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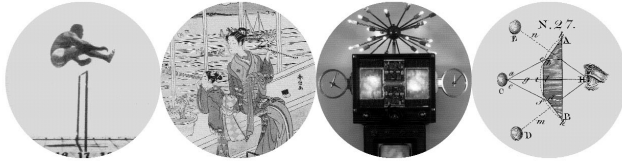
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Abstract

This dialogue is an opportunity for Mark Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey to speak together in print for the first time since their edited collection entitled *The Subjects of Art History* (1998). Concerned, in that volume, with the prospect that 'art history, like many other fields in the humanities, has entered a post-epistemological age', the three editors wrote opening 'position papers' outlining, respectively, their concern for the (Kantian) philosophical imperatives of/in art history, and how the specters of context haunt the writing of the history of art, and the historiography of art history as Hegelian. Overall, their collection was a chance to reassess the role that the philosophies of history of Kant and Hegel and other philosophical, semiotic, queer, postcolonial, psychoanalytic and museological traditions concerned with 'history' have played, and continue to play, in art history's efforts to legitimate its past and predict its future. In many ways, then, *The Subjects of Art History* was an attempt, from within the discipline of art history, to picture that area of inquiry in an expanded field that we may continue to call art history or might be more usefully designated as visual studies. The dialogue in this issue of the *journal of visual culture* is an opportunity to continue that conversation. Specifically, it is a chance to rethink the question of the place of both 'aesthetics' and 'history' in and through visual studies. As such, this dialogue seeks to address questions such as: how might visual studies rethink what we thought we already knew? Are both critics and supporters of visual studies right to believe that 'aesthetics' has nothing to do with visual studies? Why might they be right, or wrong? (And if they are wrong, how does visual studies offer us an occasion to engage with aesthetics in new ways?) What status do or should the philosophies of history of Kant and Hegel, say, have in visual studies? How does visual studies affect such models of history, or what does it mean for it no

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longer to believe it needs History at all? Or, to put it more kindly, is there something that visual studies can teach us about Kant and Hegel and subsequent historiographical thought? By no means looking to resolve these questions, this dialogue is motivated by an urge to problematize in productive ways the accusation that visual studies does not do, care for, take into consideration, or otherwise understand 'history'. It hopes to indicate why visual studies has to deal with history, however conceived, if for no other reason than at least (and most importantly) that it can attend necessarily to the genealogies of the study of our visual cultures.

Keywords

aesthetic communities • cosmopolitanism • globalization • historiography
• practices of teaching and research • visual studies

Keith Moxey (KM): The idea of a conversation on some of the issues raised in *The Subjects of Art History* (1998) is a provocative one. Among many other things, the essays in that volume raised questions about the nature of 'history' and 'aesthetics' – the Scylla and Charybdis of art-historical historiography. There have been moments when art history threatened to dissolve into the morass of contextual detail that inevitably surrounds the creation of what we call 'art', so that its 'autonomy' either went unremarked or was assumed, and times were when all that mattered was an internal history of the object that insisted on its freedom from cultural entanglement. I suppose that in saying this I am opposing Erwin Panofsky's 'iconology' and Michael Baxandall's 'social history of art', with, say, Heinrich Wölfflin's notion of 'style', Alois Riegl's 'Kunstwollen' and Clement Greenberg's 'flatness'. History and aesthetics might be said to be the poles around which the discipline has organized its activities and negotiated their relation to one another to constitute what we mean by art-historical writing. Every time the profession decides to favor one of these poles, the other suffers and vice versa.

Mark Cheetham (MC): Yes, the alternation of paradigms seems still to be with us, if we define ourselves as art historians active in a broad, but nonetheless mappable, field. Of course, as you and Michael both know from your conference (2001) and publication (Holly and Moxey, 2002) from the Clark Institute entitled *Art History, Aesthetics, Visual Studies*, as well as numerous earlier activities, coordinates do seem to change once we add 'visual culture' to the conversation. There is a challenge both to history and to aesthetics, traditionally conceived. I wouldn't want to say prematurely what these challenges are, but from a visual studies perspective – really from all of the perspectives under scrutiny here – clearly we need to rethink the objects of inquiry, both their status within a western canon and perhaps especially those that come from other traditions. Traditional aesthetics, that is practiced by self-identified philosophers, to me remains often too pure a discourse, one that assumes (or wishes) that ideas can be compared and improved

upon, more or less in a vacuum. Visual studies (and much art history) of course challenges this way of working. I doubt that art history alone would have made these discrepancies in method so apparent. How does the profession 'decide' to move in any direction? I would like to think about how we decide as putative individuals, how we choose our research topics, conference papers, grant proposals and what we will teach. What I should say here is that Michael and I disagree about the nature of the 'decision', as to how exactly one comes to one's research. While I acknowledge our lack of autonomy or volition, I still try to take a more sociological point of view of how it is that we do what we do.

