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Brutal Encounters:

Primitivity, Politics, and the Postmodern Revolution

An Honors Project for the Department of History

By Archer Thomas

Bowdoin College, 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The subject matter I treat here is well-trodden ground. Thousands of historians, artists, and critics have endeavored to explain or describe the replacement of modernism by postmodernism in the Western world with varied results. It is true that there are few topics as broad and nebulous as this, but it is also true that there are few which are as consequential, especially from the position in which we find ourselves today, when all historical metanarratives are immediately suspect and few remain unscathed by the forces of deconstruction, parody, and irony. In 1874, Friedrich Nietzsche lamented that "we are all suffering from a consuming fever of history."[1] If only he could have witnessed the overwhelming historical consciousness of today's world!

In light of both the broadness and the relevance of this topic, my intention is not to deny or disprove the other accounts of the transformation which I describe but rather to complement them by narrativizing the events and ideas with which I engage from a new perspective. My approach to intellectual history is genealogical, in that it traces novel ideas to the intellectual environments from which they originate, but I complicate these chains of intellectual transmission by tethering them to a separate but always present parallel history of class conflict and development. In short, the narrative I present is guided by a Marxian analysis of aesthetic transformation.

Why do I choose to engage with the ideological conceits of Marxism in a discussion of aesthetics? The most important reason is that Marxism was the language used by the generation which came of age in the West before, during, and immediately after the Second World War to

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[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, n.d.), 57–124, 60.

describe the ideological and aesthetic struggles which they participated in. Clement Greenberg and Jean-Paul Sartre, to name just a few, could not help but evaluate the world around them in light of capital's exploitation of the proletariat, even if their political allegiances did not always follow the party line. Choosing to ignore the prevalence of Marxian thinking—if not Marxism outright—among Western intelligentsia in the mid-20th century would fail to convey the ramifications of modernism's predicament.

  Presenting history through a Marxian lens means that I am situating myself within a very specific tradition with a distinctive set of practices and—more crucially—ideologically-dependent assumptions. I am not entering in on this exploration from the ground floor. Instead, I stand on the shoulders of Karl Marx and those inspired by him, including Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson. I consult their texts both as primary sources and as frameworks which guide my thinking.

  This is not to say that I am willing to merely accept Marxism as true. It is important to remember that, although any discussion of "primitivity" must necessarily tackle the fraught relationship between center (Europe) and periphery (the rest of the world), the thinkers I engage with are almost exclusively situated in the center looking outwards. Whether or not Marxian thought accurately describes the processes of class development and reconfiguration that took place in the Global South is a question for another paper—what matters here is that many Westerners *did* believe this was the case, and that this belief shaped how they saw themselves and the world around them.

INTRODUCTION

What is modernism?

In his 1931 introduction to Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture*, Frederick

Etchells hypothesizes that "A man of the eighteenth century, plunged suddenly into our

civilization, might well have the impression of something akin to a nightmare."[2] Le Corbusier

(1887-1965), born Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, was a Swiss-French architect and aesthetic

theorist who first articulated some of modernist architecture's most important ideas, most of

which revolved around the idea that "Our own epoch is determining, day by day, its own style."[3]

His vision for the cities of the future, therefore, involves the replacement of anything traditional

or colloquial with the conspicuously modern. He redefines a house as a "machine for living in"

and an armchair as a "machine for sitting in."[4] Etchells's statement appears, at first glance, to

criticize Le Corbusier's manifesto, which proudly proclaims that "things have changed: and

changed *for the better*."[5] Common sense leads us to agree with Etchells. What would the average

denizen of the eighteenth century think, plucked from the relative humility of preindustrial

civilization and placed in the modern age, when gleaming towers as large as mountains and

vehicles faster than most birds are commonplace? Should this feeling of unease with the world

modernity has created lead us to become Luddites, or at least reactionaries? No, Etchells

answers, "We need not be unduly alarmed."[6] The world has changed, undoubtedly, but the

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[2] Frederick Etchells, "Introduction," in *Towards A New Architecture*, Dover Books on Architecture (New York: Dover Publications, 2013), v.
[3] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Etchells, Frederick, Dover Books on Architecture (New York: Dover Publications, 2013), 3.
[4] Le Corbusier, 95.
[5] Le Corbusier, 272.
[6] Etchells, "Introduction," v.

modern person "seems happy or unhappy to much the same degree before…He learns to admit and even, in a sneaking sort of way, to *like* new and strange forms."[7]

Etchells's statement expresses an important nuance within modernism itself. From the perspective of visual arts, modernism holds the curious position of being an aesthetic movement with philosophical aims. Ezra Pound famously declared "Make it new!"[8] and in doing so accepted the challenge of contradicting the values of classical beauty and common taste. Why? Modernism is a theoretically heterogenous movement, but at the foundation of every tendency lies a progressive historicism—that is, a sense that history is *headed* somewhere. In its present formulation, modernism's teleological sense of history can be traced to German idealists such as Hegel, who posited that "History is the process whereby the spirit discovers itself and its own concept."[9] The end of such a vision of history "is that the spirit should attain knowledge of its own true nature, that it should objectivise this knowledge and transform it into a real world, and give itself an objective existence"[10] leading to the resolution of humanity's internecine struggles. Being an idealist, Hegel locates his dialectic within the realm of pure thought. His contribution to modernism was attached quite tenuously, therefore, to the economic, social, and environmental upheaval that had already begun to revolutionize Western life in the early 19th century.

Hegel's philosophy of history spawned a whole field of scholars who critiqued, reapplied, and politicized his work. Among these was Ludwig Feuerbach, whose book *The Essence of Christianity* enlisted the dialectical idea to describe religion as an anthropological, material phenomenon.[11] In 1844, the young Karl Marx composed a manuscript commending Feuerbach's

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[7] Etchells, v-vi.
[8] Ezra Pound, *Make It New* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935).
[9] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 62.
[10] Hegel, 64.
[11] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (New York: International Publishers, 1964), 171.

materialism for making "the social relationship of 'man to man' the basic principle of the theory."[12] Instead of locating historical change within the venue of pure thought, Marx argued that individuals' relationship with property and the class dynamics which govern it constitute more coherent determinants of history. "Communism," he argued, was "the *positive* transcendence of *private property*, as *human self-estrangement*, and therefore as the real *appropriation* of the *human* essence by and for man…Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution."[13] Marx applied Hegel's framework to the rapid modernizing changes he observed in the world around him, ushering in a modernism tied to technological progress. While the implications of Hegel and Marx's approaches differed greatly—i.e. metaphysical versus political revolution—both agree that progress entails self-discovery, a return to a more essential humanity.

Modernism, therefore, views historical progress as possessing an epistemological function. "Progress," though vague and wide open to interpretation, informs our expectations for both the future and our own self-conceptions. Modernism turns history in on itself, reflecting upon and participating in the historical changes which will fulfill modernists' prognostications for the future. As American historian Priya Satia asserts in her book *Time's Monster*, "An important part of what makes modern historical activity 'modern' is that modern historical actors consciously seek change that they understand as 'historical.'"[14] A consequence of this attitude is that modernism can even be at odds with modernity or modernization if these more material—and thus (hypothetically) more objective—states and processes behave unpredictably.

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[12] Marx, 172.

[13] Marx, 135.

[14] Priya Satia, *Time's Monster: How History Makes History* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020), 51.

What is postmodernism?

Self-reflection, therefore, is a key attribute of modernism. Nevertheless, a certain type of "reflexive" art—works which react to themselves, make use of irony, or acknowledge the historical narratives in which they are involved—has with greater frequency over the past half century been recognized as "postmodern." This term is framed in contrast with modernism, despite the obvious continuities between the concepts. In *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson (1934-) posits an understanding of the term which is grounded more in historical context than substantive difference—"Modernism…thought compulsively about the New and tried to watch its coming into being…but the postmodern looks for breaks, for events rather than new worlds,…for the 'When-it-all-changed.'"[15] Modernism values history for its ability to bring out real change—the postmodern values history *as such*. Every event that occurs in the postmodern era is self-conscious of its historical meaning—it simulates the gravitas of "real" events.

In his essay *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, Jean Baudrillard (1927-2007) contrasts the earnestness of the Second World War with the protracted "non-war"[16] that constituted the first conflict between the United States and Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The Second World War represented extreme suffering for the sake of concrete political aims and ultimately far-reaching social transformation. The Gulf War was framed in similar terms (i.e. civilizational clash, "freedom") but in fact changed very little for almost all of us who are not Kuwaitis. What, then, did occur? As Baudrillard explains, "The media promote the war, the war promotes the media,

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[15] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), ix.
[16] Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, trans. Paul Patton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 24.

and advertising competes with the war."[17] During the postmodern era, the mere consciousness of "being at war" as a heavy and exciting historical event becomes more palpable than the war itself. Postmodernism, therefore, is unconcerned with the "true meaning" of things. It does not deny reality, it merely adopts an agnostic attitude towards it.

As the Gulf War demonstrates, the representation of history can be effectively used to sublimate what Jameson calls "the Utopian impulse,"[18]—that is, the desire to effect actual political transformation. Since "Utopian representations knew an extraordinary revival in the 1960s," Jameson suggests that "postmodernism is the substitute for the sixties and the compensation for their political failure."[19] Demand for the signifiers of Utopia, however, has existed since the birth of modernism, most evidently in Marxian thought. The whole emphasis on dialectical materialism creates a historical framework which demands embodiment.

How does one reconcile the fact of modernism and postmodernism being substantially different with the knowledge that neither can be cleanly periodized? Modernism, in conceiving of history as a cohesive, progressive narrative, necessarily concedes some ground to self-consciousness, and therefore irony, reaction, and all the other characteristics which would later be bundled into the concept of "postmodernism." Modernism and postmodernism are therefore engaged in a dialectic relationship with one another. The question, therefore, should not be "Why did postmodernism supersede modernism?" but rather "How did modernism necessarily define postmodernism, and bring it into dominance?" Rather than emphasizing the postmodern break, therefore, I will recontextualize the development of postmodernism as a logical "next step" with

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[17] Baudrillard, 31.
[18] Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, xvi.
[19] Jameson, xvi.

continuities that reach far back into the decades during which modernism was supposedly at its height.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE POSTWAR AVANT-GARDES

Whatever those continuities may be, it is clear that modernism was rife with contradictions. Even when viewed as an aesthetic movement, one finds that modernism was preoccupied with questions seemingly beyond the pale of aesthetic beauty. Tasked with ushering in a new age, theoreticians of modernist aesthetics approached art and literature with a fervor usually associated with revolutionaries and ideologues. This is not to say that their endeavor sought to overcome "mere" taste. On the contrary, many sought to discover or imbue morality in taste. Modernism in aesthetics became increasingly ideological—a state of affairs which only intensified in the wake of the First World War.

Admittedly, there was good reason to critically evaluate aesthetics through a political lens. Social and political upheavals had transformed the role and form of aesthetics in Western civilization over the course of the long 19th century. Thanks to the rise of the bourgeoisie both economically and politically across Europe, "high" art had gradually extricated itself from the aristocratic patronage networks to which it had hitherto been confined. Newly erected opera houses and museums therefore replaced churches and cathedrals as the focus of civic life in the decidedly "post-Nietzschean culture"[20] of the *fin de siècle*. Aesthetic achievement came to be seen as the ultimate marker of nationhood and social status. Ismail Pasha, the Khedive of Egypt, for instance, considered aesthetic achievement so indispensable to his country's legitimacy on

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[20] Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siécle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), xix.

the international stage that he commissioned Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida*[21] just to have an excuse to invite the continent's élite to his new Italian opera house in Cairo.

The transition from aristocratic to bourgeois dominance in the aesthetic sphere was made a fait accompli by the tumultuous aftermath of the First World War. The Tsar and the Kaiser were ousted, communist revolutions sprung up in Russia, Germany, and Hungary, and the once-opulent Austrian Empire found itself splintering into several successor states. The intertwined destinies of politics and aesthetics were reflected in both of the main ideologies which fed on the destruction of 19th century Europe: communism and fascism. In his 1935 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), the German-Jewish philosopher whose writings laid the foundations for "political aesthetics" as a field, contends that the appeal of fascism lay in its ability to simulate popular power without upsetting society's class structure—"This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art." The political aesthetics of the interwar era were therefore mirror images. Both directed their attention towards mass culture and used it to underpin their conceptions of politics.

Socialist realism

Despite its sheer geographic extent, Europe's revolutionary wave largely subsided within five years of armistice. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were put to death in Germany, while red Hungary fell victim to "white terror."[22] The only country where communist militancy managed to succeed beyond the immediate aftermath of the First World War was the fledgling

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[21] Hans Busch and Giuseppe Verdi, *Verdi's Aida: The History of an Opera in Letters and Documents* (University of Minnesota Press, 1978), liv.
[22] Bela Bodo, "The White Terror in Hungary, 1919-1921: The Social Worlds of Paramilitary Groups," *Austrian History Yearbook* 42 (2011): 133+.

Soviet Union, turning the rump state into an international pariah. The Bolsheviks' exceptional victory, however, provided a unique vehicle for the modernist movement in interwar Europe. Avant-garde movements—including Kazimir Malevich and El Lissitzky's Suprematism as well as the experimental filmography of Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov—experienced a brief but spectacular blossoming in the wake of the Russian Revolution. The flourishing of art during this period was no coincidence, as many artists "actively participated in the Soviet project, directly engaging with Bolshevism to realize their own creative visions of aesthetic and social transformation under the aegis of state patronage."[23] For the revolutionary generation, modernism was closely linked with the mass politics of the time. Political change meant an opportunity for aesthetic transformation that pushed the boundaries of art. Take, for example, Vladimir Tatlin's proposed Monument to the Third International: a ziggurat-shaped tangle of steel that would have towered over St. Petersburg. (Fig. 1.)[24] Bold modernism was seen as a service to the people. The first years of the Soviet period loom large in the Western imagination as an era of highly fruitful aesthetic production, a view which is compounded by the supposed barrenness of the era which immediately followed it: the era of "socialist realism."

The supposed reasons for the development of socialist realism as the young country's official aesthetic stance are varied, including the unfavorable juxtaposition of the "incomprehensible gibberish"[25] produced by the avant-gardes (such as Taltin's monument) with the severe economic devastation resulting from almost a decade of total war as well as the desire to craft a new non-bourgeois aesthetic that would confirm the Marxist idea that culture is

[23] Pamela Kachurin, *Making Modernism Soviet: The Russian Avant-Garde in the Early Soviet Era, 1918-1928* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2013), xvii.
[24] Yelena Lapshine and Vladimir Tatlin, *Drawing of the Reconstructed Model of the Monument to the Third International, Orthogonal Projection, "West Facade,"* ink on paper, 1993, Artstor.
[25] C. Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 39.

fundamentally downstream of material circumstances. The basic tenets of socialist realism, as articulated by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, were *narodnost'*, *klassovost'*, and *partiinost'*, which can roughly be translated as "people-ness," "class-ness," and "party-ness," respectively.[26] While *klassovost'* and *partiinost'* involve a work of art's adherence to the Party and its ideological line, the concept of *narodnost'* had theoretical implications that transcended the particularities of the Soviet state. "In very primitive societies," it was asserted, "art had a genuinely 'popular' (*narodny*) character. But the rise of capitalism and consequent development of its distinct class system led to a rift between spiritual and physical activities and hence between the masses and art."[27] With regards to aesthetics, this translates to a leveraging of art for status or money rather than personal enjoyment, a phenomenon which the Soviet line alleged resulted in the separation of "high" and "popular" art.

