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CONCEPTUALISM: POLITICS, PROTEST AND THE URBAN

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Abstract

This thesis concentrates on attempts by artists to engage with issues which, in some instances, promote difference in the face of evolving forms of power and dissent in society, but which also re-constitute a case for the political throughout visual culture.

Section one looks at the internationally dominant American art preceding conceptualism, an analysis of which formed a critical foundation for later art production. Section two examines ways in which some American artists took up this criticism, making work, which, in part, evolved from Abstract Expressionism while rejecting its emphasis on specialisation.

Sections three and four concentrate on some of the more politicised European art of that period which was produced under very different circumstances to the US post war economic boom. Part three, in particular, highlights these circumstances, focusing on work by the Hungarian artist Miklós Erdélyi in which he employs many of the strategies later associated with conceptualism in the West. His work, *Unguarded Money*, was an overtly political piece constituting a form of art-activism with a Situationist understanding of power relations and dissent in urban geography. This section also describes precedents for a Hungarian avant-garde and shows how, in some instances, left-wing politics were central to this. The critical nature of *Unguarded Money* counters the view of a simple cold war divide where free innovation in the West supposedly contrasted Eastern Bloc Socialist Realist orthodoxy.

Section five looks at a number of works from the West. However, this includes one piece made by the Catalan *Grup de Treball* working under the Spanish dictatorship, further questioning assumptions about democracy in western visual art during the Cold War. Again, urban geography, with its interstices of social and political control, is central to art production and political commitment. The section further examines these issues within the liberal democracies; in relation to class, with Victor Burgin's poster *Possession*; gender, with Martha Rosler's *Semiotics of the Kitchen*; anti-Vietnam war protest, looking at *The Artists' Tower of Protest* in LA; and the issue of migrant workers is examined in *Welcome to America's Finest Tourist Plantation*, a work made by a collaboration of Southern Californian artists. However, the section begins by looking at a piece by Robert Barry which relates more specifically to commodification and distribution within the art world, paralleling similar developments in society.

The conclusion examines recent attempts to maintain a critical, politicised art in the face of globalisation, the end of the Cold War, and a prevailing sense of an apparent lack of alternatives to multinational capitalism. The section looks at recent protests and art production within a de-centralised, non-hierarchical paradigm, which, while retaining a recognition and acceptance of difference, might connect across boundaries to constitute what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have called a 'multitude of singularities'. This is again placed in the context of the urban, and the role of art in phenomena such as gentrification.

"THIS IS WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE."

Chant at recent anti-war demonstrations

The end of the Cold War was characterised by a prevailing sense of victory for Neo-liberal capitalism combined with a lack of viable alternatives. This uncertainty about the possibility of alternatives to capitalism engendered a disinclination in society at large to engage with politics: a disinclination, which was, arguably, reflected in the art of the 1990s.¹ This absence of political intention in much recent art contrasts the central position of these concerns in Conceptual Art during the late sixties and early seventies.² Since the forms of production and social life during the period of the Vietnam War, a period which experienced a widespread radicalism, were so different to contemporary forms, the recent absence of engagement should, perhaps, come as no surprise. Some would now go so far as to claim that art cannot have a legitimate engagement with the political.³

This position is hardly new, echoing, as it does, claims made for artistic autonomy during the earlier part of the Cold War by the American critic Clement Greenberg. Just as some of Greenberg's opponents refuted the notion of an autonomous art, there are those now who highlight the fact that the implicit politics of the culture industry permeate contemporary art. In this reading, cultural production, which does not actively engage with its wider political context passively embodies society's dominant values making a truly apolitical art impossible. However, even among this critical group there are still some who defend political engagement in art through a metropolitan exclusivity, which, despite their best intentions, reflects some of the elitism they reject.⁴ This emphasis on the role of the traditional metropolitan centres, at the expense of the periphery, now, in itself, seems reactionary. If the radicalism of the 1960s (including its hypercritical Conceptual Art) led to any successes at all then surely they are typified by the recognition and empowerment of difference, a rejection of the centralised institutions and forms, certainly in terms of artistic practice but also in relation to gender, race, and regional autonomy.

If conceptualism also questioned the normative category of art itself, then perhaps the ensuing absence of the political from much art is unsurprising: arguably, art as such,

constitutes a reactionary category within a broader visual culture.⁵ Post-modern protest movements reject aspirations to the centralised state power of modernity, hoping to avoid its accompanying authoritarianism. Similarly, does the apparent political disengagement of visual art, as a category with its own centralised institutions and recognisable forms, actually mean that the political neutrality of contemporary art is all that could reasonably be expected to persist after the critique of Conceptualism?

The legacy of Conceptualism is clearly visible in recent art: in its diverse media and in the terminology of Neo-Conceptualism. However, what is the value of this if it has been divorced from a critical base? Did Conceptual Art ultimately fail or are its original aims still relevant and being pursued?

This dichotomy of material and aims is something that conceptual artists were contemporaneously aware of. Writing about 'the failure of Conceptual Art' in his essay '1975' Joseph Kosuth cited his 'reservations as to whether "failure" adequately describes the rather complex history of its diverse currents of artistic intent.' He dispels the myths of conceptual paraphernalia and alternative media as in themselves radical. Art can exhibit qualities associated with a rejection of traditional forms, implying critique, whilst embracing the conservative. For example, Robert Smithson, was another major figure from the period who exhibited alongside artists associated with conceptualism and whose art hardly makes him a traditionally conservative figure. However, Smithson's land art, with its acceptance of entropy, led him to different allegiances: support for Nixon and ingratiating business.⁶

Certainly the activities of the mass of practitioners within what is now an (art) institution is a betrayal of the impetus of its original aims. Stylistic conceptual art (hereafter SCA) is to my view superstructure begetting superstructure: a formalistic hypostatization of cultural sleepwalking; as dependent on and as expressive of the institutions of the prevailing dominating socio-political-economic ideology as is the current practice of the more traditional modes of art-making (painting and sculpture).⁷

Against a formalist definition of Conceptual Art and what Kosuth saw as an 'annexation' of conceptual structures minus their critical basis, he highlights Conceptualism's critique of conservative institutions and forms: against SCA he posits a Theoretical Conceptual Art (TCA). Through these characteristically bureaucratic acronyms, Kosuth identifies an ideological divide at a time, in the mid 70s, of a conservative retrenchment of power. In terms of art production, the period saw painting and sculpture regain something of their former primacy, accompanied by, as Kosuth saw it, a variant formalism in Conceptual Art based on the 'logic of modernism'. In contrast to the institutional norms of SCA, Kosuth advocated an 'anthropologized art' which 'must concern itself with exposing institutional contradictions and thereby obliterating art ideologies which presuppose the autonomy of art'.⁸ Kosuth also attached an ethnological significance to this. At the time Conceptual Art was largely associated with the English-speaking world and, though a wider interpretation of Conceptualism may now seem commonplace, until quite recently, anglo-centricity still dominated major surveys including *L'art conceptuel* at ARC in Paris, 1989-90 and *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1995-96. However, the later *Global Conceptualism* (Queens Museum, New York, 1998) provided a wider interpretation of Conceptualism, encompassing artists and places outside these more established centres.⁹ This thesis will also look at some of those formerly peripheral artists whose work employed conceptual strategies with politics at their centre.

For Kosuth this art's awareness of its 'ethnologic' is part of its critique of 'the prevailing dominating socio-political-economic ideology'. Precluding the kind of metropolitan exclusivity mentioned above, this further entails rejection of the kind of heroic myth of a modernist avant-garde as described by Habermas':

The avant-garde understands itself as invading unknown territory, exposing itself to the dangers of sudden, shocking encounters, conquering an as yet unoccupied future. The avant-garde must find a direction in a landscape into which no one seems to have yet ventured.¹⁰

In the case of Abstract Expressionism, the dominant form of artistic production preceding conceptualism, this advance took place within the formal confines of modern

specialisation and concentration on that which, in Greenberg's terms, was particular to each artist's preferred form. However, the period Kosuth reviewed in '1975' questioned these constraints in both art and society. A top down culture producing and re-producing an elite autonomous art was no more a given than similar power structures in society.

[...]The great theoretical advantage of the Marxist topography, i.e. of the spatial metaphor of the edifice (base and superstructure) is simultaneously that it reveals that questions of determination (or of index of effectivity) are crucial; that it reveals that it is the base which in the last instance determines the whole edifice; and that, as a consequence, it obliges us to pose the theoretical problem of the types of 'derivatory' effectivity peculiar to the superstructure, i.e. it obliges us to think what the Marxist tradition calls conjointly the relative autonomy of the superstructure and the reciprocal action of the superstructure on the base.¹¹

Althusser's determination of superstructure by base, while recognising other effects, accords with Kosuth's description of TCA against a 'superstructure begetting superstructure' SCA, which recapitulates the supposed autonomy of Abstract Expressionism. An 'anthropologized art' refutes the autonomy associated with SCA or Abstract Expressionism. This theoretically rigorous art, with its reference to the overall structures of society is, necessarily, a political art.

This thesis will also look at the way in which the spatial metaphor has been applied to the physical environment. Urban Geography and the influence of the Situationists formed part of a climate in which artists gained greater awareness of, and further renegotiated, institutional settings.

However, the urban setting and its production of particular types of space are also revealing in terms of the great ideological divide of the period. When Henri Lefebvre asked if state socialism had produced a space of its own he was emphasising the importance of a revolution's impact on its environment:

A revolution that does not produce its own space has not realized its full potential; indeed it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses.¹²

In this sense of how little the Cold War saw a significant transformative effect on the environment of the Eastern Bloc the divide between East and West now seems more porous.

Accordingly, though associated with the dominant Western culture conceptual practices went on in other continents and behind the iron curtain where particular local circumstances were, nevertheless, frequently central to a conceptual critique. For example, in the Eastern Bloc, even minor deviation from the formal orthodoxy of Socialist Realism was sometimes seen as an attack on power. In some respects the oppositional role of such work makes it easier to clearly identify Kosuth's line of Conceptualism in work produced outside the major centres of the West.

Tracing developments within the canon while paralleling them with art seen as peripheral from other ideological blocs, this thesis will show how conceptualism employed a critique of power relations in which politics were central. Furthermore, it will show how a view of this period as a straightforward Cold War divide between Western democracies and the Communist Bloc, doesn't adequately account for some of the most critical art produced.

The Cold War finished with economic collapse in the Eastern Bloc, increasingly deregulated capitalist expansion around the globe, and the re-drawing of national borders and boundaries along with significant changes in forms of production, both cultural and industrial. Among texts charting the progress and origins of globalization, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*, provides a rigorous account. Hardt is a literary theorist and professor at Duke University, while Antonio Negri has been a lecturer in political science in Paris as well as a professor at the University of Padua. During the 80s Negri worked in France collaborating with, among others, Michel Foucault and Giles Deleuze. Hardt and Negri's description of new configurations in the post-imperial world led Frederic Jameson to call *Empire* 'prophetic' and 'the first great

new theoretical synthesis of the new millennium'; it will be a constant theoretical touchstone in this thesis.¹³ Hardt and Negri have also re-examined the spatial metaphor and accompanying changes in production resulting from globalization:

Most significant, the spatial divisions of the three Worlds (First, Second and Third) have been scrambled so that we continually find the First in the Third, the Third in the First, and the Second almost nowhere at all. Capital seems to be faced with a smooth world - or really, a world defined by new complex regimes of differentiation and homogenization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization. The construction of the paths and limits of these new global flows has been accompanied by a transformation of the dominant productive processes themselves, with the result that the role of industrial factory labour has been reduced and priority given instead to communicative, cooperative, and affective labour.¹⁴

Conceptualism reflected this shift in production toward information, re-examining accompanying changes in relations between institution, artist, curator, collector, and viewer, and moves away from established territories such as the gallery and art object. Critical art had to move, not only between material sites of contestation but into areas of theoretical and political debate. Sometimes this has meant dealing directly with issues and locale in art approximating a form of protest. Contentious issues such as the migration of populations around the globe and the gentrification of inner cities, in a sense, become sites of discussion. Art can play an engaged role or, as with Kosuth's definition of SCA, it can collude, even unwittingly, in the assertion of power. For example, a work called *The Source* was recently installed in the atrium of the London Stock Exchange.

The Source is a dynamic piece of sculpture specially designed by artists Greyworld for the London Stock Exchange. Permanently positioned in the main atrium of our new building at Paternoster Square, The Source consists of 729 spheres, suspended on metal cables stretching the full height of the 32-metre, 8-storey atrium.¹⁵



Figure 1: Greyworld: *The Source* in London's Stock Exchange and with a BBC reporter reading financial reports.

The Source is a well-made installation containing many working parts and, as developed by a team of collaborators, its production bears little resemblance to more traditional works by any individual artist/author. However, its movements, directed by fluctuations on the stock exchange, betray little critical engagement with this institution. Though artists such as Hans Haacke and Sophie Calle have critiqued institutions through engagement rather than rejection, Greyworld's piece does neither. Furthermore, *The Source* features as a back-drop to BBC financial reports. The state broadcaster's juxtaposition of the stock market, reports from Iraq and *The Source*, equates business with news (and by implication truth), as well as equating democracy with capitalism. Then, to complete this, art as an implicit expression of freedom, appears at the centre of it all. While *Greyworld* may not work mainly within the art world, they do fulfil the role of artist-consultants, working 'within major industry', as envisaged by Robert Smithson.¹⁶

All art has become public art, not in the sense of a Henry Moore sculpture imposed on a housing estate, but in as much as even the most gallery bound contemporary art plays an ever more crucial role in shaping urban geography. Art has played a vanguard role in the gentrification of many Western cities, a process many artists may not support and which, in the long term, doesn't benefit them. Yet art is still seen as central to democratic culture and much is made of this as evidence of freedom of expression.

Rosalyn Deutsche is an art historian and critic who has written on the subject since the 80s.

I have been interested in public art discourse not because I seek a type of art that is located in some universally accessible site but because the discourse about public art is itself a political site, a site, that is, of contests over the meaning of democracy and, importantly, the meaning of the political.¹⁷

It seems almost impossible for artists to produce work which is not now subject to the sort of 'annexation' described by Kosuth. This resembles, in a heightened way, the position of abstract expressionist painters in the 1950s whose work stood for something during the Cold War which, considering their radical origins, they may have repudiated. Contemporary art has reached a similar formal point of acceptance by the establishment where Habermas' earlier description of an avant-garde invading unknown territory can no longer function as anything but parody.

With the political in art all pervasive, some contemporary work aims to create a space which, if only briefly, provides the opportunity for unmediated relations. Other work engages in overtly activist roles employing strategies associated with conceptualism, (its processes, media, and presentation), but in such a way that the idea of the work as art is less important than the engagement with issues. These strategies, as Kosuth's description of stylistic formal art and the 'logic of modernism' indicated, could be used by any ideology that chooses them, but are, nevertheless, appropriate for art that protests the 'prevailing dominating socio-political-economic ideology'.

Notes

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- ¹ Marcus Verhagen, 'Micro-Utopianism', in *Art Monthly*, December-January 2003-2004, p. 2.
- ² Paul Wood, *Conceptual Art*, (London: Tate, 2002), p.75
- ³ Michael Archer, 'Crisis? What Crisis?' in *Art Monthly*, March 2003/no. 264
- ⁴ Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*, (London: Verso, 1999), p. 128.
- ⁵ <http://www.variant.randomstate.org/10texts/Mulholland.html>
- ⁶ Blake Stimson, 'Conceptual Work and Conceptual Waste', in *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice*, ed' by Michael Corris, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2004), p. 286.
- ⁷ Joseph Kosuth, '1975', in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro & Blake Stimson (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT, 1999), pp. 334-349, p.335).
- ⁸ Kosuth, p. 339.
- ⁹ Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language*, (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: MIT, 2001), p. 36.
- ¹⁰ Jurgen Habermas, 'Modernity: An Incomplete Project' in *Art in Theory* ed. by Charles Harrison & Paul Wood, (Oxford: Blackwell,1992), pp.1000-1008, (p.1001).
- ¹¹ Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Art in Theory*, ed. by Charles Harrison & Paul Wood, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp.928-936 (p.929).
- ¹² Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans by Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 54.
- ¹³ <http://www.politische-geographie.de/empire.htm>
- ¹⁴ Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard, 2000), p. xii of the Preface.
- ¹⁵ <http://www.londonstockexchange.com/en-gb/about/coooverview/thefsource.htm>
- ¹⁶ Stimson, p. 282.
- ¹⁷ Rosalyn Deutsche, *The Question of Public Space*, www.thephotographyinstitute.org/www/journals/1998/rosalyn_deutsche.html.

1. BEFORE CONCEPTUALISM

WHAT HAD TO BE EXHIBITED AND MADE EXPLICIT WAS THAT WHICH WAS UNIQUE AND IRREDUCIBLE NOT ONLY IN ART IN GENERAL BUT ALSO IN EACH PARTICULAR ART — EACH ART HAD TO DETERMINE THROUGH THE OPERATIONS PECULIAR TO ITSELF THE EFFECTS PECULIAR AND EXCLUSIVE TO ITSELF

CLLEMENT GREENBERG, 'MODERNIST PAINTING'

IN THIS NEW FACTORY-SOCIETY PRODUCTIVE SUBJECTIVITIES ARE FORGED AS ONE-DIMENSIONAL FUNCTIONS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. THE FIGURES, STRUCTURES AND HIERARCHIES BECOME EVER MORE WIDESPREAD AND MINUTELY DEFINED AS CIVIL SOCIETY IS INCREASINGLY ABSORBED INTO THE STATE

MICHAEL HARDT AND ANTONIO NEGRI, 'EMPIRE'

In looking at Conceptualism, and its political implications, it is first necessary to look at the art preceding it, particularly, in post-war America. This is necessary both because of its formal innovation at the forefront of Art, and because this same preoccupation with the formal led it to a political impasse as high Modernist formalism became synonymous with Western values and US Cold War ideology.¹ This all helped to form a critical foundation for later artists.

Conceptual artists came to see Modernism, enshrined in the writing of the critic Clement Greenberg, as played out; its standards indicators of what they didn't want to value or produce.² The artists championed by Greenberg did have political convictions and some, including Pollock, Rothko, and Newman, had previously demonstrated commitment to them, both in their work and through other activities.³ However, the work of Pollock, De Kooning and Rothko, represented a formal advance to the exclusion of political considerations.

Following Greenberg's own focus on the formal qualities of each medium, these artists were concerned with the attributes delimiting their particular medium of painting. Greenberg initially argued for this modern specialisation as an alternative to overtly politicised art such as Socialist Realism or its Nazi equivalent as well as kitsch, but he eventually disregarded any wider cultural or political context as his writing became preoccupied with exclusively formal concerns.

In 1939, when Greenberg wrote *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* for the Trotskyist *Partisan Review*, he was part of a broadly Marxist scene in pre-war New York and argued for the development of a culture insulated from the pernicious effects of the mass market.

Today we no longer look towards socialism for a new culture – as inevitably as one will appear, once we do have socialism. Today we look to socialism simply for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now.⁴

The committed tone of the piece, written on the eve of war, indicates a vision of art as a component in a greater social and political context. However, as America moves closer to participation in the war, Greenberg renegotiates his position. By 1940 wider concerns are set

aside as he increasingly advocates a kind of 'art for art's sake': 'The arts lie safe now, each within its 'legitimate' boundaries, and free trade has been replaced by autarchy'.⁵ Theodore Adorno, exiled in America during the Nazi era, was critical of this kind of 'autonomous art'.

[...] any literature which therefore concludes that it can be a law unto itself, and exist only for itself, degenerates into ideology no less.⁶

For Adorno the structure of Western society was such that autonomy could not be preserved against the doctrine of the market.

This is not a time for political art, but politics has migrated into autonomous art, and nowhere more so than where it seems to be politically dead.⁷

Before Conceptualism emerged as a more critical practice, American painters, especially in New York, occupied the dominant position previously held by European centres before the war. Hostility towards the avant-garde in totalitarian Europe had initially forced artists towards centres in the remaining liberal democracies - principally Paris. Eventually, with the whole continent threatened, many went to America, some remaining after 1945.

What effect did these émigrés have in America? After the war, the impression of a shift in dominance in visual art from Europe to the US is notable.⁸ However, while American artists absorbed some European formal innovations, more significantly, US society was itself changing. American involvement in WW2 meant a move from isolationism to an international role. This was arguably an extension of changes dating from the previous decade and Roosevelt's New Deal.

The New Deal constituted a real departure from the previous forms of the bourgeois regulation of economic development. [...] the importance of the New Deal should be gauged not only in terms of its capacity to restructure the relations of production and power within a single dominant capitalist country but also, above all, in terms of its effect throughout the world - effects that were not direct or straightforward but nonetheless profound.⁹

The New Deal drew support across American society: trade unions and the poor supported Roosevelt's programs to reduce unemployment, while large-scale business interests took

public money in contracts for ambitious projects that included a massive dam building program. As a response to the depression that followed the First World War, the New Deal produced what Hardt and Negri describe as 'the highest form of *disciplinary* government'.

We are not referring to the juridical and political forms that organize it. We are simply referring primarily to the fact that in a disciplinary society, the entire society, with all its productive and reproductive articulations, is subsumed under the command of capitalist production.¹⁰

Post-war American art reflected the political and economic climate of the Cold War. However, the formal innovation of Abstract Expressionism, with its apparent freedom of experimentation, mirrored the Roosevelt era's incorporation of elements of left wing thought during the depression. Formal experimentation was not only accommodated within a capitalist economy but became synonymous with that way of life. Some on the Old Left, in common with Greenberg, saw this as a gain in itself, a victory for freedom of expression over totalitarianism. More significantly, powerful proponents of American business also supported this liberal program through patronage of institutions founded by business dynasties. The Guggenheim, Whitney, and Museum of Modern Art reflected culturally the influence of their founders and patrons in the economy. These institutions espoused a program of Modern Art as an expression of Western freedoms, but the terms of this canon were largely dictated by their choices. Again, this can be seen as a retrenchment of the New Deal's apparently broad consensus.

In the United States, the New Deal was supported by a strong political subjectivity among both popular forces and the elite. The continuity of the liberal and populist faces of American progressivism from the beginning of the century converged in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's action program.¹¹

During the 1930s the consensual climate in the US was reflected internationally as the Popular Front united Liberals and Social Democrats with Marxists. Previous closely held convictions about class struggle were subsumed in an atmosphere of co-operation.

State funding for art, as part of Roosevelt's wider 'action program', took the form of projects promoting the aims of the New Deal, such as the Federal Art Project, involving some of those artists who came to prominence after the war. They shared similar social and political

concerns with broadly socialist convictions and many of their works reflected the effects of the depression on America.¹² These were often depicted in a kind of American genre painting. Jackson Pollock's painting from the thirties *Going West* (Fig' 2) is concerned with the migration typical of the time; the rural poor forced to leave the environmental disaster of the dust bowl in search of work, probably in California. Pollock's mentor, Thomas Hart Benton, was a progenitor of 'American Scene' painting, as it had come to be known, so Pollock's training was in keeping with the requirements of the Federal Art Project.



Figure 2: Jackson Pollock, *Going West*, (1934-35), oil on board, 38 x 53 cm.

With its distortion of scale and form reminiscent of European Expressionism, *Going West* also highlights Pollock's awareness of developments in European art, particularly, in this case, the work of Van Gogh. Yet these formal considerations do not deviate from the main purpose of the image: whether the subject was agricultural dereliction or urban poverty, an essentially illusionistic treatment predominates during the period.¹³

However, in the post-war era different attitudes prevailed. The dissipation of class struggle in the Popular Front led to an expedient liberal homogenisation of radical elements, such as a drive for full employment and increased consumer spending power. The pre-war failure of the left to fight fascism along with the adoption of reactionary precepts in the arts, defeat in Spain, Stalinist show trials, the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact, and myriad disillusionment, understandably led artists to doubt political commitment.¹⁴ Combined with McCarthyist anti-communism and a consumer boom which bolstered the art market, the 1950s saw sufficient inducement for previously radical artists to revise their positions.¹⁵

Laissez-faire capitalism was presented as the desirable Western alternative to the controlled economy in the Eastern Bloc.¹⁶ Along with purported economic freedom it was important to be seen similarly to espouse freedom of speech and thought, and of course, as an expression of this, artistic freedom. However, this same period saw anti-communist blacklisting and witch-hunts. In practice, America's economy was increasingly dominated by big business while foreign policy became more interventionist. However, some art did flourish in this climate and, recalling the outright persecution of the European avant-garde, it is possible to see how the acceptance of innovative American art could be seen as a victory of sorts.

Abstract Expressionism dominated this period in America. Although those associated with the group included the photographer Aaron Siskind and the sculptor David Smith, Abstract Expressionism is predominantly associated with painters including Pollock, Rothko, De Kooning, Still, and Gorky.¹⁷ Painting was still seen as the dominant visual art form, a value judgement soon to be regarded as deeply conservative.¹⁸ The paintings of these American artists were largely abstract although some figurative imagery was apparent. For example, in the case of Pollock's work, figurative elements were integrated into an overall abstraction, and in De Kooning's work figuration re-emerges from abstraction. Not only did their work seem to represent values of free expression as embodied in their experimental technique but, unlike American popular culture, it emanated an aura of the high brow and intellectually authoritative. In writings such as *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* and later, more explicitly, in *Modernist Painting*, Greenberg made a case for this kind of abstract painting as an antidote to the deluge of popular culture.

