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Theories of Modernism. Politics of Time and Space

The Modern, Modernism, and Repetition: New / The Newest

The modern and modernism are artistic, cultural, and social formations that refer to changes in art, culture, and society in historical and geographical terms. The modern and modernism are viewed as formations that *should* uncover a new "state of affairs" within contemporaneity. On the other hand, viewed ontologically, the modern and modernism are also about redefining the potentially new into a *sustainable new* or the "tradition of the new" as a permanent search for and realisation of a "different world" as "the horizon of possibility" for the newer than new. This search for and realisation of a "different world" or "new state of affairs" as the horizon of feasible possibilities for the newer than new may be identified with the concept of permanent modernisation.

The modern and modernity are interpreted as situations of a *new sensibility* of time within contemporaneity. The paradigms of the modern or modernity were established as contexts of Western society, culture, and art between the eighteen and the mid-twentieth centuries.[1] The feeling of modernity signifies the possibility of identifying the current moment: the here and now as opposed to the overcoming of the past and an expected future. The modern begins in the history of the West at the moment of an artistic and aesthetic that is, cultural and political break with the past as a safe tradition. The modern is characterised by opposing the present or contemporary time of the past—it rejects all narratives of memory, tradition, and history. For instance, Peter Osborne views the modern and modernity as expressions of a specific politics of time:

> "Modernity", we have seen, plays a peculiar dual role as a category of historical periodization: it designates the contemporaneity of an epoch to the time of

[1] Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Incomplete Project," in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, London: Pluto Press, 1985, 9.

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> its classification; yet it registers this contemporaneity in terms of a qualitatively new, self-transcending temporality which has the simultaneous effect of distancing the present from even that most recent past with which it is thus identified.[2]

In the European context, the politics of time signifies procedures whereby social, cultural, and artistic phenomena are selected with regard to contemporaneity, which means regarding differences between the past, the contemporary as the new or newer, and the future.

Modernism is a developed and "accelerated" modern. Modernism emerges when the contemporary interval of being here and now is posited as a practice that is superior to all aspects of social life and when the desire for the new is posited as a source of permanent social "breaks" leading either to emancipation or to cultural *fashion*. Whereas the relatively static modern was characterised by the bourgeois national industrial capitalism of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, modernism is characterised by moving from capitalism as an "industrial system of production" toward an internationalised global market system. In other words, the modern is defined by a recognised modernisation of production within national cultures, whereas modernism is determined by a global modernisation of mass consumption. Permanent modernist emancipation refers to processes of social, cultural, and artistic progress that direct human life toward ever-increasing freedom. Permanent fashion refer to consumerist craving for the new and newer than new that over time starts repeating itself, directing itself toward the production, exchange, and consumption of the newest. Modernism is thus a selective political practice that enables a choice that inevitably leads toward the new and newer than new.

At this point, the stable model of the bourgeois proprietary modern, based on aesthetic identification by way of a culturally protected privacy and realised autonomous art, is replaced by a permanent emergence of ever-newer artistic products with aesthetic or anti-aesthetic properties. Artistic products suggest novelty and consumerist enjoyment in the new, as opposed to the traditional model of identifying within one's own class and its patriarchal structures. Terry Eagleton has emphasised the class model of the modern aesthetic:

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[2] Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-garde*, London: Verso, 1995, 13–14.

> My argument, broadly speaking, is that the category of the aesthetic assumes the importance it does in modern Europe because in speaking of art it speaks of these other matters too, which are at the heart of the middle class's struggle for political hegemony.[3]

Eagleton's discussion of "the ideology of the aesthetic" and then T. J. Clark's critical identification of, say, the role of Impressionist painting in the construction of modern bourgeois life point to a transition from a static to a dynamised modernity, i.e. liberal modernism:

> As the context of bourgeois sociability shifted from community, family and church to commercialized or privately improvised forms—the streets, the cafés and resorts—the resulting consciousness of individual freedom involved more and more an estrangement from older ties; and those imaginative members of the middle class who accepted the norms of freedom, but lacked the economic means to attain them, were spiritually torn by a sense of helpless isolation in an anonymous indifferent mass. By 1880 the enjoying individual becomes rare in Impressionist art; only the private spectacle of nature is left.[4]