For the theoreticians of socialist realism, therefore, the solution to the excesses of the bourgeois aesthetic was to look towards the marginalized folk traditions of the past. This is not to say socialist realism was a reactionary or anti-modern ethos. On the contrary, sources on Soviet aesthetic policy are clear that "works become 'popular' only when the social and aesthetic ideals upon which they rest are expressions of the most progressive tendencies of the times."[28] Modernism—if one defines it as the valuation of progression in aesthetics—therefore remained the prevailing intellectual current in Soviet criticism, despite the ostensibly dramatic shift in both the content and style of officially condoned art and literature. To bridge this gap, Soviet theoreticians drew upon the Marxist conception of historical change, that is, the dialectical idea that class antagonism would inexorably lead to the victory of the proletarian class and therefore

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[26] James, 1.
[27] James, 4.
[28] James, 3.

socialism, which they believed built upon and resolved the contradictions inherent within the social systems which preceded it. "The most progressive tendencies" were defined along class lines as opposed to actual aesthetic innovation. Given Marxism-Leninism's strong materialism, it only made sense for the communist theoreticians of the 1930s to apply its framework of economic change to the realm of aesthetic philosophy.

The incorporation of dialectic materialism into aesthetics found a powerful advocate in György Lukács (1885-1971), a philosopher and critic who served in Hungary's brief communist government in the immediate aftermath of the First World War.[29] He had a famously erratic relationship with Moscow, especially during the Stalin years, including participation in Hungary's 1956 uprising. His writings later made him a Western Marxist darling. Nevertheless, Lukács embodies the ethos of socialist realism in his essay "Realism in the Balance," which argues that "the objective social context and the 'insistence on all-round knowledge'"[30] are essential to good literature because they are necessary to counteract "the experience of disintegration"[31] which capitalism perpetrates on the masses. Socialist realism, therefore, reminds the people of the ways in which the social and political intervene in—and even determine—the personal. The essential direction of history is revealed. By facetiously appropriating a quote from his interlocutor Ernst Bloch, who compares the "stream of consciousness" model of narrativization to "a mouth without Ego,"[32] Lukács excoriates the boldly individualistic perspective of the surrealist or expressionist voice.

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[29] Andy Blunden, ed., "Lukács, Georg (1885-1971)," in *Marxists Internet Archive Encyclopedia* (Marxists Internet Archive, n.d.), https://www.marxists.org/glossary/people/l/u.htm#lukacs-georg.
[30] György Lukács, "Realism in the Balance," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 198p), 33.
[31] Lukács, 32.
[32] Lukács, 34.

The Soviet line had a powerful sway over the radical aesthetic in the West during the

1940s, percolating though the avant-gardes by way of their often-radical politics. Benjamin's

belief that the response to fascism should be the politicization of art was shared widely among

leftists (or at least anti-fascists) across the West. According to architectural critic Reyner

Banham (1922-1988), the Architect's Department of the London County Council was a notable

stronghold of the "Anglo-Zhdanov line"[33] since "the social conscience of the older architects in

the Department had, in many cases, hardened into an acceptance of Communist doctrine."[34] The

political slant of the Architect's Department was enormously influential—it was the body

empowered to oversee one of Europe's most ambitious public rebuilding programs in the

aftermath of the Second World War. The ethos of British council housing in the immediate

postwar therefore mirrored the ideals of socialist realism with additional influences from

Swedish "New Humanistic" architecture[35] and the exigencies of replenishing a housing stock

depleted by the Blitz.[36] In any case, the architectural establishment in England enthusiastically

enculturated the Soviet idea of the 'popular' (*narodny*) aesthetic, borrowing from the sentimental

flourishes of "Merry England" and resulting in an attitude which Banham described as "soft"[37]

among the established architects of the Department.

Hans Prinzhorn and 'degenerate' art

While socialist realism was being constructed in the Soviet Union and among the left-

wing movements of the West, a similar marginalization (or reinterpretation) of the avant-gardes

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[33] Andrei Zhdanov was the chief doctrinaire of Soviet cultural production in the immediate postwar era.
[34] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1966), 11.
[35] John Boughton, *Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing* (London: Verso, 2018), 100.
[36] Boughton, 90.
[37] Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 13.

was occurring in Germany. Ironically, this parallel development was due to the staggering ideological divergence between the two countries, a chasm which only widened as the Nazi Party consolidated power and began formulating its own aesthetic philosophy centered around an antimodern crusade against "degeneration" (*Entartung*).[38] Modernism, according to Nazi critics of "degenerate art" (*Entartete Kunst*), was the reflection of poor mental health and a lack of "racial hygiene."[39] While the chief product of this stance was a series of art exhibitions featuring the works of Germany's foremost modernist artists juxtaposed with the art of institutionalized mental patients and smug, mocking slogans like "Crazy at any price" and "Madness becomes method,"[40] the connection between neurodivergence and modernism actually had deep roots in European aesthetic discourse, and not always in a negative sense.

Hans Prinzhorn (1886-1933), for example, was an administrator at a psychiatric hospital in Heidelberg who collected thousands of works produced by mental patients from around continental Europe. The culmination of this project was a book, published in 1922, entitled "Artistry of The Mentally Ill" which identified "Ten Schizophrenic Masters" who created art that, in its compositional and conceptual creativity, could easily fit (in Prinzhorn's view) within the newly minted modernist canon. Each case study features a brief biographical description of the artist followed by a formal analysis of a couple selected pieces. While Prinzhorn connects the individual elements that appear in the artists' work to their illnesses or experiences, his analyses utilize the language of non-institutionalized artists, demonstrating a clear respect for the art

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[38] Olaf Peters, "From Nordau to Hitler: 'Degeneration' and Anti-Modernism Between the Fin-De-Siècle and the National Socialist Takeover of Power," in *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany 1937* (New York: Prestel, 2014), 17.

[39] Mario-Andreas von Lüttichau, "'Crazy at Any Price': The Pathologizing of Modernism in the Run-Up to the 'Entartete Kunst' Exhibition in Munich in 1937," in *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany 1937* (New York: Prestel, 2014), 36-51.

[40] von Lüttichau, 36.

object apart from mere curiosity or clinical interest. According to Prinzhorn, the aesthetic value of these works should lead society to ask itself "What is schizophrenic about this picture?" the answer being, "We cannot be certain…Instead we have to make up our minds once and for all to count on a separate creative component and to look for the value of a work only within the work itself—even if it is that of a schizophrenic."[41] In this approach we may view the first inklings of late modern aesthetic criticism, including the essentialism of Clement Greenberg's writings on painting.

The other component of "degeneration" lay in the racial element of Nazi ideology, which believed that a root cause of modernism and its supposed degradation of Western culture was racial contamination, specifically through the presence of Jews in both high and popular culture. As Adolf Hitler declared at the 1934 Nuremburg Rally (famously featured in Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*) "the works of those artists who are racially related in spirit [to the Aryan] must necessarily stand in closer proximity to his own and convey much more meaning for him than the artificial products of an alien infection that has spread amongst his Volk."[42] Similarly to neurodivergence, however, the link between xenophilia (or at least fetishism)—specifically towards those cultures that were viewed as more "primitive"—and modernism was also emphasized as a positive aspect of the new aesthetic by theoreticians during the interwar period.

A prominent example of this was Ljubomir Micić's (1895-1971) concept of "barbarogenius," as articulated in his literary magazine *Zenit*. Micić was one of the first prominent avant-garde poets from the Balkan Peninsula, a region which was still reeling from its devastation during the First World War.[43] While Micić's explanations of the concept involved a

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[41] Hans Prinzhorn, *The Art of Insanity: An Analysis of Ten Schizophrenic Artists* (Solar Books, 2011), 157.

[42] Adolf Hitler, "Art and Its Commitment to Truth," in *The Third Reich Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 752.

[43] Jelena Milojković-Djurić, "Great War Legacies in Serbian Culture," *Balcanica* 2015, no. 46 (2015): 241–54.

series of demands related to the perceived position of his native Yugoslavia on the margins of European civilization, including the recognition of the Balkans as the "sixth continent" and the "Balkanization of Europe," the basic goal of "barbarogenius" was the creation of "a new symbolic figure of an artistic/creative genius invested with a pure barbarian force."[44] Micić not only self-consciously identified with the primitive outsider but also hailed him as the catalyst behind the modernist movement. Ironically, this stance was shared by the Nazis, albeit with completely opposite connotations.

A NEW EPISTEMOLOGY OF MODERNISM

Despite the defeat of Nazi Germany, the heyday of socialist realism-inspired "New Humanism" in the West faded almost as quickly as the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union. As Carl E. Schorske recalls in the introduction to *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, "In the decade after 1947…a mood of pessimism—sometimes of impotence, sometimes of rigid defensiveness, sometimes of surrender—settled over an intelligentsia that, whether centrist or radical, liberal or Marxist, had for several decades been united in social optimism."[45] Among the Left, the philosophy of history that had justified the Soviet rejection of the avant-gardes no longer seemed tenable. No longer could it be trusted that the dialectic relationship between proletarian and bourgeois taste would result in an aesthetic which is both popular and "good." Unlike the First World War, the Second involved loftier ideals than mere élite vainglory yet resulted in even more social upheaval and human death. The culture of modernity, now tied to the horror of the

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[44] Ljiljana Blagojević, *Modernism in Serbia: The Elusive Margins of Belgrade Architecture, 1919-1941* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 10.
[45] Schorske, *Fin-de-Siécle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, xxiii.

Holocaust and the atom bomb, seemed less like a vehicle for positive change and more like a lethal taint.

Few areas of the world were exempt from the feeling of disillusionment with interwar aesthetic philosophy. With the death of Josef Stalin, even the Soviet Union began to grapple with the effect of its governing ideology on the individual.[46] Thousands of political prisoners were released from gulags, a tacit admission of Stalinist excesses. Meanwhile, many philosophers and artists of the early revolutionary period were either officially or "silently" rehabilitated, paving the way for the demise of socialist realism. Internationally, the revelations issued in Nikita Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union triggered mass abandonment of Western communist parties by intellectuals and activists, deradicalizing elements of Western criticism which had once looked towards the Soviet Union for leadership and guidance. In 1957, Howard Fast, author of *Spartacus*, the novel upon which the famously blacklist-busting film of the same name was based, wrote *The Naked God: The Writer and the Communist Party* as an account of his disillusionment with the communist movement. Despite the fact that he that had even spent time in prison for refusing to cooperate with the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), Fast recalled that after the "Secret Speech" he felt that "The sick god was naked from the beginning; there only had to be a voice to proclaim the fact."[47]

Modernism as the prevailing strain in aesthetic philosophy, however, managed to hobble on for a few more decades. In order to respond to the failures of interwar aesthetic philosophy, that is, the inability to reconcile modernity as desirable with the unprecedented cruelty of the

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[46] Miriam Dobson, "The Post-Stalin Era: De-Stalinization, Daily Life, and Dissent," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 905–24.

[47] Howard Fast, *The Naked God: The Writer and the Communist Party* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1957), 172.

Second World War, the new generation of left-wing modernists had to shift the locus of their

epistemology, beginning with a process of "transferring their intellectual foundations from Marx

to Freud."[48] Historical change would continue, it was hoped, but class transformation alone as its

driving factor would have to be bolstered by other forces, namely, a deeper understanding of the

human psyche. Such an attitude would also entail a repudiation of pure Marxian materialism—

history would have to be dependent on human nature rather than vice versa. In light of the

movement's setbacks, the new generation would have to argue for modernism as containing

objective but not necessarily self-evident truths, truths which only an epistemology resembling

experimentation would be able to reveal. As in any experiment, there would need to be a control,

an example of a "true self" uninfluenced by culture. Such a person, an idealized primitive, would

then allow artists and philosophers to confirm the modernist project as being aligned with the

liberation of the human spirit.

While primitivity had been present in aesthetic discourse for decades (as demonstrated by

the role of neurodivergence and exoticism in Germany), it had hitherto not been used as an

epistemological grounding for modernism itself. The first seeds of change, however, had been

planted by Hans Prinzhorn. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the French

artist and collector Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985) picked up where Prinzhorn left off and began

amassing his own collection of works by non-Western, child, and neurodivergent artists.[49]

Unlike Prinzhorn, however, Dubuffet actually started receiving some acclaim in the art world—

especially in the United States. In 1946, he was featured in an exhibition of School of Paris

artists at Pierre Matisse's gallery in New York. Dubuffet made such an impression on American

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[48] Schorske, *Fin-de-Siécle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, xxiv.

[49] Valérie Rousseau, *Art Brut in America: The Incursion of Jean Dubuffet* (New York: American Folk Art Museum, 2015), 9.

high culture that *Newsweek* ran an article which referred to him as "the darling of Parisian avant-garde circles."[50] His art struck a chord with postwar audiences specifically because it reflected disillusionment with established culture,[51] the idea of Europe as the center of the art world,[52] and the politics of interwar modernists like Pablo Picasso.[53] He began referring to his works as *art brut* ("raw art"), and in 1948 established a foundation, the Compagnie de l'Art Brut, to seek out and promote the genre.[54] It was only after he brought his collection to the United States, however, that he became a financial success. Either way, the psychological had embedded itself deeply within the fabric of a new postwar aesthetic.

Freudians for modernism

While Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is not normally thought of as an aesthetic philosopher, he does formulate a coherent theory of art in his book *Civilization and Its Discontents*, published in 1930. The main argument of the book is that human society is shaped by two opposing forces that originate in the primal needs for both sexual reproduction and survival—forces which he dubs "Eros" and "Thanatos" after the Greek gods of love and death, respectively. Eros is the animal aspect of the human mind which seeks sensory pleasure above all, primarily of the sexual but also of the non-sexual type. It radiates a force which Freud calls libido, or desire. Mere Eros, however, cannot fulfil itself in the long term because it is unable to practice prudence or delayed gratification. Though "it is simply the pleasure-principle [Eros] which draws up the programme of life's purpose," Eros alone "is in conflict with the whole

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[50] Aruna D'Souza, "'I Think Your Work Looks a Lot Like Dubuffet': Dubuffet and America, 1946-1962," *Oxford Art Journal* 20, no. 2 (1997): 61.
[51] D'Souza, 66.
[52] D'Souza, 61.
[53] D'Souza, 65.
[54] Rousseau, *Art Brut in America: The Incursion of Jean Dubuffet*, 11.

world"[55] and therefore can lead to severe unhappiness in addition to moments of unadulterated joy.