In some ways his ideas echo Adorno's resistance to the manipulative effects of mass culture. The difference is that while Greenberg's account of the well-crafted, unique, art object allows a contemplative experience separate from more temporal and coercive mainstream culture it also precludes any political content as a crude diversion from the purity of the form. The artist is supposed to be concerned only with that which is integral to their medium. In painting, this was seen as a continuation of the tendency from Manet and onwards through cubism to acknowledge flatness of surface. This concern took precedence over illusionistic depiction or

reference to subject matter beyond the form itself. So while certainly refuting mass culture, Greenberg's ideas are open to criticism as defending the kind of 'autonomous art', which Adorno saw as having a symbiotic relationship to 'kitsch':

Both bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change [...] Both are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which, however, they do not add up.¹⁹

It was expedient for the Cold War American establishment to highlight Abstract Expressionism as an example of the artistic freedom of expression enjoyed in the West.²⁰ With their previously left wing sympathies, Abstract Expressionist artists were not necessarily comfortable with this role. Once again, however, the Old Left's disillusionment with the failures of the 30s mitigated any discomfort. This confusion over political choices combined with a richness in other thought, such as Jungian psychoanalysis, led to a predominance of other concerns. In keeping with this:

Pollock and Rothko dabbled in psychoanalysis and classical myth... they were also directly affected by the topical theme of 'Modern Man'.²¹

Although somewhat at odds with the strictly object oriented aesthetic of Greenberg's criticism, these themes undoubtedly appeared and reappeared in Pollock's work. This was the so-called 'Age of Anxiety'; the horrors of occupied Europe and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which were followed by nuclear proliferation, created a sense of post war unease. Perhaps unsurprisingly, humanist concerns found a ready audience:

Whether embodied in magazine articles, films, or socio-philosophical treatises (by the likes of Lewis Mumford and Archibald MacLeish), this line of thought held man to be fundamentally irrational, driven by unknown forces from within and without. Hence the typical film noir plot in which the haunted hero-figure becomes enmeshed in crime or violence for reasons beyond his control. It is not difficult to imagine Pollock mythologizing himself in such terms, but the larger point is that, however much Abstract Expressionist bohemianism, which involved infamous brawls at New York's Cedar Tavern, continued a venerable anti-bourgeois tradition, it was inevitably part and parcel of this wider discourse. And in certain ways this was the ideology of a newly emerging class of "business liberals".²²

Again, previous hostility towards the avant-garde in totalitarian Europe allowed such fashionable acceptance to appear as a positive success. Devoid of any political engagement, Abstract Expressionism, and its institutionalisation in museums such as MOMA and the Guggenheim, could still be seen as a vindication of leftist values.

Whether artists, critics, and gallerists colluded with Cold War American politics or whether Abstract Expressionism really amounted to a cohesive movement that was particularly abstract or expressionistic, the fact remains that this grouping were seen as the dominant one in a world divided between two major ideological camps, both promoting their values in visual terms. In the Eastern Bloc, Socialist Realism depicted a population valued for its capacity for production: in America, Abstract Expressionism represented formal freedom but divorced from political content. Barnett Newman thought that his pictures, if properly understood by collectors, would mean the end of all state capitalism. However, along with the work of his peers, Newman's paintings were saleable to the extent that by the late fifties they fetched six figure sums outstripping those of European old masters. Their grand scale and formal innovation contributed to their appeal as cool collectable items. Despite apparent intellectual credibility and claims such as Newman's, these paintings were commodities in the post war American consumer boom with its roots in Roosevelt's New Deal.

The affluent suburban society of the Fifties ("The American Way") was already being advertised on roadside billboards in the late Thirties, while in New York the World's Fair (1939-40) simulated a streamlined and socially harmonious utopia. Increasingly, passive consumerism was to become characteristic of American leisure.²³

The West, in contrast to Soviet society, attached greater value to its population's capacity for consumption. More diverse work was being made, other artists regarded Abstract Expressionism as an impasse; it's devotion to formal development within one discipline constraining.

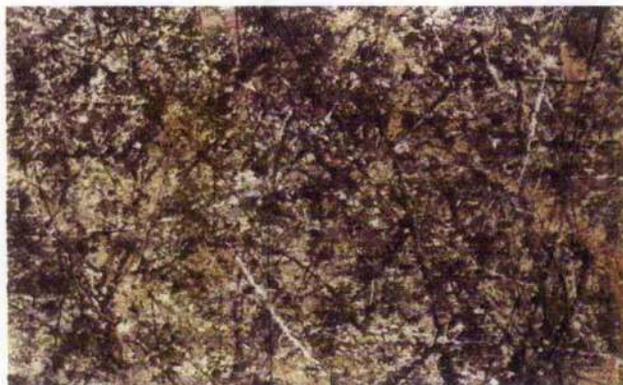


Figure 3: Jackson Pollock, *Lavender Mist* (detail) Oil on Canvas, 1950

However, consider first of all a work epitomising that dominant tendency of the 50s. Pollock's *Lavender Mist* (Fig' 3) is an example of the avant-garde of its time. It typifies the Greenbergian attitude whereby the artist pushes the medium of painting to its apparent limit. *Lavender Mist* embodies craft and endeavour; this is a hard won image with a distinct connection to tradition; it is, after all, a painting, a form derived from a European lineage of old masters and patronage. Even so, American artists in the 50s critiqued that tradition. Pollock's 'all-over' treatment of surface rejected illusionistic space and his evenness of treatment (no one part of the canvas is a greater focal point than another), even posed questions about the continuing need for paintings to be easel paintings.²⁴

Pollock's approach didn't necessarily call for the construction of a picture in isolation bound by its dimensions. He famously rolled unstretched canvas on the floor dripping paint onto its surface and over the edges. His use of industrial paint allowed greater flexibility; the resultant type of mark became known as gestural, a term forming part of the vocabulary employed to interpret this new kind of painting. On a sliding scale you might say that Pollock was very gestural; de Kooning, pretty gestural; Still, a little gestural; and Newman, not at all.

However, the end result was paintings. Two-dimensional painted objects; canvases mounted either on stretchers or otherwise hung on walls. They were exhibited in galleries and bought and sold as the expensive commodities of wealthy collectors. Ultimately, the left-wing politics previously adopted by many of these artists played little or no part either in the making or in

the presentation of their work. Again the idea of their inclusion in American culture as contrasted with the marginalisation of European counterparts comes into play. In some ways they epitomised the Old Left of the Roosevelt era. By adapting to the changed climate of the post war period they came to see a formalist version of modernism as a victory for past Leftist credentials. The fact that Abstract Expressionism was nevertheless an art devoid of any real political content sat comfortably with Greenberg's view of such subject matter as essentially vulgar.

This version of Modernism was further enshrined in major institutions, and New York's Museum of Modern Art in particular was a prestigious venue and ally for the artists championed by Greenberg. The museum itself was founded and financed by major pillars of the American establishment including the Rockefeller family.²⁵ Whilst advocating the kind of liberal art practices of the Abstract Expressionists, politically they represented an emergent multinational capitalism which could enjoy power and influence over and above that of specific business interests. As business liberals they rejected the isolationism of traditional conservatives so attaining greater influence over government including matters of foreign policy. By accommodating innovative modernist painting, this amalgamation of state and corporations could more effectively promote their own values as progressive. The confluence of a new American art with the advent of the Cold War transformed this work into propaganda.

Lavender Mist is one of Pollock's paintings considered a success by Greenberg. In formal terms it has the quality of 'grace' Valued by Greenberg and followers like Michael Fried.²⁶ Of all the drip paintings it has one of the most balanced 'all-over' surfaces. Pollock's drip marks do not leave too much raw canvas exposed; he has used colour very sparingly while his gestural marks look more open and less laboured than in some of the earlier paintings. At nearly 7 x 10 feet the picture has a scale and grandeur which fully exploits Pollock's horizontal treatment of the canvas and his partial repudiation of easel painting. This is in keeping with the formal aspirations of Greenberg's theories, expunged of any of the political, social, or figurative content to be found in Pollock's earlier work.

In order to help explain this difficult art, and give it a context, the Museum of Modern Art both arranged its exhibits in a particular chronology and published its own catalogues and books on subjects like Cubism and Surrealism. Alfred H. Barr Jr. was involved with MOMA from its inception until the 1970s in various roles including writing many of these guides to modern art. Again they emphasise the formal qualities of technical innovation as the essential dynamic of modern art. With this kind of institutional support the work of the Abstract Expressionists was to be enshrined in MOMA as the American culmination of all preceding movements in modernism.²⁷

Notes

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- ² Andrew Wilson, 'Sol Lewitt Interviewed' in *Art Monthly*, no. 164, March, 1999, pp. 3-5.
- ³ Jonathan Harris, 'Modernism and Culture in The USA, 1930-1960', *Modernism in Dispute: Art Since the Forties*, eds. Wood, Frascina, Harris, Harrison, (New Haven and London: Yale and Open University Press, 1993), pp.2-76, (p. 9).
- ⁴ Clement Greenberg; 'Avant-Garde and Kitsche' (1939), in *Pollock and After*, pp. 48-59 (p.58).
- ⁵ Clement Greenberg, 'Towards a Newer Laocoon', (1940), in *Pollock and After*, pp.60-70, (p.66).
- ⁶ Theodore Adorno, 'Commitment', (1962), in 'Art in Theory', ed. By Charles Harrison & Paul Woods, (London: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 760-764 (p763).
- ⁷ Adorno, p.764.
- ⁸ Harris, p.57.
- ⁹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.241.
- ¹⁰ Hardt and Negri, pp.242-243
- ¹¹ Hardt and Negri, pp. 241-242.
- ¹² Harris, p. 9.
- ¹³ Harris, p. 30.
- ¹⁴ Serge Guilbaut, 'The Adventures of the Avant-Garde in America', in *Pollock and After*, pp.197-210, (p.198).
- ¹⁵ Guilbaut, pp. 203-204.
- ¹⁶ Guilbaut, p. 206.
- ¹⁷ David Anfam, *Abstract Expressionism*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), p. 15.
- ¹⁸ Charles Harrison & Paul Wood, 'Modernity and Modernism Reconsidered' in *Modernism in Dispute: Art Since the Forties*, pp.170-257, (pp. 196-197).
- ¹⁹ Theodore Adorno, 'Letter to Walter Benjamin' in *Art in Theory*, Adorno, p.522.
- ²⁰ Harris, p. 57.
- ²¹ David Hopkins, *After Modern Art*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2000), p.10.
- ²² Hopkins, p.11.
- ²³ Ralph Willet and John White, 'The Thirties' in *Introduction to American Studies*, 3rd ed. Malcolm Bradbury and Howard Temperley eds. (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 220-241, (p.241).

²⁴ Harris, p. 43.

²⁵ Eva Cockcroft, 'Abstract Expressionism' in *Pollock and After*, pp.147-154, (p.148).

²⁶ Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood' in *Art in Theory*, pp. 822-834, (p. 832).

²⁷ Harris, pp. 62-63.

2. ART OF IDEAS

SOMETIME IN THE NEAR FUTURE IT MAY BE NECESSARY FOR THE WRITER TO BE AN ARTIST AS WELL AS FOR THE ARTIST TO BE A WRITER. THERE WILL STILL BE SCHOLARS AND HISTORIANS OF ART BUT THE CONTEMPORARY CRITIC MAY HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN A CREATIVE ORIGINALITY AND EXPLANATORY HISTORICISM.

LUCY LIPPARD AND JOHN CHANDLER: THE DEMATERIALIZATION OF ART

As the dominant school of post-war art, Abstract Expressionism soon attracted critical scrutiny. While a second generation of painters, including Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitski, continued to work within the strict confines of the medium, others tested alternatives to Greenberg's precepts.

The exhibition *Sixteen American Painters*, held at MOMA (December 1959 - February 1960) contained the work of younger artists, including Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, and reflected different concerns. There was less emphasis, or certainly a very different kind of emphasis, on gestural abstraction and the hand of the artist. Notions of authorship were challenged by borrowing imagery from popular culture and a more constructed look less dependent on chance than Greenberg's ideas about grace and whether a picture 'sits' right. In *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* Greenberg wrote that as a society develops it becomes less able to justify 'the inevitability of its accepted forms'. In the case of the visual arts the accepted ideas of what constitutes high art as opposed to utilitarian or commercial graphic design were thrown open to question. Greenberg believed modernism was the result of a society that had become more self-aware and self-critical than any previously.¹ Rauschenberg may not have been aware of Greenberg's criticism but he certainly was aware of the dominant Abstract Expressionist painting of the time and its assumptions of craft and authorship.

In *Factum 1* (Fig' 4) Rauschenberg combined elements of gestural painting with screen-printed images from mass-produced items such as photographs. However, Rauschenberg also paired this with a very similar picture, *Factum 2*, so negating the authenticity of the most painterly, autographic marks of both pictures. By implication the crafted and unique marks so valued in Abstract Expressionism had arrived at the very position of what Greenberg described as 'Alexandrianism' in *Avant-garde and Kitsch*: their apparent certitude become stagnation.

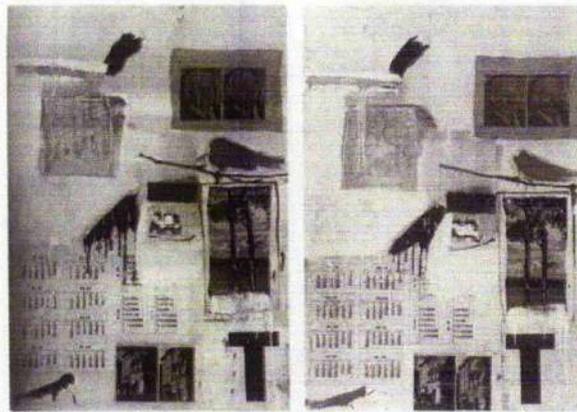


Figure 4: Robert Rauschenberg, *Factum 1*, 157x90cm & *Factum 2* (1957), 156 x 90cm.

During the exhibition Sol Lewitt was working as a night receptionist at MOMA along with a number of other artists and the critic Lucy Lippard. Lewitt later described some of his concerns in relation to *Sixteen American Painters*.

The discussions at that time were involved with new ways of making art, trying to reinvent the process, to regain basics, to be as objective as possible. The work of Stella and Johns, who were in a show at MOMA...about then, were of particular interest... My thinking was involved with the problem of painting at the time: the idea of the flat surface and the integrity of the surface. By the end of the Fifties Abstract Expressionism had passed, it was played out. Pop art had a completely different idea. It was more involved with objects. I wasn't really that interested in objects. I was interested in ideas.²



Figure 5: Sol Lewitt, *Untitled*, (1957), oil on canvas.

Lewitt had been making gestural abstract paintings (Fig' 5), however circumstances caused him to question this method. As well as noting the opinions of other artists, Lewitt had been employed as a graphic designer in I.M. Pei's architectural practice where he was influenced

by the necessarily collaborative approach to designing and building architectural projects.³ It was possible to make things without full participation from inception through execution to a finished work containing the authorial autograph: if the idea was paramount then these other considerations were no longer significant. Comparing Lewitt's *Wall Structure Blue* (Fig' 6) to *Lavender Mist* and his own earlier abstract painting, it is clear he is working to different criteria foregoing expressive marks and emotional or personal content. The title itself negates the tradition of painting highlighting instead its construction. However, to reiterate, Lewitt was less interested in objects and more interested in ideas as he made clear in his 1967 *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art for Art Forum*.⁴

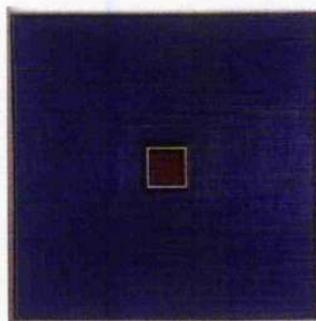


Figure 6: Sol Lewitt *Wall Structure Blue*, 1962, oil on canvas and painted wood.

In conceptual art the idea is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.⁵

Through conception, execution, and exhibition, the piece renegotiates ideas about how art is conceived, made, seen, and even what it is. With Abstract Expressionist painting we are asked to question traditional Western mimetic ideas about art, but we are still presented with a painting, a crafted object, apparently self-contained and without reference to its context, neither that of its production or reception. The artist who has executed this piece of work is still seen as the author, a role little different to predecessors in the Western canon. Despite a critique of the form itself this still assumes a kind of formal autonomy and, similarly, the artist's role as author is independent and unique having executed the work as they alone are capable of doing. When exhibited in a gallery the context can be seen as equally autonomous and isolated, the gallery being the purely appropriate space for seeing such a work. The work

may then be purchased by a collector and perhaps seen in the rarefied context of their home. This conforms to normative assumptions about art in the period. The abstract, non-referential form of such a picture makes it a more demanding image yet doesn't disturb the order of art and its place in Western bourgeois culture. Remember that for all Greenberg's high culture claims for Abstract Expressionism, it was a consumer boom and increased sales of their work which helped establish the artists involved. While they were certainly bought by institutions, private collectors also acquired Abstract Expressionist paintings. In as much as these objects became a component in something like our saturation of contemporary daytime television interior decoration, they epitomised much that Greenberg repudiated in kitsch.

In contrast, *Wall Structure Blue*, while apparently another abstract non-referential image, deviates from this canon. Here, the idea has made the work rather than the hand of a single author, representing a fundamental shift away from the aesthetic.⁸

Adorno referred to the pre-war fascism he fled in Germany as constituting an aestheticisation of politics.⁷ The wider context of an emerging Conceptual Art can be seen to reflect an increasing scepticism about the dubious attractions of aesthetics as part of an implicitly authoritarian spectacle. Abstract Expressionist gestural mark making can be read as a sign for a purely gestural freedom. Instead of conferring social or political freedom it mythologizes the artist as heroic author; alienated from mainstream society and the traditional constraints of artistic convention, he becomes an archetype fulfilling his own destiny. Again the myth of 'modern man', as the contemporary pre-occupation of artists like Pollock, comes into play along with the constitution of a specifically male subject.⁸

Lewitt's work goes some way to negating notions of himself as the traditional male author. It is again worth noting Lewitt's friendship with women artists and theorists like Martha Rosler, Eva Hesse, and Lucy Lippard, all key figures in their own right, whereas, Lee Krasner, though herself an artist, was typically seen as Pollock's supportive partner.⁹ The Abstract Expressionist environment occupied by Krasner included the misogyny of places like the cedar tavern where women were treated like cattle.¹⁰ Lewitt's questioning of authorship, in

terms of how it relates to a specifically male role, marks a departure from his Abstract Expressionist predecessors. Furthermore, Lewitt's refusal to privilege any component of his process over another, as well as his use of forms traditionally regarded as minor, such as drawing, indicate an egalitarian, less dominant role.

Lewitt's instructions for making one of his wall drawings, lacking any macho emotional charge, are simple and devoid of angst or heroics: 'Short vertical lines, four colours, each colour drawn randomly for one hour'.¹¹ If, however, you follow such instructions you have to ask questions about how short should a short vertical line be? Which four colours? The final execution depends on others and their input. The viewer also becomes involved in the work by interpreting its structure, by working things out. Activity and engagement replace the passivity of spectating the powerful painterly statement of a Pollock in an implicitly democratising move away from the privileged authorial role towards those of artisan and viewer.

Despite the cool appearance of his work Lewitt describes his practice as intuitive rather than rationalist.¹² His vocabulary of a few basic elements such as lines, colours or cubes, allows a great deal of playfulness. His use of mathematics is deliberately rudimentary and he has stated that he's not interested in mathematics as such.¹³

He is an avid reader of fiction. There are parallels between working out clues in a detective novel or engaging in imagining another world in science fiction and the kind of involvement necessary to read one of Lewitt's constructions or wall drawings.¹⁴

Although Lucy Lippard has said that he is 'overly interested in Cartesian order' Lewitt refutes any specific interest in philosophy and simply uses a basic premise within which the work develops.¹⁵ However, this development, bordering on the edge of the rational, though not quite out of control, recalls Wittgenstein's aim in writing *Tractatus*:

Thus the aim of the book is to draw a limit to thought, or rather – not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts...and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense.¹⁶

Lewitt's vocabulary of lines, colours and constructions is highly articulate within the structures but also suggests a continuation beyond them.

Wall Structure Blue was made during a period of the Cold War which threatened to turn into open conflict between the US and Soviet Union. While Lewitt's methodology goes a long way to challenging notions of authorship and, by implication, other assumed roles within visual art, the piece is in no way overtly political. Although it may seem banal to emphasise the implicitly political importance of the various components of Lewitt's practice, it is necessary to remember that they formed part of a vital shift at the time. It is all the more necessary to remember this because subsequent readings are easily able to play down such importance in less politicised times.

[...] Works, which seemed to undermine even the material conventions of Western art, have taken on, now that the dust has settled, a historical resonance that permits us to think of the best of them as, ... in late twentieth-century terms, our deepest memories of monuments as remote and awesome as Stonehenge or the Pyramids of Giza'.

The same sort of thing is now happening with so-called Conceptual art, for not only is it fitting more and more readily into familiar patterns of historical continuity but also, in its wide range of manifestations...we are gradually distinguishing more easily between good and indifferent, major and minor work.¹⁷

This is true in that the Western canon has integrated Conceptual Art, but in doing so it has divested the work of its idea based dynamic, 'its wide range of manifestations' reduced to a style. This absorption into formalist art history revives value judgements based on ideas of quality defined by one critic, group, or vested interest over another. History itself is kept at the safe distance of the Stone Age or ancient Egyptian monuments with messy distractions removed: 'As always the strikingly new art that initially unbalances us ends by joining forces with and rejuvenating the past'.¹⁸

However, the early 60s were a period of escalating conflict. Lewitt himself had previously served in the Korean War, a conflict for which the US (under the umbrella of the United Nations) had been criticised by the Left. In 1962, the same year that Lewitt made *Wall Structure Blue*, there was a gradual escalation in American military involvement in Vietnam. Although the post-war years had seen a general consolidation of conservative values under the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, the Kennedy era seemed to promise much in the way of a substantial liberalisation of American society. However, the interventionist foreign policy begun in earnest in the 1950s was not about to be reversed. The Kennedy doctrine was, if anything, more aggressive in its prosecution of military attacks on any remotely Leftist regime or insurgents.

How does work like Lewitt's fit into this tense period? He was, after all, working within a Western capitalist economy with an aggressive foreign policy, just as the Abstract Expressionists had been before him. Lucy Lippard had written about the dematerialization of the art object as a means of undermining its commodity status. She had disagreed with Lewitt over this but later conceded that his views were vindicated when text and photocopies etc. became marketable as Conceptual Artists raised their profile. She also said that: 'Despite his unquestioned political commitment, it is impossible to ascribe political content to his art, and the notion is anathema to him'.¹⁹

Lewitt felt that to project such concerns into public space amounted to a kind of elitist colonisation of both the arguments and the spaces in question. He nevertheless felt responsible for the uses to which his art was put and has not benefited from the kind of covertly political funding associated with Abstract Expressionist painting. As Francis Frascina has pointed out, the 'American Committee for Cultural Freedom, affiliated to the Congress for Cultural Freedom' was later revealed as CIA funded 'as part of Cold War attrition'. Greenberg was an important figure within such organisations and actively promoted Abstract Expressionism through them.

In his writings for magazines such as *Commentary*, and his membership of groups such as the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, Greenberg was part of the

intelligentsia who, in Chomsky's terms, acted as 'cultural commissars' (N. Chomsky, *Language and Responsibility*).²⁰

Where Abstract Expressionists and successive formalists saw their work incorporated into CIA funded exhibitions and tours overseas as the cultural dimension of US foreign policy, Lewitt was conscious of the wider implications of how his work was shown.

Going beyond Lewitt's position, political concerns would no longer be seen as excluded from art and US foreign policy proved to be a target which would galvanise this shift. Whilst Sol Lewitt described his practice in terms of the idea being an engine that made the work, a full-blown Conceptual Art where the idea was the work was beginning to emerge.²¹ The democratising implications of Lewitt's work would become the more explicit province of other artists in a period of accelerated criticism and dissent.

Notes

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- ² Gary Garrels 'An introduction to Sol Lewitt' in *Sol Lewitt, A Retrospective*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Yale UP, 2000), pp.22-35, (p26).
- ³ Garrels, pp. 25-26.
- ⁴ Sol Lewitt 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', (1967) in *Art in Theory*, pp. 834-837 (p. 834).
- ⁵ Lewitt, pp. 834.
- ⁶ Kynaston McShine, *Information*, (New York: MOMA, 1970), p.14.
- ⁷ Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002), pp. 128-129.
- ⁸ David Hopkins, *After Modern Art*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford, 2000), p. 10.
- ⁹ Anna C. Chave, 'Pollock and Krasner' in *Pollock and After*, (London & New York: Routledge 2000), pp. 329-347, (p. 327).
- ¹⁰ Hopkins, pp. 10-11.
- ¹¹ Lucy Lippard, 'The Structures, The Structures and The Wall Drawings, The Structures and The Wall Drawings and The Books' in *Sol LeWitt: The Museum of Modern Art*, (New York: MOMA,1978), pp.23-30, (p.27).
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- ¹³ Lippard, p. 23.
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- ¹⁵ Lippard, p. 27.
- ¹⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*; (London: Routledge; 1997), p.3.
- ¹⁷ Robert Rosenblum, 'Notes on Sol LeWitt' in *Sol LeWitt: The Museum of Modern Art*; (New York, MOMA, 1978), pp.15-21, (p.15).
- ¹⁸ Rosenblum, p. 15.
- ¹⁹ Lippard, p.28.
- ²⁰ Francis Francina, The Politics of Representation in *Modernism in Dispute: Art since the Forties*, by Francina and others, (New Haven & London: Yale Press in association with The Open University Press, 1993), pp. 77-169, (p.145).
- ²¹ Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, (Berkeley: California UP, 1973), p. vii.

