger uses, at one point, a couple of metaphorical models to highlight linguistic or rhetorical differences on the part of various historical epochs: Lefebvre's painting would correspond most closely in this scheme to the model of 'the theatre stage'; whereas, Delaunay's corresponds to that of 'the diagram'.<sup>138</sup> In terms of the former model, the subject matter is presented as a tableau, while art is seen as an artificial language; in the latter model, the image constitutes a directly observable, symbolic rendering of invisible processes. It is noteworthy in this context that Delaunay's depiction avoids any suggestion of a staged tableau; all the props and all the actors have been erased in order to accentuate the portrayal of the dynamism of electric light.

Michael Fried's characterisation of the element of theatricality in academic painting may be understood as a function of the hierarchy of genres, which served not only as a simple taxonomy of types of subject, but also as a manifestation of a specifically new way of perceiving the image.<sup>139</sup> He describes this altered perception in terms of a change in the appreciation of the dramatic effect of the image, an accentuation of its essential unity and a new relationship between the image and the viewer. The theatre stage served, therefore, not only as a metaphorical model (for the composition as a static tableau), but also as a paradigm, both for the perception of the genre of visual art (as genre) and its communicative function. And it is in its obvious transgression of this tradition that Delaunay's painting inscribes itself so strikingly in a radically different definition of the ontology and truth criteria of visual art.

This changed definition also points to a changed way of reading. As we saw earlier, Lefebvre's painting served as a codified form of representation, in which the presumption of a varying degree of familiarity on the part of the public with the code would determine its significance in a particular context. Delaunay's painting is also, of course, a coded representation, but here, the interpretation—in its original context—appeared more indirect and intuitive: the specific iconography of the former work has been transformed in the latter into more general allusions. This meant that the need for conventional linguistic skills in the case of the former work was replaced by a more general requirement for an imaginative sensibility in the latter. At issue here is a changed relationship between image and narrative that is indicative of the increased focus on the purely visual and the formal in the modern discourse of the visual arts. The idea of the exclusively visual nature of art would appear to be a distinct, historically specific and relatively recent construction. Many of the visual cultures of the nineteenth century were not intended to be understood exclusively as visual cultures but in terms of a more or less clearly-defined textual and narrative framework.<sup>140</sup>

This text-based way of reading is, of course, not new to the modern era but part of an ancient tradition of mythological allegories and religious iconography. The allegorical aesthetic would, in this sense, establish at least one common criterion within the visual cultures of the late nineteenth century: the close connection between image and story. Here, the allegory may be likened to what Kant called the *parergon*: an element, or layer, which exists both alongside and inside the work (ergon), like the frame of the painting, the drapery of a statue or the columns of a building.<sup>141</sup> In neo-classicism, a distinction was, in fact, made between substance and ornament, with truth/beauty being constituted by the former, although the latter (in the form of myth and history) was deemed equally necessary to adorn, as it were, the ideal and to uphold the intellectual level of the work.<sup>142</sup> The allegory appears to have served rather as an interface between the work's external and inherent qualities. While its various linguistic levels created a duality, they also interacted and displaced one another. How this interaction and its reception function is entirely dependent

on convention, but even though the meaning of the allegory may be fixed by a particular iconography, a gap nevertheless exists between idea and image. A gap that meant, according to Walter Benjamin, that the allegorical idiom had to be understood as dialectical and, thus, in principle, open-ended.<sup>143</sup>

The distinction between allegory and symbol may seem peculiar at first because both terms appear to be so closely related in many ways. Even though the concept of allegory has its origins in a rhetorical practice, Hans-Georg Gadamer has described how both concepts clearly relate to a philosophical and religious context in which they function as a means to understand and make visible a concealed meaning/truth:

Both words refer to something whose meaning does not consist in its external appearance or sound but in a significance that lies beyond it. . . . The allegorical procedure of interpretation and the symbolical procedure of knowledge are both necessary for the same reason: it is possible to know the divine in no other way than by starting from the world of the senses.<sup>144</sup>

The semantic problem is made all the more intricate by the existence of so many different definitions. Although both allegory and symbol may be defined as the representation of something in the guise of something else, and although an allegory may also contain symbols, there are nevertheless some crucial differences. First, there is the unity and closed nature of the symbol, as opposed to the allegory's syntactical merging of discrete entities and its openness and, second, the sense in which the symbol communicates by means of an immediate insight, as opposed to the reflexive and postponed reading of the allegory.<sup>145</sup> The distinction between symbol and allegory that was drawn in the late eighteenth century also entailed a redefinition and transformation of the meanings of the terms, and this led to a shift in the intuitive (aesthetic) connotations of the allegory and the rational (scientific) connotations of the symbol; they changed place, so to speak: the symbol was now presented as an intuitive and occasionally irrational fusion of the sensual and the transcendental in contrast to the way in which the allegory maintained a meaningful, although artificial, relation between these two levels.<sup>146</sup> From the end of the eighteenth century,

this change in the way art was perceived also entailed a relatively explicit criticism of the cold rationalism of classical doctrine, both in terms of its forms of education and the increasingly abstract and bloodless allegorical tableaux that resulted from its aesthetics.<sup>147</sup>

The shift in meaning reflected a broader current of ideas that not only affected the distinction between allegory and symbol, but also brought about a revaluation of the former at the cost of the latter. Ernst Gombrich has aptly described the new value assigned to the symbol:

[T]he implication that the Great and the Beautiful provide the mind with a symbol through which we can grasp a hidden truth certainly led back to Platonism. And while German classicism had thus taken the upward path on the ladder of analogy through the image of harmonious forms to the idea of harmony, Romanticism re-discovered the Areopagite's alternative, the power of the mysterious and the shocking to rouse the mind to higher forms of thought.<sup>148</sup>

What emerges here is not simply a change in aesthetics and in artistic ideals, but a change, too, in the way the nature of art and its linguistic identity and function were seen. In the work of Goethe and Schelling, for example, this distinction was formulated in terms of a critical polarisation between two forms of presentation, an idea to which Friedrich Creuzer would return somewhat later in *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen* (1810–12). In this work, the allegory is presented as a general concept or an idea separate from itself; whereas, the symbol constitutes the very incarnation and embodiment of the idea. The mediation of the idea by the symbol takes place not through a conventional reading of its syntactically arranged attributes, but through an immediate and intuitive insight, and this constitutes, in Creuzer's view, the very ground of 'the nature of pictorial expression'.<sup>149</sup> This would suggest that these defining characteristics were not being identified on the basis of a neutral desire to classify categories of images of rhetorical figures, but from an already existing need to draw a distinction between two fundamental approaches concerning the essence and communicativeness of art. Interestingly, one of the basic tenets of classicism—the idea of

the unity of the work of art—would appear to have undergone a transformation, from forming part of an aesthetic ideal to becoming a defining characteristic of the nature of art, the work of art, that is, seen as an organic whole integrating form and content.<sup>150</sup> As part of this process, the function of the symbol would alter, from serving as a pictorial element to being a definition of the art work in itself.

## Critical Margins

Modernity may be described as a phenomenon that encompasses both an extensive historical process and a definitive change. In this sense, it calls to mind Norbert Elias' description of the process of civilisation itself: an interweaving of individual human plans and actions whose outcome is quite different from what anyone planned, creating a particular kind of order that is both more powerful and more compelling, but also more diffuse, than any purpose or formulation on the part of an individual or a group.<sup>151</sup> The break between the modern and the premodern should not, therefore, be seen as absolute, but understood, instead, in terms of both continuity and discontinuity. The specifically new context created as a result of the change in social and experiential patterns introduced by modernity may have broken with tradition, but the resulting forms of experience were far from unambiguous. On the one hand, the present and the future were described in many contexts as a process of continual expansion in all fields, which, in its most extreme form (the discourse of the twentieth century avant-garde), would lead to historical memory, as such, being declared superfluous or even reactionary—a notion that, in some instances, would result in a cult of the future.<sup>152</sup> On the other hand, reference may also be made to a modern cult of the past.<sup>153</sup> In both cases, modernity introduced a situation in which a particular relation to the past was established: a sense of circumspection and loss that created a need to bridge the gulf to the past—not in the sense of a real return, but in the form of various means of reexperiencing (and thus transforming) what had come before.

An array of ideological and institutional changes may be identified with modernity, which constituted and characterised the



development of the value sphere of the visual arts in the Western world during the nineteenth century, with Paris as its more or less accepted centre. Let me focus here on three of these changes: (1) the expansion of the art academies, (2) the interaction between the public and the private and (3) the development of a system based on competition within and around a critical margin. All these structural changes affected the relation of the visual arts to what Jürgen Habermas has called the 'bourgeois public sphere': an expanding and increasingly significant public arena in which the middle class gained a role in the formation of opinion and in economic and social exchange. It was in this arena that new forms of economies of the sign in the world of art were established as part of major structural transformation. This change was not perceived as linear and unidirectional in the world of art or in social life as a whole; on the contrary, a broad range of trends can be identified that worked both in its favour and against it. It thus provides a classic example of the pluralism, contradictoriness and ambivalence of the modern era.

By the beginning of the century, the system of art academies had become increasingly specialised while also expanding in unprecedented fashion: from only a score or so art academies in Europe at the beginning of the eighteenth century to well over a hundred by the start of the following one.<sup>154</sup> The significance of the art academies thus appears to have gradually increased by the start of the modern era. Nikolaus Pevsner explains this expansion both in terms of the ever greater emphasis on the social, political and national-economic benefits of the dissemination of knowledge brought about by the Enlightenment and a new realisation of the commercial value of art and design on the part of manufacturing industry.<sup>155</sup> The demands on the administrative agencies to maintain the political, administrative and normative continuity of society were an additional factor. Despite the growing scale of political conflict, as exemplified in the various revolts of the nineteenth century, the overriding function that the Art Academy fulfilled to the satisfaction of every regime was to meet a requirement increasingly experienced during the modern age for a stable organisation of various areas of administrative responsibility.<sup>156</sup> Academic discourse was thus an integral part of the growth of a

normative scheme for mediation, discipline and control within the fields of both production and consumption. While the didactic, economic and political explanations correspond in this regard to various kinds of needs within the modern public sphere, they also provide a pattern-card of the way the old and the new interacted in modernity, allowing us to observe how some traditional institutions and ideals continued to survive while undergoing changes in a number of crucial respects.<sup>157</sup> It was, of course, essential for any regime that was not completely authoritarian to create a certain (acceptably large) space for new movements and changed ideals within the art world, as in other fields.