The modern is viewed as the determining context of a realised, urbanised, liberal, and bourgeois contemporaneity. In *The Arcades Project*, for instance, Benjamin wrote about the analogy between capitalism and nature: "Capitalism was a natural phenomenon with which a new dream-filled sleep came over Europe, and, through it, a reactivation of mythic forces."[5]

In his *Philosophy of New Music,* Adorno critically characterises the realised modern as the "dialectics of loneliness."[6] He thereby identified bourgeois contemporaneity as an effect of alienation in the industrial and emerging market world. Fredric Jameson likewise emphasizes the capitalist character of the liberal modern, regarding modernist abstract art, positing a correspondence between the

3 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990, 3.

4 T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris and Art of Manet and his Followers*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1985, 3–4.

5 Walter Benjamin, "K (Dream City and Dream House, Dreams of the Future, Anthropological Nihilism, Jung)," in *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002, 163.

6 Theodor W. Adorno, "Dialectic of Loneliness," in *Philosophy of New Music*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, 37–40.

abstraction of money and that of *painting and sculpture*: "Modernist abstraction, I believe, is less a function of capital accumulation as such than rather of money itself in a situation of capital accumulation."[7]

The Ontological Core of Modernism

There is more than one periodisation of modernism. For instance, according to Raymond Williams, modernism is periodised as art after 1950:

> "Modernism" as a title for a whole cultural movement and moment has then been retrospective as a general term since the 1950s, thereby stranding the dominant version of "modern" or even "absolute modern" between, say, 1890 and 1940. [...] Determining the process which fixed the moment of modernism is a matter, as so often, of identifying the machinery of selective tradition.[8]

Regarding Williams's notion of modernism, I will use the term "high modernism," dating it in the Western world in the post-WWII period. Unlike Williams, I will use modernism to label various phenomena in society, culture, and art that began around 1900, when there was an accelerated shift of cultural and artistic fashions: Post-Impressionism, various expressionisms, Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism, Cubo-Futurism, Suprematism, Neo-plasticism, Constructivism, Surrealism, Art Deco, *Retour à l'ordre*, New Objectivity, etc. We may understand Williams's modernism, that is, in my modification, "high modernism," as the highest or final stage of international modernisation as a social, cultural, and artistic project.

Historically, modernism, as the phenomenon of acceleration in the sequence of various paradigms of emancipation and types of fashions, signified technological, social, cultural, and artistic changes during the twentieth century. In such a periodization, modernism signified three characteristic phenomenological moments: (1) the break with the past, (2) the establishment of the contemporary, and (3) the anticipation of the future. Every fresh seizure of contemporaneity was signified with the demand that the feeling of confronting the new be re-

7 Fredric Jameson, "Culture and Finance Capital," in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998*, London and New York: Verso, 2009, 136–161.

8 Raymond Williams, "When Was Modernism?," in *Politics of Modernism*, London: Verso, 2007, 32.

peated regarding the new that had become the old and regarding the future that would become potentially possible only with the next turn from the new that would grow obsolete into the new that has yet to come and be the newest. This obsessive repeatability of attaining the newer than new would become the ontological core of modernism.

Thus emerges the formula of permanent repetition: "Times have changed" and again, "Times have changed," and again. [...] The consequence is that things no longer stand in the stable traditional or usual way. It seems as though something from the past has become superfluous or impossible,[9] and something new from the present has emerged in a way that was erstwhile unthinkable. To its contemporaries, the new therefore always seemed unjustified, opaque, and incomprehensible, although, at the same time, fatally attractive as well. That is probably why Theodor W. Adorno at the beginning of his *Aesthetic Theory* felt compelled to call for a redefining of the self-evidence of contemporary art: "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist."[10]

With the accelerated shifts of modernist paradigms, art increasingly differed from the real or the ideologically projected ideal tradition of great Western art (Antiquity, Renaissance, Baroque). It became necessary to perform a new interpretation of art and culture simultaneously and in parallel with the emergence of new art within a changed culture. That was probably why Arthur C. Danto made his claim that interpretation was constitutive of modernist art: "My view, philosophically, is that interpretations constitute works of art, so that you do not, as it were, have the artwork on one side and the interpretation on the other."[11]

This claim enables the understanding of the modernist notion of "artworld," which Danto opposed to the tradition of understanding the *pure* and *universal* work of art within the modern and an imaginary Western tradition that linked the modern with the timelessness of the classical, i.e. that of Antiquity: "To see

9 *Cf.* the logic of thinking about a changed state of things in Jacques Rancière, "In What Time Do We Live?," in *The State of Things*, London: Office for Contemporary Art, Norway and Koening Books, 2012, 12.