3. Western Europe

OUR MARXIST CONCEPTION OF THE OBJECTIVE SOCIAL
DEPENDENCE AND SOCIAL UTILITY OF ART, WHEN TRANSLATED INTO
THE LANGUAGE OF POLITICS, DOES NOT MEAN A DESIRE TO
DOMINATE ART BY MEANS OF DECREES AND ORDERS.

LEON TROTSKY: LITERATURE AND REVOLUTION

... COLLECTIVE FARMERS, PARTY MEMBERS, BUSINESS MANAGERS,
ENGINEERS, MEMBERS OF THE YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE,
PIONEERS—SUCH ARE THE CHIEF TYPES AND HEROES OF SOVIET
LITERATURE.

ANDREI ZHDANOV: SPEECH TO THE CONGRESS OF SOVIET WRITERS.

In contrast to the post-war consumer boom and accompanying art boom in America, Europe experienced austerity during a period of slow rebuilding. Contrary to the appearance of an American art where formalism was seen to be paramount to the point of obscuring other values, there was no one dominant school of thought in a post-war Europe which presented a complex array of concerns. Some European artists such as E.W. Nay and Jean Dubuffet, the latter of whose work was unfavourably compared to Pollock's in a piece by Greenberg, pursued forms of abstraction, which, nevertheless, did not dominate to the point of excluding of other types of work.¹ Moreover, first-hand experience of Fascism helped maintain a focus on political commitment for some European artists in a way that resembled concerns of the 1930s.²

Even after the end of the war many Europeans still lived under one shade of Fascism or another, as in Spain and Portugal, and, in Central and Eastern Europe, totalitarianism consolidated its position after the Red Army's advances. Moreover, post-war conditions meant food shortages across the continent, with starvation a serious prospect.

The Marshall plan was instituted by the post-war Truman administration, ostensibly to provide the necessary means of rebuilding Europe. However, Noam Chomsky has identified so called 'flight capital' as a condition of this US economic assistance wherein, 'After World War II, there was reported to be heavy flow of capital from Europe to the United States'.³

While American taxpayers funded the Marshall Plan for the regeneration of war-scarred Europe, wealthy Europeans were encouraged to shift their investments to US concerns. In the aftermath of a conflict that had almost destroyed Europe, persuading investors to relocate funds to a place of relative peace and stability was not difficult. The phenomenon of flight capital continues to dominate US foreign and economic policy, and is a particular feature of recent World Bank and IMF relations with the Third World.⁴ This contrasts the received wisdom that the US generously donated funds for European post-war reconstruction. Altruism is a key myth in the American State's embodiment of enlightenment values put into political practice.

The favoured illustration of "generosity and goodwill" is the Marshall Plan. That merits examination on the "strongest case" principle. The inquiry again quickly yields facts "that 'it wouldn't do' to mention." For example, the fact that "as the Marshall Plan went into full gear the amount of American dollars being pumped into France and the Netherlands was approximately equalled by the funds being siphoned from their treasuries to finance their expeditionary forces in Southeast Asia [...]"⁶

Subsidising anti-communist colonial struggles was of equal or greater importance to the task of reconstruction. When considered in this light the declared relocation of the avant-garde from Europe to the US has an air of triumphalism born of other considerations. Greenberg's involvement with The American Committee for Cultural Freedom and its connections to the CIA can be seen in light of this progress.⁶ Abstract Expressionism undoubtedly displayed a formal sureness and dynamism lacking in some European post-war counterparts, but it soon reached an impasse demanding a reassessment of the narrowly formalist tenets of 'Greenberg and the group'. The quandary that Greenberg's later writing summarily dismissed, between form and content, still pre-occupied some European artists. It was sometimes expressed awkwardly, in committed art with its politics to the fore, while failing to address equally pressing issues of form. As Walter Benjamin had written in the 1930s:

[...] this debate has never got beyond a boring "on the one hand, on the other hand",... One can declare that a work which exhibits the right tendency need show no further quality. Or one can decree that work which exhibits the right tendency must, of necessity, show every other quality as well. This second formulation is not without interest; more, it is correct. I make it my own.⁷

For many in post-war Western Europe the right tendency was clear. National communist parties had been at the forefront of resistance to Nazi occupation, gaining them a great deal of credibility after the war. The Communist Party of Great Britain enjoyed its period of highest membership in the late 1940s indicating something of the faith, shared by many at that time, that these parties and the Soviet Union had played a crucial role in the defeat of the Axis powers. However, in the eyes of many others on the Left, their association with Soviet power tainted Western communist parties. The Nazi-Soviet pact had helped initiate the Second World War. German communists had been early victims of the concentration camps, their names often supplied to the Nazi's by Soviet authorities. The much-vaunted Popular Front that fought Fascism in Spain had seen Stalinists collude in the defeat of the Republic. In

Europe, the Old Left was marked off from any artistic avant-garde by an aesthetic dogma of a remarkably reactionary variety.

Civilisation atlantique by Andre Fougeron (Fig' 6) deals with specific episodes of political confrontation in post-war France. Fougeron himself was a committed PCF (Partie Communiste de France) member and uses an illustrative style to depict the realities of post-war protest. The top left of *Civilisation atlantique* shows the prison where Henri Martin, a young sailor and activist, was detained for distributing leaflets among fellow sailors as a protest against the French government's war in Indochina. Their fight against the forces supporting independence would eventually lead to a humiliating defeat for the French state as well as escalating American involvement when the Indochinese liberation movement (as was to be the case with many national liberation struggles the world over), came into the focus of US anti-communism.

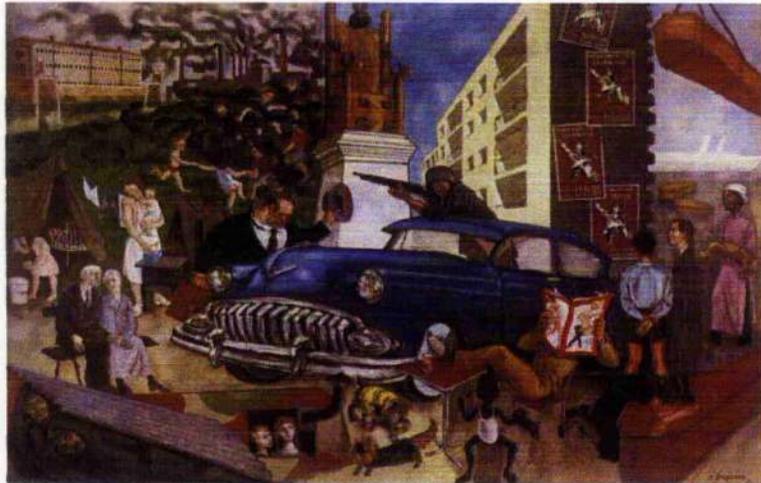


Figure 6: Andre Fougeron, 'Civilisation atlantique', (1953) oil on canvas, 380 x 560 cm.

Civilisation atlantique also shows the homelessness and poverty of Parisians in a war-ravaged city in contrast to the newly built homes for US NATO officers. Other references to Americanisation and US support for German rearmament in 1953 (seen as cynically anti-communist in France) put Fougeron's politics beyond doubt. However, some party members saw even this literal depiction as problematic. Leading PCF intellectual Louis Aragon

condemned the picture for its lack of realism. While agreeing with Fougeron's statement politically, he criticised the picture's allusions to Surrealism and Symbolism as well as its distortion of perspective.

[...] For Araagon, who broke with the Surrealists in the early 1930s to support the PCF, Surrealism and photomontage connoted Trotskyism. As this was ideologically unacceptable to a member of the PCF, which was pro-Stalinist, 'Civilisation atlantique' was a gross error of judgement of competence by Fougeron who was essentially the party's official artist.⁶

Even when the PCF attracted the support and membership of Picasso, the party was critical of his work in a way that displayed a dogmatic adherence to a narrow set of formal precepts.

Conceptualism later questioned the whole formal dimension of art, negating the physical in favour of ideas. Picasso, despite criticism by the PCF, can be identified with a formalist tradition beginning with Manet and the Impressionists and culminating in Abstract Expressionism. This further underlines the means by which modernist American art was seen to stand as an emblem of the 'Free World'. If modernist formalism opposed the oppressive narrowness of Socialist Realism, an orthodoxy which couldn't accommodate even well-established work like Picasso's, then that opposition in itself gave formalism credibility.

Picasso had been drawn to the PCF as a result of the party's wartime resistance activities. When Breton criticised Picasso's party membership on returning to France after the war, Picasso simply retorted that Breton had not lived through the occupation.⁹ Particularly in France and Italy national communist parties enjoyed massive popular support because of their role in the resistance. Indeed it took a great deal of covert as well as more blatant intervention on the part of US intelligence to prevent them gaining full power.¹⁰

[...] the commitment to democracy, which, if more than rhetoric, would have meant that popular forces to which the US was opposed—Communists, radical democrats, labour, and so on—be permitted to play more than a token role in political and social life. Marshall Plan aid was used to coerce choices, notably in Italy in 1948...¹¹

While this policy contributed little to the idea of American culture as a force for democracy in Europe or elsewhere, the Old Left's backward take on visual culture made American

formalism look enlightened by comparison. By opting for a consolidation of the most conservative art practices, politicised European artists were effectively outflanked by formally, if not politically, engaged US counterparts.

Notes

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- ¹ Jonathan Harris, 'Modernism and Culture in The USA, 1930-1960', *Modernism In Dispute: Art Since the Forties*, ed. By Francis Francina and others (New Haven and London: Yale and Open University Press, 1993), pp. 2-74, (p. 64).
- ² Francis Francina 'The Politics of Representation' in *Modernism In Dispute: Art Since the Forties*, pp. 77-166, (p. 128).
- ³ Noam Chomsky, *Rogue States: The Rule of Force in World Affairs*, (London: Pluto Press; 2000), p.102.
- ⁴ Chomsky, pp. 102-105.
- ⁵ Chomsky, p.126.
- ⁶ Francina, p. 142.
- ⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', in *Thinking Photography* ed. by Victor Burgin, (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp.15-31, (p.16).
- ⁸ Francina, p. 137.
- ⁹ Francina, p. 134.
- ¹⁰ Norman Kogan, *A Political History of Post-War Italy*, (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966), pp. 51-53.
- ¹¹ Noam Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy*, (London: Vintage, 1992), p.48.

4.1 Eastern Bloc

THE SOLUTION

AFTER THE UPRISING OF 17 JUNE
THE SECRETARY OF THE WORKERS UNION
HAD LEAFLETS DISTRIBUTED IN THE STAGNATION
STATING THAT THE PEOPLE
HAD FORFEITED THE CONFIDENCE OF THE GOVERNMENT
AND COULD WENT BACK ONLY
BY REDOUBLED EFFORTS. WOULD IT NOT BE EASIER
IN THAT CASE FOR THE GOVERNMENT
TO DISSOLVE THE PEOPLE
AND ELECT ANOTHER?

BERTOLT BRECHT

THERE WERE DOZENS OF PEOPLE TRYING TO PULL DOWN THE STATUE OF STALIN
IMPS GATHERED AROUND HIS BOOTS. THERE WERE MANY MORE PEOPLE GIVING
ADVICE ON HOW IT SHOULD BE DONE. THE ASSAYS AND ADVICE HAD BEEN GOING
ON FOR SOME TIME. SLEDGEHAMMERS, HACKSAWS, CHAINS ATTACHED TO
LORRIES, AS WELL AS COPIOUS ABUSE HAD ALL BEEN DIRECTED AT THE EIGHT
METRE HIGH STATUE.

TIBOR FISCHER UNDER THE FROG

While the merits of Socialist Realism were at least still being debated in the West, elsewhere, in the former Eastern Bloc, it was the prescribed orthodoxy. However, some artists risked disapproval to pursue other approaches. There were also periods when the rules were more relaxed and artists had greater leeway to make other types of work. However, it is the contrast in environment and the way that the authorities in East and West dealt with art that was apparently unsympathetic to their respective positions. Experimental, Avant-Garde or Conceptual Art, even if any of these essentially Western terms do apply, was officially marginalized in Eastern Europe.

The governments of the Eastern Bloc did not try to integrate or adopt these practices. Patronage in America, whilst arguably a means to exclusivity and control achieved these ends by its tendency to accommodate and neutralise. They effectively took what was already there, repackaging it to stand for any expedient Western values at a given time. At this point, those values were fundamentally anti-Communist so the contemporary art adopted by the American establishment became a sign for the freedoms apparently enjoyed by citizens of the Western liberal democracies.

Just before World War 2 Greenberg had written about the curious status of the Avant-Garde. At that point he was still a committed Marxist intellectual who, nevertheless, acknowledged the somewhat precarious position of an Avant-Garde which, while trying to be subversive, actually established cultural forms that remained economically dependant on the ruling elite. In *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, Greenberg describes the Avant-Garde as having formerly belonged to this elite, while the masses were more or less indifferent towards highly specialised and ambitious culture. However, he further states that the Avant-Garde was further being abandoned by the ruling class, leaving it without social or economic support:

[...] in the case of the Avant-Garde this was provided by an elite among the ruling class of that society from which it assumed itself to be cut off, but to which it has always remained attached by an umbilical cord of gold. The paradox is real. And now this elite is rapidly shrinking. Since the Avant-Garde forms the only living

culture we now have, the survival in the near future of culture in general is thus threatened.¹

After the war, US art was enthusiastically supported by a significant part of the American ruling class. Those business liberals, who would shape much of the future of American culture, economic and foreign policy, began to allow the Avant-Garde a way in. Centres like MOMA and the Guggenheim, founded and funded by some of the major capitalist interests in the US, enshrined Abstract Expressionism as the apotheosis of Modernism and, in so doing, re-established and compounded this link between 'ambitious', experimental culture and the ruling elite.

While Greenberg initially seems to make a compelling case for this fragile co-existence of power and culture, *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* skirts around some of the issues; for example the notion that ambitious culture necessarily belongs to the ruling class. This is stated virtually as a given with the need for funding and support as justification.

T.J. Clark has taken issue with Greenberg's continuum of ruling elites and established cultural forms from past societies through to the mid-20th century capitalism about which he was writing.

To compare the conditions in which, in late capitalism, the meanings of the ruling class are actively disputed with those in which, in Hellenistic Egypt, say, established meanings stultified and became subject to scepticism – this is to compare the utterly unlike. It is to put side by side a time of economic and cultural dissolution – an epoch of weariness and unconcern – and one of articulated and fierce class struggle. Capital may be uncertain of its values, but it is not weary; the bourgeoisie may have no beliefs worth the name, but they will not admit as much: they are hypocrites, not sceptics. And the Avant-Garde, I shall argue, has regularly and rightly seen an advantage for art in the particular conditions of ideological confusion and violence under capital; it has wished to take part in the general, untidy work of negation and has seen no necessary contradiction (rather the contrary) between doing so and coming to terms once again with its "medium".²

The very gestural nature of Abstract Expressionism stood for an abandonment of all the ties to established aesthetic forms and, by implication, the authoritarian conventions of the European imperialist societies from which they had emerged. While this only amounted to a gestural sort of freedom, during the Cold War it was an effective signifier of mythologized US

values. In those countries of the post-war Eastern Bloc, even de-politicised abstract painting was perceived as a threat to Stalinist regimes.³

Originally, the 1917 October Revolution had begun moves in the direction of a social, political and cultural, revolution. The *Proletcult (Organization for Proletarian Culture)* had been founded in 1916 but really came to prominence after the revolution. Its leading theorist, Alexander Bogdanov, believed in the organisation's independence within a three-pronged revolutionary strategy that was economic, political, and cultural. Bogdanov was a scientist, philosopher and activist; he epitomised a tendency to put theory into practice and then into life.⁴ He clashed with Lenin who advocated centralised party power over all these areas so that even after the end of civil war, in a period of relative stability, the Proletcult came steadily under the control of *Narkompros (The Peoples Commissariat for Education)*. From a position where, during the chaos of the immediate post-revolutionary years, Bogdanov's policies had recognised all groups, there subsequently emerged a more centralised orthodoxy.

Ironically, given the later association of abstraction with Western freedom, Lenin's re-introduction of capitalism during the NEP (*New Economic Policy*) further encroached on artists' freedom to make new types of work. By recreating a pre-revolutionary art market, which fostered more traditional approaches, innovative Soviet art with abstract, avant-garde and revolutionary tendencies, was further marginalized.⁵

The leadership's reluctance to reject bourgeois cultural forms presaged then accompanied similar faltering in social and economic reform. As in the West, where unprecedented formal liberalism prevailed, art was disengaged from the potential to translate any of this into other freedoms. The NEP saw a limited re-instatement of consumerist choices within a structure of effective powerlessness for citizens. According to Lenin, Marxism 'won its historic significance as the ideology of the revolutionary proletariat' not by rejecting bourgeois achievements, but by assimilating them.⁶ Overruling Bogdanov, Lenin centralised Soviet policy on art, making this line a strict prescription.

[...] the all Russia Proletcult Congress rejects in the most resolute manner, as theoretically unsound and practically harmful, all attempts to invent one's own particular brand of culture, to remain isolated in self-contained organisations, to draw a line dividing the field of work of the People's Commissariat for Education and the Proletcult, or to set up a Proletcult 'autonomy' within the establishments under the People's Commissariat for Education and so forth.⁷

In 1932, a few years after Lenin's death and the ensuing struggle that brought Stalin to power, centralised Soviet policy had developed into the ultra-orthodoxy of Socialist Realism.⁸

Socialist Realism was inherited by the Central and Eastern Europe states under Soviet occupation after the Second World War. The Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács described capitalism in terms of reification, where values, including relationships between people, had been commodified. In late capitalism even intangibles had become things. Arguably, the economies of post-war Eastern Europe operated in the same way. The things that people became were more akin to producers than the consumers of Western capitalism but were still the result of cultural reification. While the Western Left too often agonised over the rights and wrongs of Stalinist regimes, the Situationists would later make Soviet society's form of state socialism as much a target as the failings of capitalist consumer societies. In contrast, one indication of the established Left's slowness to respond to Stalinist excess can be found in Louis Althusser's correspondence with the academic Jean Lacroix. Althusser condemns Lacroix's doubts over the trial of László Rajk, a former member of the Hungarian communist government and is incredulous at the idea that the party may have staged this as a show trial.

[...] a public trial involving precise accusations, full confessions, and the testimony of a number of different people, testimony that counts (these witnesses are, if not cutting their own throats, at least putting themselves in the dock).⁹

When a later uprising briefly ousted Stalinism in Hungary, leaving the sympathetic but compromised Lukács in a government trying to accommodate popular demands whilst essentially keeping a lid on things, the Situationists unequivocally supported the insurgents. Csepel Island, a working class district in southern Budapest, is praised in Situationist literature along with other places that supported populist uprisings and strikes.

Workers of Asturias, Limburg, Poznan, Lyons, Detroit, Csepel, Leningrad, Canton, Buenos Aires, Johannesburg, Liverpool, Kiruna, Coimbra—it is you who are destined to let the entire proletariat add the joy of revolution made for one and all to the lesser, everyday pleasures of love, iconoclasm and obedience of the dictates of passion!¹⁰

This attitude contrasts the oppressive bureaucracy of Stalinist authoritarianism. While capitalism commodified culture with inducements, the Soviet system, even from its inception, was more confrontational. While Lenin thought that Soviet culture should be imbued with the spirit of class struggle, he had not extended this to a critique of the accepted forms of the old ruling class. Lenin's centralised and prescriptive policies had, under Stalin, developed into an even more severe orthodoxy.

By the 1950s Hungary had a typically harsh Stalinist regime with the notorious Minister of Culture Jozsef Revai in charge of the arts. As Hungarian art historian László Beke wrote: 'Hungary suffered under Communist party dictatorship from 1948 onward, and during the 1950s, even abstract art was considered a form of political opposition'.¹¹

The Hungarian experience was compounded in the first instance by the imposition of a Communist regime composed of leaders, like Mátyás Rákosi, many of whom had grown up politically during the ultra-orthodoxy of the late 1930s (the era of the popular front). As a result of the Soviet invasion/liberation in the later stages of the war, it was this Stalinist group who had insinuated themselves into power. Furthermore, the Soviet conviction that Hungary had been a committed member of the Axis led to a hostile occupation by the USSR.

After the war, the Moscow line was reflected in visual art by a strict adherence to Socialist Realism. By attempting to openly control and crush freedom, the authorities of the Eastern Bloc validated Western criticisms. It wasn't difficult to make the formal experiments of Pollock, Rothko, Newman, and De Kooning seem a virtual paradigm of freedom by comparison. However, one criticism of the formalist version of art history is that it is unhistorical.

Modernist art history has evacuated the term's historical meaning using it to signify an idea about the way art develops and artists function in relation to society. Avant-garde is now a catch-all label to celebrate most 20th century art and artists. 'Avant-gardism' has become the pervasive, dominant ideology of artistic production and scholarship. It instates and reproduces the appearance of a succession of styles and movements often in competition and each one seemingly unique and different in its turn. And like all ideologies, 'avant-gardism' has its own structures of closure and disclosure, its own way of constant change and innovation disguises a more profound level of consistency, a consistency of meaning for the avant-garde that results from the concrete history of real practices and postures which were first designed as a cultural avant-garde in Paris in the 1850s-1870s [...] ¹²

Accordingly, in the kind of progress outlined by Alfred H. Barr in his guides for the Museum of Modern Art, artists develop styles and techniques which subsequent generations become bored with or find inadequate and so develop their own forms. All this takes place in relative isolation from other events, and with apparently little mention of the role played for example by the patronage of an institution like MOMA and the political and economic implications therein. The same insulation from wider cultural, social and political concerns was reflected in Greenberg's later writing.

However, this insulated view of culture can equally apply to historical events themselves. It was a common feature of media coverage on the collapse of the post-Stalinist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe to talk about their return to democracy. The end date of the Second World War was usually given as an indicator of their previous inclusion in the democratic fold when in fact most of the places concerned had little experience of democracy.

In Hungary, immediately before the Russian invasion, the Nazis briefly installed the Fascist 'Arrow Cross' regime. This was in response to Horthy's attempts to secretly make peace with the allies. Admiral Miklós Horthy, ('The Admiral without a fleet'), had been in power since the early 1920s. He was a political anachronism representing that extension of Hungarian power and influence formerly embodied in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The loss of Hungarian territory to neighbouring countries after the Treaty of Trianon was a national humiliation: a lasting problem for millions of ethnic Hungarians constituting minorities in other states. This loss of territory also gave rise to Horthy, the high-ranking naval officer in a by then land-locked country, as Regent. Horthy's regime became a hybrid of old Hungarian aristocratic and imperial values with their accompanying anti-semitism which, in this instance, owed more

to religious prejudice than to Nazi theories of race. While German and Italian Fascism had radical pretensions, Horthy espoused a reaffirmation of conservative nationalism. He also instituted a kind of minor personality cult wherein he and his family became synonymous with Hungarian national identity.



Figure 7: Postage stamps, indicating a minor personality cult, show The Regent, his son, Istvan, and Horthy's mother Magdalene.

Along with the persecution of the period went a certain continuity, a sense of enduring national identity, allowing many Hungarians to believe that the inter-war years were essentially tolerable and that there was even some cause for optimism. Later, reflecting on the period in the knowledge of what followed, the Hungarian liberal and novelist Sándor Márai wrote:

[...] the Regent in an admiral's uniform mounted on a white horse. And then the eminent priests, barons, statesmen in gala attire and the national hierarchy of personnel dressed in various, most often tasteful uniforms: ministers, lord lieutenants, fire chiefs on down to station masters.¹³

I understood that I was not the only caricature in the milieu between the two world wars; there was, instead, some kind of caricature in Hungarian life, in the institutions, in the way people looked at things, in everything. This comforted me. It is always good to know that one is not alone.¹⁴

In terms of the recent mythology of Eastern Europe's return to democracy, it is ironic that Horthy the Ruritanian autocrat came to power through his violent suppression of a popular socialist uprising and its brief 'Republic of Councils'.

After initial successes, the Republic of Councils briefly seemed secure. However, fearful of broken peace agreements and potential revolt among their own populations, some of the so-

called successor states, who had absorbed former Hungarian territory, invaded. The Rumanian army's occupation of Budapest was a bitter experience and led to a patriotic backlash and nationalist military take-over.

The leader of this short-lived popular Hungarian Republic, Béla Kun, was subsequently exiled to the Soviet Union where he was later a victim of Stalin's purges; rumours of his execution only gradually filtered back to Hungary. In total nineteen leaders of the Hungarian Soviet were executed as a result of Stalinist purges.

By the 1930s a generation of the Left unconnected with the failed Republic, including anti-Muscovites like László Rajk and Imre Nagy, believed that Horthy's government was on the brink of collapse. However, Horthy's alliance with the Fascist ascendancy around Europe bolstered Hungary's decrepit dictatorship. Many Hungarians admired Hitler's disregard for the conditions of the Versailles Treaty, echoing their contempt for the loss of territory at Treanon; fear of Soviet invasion and a desire to regain the lost territories, forged alliance with Germany.

The Horthy regime had certainly been reactionary: passing anti-Semitic laws, persecuting gypsies and crushing any form of trade-union protest. Their response to the Republic of Councils was draconian: 5,000 were executed, 75,000 jailed and 100,000 exiled.¹⁵ Many forced to leave, Jews, Liberals, scientists and artists, were unconnected with the Soviet, but might have contributed to a different type of society feared by the new regime. Nevertheless, when the regime blundered into World War 2, it did so largely at the behest of its Nazi allies.