Michael Ann Holly (MAH): The Scylla and Charybdis dilemma in art history is not one that troubles me. In fact, I revel in its capacity to unsettle. Even supposing that we could do without either history or aesthetics (as some of the most glib [mostly student] work in visual studies does mistakenly presume) or even disabling just one of the poles would be to disarm completely one of the most venerable (ha!) disciplines in the humanities. Do we take the art out of history, or the history out of art? If we managed to perform that surgical operation, we would have much more to lose than to gain. I'm a historiographer through and through. Responsibility to both *questions* about aesthetics (not only when or where aesthetics comes in, but what it is at that moment of interpretation, etc.) and *questions* about history (for whom, to what purpose, what evidence, etc.) dog us relentlessly, but that doesn't mean scholars of the visual arts will ever escape the need to turn around and confront them. In fact it is in the confrontation that entirely novel insights arise. When we composed *The Subjects of Art History*, we asked each essayist to take an explicit approach from the 'new' art history and rub it up against an 'old' object and see what happens. I don't think we could ask for the same naive approach now, but it seemed to work then. And one more matter, gentlemen. When we choose our corner of the scholarly terrain, we cannot forget that it is also the case that the terrain (or at least the kaleidoscopic shake-up of it today) chooses us – time changes questions that the artwork puts before us, different objects call to different subjects at different moments, new political angles make new objects come into view. So the 'deciding' is always a see-sawing enterprise. Mine is more a phenomenological conviction, Mark, as compared to your sociological view.

KM: Yes, that see-sawing is certainly evident. However, the situation is perhaps singularly fraught with difficulty at the moment because there is little agreement as to how either of the poles might be defined. Our traditional confidence in a Hegelian model of history, with its reassuring evolutionism, its inspiring teleology and its reliance on the concept of genius, has been shaken beyond repair. Georges Didi-Huberman's *Devant le temps* (2000) and Mieke Bal's *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (2001) have demonstrated the inevitable anachrony of the art-historical enterprise. In drawing attention to the role of the present in the construction of history, they pose the old question: 'What is to be done?'. Are there any principles according to which history is to be told, or should we recognize once and for all that history must depend on the nature of the

interpreting subject? If this is indeed the case, then what is to identify history as a genre that would distinguish it from, say, fiction?

MAH: Perhaps because it should have an ethical commitment, a dose of intellectual rigor, a temporarily accepted protocol of investigation, a clear delineation of argument, etc. – and more, Keith.

MC: I agree that the Hegelian model of evolution has been challenged frequently and powerfully, but – and I never thought I'd echo Ernst Gombrich in print – I also think that we have to watch carefully for examples of this sort of thinking still holding sway. I was at a symposium recently on the topic of 'Making History'. A prominent curator spoke passionately about the spirit of the times driving artmaking and its critical response. I objected strenuously to these potentially misleading mystifications, but I sensed that many people in the audience felt quite comfortable in abdicating any sort of agency or responsibility for the art history that most would agree is made, rather than motivated from within. We have to take responsibility for our choices as art historians, critics and curators. On the other hand, we aren't always even partially aware of why we do what we do, and no doubt many of our 'decisions' are the result of institutional conditioning. I don't see that we can step outside this cycle and I do not believe that a 'critical' position requires that we do so.

MAH: Or as Gombrich would say in his well-known rant against Hegel, dispense with the metaphysics and concentrate anew on the critical choices and their relationships. But how do we know what choices? What criticality? Consider Horkheimer:

Critical theory appears speculative, one-sided and useless – it runs counter to prevailing modes of thought ... Those who profit from the *status quo* entertain a general suspicion of any intellectual independence. (1972[1968]: 218, 232)

But of course that would also include Gombrich.