10 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, London: Continuum, 2002, 1.

11 Arthur C. Danto, "The Appreciation and Interpretation of Works of Art," in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, 23.

something as art requires something the eye cannot decry—an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld."[12]

Therefore, the art of modernism must be viewed in its variability as a complex web, intertwining the sensory and the discursive, and relating to cultural and social contexts.

The modern and modernism traversed the path from an anticipated potentiality, which would be the regime of alternative and avant-garde practice, to a realised potentiality as an attained new with all the consequences that accompany the establishment of artistic, cultural, and social hegemony in relation to other historical and geographical formations. Between anticipating a potentiality and realising it as something new, there comes the demand for something newer than what was already achieved, which leads toward transcending the realised modernity in order to reach an even more characteristic modernity. Modernism was more modern than the modern, and post-WWII modernism was more modern than interwar modernism.

Liberal *Différance*: Modernist Painting

The historical debates about modernism were developed on the basis of a canonical definition of the international—and this signifies hegemonic—Western modernism as a grand and totalising post-WWII *style*. This is the "Western story" of universal modernism and its realised autonomy, i.e., its emancipatory potentiality. Here we will mention Clement Greenberg's concept of modernist painting and Charles Harrison's critique of that concept.

Clement Greenberg interpreted the concept of "modernist painting," as it was established after WWII, ranging from abstract expressionism to post-painterly abstraction, as an expression of a historically directed evolution of the immanent means and effects of painting. Greenberg's aesthetics of painting is a neo-Kantian aesthetics of liberal artistic creativity with a precise experiential distinction between aesthetic judgement and aesthetic enjoyment in relation to

[12] Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld," in *Philosophy Looks at the Arts: Contemporary Readings in Aesthetics*, ed. Joseph Margolis, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986, 162.

intuitive insight.[13] This evolution led from illusionistic realist painting via Impressionism, Expressionism, and Cubism, to "pure abstraction," free of direct references to literary narratives or sculptural three-dimensionality. Greenberg's evolutionism posited modernism not as a break with the past, but as a gradual self-reflexive perfection and development of the autonomy of the artistic medium in discovering the immanent nature of painting. The medium of painting thus became the essential topic of a creative treatment of surface:

> Modernist painting asks that a literary theme be translated into strictly optical, two-dimensional terms before becoming the subject of pictorial art – which means its being translated in such a way that it entirely loses its literary character. [...]
> It should also be understood that the self-criticism of modernist art has never been carried on in any but a spontaneous and subliminal way. It has been altogether a question of practice, immanent to practice and never a topic of theory. [...][14]

Greenberg advocated aesthetic formalism based on the modern tradition. Modernist painting might therefore be interpreted as an evolution within the "tradition of modernity". He understood this notion of evolution, predicated on a modernisation of painting, not in the Marxist sense of "social practice," but in terms of liberal, i.e., individual mastering of creative skills in art as a free and specialised pursuit of human "self-expression" and "self-positing." Greenberg's interpretative discourse recognised the painterly productions of Claude Monet, Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, and the like as exceptional achievements of the modernist evolution whereby the pictorial plane witnessed pictorial inscriptions of the hand or the body of the artist. Those inscriptions could not be related verbally; they are exclusively a painterly trace and as such geared toward an optical effect that one may only indirectly and insecurely verbally present as metaphor in judging a work as such.

In Charles Harrison's view, Clement Greenberg was the critic who set up terms for periodizing and defining modernism in the sense of identifying the essential

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13 Clement Greenberg, "Intuition and the Esthetic Experience," in *Homemade Esthetics: Observations of Art and Taste*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 4–9.