An academic code could, nevertheless, be said still to exist that embraced a range of distinctions—both in practice and in principle—affecting the various parts of the art world: the definition of art and the value of art, the way the function of art was seen in society, the practise of artistic education, the definition of the social and professional identity of the artist as subject. In broad terms, the academic code may also be considered to have been a means of determining the boundaries between various fields within the visual culture of modernity.<sup>158</sup> This differentiation corresponded both to a change and a need that affected all the fields of the art world. Having constituted a boundary between various genres of subject matter (history and genre painting), the distinction between high and low—which had, of course, been codified within the hierarchy of genres—would later be transformed in Romantic/Modernist aesthetics into a universally applicable definition of a difference in kind within visual culture. This difference in kind did not, however, necessarily entail a distinction between the fine and the applied arts but, rather, that Art should be understood as a transcendent attribute of a particular type of artefact (the work of art).

What this makes clear is that the order of the academic code should be understood in relation to the gradually more autonomous position of the art world within the bourgeois public sphere. It was becoming increasingly evident at the same time, however, that this autonomy was dependent on public life, because the influence of the public sector encompassed not only the production but also the distribution and consumption of art. Applying

Jürgen Habermas' distinction between the public and the private, the structural change that occurred from the middle of the 1850s onwards may be described both in terms of the general development of different types of institutions within the art world and in terms of a greater and more complex exchange between the public and the private sectors. While the power base of the art academy was still very influential at this point, two other public institutions were becoming increasingly significant: the art museum and the university. The role of leading producer of art theories increasingly shifted to the university, while the art museum was developing into an ever more important arena for the encounter between the art world and the public sphere.<sup>159</sup> Perhaps the most crucial aspect of the position of the art world in the late nineteenth century was not, however, the roles played by the institutions within the system when seen as a static entity, but rather the interaction between the public and the private.

This was not a new phenomenon. For an artist working in mid-eighteenth century Paris, this dynamic would, in many cases, have been a prerequisite for survival. While the official sanction of the *Académie royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* through the awarding of commissions and prizes provided vital status, in order to survive financially, an artist had to obtain private commissions, mainly in the form of portraits. Just over a hundred years later, however, and as a result of a gradual process of change, the definition of the order of the discourse itself became the subject of a debate formulated largely within the bourgeois public sphere.

The initially problematic position of art criticism—private opinions on the works of the Salon were published in pamphlets and, subsequently, in the press—may be seen as emblematic of the changing nature of this dynamic. The general debate about art was taking place neither in private isolation, nor in the studio or the house of a collector, nor in closed sessions of the Academy, but in an open arena aimed at a literate general public—and thus beyond the sanction and control of the Art Academy. The definition and interpretation of the relevant issues, the establishment of aesthetic ideals and the evaluation of artistic devices was increasingly transferred into the private sphere during the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus the Art World was increasingly subjected to a fundamental form of

institutionalised doubt that, according to Antony Giddens, may be understood as an all-pervasive feature of the critical reasoning of the modern age.<sup>160</sup> The rhetorical and occasionally self-glorifying presumptuousness that characterised many of the theoretical and critical pronouncements of the modern era could, therefore, be seen as a consequence of such a form of doubt. Modern institutions, too, may be defined on the basis of the particular dynamic created by this form of doubt, such that a particular order may at times be stubbornly and aggressively defended as the ultimate truth, while nevertheless always (in principle at least) remaining open to revision and rejection. Similarly, a concept that has become established in a particular field may be challenged and even ousted without the institutional structure of the discourse collapsing.

In this sense, the private world may be seen as interacting with globalising trends and official institutions to create a dynamic interplay in which specific rules can be described for the possible extent of transformation within the art world. This interplay affects individuals in their choices (of career and artistic practice), but it also means that an officially sanctioned pronouncement may be challenged and flouted by the individual. A degree of democratic freedom that allows for the development of competition within a critical margin is, however, a precondition for a dynamic interaction of this kind between the public and the private.

This transformation corresponds to what Pierre Bourdieu has described as the development of an autonomous field. The specific meaning Bourdieu attributes to this phrase is not simply concerned with a process of successive position-taking within a permanent order, but describes rather an unstable state characterised by continually occurring competition for positions and by open conflict over the power to define the legitimacy and fundamental *nomos* of the field:

This relatively autonomous universe (which is to say, of course, that it is also relatively dependent, notably with respect to the economic field and the political field) makes a place for an inverse economy whose particular logic is based on the very nature of symbolic goods – realities with two aspects, merchandise and signification, with the specifically symbolic values and the market values remaining relatively independent of each other.<sup>161</sup>

The ways in which the field and the various orientations of artists are differentiated generate a wealth of variables, by which they are also evaluated: pure (intellectual) production as opposed to that on a large-scale (commercial), different political positions, the degree and significance of economic gain, the degree and type of consecration (initiated, sanctified, recognised). A key point of Bourdieu's concept of the field is that it makes visible a structure that is both fundamental and dynamic. Even if the structure of the field remains constant over time, the reciprocal relationships between the actors are subject to change, as are the values represented by the different positions. The private sector served as the main driving force for the field at the end of the nineteenth century, with the official institutions found above it (or rather in the background). An inverted economic structure provided one of the cornerstones of this arrangement, reflecting the lack of importance attached to financial matters in the self-image of avant-garde artists, while also serving as a reminder of how various types of capital are actually interdependent—the economy of signs of the avant-garde served as a reflection and function of the capitalist market.

In the decades both before and after 1900, a development may be observed that proved fundamentally similar throughout Europe with the expansion of subcultural infrastructures, whose focal points consisted of private galleries, periodicals, manifestos, theoretical writings, private art schools, social coteries. This infrastructure lacked the very features that provided the foundation for the expansion of the system of art academies during the nineteenth century, namely uniformity and continuity. However, this lack proved the key to its success: unlike the academic system, an informal, temporary and pluralist infrastructure was capable of adapting relatively quickly to changes in aesthetic, economic and social conditions.

These were the circumstances in which the idea of a cultural avant-garde was established, both then and subsequently, as a cornerstone of the historiography of this period. Such an occurrence would have been unthinkable without the profound structural change we have been discussing. The problem here, however, is that this phenomenon—the avant-garde—eclipsed the scale of this

transformation precisely because it so pointedly dramatised and heroicised the outsider status of art and the artist. Given its military connotations, the word avant-garde should never be understood as a purely descriptive or empty social category.<sup>162</sup> Applied to the cultural sphere, the constituent parts of the term (an avant and a garde) encompass a range of diverse attributes: a temporal aspect (being part of, or ahead of, one's time), a social dimension (a restricted circle that espouses a divergent viewpoint), an ideological aspect (opposition to the prevailing values) and an aesthetic one (unconventional forms of artistic expression and approaches). According to Matei Calinescu, the avant-garde would have been inconceivable without a modern consciousness in which the various attitudes and forms set up by the avant-garde appeared to serve as a kind of kaleidoscopic distorting-mirror, which showed fragments of modern life that were amplified, exaggerated and taken out of their context.<sup>163</sup> It is in this sense that the avant-garde appeared not simply dependent on modernity for its intellectual *raison d'être* but, rather, a dramatisation of modern society, in which every comment or judgement on the surrounding bourgeois culture can only ever remain a gesture because the avant-garde is dependent on this culture for every aspect of its existence. Within the framework of the economy of signs referred to above, however, this gesture is not empty but, in fact, of crucial importance.

In his critical analysis of the contemporary art world, Bourdieu describes a principle crucial to the modern value sphere of the visual arts: the necessity for different strategies to create both economic and symbolic capital. He also describes how these incompatible interests give rise to remarkable and ritualised patterns of behaviour for various types of actors as an interaction between symbolic and physically concrete factors: the different symbolic values/charges of the private institutions and their geographic distribution in Paris, for example. This led to a situation in which the artists of the avant-garde were able to (or were obliged to) create a matrix for the interpretation of their own art and its rules and forms of legitimacy. This mixture of reality and fiction, of collective identity and individualism, of pragmatism and utopia and of the historical and the contemporary may, in fact, be considered to have constituted a particular narrative concerning the notion

of an aesthetic avant-garde—a story that would, in certain cases, be refashioned into romantic myths about ‘the misunderstood genius’ or ‘the starving artist’.<sup>164</sup> For the most part, however, this narrative was produced retroactively in history books.

Let us return once more to the example of Jules Lefebvre in order to examine what the career of a successful academic artist during the second half of the nineteenth century was like. He was awarded a place at the École des Beaux-Arts in 1853 and made his debut at the Salon three years later. In 1861, he won the Prix de Rome, which made it possible for him both to live and to work during the following five years. In the 1870s, he worked as a teacher of drawing at the Académie Julian, a private art school with close connections to the Académie des Beaux-Arts, of which he was made a member in 1891. Despite this unimpeachable career within the official art world, it was primarily as the supplier of portraits and sensual female nudes to the middle classes that Lefebvre made a living. He appeared to have opted at an early stage for these genres, which were much less celebrated by the Academy, than for history painting. Although he was awarded few official commissions, he enjoyed all the more success as a result in the private market.

To compare this career path with that of an artist of the same generation as Lefebvre, such as Edouard Manet, elicits not only a different story but a different type of story. Manet, who never gained a place at the École des Beaux-Arts, was educated privately at Thomas Cature's studio (1850) and at the Académie Suisse (1861). He made his debut at the Salon in 1861 when he showed two portraits (after a failed attempt two years before) that, although given an honourable mention, made little impact. In the years that followed, he increasingly distanced himself from the academic ideal he had learnt under Cature and developed what might be called an increasingly complex form of realism. He failed in his attempt to get three works entered in the Salon of 1863 but was given the chance to show them at the officially sanctioned *Salon des refusés* instead. Although his ‘Olympia’ caused an outcry when it was shown at the Salon two years later, Manet continued to send in works to this institution throughout his working life, while also exhibiting at various private galleries.

That is about the full extent to which Manet's career was involved with the official institutions. It is worth pointing out the alternative direction he followed and the entirely different events that marked his future path, whose significant milestones included the following: his visits to the Café Guerbois in 1865 and his meetings with the younger Impressionists, the transfer of his loyalty to the Café de la Nouvelle Athènes in 1872, the rejection of his work for the World Exhibition in Paris in 1867 and his consequent decision to show fifty or so of his paintings at a private gallery instead, becoming close friends with Emile Zola at the end of the 1860s, the marriage of his brother to Berthe Morisot in 1874, his various travels, his relationship with the regime during the Paris Commune of 1870, his professional links with the art dealer Durand-Ruel, the changing nature of his social life, his interest in graphic prints and, above all, his development as an artist. Manet's career would be accorded a rather unexpected official finale when his friend Antonin Proust was installed as minister for the fine arts in 1881 and awarded him the rank of chevalier in the *Légion d'honneur* that same year.