This is where Thanatos, the "death drive," enters the picture. Thanatos is the force of internalized repression which utilizes "libido-displacements" for the purpose of "transferring the instinctual aims into such directions that they cannot be frustrated by the outside world."[56] According to Freud, the human mind is exceptional because it can sublimate its own unceasing stream of libido into other activities which will allow for its own survival, or at least the bare avoidance of the fact that humans exist in a world which is cruelly ambivalent to individuals' sense of happiness. Thanatos, therefore, is also known as the "reality-principle." Since the intensification of Thanatos is necessary for planning, organization, and productivity, Freud speculates that the development of civilization is directly proportionate to the domination of Thanatos over Eros, with the most advanced societies (western Europe and North America) being therefore the most repressed. The problem with the dominance of Thanatos in modern society is that, while self-denial helps us avoid the deepest depths of suffering, it also blunts the purest enjoyment of happiness.

The enjoyment of aesthetics, in Freud's opinion, is one of the clearest examples of "libido-displacement" because the "aesthetic attitude offers little protection against the menace of suffering, but it is able to compensate for a great deal."[57] For this reason, the hallmark of "a high level of civilization"[58] is the omnipresence of aesthetic beauty as a cultural value. We are reassured against the looming threat of existential dread "when we see that the industry of the

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[55] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. Joan Riviere (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), 27.
[56] Freud, 33.
[57] Freud, 38.
[58] Freud, 54.

inhabitants is applied as well to things which are not in the least useful and, on the contrary, seem to be useless,"[59] i.e. art.

One would expect from Freud's analysis of civilization as a fundamentally repressive force that he advocates for a sort of pleasurable regression to a simpler point in history when Eros was somewhat freer. In practice, however, Freud ridicules "this strange attitude of hostility to civilization"[60] as a romanticization of the aspects of pre- or extra-industrialized life that were "erroneously attributed to the absence of the complicated conditions of civilization"[61] or a misunderstanding of the privations which did occur in the distant past.

Despite Freud's opposition to primitivism and his identification of art with the repression inherent within civilization, the intellectual vacuum of the postwar era allowed for the reinterpretation of his ideas by a new generation which was far more disenchanted with modern life. Having witnessed the frenzied triumph of "Thanatos" on the battlefields, concentration camps, and bombed-out cities of a supposedly civilized world, they sought something within the human psyche that was both peaceful and productive, thus validating the continued development of humanity.

Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), a German-American philosopher identified with the Frankfurt School who, during the 1960s, became known "alternatively as the father, grandfather, or guru of the New Left"[62] for his attempts to reconcile Marxism with individual freedom, sought to apply Freud's theories of subconscious tug-of-war to the dialectical model of history proposed by Marx. The result of this effort was the book *Eros and Civilization*, published in 1955. The replacement of ruling and laboring classes with the reality- and pleasure-principles was simple

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[59] Freud, 54.
[60] Freud, 44.
[61] Freud, 45.
[62] John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb, eds., *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), 2.

enough, given their method of development through contradiction, but Freud's idea that the

advancement of society necessarily entails increased repression appeared contrary to the Marxian

hope of human liberation through material progress. The solution to this ostensible problem, in

Marcuse's formulation, drew from another of Freud's core observations about the psyche: that

denied urges must resurface in some form. Marcuse therefore declared that "The *return of the*

repressed makes up the tabooed and subterranean history of civilization."[63] History could be

described as a process of perpetual self-discovery, resulting in a society that was both materially

advanced and emotionally—not to mention erotically—fulfilled.

But what does this mean for aesthetics? Marcuse rejected Freud's assumption that the

presence of art in advanced societies reflected self-control and therefore the dominance of

Thanatos. Instead, Marcuse frames art as a product of the natural proclivity towards play[64]— a

core attribute of Eros. The aesthetic sentiment should thus be seen as an attempt to "reconcile the

two spheres of the human existence [senses and the intellect] which were torn asunder by a

repressive reality principle."[65] Art allows us to grapple with the fundamental ambivalence of the

world without demanding rigid self-denial, "consequently, the aesthetic reconciliation implies

strengthening sensuousness as against the tyranny of reason and, ultimately, even calls for the

liberation of sensuousness from the repressive domination of reason."[66]

Clement Greenberg's modernist essentialism

It is difficult to define what "play" is, but it is somewhat easier to prove what it is *not*. In

his book *Homo Ludens*, written in 1938 but only translated into English in 1949, Dutch cultural

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[63] Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 16.
[64] Marcuse, 178.
[65] Marcuse, 179.
[66] Marcuse, 179-180.

theorist Johan Huizinga (1872-1945) claims a defining characteristic of play is that it "is not 'ordinary' or 'real' life."[67] Within play, "an absolute and peculiar order reigns."[68] Play is a voluntary system of pros and cons that exists (at least temporarily) apart from the considerations imposed by "reality." If art is a form of play, as Marcuse argues, it can therefore be viewed as an auxiliary reality with its own rules of desire and fulfillment. This line of reasoning bears striking similarities to Freud's explanation of psychosis, specifically as "One last possibility of dealing with life…[delusion] offers them at least substitute-gratifications."[69] Religion, according to Freud, also "consists in decrying the value of life and promulgating a view of the real world that is distorted like a delusion."[70] The value of art, therefore—like psychosis and faith—lies in the fact that aesthetic beauty has its own reflexive logic of the "good," an assertion which bears a striking similarity to Prinzhorn's belief that aesthetics must "count on a *separate* creative component,"[71] the emphasis being on the separateness from conditioned sensibilities like wealth or status which go beyond the aesthetic. The best art dislocates itself from "reality" and instead seeks to reveal the essential aspects of its own medium.

This approach, to evaluate aesthetics as divorced from culture, is the fundamental core of Clement Greenberg's (1909-1994) art criticism, which defined the avant-garde modernism of the postwar era. Greenberg, a Trotskyist and native New Yorker, rose from obscurity to widespread esteem during the 1940s as one of America's most inventive art critics in a time in which the United States was considered an afterthought in the art world.[72] The publication he edited,

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[67] Johan Huizinga, "Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon," in *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), 8.
[68] Huizinga, 10.
[69] Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 41.
[70] Freud, 42.
[71] Prinzhorn, *The Art of Insanity: An Analysis of Ten Schizophrenic Artists*, 157.
[72] John O'Brian, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

Partisan Review, soon became known as one of the foremost mouthpieces of the American intelligentsia. Repudiating the bipolar relationship with politics that Benjamin prescribed for art, Greenberg claimed of the development of modernism over the course of the past century that "once the avant-garde had succeeded in 'detaching' itself from society, it proceeded to turn around and repudiate revolutionary as well as bourgeois politics."[73] The imperative of aesthetics in society was not to express the will of the people but to seek a greater truth—"something *given*, increate, independent of meanings, similar or originals."[74] He especially disapproved of art that tugged on the heartstrings or located itself within the vapid language of popular culture because it failed to gesture towards the transcendence which he so valued. Sentimentality or exchange value, being present but not endemic to art, had no place within aesthetic evaluation. To Greenberg, popular, persuasive, or commercial art was *Kitsch*, a German term which refers to objects that claim aesthetic value for reasons other than pure aesthetic enjoyment. In his 1939 essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," Greenberg identified Kitsch with the ascendant classes of capitalism: the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. These groups were originally situated between the aristocracy and the pre-modern working classes, and so the Kitsch aesthetic became identified with the "middlebrow"—a class which was not totally unaware of "art" as a high-status social institution but lacking "the leisure and comfort necessary for the enjoyment of the city's traditional culture."[75] Kitsch was therefore a way for the masses to participate in the social benefits which art supposedly granted without carrying any objective aesthetic value.

Since Kitsch is, Greenberg asserts, the direct result of capitalistic and thus bourgeois culture, he connects it with the post-liberal ideologies which arose during the interwar period.

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[73] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 7.
[74] Greenberg, 8.
[75] Greenberg, 12.

The aesthetics of both fascism and communism (as headed by Stalin) were Kitsch "not because their respective governments are controlled by philistines, but because kitsch is the culture of the masses in these countries, as it is everywhere else."[76] Kitsch was "merely another of the inexpensive ways in which totalitarian regimes seek to ingratiate themselves with their subjects"[77] and therefore establish control over society. This critique, while issued immediately before the breakout of the Second World War, provided the basis for the equivocation of Nazi and Stalinist aesthetic theory—in contrast to the West—in the postwar era.

On its surface, Greenberg's aesthetic philosophy can seem terribly elitist. It was certainly anti-populist, but he was careful not to exclude all forms of working-class aesthetic sensibility. After all, Greenberg's political roots lay in the United States' burgeoning communist movement. He composed a poem in 1940 entitled "Ode to Trotsky"[78] and the *Partisan Review* was literally affiliated with the Communist Party USA. While his radical fervor cooled in the years immediately following the Second World War, Greenberg retained a distinctly Marxist view of history which influenced his aesthetic writings. He believed that a truly unpretentious art could be discovered among the fringes of the bourgeois ecumene—that is, "in those outlying countries of Western civilization over which metropolitan culture was comparatively thinly spread— Germany, the Balkans, and North America."[79] This art could transcend both Kitsch and the obvious exclusivity of pre-modern hierarchy. In his essay "Primitive Painting," Greenberg hails the isolated artist by observing that "His painting goes back to the first assumptions of pictorial art and reexamines them in all their original freshness, reminding one again of the excitement

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[76] Greenberg, 20.
[77] Greenberg, 20.
[78] O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, xx.
[79] Clement Greenberg, "Primitive Painting," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 111.

there is in simply discovering that it is possible to depict three-dimensional things on a flat surface."[80] He suggested that primitive painters upheld the axiom of "art for art's sake" so well because art was, for them, a fundamentally solipsistic exercise. Greenberg was therefore cautiously optimistic that primitivity could prove a useful subversion of Kitsch's march towards world domination. The lowbrow with its authenticity could form an alliance with the highbrow and its sophistication against the middlebrow.

That being said, Greenberg is aware that primitivity is not immune from cooption by Kitsch. He draws a strong contrast between genuinely primitive art and falsely "primitive" art manufactured for the masses to gawk at. "'Primitive' art," he posits, "belongs to the Industrial Age,"[81] It is defined by what is not—it is not "metropolitan," academic, or commercial— meaning that it is difficult to argue which works are genuinely "primitive." As he notes, there is "a very important distinction…[between] professional 'primitive' painters who made a living by their art, and…amateur primitive painters who paint chiefly for their own satisfaction."[82] The former category is liable to being wrapped up in the economic forces which inspire Kitsch, and some are cognizant of their "primitivity" in a self-conscious way that morphs their aesthetic into exactly what primitive art should not be.

Greenberg identifies surrealism as a uniquely ham-fisted attempt to feign primitivity. He doubts that the strategy of automatism (striving for the unadulterated output of the id) is actually effective since, for the most part, surrealists were still academically trained artists who only later in their career decided to flirt with fanciful imagery.[83] They might think they can reject the

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[80] Greenberg, 112.
[81] Greenberg, 109.
[82] Greenberg, 110.
[83] Clement Greenberg, "Surrealist Painting," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 229.

influence of culture through free association, but their use of the absurd and shocking reveals that

"the desire to sin against decorum, violate all the rules, do the disreputable thing, and attach

oneself to whatever seems discredited"[84] is the true motive of their aesthetic sensibility rather

than the impulse to create the best art. Even the supposed "avant-gardes" of the interwar era,

therefore, were part of a "reactionary tendency which is attempting to restore 'outside' subject

matter,"[85] that is, failing both to separate aesthetics from tradition and provide a suitable

epistemology for modernism.

     Having been sorely disappointed by both the aesthetics and politics emanating from

Europe during the interwar years, Greenberg sought a new fount of creativity that would

demonstrate his theoretical ideas. In fact, it was Greenberg who "discovered" Jean Dubuffet and

popularized his art in the United States.[86] Though he found Dubuffet personally annoying,[87]

Greenberg asserted in *Partisan Review* that "Jean Dubuffet is perhaps the one new painter of real

importance to have appeared on the scene in Paris in the last decade."[88] Nevertheless, he

remained unsatisfied with Dubuffet precisely because of his Parisian origins—for critics in

postwar America "Dubuffet was a successful painter as long as his Frenchness did not show

through."[89] Greenberg yearned for an artist who could combine Dubuffet's formal sensibilities

with a non-European persona. Fortunately, Greenberg discovered Jackson Pollock and was

immediately won over. "He is the first painter I know of to have got something positive from the

muddiness of color that so profoundly characterizes a great deal of American painting,"

Greenberg waxed in his first review of Pollock's art, "[His works] are among the strongest

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[84] Greenberg, 229.
[85] Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 9.
[86] D'Souza, "'I Think Your Work Looks a Lot Like Dubuffet': Dubuffet and America, 1946-1962," 61.
[87] Rousseau, *Art Brut in America: The Incursion of Jean Dubuffet*, 17.
[88] D'Souza, "'I Think Your Work Looks a Lot Like Dubuffet': Dubuffet and America, 1946-1962," 61.
[89] D'Souza, 68.

abstract paintings I have yet seen by an American."[90] Greenberg also compared Pollock and Dubuffet favorably.[91] From then on, Greenberg and *Partisan Review* became the most prominent defenders of the genre which later became known as Abstract Expressionism.

Theory in action: Brutalism

  In any other decade, Abstract Expressionism might have remained confined to the United States. Hitherto, the centers of the avant-gardes had been located almost exclusively in Europe. America was considered far too provincial to push the boundaries of high culture. The Second World War, however, radically changed this state of affairs. In the aftermath of the conflict, the roles between the United States and Europe were reversed. Instead of Americans receiving and being scandalized by the cultural output of an innovative Europe, the arrival of Abstract Expressionism struck the Old World off guard. "Europeans…had been brought up against the art of Jackson Pollock for the first time, and without any preparation by the European art-press, at the 'Biennale di Venezia' of 1950,"[92] years after his work had become widely celebrated across the Atlantic. Furthermore, *art brut* had become far more popular in the US than it had ever been in its native Europe.[93] The new aesthetic radiating from New York "was almost completely incomprehensible to European eyes,"[94] but made a big impression to a younger generation of artists, critics, and theoreticians who lamented the persistence of socialist realism, Surrealism, and other interwar aesthetics.