14 Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" (1965), in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison, London: Harper & Row, 1986, 8–9.

properties of a painterly work of art.[15] Harrison viewed Greenberg's method of defining modernism as an essentialist objectivism opposed to the theoretical relativism of the avant-gardes and popular culture. For Greenberg, painting was always a matter of *objective taste*, rather than a demonstration of a theoretical position in a work of art. Or in Harrison's words: "For example, asked for evidence that esthetic judgments are indeed involuntary and objective, rather than being governed by specific theories or individual preferences, Greenberg pointed to a "'consensus (of taste) *over time*' which has settled on the defining high point of an artistic tradition."[16]

Greenberg's theory is characterised by his claims that the creative transcends the critical, that artistic practice is governed by intuitions as direct expressions of emotions, and by a direct, all-encompassing experience of the work of art. Therefore, artistic creativity invariably precedes theory, i.e. art theory is merely a secondary addition to the organic wholeness and fullness of artistic expression. Greenberg wrote: "Art is a matter strictly of experience, not of principles."[17]

Harrison opposed Greenberg's neo-Kantianism, which excluded any kind of intellectual engagement with artistic creativity and advanced an intuitive establishment of a unitary and universal model of modernism. In Harrison's view, in contrast to Greenberg's "one-dimensional definition of modernism," the history of modernism after the Second World War has been determined by two mutually opposed concepts of understanding the character of artistic labour.

The first is Greenberg's concept of high modernism, based on the link between intuition and taste, which brings the values of the autonomy of abstract painting into a position of aesthetic dogma in Abstract Expressionism and in post-painterly abstraction:

> The productions of the modern artist, it is assumed, are determined by some special insight into the nature of reality—be it the reality of the natural or of the social or of the psychological world. The work of art is an assertion of the human in the

15 Charles Harrison, "Introduction: The Judgment of Art," in Greenberg, *Homemade Esthetics*, xiii.

16 *Ibid*., xvii.

17 Clement Greenberg, "Abstract, Representational and So Forth" (1954), in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1961, 133.

> context of the real. Although the values of humanity are seen as "relatively constant," art of "quality" is a form of stimulus to spiritual change.[18]

The other voice, and this is Harrison's innovation, is critical of high modernism, where intuitions, spontaneity, expression, and aesthetics are independent of the semantic and political conditions of contemporary society, culture, and art:

> In the second version of the story, the first is taken as given. It is quoted in a spirit of scepticism, not as a true story, but as one typical of a certain culture and rooted in certain interests. The second voice seeks to explain what the first has said, and how it has come to be saying it.[19]

Harrison's thesis is that the first voice intended to show that artistic production always and by necessity intuitively preceded theory (the painting of Jackson Pollock and Kenneth Noland). By contrast, the other voice disregards this separation of the creative from the critical and shows that that distinction in artistic positions is not an effect of the nature of art or creative individualism, but a consequence of the organisation of artistic culture in society. This other voice (Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Donald Judd, Robert Morris) is determined by a critical approach that insists on a link between the conceptual and the sensual in the context of social differences and antagonisms.

Modernism and the Neo-avant-garde: Dialectical *Différance*

If one transferred Harrison's "second voice" from its Anglo-American context to a European, Asian, or South-American context, the critical potential of artistic acting against the autonomous aestheticism of high modernism could be identified with the term "neo-avant-garde". The concept of neo-avant-garde signifies a "second avant-garde" about which rather divergent interpretations exist.

For instance, the early avant-garde of the early twentieth century is viewed as original pioneering artistic acting with a pronounced transgressive and innovatory potential. The post-war avant-gardes are identified as institutionalised avant-gardes, i.e. second-hand avant-gardes, remakes of the first (the "histor-

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18 Charles Harrison, "A Kind of Context: Modernism in Two Voices," in *Essays on Art & Language,* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991, 5.

19 *Ibid.*

ical") avant-garde in the context of high modernism. For instance, in his retrospective defence of his thesis of the neo-avant-garde as an institutionalised avant-garde, Peter Bürger made the following suggestion:

> The argument of *Theory of the Avant-garde* runs as follows: the neo-avant-gardes adopted the means by which the avant-gardists hoped to bring about the sublation of art. As these means had, in the interim, been accepted by the institution, that is to say, were deployed as internal aesthetic procedures, they could no longer legitimately be linked to a claim to transcend the sphere of art. "The neo-avant-garde institutionalizes the avant-garde as art and thus negates genuinely avant-gardiste intentions".[20]

Against Bürger's conception, one could argue that after WWII the avant-garde realised and concretised those technological utopias and projects of the early avant-gardes that could not be realised before. For instance, solutions in art, design, and architecture that the Soviet avant-garde, Bauhaus, and De Stijl offered on a utopian level became part of the international style and mass market only in American high modernism.