So, how do we proceed? Shouldn't the protocols of interpretation be often ironic, turning one thinker (past or present) round another, twisting one idea (past or present) inside another? That's genuine 'intellectual independence', the kind that you hope will help the interpreter (or his or her students) think anew, producing new knowledge rather than reproducing the old.

MC: I agree, and I believe that this was very much the purpose of *The Subjects of Art History*. It wasn't naive to ask contributors to our collection to put their methods into proactive contact with art-historical subject matter in a more or less practical demonstration. It worked and it still does. Some form of history (if not historiography): this idea came to us about 10 years ago, even though the collection appeared in 1998. It seemed like a good plan for the target audience and was suggested by Cambridge University Press, which was keen to present the book as a useful 'text', which it has been.

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KM: If traditional notions of history have been placed in question, as we've already begun to outline, is the situation any clearer when it comes to aesthetics? As a consequence of the long reign of 'objectivism' that art history went through following the Second World War, it became incumbent on art historians to conceal the nature of their aesthetic relation to the works they discussed. The social history of art has perpetuated attitudes developed during the heyday of iconography and iconology, in which the last thing expected of the historian was the subjective expression of his or her aesthetic response. The result has been the deep naturalization of Kantian and Hegelian ideas. It is perhaps the modernist field, with its investment in the criticism of contemporary art, that has demonstrated the greatest creativity in the application of the Frankfurt School aesthetic theory of Adorno, Benjamin and others, as well as the phenomenological traditions associated with the work of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Yet even this field must find its certainties challenged by an ever-increasing awareness of the artistic production of those parts of the world not usually identified with the modernist tradition. How is contemporary African art to be evaluated? On what grounds are aesthetic discriminations to be made? To what extent will the stories we have been telling ourselves about the quality of artistic objects apply in these circumstances? Should we begin to think in terms of 'aesthetic communities' rather than in the universal terms usually associated with the idea of aesthetic value?

MAH: Neat idea, but doesn't that stretch the word beyond all recognition? Or maybe you're right – we can just burrow inside the concept and inhabit it in a new way. Its appropriation then becomes part of a new politics of recognition. But, then again, how can any one scholar understand, much less question, even a minority of the 'aesthetic communities' of the world? To be unaware of even a few of them jeopardizes what any one of us might wager to say about her or his own chosen community.

MC: I like the notion of more localized, specialized interpretive communities. I think that's what we have, however universalist our fantasies may be at times. I've just given an example of the naturalization of Hegel that Keith notes, but on the other hand, there is now and has been for some time a widespread denaturalization of the philosophical elements of art history. What I'd like to see is avid rereading of these texts (in addition to others, and with no special priority) so that, say, new 'Kantian' ideas can be put into play in the fields concerned with the visual arts. I tried to do this in my book on Kant and the visual arts (Cheetham, 2001) by reading Kant's autonomy aesthetic against itself and against its social and political contexts of creation and reception. He becomes less important as a formalist when we think of his powerful example in the political arena c.1800 or his obsessions with bodies, notably his own. To be frank, I wasn't thinking explicitly about the expansion of the discourses around the visual made by visual studies. My approach was deconstructive in many ways. But I felt then (in the late 1990s when I was writing) and believe still that art history has become an increasingly capacious and flexible field over the past years. Perhaps there is a point at which for some art history shades over into visual studies because of the

approach or the work in view, but I have tended to blithely assume (as a way of insisting) that we can go ahead and call this art history if we so desire.

MAH: May I interject something here – your and Keith’s references to the almost unconscious hold that Kant and Hegel have on art history remind me of Fernand Braudel’s quest

to convey simultaneously both that conspicuous history which holds our attention by its continual and dramatic changes – and that other, submerged, history, almost silent and always discreet, virtually unsuspected either by its observers or its participants, which is little touched by the obstinate erosion of time. (1966[1949]: 16)

Is that what you’re advocating: a recognition of a submerged history that cradles the eruptions and disruptions of surface perturbances – which today might be called visual studies?

MC: Yes, I like this formulation. Lately I’ve been thinking about Bruno Latour’s *Politics of Nature* (2004), which also seeks to recognize crises rather than regularities.