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[90] Clement Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of Marc Chagall, Lyonel Feininger, and Jackson Pollock," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 166.
[91] Rousseau, *Art Brut in America: The Incursion of Jean Dubuffet*, 17.
[92] Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 61.
[93] Rousseau, *Art Brut in America: The Incursion of Jean Dubuffet*.
[94] Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 61.

American ideas had a specific resonance in the United Kingdom, where the postwar "hang-over" was particularly difficult to dispel. The country was not only economically and culturally sapped by the war effort but also physically blighted by German bombing campaigns. Wartime rationing and economic sluggishness dragged on into the 1950s, far longer than Britain's neighbors and allies. The country's Labour government, in addition to their economic and social interventionism, viewed the postwar slump as a crisis of morale that could be at least partially assuaged by public pageantry. In 1951, therefore, the government hosted the "Festival of Britain," an exhibition (in the Victorian sense of the term) of Britain's history and accomplishments. The site, located on the South Bank of the Thames, was to be converted into a showcase of modern Britain. The persistence of interwar modernism in the immediate postwar, however, turned the project into a charming but somewhat awkward tribute to "post-war themes…gelled in a picturesque whimsy."[95] The Festival was a moderate success in terms of revenue and visitor satisfaction,[96] but the event failed to present established British modernism as a promising current in architecture and design. According to Peter Moro, one of the architects who designed the Royal Festival Hall, the whole affair served to bookend rather than rejuvenate the kind of modernism which had dominated the 1940s.[97] Moreover, the Festival of Britain failed to save the Labour government, which was defeated in the general election of the same year.

The challenge of rebuilding Britain's cities, combined with the mixed results of the Festival of Britain, offered the chance of a critical juncture in British architecture. For Peter and Alison Smithson (1923-2003 and 1928-1993), a husband-and-wife architect duo, postwar England proved to be fertile ground for experimentation. Their greatest inspiration originated in

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[95] Elain Harwood, *Space, Hope, and Brutalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), xxiv.
[96] Harwood, xxv.
[97] Harwood, xxv.

the ethos of Abstract Expressionism and therefore Greenberg's interest in discovering the essence of aesthetic taste, an epistemological strategy which they hoped would confirm the modernist project. Concrete, with its unassuming versatility and simplicity, became their medium of choice. They called their aesthetic "New Brutalism," which evolved in the popular lexicon to simply "Brutalism."

The reason why the Smithsons adopted this term is contested, and there are a handful of overlapping theories. Reyner Banham, at the time a critic for *The Architectural Review*, gradually associated himself with the movement, and in his writings articulated its history and theoretical basis. In Banham's 1966 retrospective on the movement, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* he notes that the Swedish architect Hans Asplund (not to be confused with fellow Swedish modernist Gunnar Asplund) claimed to have invented the term in 1950 in order to describe a house in Uppsala designed by colleagues at his firm.[98] The Smithsons, on the other hand, seem to imply through their artists' statements that the French phrase *béton brut* ("raw concrete"), popularized by Le Corbusier, is the actual inspiration for the term "Brutalism."[99] The Smithsons' insistence that Brutalism derives from Le Corbusier complicates Asplund's account because the house which he was referring to—the Villa Göth—has an exterior in brick as opposed to raw concrete. (Fig. 2)[100] According to Banham, the ostensible contradiction between these two etymologies can be resolved through a third theory: that "Brutalism" derives from the word *brut* in the sense of "raw" or "unsophisticated."[101] This theory draws a connection between *béton brut*, the *art brut* movement, and the supposedly "anti-artistic" qualities of Abstract

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[98] Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 10.
[99] Banham, 45.
[100] "Bengt Edman / Lennart Holm: Villa Göth, 1950" (#SOSBrutalism, n.d.), http://www.sosbrutalism.org/cms/19758479.
[101] Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 61.

Expressionism. It is for this reason that Banham contends that Brutalism is "an ethic, not an aesthetic."[102] Concrete does not define Brutalism, but rather is a rhetorical technique that helps articulate its theoretical argument.

In 1955, Banham published a short essay in *The Architectural Review* which served to synthesize the philosophy of Brutalism. He pithily summarizes the precepts of the movement as "1, Formal legibility of plan; 2, clear exhibition of structure; and 3, valuation of materials for their inherent qualities 'as found.'"[103] For Banham, a building should be the sum of its functions, materials, and nothing more. Although he does not mention it directly, is it clear that this ethos is fundamentally an application of Greenberg's ideas about painting to architecture, conveyed through the transatlantic crosspollination of Abstract Expressionism. That being said, Banham goes further than Greenberg in connecting these ideas to the epistemology of modernism itself. By mentioning that "The New Brutalism has to be seen against the background of the recent history of history, and, in particular, the growing sense of inner history of the Modern Movement itself,"[104] he recognizes that the logic of modernism could no longer rely on the dialectic model of history grounded in "Marxism's Golden Age, when you could recognize a capitalist when you met him."[105] Instead, Brutalism expresses the need to generate a new historicism based on objective truths about human nature, one that maintains "that it is even 'possible' to make a moral stand about matters of design."[106] Whereas Greenberg merely implies that the primitive could provide a path forward for modernism, Banham basically states it outright when he celebrates Brutalism's "brutality, its *je-m'en-foutisme*, its bloody-mindedness."[107]

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[102] Banham, 10.
[103] Reyner Banham, "The New Brutalism," *October* 136 (Spring 2011): 23.
[104] Banham, 20.
[105] Banham, 20.
[106] Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 135.
[107] Banham, "The New Brutalism," 23.

That being said, how can Brutalism be seen as an actual innovation upon the modernisms that preceded the Second World War? Formally, Brutalism appears little different from Le Corbusier's experiments in *béton brut*, and specifically his idea of *Unité d'habitation* ("Housing unit") which built upon theoretical principles he formulated in the 1920s.[108] Indeed, Banham attests that even Alison Smithson recognized that "when you open a new volume of 'Oeuvre complète' you discover that Corb has already had the best ideas you have just thought up."[109] Brutalism therefore felt deeply indebted to Le Corbusier's interwar work. Despite this fact, the Smithsons and their allies could also be recognized as the force which led to the collapse of the *Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne* (CIAM), an association of modernist architects from across Europe founded in 1928 by many of the continent's rising stars including Le Corbusier himself.[110] Over the course of the 1930s, CIAM developed into one of the key organs of the international modernist movement. Despite the radical roots of the association, CIAM had by the end of the Second World War assumed an "establishment" role in architectural circles, a position which attracted criticism from the generation of architects which came of age after the war.[111] In the wake of the organization's 1954 conference in Aix-en-Provence, a group of younger architects including the Smithsons began issuing statements faulting the older generation for "building yesterday's dreams when the rest of us have woken up in today."[112] They believed that the establishment was too bogged down in providing adequate housing for the urban masses rather than utilizing aesthetics as a tool for discovering objectivity. The faction

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[108] Tim Benton, "Marseille: Unité d'Habitation, or the Company of Clouds, the Sky, or the Stars," in *Le Corbusier: An Atlas of Modern Landscapes* (New York: The Museum of Modernn Art, 2013), 201–11.

[109] Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 86.

[110] Ulrich Conrads, ed., "CIAM: La Sarraz Declaration," in *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*, trans. Michael Bullock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1970), 109–14.

[111] Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 70.

[112] Banham, 71.

began calling itself "Team Ten" (also stylized as "Team-X"). They demanded a rejuvenation of modernism for its own sake as opposed to mere slum clearance or functionality. In response, CIAM allowed Team-X to coordinate the association's next conference at Dubrovnik on Yugoslavia's Adriatic coast,[113] a move which only served to divide the community further, thus resulting in its dissolution over the course of the late 1950s. David had defeated Goliath, demonstrating the depth of the postwar generational divide.

The ironic contrast between the bitterness of the schism in CIAM and the strong formal similarity between Brutalism and its interwar predecessors led the British artist Toni del Renzio (1915-2007) to note that it seemed like the guiding tenet of Brutalism was "Do as Corb does, not as Corb says."[114] We may therefore view Brutalism more as a current in aesthetic philosophy with a few stylistic hallmarks rather than a style with a complementary manifesto, as interwar art movements like surrealism had been so wont to do. Le Corbusier had gestured towards this understanding of modernism in his 1923 book *Towards a New Architecture* when he declared that "A great new epoch has begun. There exists a new spirit…The 'styles' are a lie,"[115] but the Brutalists felt that these precepts had been insufficiently practiced by many in Le Corbusier's own generation owing to their political or aesthetic commitments to quoditian taste. Only art for its own sake, they believed, could fulfil Le Corbusier's vision.

THE CRISIS OF MODERNIZATION

As the postwar era wore on, modernism persisted as the dominant mode in aesthetic philosophy. The United States poured money into western Europe, remaking it in its own image.

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[113] Banham, 70.
[114] Banham, 72.
[115] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 3.

Meanwhile, the death of Josef Stalin and the subsequent "de-Stalinization" of Soviet culture enabled the reintroduction of the transnational avant-gardes into the Eastern Bloc. From a material standpoint, however, the most important changes of the postwar order were not the rearrangement of the world along dual lines. The world population growth rate reached new highs in the wake of the Second World War, triggering a renaissance in Malthusian views such as those expressed by William Vogt's *Road to Survival* and Fairfield Osborn's *Our Plundered Planet*, both published in 1948.[116] Catastrophe would be at hand, they alleged, if human population growth was not curbed. Nevertheless, global famine did not occur, testifying to the exceptional progress that modernized public health, agriculture, and industry had made nearly everywhere. It was the acknowledgement of modernization's persistent tempo, therefore, which defined modern life in the postwar era.

Modernization and modernism, while deeply intertwined, are not interchangeable. Quite simply, modernization is a material process while modernism is an aesthetic movement which aims to grapple with the consequences of modernization. Modernization had been ongoing before the emergence of modernism and would continue after its protracted decline. For interwar modernists, modernization was the impetus for their call to renew aesthetics. Le Corbusier upheld "the engineer's aesthetic"[117] as the mode to which contemporary architects should aspire. He therefore exalts ocean liners, grain elevators, and airplanes because their hulking, utilitarian forms express the unbridled spirit of modernization. The postwar modernists, on the other hand, did not celebrate modernization for its own sake. The Second World War demonstrated the destructive capabilities of usually benign technology. The airplane, for instance, had gone from

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[116] Thomas Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment: Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 101.
[117] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 1.

Le Corbusier's favored example of how war "had mobilized invention, intelligence and daring"[118] to the carrier of the atom bomb and therefore the harbinger of human self-destruction. This is not to say that the postwar generation rejected modernization as a whole—such an attitude would be evidently anti-modernist. Rather, modernization was recast as the ambient process which revealed aesthetic truths as it progressed. It provided the basis for modernism, giving it meaning and a sense of direction, but it no longer dictated the movement's aesthetic content.

While modernism anticipated and celebrated the continued pace of modernization, many of the most influential modernists failed to fully take into account the transformative implications that would accompany shifts in the perception of modernization. If modernization continued to the point that even the most "marginal" spaces of the emergent Western-oriented world experienced technological, economic, and thus cultural change, what would remain of the primitive which, since the Second World War, had played such a crucial role in modernism's own epistemology? For our purposes, the actual extent of modernization does not matter so much as the perception that modernization had overturned the cultural underpinnings of primitivity.

The end of political art

Meanwhile, the political profile of modernism continued its shift away from interwar ideologies. The reaction against Stalinist and fascist aesthetics among boosters of modernism ironically had the effect of reconciling them with the governing ideologies of the West. Clement Greenberg's early writings, including "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," convey a willingness to place

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[118] Le Corbusier, 109.

aesthetics above and apart from politics with the goal of keeping "culture *moving* in the midst of ideological confusion and violence,"[119] an attitude which can be seen as directly refuting Benjamin's explanation of art in the bourgeois era as being connected at the hip with political ideology. As competition between the United States and the Soviet Union intensified, Greenberg's attitude of detachment towards politics shifted into a tacit condonation of the American side.

By 1948, Greenberg, the once militant socialist, defined himself as an "ex- or disabused Marxist."[120] He and his colleagues began taking advantage of cultural venues maintained by the US government. Greenberg's seminal essay "Modernist Painting," for instance, was published by Voice of America (VOA), a production company which broadcasted propaganda and American cultural exports deep behind the Iron Curtain.[121] As internal opposition to American foreign policy swelled over the course of the sixties, *Partisan Review* faced increasing allegations of ties with the CIA. The editors of the magazine vehemently denied that they were receiving support from government propagandists, and in 1967 they published a statement clarifying their "opposition to the secret subsidization by the CIA of literary and intellectual publications and organizations."[122] Nevertheless, British historian Frances Stonor Saunders alleges in her 1999 book *Who Paid the Piper?* (published in the United States as *The Cultural Cold War*) that *Partisan Review* and several other left-wing publications had quietly accepted funding from the American wing of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), a CIA-backed organization

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[119] Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 8.

[120] O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, xx.

[121] Francis Frascina, "Institutions, Culture, and America's 'Cold War Years': The Making of Greenberg's 'Modernist Painting,'" *Oxford Art Journal* 26, no. 1 (2003): 69–97.

[122] "A Statement on the CIA," *Partisan Review* 34, no. 4 (1967): 483.

dedicated to combating communist influence in academia and culture.[123] The CCF funded

publications around the world in dozens of languages, all with the tacit goal of subverting Soviet-

aligned thought. The *Partisan Review* was a valuable asset to the CIA precisely because of the

reversal in soft power occasioned by Abstract Expressionism and allied genres. It was, according

to literary critic Leslie Fiedler, "the most read [American journal] in Europe."[124]

Stonor Saunders's revelations were and continue to be controversially received,

specifically because of the tenuousness of the relationship between the CCF and the magazines it

funded. The CCF's approach was not directive or even dependent on publishing predetermined

material. Instead, the organization would reward friendly behavior with travel grants and other

forms of small funding.[125] That being said, the sheer number of publications with which the CCF

was involved demonstrates the importance the CIA placed on waging a "literary Cold War." It is

far more likely, considering the piecemeal but widely diffused nature of the CCF's influence,

that the CIA saw *Partisan Review* and others like it not as a puppet but rather an anti-communist

ally—a state of affairs which indicates the extent to which Greenberg's generation had become

comfortable with American ideological aims.

The aesthetics of decolonization

In Africa, the CCF underwrote a number of literary magazines dedicated to boosting that

continent's writers, including *Black Orpheus* in Nigeria and *Transition Magazine* in Uganda.

Ironically, *Black Orpheus* was founded by a German Jew, Ulli Beier, who arrived in Nigeria in

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[123] Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 103.

[124] Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 335.

[125] Greg Barnhisel, "Overstating the CIA's Role as Postwar Puppet Master," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 61, no. 1 (September 5, 2014).