Likewise, one might also argue that the neo-avant-garde was a specific set of movements and individual effects between 1950 and 1968 that critically provoked the unitary essentialism and universalism of high modernism. Therefore, the neo-avant-garde regime denotes a critique, subversion, or deconstruction of the realised possibilities of high modernism, or, more accurately, the artistic, social, and cultural hegemonies of the realised modern and modernisms.

The neo-avant-garde may be understood in two ways: (1) as a transgression that disrupts the newly established order of the latest hegemonic high modernism and (2) as a strategy and tactic of established modernism itself that, out of fear that otherwise it might turn into a frozen or petrified "new tradition", produces its own self-critique to destabilise, destroy, or overcome the attained state of affairs. We might compare thi dynamic as it is established between the avant-garde, modernism, and the neo-avant-garde with Thomas S. Kuhn's theory of scientific revo-

[20] Peter Bürger, "Avant-garde and Neo-avant-garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of Theory of the Avant-garde," *New Literary History* 41 (2010), 707. The interpolated quotation is from Peter Bürger, "The Avant-gardiste Work of Art," *Theory of the Avant-garde*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, 58.

lutions. The theory of paradigm shifts in science was applied to art by Charles Harrison in his interpretations of the activities of the Art & Language group.[21]

In other words, my position is that the avant-garde was an artistic or aesthetic vanguard or anticipation of modernism, whereas the neo-avant-garde was a critical and excessive practice within the dominant high modernist culture. One might say that in the context of liberal Western high modernism, predicated as it was by an aesthetic and poetic fetishization of the autonomy of the disciplines and the media of art, the neo-avant-gardes performed a trans-disciplinary critique or transgression by pointing to the potentialities of "the open work of art and acting in art," that is, to a political critique of the modernist professionalisation and institutionalisation of the production, exchange, and consumption of art (Lettrism, experimental art, happening, Neo-dada, Fluxus, New Tendencies). One might also say that the historical avant-gardes (Futurism, Dada, revolutionary constructivisms) generated alternative micro-social formations (groups, movements) that opposed the system of modern art at the time, which was still insufficiently institutionalised. On the other hand, the neo-avant-gardes became active against high modernism's formally and pragmatically established system of institutions. Whereas the historical avant-gardes, with their various techniques (collage, montage, assemblage, readymade, avant-garde periodicals as collage-montage visual texts), anticipated the aesthetic nature of emerging consumer, popular, and mass culture, the neo-avant-gardes acted in historical conditions where the paradigms of elite high art mModernism were explicitly opposed to those of consumer, mass, and popular culture. The aesthetic dialectic[22] of high taste (the autonomous values of art) and popular taste (the functions and effects of mass consumption) were thus confronted with a third party—the critical-subversive and emancipatory potential of the neo-avant-garde, which was nomadically traversing both systems—the high and the popular—of Modernist art, relativising their boundaries, deemed to be unconditional and impregnable at the time.

[21] Charles Harrison, "Introduction," in *Art & Language: Text zum Phänomen Kunst und Sprache*, Cologne: Verlag M. DuMont Schauberg, 1972, 14.

[22] *Cf.* the exhibition concept in *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture*, eds. Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1990 and Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996.

Modernism and the Neo-avant-garde: Argan's Project Theory

The relationship of Modernism and the neo-avant-garde may also be noted in Italian art historian Giulio Carlo Argan's theory of "the modern project." As a leftist intellectual writing in the European context, he recognised the emancipatory social potential of an innovative artistic practice that had traded its imaginary creative autonomy for the context of real social antagonisms. Unlike American conceptions of high modernism (Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg, Michael Fried), in Western Europe high modernism had no dominant canonical current; instead, the differences between various artistic modernisms were established in terms of political differences and their implementations in the then contemporary artworlds.