But as I anticipated, argued and have had confirmed by the reception of my own work on Kant and art history, disciplinary assumptions still get in the way of this sort of open exchange. A lot of philosophers have felt the need to defend Kant against my supposed criticisms of his place in art history. What I haven’t articulated fully in my published work, but would like to entertain here, is that we take Kant seriously when he calls in his political writings for a ‘cosmopolitan’ relationship among interlocutors. Could we productively move his ideas on geopolitical interaction to the arena of conflict – and co-operation – among art history, aesthetics and visual culture? My own answer is ‘yes’ and my tactic, again, has been ‘just’ do it (although this is a poor excuse for my passivity in the debates about these disciplinary changes). For example, I devoted the final chapter of my Kant book to a consideration of his ‘image’, including obscure miniatures from his own lifetime, phrenological photographs of his skull, mail art disseminations of his famous head and the role that Kant statuary plays in the current realignment of national identities in the Baltic region. The result was not normal art history because I discussed almost no canonized works of art or well-known artists. My own sense is that I explored the visual culture of Kant’s head, though others may see the work differently.

KM: Very much in keeping with Mark’s account of his recent work, paradoxically enough the development of visual studies may allow students of the visual to address both ‘history’ and ‘aesthetics’ in a more flexible and creative manner than has been possible hitherto. Far from rendering the concept of aesthetics obsolete, for example, the study of visual culture as a whole may allow us to see more clearly the discriminations we make when we separate ‘art’ from the rest of the realm of visual artifacts. Instead of falling back on aesthetic principles that have animated art historical writing in the past, instead of talking about ‘pleasure’, ‘originality’, ‘disinterested contemplation’,

'complexity', 'coherence', 'freedom', 'beauty', 'transcendence' and the 'sublime', it may be possible to perceive the very different kinds of value that not only different classes and age groups belonging to a single culture ascribe to those objects they seek to privilege with the name 'art', but it will be interesting to learn the value with which analogous objects are invested in other cultures. Not only does the death of modernism allow us to see the artificiality of the borders that were once built around 'art' to keep it 'pure', but also the rise of postcolonialism and the process of globalization enable us to see the power relations that guaranteed the dominance of its historical narrative. All this brings us to the very interesting question of the 'value of value'. What might be the point of finding exceptional interest – philosophical fascination – in some objects rather than others? It is here that Hal Foster's concept of 'strategic autonomy' (Foster, 2004), recalled in an interview in a recent issue of the *journal of visual culture*, is relevant. Far from drawing the conclusion that the death of the grand narratives brings the age of aesthetic autonomy to an end, it seems to me that it complicates and enriches the question of autonomy in interesting ways. It recognizes that there can be no 'essential' definition of what autonomy might consist of, and places new stress on the responsibility of the historian or critic to articulate the grounds on which autonomy is claimed.

MAH: Good point; I would even expand it. The value of visual studies is that its historians and critics often find themselves in this position of 'responsibility', defining and redefining core concepts such as aesthetic autonomy, or conceptions of the artist, or definitions of art, or characterizations of the public, not to mention many others. And can't one genuinely make the claim that for over 100 years, traditional art history has gained its 'legitimacy' over and against repeated challenges to the assumptions or values on which it is grounded? Keith, Norman Bryson and I were being too short-sighted when we claimed in the introduction to *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations* (1994) that: 'During the past fifteen years or so, the Ideas about which we think and write have seemed at odds with the traditional canon in which many of us were schooled.' Leave it to the young and brash to think they are reinventing the wheel. We not only gave too little credit (although we did give some) to the role of feminism and Marxist social history (e.g. Nochlin and Clark) 15 years before we were writing, but to ignore the role of writers such as Benjamin, Kracauer, Riegl and (for me especially) Warburg was historiographic heresy. Warburg has been invoked constantly in the last decade as the 'founder' of the 'expanded field' of contemporary visual studies. At the time I believed that he was the perfect intellectual sponsor for a variety of new developments in art history that are now loosely connected under the rubric 'visual and cultural studies', and I still partially subscribe to a good part of that genealogy. The study of art was for him a serious study of history and the power of history to shape contemporary consciousness. In his quest to discover meaning in the past, he excluded nothing: from salt boxes to altarpieces, from Native American rituals to Renaissance murals. His erudite eclecticism is precisely what continues to appeal to postmodernist art historians, even if we have lost the sense that there is any meaning there to be discovered. The problem sets in when we try to enlist Warburg as an