1950 with his wife, the artist Susanne Wenger.[126] At that point, the country was still a British colony. Like many other artists and critics of the postwar era, the couple was "disillusioned by the failed promise of technological progress in the aftermath of World War II, [and] embarked on a journey to reestablish a connection with the irrational, mysterious life forces tragically lost by modern Europe."[127] While Beier assembled exemplary works of African writing for his magazine, Wenger became a priestess of the traditional Yoruba religion. She began creating spiritual art, much of which Beier publicized in *Black Orpheus* under the Africanized pseudonym "Sangodare Akanji."[128] He believed that Wenger had been "redeemed"[129] by her contact with indigenous mysticism—despite her background in the Viennese avant-garde. Beier's notions about the relationship between art and non-European cultures was heavily inspired by Jean Dubuffet's *art brut*, and he complemented his discussions of religious art with accounts of neurodivergent artists.[130] This juxtaposition, however, demonstrates the attitude that Beier implicitly held towards Africa, despite his ostensible efforts to provide a platform for African writers and artists. He valued the highly complex traditions of Yoruba religiosity and the art of institutionalized mental patients for the same reason: that they were somehow both *brut*, that they both embodied a refreshing primitivity that Europe lacked.

Even the name of the magazine demonstrates the epistemological value Beier ascribed to African culture. The phrase "Black Orpheus" references an essay of the same name by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) which served as the preface for an anthology of poetry by Léopold Senghor, a Senegalese poet who later served as that country's president. In it, Sartre reflects upon

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[126] Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 132.
[127] Okeke-Agulu, 136.
[128] Okeke-Agulu, 134.
[129] Okeke-Agulu, 136.
[130] Okeke-Agulu, 136.

négritude, a budding literary movement in French-speaking Africa that represented an early example of French-language literary output originating outside of Europe. He argues that African and diasporic writers, facing the cultural derangement of colonialism, "must indeed, one day, return to Africa…[a] redescent into the bursting Hell of the black soul…[like] Orpheus going to reclaim Eurydice from Pluto."[131] Being "torn between 'civilization' and his ancient black roots,"[132] Sartre believes that Africans possess a unique insight into the dialectic. For this reason, he states that "Negro poetry in the French language is, in our times, the sole great revolutionary poetry."[133] The "Black Orpheus," therefore, refers to the role that postwar modernists hoped that Africans would play in fulfilling a progressive vision of history. With one foot in the primitive and the other on the vanguard of revolutionary change, they would rescue Eurydice (the European proletariat) from herself.

By choosing to evoke Sartre's essay in the name of his literary magazine, Beier demonstrated that the purpose of his exploration of African aesthetics transcended a mere interest in providing a venue for the continent's own cultural consumption. He wanted to position Africa as a mirror by which European modernists could look back at themselves. As Sartre notes, "the white man has enjoyed for three thousand years the privilege of seeing without being seen,"[134] a state of affairs which he believed négritude would alter. By using the Hegelian language of "being seen," it becomes clear that both Sartre and Beier believed the relationship between Africa and Europe constituted a master-slave dialectic which, having been disturbed by African self-consciousness, would allow Europe to achieve deeper self-awareness.

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[131] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Black Orpheus* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1976), 226.
[132] Sartre, 226.
[133] Sartre, 221.
[134] Sartre, 219.

The attempts of *Black Orpheus* and the négritude movement to imbue Africa with a sense of its own internal history, however, accompanied great changes across the continent which ultimately challenged modernism itself. Africa—along with Asia and certain parts of the Americas—was awakening not only from a literary or artistic perspective, but also politically and economically. The most obvious development was the sudden explosion of newly independent states.[135] In 1956, there were no independent sub-Saharan states except Ethiopia, Liberia, and South Africa, which was then still under white minority rule. A mere decade later, 32 more countries had joined them. These nations, however, were not the direct successors of the pre-colonial cultures so admired by Beier and Wenger, nor did they wish to be. They developed their own nationalisms predicated on engaging with the rest of the world as equals.

The word of the day was modernization, although in the minds of Africa's newly empowered indigenous governments that often meant the construction of "modern airports, …luxury hotels, sports stadiums, and international convention centers"[136] rather than infrastructure for the average citizen. These structures borrowed from the trends that were currently most popular in Europe or North America. Brutalism, ironically, found fertile ground in many of these newly independent countries. Legitimizing one's non-European national identity through "excelling" at Europe's own cultural practices was not a novel strategy. After all, Ismail Pasha attempted the same thing in commissioning *Aida* almost a century earlier. The effect of this strategy, however, was the gradual levelling of perceived cultural differences between the center and periphery.

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[135] Manuel Herz, "The New Domain: Architecture at the Time of LIberation," in *African Modernism: The Architecture of Independence: Ghana, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Zambia* (New York: Park Books, 2017), 5.
[136] Herz, 9.

The case of Kenya is particularly illustrative. Kenya's path to independence began in the early 1950s with the Mau Mau Uprising, a revolt against land dispossession which gripped the country for nine years, after which Kenya won its independence from Britain. Although many of the leaders of the young country (including President Jomo Kenyatta) were veterans or sympathizers of the Mau Mau movement, they realized that in order to compete on the global market without colonial support Kenya would have to invest heavily in the modernization of the economy and its reorientation around a handful of cash crops.[137] As architectural critic Manuel Herz explains, "The city [Nairobi] and the nation that Kenyatta then inherited were the products of a largely oppressive history. But rather than making this background and the conflict that it embodied central to his rule, Kenyatta presented himself as a conciliatory leader opposed to socialism and open to the maintenance of global commercial networks."[138] This was a pattern which was replicated across the continent. Instead of reversing the ills of colonialism, therefore, independence actually accelerated the perception that public life at both the top (with regards to aesthetic production) and bottom (with regards to economic conditions) of post-colonial societies participated in an emerging world culture.

The operative word here, however, is perception. As geographer Edward Soja states in a 1968 analysis of modernization in Kenya, "Among the many effects of European colonization has been the spread of a world culture based on modern science and technology and specific standards of government organization and operation."[139] By referring to a culture based on "science and technology" as well as "specific standards," Soja references the cultural implications of global capitalism's rapid expansion during colonialism. Thus, the British regime

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[137] Herz, 10.
[138] Manuel Herz, ed., *African Modernism: The Architecture of Independence: Ghana, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Zambia* (New York: Park Books, 2017), 401.
[139] Herz, "The New Domain: Architecture at the Time of LIberation," 8.

had already set capital-oriented modernization in motion decades before independence, despite the image furthered by ventures like Ulli Beier's *Black Orpheus* which suggested that primitivity had remained relatively intact in Africa. In fact, modernization's effect on traditional societies and economic structures had been a key cause of the Mau Mau Uprising. According to African historian Frederick Cooper, the Mau Mau creed "was indeed anti-modern, rejecting more about developmentalist [aspects of] colonialism than the fact that it was colonial"[140] Kenya's young leaders, therefore, inherited a country with the demands of a modernized economy (i.e., foreign investment) but a primitive image abroad.

As such, the leaders of Africa's newly independent countries were heavily focused in the 1960s and '70s on curating the perception of their continent as having rapidly modernized since independence. In Nairobi, specifically, architectural landmarks like the Kenyatta International Conference Center (KICC) (Fig. 3)[141] and the University of Nairobi "position Kenya, and Nairobi in particular, as a worthy equal to their global counterparts."[142] The significance of these structures as palpable symbols of Africa's willing participation in world economic systems reached its zenith in 1973 when the KICC hosted the World Bank's global summit.[143] Of these seminal modernist projects, however, "Neither…articulates a development agenda."[144] Neither the KICC nor the University of Nairobi were intended to accommodate the everyday Kenyan, many of whom suffered in extreme poverty. Whether or not Africa had actually transformed economically in the first years after decolonization, the architectural output of the immediate post-colonial period demonstrates that independence was nevertheless used as an opportunity to

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[140] Herz, 9.
[141] Aart Rietveld, *Kenyatta International Convention Centre*, 1975, reverse slide, 2.4 cm x 3.5 cm, 1975.
[142] Herz, *African Modernism: The Architecture of Independence: Ghana, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Zambia*, 401.
[143] Herz, 432.
[144] Herz, 401.

reimagine the continent's image. The products of modernism in Africa, such as the KICC, reveal "the continent's importance in global consciousness at the time"[145] and consequently the impression that post-colonial modernization had sent primitivity in Africa on its way to extinction.

The prevailing conception of colonial rule among the Left in the West was that the relation between the metropole and the working classes of the Global South was quasi-feudal in nature, attached through foreign military occupation of colonized lands. It is because of this enforced subjugation, a connection which exists beside the bonds of mere capitalism, that Sartre claims black artists are "held to authenticity."[146] The efforts of countries such as Kenya to aggressively market themselves, however, gave the impression that their class structure had suddenly switched to one that is totally mediated by capitalism. Thus, through the political and economic changes of the postwar era, the masses of the Global South—once singled out by Sartre as a class distinct from the European proletariat but still existing within a Europe-dominated world order—began to be understood as subject to a logic of capital more resembling that affecting workers in London, Paris, or Chicago. The classes which to Beier and others had represented a vestigial or primitive way of life were reconceptualized as a bona fide proletariat.

Decolonization, however, did not change the fact that most newly independent states were in practice utterly dependent on the metropole. It simply shifted the framing of this dependence from being enforced by overtly sociopolitical factors (the fact of unwilling occupation) to "economic" ones. The transformation embodied by decolonization was in turn mirrored by the movements against *de jure* privilege within Europe and North America—that is, the civil rights movements and the reforms which they inspired. In the case of the American

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[145] Herz, 432.
[146] Sartre, *Black Orpheus*, 223.

South, enforced racial hierarchy proved a substantial hindrance to economic development. In the wake of the famous chaos surrounding school integration in Little Rock, for instance, industrial investment in Arkansas fell from $130 million to $25 million from 1956 to 1958.[147] The most significant fault line of popular support for segregation among whites at the time was class, with the "upper-class business leaders [being]…more open to desegregation than the population as the whole."[148] This pattern was not restricted to Arkansas. When faced with cultural shifts occasioned by more intense scrutiny, "the overwhelming majority of Southern business concerns opted to accept desegregation rather than close."[149] For the almost entirely white Southern bourgeoisie, the end of segregation meant the lifting of a heavy burden. The poverty-stricken region was officially "open for business." The lack of redistribution of capital assured continued white domination of the upper classes, but now the justification for this state of affairs was "meritocratic" rather than traditional. The Southern aristocracy, just as the élites of newly independent African nations, could assimilate into a bourgeoisie which transcended the provinciality of their region. Correspondingly, the civil rights movement enabled the conversion of a separate African American cultural experience enforced by legal discrimination into merely another facet of proletarian culture—the culture of poverty.

The effect of modernization, therefore, was the perceived consolidation of unique class structures in both the Global North and South into a bifurcated framework that more closely characterizes capitalism. The pre-modern working classes once held down by colonialism or enforced discrimination were consolidated into a globalized proletariat while the élites who

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[147] David L. Chappell, "Diversity within a Racial Group: White People in Little Rock, 1957-1959," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (Summer 2007), 190.
[148] Chappell, 189.
[149] Joseph Luders, "The Economics of Movement Success: Business Responses to Civil Rights Mobilization," *American Journal of Sociology* 111, no. 4 (January 2006), 970.

benefited from their oppression were consolidated into a globalized bourgeoisie. Thus, the West learned to understand not only literally distant societies as being subject to the same economic laws which govern themselves, but also those societies who were more figuratively far from political and economic power, including oppressed minorities within their own countries.

But what did this mean for aesthetics? From a Greenbergian perspective, the subordination of the class system to the logic of capital poses a threat to non-Kitsch art. As Greenberg states in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," "Kitsch is a product of the industrial revolution which urbanized the masses of Western Europe and America… [that is] The peasants who settled in the cities as proletariat and petty bourgeois."[150] When Greenberg wrote this description in 1939, he was able to defend highbrow art and promote lowbrow art because he believed that there still existed aristocratic and pre-modern working classes whose taste remained undistorted by Kitsch and therefore capitalism. The alliance of "authenticity" against Kitsch was frustrated. The primitive, whether located within "civilization" (as with neurodivergent art) or outside it (as with African traditions) was recontextualized within an emerging capitalist world culture. Perceived primitivity, therefore, could no longer maintain its place within the epistemology of modernism. With the theoretical division between art and everyday culture rendered untenable, the search for objectivity was complicated.

TOWARDS A POSTMODERN POPULISM

In 1953, Rathenower Optische Werke, one of the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) largest lens manufacturers, released a series of stereographic cards depicting the newly constructed "Stalinallee," the monumental axis of Berlin's Soviet zone. Viewed through a

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[150] Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 11-12.

stereoscope, the cards emphasize the saturated colors of the gardens, the wide airiness of the

rotaries, and the sheer mass of the gleaming-white apartment blocks lining the boulevard. (Fig.

4)[151] The whole scene is quite literally larger than life. This is exactly the effect which East

Germany's Soviet-aligned government desired. Soviet architects and planners taught their

German counterparts to manifest the state's "centralization, hierarchy, and monumentality"[152] in

public architecture. Terms such as "formalism" and "cosmopolitanism," on the other hand, were

used to label and disparage the simplified and rational tendencies of international modernist

architecture. The aesthetic that guided Stalinallee was hardly a rebuke of Nazi artistic prejudices,

and in fact the monumentality of the boulevard bore striking parallels to a plan drafted by Albert

Speer, Hitler's head architect, to completely remake Berlin (or *Germania* as it was to be known)

in a lavish faux-classical style.[153]

Observers and critics in the West "relentlessly pilloried"[154] the Stalinallee project. The

East German government's attempt to "sell" the still-depleted country's success through eye-

popping but fundamentally cheap and inauthentic façades soon became an object lesson on the

connection between socialist realism and Kitsch.[155] To Western eyes, the boulevard was

overwrought, ornamental, and distanced itself insufficiently from the city's Nazi past—in short,

a total affront to the Greenbergian consensus. Ironically, the construction of Stalinallee was

almost immediately followed by the death of Stalin and the hectic drive within Soviet-aligned

countries to scrub their civic vocabulary of his influence. Pressure to de-Stalinize led the East

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[151] "10 Stereograph Views of the Stalinalle, Accompanied by One Viewer" (VEB Rathenower Optische Werke, 1953), https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/novelties/stalinallee/stalinallee.
[152] Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting Germany History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 182.
[153] Ladd, 135.
[154] Ladd, 187.
[155] Ladd, 187.

German government to rename the boulevard Karl-Marx-Allee, erasing any official connection to the aesthetic philosophy of the interwar. Once imagined as a spectacular showcase, East Berlin's most imposing boulevard languished for decades.