Although this comparison could, of course, be fleshed out in greater detail, it reveals not only two different artistic careers, but also, more significantly, two distinct patterns of movement in the French art world of the later nineteenth century. An artist emerges, in the case of Lefebvre, who was able to move between the private and public sectors and for whom, even though success in the one did not necessarily mean success in the other, these sectors were not opposed in principle. Despite these movements, social and aesthetic interconnections were established in Lefebvre's career that were determined by the discursive practice of the Academy. These provided him with an identity that allowed the artist access to specific opportunities within both the sectors referred to above. For Manet's part, his failure within the official institutions meant that his career took a different route and led to acceptance within quite different circles. The entire institutional framework took on a different guise in his case. While it is entirely possible that Lefebvre visited the Café Guerbois in the mid-1860s, these premises played no role in his career, neither in terms of the narrative of an artist's *oeuvre* as a form of social identity, nor, presumably,



in terms of actual networks or social contacts. The narrative form Manet's career subsequently generated in art-historical writing became, in fact, normative of the social and aesthetic identity of the artist in general. According to this narrative, which relies on tropes regarding the exclusion and individuality of the artist, his social agony and aesthetic autonomy, the originality and authenticity of the work and the connection between the artist's oeuvre and his life, not only would Lefebvre's irreproachable career have been a failure, but also all but impossible to integrate within the confines of such a story.

Thierry de Dueve has described Manet's artistic activities in the period 1860 to 1870 as heralding a radical change in the discursive standardisation and classification of officially exhibited works of art. Furthermore, the shift in question also applied to the narratives that legitimised this altered situation, both for Manet's peers and posthumously.<sup>165</sup>

This shift encompassed not only movements within an institutional framework, but also, ultimately, a change in the concept of truth in art as well. Although the requirement for originality and individuality in execution and concept were also emphasised within a classicist tradition regulated through the discursive practice of the academy, authenticity in that instance referred to the credibility of the image as a representation of a transcendent (historical/metaphysical) ideal. The artist was expected to work in a rational manner and meticulously calculate each step in the process, starting with the sketch. This ideal might perhaps be better described in terms of the distance and the absence that characterised how the artwork was seen—the distance in time from both the historical/mythological models and the canonical art of the Hellenistic period and by genre from the realm of the Ideal. In terms of this approach, the work of art seemed to be a language that might describe the truth and, at best, even approximate it by means of its form, iconography and dramaturgy, but it could never, in itself, be anything other than a reflection or a trace of the Absolute. The Romantic aesthetic was a different matter. Here, the issue was no longer the acquisition and mediation of a foreign/extinct language—to attempt to reflect the connection between the natural and the ideal that had been lost by modern man by

means of a rational analysis of the composition and by the use of allegorical stagings—it involved, instead, the creation of an organic whole in which the authenticity of the sign was understood in terms of proximity to and presence in a specific origin (the artist/the contemporary world). It is this shift in particular that is indicated by the change in metaphorical language from describing art as a mirror (representation) to a lamp (expression).

This approach meant that truth appeared to be manifested directly in the authentic work of art as both meaning and aesthetic value. The transcendental or prelinguistic meaning was fused with the linguistic (conventional) reference to the surrounding world and relocated to a higher sphere of eternal values. While the artist was free, in principle, to create his or her own interpretation, it was evaluated on the basis of a new requirement that the image be a representation of an integrated subject. In contrast, the requirement formulated within the discursive practice of modernism was for the uniformity and continual development of an artist's *oeuvre*, which could, ultimately, be evaluated in the form of representation provided by the retrospective exhibition, because the authentic image had to bear the hallmarks of an inner necessity rather than any external factors.<sup>166</sup> The discursive context used to legitimise what were, in their time, the extreme forms of transgression represented by some of the key works of modernism may be understood on the basis of this form of legitimation through authenticity.

A gradual process of adoption meant, however, that a particular tradition and hierarchy were established over time and that the legitimation of the avant-garde occurred at the cost of its fundamental openness. It might be said, in this regard, and to paraphrase Foucault, that in order for an utterance to appear to be true it must be uttered 'in the true': the various transformations of the avant-garde could only be inscribed as representations in the value sphere of the visual arts within a discursive system of norms that emphasised the interaction between 'change' and 'authenticity'.<sup>167</sup> However, the development of this position—both with regard to its linguistic transparency and the critical legitimation of that openness—involved a radical reformulation of what the concept of Art might encompass.

The change we are referring to here did not, however, involve the kind of definitive break that results in the fracturing of the discursive structure at a particular moment but, still in the words of Foucault, in a process that brought about a shift:

To say that one discursive formation is substituted for another is not to say that a whole world of absolutely new objects, enunciations, concepts, and theoretical choices emerges fully armed and fully organized in a text that will place that world once and for all; it is to say that a general transformation of relations has occurred, but that it does not necessarily alter all the elements; it is to say that statements are governed by new rules of formation, it is not to say that all objects or concepts, all enunciations or all theoretical choices disappear. On the contrary, one can, on the basis of these new rules, describe and analyse phenomena of continuity, return, and repetition: we must not forget that a rule of formation is neither the determination of an object, nor the characterization of a type of enunciation, nor the form or content of a concept, but the principle of their multiplicity and dispersion.<sup>168</sup>

A mistake that is often made is to consider the most aesthetically radical groups as providing the pattern for this process. This risks obscuring both the true scale of the process and the variation in its artistic effects. The avant-garde movements of the late nineteenth century could be said to have revealed the development of a field within the discourse of the visual arts. These movements signalled the presence of radically different aesthetic perspectives but did not, in themselves, define the existence of the field. The advent of the avant-garde was incorporated, rather, as part of a larger institutional and aesthetic process of differentiation, whose consistent theme was defining a position outside the order of academic discourse as such. Even during the first half of the nineteenth century, an increasing measure of pluralism was an ongoing feature of the official art world as well.<sup>169</sup> The complex and disparate course of art history of the modern age may be understood within this context, which extends from the ever-greater acceptability of Romantic art to the increased significance of landscape and genre painting at the Salons to the establishment of various kinds of *juste-milieu* painting to the more radical groupings that were called avant-garde (by their contemporaries or posthumously).

An array of alternative codes were established in turn within the value sphere of the visual arts, which stipulated different types of aesthetic ideals and different kinds of identities to those that had been approved and mediated by academic discourse. The approximate timeframe for this conflict over interpretive privilege extends from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. A decisive shift took place in the course of these hundred years that redefined what art is and what it may be, what form of legitimation a work of art must espouse in order to be accepted within the discourse and what types of transformation the discursive space will allow. Or to put it another way, it was a shift that created a context in which Duchamp's bottle rack would become a possible utterance; whereas, Lefebvre's mirror would not.

## Endnotes

1. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, (Trans. Alan Sheridan) London/New York 2003 (1966/1970), p. 331.
2. Octavio Paz, *Children of the Mire. Modern Poetry from Romanticism to the Avant-Garde*, (Trans. Rachel Phillips), The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures 1971–72, Cambridge (Mass.) 1991 (1974), pp. 1–2.
3. Kirk Varnedoe, *A Fine Disregard. What Makes Modern Art Modern*, New York 1994 (1990).
4. Ibid, p. 22.
5. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, (Trans. Robert Hullot-Ketnor), London 2009 (1997), pp. 25–26.
6. Both these phrases also served as titles, see Ezra Pound, *Make it New*, London 1934 and Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New*, New York 1959.
7. According to Matei Calinescu, although the term ‘modernism’ was used as a term of invective as early as the beginning of the 18th century (in the work of Jonathan Swift), it was not until the 1920s—and then mainly in the Spanish-speaking world—that the term was employed on a more systematic basis (and with more neutral or even positive connotations) to characterise a rather broad spectrum of different avant-garde or nonconformist literary movements (*Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, Durham 1987, (1977), pp. 68–85).
8. Although this general, and to some extent unproblematic, relationship between modernity and modernism can be traced far back into the past, it should not, for that reason, be considered simply a residue of the historiography of older ages, but a feature of contemporary revisionist settlements with modernism/modernity. One example of this was provided by the symposium on ‘Modernism and Modernity’ held in Vancouver in 1979 (see Benjamin Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut & David Solkin (ed.), *Modernism and Modernity. The Vancouver Conference Papers*, The Nova Scotia Series Source Materials of the Contemporary Arts 14, Halifax 1983). The

overarching theme of the conference was the need for a reinterpretation of modernism as a historical phenomenon when reconsidered from a postmodern position. And while the published anthology contains a range of brilliant contributions, the problematic nature of the relationship between modernism and modernity was completely overlooked—apart from in purely passive terms. To the extent the issue of modernity was touched on at all, the term was used as a keyword for the rather one-dimensional social, political and economic backdrop against which modernism was defined. The only thematic analysis of modernity contained within the published proceedings is an extract from the study *Introduction à la modernité* (1962) by the French philosopher Henri Lefebvres. This text, however, fails to deal with the relationship between art and society in any way and provided, instead, an introductory philosophical and ideological reference point, which freed the remaining speakers from having to deal with the relationship actually referred to in the title of the conference. The rubric and the lack of problematisation meant that here, too, a direct and self-evident relation between modernism to modernity was simply taken for granted.

9. Louis Dupeux, “‘Revolution conservatrice’ et modernité”, *La révolution conservatrice allemande sous la republique de Weimar*, (Ed. Louis Dupeux), Paris 1992, p. 19.

10. Charles Harrison & Paul Wood (ed.), *Art in Theory 1900–1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Oxford/Cambridge (Mass.) 1992, p. 126.

11. Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air. The Experience of Modernity*, New York 1983 (1982), pp. 345–346.

12. Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863), in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, (ed. Jonathan Mayne, trans. Jonathan Mayne), New York 1986 (1964), pp. 13–14.

13. Charles Harrison, “Modernism and the Transatlantic Dialogue”, in Francis Frascina (ed.), *Pollock and After: the Critical Debate*, London 1985, p. 217.

14. See Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity. Essay on the Ontology of the Present*, London/New York 2002, p. 19.

15. Two extremes may be observed in this regard: Henri Lefebvre, on the one hand, who uses the concept of modernity to characterise the modernisation of the twentieth century (Lefebvre, “Modernity and Modernism”, in Buchloh, Guilbaut & Solkin, pp. 3–12), and Matei Calinescu, on the other, who traces back the intellectual foundations of modernity to a fifth-century Christian reinterpretation of the concept *modernus* as opposed to *antiquus* (Calinescu, pp. 14–15.). What most writers and thinkers seem to be agreed on (explicitly or implicitly), however, is that modernity as an epochal term encompasses a post-feudal and post-traditional order with its origins in the social, economic and intellectual revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

16. A distinction may be drawn here between descriptive and normative theories: the former describes how and why things are, the latter how they ought to be. But what this actually entails is a distinction of a more operative kind between different levels within one and the same theory. We have, in fact, already seen how this applied in Marshall Berman’s account of the relationship between modernism and modernity. Although the most obvious example might be the contemporary analysis provided by Marx and its prognosis of the classless society, the more specialised and scientific (positivist) theories of modernisation produced in the post-war period also contained a powerful normative element. The scientific perspective merged here with the reproduction of ideals, with the apparent aim of taming the maelstrom, so to speak, of identifying the logic of its laws and the strategies required to adapt social change to those laws or of steering the development of society towards a desirable goal.