For Argan, it was important to critically re-examine the conditions of the relationship between art and society. In his view, the basic *dispositif* of modernism was established around the concept of the project of a critical and exploratory art within a neo-capitalist system that enslaved and alienated the individual. The dialectic of the individual (liberal) and the collective (social) is essential in his thinking. The modern project denotes plans, visions, projections, and anticipations of an emancipatory transformation of society and art. The modern project is associated with critical approaches to the notions of social, technical, and artistic progress in the name of social liberation. The project of art is characterised by participation in the social event. Therefore the artistic project is opposed to social passivity:

> Just as it once discovered in the object the immobile structure of the objective world, today art is discovering in the project the mobile structure of existence. The project, which art must furnish with a methodological model, finally constitutes a manoeuvring defence of social, historical life in its perennial conflict with eventuality and chance.[23]

By positing art as a project, Argan takes art itself into a complex and multifaceted fight for actualising human life in the modern world. Therefore, artistic projecting is the opposite from as well as an alternative to technological project-

[23] Đulio Karlo Argan (Giulio Carlo Argan), "Projekt i sudbina" (Project and Destiny, 1964), in: *Studije o modernoj umetnosti* (Studies in Modern Art), Belgrade: Nolit, 1982, 79. Italian original: C. G. Argan, "Progetto e destino," in *Progetto e destino*, Milan: Il saggiatore, 1965, 9-74.

ing *qua* programming, i.e. controlling alienated living in liberal neo-capitalism. In Arganian thinking, a liberal aesthetic and artistic liberation from the non-optical in the work is insufficient; art should instead be viewed as a domain of sociality and, therefore of the social struggle for human liberation and genuine emancipation. The target of his discourse is the technocratic and market alienation of neo-capitalist neoliberalism.

Argan developed his theoretical position by linking critical Western Marxism with an existentialist Sartrean examination of forms of life and the modernist trust in the potentiality of art as a *dispositif* of emancipation. In Argan's view, the survival of art in tomorrow's world hinges on the project, making the art of today conditioned by the art, culture, and society of tomorrow. In this respect, he is quite close to the neo-avant-garde way of thinking. Opposed to "market fashions", Argan offers the conception of a political change in art as an important factor in social emancipation. Rather than privileging the immanence of artistic form, Argan advocates anti-form (Informalism: Lucio Fontana, Alberto Burri) and art beyond the borders of artistic disciplines (post-Informalist art: Piero Manzoni, Enrico Castellani), to point to the place of the work or act of art

in a web of antagonistic social relations. According to Argan, art that acquires *an exploratory character*[24] initiates the passage from the work into performing practices and productions that provoke or even change forms of modern life amid alienated consumption.

Modernism and the Neo-avant-garde: Multiple Modernities

Beyond the Western context, the term "neo-avant-garde" signifies complex processes of artistic subversion and a critique of locally dominant modernisms, i.e. alter-modernisms. These are manifestations of modernisation "beyond the cultural-geographic sphere" of Western Europe and the United States. Alter-modernisms may denote various geographical modernities and modernisms that occurred in the specific contexts of colonial or real-socialist societies, away from direct or profound impacts of Western liberal modernism's hegemonies.

[24] Đulio Karlo Argan [Giulio Carlo Argan], "Umetnost kao istraživanje" [Art as Exploration, 1965], in *Studije o modernoj umetnosti*, 153–160. Italian original: G. C. Argan, "Arte come ricerca," in *Arte in Europa: scritti di storia dell'arte in onore di Edoardo Arslan*, Milano, 1966, 3-8.

Alter-modernisms differ from Western international modernism. In local environments, certain alter-modernisms become hegemonic centres of artistic influences, while others become their peripheral followers. In relation to the notions of "global modernity" as a multiplicity of alter-modernisms, Western modernity and modernism are viewed only as one possible instance of modernisation. That is why one speaks of "multiple modernisations" or "multiple modernisms": "This is seen to be indicated by the move away from an idea of the singularity of modernity, based on more traditional, non-linear, historical understandings, to discussions about the multiplicity of *modernities*."[25]

Destabilising "unitary" or "holistic" modernism led from asking "How to periodise unitary and universal modernism?" to asking how and why modernism took place and under what social, cultural, and artistic conditions. Furthermore, the concept of theoretical reflection on multiple modernities and multiple modernisms stems from three theoretical models that question unitary and universal Western modernism:

1. postcolonial studies, which project notions of modernity and modernisms in the Third World whilst "avoiding Euro-centrism"[26]—the colonial societies of Asia, Africa, South America, and the Pacific islands;
2. socialist and post-socialist studies, that address modernity and modernisms in the real-socialist societies of Europe and beyond, highlighting asymmetries with Western modernism—the so-called Second World societies;
3. the humanities and social studies, above all art-history studies,[27] led by concepts from the Spatial Turn.