intellectual predecessor and patron in more than the most general genealogical line. As much as I admire them and have devoted my intellectual life to these figures from the past, I have grown increasingly skittish about the insidious ways in which this compulsive return to earlier theoretical art historians – say Warburg, Riegl or Panofsky – is contributing to the disparagement and dilution of genuinely novel thought. Just at the moment when all sorts of new subjects and approaches are coursing through our field, we seem to have succumbed to a conservative urge to revisit earlier authorities, as though to emphasize that this sort of thinking has been part of art history for a very long time. Invoking precedents in order to tame the untamable. In other words, the past sometimes gets in the way of the present, something Nietzsche recognized long ago. One of the most serious issues raised by the current practice of art history is whether its cultural foundations in a particular intellectual milieu flourishing at least three generations ago can sustain the usages and practices derived from it. In the United States at any rate, there's a great deal of significance in changing the name 'art history' to 'visual studies'. For the latter refers more to an intellectual attitude than a field of study. It names a problematic. It's the banner that proclaimed 10 or 15 years ago that 'the times, they are a-changin''. But of course we only recognize change if we study, historiographically, where we have been. So what am I saying? I don't think that there has been a major theoretical shift recently, but rather a working out of the implications of an earlier seismic one that occurred a couple of decades ago, rather than a century. The theoretical shift of the 1960s and 1970s – which reached art history most fully in the 1980s – has been followed by the practical application of these earlier ideas. In other words, developments in visual culture now would be inconceivable without Foucault, gender theory, deconstruction, postcolonialism, etc. Our mothers and fathers, rather than our venerable great grandfathers, should be held most directly accountable for our behavior.

MC: Michael, these are provocative questions. Your query was to Keith, but I want to ask if Warburg was a predecessor – now rediscovered – or an influence? Like you, I've heard a lot of papers on his work recently, but he seems to be taken more as a model for a certain kind of creative and conceptual thinking-through of questions concerning the cultural history of art history and visual studies and not examined historiographically as such. Do those looking back at Warburg and others see them as part of a traceable lineage, or as examples to be emulated but without a continuous historical effect between their time and ours?

Going back to Keith's point about autonomy, Modernism is in part defined by the autonomy topos, or the rhetoric of autonomy, whichever specific strain one articulates. Whatever else we may say, many species of that paradigm seem to be past, which means that we can now understand the modern as a period and set of tendencies with a beginning and end. But of course many scholars would disagree – for example, Arthur Danto and Thierry de Duve – which at least proves the point that modernism in some way continues to hold sway.

MAH: By the way, following up on the matter of Warburg and historiography and historiography in visual culture, I always wonder why 'visual studies' equally cannot refer to a new theoretical understanding of old art – of the Renaissance, for example? Why is modernism always invoked? Just a question (or a desire to return to Warburg!). When the term 'visual culture' was first nominated by Michael Baxandall in *Painting and Experience* (1972) and seconded by Svetlana Alpers in *The Art of Describing* (1983), it was, after all, about Renaissance images and Dutch visual culture and thereby ripe for a re-energizing of early period studies.

MC: Modernism comes up so often because so many of us work in this period and, perhaps more importantly, because we wonder if the modern is indeed somehow over. I think it's past in an historical sense but remarkably influential still as a set of paradigms. I'm also bemused by the increasingly frequent bashing of postmodernism, often from a conservative position in the sense that it asserts the ongoing primacy of modernist paradigms. I'm thinking here of much of Thierry de Duve's writing and the visual production of Jeff Wall. There was a paper delivered at the recent CIHA (Comité International de l'Histoire de l'Art; Hadjinicolau, 2004) conference in Montreal that sought to dismiss the importance of pretty much all French poststructuralist thinking on the study of the visual arts. Thankfully, Keith spoke to this elision. I really don't know to what extent these debates involve visual studies. But to respond to you directly Michael, I think that we can always find earlier and earlier examples of a paradigm recently identified. What's the purpose of such a quest for authenticity in origin? But you've shown the positive side of such archaeology: many pay overdue attention to Riegl and many others now. I'd really rather use texts and ideas and images than say who got to what and where first, which strikes me as disciplinary posturing. It's likely true that there is more emphasis on modern and contemporary art than on other areas, as you say, but again I think the reasons are sociological and institutional.