17. Jameson, 2002, p. 34.

18. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Cambridge 1991, p. 1.

19. Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society*, Cambridge 2001, p. 58.

20. Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940), in *Illuminations* (ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn), London 1999 (1955), p. 249.

21. Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, Giovanni Severini, “Manifesto of the Futurist Painters” (1910), in Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi & Laura Wittman (eds.) *Futurism. An Anthology*, New Haven & London 2009, pp. 62–63.

22. Adorno 2009, p. 45.

23. Ibid, p. 27.

24. Jameson, 2002, p. 143.

25. Two fundamental distinctions may be noted between these concepts. The first involves the difference in the terms’ lexical significance. The two parts of the concept of the avant-garde (‘avant’ and ‘garde’) actually encompass a social or temporal positioning: a group that goes ahead, which is in advance. How this frontal position should be understood obviously depends on the context in which the term is used. In cultural contexts, its metaphorical meaning usually refers to a group that is ahead of the dominant culture in an aesthetic sense. A second distinction based on ideological and/or theoretical grounds creates a greater difference in principle between the two terms. The German literary theorist Peter Bürger, for example, considers modernism to represent an attempt at preserving the autonomy of art and thus as a form of continuity in established discourse; whereas, the avant-garde is defined as that which has deliberately taken up a position outside that discourse and attacked it—as that which has transgressed the boundaries of anything that might be called art. For Bürger, the prime example of the avant-garde work of art is provided by Marcel Duchamp’s readymades, which rebelled against the institutional order of the art world and subsequently undermined it. (Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, (Trans. Michael Shaw), Minneapolis 2002 (1974), pp. 51–54 ) He contrasts the medium-critical revolt of modernism with the avant-garde’s critical attitude to institutions. He also identifies and classifies the avant-garde work as ‘non-organic’, in that it was based on the compositional principles of the montage (allegory), chance and the fragment and, thus, no longer complied with the modernist idea of the work of art as an organic whole (Bürger, pp. 68–70). This distinction amounts to an attempt to isolate and save, so to speak, the ideologically and aesthetically radical aspects of modern art from the institutionalisation modernism



underwent during the post-war period. For a discussion of the relationship between modernism and the avant-garde, see also Håkan Nilsson, *Clement Greenberg och hans kritiker*, (Diss. Stockholms universitet 2000), Stockholm 2000, pp. 31–39.

26. The notion of the new man is connected with the romantic and occasionally apocalyptic idea that modernism represented the last, doomed stage of an age for which the art of the avant-garde would serve as a signpost to a new era. German Expressionism, in particular, cherished an, at times, almost messianic notion of the role of the artist, who was considered not only to have an intuitive connection to spiritual forces, but also was capable of acting outside the established moral and aesthetic norms of bourgeois society (see, e.g. Douglas Kellner, “Expressionist Literature and the Dream of the ‘New Man’”, Stephen Eric Bronner & Douglas Kellner (ed.), *Passion and Rebellion. The Expressionist Heritage*, New York 1988 (1983), pp. 166–200). A similarly Utopian ambition can be discerned in most of the avant-garde movements, even though this might take on very different forms of expression. It is in this regard that modern art, despite its extremely individualistic notions of art and man, was considered capable in itself of producing (or at least providing the catalyst for) social change. This is the somewhat obscure context in which the temptation felt by certain representatives of the avant-garde to seek out extreme political movements (both fascism and communism) may be explained, though not explained away. It is here, too, that the state of tension may be observed that existed between the belief of the aesthetic avant-garde in the socially transformative role of art and the view held by the political avant-garde that art had to be subordinated to political leadership.

27. Renato Poggiolo, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, (Trans. Gerald Fitzgerald), London/Cambridge (Mass.) 1968 (1962), p. 218.

28. Calinescu, p. 41.

29. Ibid, p. 265.

30. T. J. Clark, *Farwell to an Idea. Episodes from a History of Modernism*, New Haven/London 1999, p. 175.

31. John Berger, *The Success and Failure of Picasso*, New York 1989 (1965), p. 71.

32. Guillaume Apollinaire, "The New Painting: Art Notes" (1912) in Leroy C. Breuning (ed.), *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews 1902–1918* (Trans. Susan Suleiman), London 1972, pp. 197–198.

33. Clement Greenberg, "Collage" (1959), *Art and Culture. Critical Essays*, Boston 1984 (1961), p. 74, John Golding, *Cubism. A History and Analysis 1907–1914*, London/Boston 1988 (1959), and William Seitz, "The Liberation of Objects", *The Art of Assemblage*, Museum of Modern Art, New York 1961, pp. 22–25.

34. See W Clark, 1999, p. 79 and *passim*.

35. An obvious symptom of this turn is provided by the historical genealogies of expressive art, set out in some of the writings and manifestos of the avant-garde. A prime example is *Die Blaue Reiter Almanach* of 1912, in which a manifesto by Franz Marc described how modern art was revealing 'spiritual treasures' in history and in other cultures; the same perspective also permeates the rest of the anthology (Franz Marc, 'Spiritual Treasures', in Klaus Lankheit (ed.), *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, The Documents of 20th-Century Art, London 1974 (1965), pp. 55–60). This search for the sources of authentic art outside the norms of modern civilisation encompasses two of modernism's favourite narratives, to use the terminology of Kirk Varnedoe: visiting distant places and visiting museums (Varnedoe, 1994, p. 183). Peter Selz makes the important point that this interest involved both domestic traditions and exoticism, history and escapism, which was made possible in particular by museum exhibitions and the general dissemination of reproductions (*German Expressionist Painting*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1974 (1957), pp. 12–16 and *passim*).

36. See e.g. Guillaume Apollinaire "Art News: The Futurists" (1912), in Breuning, pp. 202–203.

37. Georges Braque, "Thoughts on Painting" (1917), in Edward Fry (ed.), *Cubism*, London 1966, p. 147.

38. In a review dated 1912, Apollinaire dismissed the artistic products of Futurism as lacking originality and as pale and unfinished reflections of the French avant-garde in general and Cubism in particular ("The Art World: the Italian Futurist Painters" (1912), in Breuning, p. 199). But Apollinaire approved of their boldness and their general aim of depicting shapes in motion and, in 1913, wrote a manifesto of

his own with the title 'L'antitradition futuriste' that clearly travestied the typography and slogan-like phrases of the Futurists (see Folke Edvards, *Den barbariska modernismen. Futurismen och 1900-talet*, Malmö 1987, p. 247). The key turning point came in the same year when Apollinaire enrolled Futurism in the Orphist movement in an article published in German in Herwald Walden's periodical *Der Sturm* ('Modern Painting' (1913), in Breuning, p. 270).

39. An interesting analysis of Picasso's relation to Futurism is found in Rosalind Krauss, *The Picasso Papers*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1999 (1998), pp. 83–84 and footnote 58, pp. 251–252.

40. Pablo Picasso, "Statement to Marius de Zayas" (1923), in Fry, 1966, p. 168.

41. Adorno, 2009, p. 7

42. Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 1995 (1990), p. 83.

43. Krauss, 1999, pp. 47–48 and *passim*.

44. Apollinaire (1913), in Breuning, p. 269.

45. Jeffrey S. Weiss, "Picasso, Collage, and the Music Hall", in Kirk Varnedoe & Adam Gopnik (ed.), *Modern Art and Popular Culture. Readings in High and Low*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1990, p. 93.

46. Adorno, 2009, p. 233.

47. Linda Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces. The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity*, The Walter Neurath Memorial Lecture 1994, London 1994, p. 7.

48. *Ibid*, p. 8.

49. Paul de Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity", *Dædalus. Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 99, Spring 1970: 2, p. 391.

50. See Horace Engdahl, *Stilen och lyckan. Essäer om litteratur*, Stockholm 1992, p. 57.

51. See Patricia Mainardi, *The End of the Salon. Art and the State in the Early Third Republic*, Cambridge 1993, p. 90.

52. Richard Wrigley, *The Origins of French Art Criticism. From the Ancien Régime to the Restauration*, Oxford 1993, p. 12.

53. Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, New Haven/London 1986 (1985), p. 3. Richard Wrigley has estimated the number of visitors to the Paris Salons at the end of the 1780s at around 35,000, while the corresponding figure during the 1840s was just over 1 million. (Wrigley, pp. 78–80.) There are no exact figures available for the number of visitors at the end of the eighteenth century, which have instead been calculated on the basis of the number of catalogues sold. The fact that these figures should be taken with a pinch of salt—or that the number of visitors fluctuated over time—is demonstrated by Jules Claretie's calculations that the number of visits made to the Salon of 1880 was 680,000 (*La Vie à Paris 1880*, Paris 1881, pp. 97–98, reproduced in Mainardi, p. 72).

54. Crow 1986, p. 1. The exhibitions of the Paris Salon were opened to the public in 1725 and were held regularly every, or every other, year, which set the pattern for the rest of Europe. During the nineteenth century, the Salon developed into by far the most important stage for the art world. While there were other opportunities for artists to exhibit outside the Academy, they were usually occasional and received much less attention (Wrigley 1993, p. 38). Initially, the exhibitions of the Salon were restricted to artists connected with the Academy, but following the Revolution, they were open not only to independent artists, but also to those of every nationality, which served to cement the central role played by Paris on the contemporary exhibition scene (Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, *The Expanding World of Art, 1874–1902. Vol 1: Universal Expositions and State-Sponsored Fine Arts Exhibitions*, New Haven/London 1988, p. 173). Once participation in the Salon was no longer linked directly with the Academy, the jury system (which was established in 1848) became the key to control. In the increasingly divided French art world, the composition of the jury and the selections it made were the source of (now almost legendary) controversies. At the end of the 1870s, Edmond Turquet, the minister of the republic responsible for cultural matters, initiated a number of reforms that loosened the dominant grip of the Academy on the selection of jury members and also led to the works being hung thematically—which meant alternative art movements became increasingly visible (Mainardi, pp. 74–89). In 1872, a quarter of the jury

were appointed by the administrators of the Salon, while three quarters of the artists chosen were linked with the Academic establishment (its members, laureates, recipients of its medals and honours). Turquet's reform of 1879 meant that the jury had to include all the artists who had exhibited in the three previous Salons, which increased the number of artists entitled to vote in the painting section of the jury from 711 to 2219. The following year, he set up two separate jury groups within painting, one for historical and figure painting and one for the lower categories (genre, landscape and still life). Conflict over the composition of the Salon jury and the role of the Academy in the public art world should be seen in the light of an increasingly lively formation of political and social opinion during the second half of the nineteenth century. In Mainardi's view, the forces in conflict may be inscribed on a political value-scale, with the conservative groups in favour of greater centralised control through the Academy, while the republicans called for a liberalisation of the structure of the art world (Mainardi, p. 82). Irrespective of the merits of the arguments of the opposing sides, the very intensity of the conflict demonstrates that the Salon was considered a vital arena in both political and aesthetic respects: being able to control this arena was also a means of influencing the formation of opinion.

55. Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism. Part I" (1980), *Beyond Recognition. Representation, Power, and Culture* (ed. Scott Byron, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman & Jane Weinstock), Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1997 (1992), pp. 52–53.

56. Nochlin, 1976, p. 104. This notion was not an invention of the Realists, according to Nochlin, but an idea with deep roots in the world view of Romanticism and its conception of art.

57. Habermas (1981), 1998, pp. 7–8.

58. Wrigley, p. 285.

59. Thomas B. Hess, "Some Academic Questions", in Thomas B. Hess & John Ashbery (ed.), *Academic Art*, London 1971 (1963), p. 2.

60. Greenberg (1940), 1988 a, p. 27.

61. Lionello Venturi, *History of Art Criticism*, (Trans. Charles Marriott), New York 1964 (1936), p. 254.

62. Clive Bell, *Art*, Oxford 1987 (1914), pp. 178 f. and 192.

63. Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, (Trans. Michael T.H. Sadler), New York 1977 (1911), p. 1.

64. See e.g. Nicolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art. Past and Present*, London 1940, pp. 190–245, concerning the reactions of the romantic movements for and against the academic training of artists.

65. Although different in some respects, the image of this century that emerges in Richard Müller's comprehensive three-volume work *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert: I-III*, München 1893–94, is not unfamiliar. The enormous amount of text is structured according to different types of genres, problem areas, nations and styles. The result may be a little confusing, but it provides a fascinating insight into a body of historical material before it became incorporated into a dominant narrative—and before that narrative was taken for granted. While, unsurprisingly, academic art is accorded a significant amount of space, this applies to the second half of the century and is under the rather charged heading 'Die Epigonen' (Müller, s. 355–381). A couple of decades later in a general survey work by Karl Woermann, *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker. Bd. 3: Die Kunst der christlichen Völker vom 16. bis zum Ende der 19. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig/Wien 1911, the art of the nineteenth century is presented to a considerably greater extent in terms of the linear narrative that subsequently became so familiar. Here, too, it is academic art of the second half of the nineteenth century that is dealt with, although it is treated to an even greater degree as a historically subordinate and qualitatively inferior part of the art history of the epoch when compared with the various representatives of Realism. (Bastien-Lepage just as much as Courbet and Manet). The restriction of narrative and selection is further consolidated in Helen Gardner's *Art Through the Ages. An Introduction to its History and Significance*, London 1927. While the academic tradition is summarily referred to in Gardner's study (without naming the artists concerned), it is defined as the antithesis of the 'spirit' of the new age (p. 369): the great developmental line, that is, from Romanticism onwards. The same image appears even when one turns to contemporary French survey literature, such as André Michel's work on the nineteenth century in the huge eighteen volume compendium *Historie de l'art. Tome VIII :2, L'art en Europe*

*et en Amérique au XIXe siècle et au début de XXe*, Paris 1926, or to the depiction of that century in Louis Réau's three-volume *Histoire universelle des arts. La renaissance l'art moderne*, Paris 1936.

66. In *The Story of Art*, London 1967 (1950), p. 381, Ernst Gombrich refers to a gulf opening up between 'official artists' and 'nonconformists' during the nineteenth century and how this gulf subsequently led to a shift of historical focus and to the exclusion of late academic art from the art-historical narrative. Whereas art historians of today may be rather unfamiliar with the official art of that period, Gombrich is convinced that it actually surrounds us, although in areas outside the domains of serious art and art history: as public monuments in urban space, as mural paintings in town halls, as stained-glass in churches, as the decor of hotel foyers. What is interesting about this relatively minor comment of Gombrich's is the fact that it is even included in his text. This historiographic segment is missing from the original edition of 1950. It is, of course, impossible to provide any unambiguous answer as to why he chose to reflect on the disappearance of the academic tradition in subsequent editions. But perhaps the classically trained Gombrich, who always adopted a sceptical attitude to modernism, was perturbed by the fact that the tradition of nineteenth century academic art had been so completely excluded from the image of that century presented in the survey literature. This process of rendering the academy invisible while normalising the avant-garde is also a dominant feature of such works as H. W. Janson's *History of Art. A Survey of the Major Visual Arts from the Dawn of History to the Present Day*, New York 1962, which is probably, in international terms, the most influential art-historical handbook of the post-war period. Here, the presentation is based exclusively on a number of epochal concepts (romanticism, neo-classicism, realism, impressionism), and the narrative is driven forward by an almost exclusive focus on a few artists and on the stylistic comparisons drawn between them. Art (with a capital A) is presented as an autonomous phenomenon, without any real links to economic and social circumstances or to a context of intellectual history. No traces of alternative forms of representation are to be found in this survey since the aesthetic and historical selection criteria have been woven together to create an impenetrable whole, under the aegis of a notion of (stylistic) innovation.

67. Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art?* (Trans. Christopher S. Wood), Chicago/London 1987 (1984), pp. 12–15.

68. Hilton Kramer, “Does Gérôme Belong with Goya and Monet?”, *New York Times*, 1980-04-13, section 2, p. 35.

69. Paul Oskar Kristeller, “The Modern System of the Arts. A Study in the History of Aesthetics”, Part II, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 13, No. 1, January 1952, pp. 17–24.

70. Ibid, pp. 42–43. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, (Trans. Werner S. Pluhar), Indianapolis/Cambridge 1987 (1790), particularly § 56–59, pp. 210–224.

71. The dissemination and normalisation of the defining features of the system to a broader social stratum of interested laymen, academic functionaries and professional artists occurred primarily through the publication of general encyclopaedias and specialist reference works in which this approach was expressed in various articles. Marta Edling has demonstrated the considerable significance of Johann Georg Sulzer’s *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* (1771–1774) and Claude-Henri Watelet’s & Pierre-Charles Levesque’s *Encyclopédie Méthodique. Beaux-Arts* (1788–91) for the dissemination of this view, not least in terms of their influence on the second edition of Diderot’s and d’Alembert’s general *Encyclopédie* (1777–1779), which was widely circulated throughout Europe (Edling, pp. 33–37.).

72. Maria Görts, *Det sköna i verklighetens värld. Akademisk konstsyn i Sverige under senare delen av 1800-talet*, (Diss. Stockholms universitet 1999), Stockholm 1999, p. 195.

73. For an exhaustive discussion of the nineteenth century bourgeois public sphere and its private and official dimensions, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, (Trans. Thomas Burger & Frederic Lawrence), Cambridge (Mass.) 1991 (1962), pp. 141–159.

74. Daniel M. Fox, “Artists in the Modern State: The Nineteenth-Century Background” (1963), in Milton Albrecht, James Barnett & Mason Griff (ed.), *The Sociology of Art and Literature*, London 1970, p. 371.



75. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, (Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith) London 2001 (1972), p. 117.

76. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, London 1984 (1981), pp. 235–236.

77. Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity – An Incomplete Project” (1981), in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture*, New York 1998 (1983), pp. 7–8.

78. Habermas’ ‘separation’ should not be taken as either self-evident or objective; it has, in fact, been the object of fairly extensive criticism. Fredric Jameson describes, for example, how the autonomy of aesthetics served as a key tenet of the historicising ideology of modernism after the Second World War, which may be understood as criticism in indirect form of the description of the separation of the spheres as portrayed by Habermas. (Jameson, 2002, p. 161). In his turn, Richard Rorty has explicitly criticised Habermas’ system both because it sets up boundaries between the spheres that are far too rigid and because it takes seriously Kant’s extremely arbitrary (and fundamentally metaphysical) philosophical division (Richard Rorty, “Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity”, in Ingeborg Hoestercy (ed.), *Zeitgeist in Babel. The Postmodernist Controversy*, Bloomington/Indianapolis 1991, pp. 88–90). But even though Habermas’ distinction may be criticised, it is a useful means—bearing the objections cited above in mind—of highlighting and defining that area of modern social life where ideas about Art and aesthetics have their place.

79. In the work of Thomas Kuhn, the concept of the paradigm is used exclusively to explain developments within various areas of the natural sciences such that the search for knowledge may no longer be considered as the continual pursuit of ever-greater understanding of the world, irrespective of the social and political context of the production of knowledge. Instead, certain scientific conquests emerge at a particular point as ‘model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners’ (Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago/London 1970 (1962), p. viii). Those periods of ‘normal science’, in which the scientific cohort ‘know what the

world looks like' and in which the production of knowledge is, in principle, aimed inwards in order to supplement the dominant paradigm, will over time and as a result of an ever greater accumulation of anomalies shift into a 'period of revolution', when the paradigm can no longer be revised but has to be replaced by a different one in order to provide a theoretical scheme capable of encompassing the observations and calculations that have been made. In our context, however, the term paradigm should be understood in a more general sense in keeping with its fundamental linguistic sense of a social framework that constitutes and regulates the production by the art world of knowledge and value. Understanding a process of change as paradigmatic would therefore mean that it is governed by particular local and arbitrary (discursive) norms, rather than by universal laws for the development of Art and its ends.

80. Arthur Danto, "The Art World" (1964), *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 61, No. 19, American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Sixty-First Annual Meeting (Oct. 15, 1964), p. 577.

81. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Second edition, (Ed. James A. H. Murray, Henry Bradley, W. A. Craigie & C. T. Onions), Vol. 1, Oxford 1989, pp. 795–796.

82. Krauss (1981), 1991, p. 157.

83. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (1966), *Writing and Difference*, (Trans. Alan Bass), London/New York 2001 (1967), p. 353.

84. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak), Baltimore/London 1997 (1967), pp. 6–26 and passim.

85. For a history of the metaphor of the organism and its effects, see Abrams, p.184–225. Particular mention should be made here of Edward Young's distinction in *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) between 'the growth process of the organism' and 'mechanical production' as a symptom of a change of perception, which, in terms of aesthetics, would subsequently become common property.