After reunification, however, Karl-Marx-Allee began attracting renewed attention from unexpected corners. Philip Johnson (1906-2005), a renowned American architect who had once been a devoted acolyte of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe but evolved in later decades into "the chameleon architect of high capitalism," claimed that he had been a proponent of the boulevard from the beginning and that he considered it to be "true city planning in the grand style."[156] Aldo Rossi, the Italian architect who won the Pritzker Prize the year Germany reunified[157] dubbed it "Europe's last great street."[158] The boulevard that had been the object of Western derision suddenly, in the eyes of some important architectural tastemakers, attained acclaim in spite of (or possibly even because of) the site's provocative kitschness.

What happened? How did the trends of the postwar era—against Kitsch, sentimentality, decoration, and all of the other characteristics which defined interwar aesthetics—reverse themselves within a few decades? How did seeing the world through the warped lens of the stereoscope become desired—not merely accepted or denied? The sensibilities of the new era seemed to fly in the face of modernism, and indeed pronounced its demise in the name of a new "postmodernism." The genealogy and characteristics of postmodernism, however, reveals that it is the product of the same force which tore apart late modernism: perceived modernization.

Despite the rift implied by the word "postmodern," the seemingly dramatic reversal in aesthetic sensibility was not fomented by the same sort of generational rupture which had

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[156] Ladd, 187.

[157] Mark Alden Branch, "Aldo Rossi Wins Pritzker Prize," *Progressive Architecture*, May 1990.

[158] Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting Germany History in the Urban Landscape*, 187.

separated the postwar cohort from their predecessors. Crucial thinkers and concepts carried over from late modernism into postmodernism, lending the newer movement its theoretical basis. Reyner Banham, though one of Brutalism's foremost advocates in the 1950s and early 1960s, transformed himself over the course of a couple years into a narrator of the postmodern reaction. Much of the theoretical literature which commentated on postmodernism continued to fit the upheavals of the late 20th century into the traditions, if not the frameworks, of Western Marxism and Freudian thought.

Jean Baudrillard's work is emblematic of the continued attempts to place class and psychoanalytic analysis in conversation with aesthetic change. His book *Simulacra and Simulation*, though published in 1981, envisions the postmodern decoupling of signifier and signified as a delayed consequence of capital's separation of exchange- from use-value, the process which enabled the practice of accumulation for something more than mere utilization. "It was capital that first fed on the destruction of every referential,"[159] Baudrillard claims, tying Greenberg's critique of Kitsch to the rupture in the connection between art's role as a status object (and thus its social "exchange value") and its aesthetic value. What has changed, however, is that Baudrillard turns capitalism's logic of "deterrence, abstraction, disconnection, deterritorialization, etc."[160] in on itself. He criticizes the Left's attempts to attack capital "according to moral or economic rationality"[161] because it fails to recognize that "Capital, in fact, was never linked by a contract to the society that it dominates,"[162] an assertion which itself echoes the Greenbergian critique of value. Baudrillard even remarks that contemporary left-wing thought entails "no need for revolution: it suffices that capital accommodate itself to the rational

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[159] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 22.
[160] Baudrillard, 22.
[161] Baudrillard, 15.
[162] Baudrillard, 15.

formula of exchange."[163] Baudrillard thus subverts Marxism by extrapolating the postwar generation's cultural applications of Marxist principles. As such, he embodies the continuity between postmodernism and late modernism. For this reason, *Simulacra and Simulation* can be treated as an account of the postmodern transformation from the perspective of one of its participants.

Postmodern epistemology and ethnology

Ethnology of the primitive had become a core epistemological tool of modernism just as perceived modernization was beginning to revolutionize the image of cultures which had been identified as "primitive." Baudrillard thus argues that ethnology, the most straightforward instrument by which social science engaged with primitivity, suffered a crisis of confidence. He illustrates the "paradoxical death"[164] of the field by describing the story of the Tasaday, a supposedly uncontacted tribe "discovered" in 1971 deep in the forests of the Philippines by a group headed by Manuel Elizalde, an associate of President Ferdinand Marcos. An international media circus ensued, including a series of articles in *National Geographic* on the "Stone Age Cavemen of Mindanao." Nestled among advertisements for watches and cars, the magazine depicts the Tasaday as a pristine people, lacking a word for "war"[165] and monogamous for life.[166] Instead of allowing the emerging world culture to consume them, "the Philippine government decided to return the few dozen Tasaday…to their primitive state, out of the reach of colonizers, tourists, and ethnologists."[167] Baudrillard argues that by encasing the Tasaday within "the glass

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[163] Baudrillard, 15.
[164] Baudrillard, 7.
[165] Kenneth MacLeish and John Launois, "The Tasadays, Stone Age Cavemen of Mindanao," *National Geographic Magazine*, August 1972, 242.
[166] MacLeish and Launois, 232.
[167] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 7.

coffin of the virgin forest,"[168] society revealed its true priorities. Primitivity could no longer provide fodder for modernist experimentation.

In Baudrillard's perspective, it did not matter that the Tasaday's seclusion was inauthentic—their "primitivity" dependent on ethnology rather than the reverse—or that mounting evidence suggested that the Tasaday were not, in fact, uncontacted, but rather an impoverished indigenous band with links to settled tribes around them.[169] What mattered to the global public, according to Baudrillard, was that the image of primitivity remained, whether or not the Tasaday constituted a holdout of "genuine" primitivity. The military's approach to psychiatric illness fakers was "If he is this good at acting crazy, it's because he is."[170] To Baudrillard, the Tasaday affair demonstrates the extent to which the attitude of simulation for its own sake appears to have been adopted by the world as a whole. If someone is this good at acting "primitive," it is futile to try and determine if he is not.

Once liberated from the burden of objectivity, free from needing a "control" or even believing that it is even possible to systemize human nature, Baudrillard declares that "*We are all Tasaday*"[171] in the eyes of postmodern ethnology. Far from evaporating along with its traditional subjects, ethnology "survives in an antiethnology whose task it is to reinject the difference fiction, the Savage fiction everywhere, to conceal that it is this world, ours, which has again become savage in its way, that is to say, which is devastated by difference and death."[172] The postwar modernists, disillusioned with the masses of their countries, banished the object of ethnological evaluation to the margins of the Eurocentric world. Now, with "the Savage fiction"

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[168] Baudrillard, 8.
[169] Oswald Iten, "The 'Tasaday' and the Press," in *The Tasaday Controversy: Assessing the Evidence*, AAA Scholarly Series 28 (Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1992).
[170] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 3.
[171] Baudrillard, 39.
[172] Baudrillard, 9.

and the idea that human nature is fundamentally unknowable, all people had ethnological value. If nobody is the "savage," then we all are.

This is not to say that postmodern ethnology, like modernization and the supposed emergence of a world culture, ignores or eliminates differences between groups of humans. In fact, as Baudrillard notes, it aims to "reinject the difference fiction,"—the notion that globalization has been anything other than a centripetal process on individual cultures. Just as intentionally limiting contact with the Tasaday served to maintain the simulacrum of primitivity at the expense of what earlier generations of social scientists would have identified as objective truth, focusing on identity served to maintain the image of difference. Identity-based political discourse across the Global North therefore fed off of the ongoing movements for decolonization and civil rights, even though (ironically) these movements also enabled capital to extinguish difference.

For those with intellectual disabilities or mental illnesses, for example, civil rights meant a long process of deinstitutionalization: the process by which long-term mental hospitals and asylums were closed and their residents restored to public life or dispersed among group homes. *Art brut*, being grounded in these types of institutions, faced an existential challenge. In the English-speaking world, *art brut* was translated as "outsider art" and took on a meaning greater than Jean Dubuffet intended.[173] While Dubuffet defined *art brut* as "a critical concept supporting a theorization that aims to explore the notion of art itself,"[174] outsider art was broadened to include "all forms of work that rebel against official art, whether or not they were self-taught auteurs situated outside the art mainstream."[175] Outsider art was now conceived in relation to the

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[173] Rousseau, *Art Brut in America: The Incursion of Jean Dubuffet*, 75.
[174] Rousseau, 31.
[175] Rousseau, 75.

narratives of its practitioners rather than as an objective epistemological tool. Borrowing from the language of civil rights, outsider art (including *art brut*) became a form of what sociologist Gary Alan Fine calls "identity art"[176]— art valued for "the social location of the artists that links the works together, not formal qualities of the work." In the United States, outsider art came to be subsumed into the even larger category of "folk art," a label which fused it with the popular and commercial traditions of North America, that is, exactly the type of art which (owing to its persuasive or utilitarian rather than purely aesthetic value) would either be described as *narodny* or Kitsch by the theoreticians of socialist realism or Clement Greenberg, respectively.[177] Whereas *art brut* had a transcendental and ideological purpose, folk art indulged the public's natural curiosity. It is this lack of fundamental applicability which led Baudrillard to state that "Nothing changes when society breaks the mirror of madness (abolishes the asylums, gives speech back to the insane, etc.) …and [decides] to bend down before the 'differences.'"[178]

Populism and the precession of simulacra

Modernism as a current in aesthetic thought and modernization as a material process had never been so at odds. The ostensible "liquidation" of primitivity, therefore, was a substantial blow to the modernist movement. That being said, modernization only threatened modernism because of the epistemological shift within the movement following the Second World War. From the perspective of traditional Marxism, the dialectic (and therefore meaningful historical change) is certainly not resolved by mere modernization since the ultimate confrontation

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[176] Gary Alan Fine, "Crafting Authenticity: The Validation of Identity in Self-Taught Art," *Theory and Society*, no. 32 (2003), 155.
[177] Christina McCollum, "Exhibitions of Outsider Art Since 1947" (Dissertation, New York, The Graduate Center, City University of New York, 2017).
[178] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 9.

between working and owning classes is yet to occur. If one accepts historical materialism, then human "nature" is merely a symptom of material conditions and class struggle continues. The Marxian material conception of human "nature" contradicts the Freudian conception which posits behavior as arising from a baseline set of subconscious needs and desires, regardless of material conditions. As Carl E. Schorske explains, Freudian thought appealed to the postwar Left because it implied (*à la* Marcuse) that the proletariat's complicity in horrors of the Second World War and Stalin's purges did not represent the genuine nature of the modern man but rather a warped and repressed version of it,[179] thereby preserving the hope of human liberation through modernism. Understanding the undistorted, unrepressed "primitive" human nature became a key project for modernists. Ironically, this means that the confluence of Freudian and Marxist thought set modernism on its dangerous course.

Interwar modernism was far more coherent epistemologically. It was unabashed about its positive relationship with modernization, from Le Corbusier's definition of a house as a "machine for living" to socialist realism's celebration of industrial and agricultural improvement. Nevertheless, returning to these roots was untenable thanks to the catastrophic reputation of interwar ideologies. It is fitting, then, that what replaced modernism—postmodernism— continued to define itself according to its immediate predecessor's epistemology, tethered to the ethnology of primitivity even though "primitivity" as it had hitherto been defined no longer existed. One of the many definitions of postmodernism which Fredric Jameson offers in *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* therefore describes the movement as "what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good," as opposed to modernism, in which "some residual zones of 'nature' or 'being,' of the old, the

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[179] Schorske, *Fin-de-Siécle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, 23.

older, the archaic, still subsist; culture can still do something to that nature and work at transforming that 'referent.'"[180] While Jameson is certainly correct that modernization precipitated the rise of postmodernism, his definition ignores how modernism defined itself prior to the Second World War, that is, as a call for aesthetic renewal in response to the consequences of modernization (i.e. material advancement and, in the Marxian view, class conflict) rather than as process of discovering human nature, a modernism which was ironically both allied and hostile to modernization.

Modernism's increasingly contradictory epistemology was hard to ignore. Even Reyner Banham recognized this state of affairs as early as 1955, when he published his first description of "The New Brutalism" for *The Architectural Review*. In it, he notes the movement's mounting consciousness of its own metahistorical role.

> "Introduce an observer into any field of forces, influences or communications and that field becomes distorted. It is common opinion that Das Kapital has played old harry with capitalism, so that Marxists can hardly recognise it when they see it, and the widespread diffusion of Freud's ideas has wrought such havoc with clinical psychology that any intelligent patient can make a nervous wreck of his analyst."[181]

The result, in the short term at least, was an earnest attempt to make sense of art history as a progressive process, hence Banham's commitment to high modernism in architecture, specifically. However, as he suggests, this same awareness poses a considerable threat to modernism because it incentivizes the simulation of the values which comprise its epistemology. As Baudrillard notes in *Simulacra and Simulation*, "To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have…But it is more complicated than that because simulating is not

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[180] Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, ix.
[181] Banham, "The New Brutalism," 19.

pretending…pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact…whereas simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false,' the 'real' and the 'imaginary.'"[182] By placing greater emphasis on the epistemological power of human "nature," postwar modernism's theoreticians created demand for idealized primitivity despite the growing sense that primitivity was moribund. Something had to give. But what? Shifting the goalposts on what constituted "authenticity" became a tempting way out. Neither primitivity nor modernity would have to be sacrificed.

According to Baudrillard, the West's mid-century change of heart was merely the final step in a longer process of demystification originating in debates about the power and place of images in religion. In various religious traditions (including Christianity and Islam) there have been periods of intense conflict over the practice of depicting divinity through the production of icons, that is, artificial images that serve as the object of veneration. Iconoclasts, the group that rejected the use of iconography, feared images of divinity because, in their view, "the visible machinery of icons substituted for the pure and intelligible Idea of God…[thereby suggesting] that deep down God never existed, that only the simulacrum ever existed."[183] Traditionally, iconoclasm has been viewed as a defense of a "Platonic Idea of God"[184] which cannot be conveyed through artificial objects. Baudrillard, however, rejects this interpretation of iconoclasm. Instead, he argues that iconoclasts' "metaphysical despair came from the idea that the image didn't conceal anything at all."[185] They recognized that, at some point, the simulacra of divinity could replace actual faith in God among believers.

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[182] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 3.
[183] Baudrillard, 4.
[184] Baudrillard, 4.
[185] Baudrillard, 5.

Simulacra, however, were not just a theological problem. Baudrillard believed that the gradual replacement of reality with its facsimile—a process which he termed the "precession of simulacra"—could explain the generalized retreat from notions of objective value, including in aesthetics. In his understanding, the precession is composed of four phases, each one expressing a different relationship between reality and the simulacra that reference it. In the first phase, when "it [the simulacrum] is the reflection of a profound reality,"[186] there is an earnest desire to demonstrate what is true; for example, iconolaters' genuine insistence that icons aid in worship. In the second, when "it masks and denatures a profound reality," there exists a type of simulacra that improperly and thus detrimentally convey a truth—the kind of idolatry which iconoclasts were supposedly concerned with. The third phase, in which "it masks the *absence* of a profound reality," refers to the image which is consciously misleading. Greenberg, for instance, detested Kitsch because he resented the profit-driven fakeness which it represented. In the final phase, however, in which "it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum," authenticity-based critiques no longer make sense. Truth is not denied, per se, but merely suffers from irrelevance. By rhetorically positioning themselves in opposition to art (and thus "culture" as a whole), *art brut*, Brutalism, and abstract expressionism had attempted to peel back the layers of simulacra, believing in and attempting to prove a profound reality. Greenberg had defended high and low art against Kitsch on the grounds that they were unconcerned with the market and therefore possessed epistemological value. Now, after the perceived consolidation of the class system, all aesthetic output could reasonably be accused of being Kitsch—that is, oriented towards exchange- rather than use-value. In a world composed entirely of Kitsch, anything

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[186] Baudrillard, 6.

before the final step of the precession of simulacra must be viewed agnostically. If discussions of religion initiated the precession, discussions of capital ended it.