The concept of horizontal or geographical distinctions in modernism is notable in authors working outside of the European context (China, the Arab world, South-American cultures), as well as in some European theorists of art. For instance, British art theorist Paul Wood's discussion of conceptual art may be read in terms of a horizontal distinction between Western and other modernisms:

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25 Gurminder K. Bhambra, "Introduction: Postcolonialism, Sociology, and the Politics of Knowledge Production," in *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*, New York: Palgrave, 2009, 5.

26 Gurminder K. Bhambra, "From Modernization to Multiple Modernities: Eurocentrism *redux*," in *Ibid.*, 56.

27 Piotr Piotrowski, "On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History," *Umèni / Art: Journal of the Institute for Art History,* Prague, 56 (2008): 378–83.

> [...] "conceptualism" takes on a double identity. "Analytical" conceptual art gets downgraded as the art of white male rationalists, mired in the very modernism they sought to critique. The expanded history, on the other hand, begins to excavate a huge array of artists, men and women alike, deemed to have been working in a "conceptualist" manner from the 1950s onwards, on a range of emancipatory themes ranging from imperialism to personal identity in far-flung places from Latin America to Japan, from Aboriginal Australia to Russia.[28]

This shows that in alter-modernisms, different neo-avant-gardes are established, too. For instance, neo-avant-gardes working in alter-modernist contexts are characterised by critiques of racial, gender, and class identities, as well as Western economic or cultural imperialism (Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, Antonio Dias, M. F. Husain, Wang Jin).

Socialist Modernism and Neo-avant-gardes: Permanent Transitions

The notions of the Western capitalist, i.e. liberal concept of modernisation, developed from modernity to modernism, were confronted by those of revolutionary communist modernisation in the countries of real socialism (i.e., the Second World). The primary communist modernisation was based on a revolutionary and anti-liberal ideology of modernisation. Above all, it concerned the urbanisation and industrialisation of the underdeveloped Russian Empire in the form of the Soviet Union.

One Leninist slogan ran as follows: "Industrialisation + Electrification = Communism." The slogan may be explained by reference to Lenin's programmatic speech about the overcoming of Russia's industrial backwardness:

> Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country. Otherwise the country will remain a small-peasant country, and we must clearly realize that. [...] Only when the country has been electrified, and industry, agriculture and transport have been placed on the technical basis of modern large-scale industry, only then shall we be fully victorious.[29]

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[28] Paul Wood, "Approaching Conceptual Art," in *Conceptual Art*, London: Tate Publishing, 2002, 9.

[29] "Vladimir Lenin, "Report on the Work of the Council of the People's Commissars. December 22, 1920," http://soviethistory.macalester.edu/index.php?page=subject&SubjectID=19

In the Soviet context, modernisation determined industrial and economic development, associated with realising the ideal of the "class struggle." But in terms of aesthetics and art, modernisation ranged from radical avant-garde projects (Cubo-futurism, Suprematism, Constructivism) in the early days of the revolution to the canonisation of socialist realism as a stable expression of modern revolutionary and didactic creativity. The ideal of modern art in terms of modern realism was established as the canonised ideal. For instance, Leon Trotsky defined revolutionary realist art in the following way:

> When one speaks of revolutionary art, two kinds of artistic phenomena are meant: the works whose themes reflect the Revolution, and the works which are not connected with the Revolution in theme, but are thoroughly imbued with it, and are colored by the new consciousness arising out of the Revolution.[30]

Trotsky's understanding of the revolution was in terms of "the permanent revolution."[31] One might understand it as a radical and permanent modernisation, passing through constant transitions toward the universal and geographically global communist society of the future. Moving from an avant-garde to a revolutionary and then to a socialist-realist modernisation of art meant creating a specific modern expression serving the party and the state.