86. Hugh Honour describes, for example, how many researchers have been perplexed by the discrepancy between the spontaneity of

Canova's sketches and the coolness of their execution, although this difference was, in fact, a particular feature of an established artistic practice in which the *bozzetti*, rather than being an autonomous form of artistic expression, represented an initial attempt to capture the ideal form of the subject matter (see Hugh Honour, *Neo-Classicism*, Harmondsworth 1984 (1968), p. 101–102).

87. Albert Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, London 1971, pp. 82–87.

88. Ibid, pp. 85–87.

89. Ernst Kris & Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist. A Historical Experiment*, (Trans. Alastair Lang & Lottie M. Newman), New Haven/London 1979 (1934), p. 52.

90. Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters" (1940), *The Tradition of the New*, Chicago/London 1982 (1959), pp. 25 and 28.

91. Krauss (1981), 1991, p. 167.

92. Although this approach was not, it should be said, based solely on the words of Rosenberg, it took on a new topicality as a result of the dramatic force of his judgements and the enormous influence he exerted over the American art world of the 1950s. This was made clear to me when perusing a number of the annual volumes of *Art News* (vol. 54–62, 1955–1963), which was, under the editorial control of Thomas B. Hess, far and away the most influential periodical at that time in American art circles. What I found confirmed in these pages was not only the extent of the dominance of Abstract Expression, but also that the manner in which this art was interpreted, written about and understood was based on Rosenberg's aesthetics in various forms. But instead of his radical notion of the primary significance of the creative act over the material appearance of the work, what most critics focused on was the work as an autonomous structure of signs and on the value of the brushstroke as the expression of the artist's sensibility and the authenticity of the work. Now the objection may of course be made that this was only one of many sources and that, despite the significance of this particular periodical, it cannot be assigned any absolute authority. But, in my view, the vast amount of

articles and reviews involved serve as a quantitative confirmation of an image that is frequently mediated by other sources (specialist studies, monographs, survey works) and which, interestingly, were still so dominant well into the 1960s when a new generation of critics began taking over and when attention was increasingly devoted to other art forms, such as assemblage, environments, junk-art, happenings and pop art. The transition period between Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art may, in fact, be considered a key resource for understanding the actual significance of the idea of the value of the brushstroke in the American (and to some extent the European, as well) art world. Both by studying the rather laborious process almost all Pop artists went through in order to free themselves from the 'idiom of the brushstroke' (see Peter Schimmel, "The Faked Gesture: Pop Art and the New York School", in Russell Ferguson (ed.) *Hand-Painted Pop. American Art in Transition 1955-62*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, New York 1993, p. 19) and through a consideration of the more or less ironic representations of this idiom in Pop Art during its established phase, as in Andy Warhol's rhetorical and practical use of the silkscreen technique as a mechanical antithesis to the brushstroke or Roy Lichtenstein's gigantic paintings representing 'authentic brushstrokes', painted by copying the raster artwork of the comic.

93. Sven-Eric Liedman, *I skuggan av framtiden. Modernitetens idéhistoria*, Stockholm 1997, p. 452.

94. See Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia*, (facsimile of the 1618 edition), Milano 1992 (1593), pp. 463-464.

95. Among the immediate predecessors of Lefebvre's composition of a naked woman holding up a mirror was Pierre-Jules Cavalier's sculpture 'La verité' of 1849-53 (see T. J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois. Artists and Politics in France 1848-1951*, London 1973, p. 40).

96. See F-G Dumas, *Livret Illustré du Musée du Luxembourg*, Paris 1884, p. xxxvi and p. 153, and *The Musée d'Orsay*, Paris/New York 1987 (1986), p. 153. While Lefebvre may have been feted by the official art world, his works and academic methods of instruction were the object of contempt in more radical and avant-garde circles (see e.g. Emile Zola, "Une exposition de tableaux á Paris" (1875), *Salons*, Société de publications romanes et francaises LXIII, Geneve/

Paris 1959, p. 165, and John Rewald, *The History of Impressionism*, Museum of Modern Art, New York 1946, p. 330).

97. Liedman, 1997, p. 453.

98. Kenneth Clark, *The Nude*, Harmondsworth 1960 (1956), pp. 1–25. Clark's distinction, which largely reproduces the ideal of academic art, obscures the fact that all portrayals (including the naked) are culturally coded, while the idea of the nude also serves to conceal the proximity of this kind of painting to an area beyond the confines of the socially acceptable. It was, in fact, this very distinction and the way that the naked body could be used to mediate higher values that long allowed this motif to be a source of aesthetic pleasure (see Lynda Nead, *The Female Body. Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, London/New York 1997 (1992), p. 25). Not only the naked body but also the sexual gaze was therefore dressed in (disciplined through) Art.

99. Antonio Ludovico Muratori, "Della perfetta poesia italiana" (1706), as quoted in Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics. III. Modern Aesthetics*, (Trans. Chester A. Kisiel & John F. Besemer), Haag/Paris/ Warszawa 1974 (1967), p. 447.

100. The presentation of human beings and human actions was a key aspect of academic doctrine since the human being in action was considered to be the purest and most visible means of portraying the human soul. The human form, therefore, not only had to be anatomically credible, but also had to represent an abstract concept of ideal beauty and a personification of an abstract content. Under the generic constraints of history painting, this action was supposed to serve as a carefully considered interpretation of a historical, mythological or religious subject whose details had to be in harmony with the whole. The dramatic, epic and narrative effects also had to be weighed against the ideal harmony of the composition and the elevated dignity of the subject matter.

101. Friedrich von Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man. In a Series of Letters* (1795), English and German Facing, (Trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson & L. A. Willoughby), Oxford 1982 (1967), p. 57.

102. Erwin Panofsky has described this tradition as being based on Plato's distinction between art as the depiction of material (imperfect)

reality and art as an attempt to make visible a higher (perfect) understanding, which the Greek philosopher referred to as an idea (Erwin Panofsky, *Idea – Ein Beitrag zur Begriffsgeschichte der älteren Kunsttheorie*, Berlin 1960 (1924), pp. 1–2). Even during antiquity, Plato's negative view of the function of visual art as purely representational was subjected to reinterpretation, however, and made part of an approach in which art served as one possible (or perhaps even the best) means of depicting the ideal order of the world and of objects: the order in which the variation of nature has its origin. One consequence of this was that during the Renaissance it was believed that the rules of art theory could be derived from a system of universal laws, which were applied primarily in the principles of perspective (geometry, mathematics) and proportion (anatomy). However, a notion of the beauty of art was not necessarily based on any speculative, neo-Platonic theory and, during the High Renaissance, was often described in terms of a 'spiritualised' selection theory, notions of a higher reality and the perfection of nature (Panofsky, p. 35).

103. The idealist view of art created specific notions both about the inherent value of art and about the methods used to teach it. The training offered by the art academies, however, encompassed both practical skills and theoretical knowledge: from the study of drawing to the teaching of the principles of perspective and proportion; from history, mythology and anatomy to geometry, philosophy and art theory. Every aspect of art had to be studied separately while also forming part of a systematic progression: the student began by learning how to draw parts of the body before being allowed to portray the body as a whole; the body was studied bone by bone, muscle by muscle, before the student was taught how to draw the posture and movement of the body through the study of antique plaster casts, anatomical preparations or live models. Torsten Weimark has described the crucial role played in this training by the systematic study of anatomy, which ranged from theoretical studies to the practice of dissection, and is characterised in his words as lacking 'clearly defined boundaries between academic and anatomical drawing, drawing, that is, from living and dead models' (*Akademi och Anatomi. Några aspekter på människokroppens historia i nya tidens konstnärsutbildning och ateljépraktik, med särskild tonvikt på anatomiundervisningen vid konstakademierna i Stockholm och Köpenhamn*

*fram till 1800-talets början*, Stockholm/Stehag 1996, p. 123). The relationship between anatomy and antiquity was fluid in the same way: although the former involved the study of a real phenomenon (a corpse), the knowledge gained from this study was aimed at creating the familiarity needed to form the basis for the artistic interpretation of ideal beauty.

104. The art academies long taught only drawing, as it was considered to be that part of the artistic process that could, in fact, be taught. Learning to draw from other drawings, plaster casts and living models did indeed involve training in practical skills but also—and above all—the capacity to see, assimilate and apply ideal forms. In order to learn the crafts of painting and sculpture, students were sent to the private studio of a master, which would be outside the organisational reach of the Academy (in formal terms at least). This situation gradually changed during the second half of the nineteenth century, however, when painting and sculpture became increasingly integrated into academic teaching. In some of the more progressive German academies, a significant shift had taken place by the mid-nineteenth century, when the teaching of painting was introduced and the student was given the choice of attending the master classes of various teachers (Pevsner, pp. 218–219). In France, however, the established system of teaching painting in the studios of master painters outside the teaching programme of the Academy remained intact long after the mid-century. This circumstance led to the development of an increasing number of private or semi-official art schools in Paris and elsewhere, such as the Académie Julian. In 1863, however, the authorities made three studios available to each professor at the École des Beaux Arts, where students were trained instead of in the teacher's private studio (Pevsner, p. 226).

105. See Görts, p. 55. The hierarchy of genres was established in academic discourse at the end of the 1660s and codified in André Félibien's *Conférences de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture pendant l'année 1667* (1669). The force of this fundamentally classicist system of norms was, however, by no means self-evident and was further diminished by the preoccupation of the Rococo with intimate and elegant genre motifs that were often lighthearted and carefree. The renewed focus on the hierarchy of genres during

the second half of the eighteenth century may also be considered a reaction in part to Rococo painting (see e.g. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality. Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, Chicago/London 1988 (1980), pp. 72–76). Even though the hierarchy took on different guises and also underwent significant changes (or rather dissolution) during the nineteenth century, its fundamental ranking was that history painting was placed highest, followed by genre, portrait, landscape and still life. The supreme position of history painting within this hierarchy was partly a result of this genre being considered the most demanding (it brought together all the different aspects of the visual arts) and partly because it provided the most profound aesthetic and emotional form of representation: history painting speaks to the soul, where others only offer pleasures for the eye (Fried, 1988, p. 74, quotation of La Font de Saint-Yenne, *Réflexions sur quelques causes de l'état présent de la peinture en France*, Paris 1747). It was in history painting that the cherished tenet of academic doctrine, which demanded a fusion of epic and allegorical (literary) content with an ideal (visual) form, was manifested. This approach to painting was based on the Renaissance theory of epic poetry, in which the action and the structure of the narrative were intended to encompass an inherent higher meaning (Rensselaer W. Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting*, New York 1967 (1940), p. 19). History painting also entailed an extraordinarily complex and multifaceted form of representation with various overlapping levels of meaning, in which the viewer was expected to be able to decipher the different layers of the work by means of the other layers. Despite their multiple legibility, these paintings were not considered fragmentary or partitioned in any sense because the classicist ideal prescribed that all parts of the whole should come together to form an organic whole. In similar fashion to the insistence of classicist doctrine on the unity of time, action and place in drama, the Aristotelian doctrine of the unity of action served as the guiding principle in the visual arts for the harmonisation of the different elements of time and action in painting (Lee, p. 63).