After the disaster of the war, Hungary endured three years of political manoeuvring before the unpopular Stalinists finally consolidated power. As was the case elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe at the time, there were bitter struggles within the Communist Party itself. Party leaders came and went with two main figures vying for position: Imre Nagy, a critic of Stalinist excess and popular within Hungary, while the popularity of the pro-soviet Mátyás Rákosi can be gauged by the nickname 'arsehole'.¹⁶

Strict adherence to Socialist Realism became the norm. Tellingly enough, the artists who were perhaps best placed to fulfil this aesthetic criteria were often the same bourgeois hacks who had produced similar work under the old dictatorship. Similarly, the ranks of the Állam Védelmi Osztály (State Defence Department), known as the AVH, were in part composed of officers who had also served under Horthy and the Arrow Cross. Whether the requirement was for well-crafted public statuary or violent political repression it made sense to employ the experts.

Although Rákosi ousted Nagy for 'deviationism' in 1955, demands for greater freedom persisted. The following year when the former interior minister László Rajk (executed by Rákosi on the grounds of Titoism) was being reburied, 200,000 people attended. This was a demonstration of support not only for Rajk but also for his widow Julia who had publicly criticised the government.

Poland's leader Gomulka had just won concessions from Moscow and, partly as a display of solidarity with this and also with the fact that, in a region subject to ethnic conflict, Poland and Hungary have traditionally enjoyed sympathetic relations, 50,000 or so demonstrators marched to the statue of the Polish General Bem in Budapest. The crowd eventually besieged the radio station and was fired on by the AVH. Many were killed and the brutal reaction sparked a massive uprising against the security forces.

This became a widespread revolt against Soviet rule and, briefly, the Hungarian uprising appeared to be succeeding against incredible odds. CIA sponsored radio broadcasts encouraged Hungarians to fight the regime with promises of assistance. When this help did not materialise the Soviet tanks moved in and, despite continued resistance, the revolt was inevitably crushed. A general strike continued for months despite mass arrests and further repression.

During the uprising, the artist Miklós Erdély placed his *Unguarded Money* (*Őrizetlen pénz*), a makeshift piece of art, around Budapest. A response to the events of October 1956, this work also challenged established forms of art production and dissemination.

In the US at this time, Pollock had gone some way to challenge that context through his partial rejection of easel painting. The circumstances that brought this American painting to the fore were very different to those of Central Europe. Would-be Abstract Expressionists had benefited from the inclusiveness of the New Deal in the 30s. Greenberg, Pollock and Rothko were able to take part in politically open and critical projects such as the magazine *Partisan Review*. However, few such opportunities existed in most of Europe. In 1932 when the Hungarian government identified the leadership of an outlawed Communist Party they simply executed them. After the war, Western European artists could debate the merits of Socialist Realism while much US art had apparently dispensed with all but formal concerns. By contrast, in Hungary a strict Socialist Realist orthodoxy prevailed.

Works such as László Felegyházi's painting of a model worker (Fig' 8-left) were paradigms of Socialist Realism to such an extent that they were exhibited in Moscow in 1951 as part of a retrospective of Hungarian Socialist Realism. Though made in 1953, the year of Stalin's death and the beginning of a slightly more relaxed period, József Somogyi's *Smelter* (Fig'8-right) still adheres to the limitations of Socialist Realist subject matter and literal depiction.

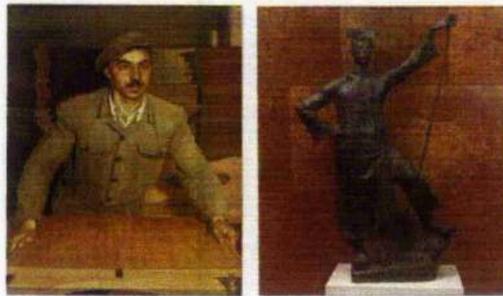


Figure 8: László Felegyházi; *Stakhanovite Furniture Factory Worker*, (oil on canvas) 1949 and József Somogyi; *Smelter*, (bronze) 1953.

In this context *Unguarded Money* is a political statement which also takes a form that is both expedient and subverts the usual art context and ideology.

4.2 STREETS

In Erdély's *Unguarded Money* his use of the streets of Budapest is, in itself, important. The work consisted of a number of boxes left in the streets with signs inviting contributions for the 'martyrs' of the revolution. At this point the uprising had reclaimed the streets in question from the authorities.

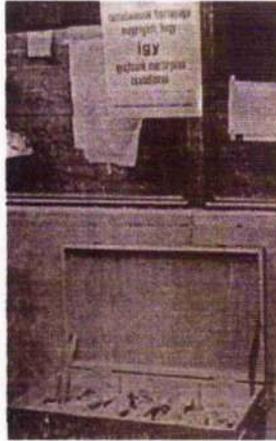


Figure 9: Miklós Erdély: *Unguarded Money (Őrizetlen pénz)*, October 26 1956. The text reads: *This collection is for the purity of the revolution so give to the martyr's families.*

Though the area around Budapest has been settled since at least Roman times, this network of streets was part of a nineteenth century design which remains largely intact today. Though buildings and roads from subsequent periods are found in varying concentrations, the basic layout of ring roads and connecting boulevards straddling the Danube remains largely intact.



Figure 10: Budapest's ring roads and bisecting boulevards.

Although Erdély's work can generally be characterised as Conceptual, his installation of *Unguarded Money* around the reclaimed streets also resonates with the activities of the

Situationists. This, along with Situationist contempt for the mainstream Left's vacillation over the vagaries of Stalinist Societies, gives *Unguarded Money* a strong connection with Situationist strategy. Erdély may not have been aware of the Situationists at this point but his work constitutes an independent response to events that parallels and even pre-empts much in the West. A critique of the role and limitations of art institutions can be inferred from his use of the streets as well as a wider questioning of the urban landscape. This applies not only to the physical environment, its bricks and mortar, roads and squares, but to the combination of all this the whole mesh of the production of the political and economic environment of the city.¹⁷ The fact that Erdély was working within a supposedly Socialist planned economy has no bearing since the control of production and consumption still applied in the Stalinist economies with just a shift in emphasis toward production.¹⁸

The French Situationist Guy Debord's parody of Haussman's plan of Paris, *Life Continues to be Free and Easy* (Fig' 11), exposes the psychogeography of a Western European capital. Here the apparent primacy of cultural institutions and rational city planning is exposed as the product of reification, including imperialism, fabricating the submission of one class to another.¹⁹

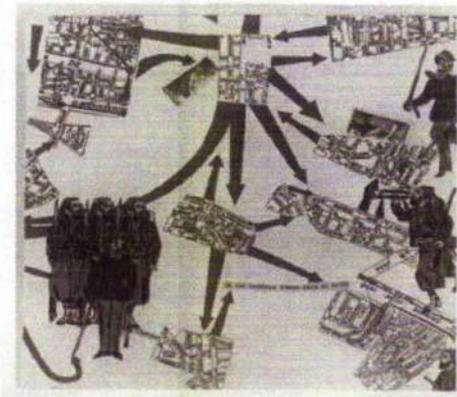


Figure 11: Guy DeBord, *Life Continues to be Free and Easy*.

The architect Frigyes Podmaniczky was responsible for Budapest's design. Although employing mostly Hungarian architects to design the main boulevards, Haussman's Paris

heavily influenced Podmaniczky with, for example, Eiffel's company building Nyugati Pályudvár (Western Railway Station).

That Erdély's work was left in these streets during a revolt is in keeping with all this. Just as Haussman's Paris was built for the needs of a newly emergent industrialised metropolitan society, Podmaniczky's design was a similarly aspirational project. However, Haussman's plan was also a designed form of police control against Parisian revolts.²⁰ This was partly as a result of the 1848 revolutions which, swept across Europe and included a Hungarian uprising against Austrian rule. The poet Sándor Petőfi was an important figurehead in this revolution. Prior to 1848, his poetry had been one of the means used to revive the Hungarian language. In the urban centres, particularly Budapest, German had become the first language with Hungarian relegated to the rural fringes. Although the revolution was unsuccessful, and at first brutally suppressed, the Austrians eventually took a more conciliatory line allowing greater national autonomy and, effectively, guaranteeing the loyalty of the Hungarian establishment. They realised that they could consolidate the power of the empire as a whole by according Hungary equal status.

This newfound autonomy instigated a period of accelerated growth, especially in Budapest. The reconstructed Castle Hill, which surveys the whole city, initially signified Austrian dominance, but its strategic importance continued in the newly autonomous Hungary. From this vantage point it was possible to see areas of unrest in the working class districts of Pest, as well as the Jewish ghetto, and artillery fire could reach them all from Castle Hill. Erdély's happening was intended to collect money for what he called the Martyrs of the revolution. Some of the heaviest casualties of 1956 were on the riverside of Pest facing Buda's Castle Hill and on the bridge between these two central districts of Buda and Pest.

During the 19th century redevelopment this stretch of the river had seen major changes. The old pontoon bridges across the Danube were replaced as part of the city's ambitious new plan and, while Podmaniczky was responsible for the city's overall layout, many other engineers and architects undertook various prestige projects. The Scottish engineer Adam Clarke

designed the Széchenyi Lánchíd (Széchenyi Chainbridge) named after Count István Széchenyi, sometimes referred to as the greatest Hungarian. This Hungarian aristocrat, a combination of innovator and eccentric, introduced many Western ideas to Hungary, including the country's first flush toilet; that The Lánchíd, a rather more ambitious project, was named after Széchenyi was, nevertheless, an indication of its importance.

As well as looking impressive and providing a reliable link between the two formally amalgamated cities, the Lánchíd was a swift connection by road and on foot between a large military installation, on Castle Hill, to the Országház (parliament), its surrounding bureaucratic district, and the teeming districts of Pest beyond.

In 1956, protestors had been arrested and detained on Castle Hill and it was the attempt to rescue them from the security forces that resulted in such heavy loss of life on the riverside as well as on the Lánchíd itself. The whole area was a focus for events, since it contained the political district and, hand in hand with this, various out-posts of the AVH security forces. The initial demonstrations were mainly by students, thousands of whom marched around this district.

Erdély would have been in solidarity with this group as an artist, intellectual and recent graduate of more than one of the city's higher education institutions. He had been an architecture student at the technical university after the war when, in an interdisciplinary move that would typify his later practice, he decided to diverge into sculpture. This meant spending a couple of terms (1946-47) at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts on Andrásy Út. Beginning at the outskirts of the city plan at Városliget (City Park), Andrásy Út is one of Budapest's main boulevards crossing some of its major ring roads (such as Erzsébet körút and Teréz körút) and traversing a number of diverse neighbouring districts.

Between the top of Andrásy Út and the park is Hőssök tere (Heroes Square), a vast open space with a pantheon of stone statues on one side. Many of these sculptures of national heroes had been associated with the kind of appeals to patriotism characteristic of the Horthy

era and so were temporarily replaced by the Communists after 1948. Stalinist statuary, never a popular choice, unsurprisingly became a target for crowds during the uprising. On either side of Hőssök Tere stand the Hungarian National Gallery and the Műscárnok (Art Hall); one home to the country's national art collection including some works by old masters like Rubens, and the other a venue for the sort of contemporary Hungarian equivalent to the Paris Salon.

Andrássy Út proceeds from Hőssök Tere through a diplomatic district with many foreign embassies. Near the square itself is the former Yugoslavian embassy where Imre Nagy, the popular Communist leader whose reinstatement the crowds of 1956 had called for, took refuge after the Soviet tanks rolled back into Budapest.



Figure 12: Andrassy Út at Hőssök tere (Heroes Square) and Városliget (City Park),

Just where the diplomatic district on Andrassy Út thins out, Fiuk Művészeti Klubja (FMK-The Young Artists' Club) is situated in an old villa with surrounding gardens. FMK has been a venue for new art from Hungary and abroad since the 1960s, something unthinkable during the Stalinist 50s when even abstract painting was officially prohibited and no such exhibition spaces existed. On the same side of the road, just one metro stop away at 60 Andrassy Út, are the old headquarters of the AVH police. During the 1956 uprising the AVH became targets for the crowds among whom many would have lost friends and relatives as victims of the organisation. Just a few yards along, on the opposite side of the road, is the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts where Erdély studied sculpture. Traditionally a fairly conservative institution, the Academy has seen various factions vying for dominance over decades. In the period before the uprising there was a curious partnership between the most conservative

forces in art and those who claimed a progressive revolutionary stance in politics. Throughout his life Erdély was critical of this expedient combination.



Figure 13: Andrassy Ut

The majority of people in Hungary, caught unprepared by the social changes, expected the arts to take a stand in defence of tradition, to represent stability in a changing world. Since the vast majority of artists would not and could not refuse to meet these expectations, backwardness came to acquire an aura of heroism. To this day, resistance to change and reverence for the traditional genres and artistic ideals have been seen as evidence of strength of character. To complicate matters, the political forces responsible for social change had decided to support such resistance, probably on the rationale that any illusion of permanence and stability merited special nurturing in view of the changed social circumstances.²¹

Although the uprising was against an ostensibly Marxist regime many who took part could not be characterised as conservative or right-wing. Certainly Erdély's own politics and practice were progressive.

One result of the later Hungarian defeat by Soviet tanks was a massive drop in membership of Western Communist parties as the period saw a growing sense of political values becoming increasingly relative. This was evident even in the enclosed environment of Hungary where, after 1956, Socialist Realism was quietly sidelined. But at the time of Erdély's happening his work indicated a rejection of Soviet authority through an undogmatic collective response. The work's installation in the streets, among the weave of political, social, and cultural centres representing order, made it part of the uprising's brief overturning of authority.

4.3 COLLABORATION

Erdély made *Unguarded Money* with friends, distributing empty boxes throughout the streets. The work is collaborative because of this group activity but also because of its involvement of participants in the uprising, and people who were just out for a look at events in the streets. It was part of the re-occupation of the city's space by the population after the regime's loss of control.

Twentieth century Hungarian art is marked by the periodic attempts of different groups to respond to innovative currents in Western art. While this usually involved formal borrowing, it was often combined with radical social and political visions; all the more important to remember since inter-war dictatorship and subsequent Stalinism negated those concerns and, at best, stifled Hungary's most progressive artists.



Figure 14: Imre Makowecz: Sarospatak Cultural Centre 1974 (left), Forkasret Mortuary Chapel 1975 (centre), and Paks Catholic Church 1987-90.

Hungarian folk culture has also been susceptible to appropriation by both Stalinism and a religious conservative nationalism. Recently, the architecture and design of Imre Makowecz (Fig'14) appeared to fuse modernism with traditional materials and the forms of rural vernacular architecture. Along with others such as Katalin Keserü, who became director of the Múscarnok in 1989, his work echoed an emergent Christian right of centre in post-communist Hungary. They represent a continuity with the past similar to the 'stand in defence of tradition, to represent stability in a changing world' criticised by Erdély. Keserü describes the Múscarnok in terms of:

'the Eastern European "*Kunsthalle*" conception of the support of contemporary art, which has been alive and functioning since the nineteenth century,' which 'has not lost its validity at all.'²²

The positive face of this kind of stand is that, during her time as director, Keserű undertook an extensive restoration of the Múscárnok, securing funding in a period of economic difficulty. However, this kind of prestige project could equally attract criticism, perpetuating, as it might, the division of a cultural elite separated from the economic problems experienced by many in Hungary.

However, though many of a religious, nationalist position came to prominence during the 1990s it is also worth noting that Arpád Szábados, who became director of the Hungarian Academy of Fine Art after the change of regime, rejected these traditions in favour of an international and secular view of contemporary Hungarian art. Janos Sugar and Dora Maurer, two artists who collaborated with Erdély, now also teach at the Academy. Sugar, in particular, still values Erdély's influence and sometimes Erdély's reputation within Hungary now seems to be of legendary proportions.²³ However, there have in fact been many historical examples of radical Hungarian art, which, in some cases, was combined with equally radical politics.

In 1907, a group called *MIENK* (an acronym for The Association of Hungarian Naturalists and Impressionists) was formed as an alternative to exhibitions in the Múscárnok. The group condensed decades of formal innovation in French painting, from Courbét's *en plein air* approach as an alternative to highly finished, dingy academic landscapes, to Manet's acknowledgement of surface and the fragmentation of light in later Impressionism.

MIENK exhibited Hungarian artists like Rippl-Rónai, Ivanyi Grunwald and Kernstock alongside Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Matisse and Picasso. In the rush to catch up with innovative art *MIENK* attracted many ambitious young Hungarian artists and led to the formation of a number of splinter groups. Among these, *Nyolcák* (The Eight) had a radical agenda for a formal avant-garde. The eight were Károly Kernstock, Béla Czóbel, Dezső Czigány, Ódön Márffy, Dezső Orbán, Lajos Tihanyi, Róbert Berény and Bertalan Pór. They saw their art in

not dissimilar terms to Greenberg's later view of Abstract Expressionism and were certainly close to Matisse's attitude of painting as a form of respite from the demands of modern society. They thought art should offer a safe space away from class and politics. This formal avant-garde was able to mediate between new developments in Western Europe and some of the Hungarian public. They were finding a gradually more receptive atmosphere in Budapest. Hungarian Millennial celebrations had enhanced the city's status, giving Budapest an air of the metropolis.²⁴ When the emperor of Austro-Hungary visited the festivities he was not only an honoured guest but was witness to Budapest as a city to rival Vienna. With its emergent young middle class who constituted a willing audience, the city became a more likely venue for innovative art.

Nyolcák's leader, Károly Kernstock (1873-1940) had studied at the *Academie Julien* in Paris and had been influenced by the Post-impressionists as well as Matisse and Picasso in an environment where their work was accessible and widely debated. Kernstock also defended *Nyolcák* in print and his manifesto for the group, *Art as Exploration*, drew fire along with the group's exhibitions.

The Marxist intellectual Georg Lukács supported *Nyolcák* in his essay 'The Parting of the Ways' by praising their decisive break with Impressionism. In Lukács, *Nyolcák* had a credible supporter who saw their work not merely as a formal rejection of Impressionism, but as an art of ideas.

[...] attitudes themselves were the goals, since they too could be the carriers of sensations and moods. Kernstock considered his ideas as ends provided they were sufficiently new and sufficiently interesting. To Kernstock, ideas denote ends, not means; sensations and stimuli, not tasks and duties. The new art is the art of the creation of the whole, that of going all the way, of profundity.²⁵

All this provoked outrage in some quarters; in 1911 Prime Minister István Tisza attacked *Nyolcák* in the national press a reaction which raised their profile and further established contemporary art within a wider cultural debate. It is possible to see how initially convincing a claim for autonomous art could be in this sort of climate. Although *Nyolcák* soon fragmented, they had set a precedent for others to form groups and colonies such as that at

Szentendre north of Budapest, which was committed, if less programmatically, to formal problem solving. However, once the initial furore over Post-Impressionist influences abated, and though later work continued to reflect these concerns, despite the prevailing climate of extreme political conservatism in the interwar years the work was perceived to be far less controversial. Later still, one member of *Nyolcák*, Bertalan Pór, whose work had inclined to social as well as a formal critique, became a leading exponent of Socialist Realism during the Stalinist 1950s; his earlier innovative realist approach discarded in favour of uncritical adherence to state policy.²⁶

Despite this later degree of accommodation, in the early decades of the twentieth century establishment fears over foreign artistic influences were undoubtedly further provoked by the overt radicalism of Lajos Kassák's *MA (Today)*, which became the main journal on contemporary art as well as a forum for discussion on social and political change. Kassák was an artist, writer and activist. He was an important figure not just in Hungarian art but also in the context of a wider debate about the dominant forms of art production and dissemination. Kassák's interdisciplinary approach including the necessarily collaborative form of a magazine like *Ma*, make him an early twentieth century model of this methodology. He had travelled extensively around Europe and was familiar with the leading German periodicals of the time, *Aktion* and *Sturm*. He was a key figure in *A Tett (Activist)*, a Hungarian group and journal (the forerunner of *MA*), which transcended its local roots to become 'an integral part of the European avant-garde.'²⁷

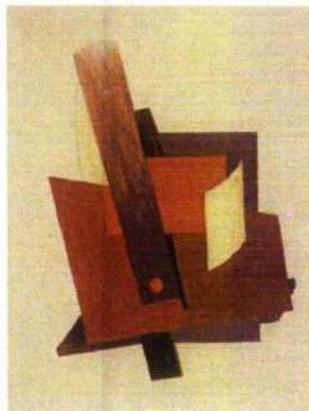


Figure 15: Lajos Kassák, *Spatial Construction*, 1922.

Kassák's work as a writer on *MA* and *A Tett* brought him into contact and collaboration with most of the new Hungarian artists. *A Tett* was closed in 1916 because of its criticism of state propaganda during the First World War and, eventually, as its successor, *MA* had to be published abroad because of its association, in the eyes of the authorities, with the post-war Republic of Councils.

Hungarian art of the period has to be seen in light of this increasing radicalism. Attempts to create an effective political Left since the mid-nineteenth century had stalled in a country totally dominated by its rural economy and with no sizeable urban industrial proletariat. The various intellectual circles and societies as well as craft based trade unions viewed the peasant majority as backward and mired in religious superstition. The situation was exacerbated when the war began, decimating trade union membership as workers were conscripted.

The Austro-Hungarian armies, whose diverse ethnic groups resented their involvement in the war, performed poorly and reluctantly; the diverse ethnic groups of the empire resented their involvement. Paralysed with daily injustices imposed by an officer class whose inflated status was maintained at the expense of other ranks, the army was rife with anti-semitism and the other ethnic tensions endemic in the empire. By 1917 Austro-Hungarian forces were totally demoralised. The Russian Revolution and Soviet withdrawal from the last months of the conflict changed the perception of agrarian societies as incapable of achieving major political change. If an industrially underdeveloped country like Russia could achieve revolution and pull out of the war, then the feeling was that Hungary too could achieve as much.

Many left-wing Hungarians, dragooned into the army sometimes as a punishment for agitation, found themselves in Russian POW camps on hand to witness the October revolution. Hungarians were the most receptive of all prisoners to the Soviets and among the activists was Béla Kun who later headed the Hungarian Republic of Councils, the short lived Marxist government which, unlike the later 1948 Russian dominated regime, was the product of a popular revolt.

Kun was smuggled back in a group of activists just after the war, posing as a military surgeon. He arrived in a turbulent Budapest where trade union membership had soared from pre-war numbers to a massive popular protest movement (Fig' 16).

HUNGARIAN TRADE-UNION MEMBERSHIP, 1899-1919

Year	Membership
1899	8,525
1900	8,222*
1901	9,999
1902	15,270
1903	41,136†
1904	53,169
1905	71,163‡
1906	129,332
1907	130,120
1908	162,854
1909	85,226
1910	86,478
1911	95,180
1912	111,966
1913	107,486
1914 (June)	96,290
1914 (December)	51,510
1915	43,381
1916	55,338
1917	215,222
1918	721,437
1919 (April-May)	1,000,000† (est.)
1919 (June)	1,420,000 (est.)

Figure 16: A record of Hungarian trade union membership showing a steep increase in membership preceding The Republic of Councils.

Soon after his arrival Kun was arrested and badly beaten in police cells. A journalist witnessed the incident and reported it in *Az Est* (evening-paper). Kassák also wrote of the authorities' desperation in handling events: '[...] after the *Az Est* report on Kun's beating appeared, the sympathy of the greater part of the workers went to the communists'.²⁹

For a time Kassák focused much more on his writing and activism and it was only in later life that he returned to making visual art with constructions composed of various materials built on two-dimensional supports. These late works resembled the early twentieth century experiments of synthetic cubism and early Soviet constructivism. Kassák was still identified with the avant-garde, although during the Kadar era he was accommodated within the staff of the Academy. It is again clear however, certainly in terms of Kassák's early work, that he was another important precedent for a radical practice in Hungarian art and that Erdély, rather than being an exception, actually had examples of avant-garde, collaborative and highly politicised art production from within Hungary itself. The group forum of movements such as

Nyolcák and Kassák's collaborations through journals set a particular sort of precedent for Erdély.



Figure 17: Images from 1956 film footage of *Unguarded Money* with Erdély's poster, box with donations, and a participant casting money into the box.

In 1919, the collaboration of different sections of Hungarian society had led to an initially successful challenge to the authorities. Collaboration in its broadest sense, here as a means to social change, is equally applicable in visual cultural terms. In his later work with *INDIGO* (*interdiszciplináris gondolkodás; Interdisciplinary thinking*) Erdély made communication and activity with other artists central to his practice. However, even the very early *Unguarded Money* is a collaborative work containing many ingredients characteristic of Erdély's later work: apart from collaboration itself, using available materials, working across disciplines traditionally bounded by restrictive categories – art, political activism etc – as well as the fact that political activity was the dynamic driving the whole project. *INDIGO* later made work from military equipment, often in the form of consumer durables, for peaceful uses. As a group, they were also directly involved in *DIALOGUE*, a branch of the Hungarian peace movement in the 80s. *Unguarded Money* also depends on the involvement of others as active participants, projecting shared values in a rejection of police control.

Erdély retrospectively called *Unguarded Money* a happening.³⁰ Arguably, this gives the work a spurious air of innovation; Alan Kaprow and others only later used the term in the West. Erdély also called the work a street action which seems more satisfactory given the situationist implications of its overtly political character.