KM: Even if visual studies follows its ancestor cultural studies in dedicating itself mainly to synchronic analyses of contemporary cultural production, the concept of history seems inescapable. Not only will the passage of time need to be acknowledged in one way or another, but the historicity of the analyst's own position will figure either explicitly or implicitly in any narrative. In both cases it is possible that the encounter with visual traditions whose pasts have been shaped by forces distinct from those traditionally associated with the history of art, as well as the development of new subject positions from which to view them, will offer opportunities for creative new solutions to the problem of 'artwriting'.

MC: For me as well, it is imperative that art writers – whatever their focus – have a working sense of their own historicity and those objects or themes that they explore. We must instill the sense that the past was different but that our access to it, our writing of it, posits a connection *in the present*. There is no time travel, but there is what we call time and we must account for its role in the changes we seek to account for in art.

MAH: Back to an old art historian. I cannot help myself (despite my suspicions of a few minutes ago), for there is where the philosophical grappling with the assumptions of art history seems so frequently to reside. Riegl (1982[1903]) already worried about this conundrum in his essay on monuments. Drawing a distinction between 'historical-value' (that which elucidates the past) and 'age value' (that which imbricates the viewer in his own ruminative sense of the past as no longer), to which should we be more responsive in the practice of artwriting (*pace* Carrier, 1987)? Historians or poets? And do philosophers fall in-between? Why have we abdicated the 'pasts' of art history for the 'presents' that studies of visual culture give us? What have we sacrificed? What about the act of writing itself? What change of commitment and direction in research would it take to say that in visual studies we work towards more understanding than 'proof'? Even more 'poetry' than analyses?

MC: Your question reminds me of Richard Rorty's (1981) vision of analytic versus continental philosophy and what counts for truth. A few more thoughts: perhaps we could each comment on how we teach material related to our collaborative edition now, your recent course at MIT, for example, and mine upcoming at the University of Toronto. What do you have people read? What do they look at? Do they find this sort of program useful, and how so? And have you both changed at all in what you teach and what you think? Another way to put this: if we were doing *The Subjects of Art History* now, what would we change, roughly 10 years on? I haven't taught 'theory in art history', as we call it, for several years. The last time, I used our book in conjunction with Donald Preziosi's excellent *The Art of Art History* (1998). But *Subjects* has sold its print run and is unavailable in English. One needs to be able to read Korean to get a copy now – 2000 copies of a Korean translation will be published soon – which is perhaps indicative of where art history is going, in a positive sense. My sense is that the demand for this sort of book – a methods and theories of art history book – still exists among students. I do not subscribe to the argument that 'theory' has been so absorbed by our discipline that to teach it separately is to ghettoize; most who float this line do so from a conservative position. So, I'm using Preziosi as a main text with *Subjects* available on library reserve. I'm also making a new book available: Robert Williams, *Art Theory: An Historical Introduction* (2004). But what will still be missing in my students' readings will be a sustained reading of the debates over the terrain of visual culture. I will bring this up as an issue.

And what about your research, any changes in direction or desire since the advent of visual studies? What would you write now if there were no institutional restrictions, if you had no other obligations? Personally, I would curate more contemporary art. Why? Because I believe that working with contemporary artists (aside from all the other reasons that it is exciting and worth doing) opens one's eyes to some of the debates exercised here. This is my other answer to Michael's question about why there is such a modern or contemporary focus in visual studies. To be polemical, one finds out more about the motivations and intricacies of visual culture from its practitioners than any other source.

KM: In attempting to answer Mark's important question, I'd like to return to

the issues of history and aesthetics with which this conversation began. Both seem to depend on universal structures of thought born in the Enlightenment that have proven both empowering and distinctly inimical to the way in which we approach non-western cultures. Partha Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (1993) and Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000) have shown how inappropriate western notions of historical development are to the analysis and interpretation of Indian history. As fruitful as subaltern studies have been in rewriting the history of British India, for example, the Marxist model on which this was undertaken had its distinct limitations. Having never experienced capitalist industrialization nor seen the rise of a bourgeoisie – the necessary conditions for proletarian revolution – subaltern historians often characterized Indian history as incomplete and deficient. India's peasant culture allegedly condemned it to play a backward role in contemporary historical developments. In Chakrabarty's terms it is necessary to 'provincialize Europe' if historians are to do justice to the unique qualities of Indian history.