106. Marta Edling, *Om måleriet i den klassicistiska konsteorin. Praktikens teoretiska position under sjuttonhundratalets andra hälft* (Diss. Stockholms universitet 1999), Stockholm 1999, p. 87. The boundaries set by the hierarchy of genres also imposed a definition



of the ideal and autonomous functions of art as opposed to its representative and ideological ones. Both these poles were the subject of continual debate during the nineteenth century, particularly during turbulent historical periods, such as in the wake of the French revolution of 1789 and after the insurrections of 1848. Making a direct link between the (general) value of the visual arts and the (particular) demands of politics could be hazardous. An interesting example is provided by the disputes about the continued survival of both the hierarchy of genres and the academy of arts following the French Revolution, when radical groups proclaimed the necessity of eliminating these remnants of the old society (Wrigley, pp. 287–290). The problem then arose that the framework for the definition and interpretation of art would also have been dissolved and the function of art in society made unclear, which might have led at worst to the visual arts becoming a subversive element in the new republic. The continued crucial role played by the hierarchy of genres in both Republic and Empire, as well as during the Restoration, demonstrates the common need felt by these different regimes for stability. While history painting in the form of battle scenes was explicitly employed during the Napoleonic era to glorify the military efforts of the regime, the tendency during the Restoration was to tone down the political role of painting and emphasise instead its autonomous and ideal meanings (Wrigley, p. 332 and pp. 339–340).

107. The aesthetic and communicative implications of academic doctrine were to do with scope—the artist, quite simply, being expected to express as much as possible with the least possible means. Simplicity and refinement may be considered the two key virtues in this regard, not only as a result of a fixed aesthetic ideal, but also in order to retain the concentrated focus of the image while extending its capacity to affect the viewer.

108. An example of this approach can be seen in Joshua Reynold's third 'Discourse' (1770), in which he describes the educational course to be followed by the artist, from the introductory mechanical copying of objects in the surrounding world to the necessity of developing an individual form of interpretation and the capacity to correct nature in order to achieve both maturity as an artist and beauty of style, no matter how difficult it was to capture the nature of this grand style

in words (see Reynolds, "Discourse III. Delivered to the Students of the Royal Academy on the Distribution of the Prizes, December 14, 1770" (1779), *Discourses on Art*, (ed. Robert R. Wark), New Haven/London 1981 (1959), pp. 41–53).

109. This theme had already been discussed in Weber's study *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist der Kapitalismus*, Tübingen 1934 (1904–05) and was raised in his posthumously published work *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*, Tübingen 1980 (1920).

110. The continual expanse of rationalisation in science and social life during the twentieth century may also be deemed to have resulted in periods that witnessed an upswing both in the practice of traditional religion and the development of new spiritual and esoteric movements. Neither did demystification lead to an absence of the mystical dimension in general; mention need only be made here to the increased significance of the nation state, nationalism and regionalism during the twentieth century, all of which frequently made allusion to mystical narratives about historical origins and ethnic/national identity.

111. Weimark, 1996, p. 134. The linguistic metaphor has been drawn from Mathias Duval's and Édouard Cuyer's *Histoire de l'anatomie plastique* (1899).

112. Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude. Sexuality, Morality and Art*, Manchester/New York 1996, p. 17.

113. Schiller, pp. 31–32.

114. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*, Wien 1934 (1764), pp. 128–131. One example mentioned by Winckelmann is how artists were able to study the perfect bodies of young men at Gymnasia and the other places, where the latter trained in order to take part in games and sporting events, and, by doing so on a daily basis, artists could acquire a superior understanding of the structure of beauty (Winckelmann, p. 151).

115. Ibid, p. 149.

116. See Calinescu, pp. 26–35. As early as the seventeenth century, in the work of writers such as Charles Perrault, the compilation of

rules brought about by rational and scientific thinking for the field of aesthetics as well provided the stimulus not only for a greater and more informed awareness about the nature of beauty, but also for the production of works of superior quality. This was lent added force by the self-evident moral superiority of the absolute truth of Christian doctrine demonstrated by contemporary understanding when compared with the pagan cultures of antiquity.

117. Schiller, p. 57.

118. Sabrina Norlander, *Claiming Rome. Portraiture and Social Identity in the Eighteenth Century*, (Diss. Uppsala universitet 2003), Uppsala 2003, pp. 6–9.

119. Maiken Umbach, “Classicism, Enlightenment and the ‘Other’: Thoughts on Decoding Eighteenth-Century Visual Culture”, *Art History*, vol. 25, June 2002: 3, p. 333.

120. Meyer Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp. Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, Oxford 1971 (1953), pp. 51–52.

121. Abrams, p. 70.

122. The use of the term pivot (*cheville* in French) is derived from Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, (Trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod), Chicago/London 1987 (1978), p. 18. I use the terms, however, in a different sense: not as a metaphor for how Kant succeeded in turning philosophical investigation towards his own premises, but as a much simpler image of how a particular intellectual shift can create a new and different paradigm over time.

123. Liedman, 1997, p. 453, the paperback edition of the same book, respectively (Stockholm 2000), p. 453.

124. The history of electric light runs parallel to that of the electric generator. Edison’s patent, both of a particular type of electric bulb and of a system for the provision of electric current, heralded rather the start of the practical and commercial use of electrical lighting (see Thomas P. Hughes, *Networks of Power. Electrification in Western Society, 1880–1930*, Baltimore/London 1983). Although rudimentary forms of apparatus for the production of electricity were already in existence in the seventeenth century, access to a continuous form of electric current only arrived with Alessandro Volta’s pile (a battery)

in 1800. By 1802, the English chemist Sir Humphrey Davy used electricity from the Voltaic pile to make threads of platinum glow, and in 1808, he demonstrated an electric arc lamp to the Royal Institution of Great Britain. Practical operation of the arc lamp became possible from the 1850s but only on a very limited scale. Various attempts to develop more practical forms of incandescent bulbs were made during the first half of the nineteenth century. Ideas about electricity and electric light were prevalent throughout the entire nineteenth century and were not just the province of obscure laboratories but increasingly formed part of public awareness through various types of demonstrations and events, such as the first use of the arc lamp as a stage prop at the Paris Opera in 1836, when the electric light it produced was, presumably, as much a matter of dramatic extravagance as a practical source of illumination. References to electric light can also be found in the fiction of the period, particularly in Jules Verne's novels *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864) and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1869–70), in which electric light serves as a symbol that underpins the theme of both works: the combination of fear and fascination at the effects of the (prospective or Utopian) achievements of modern technology.

125. See, e.g., Louis Énault, *Paris-Salon 1881*, Paris 1881, p. 26, A. M. Belina, *Nos Peintres dessinés par Eux-Mêmes*, Paris 1883, p. 267 and Jules-Antoine Castagnary, "Année 1870", *Salons*, Paris 1892, pp. 420–421.

126. Smith, pp. 104, 115.

127. Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New. Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century*, New York/Oxford 1988, p. 158.

128. Ibid, pp. 232–233.

129. David E. Nye, *Image Worlds. Corporate Identities at General Electric 1890–1930*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 1985, p. 122.

130. A comparison of the presentation of the Veritas motif in academic art and the recycling of the same motif in various trademarks can be found in Jan Garnert, *Anden i lampan. Etnologiska perspektiv på ljus och mörker*, Stockholm 1993, pp. 150–159. For AEG's

trademark and its ideological context, see Tilmann Buddensieg, “Behrens und Messel. Von der Industriemythologie zur ‘Kunst in der Produktion’”, in Tilmann Buddensieg (edit.), *Industriekultur. Peter Behrens und die AEG 1907–1914*, Berlin 1980 (1979), pp. 21–23.

131. See Roland Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image” (1964), *Image, Music, Text*, (Trans. Stephen Heath), London 1977, p. 38.

132. Nochlin, 1976, p. 41.

133. Marvin, pp. 56 and 59.

134. Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, New York 1976, pp. 7–8.

135. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 1992 (1990), p. 9.

136. Linda Nochlin, *Realism*, New York/Baltimore 1976 (1971), p. 25.

137. Stanley Baron, *Sonia Delaunay. The Life of an Artist*, London 1995, pp. 51–52.

138. John Berger, “The Moment of Cubism” (1969), *Selected Essays* (ed. Geoff Dyer), New York 2002 (2001), pp. 84–85.

139. Fried, 1988, pp. 75–76.

140. Lena Johannesson, *Den massproducerade bilden. Ur bildindustrialismens historia*, Stockholm 1978, p. 243.

141. Kant, § 14, p. 72. See also Derrida, 1987, pp. 17–147.

142. Abrams, p. 269.

143. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, (Trans. John Osborne), London/New York 2003 (1928), p. 160 and passim.

144. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (Trans. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall), New York 1995 (1960), pp. 72–73.

145. In various publications Paul de Man has analysed the allegory as a particular form of reading, see e.g., “The Rhetoric of Temporality” in *Blindness and Insight. The Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, Minneapolis 1997 (1971).

146. For a historical survey of this change, see Götz Pochat, *Symbolbegreppet i konstvetenskapen*, Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademiens Handlingar, Antikvariska serien 30, Stockholm 1977, pp. 3–35.

147. See Gombrich, 1978, p. 183.

148. Gombrich, 1978, p. 187.

149. Friedrich Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen*, Bd. I, Leipzig 1819 (1810), p. 80. See also Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, (Trans. John Osborne), London/New York 2003 (1928), pp. 164–165.

150. See Benjamin, 2003 (1928), p. 160.

151. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process. Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, (Trans. Edmund Jephcott), Oxford 2000 (1939), pp. 376–379. The notion of modernity as a post-traditional idea nevertheless presupposes a process of change of vast proportions, which could obviously not be understood simply through causal explanatory models. The fact alone that the various phenomena which characterise the modern as an epoch range in time over a hundred or so years, and that they also vary between different cultures and even exist, on occasion, in a contradictory relationship to one another, disqualifies explanations of this kind.

152. This view reflects, perhaps, both a general desire for change (the desire of the aesthetic avant-garde to seek out and constantly shift the frontline between the present and the future) and the pursuit of a particular kind of future (the utopian goals cherished by the political avant-garde for the society to come). The utopian ideal would, however, seem paradoxical in terms of modernity's approach to time, because it defines the goal of development as a state that transcends all change. Were the utopia of art to be realised, change would no longer be possible and art would die. It was for this reason, in the view of Theodor Adorno, that art had avoided this catastrophe by continually altering and postponing utopia. This would also mean that the disavowal of a historic purpose on the part of the avant-garde appeared legitimate as long as it was the new itself, which served as its sole aim. (Adorno, 2009, p. 41).