This was a truly significant action – and caused plenty of trouble – and I don't like to talk about it because even now it's still a bit sensitive. But I know that the idea popped into my head that evening, [...]. From then on I did not let go of the idea. And I had never even heard of happenings or action art. The first time I heard of that was I

think in '65 when Lakner told me that Kantor and others in Poland had walled in a door.³¹

Not until the following decades would there be comparable radical, democratic, participatory examples of such work in the West. Hans Haacke has come to be seen as the pre-eminent political artist, a problematic role in terms of its function within the capitalist framework of the art world. Haacke's work bearing the closest resemblance to *Unguarded Money* in its invitation to participate as well as its material construction, is his *MOMA-Poll* of 1970. Haacke installed the piece for *Information*, MOMA's major exhibition of conceptual art that year. As Erdély's work had been a response to events in Hungary, *Information* took place against the backdrop of America's involvement in Vietnam. By 1970 this had reached a peak of destructiveness in Vietnam itself, was spreading into neighbouring countries including Cambodia (which had declared itself neutral), and was the cause of increasingly polarised opinion in US society.

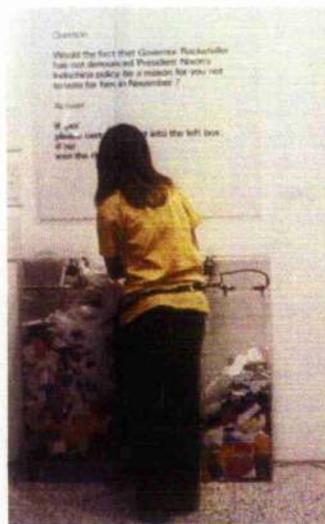


Figure 18: Hans Haacke's *MOMA Poll*, (1970), text, plexi-glass ballot boxes and coloured ballot papers.

Information was curated by Kynaston McShine; the first black curator to be involved in such an event at MOMA. Although the exhibition was not intended to be political, given contemporary events un surprisingly some artists wanted to change their contributions to reflect what was going on in South East Asia and the US. McShine supported their attempts to change exhibits. As previously mentioned, MOMA was founded and run by members of powerful and wealthy corporate families in the US. The museum's role in shaping the history of Modernism was bound up with these other interests, their self-perpetuating status in

American society and its political culture, as well as US foreign policy. Nelson Rockefeller had been on the Board of Trustees since 1932. In 1970 he was Republican Governor of New York and up for re-election. Included among his family's many financial interests were companies allegedly connected to napalm production and other chemical, biological, and conventional weapons. This formed a clear link between corporate power, US culture and society, and events in south East Asia.

Haacke's work revealed these connections and gave visitors to the museum a chance to comment on their relevance. As in *Unguarded Money*, Haacke's *MOMA-Poll* featured boxes and a text inviting participants to cast something into them. Where the boxes in the streets of Budapest became containers for donated money as a demonstration of support for the 1956 uprising, Haacke installed two clear plexi-glass ballot boxes with photo-electric counting devices. In *Unguarded Money* a printed text asked for donations to the 'martyrs' of the revolution. By donating, participants clearly demonstrate sympathy with the insurgents; by not donating they implicitly do not side with the uprising but possibly with the authorities. In Haacke's *MOMA-Poll* each side of the debate is accommodated within the participant's potential role in the piece. His text consists of a question and the two possible answers constituting options in the work's referendum.

Question

Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon's Indochina policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?

Answer

**If 'yes'
Please cast your vote in the left box
If 'no'
Into the right box.**

Haacke's *MOMA Poll* was collaborative in its involvement of the viewer but it was also part of a critique of institutions forming a re-engagement with galleries and museums. By contrast *Unguarded Money* absented itself from all such official spaces. Collaboration continued to be an important aspect of Erdély's work; for example, in his experimental films made whilst working for Hungarian state television and in his extremely varied work with the *INDIGO*.

4.4 MATERIALS



Figure 19: A donation to *Unguarded Money*.

In common with other conceptual works, the materials in *Unguarded Money* are of less importance than in traditional painting or sculpture. Nothing is left of the piece of work itself and even bullet holes from the uprising (still clear on some local buildings) are gradually disappearing with the gentrification of inner Budapest.³² The boxes used for *Unguarded Money* didn't have to be of any particular dimension or type. While the money donated had an obvious utilitarian aim in providing economic aid to victims and their dependants it had other resonances too. Bank notes had also been stuffed into the uniforms of dead AVH officers as an ironic comment on the blood money they had been paid by the state.

Later, in 1963, Erdély worked in Paris and, this time in the context of a Western consumer society, again used money as his medium.

When I first arrived in Paris, I was instantly seized by a new and different, crazy spirit, and immediately discovered the curse that went with it. Because I found the freedom that was proclaimed there totally incomprehensible. I sensed a tremendous contrast between the proclaimed conditions of freedom and people's actual behavior. That is, everyone acted as if their behavior was controlled by invisible strings. I could not at first identify the organizing principle behind this phenomenon. Then I realized that money had saturated their nervous systems to a far greater extent than what we had gotten used to – in Hungary. And it seemed to me that the power of money had somehow organized all this behaviour. It was an invisible power. And so I said to myself, what if we could somehow make a crack in this invisible power...!³³

Besides using money as an art medium, Erdély used text, another typically conceptual approach. Haacke's question and answer in *MOMA Poll* worked similarly as a means of facilitating democratic participation. The makeshift form of *Unguarded Money*, and the usefulness of text as a means of communicating the way in which the piece works, resembles later attempts by Western conceptualists both to use less privileged materials and to dematerialise the art object altogether.

Joseph Kosuth used photocopied text to undermine the uniqueness and commodity value of the object in order to question its standing as art. In *Art as Idea as Idea-[Meaning]* (Fig' 20) he also places these concerns in a wider philosophical context. His photocopied dictionary definition works as art as a question about itself and the value system conferring its status while Erdély's text functions as an overtly political question. Kosuth's piece is non-prescriptive but Erdély's offers options which, by implication, lead to some form of commitment.

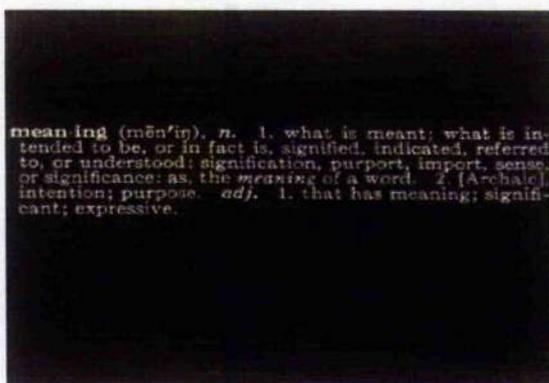


Figure 20:

**Joseph
Kossuth**

***Art as Idea as
Idea-
[Meaning],
(1967), Photo-
graphic
enlargement
of dictionary
definition.***

As with *Unguarded Money's* location in the streets, Erdély's use of rudimentary materials contrasts the regime's monumental, official public art. Even smaller scale Socialist Realist paintings stand out as grandiose through their association with official venues and state policy while *Unguarded Money* achieves heterogeneity with its surroundings.

Erdély continued to use unprivileged materials throughout his career. Besides his sale of money in Paris Erdély's films of the 1960s incorporated the approach of many Fluxus artists in the West. Aside from the collaborative process of film making, his use of the material of film itself posed questions about the privileging of certain types of seeing or viewing. The

clearest examples of this are his early films collectively known as *TV Garbage*. They are compiled from film scraps collected from the waste bins of Hungarian National TV, spliced together and reworked, they reevaluate the editorial process, which having ascribed value to some shots had discarded others.

In the 80s *INDIGO* also staged drawing events where participants 'resolved that we would draw until that originally extremely obvious activity would become un-namable.' The group even agreed categories, 'Beautiful but bad drawing, Ugly drawing, A good theme poorly rendered, Mirage, and Sticky media', forming criteria for the drawings which undermined more traditionally crafted effects.³⁴

INDIGO also made work with sand, coal and various other experimental materials. This formal experimentalism involved certain risks and János Sugár believes he was expelled during his post-graduate studies at the academy because of his involvement with *INDIGO*.³⁵ Along with these formal matters political action was never far from *INDIGO*'s work and, in one instance, the group's designs for badges used by *DIALOGUE*, had to be taken out of Hungary by the author and activist E.P.Thompson to be produced in the UK.

Activists brought the badges into Hungary on visits and by December of 1982, fifty Hungarian activists and a few hundred followers were wearing them.³⁶

Even by the standards of Erdély's later activism, *Unguarded Money* represents one of the most clearly political examples of art in the whole period. It is an overt criticism of Stalinist state power and its narrow prescription for acceptable culture.

How can this be seen looking from the Western perspective of the political Left? Where are the points of contact in a work of this kind which was made in opposition to a state that was, in name at least, Socialist, and which used all the trappings and terminology of the Left? Some in the Western democracies might have felt quite comfortable with the hackneyed

vocabulary of workers parties, Stakhanovites and collectivised farms, as well as the products of Socialist Realism in art.

The terminology of 1930s politics had, by this time, become clichéd, as political divisions in Hungary were played out across more complex relations than before. Many of the most committed insurgents were workers for whom the pseudo-marxist rhetoric of the Stalinist leadership meant nothing more than progressively harsher conditions and effective powerlessness.

Likewise, in the West, the kind of conservative backlash that brought McCarthy to prominence in America didn't continue as an acceptable school of thought within the mainstream. However, it did remain in the background; a wellspring for others to occasionally tap into. Richard Nixon launched his career by direct involvement with McCarthy and Ronald Reagan came into politics as Republican governor of California against the background of witch-hunts in the film industry. Both later went all the way to the presidency, with Reagan's political origins still working in his favour into the late 1980s. However, in both cases the rhetoric of anti-communism played progressively less of an overt role, especially in terms of internal American concerns.

Attempts to control opinion and individual desire were far less effective than accommodating and manipulating them. Values had become relative. The adoption in the 1950s of Abstract Expressionism by America's leading business liberals exemplifies Western co-option of opposed or ambiguous values.

Erdély used the term 'martyr', with its religious connotations, in reference to those killed by the Soviets. Religious opposition was one of the most enduring and effective rallying points of subversion against Eastern Bloc governments during the Cold War. This contrasts the context of the West or anywhere that the church, traditionally, has more conservative associations. It's clear from Erdély's own statements and practice that he was not of this

conservative position. His work now seems characteristic of a progressively less grounded interplay of different meanings and values.

Not only did Hungary endure dictatorship in the inter-war period but, like other parts of Europe, it had also seen a burgeoning avant-garde. In common with the experience of Germany and the many other states that became subject to different kinds of totalitarianism these movements were effectively stopped or exiled. Although Hungary's post-war isolation continued this repression, Erdély's work provides an exemplifies a far more clearly politicised art, as well as one of considerable formal awareness, than US counterparts did in 1956.

Now that the tumult associated with 1956 has dissipated and Hungary has been a market economy for 15 years, as well as recently joining the EU, its visual culture can take part on an equal footing with other international work. However, these changes did not lead to the kind of democracy, political or cultural, anticipated by many Hungarians. As one veteran of 1956 said on returning to Budapest after 40 years in exile 'we got rid of the tanks only to let in the banks'.

Notes

- ¹ Clement Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsche', in *Pollock and After*, ed. by Francis Francina (London & New York: Routledge 2000), pp. 48-59 (p.51).
- ² Clark, T.J., 'Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art', in *Pollock and After*, pp. 71-86 (p.75).
- ³ Antal Kampis, *The History of Art in Hungary*, trans. by (London: for Corvina, 1966), pp.360-362.
- ⁴ Alexander Bogdanov, 'The Paths of Proletarian Creation', in *Russian Art of The Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902-1934*, ed. John E. Bowlt (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), pp.178-182
- ⁵ Camilla Gray, *The Russian Experiment in Art: 1863-1922*, (London: Thames & Hudson, Revised ed' 1986), pp. 244-245.
- ⁶ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 'On Proletarian Culture', in *Art in Theory*, (London: ed. By Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (London: Blackwell 1992), pp. 383-384 (p. 383).
- ⁷ Lenin, p. 383.
- ⁸ Gray, p.245.
- ⁹ Louis Althusser, 'Letter to Jean Lacroix' in *Louis Althusser, Early Writings: The Spectre of Hegel*, trans. by G.M. Goshgarian, (London & New York: Verso, 1997), pp. 197-230, (p. 202).
- ¹⁰ Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans. by Donald Nicholson Smith (London: Rebel; 2003), p. 277.
- ¹¹ László Beke, 'Eastern Europe' in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art/Distributed Art Publishers, 1999), pp. 41-52) p.47.
- ¹² Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, 'Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed' in *Pollock and After*, ed. Francis Francina (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.211-226 (p.211).
- ¹³ Sándor Márai, *Memoir of Hungary 1944-1948*; trans. by Albert Tezla (Budapest, Corvina, 1996), p. 185.
- ¹⁴ Marai, p. 185.
- ¹⁵ Rudolph L. Tökés, *Béla Kun and The Hungarian Soviet Republic*, (New York & Washington: published for the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stamford California: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), p. 214.
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- ²⁸ Tóké, P. 227.
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- ³³ Peternák, p. 76.
- ³⁴ Miklós Erdély, *INDIGO Drawing Course 1982-83*, (Miklós Erdély Archive)
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- ³⁶ Letter from Annamária Szoéke,

5.1 THE WEST

THE DEVELOPMENT OF DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL FANTASY SHOWS SUFFICIENTLY WELL AT LAST. THAT THERE IS NO INDIVIDUAL FANTASY INSTEAD THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF GROUPS, SUBJECT-GROUPS AND SUBJUGATED GROUPS...

DELEUZE AND GUATTARI, 'ANTI-OEDIPUS'

WE WILL REFUSE THE ROLES ASSIGNED TO US.

TAKE YOUR DESIRE FOR REALITY.

WHEN EXAMINED, WE WILL ANSWER WITH QUESTIONS.

DO NOT ADJUST YOUR MIND, THERE IS A FAULT WITH REALITY.

I DON'T WRITE ON WALLS.

GRAFFITI, PARIS MAY 1968

This section looks at examples of Western art that were broadly conceptual and, by degrees, political, and which take diverse approaches to elaborating these concerns in art. Though in Cold War Central and Eastern Europe a centrally controlled ideology of art was dominant, in the West, while conventions were not as apparent or obviously enforced, there was nevertheless a dominant imagery which lay outside the conventions of the art world and was communicated through the mass media. Even high art rejection of kitsch acquiesced in the values of the society producing it. Abstract Expressionism became a commercial success with the purchase of paintings by middle class consumers for display alongside the other commodities in their homes. Writing about the US economy during and after American involvement in World War 2, Francis Frascina describes an economic buoyancy contrasting war torn Europe.

Between 1942 and 1946 the GNP of the US rose 66 per cent, share prices by 80 per cent and much of the population saw its income rise markedly. The demand for consumer durables and luxury goods increased dramatically in the mid-forties with a boom for commercial galleries.¹

In 1956, when Erdély put his *Unguarded Money* in the streets of Budapest, the Abstract Expressionists were still ascendant in the West with critical support gradually translating into financial gain. This commercial success was assured when younger collectors, once they had sufficient income, began buying their work.²

While US modernism thrived in this economic upturn, the consumer boom became an ideological manifestation of Cold War anti-communism. Arguably, Abstract Expressionism's formal innovation was waning by the time it succeeded in the market. Greenberg believed that Pollock had lost his way by this time and reverted to figuration.³ Despite this loss of direction, commercial and critical success could still project Abstract Expressionism positively.

By 1961 Abstract Expressionism was an economic, institutional and critical success. In the late fifties MOMA, under its international programme, had transported exhibitions of post-war US modernism all over the world. Characterized in formalist terms (stressing technical and abstract qualities) and as the 'free' expression of unfettered Americans, Abstract Expressionism was returned to New York as a triumphal avant-garde.⁴

Others had always made different types of art whether figurative painters or those pursuing a critical line owing more to the Duchampian legacy of Modernism. Notably, in Europe, where a satisfactory equivalent to Abstract Expressionism had never emerged, Yves Klein and Piero Manzoni conducted a playful questioning of art in their own distinct ways. Even in America where Greenberg's ideas were dominant, he still had outspoken critics. In *The Fall of Paris* (1940) Harold Rosenberg acknowledged the internationalism of modernism in contrast to Greenberg's view, which, increasingly focused on American art. Rosenberg also emphasised what he saw as the existential qualities of Abstract Expressionist painting contrasting Greenberg's concentration on the formal.

A painting that is an act is inseparable from the biography of the artist. The painting itself is a 'moment' in the adulterated mixture of his life – whether moment means the actual minutes taken up with spotting the canvas or the entire duration of a lucid drama conducted in sign language. The act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artist's existence.⁵

Rosenberg had employed the term 'Action Painting' before Greenberg's Abstract Expressionism became dominant. For Rosenberg the term 'action' had other implications than just painting. He acknowledged that 'many of the painters involved were "Marxists" (WPA unions, artists' congress); they had been trying to paint Society. For Rosenberg the 'gesture on the canvas was a gesture of liberation, from Value, - political, aesthetic, moral'.⁶

However, this focus on the painterly, whether relating to the formal, existential or the political, was proving a point of departure for some American artists. The work of artists like Rauschenberg and Johns had already incorporated less privileged objects whilst retaining much of the traditional form of their recent American predecessors. While this was some way from the tendency to dematerialise seen in later Conceptual work, it was still a move away from the sanctified notion of creating unique art objects as an expression of the artist's ego.

Yet, considering controversial US involvement in the Korean War (a major reason given by A. Dierdre Robson for the slow growth towards high prices for Abstract Expressionist paintings)

there was little direct response to these events in American visual art.⁷ An older European artist did deal with the subject but Picasso's painting of mechanistic US soldiers shooting Korean peasants was subjected to a kind of formalist cover-up. In August 1946 a Congressman Dondero from Michigan had made a speech, *Art shackled to Communism*. This resulted in:

[...] strenuous efforts by the institutional agencies of the art world to convince Americans that (despite what Dondero and his associates said) Modern art was not a Communist plot to undermine Western values and democracy. Alfred H. Barr Jr, Nelson Rockefeller and Thomas Hess (director of *Art News*) had all been working hard to equate modern art with freedom. Now, here was Picasso, with numerous works in MOMA, muddying their case.⁸

Picasso's prowess as a talented draughtsman and painter was emphasised over his right to political commitment or criticism of American foreign policy.

In the following decade a policy of direct US involvement in foreign affairs became even more apparent with the *Bay of Pigs* and *Cuban Missile Crisis* but also with escalating US intervention in Vietnam. In this case there was a more overt response on the part of some American artists. Some of the strategies employed also criticised the dominant institutions and by implication the dominant forms they supported. In the case of the *Art Workers' Coalition*, a protest inside MOMA was staged in front of Picasso's *Guernica* in 1970 at the height of the war in Vietnam. There was a growing sense that institutions like MOMA, with their wealthy patronage, embodied the American values being aggressively asserted in Indochina.

By the early 1960s the material concerns and myths of self-expression in Abstract Expressionism were being challenged by a critical art of ideas. Just as the economy was moving towards globalization, works such as Erdély's *Unguarded Money* were indicative of Conceptualism as a global shift with certain shared concerns, particularly with the primacy of ideas and strategies like dematerialisation. The New York based artist Robert Barry's work perhaps epitomised the move away from object based art.

One of a group of artists working with the dealer Seth Siegelaub that also included Lawrence Weiner, Douglas Huebler, Carl Andre and Joseph Kosuth, Barry's work attempted to dematerialise the art object. This was intended to detract from art's market value as a commodity and also involved Barry questioning the privileged spaces traditionally accorded painting and sculpture.

However, Barry's strategy uncovered other issues along the way. A piece like *Inert Gas Series* (1969) reflected the increasing complexities of commodities, themselves no longer predominantly material in character, but often taking the form of information and its dissemination. There is no way in which his work, any more than that of Sol Lewitt's, can be seen as overt protest and certainly not against anything as specific as the Vietnam War. However, there is a corollary between the emergence of this kind of work and the role of information as purveyed by television. It is frequently said that Vietnam was the first televised war and media coverage was crucial to public attitudes. Noam Chomsky has stated that:

It is widely held that the media "lost the war" by exposing the general population to its horrors and by unfair, incompetent, and biased coverage reflecting the "adversary culture" of the sixties.⁹

However, Chomsky then goes on to dispute the parameters of this argument as set down by the military and political establishment. For him the media, even when showing 'horrific' and negative imagery from the war, always framed its coverage within the official argument of an invited US mission to assist the beleaguered south against the unwanted spread of Communism.

The "intervention" in 1965 included the deployment of US combat forces in Vietnam, the regular bombing of North Vietnam, and the bombing of South Vietnam at triple the scale...It is a highly significant fact that neither then, nor before, was there any detectable questioning of the righteousness of the American cause in Vietnam, or of the necessity to proceed to full-scale "intervention".¹⁰

The impartiality of media, given its corporate ownership, is doubtful, but what is also apparent is the role of coverage in making the information appear to become the event. While the war

was all too real it was its impact within the media spectacle that was, however partial, most widespread.

Clearly the importance of information and its distribution had become a defining characteristic of Western and, increasingly, of global society. These developments were paralleled in art with an emphasis on documentation and its distribution.

The inaccessible staging of *Inert Gas Series* in the California desert necessitated an inventive distribution of the information after the event. In general, documentation of Conceptual work or, as *part of the work*, became crucial. Inevitably this became the commodity. Just as media coverage replaced more direct experiences, documentation, as commodity, replaced art in the market.

Another consequence of the massively increased dissemination of information on the Vietnam War was the growth of a widespread and extremely diverse protest movement in the West that included the emergence of the Feminist movement. Some artists who critiqued traditional feminine roles also dealt with their construction in consumerism and its imagery. As Lukács had pointed out in the early twentieth century these constructions are powerful.

The essence of commodity-structure has often been pointed out. Its basis is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity', an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people.¹¹

The reification produced by publicity is certainly evident in relation to women's status, a situation which sometimes formed a core of the critique of this language and its signs in the work of women artists. This is a set of concerns, which, far from being limited to something like a mere single issue, reveals something of how capitalism generally works. As Susan Buck-Morss has commented:

Ironically, if playing with dolls was originally the way children learned the nurturing behaviour of adult social relations, it has become a training ground for learning reified ones. The goal of little girls now is to become a "doll." This reversal epitomizes that which Marx considered characteristic of the capitalist-industrial mode of production:

Machines that bring the promise of the naturalization of humanity and the humanization of nature result instead in the mechanization of both.¹²

Martha Rosler's video *The Semiotics of the Kitchen*, (1975) resembles daytime TV not just in its choice of medium but also in its corollary of women's designated roles amidst an array of consumer durables. Rosler parodies all this in a way that, while humorous, reveals anger and frustration at the absurdity of these constructs and signals a seemingly inevitable change.

Rosler's demonstration of ideology in the media shows that for Feminism, along with other movements of the period, that there was a misleading, though nonetheless dominant, impression of a gradual accommodation of radical tendencies within the Western liberal democracies. This image of the late twentieth century, when seen through the ongoing Cold War stalemate, appears as a simple division between the democracies and Communist Bloc. Yet, while some Western artists, like Robert Barry, so typified aspects of conceptualism that they've become synonymous with it, conceptualism was not a phenomenon confined to Western centres. As with Erdély in Hungary, a use of alternative media and a reflexive examination of meaning in preference to statement making, was similarly happening elsewhere. If Erdély's work is one example in Eastern Europe then much was produced in many Western countries periodically under dictatorships. In Europe alone this included Greece, Portugal and, most enduringly of all, Spain.

Franco's regime, beginning with Nationalist victory in the civil war in 1939 and only ending with his death in 1975, practiced political and cultural repression against opponents including Spain's regional minorities. The Catalan Grup de Treball (*Working Group*) made work reflecting a concern with time and measurement as well as the use of language as a medium. Similar to Erdély's use of the streets in Budapest, Grup de Treball manifest a strong sense of Psychogeography pertaining to a wider context than art world spaces. Furthermore, their work is overtly political and the above approaches are integral to those concerns. Spain differed from Hungary in that it lacked a prescriptive visual orthodoxy equivalent to Socialist Realism. For Spanish artists, opportunities for formal experimentation existed but without

effective political freedom. Franco's policies, which marginalized the cultures of regional minorities, made Grup de Treball's use of Catalan text a challenge to the suppression of Catalan identity as well as to traditional visual orthodoxy. In contrast to the declared conditions in Erdély's Hungary, Grup de Treball produced their work within a capitalist economy because, although tighter business restrictions had at first prevailed, in the 1950s Spanish Fascism turned increasingly to consumerism, initially to attract foreign tourism but soon throughout the Spanish economy.

Western artists were living in a society where ideology had become surface in the form of advertising and popular entertainment. Eastern Bloc Socialist Realism was a visual orthodoxy but publicity, advertising and other imagery associated with popular culture, fulfilled a similar function in the West.

Publicity and the media increasingly defined perceptions of Western society, including the reception of major events; perhaps none more than the Vietnam War. As well as being a focus for diverse protest, the Vietnam War was subject to protest by artists against the war and the values for which it was being fought. Some protests took the form of art works, such as the *Collage of Indignation*, while others intervened in established art spaces like the *Art Workers Coalition* demonstration in MOMA.¹³ In an attempt both to use public space and connect their protest to the gallery district around La Cienega Boulevard in LA, as well as bidding for maximum media coverage, *The Artists' Tower of Protest* (1966) was erected as a highly visible art protest at the confluence of La Cienega and Sunset Boulevard. A metal tubular scaffold forming a four-sided construction some 37 feet and 8 inches high it was covered in small panels, each the work of a contributing artist. The tower was an explicit anti-war protest and an attempt to manipulate the media and counter pro-war propaganda.