However, what does 'provincializing Europe' amount to? Chakrabarty is not utopian enough to suggest that the understanding of the Indian past can do without the theoretical models of the Enlightenment, but that these cannot be applied uncritically to historical and cultural circumstances for which they were never intended. Inevitably, the theoretical structures developed by the dominant cultures of Europe and the United States will continue to inform every attempt to contest them. As valuable as the construction of new and alternative identities may be in the assertion of cultural difference, their strategic value will be obviated if their contingency is not recognized.

In terms of teaching, it seems important to me that we recognize the power relations that have shaped – and continue to shape – the nature of our discussions of visual culture. We live in the shadow of modernism and it would be hard to insist that artistic developments in, say, a major city in a non-western culture receive the same amount of attention as those taking place in New York. Currently, we can recognize that it is the economic, military and cultural power of the industrialized nations of Europe and the United States that supports their claims to aesthetic superiority – rather than, say, 'manifest destiny'. This allows us to relativize the dominant narrative so as to gain insight into its claims on our attention. We can see through the fabled 'autonomy' of the western artistic tradition to the cultural interests that motivate it. An awareness that aesthetic value is situational and local makes us leery of universalizing claims to transcendental value. It makes us appreciate the philosophical strategies on which claims to autonomy actually rest. As a consequence, I think that postcolonial studies and the globalization debate are necessarily embedded in the visual studies curriculum. The important authors here would be Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, James Clifford, Fredric Jameson, Arjun Appadurai, Gayatri Spivak and García Canclini. Said, Bhabha, Clifford, because they are canonical to postcolonial thinking and Jameson, Appadurai and García Canclini, because they represent radically different approaches to the project of understanding globalization, Spivak for both reasons.

MAH: Keith and I just finished co-teaching a graduate course this past semester in the History, Theory, Criticism Program at MIT that we rather pretentiously entitled 'Art History After the "End of Art"'. In it, we addressed the aesthetic traditions that have animated the history of art history, posing the question: 'What does aesthetics still mean for art history today?' The choice of readings, from Kant to Benjamin to Bürger to Belting and beyond, was prompted by our shared sentiment that if art history was ever to become philosophical again (as the best work in visual studies needs and urges it to be), it would be on the basis of questioning not only what we mean by 'history' today, but what we mean by 'aesthetics' as well. Watching the foundational concepts for our discipline metamorphose through author, time and cultural location may not provide singular definitions, but that was the point. Intellectual history goes a long way to making us all think anew.

KM: While we live with historical models more subtle and more sophisticated than either Hegel or Marx, we should be aware that even a Foucauldian notion of 'epistemes' may have little relevance for our understanding of certain cultural circumstances. While the notion of time- and culture-sensitive epistemologies is of enormous assistance in thinking about knowledge in an age of globalization, we should never forget that the very tools we use to understand the clash of epistemological systems bears the imprint of the culture in which it was developed. We thus live in the age of paradox, one in which 'both/and' and 'either/or' reign supreme. As sophistic and unsatisfactory as it may be to assert continually the limitations of our understanding, we may be too much aware of the dangers of epistemic universalism to do anything else.

Much the same may be true of aesthetics. While the power of this idea has enabled the artifacts of the world to be collected and appreciated under the rubric of 'art', it has also tended to erase the very distinctiveness that made these artifacts fascinating in the first place. The profound sadness resulting from a walk through the galleries of the Louvre last summer, where the creative works of radically different periods and places were reduced to sameness by means of an exhibition policy that implied that they were somehow equivalent to one another, was quite depressing. While the walls of this great museum are still dedicated to the 'history' of western Europe (including those geographies that have been annexed to its story so as to enhance its transcendental significance: for example, Egypt, Mesopotamia and Greece), a gesture has been made to the rest of the world by including a selection of works from Africa, Oceania and the Americas. We are informed that this is a prelude to a much more systematic representation of world 'art' in a renovated Musée de l'Homme(!). Whether or not the drabness inflicted on diverse cultural artifacts because of their categorization as 'art' will be avoided in this new setting remains to be seen.