What remains of human nature when it can be viewed only as its own simulacrum? Only that which is visible can be evaluated. Agency, framed in terms of stated desire, becomes the final, acceptable realm of inquiry into the human condition. In terms of aesthetics, the only definition of "good" becomes "what people think is good," because implying otherwise would insinuate a knowledge of some "profound reality" behind the image. "The real… no longer needs to be rational," Baudrillard explains, "because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance." In terms of postwar modernism, that "ideal or negative instance" referred to the ideal primitive as a model for human nature. Human behavior, lacking depth, "is no longer anything but operational,"[187] meaning that what is best for others can only be deduced from what they state outright—their preferences. This agnosticism regarding human "nature" reveals a second, more ideological reason that that the postmodern era did not see a reembrace of interwar communism: the deep connection which Marxism posits between the worker and the product of his or her labor. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx decries the fact that, under capitalism, "the object which labor produces—labor's product—confronts it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer."[188] Marx considered the feeling of alienation to be an essential contradiction embedded within capitalist societies. Under the postmodern conception of the self, however, Marxian alienation appears unworkable because it conceives of a human nature beyond the operational. How can the capitalist alienate one's labor when there is no self to be alienated from?

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[187] Baudrillard, 2.
[188] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan, Great Books in Philosophy (Amherst, N. Y.: Prometheus Books, 1988), 71.

The eventual result of such an agnosticism is that every individual becomes an authority on human behavior. Who are you, postmodernism asks, to deny the stated wants of others when human nature is fundamentally unknowable? Fredric Jameson recognizes in *Postmodernism* that a hallmark of the postmodern is "the effacement…of the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture," a process which manifests "as a kind of aesthetic populism."[189] The source of this populism thus lies at the end of the precession of simulacra.

Aesthetic populism, marginalized since the interwar period, sprung back with the postmodern, hence its parallels with Karl-Marx-Allee's *völkisch*-cum-Stalinist sensibilities. As architectural critic Ross Wolfe has noted, the political demands of Stalinism "allowed traits that would later become associated with postmodernism to appear in the USSR *before* surfacing in the West."[190] A calculated appeal to popular taste was a key factor in both contexts.

Theory in Action: Las Vegas and Los Angeles

The implosion of postwar modernism under the weight of its own contradictions was astonishingly rapid. In 1966, Reyner Banham published *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, a brief history of Brutalism which also functioned as a postmortem for the movement. That same year, Robert Venturi (1925-2018), an up-and-coming American architect, released *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, "A Gentle Manifesto" that denounced "the puritanically moral language of orthodox Modern architecture."[191] Whereas Banham spoke in terms of

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[189] Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 2.
[190] Ross Wolfe, "Stalinism in Art and Architecture, or, the First Postmodern Style," *Situations: Project for the Radical Imagination* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2013).
[191] Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, The Museum of Modern Art Papers on Architecture 1 (New York: The Museum of Modernn Art, 1966), 22.

architecture taking an "ethical stand,"[192] Venturi begins *Complexity and Contradiction* with a series of "I like…" statements, such as "I like complexity and contradiction in architecture," and "I do not like the incoherence or arbitrariness of incompetent architecture nor the precious intricacies of picturesqueness or expressionism,"[193] thereby framing his manifesto in terms of personal preference rather than a transcendental aesthetic "good." The parallel but opposite language of both Banham and Venturi's manifestos—specifically regarding their treatment of "image"—reflects Brutalism's position as both a final expression of high modernism and a vehicle of things to come.

The precepts of Venturi's manifesto bear the inklings of a postmodern ethos which came to dominate American architecture in the following decades. He advocates for maximalism ("More is not less"[194]), subjectivity ("I welcome the problems and exploit the uncertainties"[195]), and the examples which embellish his arguments remain unmoored from any one era, region, or school. Throughout the manifesto, however, Venturi issues indirect criticisms against the modernist movement. He describes the book as "an explanation, indirectly, of my work,"[196] but couches scathing critiques of modernism in the language of unjudgmental self-justification. Venturi accuses "Orthodox Modern architects" of appreciating "complexity insufficiently or inconsistently," and emphasizing "the primitive and elementary at the expense of the diverse and the sophisticated."[197] Venturi's most incisive critique of the postwar aesthetic, however, was the concept of "image" as articulated by Reyner Banham and the Brutalists.

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[192] Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*
[193] Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 22.
[194] Venturi, 23.
[195] Venturi, 22.
[196] Venturi, 18.
[197] Venturi, 23.

According to Reyner Banham, Brutalist buildings often employ raw concrete, exposed

utilities, and disjointed floorplans because these practices contribute "to the building as 'an

image.'"[198] The Smithsons and other Brutalist architects believed that "The building should be an

immediately apprehensible visual entity; and that the form grasped by the eye should be

confirmed by experience of the building in use." Ideally, one could to look at the exterior of a

building and know exactly how to navigate its interior. Although Banham notes that this

approach sometimes resulted in structures which could not be considered beautiful "by the

standards of classical aesthetics,"[199] "image" speaks to the postwar modernists' insistence on

authenticity as its own value. Venturi, however, posits that the height of aesthetic value—

complexity and contradiction—"results from the juxtaposition of what an image is and what it

seems."[200] By coopting the language of "image," Venturi subtly subverts Brutalism's moral

vocabulary. Instead of being able to know the interior of a building from its exterior, Venturi's

use of "image" allows buildings to distort and equivocate such that "its space and its elements

become readable and workable in several ways at once."[201] By subverting the expectations of

physical space, Venturi also repudiates Greenberg's insistence that good art should reveal the

essential aspects of its own medium. Even architecture with its palpable physicality thus became

a discipline of simulacra.

Venturi's interest in disentangling the connection between image and space led him to

seek inspiration far outside the architectural mainstream. In the years following the publication

of *Complexity and Contradiction*, he and his wife, the fellow architect Denise Scott Brown

(1931-), began studying the behemoth casinos and hotels of the Las Vegas Strip. In 1972, the

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[198] Banham, "The New Brutalism," 24.
[199] Banham, 25.
[200] Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 27.
[201] Venturi, 23.

couple (joined by Steven Izenour) condensed their findings into a book which they titled

Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form. The choice of Las

Vegas, as opposed to any other American boomtown, was deliberate. Las Vegas was Sin City.

Whereas postwar aesthetics (including Brutalism) had been obsessed with the notion of morality,

Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour make a point of declaring that "Las Vegas's values are not

questioned here."[202] Consequently, the group evaluated the city's "architecture of persuasion"[203]

without criticizing its content. The avant-gardes of the interwar had resisted capitalism and

Clement Greenberg begrudgingly tolerated it, but Venturi and Scott Brown's group embraced it

wholeheartedly.

The most important theoretical idea posited by *Learning from Las Vegas* was a proposed

dichotomy between two categories of structures which "emphasize image…and that these

symbolic and representational elements may often be contradictory to the form, structure, and

program with which they combine in the same building."[204] The first archetype, the "duck,"

named after a duck-shaped drive-in located in suburban Long Island (Fig. 5),[205] describes "the

special building that *is* a symbol."[206] Ostensibly, the "duck" possesses a certain similarity with

the Brutalist conception of "image"—it communicates implicitly. Nevertheless, the symbol

which composes its exterior fails to correspond with its interior. The group alleges that the model

of the "duck" actually "pervades Modern architecture"[207] despite the Brutalist distaste for

superficiality. "The decorated shed," on the other hand, "*applies* symbols"[208] in order to

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[202] Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972), 6.
[203] Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, 9.
[204] Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, 87.
[205] Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, 88.
[206] Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, 87.
[207] Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, 87.
[208] Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, 87.

communicate, or in Las Vegas's case, persuade. The Golden Nugget, situated on Fremont Street in Downtown Las Vegas (Fig. 6),[209] exemplifies this latter category with its massive billboard and neon sidings diverting attention from what is, fundamentally, a low-slung, rectangular warehouse. Its fundamental form can fulfill the Brutalist idea of "image" (that is, the warehouse) but its mode of communication is explicit. In comparing the "duck" and the "decorated shed," the group vows to "maintain that both kinds of architecture are valid,"[210] thus promoting Venturi's new, postmodern concept of "image" and placing the two archetypes on the same level.

The project was framed as a populist endeavor. The students who aided the authors dubbed the project "The Great Proletarian Cultural Locomotive,"[211] and their approach is introduced as a "positive, non-chip-on-the-shoulder view" of contemporary architecture.[212] As in *Complexity and Contradiction*, Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour nonchalantly criticize the establishment for being out of touch and "dissatisfied with *existing* conditions,"[213] a state of affairs which they attribute to modernism's "progressive, if not revolutionary, utopian, and purist" style. The populism argument, with its visibly political implications, took the world of architectural criticism by storm.

But what was the connection between populism and explicit communication as embodied by Venturi's concept of image? The answer lies in the shifting perspectives on the validity of mass taste. Greenberg, for example, was both elitist and radical—he was (at least initially) politically committed to the idea of workers' liberation but passionately defended high culture

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209 Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, 109.
210 Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, 87.
211 Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, xi.
212 Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, 3.
213 Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, 3.

against the exact type of aesthetic product which was most popular among the working classes (Kitsch). Through Kitsch, he argued, capitalism warped humanity's natural aesthetic sensibilities, instilling in them a false consciousness of what is good and bad art. He privileged, therefore, the implicit interests of the modern working classes above the ones that they themselves articulated, a stance which echoes the Freudian idea of subconscious needs. Venturi, on the other hand, doubted that a cultural élite could somehow know the aesthetic interests of the working classes. As *Complexity and Contradiction* demonstrates, he even doubted the existence of an aesthetic interest beyond that which could be explicitly communicated through a series of likes and dislikes. A focus on the explicit communication of aesthetic taste, therefore, represents a reaction to the elitism of the postwar era and an attempt to validate working class taste on the class's own terms—that is, in a populist manner. Ironically, Venturi's celebration of popular taste belies his own persona as an architect—*Complexity and Contradiction* is filled with references to renaissance cathedrals and modernist villas, allusions which would only resonate with those who are deeply submerged in high culture.

Even Reyner Banham was won over. The Norwich-born writer who had once celebrated Brutalism as Britain's "first native art-movement since the New Art-History arrived here"[214] decamped to sunny Los Angeles where he, taking a note from Venturi and Scott Brown, "learned to drive in order to read Los Angeles in the original."[215] A mere five years after he declared Brutalism's demise, Banham resurfaced with an enthusiastic defense of the car-centric metropolis entitled *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*. The tone which Banham adopted was one of awed detachment, like an explorer discovering an uncontacted people,

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[214] Banham, "The New Brutalism," 219.
[215] Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, 2009 ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 5.

reflecting the reimagination of ethnology (or "antiethnology") for the postmodern era. According

to Banham, Los Angeles consisted of four coexisting "ecologies" or modes of urban existence.

The first, "Surfurbia," consisted of the chain of predominantly white and upper-middle-class

oceanside communities stretching from Malibu to Orange County. Further inland lay the

"Foothills," the expensive romping grounds of the rich and famous. Between these "ecologies"

stretched "The Plains of Id," "an endless plain endlessly gridded with endless streets, peppered

endlessly with ticky-tacky houses clustered in indistinguishable neighborhoods."[216] Finally,

Banham identified the city's substitute for public space: "Autopia," the network of freeways

which crisscrossed the region.

The "Savage fiction" which Baudrillard lamented runs deep in *The Architecture of Four

Ecologies*. Banham meticulously dissects architectural landmarks from the narrow strip of

bourgeois settlement encircling the Los Angeles Basin, but disparagingly labels the proletarian

core of the city itself "The Plains of Id," even though the vast majority of Angelenos reside in

this zone. He defamiliarizes ordinary life in California, depicting Angelenos as a race of

innocents "Deeply imbued with the standard myths of the Natural Man and the Noble

Savage…this innocence grows and flourishes as an assumed right in the Southern California sun,

an ingenious and technically proficient cult of private and harmless gratifications.[217] The positive

connotations of primitivity, therefore, are carried over from late modernism, but the archetypal

"primitive" has been relocated. No longer must we trek through jungles and mountains to meet

the noble savage—he now lives in a comfortable single-family home in suburban Los Angeles.

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[216] Banham, 143.
[217] Banham, 111.

I want therefore I am. Postmodernism's radical doubt of implicit truth required that preferences be taken at face value. "Good" taste could no longer be framed in terms of what people *should* like—their "rational" aesthetic interest—but rather in terms of what people state they like. Here, the connection between populism and the postmodern becomes clear; populism derives its precepts from explicit popular demands rather than implicit popular interest. In *Learning from Las Vegas*, Venturi's group celebrates the Strip because it is an "antispacial" space in which "communication dominates space as an element in the architecture and in the landscape"[218]—"The Strip is virtually all signs."[219] A particularly illustrative image featured in the book is a doodle entitled "Recommendation for a monument" depicting a brick-shaped building supporting a gigantic billboard displaying the words "I AM A MONUMENT." (Fig. 7)[220] Lines radiate from the billboard like a halo, suggesting the triumph of explicit communication over implicit form.

Even animals, Baudrillard explains, are "made to speak"[221] because "in a world assembled under the hegemony of signs and discourse, their silence weighs more and more heavily on our organization of meaning."[222] Their speech, and therefore agency, is simulated through the application of "the 'psy' language,"[223] that is, a pseudo-psychiatry which can tap into an interpretable unconscious. "The Unconscious," Baudrillard argues, "is this logistical mechanism that permits us to think madness (and more generally all strange and anomalous

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[218] Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, 8.
[219] Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, 73.
[220] Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, 156.
[221] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 133.
[222] Baudrillard, 137.
[223] Baudrillard, 133.

formations) in a system of meaning opened to nonmeaning."[224] While the postmodern remains agnostic with regards to animal consciousness, it believes that the unconscious can provide a reasonable substitute. Baudrillard points out that obsessive or self-injuring behaviors among farm animals therefore constitute "communication" of a certain sort, for more space, food, or any other basic need. In a worldview defined by communication of self-interest, the inheritance of Freud proved useful for the "rationalization" of non-human nature.