With hindsight the Vietnam War can be seen (even after the recent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq) as an old style imperialist war.

[...] protecting countries across the entire world from communism...became indistinguishable from dominating and exploiting them with imperialist techniques.

The US involvement in Vietnam might well be considered the pinnacle of this tendency.¹⁴

Arguably the ideology the US fought for in Vietnam has evolved into what Hardt and Negri would describe as 'Empire' rather than imperialism. In 'Empire', globalization has, to some extent, replaced the need for territorial conquest of nation states, disseminating instead a dominant consumer culture. For example Vietnamese workers now make and aspire to consume the branded products prevalent in the West. However, during the emergence of Conceptual Art, Vietnamese resistance opposed Western capitalist values.

The role of publicity in Western ideology was also examined in more explicit ways. If US aggression in Vietnam was an older type of imperialist episode associated with modern nation states, then advertising and publicity showed a tremendous capacity to identify and exploit some of the diversity and difference associated with postmodern culture and production. As with Martha Rosler's work, the importance of interceding in the prevailing ideology at its major points of reception, such as media and advertising, had become an important approach for some artists. In the case of Victor Burgin's politically charged attempts to deal with the advertising media, this strategy led him to a reappraisal of his own role as male author.¹⁵ Burgin's reassessment of gender and authorship, particularly regarding his growing doubts over the legitimacy of a masculine authorial presence, further undermined any sense of an objective voice outside of ideology.¹⁶ His poster, *Possession*, was also subjected to criticism from within the art world which highlighted the use of art as an ideological tool which, while it may appear to communicate one message, arguably because of its dissemination through the economy, effectively perpetuates the dominant ideology.

Conceptualism's varied forms, even its rejection of form, facilitated a critique, which, whether explicitly or implicitly, revealed the politics of culture and society. Recalling Kosuth's distinction between Theoretical and Stylistic Conceptual Art, one tendency is critical, while the other passively embodies the dominant ideology which functions, to quote author on American conceptual art Robert C. Morgan, 'in a world where invisible systems seem to prevail.'¹⁷

The post-Vietnam era saw, not only a revival of painting, but also the collecting of Conceptual paraphernalia alongside that of more traditional art commodities. The adoption of alternative media bereft of alternative ideas, 'superstructure begetting superstructure' as Kosuth put it, meant that a conceptual formalism could lead artists to an uncritical cooperation with the 'dominating socio-political-economic ideology' along the lines of Greyworld's *The Source*.

In a post-Vietnam, post-Apartheid and post-Feminist environment, certainties based on a universal narrative of class struggle seemed in doubt. But does the apparent inclusion of different groups in a consumerist society represent a genuine extension of democracy? While Burgin's focus on unequal distribution of wealth was obscured by his use of an advertising style and, if anything, highlighted other points of difference such as gender, economic disparity nevertheless remains. Inequalities in wealth are greater than ever and, while other issues are readily absorbed by the art world, issues of class and poverty remain problematic.

In the UK for example, while unemployment has fallen in recent years, poverty persists:

There are around 50 indicators in total which, between them, portray the key features of poverty and social exclusion today in Great Britain.¹⁸

The numbers of people on relative low incomes remained broadly unchanged during the 1990s after having doubled in the 1980s.¹⁹

The myth of the classless society, assisted by the destruction of heavy industry and the replacement of a highly visible industrial proletariat with a society where everyone is now just a consumer, still can't quite obscure class division. Rather than the industrial workers of modernity this divide is perhaps now most visible globally in the mass of migrating poor. They constitute another point of difference wherever they go marking a contrast to the local, and yet, as with the majority of other groups, their difference whether based on gender, race or otherwise retains a common relation to global capital. This combination of an acknowledgement of difference along with the acceptance of common economic relations, defines many contemporary protests and some art collaborations.

Artists addressing these issues include the San Diego collaboration of Elizabeth Sisco, Louis Hock and David Avalos. Again the imagery of advertising and media is central, and any art seeking to promote ideas countering this mythology has to participate astutely. In their poster campaign *Welcome to America's Finest Tourist Plantation*, Sisco, Hock and Avalos demonstrated solidarity with undocumented migrant workers. Their was (and remains) art as activism and necessarily included non-artists in order to make excluded people visible. Their art was politically engaged and displayed an acute understanding of media.

While the group have taken advantage of the ability of media to disseminate their work widely, they remain committed to their locale and to particular identities within it. Their methodology is very inclusive of their subjects, forestalling some of the problems of incomprehension and resentment produced by *Possession*. Like Erdély and Grup de Treball the group's work has a strong sense of place focused as it is on a particular part of Southern California. It also seems less commodifiable than Robert Barry's work of the sixties. The passage of time has not yet made it fashionable: given its subject this might never happen. However, with their use of posters, billboards and dollar bills, the absence of commercial appeal is not because of any lack of objects.

5.2 Robert Barry's *Inert Gas Series*

Dematerialisation attempted to undermine the commodity value of the art object, a strategy which, in purely formal terms, seemed compatible with minimalism. However, minimalism, while going a long way to a renegotiation of artist, object, and viewer roles, as well as having been rejected as 'theatrical' by modernist critic Michael Fried, still evolved from aspects of modernism such as the Spartan qualities of Barnett Newman's painting. Followed by an apparent return to conservative values, was conceptualism a sea change or just a hiatus in a formal evolution? Rather than simply the forms, or virtual absence of them, which may have looked like the continuation of a Newman influenced modernism it was in fact the critical renegotiations of Minimalism that became the real focus for artists like Barry.

If there was anything about conceptual art? If there was one thing? It was the way the work questioned the entire system. It really dug deep and revealed the relation between art and the viewer. What being an artist was about and what conceptual art was about, was testing the limits of one's perception, pushing it as far as possible, to the point of invisibility. I think conceptual art was the end of modern art. I think art was going out on a limb to see what would happen.²⁰

For his *Inert Gas Series* in 1969 Robert Barry went to the Mohave Desert in Southern California where he released invisible gases into the atmosphere. Because of the remoteness of this location, so far removed from any formal art space, obviously, disseminating such inaccessible work proved challenging.

How do you present an art that can't be photographed in magazines devoted to colour reproductions and things like that?²¹

During the mid to late 60s, Barry's work had developed from minimalist painting with a general lack of visual incident influenced by the work of Ad Reinhardt, to a conceptual practice where action, environment, and the role of the viewer, defined the work.

In 1964 Barry produced both very large and very small, square canvases containing monochrome fields of colour with a grid of unpainted squares on white gesso grounds. By 1966 he was making multiples of similar paintings, which were still essentially minimalist in their rejection of earlier gestural New York school painters. In *Orange Edges* he put two panels edge-to-edge and painted two-inch wide orange lines, which began about two inches from the top of the canvas and continued vertically until about two inches from the bottom. These lines also overlapped the edges of the canvas and gave the sides of its structure as much emphasis as the front. Barry was blurring the definitions between painting and sculpture but still, at this point, working within those terms.

In 1967, on a recommendation from Lawrence Weiner, the dealer Seth Siegelau visited Barry's studio in, what was at that time, the run down Bowery district. Barry had already started producing cubes and placing them equidistant from one another in gallery spaces. Siegelau explained his role as collaborator/dealer and, though there was no contract, he provided Barry with a small stipend in return for art.

In 1968 Barry exhibited a painting at the Laura Knott Gallery which he placed just a few inches from the floor so encouraging the viewer to look down and along in order to see the picture. Generally, Barry's work was acquiring greater sensitivity to both environmental factors and the role of the viewer in completing the work. By contrast a modernist painting or even a sculpture, such as those by Anthony Caro, were put in the space and then later removed in their complete form without regard to other factors. The use of twine to delimit dimensions of an exhibition space, followed by another work where Barry broadcast inaudible radio frequencies, further confirmed a lack of visual incident and the importance of the intangible in Barry's work.

In his *Release of Inert Gases*, Barry's work had been removed from, or at any rate relocated and redefined, the art space. Moving away from the gallery involved a total re-evaluation of both the viewer's role and experience of the work in relation to this isolated event, as well as the role of the artist. This is because it was now the action performed, rather than an object produced, that counted as the work. In theory, there was no need to perform the action; documentation could simply provide an account of it. However, Barry has said that *the act of making the work is crucial and indeed is at the core of his rejection of objects.*



Figure 21: Robert Barry's *Inert Gas Series: Helium.*

The artist *making* his work of art is entirely different from the artist *presenting* his work of art. And art for me is making art, myself. And if in the process of making my art it involves things which are invisible, which we can't see, or which are imperceptible, which we can't perceive through our senses, then that's just the way it has to be.²²

Obviously, although Barry draws this distinction, he was still part of a system that involved the promotion of this intangible work and, therefore, presentation was extremely important. The task of promoting the work fell to Siegelau and showed his contribution as dealer/collaborator. A poster, the paradigmatic advertising form, was widely distributed. Aside from a simple text describing the action, the poster also carried an LA p.o. box address and phone number. On calling the number HO 48383, a recorded message described the work. Siegelau's strategy was as sophisticated as any advertising agency's at the time.

A combination of the dematerialisation of Barry's work, its dislocation from established art environments, and its dissemination through documentation, highlighted the changing forms of commodities in which the exchange of information superseded industrial production. Paradoxically, it also reflected the global spread of aggressively tentacular marketing. As in the case of Baudrillard's description of consumerism:

[...] you never consume the object in itself (in its use value); you are always manipulating objects (in the broadest sense) as signs which distinguish you either by affiliating you to your own group taken as an ideal reference or by marking you off from your group by reference to a group of higher status.²⁵

In terms of Barry's 1988 statement about conceptual art questioning 'the entire system', while his work did this, Siegelau managed to promote it in a way that possessed some of these same reflexive qualities. Siegelau's telling involvement as a dealer/promoter along with the actions, environment, and viewer as integral to the works which were otherwise incomplete, opened the role of artist to questioning in terms of the value traditionally ascribed it.

The impossibility of owning this work in the same way as a painting or sculpture, along with the fact that its documentation soon became so desirable, parallels the increasing importance of information as a product in itself. In this exchange realm of intangibles, utilitarian value is overshadowed by degrees of distinction imbuing an aura of desirability. The commodity moves off into this other realm where images are consumed on a massive scale as signs in a manipulated social reality. While some artists and authors sought to decode this language of signs, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari saw it as lacking underlying structure.

If this constitutes a system of writing, it is a writing inscribed on the very surface of the Real: a strangely polyvocal kind of writing, never a biunivocalized, linearized one; a transursive system of writing, never a discursive one; a writing that constitutes the entire domain of the "real inorganization" of the passive syntheses, where we would search in vain for something that might be labelled the Signifier – writing that ceaselessly composes and decomposes the chains into signs that have nothing that impels them to become signifying. The one vocation of the sign is to produce desire, engineering it in every direction.²⁴

In 1960 R.D. Laing's *The Divided Self* questioned the accepted belief that schizophrenic behaviour, such as hallucinations, were symptomatic of a disease with the necessary pathology to be describable as such.²⁵ Later, in *Sanity Madness and the Family*, Laing's case studies with collaborator Aaron Esterson attributed these symptoms to the coercive structure of family life with implications for other societal norms.²⁶

Laing influenced Deleuze and Guattari, who, in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, questioned accepted tenets of Western thought including Marx's theory of historical inevitability and Freudian Psychoanalysis.²⁷ For example, Freud's bourgeois background as a classically educated, male, Viennese was perhaps more influential in his formulation of the Oedipus complex than any objective facts about universal desire.²⁸

Deleuze and Guattari described society as a massive unseen 'body without organs' deriving its life from each individual's attachment whilst they remained, simultaneously, detached from other individuals, only able to communicate through the mediation of this central body. The myth of community is composed of this separation on the one hand and individual connections to this central organ on the other. All this is fuelled by desire: a desire to become subjects in our own right. In this sense desire became a key term in Conceptualism and much of the thinking surrounding it, which questioned accepted cultural and political forms. Victor Burgin's problems with gender and authorship led him in one essay to posit 'desire' among three linked terms, along with 'image' and 'object'. For Burgin too it is about 'Whose desire? And for what?'²⁹ There are marked contrasts in the language of the period in, for example, Fried's preference for 'objecthood' contrasted with Laing's contention that:

It is interesting, for example, that one frequently encounters 'merely' before subjective, whereas it is almost inconceivable to speak of anyone being 'merely' objective.³⁰

The elusively multi-faceted *Inert Gas Series* channels the same dissolution and confluence of signs as described in Deleuze and Guattari's 'polyvocal kind of writing'.³¹ While Barry's work reoriented relations of viewer, object and action, in terms of undermining art as a commodity, the market never really faltered and soon commodified the very dematerialised and supposedly financially worthless photocopies, documentation of gaseous releases and other conceptual paraphernalia. In this context, dematerialised art could not evade commodification, a process which the inventiveness of Siegelau and Barry actually helped to facilitate. However, Barry's *Inert Gas Series* still represents a decisive step beyond simple material reduction, further challenging the idea that art is a physical thing at all or that accepted relations between artist, viewer, and space, are unalterable. *Inert Gas Series* was made during a period when hierarchy generally was being questioned, including the patriarchal structure of Western society whether topped by the Father in the home or the boss in the boardroom.

5.3 Martha Rosler's *Semiotics of the Kitchen*

A reappraisal of desire in relation to consumerism's prescribed channels was especially evident in work by emergent women artists. Although institutionally relegated and or excluded, some women artists actively highlighted this situation. Subsequently absorbed into the art world mainstream, today artists like Martha Rosler, Mary Kelly and Adrian Piper can have major retrospectives in metropolitan venues. However, in the 60s Rosler felt it necessary to distance herself from the art world's dominant forms and institutions.

By the mid-60s I was drawing sustenance from the political movements. I felt impelled to reject the pseudo-scientific "experimental" approach to making art, roughly derived from physics but focused on aesthetic problem solving and individual perception.³²

As mentioned earlier Rosler had lived and worked around Sol Lewitt in a peer group, which, contrary to Abstract Expressionist machismo, included women like herself and Lucy Lippard. However, relocation further politicised her awareness of media and ideology as the basis of her practice.

I moved to California and was in the right place at the right time to become part of the powerfully intertwined women's and anti-war movement.³³

Where Barry's work questioned the place of object, artist and viewer, feminist artists reconstituted themselves as subjects against designated roles perpetuated by modernism which, despite formal innovation, continued genres associated with a ruling, predominantly male elite. An odalisque by Matisse, its colour and form integrated within a pictorial order acknowledging surface, still depicts women as just one more element in this formal order. The eroticism here belongs to the voyeur divorced from the objectified muse.

It was feminism that underlined for me that it is life on the ground, in its quotidian, thoroughly familiar details, that makes up life as lived and understood but that bears a deeper scrutiny. I have often, in my work, invoked the image of the decoy, a lure that attracts attention by posing as something immediately – reassuringly, attractively – known. The disclosure of the decoy's otherness unsettles certainty and disrupts expectations. I retain the hope that in some small measure my work can help us “see through” the commonsensical notion regarding things as they are: that this is how they must be. This is the first step toward change of any magnitude.³⁴

Rosler saw media too as ideologically loaded and, to counter this, worked within the medium. Her videos were fairly direct counterpoints to particular TV genres. She was an early proponent of video art and her work, as well as forming counterpoints to particular TV genres, reflected the issues of the period. For example, her video *Back Yard Economy* took its title and parodic content from American foreign policy and internal class conflict during the 60s. Rosler further developed this theme in films focused on her concerns about Western consumption in contrast to the developing world, which, partly due to US foreign policy, struggled for survival. In one case, Brazilian cuisine is seen by an American consumer as the latest in a line of consumer fetishes divorced from economic realities in Latin America itself with military take-over made possible with covert US support.

[...] These works themselves engaged with the notion of looking deep "inside the visible", for in looking at the imagery of the polite world of mainstream magazines, of newspapers and television, I saw worlds of power and wealth on some pages and on other pages, or in other slots, a world of victimized or dispossessed people.³⁵

In the *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, Rosler concentrates on the Western association of food preparation and domesticity with women's status in society. While demonstrating kitchen implements and their uses, Rosler names each in a deadpan delivery. This was also a parody of the kind of TV cookery show hosted by Julia Child, an icon of American TV who began her career with *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*.³⁶

A woman in a bare-bones kitchen, in black and white, demonstrating some hand tools and replacing their domesticated "meaning" with a lexicon of rage and frustration is an antipodean Julia Child.³⁷



Figure 22: Stills from Martha Rosler's *Semiotics of the Kitchen*

Besides being a counterpoint to Julia Child style artifice, Rosler's film betrays a sense of ludicrousness at the limitations of these roles; her demonstration of a knife is an angry stabbing action, a simulated assault, and worlds away from the affected niceties of TV.

Tactically I tend to use a wretched pacing and a bent space: the immovable shot or, conversely, the unexpected edit, pointing to the mediating agencies of photography and speech; long shots rather than close ups, to deny psychological intent; contradictory utterances; and, in acting, flattened affect, histrionics, or staginess.³⁸

An art of ideas over forms, Conceptualism questioned previously accepted approaches to the production of art and culture. Feminist art, like Rosler's, was a clear but far from isolated example of this type of critique. Contrary to the familiar roles assigned women in modernism desire here is not satisfied voyeuristically but is the projection of, rather than onto the subject, and is possible where a prescribed hierarchy of forms no longer applies. Even so, emotional

and subjective connotations of desire are not entirely out of keeping here. The austere rational appearance of some conceptual work was not indicative of a commitment to reason as such. As with Sol Lewitt's work, this can often hint at an outline of the Irrational. The rationalisation of reason, its conjunction with socially and politically expedient forms and their imposition as control, is the opposite of conceptualism's reflexivity.

However, in contrast to the highly emotive Modernism that preceded it the work of artists as different as Sol Lewitt, Martha Rosler and Robert Barry asks questions of the viewer. In the case of Lewitt's models and wall drawings, the questions follow an invitation to take part in the play of simple mathematical forms, working out different possibilities and relationships within and beyond the work. Lewitt involves the viewer in the puzzle. Barry's questions are even more about what constitutes art, its context, form and the roles of viewer and artist in an increasingly disparate flow of information. Barry involves the viewer physically at first and then, after the event, in a continuation of the work through Siegel's publicity. Martha Rosler reverses her role as viewer becoming the actor/director/author to challenge us in a more revealing exchange of information subverting the signs of media. Debord wrote:

There can be no freedom apart from activity, and within the spectacle all activity is banned – a corollary of the fact that all *real* activity has been forcibly channelled into the global construction of the spectacle.³⁹

Rosler usurps this passivity, specifically in relation to women's roles in society, whether her own as an artist or the implications for all women of various social, political, and economic roles. Her work asks questions about our own preconceptions which extend beyond her immediate concerns as a Feminist to encompass the relationship between first and third world and, generally, between those who have power, and designate degrees of wealth, status and control, over those who don't. The achievements of feminism, along with the black civil rights movement are enormous, accomplishing what other broader based movements for social and political change often failed to do. However, in common with the changes wrought by dissidents in the former Eastern Bloc countries, their legacy has been appropriated by the mainstream that previously marginalized them.

As seen with Erdély in Hungary, the perception of a broadly conceptual practice as a product of liberal democracy is not entirely accurate. While the Western art market accommodated alternative media, it is symptomatic of a Cold War world-view to generally identify an art of free expression and democracy with the West. Even the limited, commercially driven, coercive form of democracy of the US or UK was further mitigated by examples of dictatorship among other Western nations. The US propped up an un-elected and unpopular South Vietnamese regime while in Southern Africa and Latin America racist and authoritarian regimes prevailed in an anti-communist alliance. Western European dictatorships were also tolerated or encouraged as part of this strategy, notably Spain, which, despite its pariah status as a fascist dictatorship in the wake of the Spanish Civil War and World War 2, was subsequently recycled as an anti-communist Western ally.

5.4 Grup de Treball's *Recorreguts*

Grup de Treball (Working Group), a collaboration of Catalan artists working under the Spanish dictatorship, produced one of the most overtly political works in the West. While they used text and photography to do this, it wasn't their use of media in itself that made the work controversial. Rather, these techniques, especially the use of text, allowed the group to display their opposition to Franco's regime, protesting its repression of their society and, as Catalans, the repression of their language too.

The Spanish dictatorship was tacitly embraced by the West, the US in particular saw good relations with Franco as tactical and strategic compensation for the removal from France of American military bases.

Endowed [...] by nature with a first-class strategic position at the extreme south-west corner of Europe, Spain had no need for any additional qualifications at the height of the Cold War, for engaging the attention of the State Department, not to mention the Pentagon.⁴⁰

Spain was no more a democracy than the Eastern Bloc states. Along with other political opposition, indigenous regional differences, principally those of the Basques and Catalans, were repressed. Nevertheless, as an anti-communist dictator with religious fundamentalist

leanings, Franco was accommodated by the US because 'Washington was not accustomed to let ideological scruples get in its way when forming alliances with right wing dictators.'⁴¹ Therefore, Spain's initial isolation, after the defeat of its former Fascist allies in World War 2, was followed by diplomatic and political overtures in the 1950s.

In 1950, President Truman ratified a loan of \$62.5 million to Spain and US pressure led to the UN overturning a 1946 interdict so allowing Spain entry to the Food and Agriculture Organisation. In 1951 Spain joined the World Health Organisation and when, despite protests, US Admiral Forrest Sherman offered Franco a military pact with an inducement from US Secretary of State, Dean Acheson of \$100 million credit, Spain became a full member of UNESCO. Spain had become a full member of the UN by 1955, and, by 1958, gained membership of both the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. As part of this integration into the international community Spain opened itself to large-scale foreign tourism.

However, the 1959 death in Madrid of Ante Pavelic, the former Croatian dictator and Nazi collaborator, reminded the international community that, despite being recycled as a strategic ally, growing capitalist economy, and tourist destination, Spain's dictatorship retained its true ideological colours. Other residents of Madrid at that time included Belgian Nazi Leon Degrelle, SS officer Otto Skorzeny, and former Vichy commissioner of Jewish questions Louis Darquier.⁴²

The Catalan artists composing Grup de Treball used media associated with conceptualism, including text, to criticise Franco's regime. As the Catalan language was banned during the dictatorship, using text in Catalan not only questioned formal artistic conventions but also the manipulation of language by the regime. This assertion of Catalan identity constituted a form of nationalist protest.

However, Nationalism takes many forms. Franco's authoritarian and centralised Nationalism sprung from Fascism in the inter-war years. The imperialism of Western European nations

and aggressive US interventions are arguably equally nationalistic. In contrast, some manifestations of national and ethnic identity constitute a point of difference rather than dominance. The use of the Catalan language, which continued despite the regime's efforts to impose the 'Christian language', was an assertion of a democratic Catalan identity.

It is vital to an understanding of such work that it represented a serious challenge to the authorities and involved some risk to the group. This is all the more important since, with the passage of time, Franco's regime can seem comparatively benign and, certainly, a Spain that came to be synonymous with holiday destinations was easier to accept as a kind of user-friendly dictatorship. However, the denial of human and constitutional rights, backed up with the repressive use of force, was a fact of life in Franco's Spain. Indeed, during the last years of the dictatorship as the regime steadily ran out of ways to justify its existence, while the economy was increasing liberalised, political repression, of opponents, including Catalans, Basques, students and trade unionists, actually increased.

In 1973 delegates of the outlawed Catalan Ajuntament (the former and now re-instated regional assembly) were arrested at a meeting in a church in central Barcelona. Grup de Treball's response to this was *Recorreguts (Distances Travelled)* an installation of text and images, including maps of the city, pictures of speedometers, lists of names, places, and times. *Recorreguts* documented the time taken by each arrested delegate to be removed from the church to their place of detention by the police. Grup de Treball's concern with urban geography, as indicated in their documentation, recalls Erdély's use of the streets of Budapest. Again, there is an attempt with this move into the urban environment to dispense with some of the normative functions of art within its usual institutional spaces. However, this is not a naïve assertion of an escape, as though somehow leaving the gallery is to leave all restrictions behind. There is instead a sense in which the rejection of one set of institutional norms leads to the critique of a wider context of, nevertheless, equally controlled spaces. As Deleuze put it:

The individual never ceases passing from one enclosed environment to another, each having its own laws: first, the family; then the school ("you are no longer in the family" then the barracks ("you are no longer in the school"); then the factory; from

time to time the hospital; possibly the prison, the pre-eminent instance of the enclosed environment.⁴³

Unlike Erdély's action, which placed the work *in* the streets, Grup de Treball used text, images and the Catalan language to measure and document events and subsequently exhibited this material. The arrests themselves are the focus of the work which the material merely documents. There are parallels here with Barry and Siegelau's documentation, though Barry, like Erdély, had performed the action, whereas Grup de Treball recount the action of the authorities.

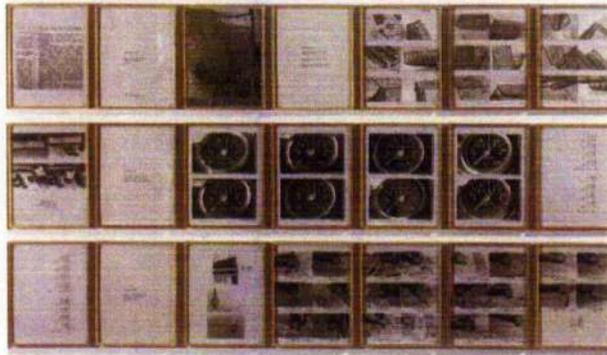


Figure 23: A Section of *Recorreguts (Distances Travelled)*, Grup de Treball's installation of photographs and text on the arrest of members of the outlawed Catalan Ajuntament.