153. An illuminating example of this can be found in the work of the historian of ideas Karin Johannisson. In *Nostalgia. En känslas historia*, Stockholm 2001, she describes how nostalgia, in the course of the modern epoch, has changed from being a medical diagnosis to a social symptom and how this feeling has, in some instances, acquired meanings that are critical of civilisation while, in others, is channelled into a modern and rational view of society.

154. Pevsner, pp. 140–141. Although this expansion occurred primarily in France and the German and Italian states, a similar trend may be observed in the rest of Europe. In terms of organisation, exhibitions and the institution of competitions and prizes, the structure of almost all of these art academies was based on that of the Académie royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in Paris. The comprehensive nature of the expansion makes it possible to refer to the development of a particular discursive order and process of standardisation in relation to the public administration of the art world, even though the establishment of these academies would also have to be considered from the perspective of the different national contexts.

155. Pevsner, pp. 149–152.

156. One example is the changes in France during the First Republic. As a royal institution, the Académie royale de Peinture et de Sculpture was the target of fierce criticism. From 1791, the Salon was open to all French artists, and the exhibition was no longer under the monopoly control of the members of the Academy; its members formed, in fact, a minority on the jury appointed to evaluate the works submitted (Daniel M. Fox, “Artists in the Modern State: The Nineteenth-Century Background” (1963), in Milton Albrecht, James Barnett & Mason Griff (ed.), *The Sociology of Art and Literature*, London 1970, pp. 375–376). The aesthetic ideals of the Academy were also called into question, but this proved to be a sensitive issue: the new regime did not want the standard of the art exhibited to fall and so undermine the reputation of the republic (Wrigley, p. 44). The aesthetic requirements were thus upheld, even though the ideological guidelines were changed. In organisational terms, however, the entire system of the academies was changed in 1791 when a majority of the established institutions were amalgamated and subordinated to the

Institut de France. Its art section was given a name more in keeping with the times: the Académie des Beaux Arts. Under its aegis, artistic education was carried out at the École des Beaux Arts (Pevsner, pp. 199–200). The fundamental role played by the Academy within the art world and public administration nevertheless remained intact, and it even gained in importance during the Empire and was confirmed during the Restoration.

157. Various political upheavals, particularly in France, also influenced the composition, influence and ideology of the Academy. T. J. Clark describes, for example, how the revolution of 1848 created a vacuum in the art world, which was confronted with the major issue (as was, indeed, the case after the 1789 revolution) of what approach to art the new republic should embrace (see Clark 1973, pp. 31–71). The problem was there was no accepted aesthetic model with which to replace the established academic code. More reform-minded forces wanted to provide greater scope for Romantic or Realist artists, such as Eugene Delacroix, Honoré Daumier, François Rude and Auguste Préault, while others were intent on upholding the established values. The politicisation of the art world during the Empire and the rapid change of course that took place after the Restoration deterred many, no doubt, from defining themselves too explicitly in terms of a particular political orientation. In this phase, the Academy appears to have been made up of what was, in ideological terms, a relatively heterogeneous collection of individuals whose unifying characteristic, nevertheless, was that they had invested their careers in a particular system. Demolishing academic doctrine in its entirety would not only have risked creating aesthetic uncertainty or even decline (which the rulers of the republic were determined to avoid at all costs), also it would have demonstrated that the investments made by many of the key actors had been a failure. Moreover, the aesthetic preferences that prevailed in the developing private art market (which admittedly suffered a major decline during the period following the revolution) were based on particular norms defined by the academic code. Although the art policy of the Second Republic could not be said to have introduced a revolution of any kind, alternative aesthetic approaches were established during the four years it lasted, which would, in the long term (several decades later), undermine the monopoly position of the academic code together with its general legitimacy.



158. Although the increased economic importance of the visual arts provided a major incentive for the expansion of the academic system at the turn of the nineteenth century, when art schools and schools in the applied arts were, in many cases, amalgamated, an entirely opposite trend was also affecting the entire art world at the same time. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of nineteenth century art teaching was the segregation, rather, of these kinds of schools. In the case of some of the art academies, this meant that although elementary courses were set up in commercial art and design, the more advanced lessons were only open to those in training to become creative artists: a process that eventually laid the foundations for a more explicit separation between colleges of fine arts and those teaching craft and design (Pevsner, pp. 228–229). Although the cause of this change was primarily practical in nature, rather than an administrative matter, and reflected a growing social need for certified professional skills, this differentiation may also be considered in terms of the problem of the artistic identity in the new public sphere of the art world. In this new social and professional landscape, the distinction between fine art and applied art became increasingly important. The need for this distinction did not, however, involve a one-sided and patronising form of exclusion from the fine art establishment but was instead emphasised by both sides. By the mid-nineteenth century, there was a growing demand for the provision of a more practical and realistic form of training within the applied arts. However, education within the applied arts long remained influenced by the academic ideal, centred as it was on drawing. Growing dependence on machinery in manufacturing industry nevertheless entailed the end of the craft skills of previous epochs, and the need for better and more practical training within the design industry became increasingly pressing. The Great Exhibition held in London in 1851 may be considered a watershed in this debate to the extent that the first major international exhibition of the state of the applied arts led to criticism and reconsideration within both established and more radical circles. Referring explicitly to this exhibition, Gottfried Semper, for example, observed that the solution to the problems of the day lay in changing the taste and approach to art of the general public on the one hand, while raising the level of education on the other, by entrenching it in practical requirements through the introduction of on-site training and the creation of a better foundation for

aesthetic judgement by reconnecting education in Art with that in the applied forms (Gottfried Semper, *Wissenschaft, Industrie und Kunst. Vorschläge zur Anregung nationalen Kunstgefühles bei den Schlüsse der Londoner Industrie-Ausstellung*, Braunschweig 1852, pp. 37–40 and pp. 61–62). A similar, if politically more radical, view of the social problem of the art industry was formulated somewhat later by William Morris, when he maintained that the commercialism and competitiveness of modern society were the cause of the decline of both the intellectual and the applied arts (for several key texts on these issues, see William Morris, *On Art and Socialism*, (Ed. Norman Kelvin), New York 1999).

159. Görts, p. 195. Tony Bennett interprets the development of the exhibitionary complex as a parallel to what Michel Foucault described as the modern society's apparatus for apportioning punishment ('the carceral archipelago'), which was designed at the same time, with both systems being seen as responding to a need on the part of the authorities for differentiation, control and order. With the considerable difference, however, that the direction of the disciplinary apparatus of the exhibitionary complex was the reverse of the modern prison's panopticon: instead of control by an invisible watchman, it provided control by making the ideals, principles and extent of the powers that be visible to the public. Surveillance in this case involved the legitimation by the official institutions of particular types of knowledge, codes and representations (see Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum. History, Theory, Politics*, London 2002 (1995), pp. 59–69).

160. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 2–3.

161. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, (Trans. Susan Emanuel) Cambridge 1996 (1992), p. 141.

162. As a general metaphor, the concept of the avant-garde first entered use at the beginning of the nineteenth century in political and cultural contexts. Subsequently, both these contexts frequently appeared in such close proximity that the radical aesthetic vanguard was able to derive its forms of representation, rhetoric and legitimacy from the political and vice versa. A key etymological aspect, which lingered on from the military origins of the metaphor, was the idea

that a battle had to be fought against some form of enemy. According to Renato Poggioli, the notion of an avant-garde movement in France in the years prior to the Revolution of 1848 had a general, but nevertheless distinctly political, connotation, as part of which art was seen primarily as an instrument of social change; not until after 1870 was the concept used in a specifically cultural sense (Poggioli, p. 9). Nevertheless, the concept was not definitively separated into two distinct areas of meaning, and it would long embrace a link between art and politics. From then on, however, it was interpreted in various ways depending on which side employed it. As Matei Calinescu has convincingly demonstrated, the crucial distinction was that the aesthetic avant-garde emphasised the independent revolutionary potential of art whereas the political avant-garde saw art as being subordinate to the needs of politics (Calinescu, p. 105). These two diametrically opposed interpretations of the function of art in society were a source of confrontation throughout the nineteenth century wherever the political avant-garde (of left or right) managed to seize power.

163. Calinescu, p. 95.

164. The combining of descriptive and normative criteria in which the self-image of the avant-garde is interwoven with the characterisation of a historical reality is a recurrent problem in every analysis of the avant-garde. One example is provided by the four fundamental attitudes shared, in Renato Poggioli's view, by all the different avant-garde movements to a greater or lesser extent: activism (the pursuit of the unknown), antagonism (its counter-cultural position), nihilism (the desire to break with established norms) and agonism (heroic suffering) (see Poggioli, pp. 25–40, and pp. 61–77). Poggioli's survey helps to make comprehensible many of the apparently paradoxical phenomena within the different representations of the avant-garde, but it also creates a blueprint for the definition of the aesthetic avant-garde that is based entirely on its own self-image. The values that underpin a particular discursive position are simply taken for granted in the historical analysis of that position. A similar, though slightly different, problem arises with Peter Bürger's description of the avant-garde, in which he employs a highly restrictive definition of what the avant-garde is based on certain ideological criteria: the avant-garde equates anti-aestheticising movements that are critical of institutions

and whose ideal model are the attacks by Dadaism (and Duchamps in particular) on the autonomy of the art work in bourgeois society (Bürger, pp. 47–54). Here, too, although the selection is more restrictive, particular historical values and identities are being taken for granted. As such, certain criteria are deduced from an empirical material and then allowed to form an *a priori* matrix for the interpretation of this material. As part of this process, exclusions are made (A is avant-garde, but not B), gradations arise (A is more avant-garde than B) and a vicious circle of descriptive and normative statements is allowed to determine the historical analysis. There is a clear need, in my view, for a sociological and historiographical analysis of this problematic context in which the issue of how a historical situation may actually be described is linked to the displacement of meaning between the concepts used and to the gradual normalisation of the judgements involved.

165. Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1996, pp. 264–265.

166. For a discussion of the retrospective exhibition as a key ‘language game’ within modernism, see Clark, 1999, pp. 55–56.

167. Michel Foucault, “The Order of Discourse”, (Trans. Ian McLeod) in Robert Young (ed.), *Untying the Text. A Post-Structuralist Reader*, Boston (Mass.) 1981, p. 60.

168. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, (Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith) London 2001 (1972), p. 173.

169. Boime, s. 14 ff.