Why, then, did Banham refer to his urban archetypes of Los Angeles sprawl as "ecologies"? He mentions the natural world sparingly, mostly as a geographical prelude to his architectural observations. "Ecology" had become a metaphor for a certain type of "natural" environment, whether or not it referred to non-human nature. Based on Banham's description of Los Angeles, he seems to frame "human ecologies"[225] as homeostatic spaces circumscribed by geography but directed almost entirely by individual consumption. The ecological metaphor now signified a logic of rational self-interest resulting in equilibrium, mirroring and justifying the logic of capitalism.

What did this mean for the political implications of the postmodern self? Generally speaking, populism flourished, but not all populist movements benefitted. In much of the West, the populist Left entered into a period of protracted decline marked by the privatization of national assets, the weakening of welfare states, and the demise of organized labor. Appeals to class interest proved less effective as the rhetoric of Marxian alienation waned. What remained of proletarian consciousness transformed into a strictly aesthetic populism. As Venturi and Scott Brown explain in *Learning from Las Vegas*, "One does not have to agree with hard-hat politics

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[224] Baudrillard, 136.
[225] Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, 4.

to support the rights of the middle-middle class to their own architectural aesthetics."[226] The masses—now framed as "the middle-middle class" rather than the proletariat—possessed a right to aesthetics but not a right to the product of their own labor. If returning to interwar communism was impossible, what about the other interwar ideology, fascism? In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin states that "Fascism attempts to organize the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves."[227] The echoes of fascism are palpable, therefore, in Venturi's insistence on a proletarian aesthetic consciousness that is separate from material class interest.

"Hard-hat politics," on the other hand, were framed as either utopian or unnatural. According to Venturi's group, "Developers build for markets rather than for Man and probably do less harm than authoritarian architects would do if they had the developers' power."[228] A product of Los Angeles's "ecologies," Ronald Reagan retained a populist veneer even as he pushed neoliberal reforms that intensified class stratification.[229] As the "Great Communicator," Reagan understood the centrality of communication in the postmodern "ecological" conception of human relations. As Margaret Thatcher forced industrial Britain into period of economic freefall, she often claimed that "There is no alternative."[230] Try as governments might, Thatcher believed that nature—that is, the free market—would always find a way to punish those who

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[226] Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, 155.
[227] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks*, 2nd ed., KeyWorks in Cultural Studies (John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 33.
[228] Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, 155.
[229] John W. Sloan, "The Economic Costs of Reagan Mythology," in *Deconstructing Reagan: Conservative Mythology and America's Fortieth President* (Armonk, N. Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 41–69.
[230] Claire Berlinski, *"There Is No Alternative": Why Margaret Thatcher Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

meddle with it. As political scholar James W. Ceaser states, for the economic liberal element within the modern conservative movement, "the foundational concept is 'spontaneous order,' the postulate that there is a tendency operative in human affairs, and most likely in the whole cosmos, for things to work out for themselves and to cohere, provided no deliberate effort is made to impose an overall order."[231] He quotes Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992), the Austrian doyen of classical liberal economics and a favorite of Thatcher,[232] who equates the development of morality to "a process of cultural selection, analogous to a process of biological selection."[233] This brand of pseudo-ecological thinking arose in tributes like *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* but later came to define a whole generation of right-wing thought which, ironically, tended to emphasize the incorrigible and natural beauty of the free market at the expense of non-human nature.

In his book *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, British cultural critic Mark Fisher (1968-2017) notes that "Capitalism seamlessly occupies the horizon of the thinkable."[234] It is an ideology which appears so natural that it does not even need to justify itself as "good"—it just needs to convince the public that "Lowering our expectations…is a small price to pay for being protected from terror and totalitarianism."[235] Postmodern capitalism, which Fisher terms "capitalist realism," justifies its existence in the same way St. Augustine might have justified the existence of earthquakes or plagues: as morally neutral symptoms of an incorrigible nature.

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[231] James W. Ceaser, "Four Heads and One Heart: The Modern Conservative Movement," in *Designing a Polity: America's Constitution in Theory and Practice* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 124.
[232] Berlinski, *"There Is No Alternative": Why Margaret Thatcher Matters*, 24.
[233] Ceaser, "Four Heads and One Heart: The Modern Conservative Movement," 124.
[234] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), 8.
[235] Fisher, 5.

CONCLUSION

As Le Corbusier declares in *Towards a New Architecture*, "We do not appreciate sufficiently the deep chasm between our own epoch and earlier periods."[236] Never before in history, he points out, have individuals been able to witness so much material and thus social transformation within their own lifetimes. Like a horse, modernization can spook the "human animal," leading to the kneejerk rejection of all changes presented, be they negative or positive. As a solution to this problem, Le Corbusier draws from his equine metaphor, suggesting that what humanity needs is a new harness—a new aesthetic—which will usher civilization through its modernizing journey. "When this human animal has put on his new harness," the Swiss architect reasons, "he will see that things have changed: and changed *for the better*."[237]

Nevertheless, the journey at hand turned out to be more treacherous than Le Corbusier could have imagined when drafting his manifesto in the 1920s. While the First World War crushed the power of the aristocracy, allowing bourgeois and proletarian ideologies to finally dominate European seats of power, the Second World War revealed an extreme brutality which appeared to implicate modern society at every level, causing many Marxist thinkers to reevaluate their faith in the proletariat as a redemptive class. They sought refuge from the political by fleeing to the psychological. Modernity still promised great things, the new generation of left-wing intellectuals argued, it was just that the masses were maladapted by a temporarily ill society. By observing "primitive" individuals and societies, it was hoped that human nature was not irredeemable.

But why did the West *need* primitivity to restore their faith? And why did the anxiety of postwar modernity have to play out in the sphere of aesthetics? By reinventing the idea of

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[236] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 271.
[237] Le Corbusier, 272.

objectively good taste for the modern era, Clement Greenberg imagined aesthetic consumption as something akin to a diet. He implies that individuals have an "appetite" for art which must somehow be satiated. Unfortunately, the consumption of "bad" aesthetic objects—namely Kitsch—can lead to a whole host of unhealthy complications: exploitation, manipulation, and generalized cultural malaise. He looks around at Western societies and sees them awash in schlock. In some regions (like Germany or the Soviet Union) the populace has been so inundated that they have allowed manipulative totalitarian politics to take hold, thus engendering the catastrophes which faced modernism.

What, then, is a good dietician to do? The answer, at least to Greenberg, is clear: identify the essence of nutrition (good taste) and prescribe it to the masses, who will happily abandon the garbage on which they have hitherto been subsisting. Part of what made Greenberg's aesthetic "diet" so promising, therefore, was that it promised a path by which modernist aesthetics could save itself. A science of aesthetics would have to lead the way, but since art cannot fit within the normal constraints of scientific methodology, society had to undertake a different sort of experiment, one of great magnitude which would be conducted over the course of decades. As in any experiment, there would need to be two groups for the sake of comparison. The first group consists of those who are drowning in Kitsch—the inhabitants of the West and other societies which have been highly modified by the pressures of capitalism. The second consists of those who are far less exposed to the unhealthy treatment of capital-infiltrated culture: the "primitive" peoples on the margins of the Western ecumene, including neurodivergent people, oppressed racial minorities, and inhabitants of colonized regions. By identifying the differences between the aesthetic diets of these two groups—one injurious and the other fortifying—the essence of aesthetic nutrition can be distilled into a medicine which would cure the West of its bad taste.

Cultural critics hailing from various spheres thus coalesced around primitivism as an epistemological tool. Herbert Marcuse, drawing upon Freudian theories on the relationship between civilization and the psyche, saw salvation in the free-wheeling eroticism of modernity. Clement Greenberg saw it in technology's ability to separate aesthetic value from mere Kitsch. Reyner Banham saw it in the brutal realism of modern architecture. This "medicine," with its anti-cultural pretensions, was undoubtedly bitter. The hulking concrete masses of Brutalism and the inscrutable paintings of Abstract Expressionism were hard to swallow. Nevertheless, modernism appeared to have been rescued (at least for the time being) from the distorting effects of the modernized, capitalist world from which it had emerged. The "modern world," however, had other plans. Ulli Beier had sought redemption at the supposed margins of the world—only to see his refuge rapidly accede to the Western ecumene. Decolonization and the gradual reduction of *de jure* social iniquities triggered a reassessment of the peoples that had earlier been saddled with supposed primitivity. If they too had been subject to the same logic of capital which Greenberg had found so objectionable, the entire experiment would be rendered bunk. The aesthetic "diet" would have to be totally reimagined.

Lacking any grounds on which to determine which aesthetic objects are "healthy," how does one go about determining what people should consume? Really, the only approach one has left is simply to give the people what they want. One must turn the apparatus of ethnology in on itself and study the unpretentious classes of one's own country as "primitive" in their own right—more in touch with their basic reactions to art, less concerned with the judging eyes of high society. As it turns out, middle-class Americans or Europeans do not want bitter medicine—they want candy. This is the ethos of Robert Venturi: the people want candy, so they deserve candy. And who's to say there's anything wrong with that?

The postmodern revolution was the tale of two generations' attempts to deal with the question of brutality. The concept of "progress" had implied a dichotomy between brutality civilization, with modernity striving towards an ever more ethical state. The events of the 20th century proved this dichotomy false by showing a modernity that was as brutal, if not more brutal, than ever. Faced with the challenge of this realization, the postwar generation strove to salvage modernity by reclaiming the "brutal"—hence the creation of *art brut* and Brutalism. Inadvertently, however, their actions had the effect of raising *brut* to the height of fashion. To meet the demand for brutality, a new generation arose that did not concern itself with the supposedly distorting influences of the market. Indeed, this generation celebrated the market, seeing it as the consequence of humanity's natural, brutal drive towards competition and communication. They rediscovered and celebrated pop culture with the detached fascination of an anthropologist. Like the generation before them, they were faced with an unprecedented challenge to the notion of progress in history. Instead of adapting modernism, however, they decisively broke with it.
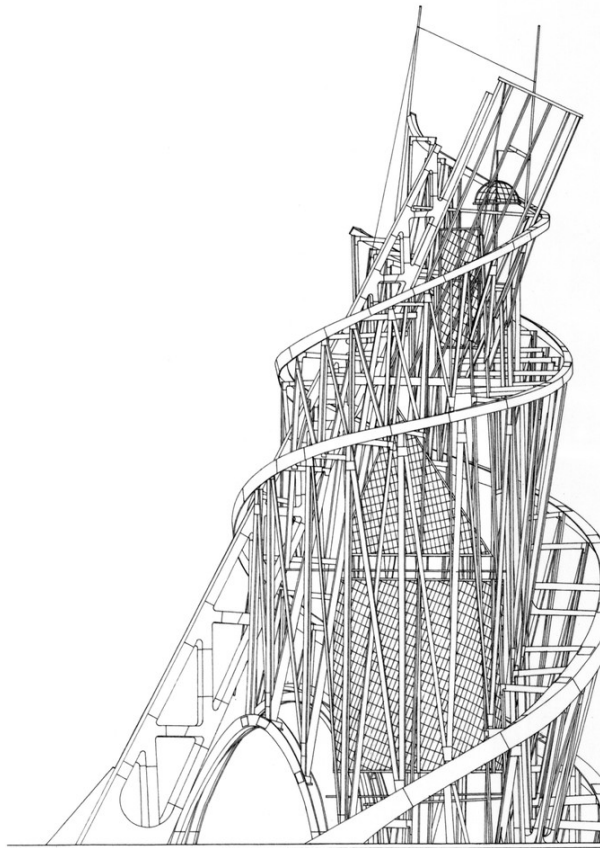
IMAGES

Fig. 1. Sketch based on a model of Vladimir Tatlin's proposed "Monument to the Third International. Drawn by Yelena Lapshine, 1993.

Fig. 2. Photograph of Villa Göth in Uppsala, Sweden. Taken by Sebastian F., 2007.

Fig. 3. Reverse slide of Kenyatta International Conference Center, Nairobi. Photograph taken by Aart Rietveld, 1975.

Fig. 4. Stereograph cards depicting the Stalinallee (now Karl-Marx-Allee) in East Berlin, GDR. Published by VEB Rathenower Optische Werke, 1953.

Fig. 5. Photograph of the "Long Island Duckling" as depicted in Peter Blake's *God's Own Junkyard*, reproduced in *Learning from Las Vegas*.

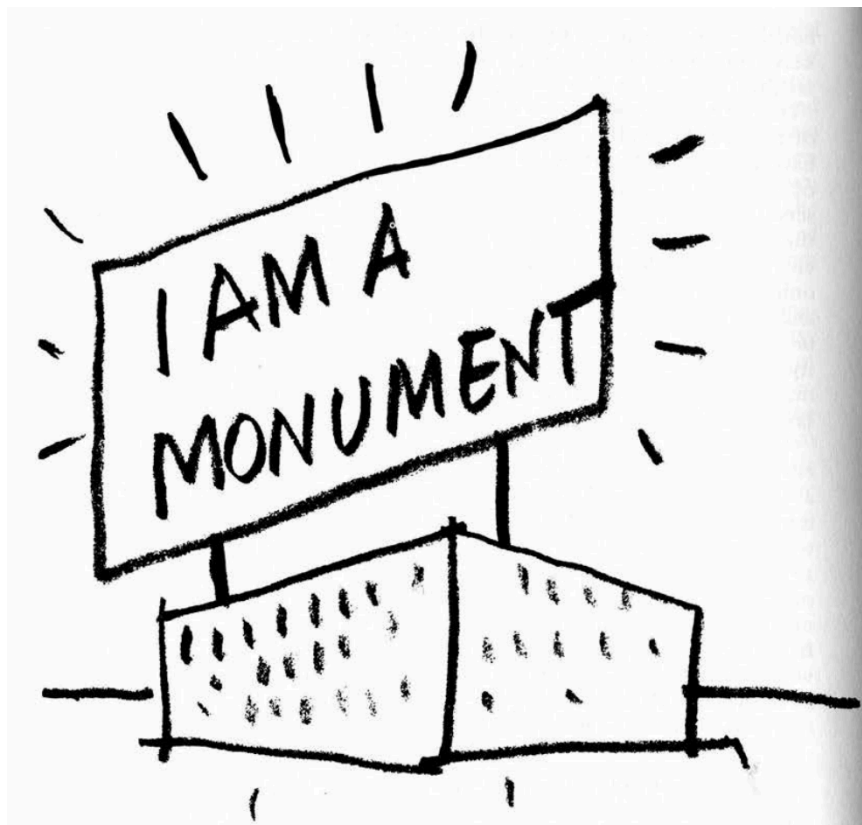Fig. 6. Photograph of Golden Nugget casino at night, Las Vegas, Nevada. From *Learning from Las Vegas*.

Fig. 7. Illustration captioned "Recommendation for a monument," from *Learning from Las Vegas*.

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