The measurement of time and space are a feature of many conceptual works, for example On Kawara's date paintings. But here, as well as timing the detention of the delegates and measuring the regime's appropriation of political freedoms, *Recorreguts* also reads, with hindsight, as a countdown to the demise of Franco's regime. From the outset Fascism had attempted to return to a Spain divided by class, dominated by religion, and incapable of accepting regional diversity.

Franco had made clear in Spain what the liberal democracies concealed so well, that while fashion, the economy, and even the physical geography of society might appear to change drastically, social and political change can remain illusive.

Adoption by the art world mainstream of the kind of alternative forms used Erdély, Rosler and Grup de Treball is part of the same assimilation and consolidation of conservative values.

Where Socialist Realism and Franco failed, the liberal democracies survive, arguably, no better justified than their vanished counterparts but capable of a skilled and expedient re-ordering of the signs.

This has made it possible to project a positive image of the market economy and as John Berger put it, a 'society which has moved towards democracy and then stopped' whilst allowing a highly selective rationale of who and what to support or undermine culturally and politically.⁴⁴ The Spanish dictatorship's last decade coincided with the Vietnam War. The anti-war movement, already seen to be crucial for Martha Rosler's development as an artist and feminist, also produced, like Grup de Treball's *Recorreguts*, some collaborative art protests.

5.5 *The Artists' Tower of Protest Against the War in Vietnam*

The Artists' Tower of Protest was a tubular metal construction some 38 feet high and covered in small panels, each a piece of work by artists protesting against the Vietnam War. Completed in February 1966, the tower, a product of collaboration across the LA visual arts community was inaugurated with speeches from Susan Sontag, the artist Irving Petlin, who had been instrumental in organising the protest, and ex-Green Beret Donald Duncan.

As a protest the tower required a similar awareness of place to Erdély's *Unguarded Money* but to a greater extent depended on collaboration and connections within the art world as well as the wider community and public opinion on the war.

Further to this, the role of media was important to emphasise the profile and relevance of the tower's protest. The event took place partly in response to a lack of media coverage of earlier protests and was an attempt to avoid further marginalisation. The previous year's Artists' Protest Committee's *March on Gallery Row*, whilst a success from the point of view of organisation and solidarity among LA artists, had little impact outside the art community. It was therefore crucial that the Tower was organised in a way that engaged people beyond the art community.

For California artists to organize and become politicised at all was no small achievement at the time. As indicated by Francis Frascina's description of prevailing attitudes in the preceding years, this sort of activism had previously been effectively curtailed.

In the post-war years, particularly in the United States, emphases on the 'democratic' were inimical to a boom in the consumer products and specialist diversifications within both elite culture, as exemplified by the rapid growth in the art market, and mass entertainment, as exemplified by the monadic experiences of television. Notions of the 'democratic' or 'collective' were institutionally regarded in the Cold War atmosphere of the 1950s as socialist or, worse as Communist.⁴⁵

McCarthy era de-politicisation recalls Martha Rosler's need to move her practice from the art world and engage more closely with activism as well as her concern with TV as disengaged, passively ingested, ideology.

A sense of place within the wider political geography of LA, of at least equal importance to aesthetic concerns, was also crucial to the tower. Its construction, and positioning at the corner of Sunset and La Cienega Boulevards in Los Angeles put its protest near the heart of the LA art world. It was also close to the headquarters of the think tank *RAND* (Research ANd Development), an amalgamation of the Douglas Aircraft Company and the US Air Force, formed after World War 2. In the 1960s *RAND* played an important role in the escalation of war in Vietnam.

Indicative of the extreme changes brought about by the Cold War, the US had ironically supported the Viet Minh against Japan in the Second World War. Viet Minh leader Ho Chi Minh expected further American backing in the war of independence against France. However, post-war anti-Communist expediency led the Truman administration to back the French and later, after their defeat, the US intervened directly. As earlier indicated by US acceptance of Franco's regime, in this climate, anyone who opposed Communism, in its broadest definition here, could find American support.

As part of this wider strategy, a mixture of private and public funding had allowed *RAND* to bring together top science graduates from around the US and beyond to work on strategic planning and, using the most advanced technology, to develop new weapons systems. Among these strategies some promoted the uprooting of Vietnamese communities and the destruction of their environment. Some of the more extreme proposals, in effect, amounted to a systematic genocide.

Through sources in the *RAND* Corporation, information on its theoretical proposals for action in Vietnam were made known. For example: proposals for a programme of systematic uprooting of communities and of hamlet relocation; the diversion of rivers to dry up deltas; the drying up of the sea to locate fish in strategically enclosed and guarded villages; strategies of ethnic or population cleansing; the use of concentration camps.⁴⁶

Over two million Vietnamese were killed during the war in which *RAND* expertise was in particular demand. Many of its employees also happened to collect art and had dealings with venues on gallery row. Parallels can be drawn with Hans Haacke's *MOMA Poll* in New York highlighting the connection between the Rockefeller dynasty and the military industrial complex, though Haacke's 1970 work was situated in an institution rather than the street.

Petlin had a contact working for *RAND* - Roman Kolkowicz - who, as a refugee from the Nazis and Stalinism, viewed what was being done in Indochina in terms of his own experience of persecution and was willing to pass on information to Petlin about what went on in *RAND*.⁴⁷ In order to assist a 1965 artists' picket of *RAND*, Kolkowicz provided information on the best picketing strategy to achieve maximum impact. This proved effective enough for *RAND* to ask a delegation of artists to talks. Kolkowicz subsequently decoded messages from Secretary of State for Defence Robert McNamara urging *RAND* to engage protestors as a means of forestalling future dissent. Armed with this knowledge, Petlin felt in a strong enough position to request an open meeting with *RAND* to which they acceded. Eventually a meeting was held at a theatre on La Cienega Boulevard near what was to become the site of the tower. Artists' representatives included Petlin, Golub and Kozloff while military strategist Bernard Brodie, a senior figure at *RAND*, represented the organisation. Eight hundred people came to the four hundred capacity theatre necessitating a loudspeaker broadcast of the

discussion to a crowd in the adjoining car park. The arguments, predictably polarised, left the artists feeling they had justified their stance while *RAND* uncomfortably defended government policy. How useful *RAND* or the US government found the meeting in gauging and controlling future dissent isn't known but the period after 1966 saw an escalation of protest.

These events, preceding the tower's installation, alerted its participants to the potential leverage of such protest and constituted impressive espionage from an art community that previously had little political consciousness. However, there was still a legacy from the McCarthy era in an internal art community divide.

Within visual art, events and groups such as *Angry Arts* and the *Art Workers Coalition* were in marked contrast to the politically engaged but culturally elitist stances of people like the critic Michael Fried and *Art Forum* editor Philip Leider - both Greenberg followers. In 1966, before its move to New York, *Art Forum* was still based in LA and was already at the centre of a debate about how politically engaged visual culture should be. So, although its editor might have been unsympathetic, in terms of the tower's media impact, *Art Forum* was potentially vital to wider coverage.

However, *The Tower of Protest*, as indicated by its position in the streets, its makeshift steel tubular construction and its 418 3-4 inch square panels, was not designed to be the kind of lasting autonomous work of art favoured by Greenberg sympathisers. A sense of *Situationist Psychogeography* is again a major part of the *Artists' Tower of Protest Against the War in Vietnam* although, those involved, including Petlin who had lived in Paris for some time during the McCarthy era, were unaware of direct parallels with France. As indicated by the presence of *RAND*, Los Angeles was the major national centre for mutually dependant US space and military research. Military technology from World War 2 and after assisted the development of rocket technology powerful enough to get into space and this, in turn, helped generate advances for military use.

Concurrent with its development as a major urban and industrial centre, LA had long been a city marked by class and race conflict. In the early 20th century the city was run by an anti-trade union elite, operating an *Open Shop* policy which effectively excluded unions and where strict control of wages and workers rights were controlled by a network of civic and private concerns. One proprietor of the LA Times, General Otis, actually fortified the newspaper's building and his homes: even his car had a machine gun on the roof. In response to this the LA Times building was blown up in 1910 apparently by union saboteurs.⁴⁸ So, long before the Cold War, LA saw confrontation along the lines of an entrepreneurial business class pursuing a vision of the 'American Dream' on one side and the realities of labour, race, and class, on the other.

After the Second World War, LA saw an increase in 'the diversity of diversity', a proliferation of difference making it the archetypal postmodern heteropolis.⁴⁹ Yet, as Rosalind Deutsche highlights, there is a danger in the specious accommodation of such diversity, of replacing the collective and assisting 'the conversion of the public sphere into a private possession, which is so often attempted today in the name of democracy.'⁵⁰ LA's diverse citizenry are unable to participate equally in the public sphere and certainly back in the summer of 1965, when differences were little celebrated, the predominantly black ghetto of Watts, blew up in a protracted riot. Poverty, bad housing and police harassment fuelled violence which was then relayed through a largely white, corporate media, giving it little context. With even civil rights leaders calling for the situation to be quelled with 'all the force necessary' Debord wrote in December that year: 'who was there to defend the rioters of Los Angeles in the terms they deserve?'⁵¹

With limited media analysis of these events as well as the war in Indochina, where black soldiers could die while black people were vilified at home, the Tower sought to intervene in LA's particular kind of segregation, becoming a focal point for protest against both the war and the values behind it.

This involved collaboration between different artists and groups, and also included work by many well-established American artists of the sixties including Elaine De Kooning, Judy

Gerowitz (Judy Chicago), Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Motherwell, Frank Stella, Ad Reinhardt, Mark Rothko. However the Tower was not intended to function in like a gallery and participation in the tower was distinct from the art world star system with each artists' status secondary to their collective involvement. While, arguably, the project carried more weight for involving established names, their presence, in this instance was meant to function as *part* of the protest. Although it is true that established names were used in a fund raising letter, with the resulting contributions undoubtedly helping to make the Tower possible.

Had the Tower been the product of one artist, even if it took a team of people to construct, it would have meant something very different. It would also have been difficult for one artist to get the support necessary to undertake such a work as a protest. Antipathy from some quarters toward anti-war opinion was also very strong and at times violent. The kind of fire drawn, if not in the media then on the ground in the immediate neighbourhood of the tower, was such that a single artist could not have coped. There were many direct assaults on the Tower as well as those making and guarding it, but this was a consequence of the necessarily overt profile needed for an effective protest and didn't detract from the protest's achievement.

On all levels Situationist doctrines were fulfilled in one event. There were daily occurrences including media interviews, attacks and various visits, such as those by the singer Judy Collins, and by Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters in their Day-Glo bus travelling around the West Coast.⁵²

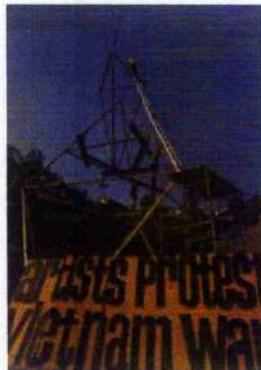


Figure 24: The Artists' Tower of Protest Against the War in Vietnam in construction.

Unfortunately, so far as the desired media coverage of the tower went, the project was only partially successful. The *Los Angeles Free Press* provided extensive coverage of the protest

but, as a genuinely independent publication which, routinely, covered relevant social and political news, including an objective account of the riots in Watts, it was exceptional. Despite its proximity, but because of its editorial line, *Art Forum* and its editor Philip Leider, gave the tower scant coverage.

Although, as Petlin recalls, Leider had remained on the sidelines of previous activities, along with other 'observers', it was a reasonable expectation that Leider would include a piece on the Tower, or a review, or at least an advertisement. On being asked, he declined such requests, saying that 'art and politics do not mix'.⁶³

Art Forum did cover an on-going debate amongst artists and critics on whether they should espouse commitment and, if so, should this be reflected in their work. This included the journal's publication of 'The Artist and Politics: a Symposium' as well as various responses including one by Donald Judd. However, aesthetically the Tower in no way concurred with the Greenbergian editorial line being consolidated by Philip Leider.

Even when the tower did receive some coverage in another journal, *Art in America*, this took the form of a colour image of its construction on the magazine's cover some five and a half years later in the November-December 1971 issue. The related article, *Politicisation of the Avant-Garde* by Therese Schwartz, referred to the tower only in passing. TV and radio coverage had helped bring crowds and support as well as verbal and physical attacks. For the kind of round the clock coverage accorded publicity, broadcast media is extremely effective but, as an ephemeral media, its coverage of the tower soon faded from public consciousness.

The direct involvement of artists in the recent war in Iraq in a role comparable to embedded journalists is similarly problematic: the closer the involvement and proximity to the conflict, the poorer the objectivity of information. Past artists and journalists may have envied such access but those who experience it now do so within a stage-managed media play of events. The Tower artists lacked this direct access to events, although those involved worked tirelessly probing the involvement of institutions in the area with events in Vietnam itself. The Tower's construction lacked the high-tech pyrotechnics of broadcast media yet it took a great

deal of planning and co-operation through personality clashes in the face of, sometimes violent, opposition. The action further galvanised a previously depoliticised art community and briefly provided an alternative independent opinion on events which contrasted corporate dominated media coverage. In this sense it was arguably a better indicator of attitudes to the Vietnam War than news images interspersed with car ad's and Julia Child kitchen tips.

5.6 Victor Burgin: *Possession*

Adopting a more traditional form of publicity than the LA artists' attempts to engage the media, Victor Burgin's poster *Possession* was placed in public spaces around Newcastle-Upon-Tyne in 1976. Using the language of advertising, the poster consisted of a colour photograph, from a bank of stock ad' images, on a black background with white text. The text above the photograph read: 'What does possession mean to you?' The image selected by Burgin showed two models posed in an embrace, their physical beauty, as usually projected by the advertising industry, would have simultaneously engendered a sense of aspiration and insecurity. Below this the remaining text read: *7% of our population own 84% of our wealth.*



Figure 25: Victor Burgin: *Possession*, in a street in Newcastle Upon Tyne.

The poster's critique of political and economic inequality, ironically communicated through the language of advertising, couldn't appear less ambiguous. However, few who saw the poster were aware of its content. Of those who were, one highlighted what they saw as its sexist content, leading Burgin to totally re-assess his work. a sticker anonymously placed on one of

the posters which read 'sexism invalidates socialist art' contributed to Burgin further examining his male authorial role in future work. In common with developments in poststructuralist thought and quandaries associated with postmodern production generally, this led Burgin to doubt the constitution of a particular subject, male or otherwise.⁵⁴ How was Burgin's awareness of media and advertising and his need to engage and subvert it flawed?

Possibly the hypnotic, repetitious quality associated with advertising media precludes any effective intervention; however subversive the intention, the end result can go unnoticed as just another fragment in the stream of images, text, and sound. In purely formal terms, the image, which showed the models posed on either side of the photograph, had a pleasing symmetry. The text with its contrast of white on black is clear and easy to read, any sharpness is offset by the curving typeface, which drops from upper to lower case while retaining sense and clarity. While the message may have been jarring the poster, which bore all the hallmarks of other publicity, clearly was not.

In her book *Decoding Advertisements*, Judith Williamson observed a growing sophistication in publicity with advertisements constructing their own system of transient values.

[...] advertisements work on concealed, unconscious and irrational levels; juxtaposing things not only unconnected but...actually opposed, but giving these juxtapositions the status of a 'natural' order.⁵⁵

Commerce, as a means of accumulating capital, was imperative in this context and as Burgin later put it in *The End of Art Theory*:

[...] with the triumph of 'universal venality' any act, any statement, any belief, can be emptied of signification to become a token in a universalised system of monetary values where money itself is the sole signified.⁵⁶

As indicated by his use of this terminology, Burgin had been interested in semiotics and particularly Roland Barthes since the late 60s. He saw the absence of such input from his

education as indicative of a lack of perspective in academic art history and humanities and was later instrumental in the development of cultural studies as an alternative, lecturing in History and Theory of the Visual Arts at the City of London University.

As was the case with Martha Rosler's videos, which also dealt with semiology and reading media, especially with regard to women, Burgin's references to such structures to inform his use of text and photography, was part of a growing engagement with this area. Signs are open to manipulation depending on our awareness and willingness to accept the particular significance of a given sign system. In *The Romans in Films*, Barthes wrote about the curious methods employed in a Hollywood movie to achieve historical plausibility: 'In Mankiewicz's *Julius Caesar*, all the characters are wearing fringes'.⁵⁷

This is the sign whereby the stars, supporting cast and thousands of extras become, in our partially suspended disbelief, Roman:

Yankee mugs of Hollywood extras: no matter, everyone is reassured, installed in the quiet certainty of a universe without duplicity, where Romans are Romans thanks to the most legible of signs: hair on the forehead.⁵⁸

Barthes elaborates on the way this type of sign denies its own artifice:

[...] the intermediate sign, the fringe of Roman-ness...reveals a degraded spectacle, which is equally afraid of simple reality and of total artifice. For although it is a good thing if a spectacle is created to make the world more explicit, it is both reprehensible and deceitful to confuse the sign with what is signified. And it is a duplicity which is peculiar to bourgeois art: between the intellectual and the visceral sign is hypocritically inserted a hybrid, at once elliptical and pretentious, which is pompously christened 'nature'.⁵⁹

By the late 60s and early 70s English translations of Barthes were available along with further English translations of writers from the 'Frankfurt School' including Walter Benjamin.

Burgin was greatly influenced by Benjamin's ideas on authorship and production especially regarding the idea of commitment.⁶⁰ If an author works in the service of a progressive

political stance because not to do so is tantamount to working for opposing interests, then what are the implications for the work's 'quality'?

The need to get beyond looking at works in isolation, making value judgements based on the use of stereotypical (in this case literary) terms requires a wider context. Benjamin's entreaty to examine the conditions of production, not simply with regard to them but 'within' them, 'concerns the function of a work within the literary production relations of its time. In other words it is directly concerned with technique'.⁶¹

In dealing with this Burgin was also addressing an implied hierarchy in the visual arts. The longevity, that signified the supremacy of oil painting, had been imbued with something of the quality of nature providing an aura of this status as a given. By moving away from a high art context Burgin was questioning what art is.

However, *Possession* provoked a response by Art & Language whose use of a propaganda image from Vichy France, *Ils donnent leur sang, donnez votre travail* (*They Give Their Blood: Give your Labour*), countered Burgin's poster.



The painting *Ils donnent leur sang: donnez votre travail* was based on a poster produced by the Nazis to recruit industrial labour in Vichy France. In the original image an artistic idealization of the (French) working class had been rendered according to a (German) political idealization of (French) artistic modernism.⁶²

As can be surmised from Harrison's references to class, ideology, and art historical categories, *Ils donnent leur sang...* criticises Burgin's apparently philanthropic art world

infiltration of a non-art environment. In another of Art & Language's best known works the head of Lenin is rendered in the style of Abstract Expressionism. While this conflates the two major ideologies of the Cold War it does so within art world terms (Socialist Realism and Abstract Expressionism). Art & Language, along with Harrison as their collaborator, have maintained strict adherence to this position, quite the opposite of Burgin's more transgressive position with *Possession*. Art & Language had adopted a form of critically aware painting, of which *Ils donnent leur sang...* was an early example, while Burgin's move out of the gallery and away from traditional art materials, addressed 'the production relations of the time' using the technique employed by advertisers and aimed at consumers.

In as much as Burgin's dealer Robert Self funded *Possession* at a cost of £772, it did represent an art world incursion into a mainstream environment. However, the Art & Language poster was itself reproduced from a painting in turn shown at Self's London gallery. It might be worth remembering that in the 60s Sol Lewitt, reaffirming his political convictions to Lucy Lippard, nevertheless, expressed qualms about the projection of such concerns into public space which, he felt, amounted to a kind of colonisation of both the arguments and the space in question.

.....

Art world values, inside galleries and outside established settings, can be seen as part of a wider struggle for space with prevailing forms operating in streets, cities, and, psychically, within individuals. The Situationist Raoul Vaneigem said, 'Urbanism and information are complementary in both capitalist and 'anti-capitalist' societies; they organize silence.' In both the East and the West, he claimed:

[...] the ideal urbanism is the projection in space of a social hierarchy without conflict. Roads, lawns, natural flowers, and artificial forests lubricate the machinery and make it enjoyable.⁶⁵

Vaneigem was writing in the late 60s during the Cold War, a divide still in place when Burgin made *Possession*. However, Burgin's poster appeared after US defeat in Vietnam at the

beginning of a new conservatism which saw the election of right-wing governments in many Western societies. The repeal of anti-trust laws allowed business, particularly in America, to expand its interests as never before. Economic pressure eventually led to Eastern Bloc collapse or as neo-conservatives might see it, to the opening of new markets making Burgin's 7:84 percentages look like comparative re-distribution of wealth.

Open markets have not enabled economic survival for a global majority any more than the culture industry's growing dependence on corporate money has empowered it. Furthermore, while post Cold War capitalism has necessitated global communication, moving information and other resources, this has also necessitated the movement of people, many seeking a living and an escape from increasing instability. While global capital needs this movement to sustain itself it is simultaneously threatened by it. Its need to consume its own boundaries leaves it unstable. Hardt and Negri have highlighted that, as a consequence of this, the globalization of resistance and opposition to capitalism. If the Vietnam War signalled the start of a new strategy on the part of capital the same can be said of its opponents.

The Vietnam War represents a real turning point in the history of contemporary capitalism insofar as the Vietnamese resistance is conceived as the symbolic centre of a whole series of struggles around the world that had up until that point remained separate and distant from one another...The various struggles converged against one common enemy: *the international disciplinary order*.⁶⁴

A by-product of globalization is migration which in turn poses potential resistance to capital. Just as Haussman's introduction of itinerant workers provided the labour that built a Paris of greater police control, it also led to greater demands for better pay, housing and ultimately power. As Hardt and Negri put it: 'Through circulation the multitude re-appropriates space and constitutes itself as an active subject'.⁶⁵

If Indonesian sweatshops are cheaper than those in Latin America, which previously undercut North America and Europe, investors shift interests leaving a multitude to move to whatever opportunities exist elsewhere. The phenomenon of migration and those affected by it has been addressed by a collaboration of Californian artists consisting of Elizabeth Sisco, David Avalos and Louis Hock.

5.7 Elizabeth Sisco, Louis Hock and David Avalos: *Welcome to America's Finest Tourist Plantation*

The work of Martha Rosler and Victor Burgin can be seen as an antidote to a media that creates the impression of a de-politicised space, whether in the street, across whole societies or at the level of biopower (an internalised form of control). There can't be many places where these issues are thrown into sharper relief than Southern California. Containing the world's greatest concentrations of affluence, the region also forms a semi-porous frontier with Mexico and by extension the rest of Central and Southern America; in other words what is usually referred to as the Third World.

In terms of such spatial divisions, Los Angeles and its satellites form a particularly apposite space shaped, as it has been, 'by the generative and problematic interplay between centres and peripheries.'⁶⁸ The region's growth into one of the largest urban conurbations in the world, spread over an area the size of some nation states, has been the result of various conflicting forces with, nevertheless, symbiotic relationships.

Unlike many of America's other urban centres in which white settlers drew other ethnic groups as cheap labour, LA was first of all a Hispanic town. By the late 19th century the Mexican settlement was being taken over by migrating white business interests from the Mid West and East. In one form or another, through industry, publishing, or city government, they eventually formed the ruling elite in LA and exercised some of the most exclusionary urban planning policies outside the segregated southern states.

San Diego, Southern California, is one of the cities in the wider LA sprawl and also borders straight onto the Mexican frontier. The city is economically dependant on an influx of cheap Mexican labour but politically dominated by middle class residential groups, so called NIMBYs (Not In My Back Yard campaigners) as well as large-scale capital concerns. This confluence of exclusive interests in conjunction with powerlessness amongst the poor, led to a

collaboration between the artists Elizabeth Sisco, David Avalos, and Louis Hock, addressing some of the myths around migration. Their approach employed the full reflexive, critical impulse of Conceptual Art along with a Situationist politicised sense of place.

Despite its dependence on cheap undocumented labour, San Diego's popular image, as perpetuated by media and some local politicians, was of an ideal community though one unfortunately plagued by a tide of illegal immigration.

Why are undocumented workers vilified and why is migration seen as a crisis. The sociologist James F. Hollifield, whilst somewhat vague as to the causes of this has highlighted a shift in power relations as a probable cause:

The best answer I can offer is that international migration provokes a sense of crisis and has been steadily increasing as a result of social and economic forces that seem to be beyond the control of states and communities.⁶⁷

The greatest rival to the power of 'states and communities' would seem to be corporations. They own the media through which migrants are generally depicted and perceived as problematic. While media often asserts itself as the voice of public opinion Hardt and Negri point out that 'It has long been clear, however, that the media are in fact often not very independent from capital on the one hand and states on the other'.⁶⁸

Hollifield concedes that migration is neither a new phenomenon nor with about 125 million people living outside their country of birth (roughly the population of Japan), is the current round exceptional.

Indeed for much of recorded history and for many civilizations, the movement of populations was not unusual. Only with the advent of the nation-state in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe did the notion of legally tying populations to territorial units and to specific forms of government become commonplace (Moch 1992). State building in Europe entailed consolidating territory, centralizing authority, controlling the nobility, imposing taxes, and waging warfare.⁶⁹

Despite the unexceptional nature of current population movement, once seen through the frame of media, migration becomes a political point-scorer for competing factions. The

potential for control by a media laying down the parameters of debate is enormous. As described by Hollifield it was the emergence of centralized political and economic control in the form of nation states which created the issue of cross border migration. This created both the conditions necessitating migration (war and inter-state conflict) and the opportunity for states to benefit from the labour and skills of migrants, while controlling their numbers and rights.