Then, in the 1950s and 1960s, the movement from socialist realism to socialist modernism marked the constitution of a hegemonic artistic pattern in Eastern Europe. Socialist modernism pointed to the potentiality of a liberal-oriented creation of abstract—*qua* Western—artistic forms and, at the same time, to a symbolic or topical interpretation of such forms, articulated by the party. The liberalisation of socialist realism in favour of socialist modernism enabled the establishment of Eastern European socialist modernism as a bureaucratised and institutionalised art in state socialism.

21electric&Year=1921, accessed: 3 April 2014.

30 Leon Trotsky, "Revolutionary and Socialist Art" (1924), in *Literature and Revolution*, London: Haymarket Books 2000, 123.

31 Leon Trotsky, "What Did the Theory of the Permanent Revolution Look Like in Practice?," in *The Permanent Revolution, and Results and Prospects*, Seattle: Red Letter Press, 2010, 231–52.

The emergence of the neo-avant-garde in Eastern Europe was a critique of the link between socialist realism as a revolutionary art and the phenomenon of socialist modernism[32] as the art of a bureaucratised post-revolutionary state. Eastern European neo-avant-garde practices[33] were motivated by seeking to establish an "alternative artistic space" or alternative artworlds. Alternative spaces were outside of the bureaucratically led institutions of socialist realism and modernism. Alternative spaces were "dark zones" within tightly controlled societies with one-dimensional state programmes of supporting and surveying culture and art.

Alternative artistic space might also be termed "the second public sphere."[34] In Eastern Europe, in the domain of culture, neo-avant-garde artistic practices took place outside the official state public sphere, in spaces where privacy was territorialised as public space (from the studio to the commune). Eastern European neo-avant-garde artists created alternative institutions, such as exhibitions and theatre plays, in private apartments or studios, founded communes on the principles of self-organising and direct democracy, published so-called *samizdat* periodicals and books in small print runs. Also, Eastern European neo-avant-gardes occupied socially indeterminate spaces that were meant for youth culture, student cultural institutions, as well as amateur cultural institutions (for instance, photo and film clubs), which in socialist societies had state support as a matter of policy.

Eastern European neo-avant-garde artists built their productions by moving nomadically through various art disciplines (literature, theatre, music, film, fine arts). They produced open and multimedia works of art (happenings, performances, installations, artists' books) that represented generational, gender, and cosmopolitan identities geared toward stepping out of closed societies. In the collectivist cultural order of real and self-managed socialism in Eastern

32 Ješa Denegri, "Inside or Outside *Socialist Modernism*? Radical Views on the Yugoslav Art Scene, 1950–1970," in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991*, eds. Dubravka Đurić and Miško Šuvaković, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003, 170–208.

33 Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, London: Reaktion Books, 2009.

34 The term was introduced by performing arts theorists Adam Czirak and Katalin Cseh in the conference "Performing Arts in the Second Public Sphere" held at the Freie Universität Berlin, on 9–11 May 2014.

Europe and in contrast to the pronounced individualism of their Western colleagues, Eastern-European neo-avant-garde artists worked with *dialectical differences halfway* between liberal individualism and self-organised collectivism. Noteworthy examples of Eastern-European neo-avant-garde practices certainly include the theatre experiments of Polish director Tadeusz Kantor and multimedia artist Józef Rabakowski, those of Czech visual poets and performers (Milan Knižák, Jiři Valoch, Jiři Kovanda), the Slovenian OHO group, the Croatian group Gorgona, Hungarian experimental artists Miklós Erdélyi and Támas Szentjóby, Serbian composer Vladan Radovanović, and Yugoslav author Bora Ćosić.

Conclusion: Difference / Dialectics

My intent in this article was to point to the hybrid complexity of modern and modernist phenomena in relation to the criteria of the *politics of time* (dialectic historicisation) and *politics of space* (geographic difference). In relation to every contemporaneity that has occurred or is occurring at different times and in different places, the modern and modernism required different conceptualisations of "modernisation" and different conceptualisations of a critical response to the transition of modernisation practices from the margins of society to its hegemonic centre, both internationally and locally.