San Diego exemplifies this dichotomy of dependence and control. Politicians promote a positive image of San Diego whilst failing to acknowledge the position of migrants and the city's dependence on them. In response to the authority's promotional campaign *Welcome to America's Finest City* - aimed at boosting tourism - Sisco, Alvalos and Hock paid for advertising on 100 local buses to display a poster reading *Welcome to America's Finest Tourist Plantation* (1988).



Figure 27: Elizabeth Sisco, Louis Hock and David Avalos: *Welcome to America's Finest Tourist Plantation*, poster on a San Diego bus.

The poster shows the arrest of two undocumented workers flanked by images of others, who, having made it over the border, find themselves working long hours for low pay in the service industries. Without formal documentation or the protection it brings, they are among the most vulnerable people in the global economy. The poster's ironic text appears across the central image of cuffed hands and the arresting police officer's holstered pistol. Elizabeth Sisco had actually taken the picture whilst on one of these local buses as she witnessed the

arrests. As in the case of Victor Burgin's *Possession*, the group used the medium and space of advertising to highlight the issues. Speaking for the group Louis Hock said, "We wanted to re-interpret commercial space, which reaches a broad, popular audience".⁷⁰

The poster campaign was well timed coinciding as it did with the massive presence of journalists and TV crews in San Diego for the Super Bowl. The initial campaign of only one hundred posters translated into massive coverage in newspapers and the broadcast media where the image was constantly reproduced along with its controversial story. The reaction of some local politicians was to call for the poster's removal, in turn whipping up further controversy and even more widespread media coverage. In terms of highlighting the issues the group's poster was an unqualified success.

Where Burgin's *Possession* used similar spaces and media, Sisco, Hock and Avalos' work appeared to have a greater impact. Burgin's funding came from his private gallerist but public money was used to fund ...*Tourist Plantation*. This proved more controversial in the face of apparent tax-payer indignation. Nevertheless, this was a controversy with which the group could actively engage.

Though their work was very much a collaboration, it seems strange to describe the group under any kind of corporate identity in as much as Sisco, Avalos and Hock does not read in the same way, or stand for the same sort of thing, as say Gilbert and George or even Art and Language. The members of the group work with other people too. They are perhaps closer in this respect to Grup de Treball in that they come together to achieve specific goals connected to the social and political scene in their locale. Louis Hock has said that:

"While many of our projects have national and international ramifications and amplification, if you examine the public media projects we have been involved in producing, they all have a topic epicentre in the San Diego - Tijuana region. We have taken up familiar, tangible issues close to home."⁷¹

Another comparable group might be the Guerrilla Girls whose membership, as well as remaining anonymous behind their gorilla masks, move in and out of the group according to

need and availability, and, whose approach, like Sisco, Avalos and Hock's, resembles activism as much as art.⁷²

The group's awareness of media and migration along with their willingness to work collaboratively, allowed them to contrast sensationalism and widespread misconceptions about undocumented workers with their own account in which the economy, it emerges, is heavily dependant on migrants and the cheap labour they provide. The same workers are also major consumers of the products and lifestyle myths of late capitalism so further contributing to this economy. However, they are kept in a semi-legal, social leper status, preserving the myth of their parasitical role as, at best, charity cases.

Mike Davis, writing about LA in a way that recalls something of Jackson Pollock's *Going West* and its depiction of migrants in the 30s, describes:

[...] thousands of day labourers and their families ...Spanish speaking Okies of the 1980s - are forced to live in hillside dugouts and impromptu brush camps, often within sight of million-dollar tract homes whose owners now want the 'immigrant blight' removed.⁷³

Martha Rosier had earlier looked at issues between first and third world from a sympathetic but nevertheless distant perspective. Sisco, Hock and Avalos' work has a directness in its context making it arguably more effective on these issues. As well as living and working in the region they are, in the cases of Sisco and Avalos, of Spanish American extraction and identify closely with those whose side they take. 'We are artists of course, but we see ourselves as part of a larger community'.⁷⁴

In the depiction of marginalised groups like undocumented workers the idea that their best interests are also ours contradicts their portrayal in mainstream media. While Sisco, Hock and Avalos highlight this, it could be argued that some contemporary art reinforces myths of division and 'the prevailing dominating socio-political-economic ideology' within which they have their place.

While the work of Sisco, Avalos and Hock has been a sign of art as opposition, it is unfortunately more often the case that the art world has appeared to be on the other side of this divide. As a vanguard for urban gentrification an art scene can be very effective. Writing about the gentrification of Manhattan's Lower East Side, urban geographer Neil Smith comments:

[...] the Lower East Side name is dropped altogether by real estate agents and art world gentrifiers who, anxious to distance themselves from the historical association with the poor immigrants who dominated this community at the turn of the century, prefer "East Village" as the name for the neighbourhood [...]⁷⁵

The West's large numbers of migrant workers and indigenous poor are excluded at a faster rate than the generic minorities from which many are drawn. Women are generally seen to have come a long way in the fight for equality. However, a debate, often along the lines of "*Why aren't there more women in the boardroom?*" while acknowledging that professional women are still excluded, says nothing of the majority of women who are constrained by factors including, but not exclusively related to, gender. Even to suppose that more women in powerful roles can, eventually, lead to greater inclusion and an overarching reform of hierarchy, is simply to re-state in gender terms the same discredited thinking implicit in 'trickle down economics'.

[...] post-feminists are, above all, class-blind in their views, knowing little or nothing of what happens in other social classes where matters are far worse. Poor women are obliged to work with terrible arrangements for their children. For them, back to work as soon as their paid leave is over, the tricky choice between nanny, child minder or nursery is something only to dream of.⁷⁶

The incorporation/accommodation of different minority groups still only works according to status achieved within the mainstream, where the old basis of class division and the essential preservation of power continue. In terms of their status as artists with formal and financial support for cultural production, Sisco, Hock, and Avalos try to avoid this selective reading of the issues. Their proximity to those at the core of their concerns negates any implied elitism associated with the art world.

In 1992 the group turned their attention to a series of attacks on women in San Diego. There were at least forty-five victims who had all been described in police reports as:

[...] prostitutes, addicts and transients, even though such labels were suspect in several instances. Police officers had been personally involved with some of these women, a fact that appeared to hinder the investigation [...]⁷⁷

The Police Department had allegedly used the acronym NHI (No Humans Involved) to describe these crimes. The work consisted of a series of billboards showing images of the women beginning in February 1992 with the unveiling of two billboards bearing the picture of Donna Gentile and the letters NHI. The group's research revealed the extent to which local police were implicated in events. Gentile was found strangled, her mouth stuffed with gravel, a month after testifying against two police officers.

This time Sisco and Hock worked with Scott Kessler and Deborah Small to produce the billboards with pictures of victims and the acronym NHI in quotation marks. Where pictures of victims weren't available, another woman from the town would stand in. This was to emphasise that the attacks concerned all women rather than just on marginal or, somehow, unworthy women as implied by the police and media treatment of the subject. Again there is a sense of solidarity and identification with the wider group that rejects attempts to fragment into distinct levels of privilege, including those of an art world, as separate from the rest.

Unsurprisingly, the group were among those considered controversial in the debate surrounding the National Endowment for the Arts. They were able to address this controversy, along with their other concerns, in a great piece of conceptual strategy recalling Erdély's sale of money. For *Arte Reembolso* the group took \$4,500 of a \$5,000 grant which came directly from the *San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art* and the *Centro Cultural de la Raza* but indirectly from the *NEA* and distributed it to local undocumented workers. Each worker was given \$10 and an outline of the project's intention.

This ten dollar bill is part of an art project that intends to return tax dollars to taxpayers, particularly 'undocumented taxpayers'. The art rebate acknowledges your role as a vital player in an economic community indifferent to national borders.⁷⁸

The tax burden in the US has progressively moved away from the wealthy to the point, now, where large corporations, for the most part, move their headquarters to offshore locations where the tax laws don't apply and some file tax returns of no income. In 1952 corporate tax accounted for 32.1% of US federal revenue: by 1975 this had shrunk to 11.4% and, despite the growth of large corporations over smaller businesses, the figure has largely remained stable at 11.5%.⁷⁹

Many of the largest corporations have, for some time now, been either media based or have owned substantial media interests. They provide the information for the kind of 24-hour news coverage which has become the norm. Given their financial interests, they seem unlikely to do this in an objective or dispassionate way. However, their coverage is ubiquitous to the point where it can almost pass for unqualified truth. The educated middle classes, who may associate a lack of intelligent analysis with stereotypes of poverty and ignorance, are not immune to this partial media. It is not necessary to be a tabloid reading, stereotype to be ill informed and take as given the most ideologically loaded constructions of people and events. The following table lists income and taxes for media corporations in the period shortly before *Welcome to America's Finest Tourist Plantation*.

Financial Data for Large Media Corporations, December 1986⁸⁰

COMPANY	TOTAL ASSETS (\$ MILLIONS)	PROFITS PRE-TAX (\$ MILLIONS)	NET PROFITS (\$ MILLIONS)	TOTAL REVENUE (\$ MILLIONS)
Advance publications (Newhouse)	2,500	N/A	N/A	2,200
Capital Cities/ABC	5,191	688	448	4,124
CBS	3,370	470	370	4,754
Cox Communications	1,111	170	87	743
Dow Jones & Co	1,236	331	183	1,135
Gannett	3,365	540	276	2,801
General Electric (NBC)	34,591	3,689	2,492	36,725
Hearst	4,040	NA	215 (1983)	2,100 (1983)
Knight-Ridder	1,947	267	140	1,911
McGraw-Hill	1,463	296	154	1,577
New Corp	8,460	377	170	3,822

New York Times	1,405	256	132	1,565
Reader's Digest	N/A	75-110 (1985)	N/A	1,400 (1985)
Scripps-Howard	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,062
Storer	1,242	68	(-17)	537
Taft	1,257	(-11)	(-53)	500
Time, Inc.	4,230	626	376	3,762
Triangle	N/A	N/A	N/A	730
Turner Broadcasting	1,904	(-185)	(-187)	570
US News & World Rpeort	200+	N/A	N/A	140
Washington Post	1,145	205	100	1,215
Westinghouse	8,482	801	607	10,731

This clearly illustrates how corporate media pays a small proportion of its income in taxes and in some cases manages to avoid payment. While this information dates back to a period that ushered in a more generous tax regime in the US, subsequent policies there, in Europe, or for that matter globally, have not seen greater restrictions on the way corporations pay or avoid paying tax. The percentages paid by workers, even undocumented workers in San Diego, indicates a harsher tax regime than for the corporations.

Simultaneous to growing tax relief for the wealthy, the minimum wage in the US is now worth roughly 40% less than 30 years ago.⁵¹ In the UK a minimum wage was resisted for most of the 90s as a route to instant mass unemployment and finally was only instituted by the EU; it has neither created unemployment nor ended poverty. In real terms the tax burden has been shifted onto the poor who now contribute more to a society in which they have less of a say. In the case of undocumented workers, many of whom do pay tax, this is particularly ironic given that the society to which they contribute does not even recognise their right in law to be there. It covertly tolerates the presence of migrants, further exploiting them while publicly deriding them.

The use of public money in *Arte Reemboiso* was a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the US authorities' funding and manipulation of visual arts. But now a greater emphasis on private funding and sponsorship in art, as in other sectors, is becoming the norm. Between 1985 and 1998 levels of US corporate sponsorship increased from just under one billion to almost seven billion dollars.⁵² Sponsorship of the arts contributes to a corporate image as not only

benign but culturally enlightened, yet, in reality, most of this is paid for by those largely excluded in such initiatives. The gentrification it spreads across poor neighbourhoods is actually only made possible by the contributions of such people as the undocumented workers. *Arte Reembolso* was an Art Refund highlighting this situation and its dynamics of class and ethnicity.

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6. THE GLOBAL

"WHEN I ACTUALLY MET HIM, I JUST THOUGHT HE WAS A REALLY NICE GUY."

TRACY EMIN ON CHARLES SAATCHI

YOUNG ARTISTS ARE JUST NATURALLY POLITICALLY CORRECT, BECAUSE THEY WERE NEVER ANYTHING ELSE.

MATHEW COLLINGS 'BLIMEY'

This conclusion will examine recent attempts to maintain a critical, politicised art, in the face of globalization, the end of the Cold War, and a prevailing sense of an apparent lack of alternatives to multinational capitalism. Some recent protests, such as those at G8 and World Bank summits, have been characteristically de-centralised and non-hierarchical. The groups involved in these protests recognise and accept differences, including those of gender and race, while also connecting across boundaries to constitute what Hardt and Negri have called a 'multitude of singularities'.¹ This paradigm, of points of difference and their connections to one another, can also be found in some recent art production. Again, central to much of this is the urban context and the role of art in changes such as gentrification.

However, the re-emergence of protest and a willingness to engage issues as a reasonably widespread activity is a relatively recent occurrence. The early 1990s were, by contrast, a period of political re-assessment; assumptions of Left and Right appeared to lose some of their clarity.² The fall of the Berlin Wall, elections throughout Central and Eastern Europe, the end of dictatorships across Latin America and victory over Apartheid in South Africa saw the end of many pariah regimes. However, within the art world, exhibitions like *L'art conceptuel* and *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*, perpetuated an association of Conceptualism, the movement which can be largely credited with a critique of the 'prevailing dominating socio-political-economic ideology', with the English speaking world. This now appeared slightly incongruous and the result of a narrowly selective reading of the period: especially in light of the subsequent exhibition *Global Conceptualism*, which included the work of Erdéy and Grup de Treball.³ More recently, Houston's Contemporary Art Museum showed *Double Consciousness - Black Conceptual Art Since 1970*, which highlighted another previously neglected point of difference. An anthropological rather than historical reading of the period, now seemed necessary, especially given the end of the Cold War and political changes in former Eastern Bloc countries.⁴ However, this more consciously inclusive approach, rather than providing simple closure at the end of a difficult era, of course sees the crisis continue. Despite the successful overthrow of Stalinist regimes by the people of Central and Eastern Europe, the subsequent power vacuum has led to even greater inequalities.⁵

The ideological isolation of Erdély's Hungary has been replaced by EU membership and opportunities for Hungarian artists to participate without formal restrictions. This inclusion could appear compatible with Kosuth's 'anthropologised art' but, in practice, it has produced a homogenised art in which the international uniformity of neo-conceptualism is the embodiment of the 'prevailing dominating socio-political-economic ideology' of globalization.

Spain joined the EU in 1986 and has, unsurprisingly, seen a cycle of recession and growth. Barcelona, in common with Budapest, has experienced accelerated gentrification while poorer inhabitants are pushed out. Richard Meier's MACBA (Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona) looked quite incongruous when it first opened in the slums of the Raval district in the mid 90s. But MACBA's impressive post-modern edifice soon imposed itself on one of Europe's most densely populated areas and the Raval quickly succumbed to gentrification.

The vacuum at the end of the Cold War in which capitalism appeared the sole choice, has given way to tentative moves towards alternatives and a growing, broad based, non-hierarchical anti-capitalist movement has staged large-scale protests at G8, IMF, and World Bank conferences around the world. These protests appear to be gaining popular support even where they have been associated with disorder; despite a Barcelona protest in 2002 controversially ending in violence, a poll in the Barcelona newspaper *El Periodico* indicated 57% support for protesters; an increase on the period before the protest.

Shouts against the war and for people not profit (in Catalan, of course) echoed through the city. People of every age were there, and significantly around 30,000 trade unionists with banners and flags attended.⁶

A circus was held in the square in front of MACBA, with the Raval reclaimed for the day. Again, as in *Unguarded Money*, *Recorreguts*, and with the activities of the Situationists, the urban setting has been central to these protests. While postmodern rejection of grand narratives contradicts the utopian aspirations of these protests, their inclusion of extremely diverse groups is itself distinctively postmodern. It is harder to imagine that, even in the fairly recent past, activists from the gay rights, environmentalists and feminist movements would

have found enough common cause to protest directly alongside trade unionists from the traditional labour movement.

There are examples of a more engaged approach in art too. While US intervention in Latin America throughout the 70s and 80s, and the 1991 Gulf War did not become such a focus of dissent as Vietnam, the recent invasion of Iraq has seen massive opposition, both in mainstream protests and within the art world. Nico Israel writes:

One notable feature of some of the contemporary war-related art recently on view in New York has been a resurgent interest in *locality* - in witnessing the effects of conflict unmediated, with one's own eyes.⁷

Again, as with *Unguarded Money*, *The Artists' Tower of Protest*, and *Recoreguts*, this sense of place, in this case the front-line, is central to the work.

Israel discusses the work of Steve Mumford, a figurative painter noted for his sincere and un-ironic approach. His work appears neither pro nor anti-war, however, he made his drawings and watercolours whilst accompanying troops who, to all intents and purposes, he depended on for his survival. Mumford continued this approach on a return visit in August 2003 when the war had been officially declared over by the Bush administration. He spent a few months on troop patrols producing, among other works, *Spc. Jose Fuentes Watching* [the film] *Three Kings While Spc. Amanda Lusk Sleeps*, *Samarra, Oct. 8*. Israel writes of this watercolour that it 'offers a rather tender portrait of how soldiers spend downtime'.

Israel concedes that Mumford's drawings seem rather "embedded" in the same sense that reports from embedded journalists are generally considered less objective because of their dependence on the military.

Israel then moves on to the digital films of British artist Phil Collins who was in Iraq some months before the invasion. Curiously, his use of technology as employed by the media, counters much of the de-personalised sense of news footage showing Baghdad being bombarded with smart bombs. The apparent accuracy of these weapons has been a stock

item in TV coverage implying minimal civilian casualties. Collins just films people: Iraqi people with whom the viewer can identify, and, even if they only appear as familiar media types, it is still quite unsettling to see that image of someone as a potential victim of war. With this heightened sense of locale and oddly clinical, yet somehow, revealing use of film, Collins' work seems to ask more penetrating questions of the situation in Iraq than Mumford's sincere approach. However, this begs the question of where the Iraqi authored version of all this is; a question posed by Israel but with a limited understanding of conditions in Iraq.

Meanwhile, Iraqi artists, for whom "being there" is less a choice than a matter of fact, have not yet responded with the kind of artistic energy one might expect given their own proximity to combat.⁸

The formal structures and spaces of the art world still frame Israel's expectations of a creative Iraqi response to the situation. Given the prevailing conditions in the Gulf it is unlikely that *Artforum* would gain sufficient access to gain any understanding of a response from the Iraqi side comparable with, for example, the sense of place in the work of Sisco, Hock and Avalos. The Californian group maintain a commitment to their region and work in close collaboration with local participants, something currently almost unimaginable in Iraq.

As indicated by protests in Barcelona, the period before the invasion saw large public demonstrations and the re-emergence of a movement for change. Marcus Verhagen has speculated about a revival of interest in Utopianism in art.

Modernism was long animated by visions of a better world. Postmodernism apparently had no place for them. In recent years that may have started to change.⁹

Verhagen goes on to list artists working with Utopian ideals, some focusing on their positive potential, but others, like Chad McCaill, looking ironically at their naivety and implicit despotism. This latter is a utopianism of Fourieresque eccentricities, as well as more plausible visions which appear to have resulted in authoritarianism. However, as Verhagen comments:

Postmodernism tends to loosen the bond between appearance and ideological substance. And in ironising modernist utopianism, it effectively reinforces the abiding

sense - one of the more sinister achievements of neo-liberalism, this - that there is no alternative to the present order of society.¹⁰

Verhagen also cites the book *Relational Aesthetics* by curator and author Nicolas Bourriaud. Though Bourriaud rejects Modernist idealism, he sees in the work of some contemporary artists the possibility for what Verhagen calls Micro-Utopianism. This is where shared experience momentarily creates another space or connection: an alternative to the normative channels of work and consumerism.

When Jens Haaning broadcasts funny stories in Turkish through a loudspeaker in a Copenhagen square (*Turkish Jokes*, 1994), he produces in that split second a micro-community, one made up of immigrants brought together by collective laughter which upsets their exile situation, formed in relation to the work and in it. The exhibition is the special place where such momentary groupings may occur, governed as they are by differing principles.¹¹

Something of Kosuth's ethnologic applies here because while artists can take part in an international scene, the conventions of the art world can, nevertheless, suppress difference; Haaning's piece allows a more telling, if ephemeral, connection in this respect. Bourriaud particularly admires the work of the late Felix Gonzalez-Torres who he sees as a forerunner of this intimate, shared kind of work, where 'Nothing is ever demonstrative or explicit in the political monumental strategy to which the artist subscribes'.¹²

As in earlier conceptual works Gonzalez-Torres involves the viewer, for example, in determining the narrative in a billboard poster of an unmade bed, where two body impressions become a memory of Gonzalez-Torres' recently deceased lover; or in the installation of a pile of individually wrapped sweets in a gallery, from which people help themselves. As Bourriaud writes, 'Gonzalez-Torres does not deliver messages; he includes facts in forms, like so many cryptic messages, or messages in bottles'.¹³

This is a long way from the direct engagement of Sisco, Hock and Avalos. And, in terms of 60s negation of the art object, though relational works owe much to renegotiations of space,

object, viewer, artist and institution, they circumvent the primacy of objects rather than dematerialising them: sharing a meal with Rikrit Tiravanija is hardly commodifiable in the same way as a painting but Tiravanija has no problem incorporating objects in the exercise.

[...] by creating and staging devices of existence including working methods and ways of being, instead of concrete objects which hitherto bounded the realm of art, they use time as a material. The form holds sway over the thing, and movements over categories. The production of gestures wins out over the production of material things.¹⁴

There is, however, a risk in the intimacy of this work, that it will be incorporated and lose its ability to produce, however briefly, freer relations. Rather than simply subverting society's more coercive norms with these alternative moments and spaces, Bourriaud's vision of a relational art reflects aspects of their implementation, because as Hardt and Negri put it.

In the postmodernisation of the global economy, the creation of wealth tends ever more toward what we will call biopolitical production, the production of social life itself in which the economic, the political and the cultural increasingly overlap and invest one another.¹⁵

Relational art's ephemeral qualities anticipate its annexation. Just as Conceptual Art's use of information as a medium reflected its growing prominence in capitalist economy, it is likely that connections made in relational work will function as an art world equivalent to the office 'casual Friday': a brief relaxation of the rules making further impositions seem a little more acceptable.

Perhaps art should not have any critical function. Art historian, Michael Archer, is dismissive of this role and the idea that its absence constitutes a crisis in contemporary art.

What is this present crisis? I am not trying to be perverse or disingenuous or obstructive in saying that I don't know how this crisis is being recognised. I don't know what is meant here by meaningful art. Or, rather, I don't understand how it can be asserted that we currently lack an art that is meaningful. I have a suspicion that art is here judged not to be meaningful because it doesn't signify in a particular way, it is deemed to be in crisis because it does not function in a certain approved manner.¹⁶

While the notion that art is ever not meaningful is, as Archer claims, perplexing, this is really more a matter of whether meaning is intended, implied, or effective. For Example, Charles

Saatchi may not be concerned with whether issues are reflected in his collection, but his involvement with particular British artists has given them, their work, and the institutions with which they have been involved a significant meaning. However, Archer is clear about the role that art should have, even providing a kind of job description:

A work might embody certain contradictions, it might excite debate, it might invite response – either in the form of other work, or criticism, or acclamation, or repression, or censorship – but it is not its job to be subversive, even of something as vague as ‘the established order’.¹⁷

Art as an ‘ask no questions, hear no lies’ employee with a job to do; but who for? The apparent freedom to jettison these concerns is itself extremely prescriptive.

The fragile claims of Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics*, while eschewing any grand narrative, nevertheless, indicate a degree of commitment which is particularly apparent when he cites Felix Guattari’s attitude toward aesthetics:

Guattari’s lines of thinking help us to consider the change currently under way in present-day art. But this, however, was not the primary aim of their author, for whom aesthetics must above all else go hand in hand with societal changes, and inflect them.¹⁸

NOTES

- ¹ Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri, *Multitude*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard, 2004)
- ² Roger Burbach, Orlando Núñez, Boris Kagarlitsky, *Globalization and Its Discontents*, (London: Pluto Press, 1997), p.1.
- ³ Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language*, (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: MIT, 2001), pp. 36-37.
- ⁴ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 1996), p. 260
- ⁵ Kagarlitsky, p. 117.
- ⁶ <http://www.urban75.com/Action/news146.html>
- ⁷ Nico Israel, 'Atelier in Samarra, Nico Israel on the Iraqi Front' In *Artforum*, Jan' 2004, p. 35.
- ⁸ Israel, p. 35.
- ⁹ Marcus Verhagen, 'Micro-Utopianism', in *Art Monthly*, December-January 2003-2004, p. 1.
- ¹⁰ Verhagen, pp. 2-3.
- ¹¹ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with the participation of Mathieu Copeland, (Dijon: Le Presses du Reel, 2002), p. 17.
- ¹² Bourriaud, p. 55.
- ¹³ Bourriaud, p. 56.
- ¹⁴ Bourriaud, p. 103.
- ¹⁵ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. xii of the preface.
- ¹⁶ Michael Archer, 'Crisis? What Crisis?' In *Art Monthly*, March 2003/no. 264, pp.1-6.
- ¹⁷ Archer, pp. 1-6.
- ¹⁸ Bourriaud, p. 104.

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