It is perhaps because of the failure of the ideology of modernism, our current reluctance to subscribe to an evolutionary view of artistic development, that allows us to rethink the heroic narrative of western art history in the 20th century. It is now possible to pay attention to what had necessarily to be neglected if that narrative was to be accorded the power and privilege it

demanded. For example, it is now possible to consider South African post-Impressionists and Brazilian surrealists without rejecting and subordinating them on the grounds of their alleged lack of 'originality'. There is a new generation of scholars at work attempting to understand the significance of western-inspired artistic forms developed in non-western circumstances. Often their stories have an 'Alice in Wonderland' quality to them. We go through the looking glass as we realize that what had one kind of meaning in Paris or New York had quite another in Johannesburg or Rio de Janeiro. Even if the scholars engaged in this project happen to be, say, South African or Brazilian, they encounter the histories of the art of their own cultures through a lens imposed on them by the dominant story of Euro-American modernism. The value of the new work is that it serves to demonstrate that the success of the dominant story depends on power relations between industrialized and non-industrialized nations rather than on rational necessity. Another important dimension of this work is that it allows us to gauge the extent to which artists active at the hegemonic centers of the western narrative were aware of artistic developments in other places, even if this knowledge was often repressed. The value of these developments, it seems to me, lies not in replacing one type of history with another, but to complicate and relativize what we once regarded as 'the' story.

Just as the passing of a modernist aesthetic allows us to tell new and different stories about the aesthetic histories of the non-western world, so the introduction of visual studies enables us to pay attention to forms of visual creativity that previously have been ignored due to art history's dedication to the canon of 'high' art. Even if the 'new art history' extended the art-historical canon by attending to overlooked artists and works by insisting that the variety of subject positions from which the history of art might be told mattered, much of its energy remained focused on those works to which traditional art history had dedicated its attention. The arrival of visual studies in a context of aesthetic relativism means that art historians can no longer fall back on an inherited canon to guarantee our professional activities without betraying a lack of self-awareness about the nature of what we do. While the construction of local and specific 'aesthetic communities' characterized by their unique characteristics seems a necessary dimension of what aesthetics might currently mean, these communities still exist in the context of aesthetic judgments that have the backing of the dominant artistic institutions of the West. While it may now be possible for us to do justice to the aesthetic potential of what Garcia Canclini calls the 'industrialized arts' of television, advertising and the new media, the traditional canon of painting and sculpture may still be assigned a privileged status, within art history at any rate, in relation to other forms of visual culture.

The real opportunities of our current situation (and this is where these ideas are affecting both my teaching and writing) seem to lie in the way in which revised notions of both history and aesthetics allow us to rethink the nature of our scholarly work. Non-Hegelian philosophies of history (Benjamin, Foucault) and non-universalizing approaches to aesthetics (Bennett, Shohat and Stam) invest the study of the visual with new philosophical and political relevance.

MAH: One of the insistent issues that has been perplexing me in my role as director of a research institute is: 'What does *research* in art history today mean anyway?' The scientific paradigm that once-upon-a-time kept art history focused on empirical data is undeniably bankrupt when it comes to its legitimation as a discipline in the humanities. Consequently, the concept of *research* needs some investigation so as to elicit its philosophical implications and commitments. The same goes for visual studies.

And something more besides. What worries me most is that the scurrying about in the name of *research* that goes on in visual studies, as well as art history, loses something along the way. Heidegger once put it this way: 'Art-historical study makes the works the objects of a science ... In all this busy activity do we encounter the work itself?' (1971: 40). The manipulations and maneuvers of any research paradigm can contribute to the process of stripping the work of its awe, the awe that makes art still matter. I guess what I am still troubled by is the loss of wonder in the writing about the visual. I hear you challenge me: 'Doesn't research resist, by necessity and necessarily so, the "wonder" that is at the heart of the aesthetic experience?' I understand that question. Just so that we don't envelop ourselves in the pernicious haze of art appreciation, we need to ask those insistent questions about why? For whom? According to which archive? etc. On the other hand, I sense that some of contemporary visual studies so willingly seems not only to have found the glib route to answering these serious questions, but also to have sacrificed a sense of awe at the power of an overwhelming visual experience, wherever it might be found, in favor of an easy identification of the 'political' connections that lie beneath the surface of this or that representation. To me, that's neither good 'research' nor serious understanding. All I am saying is that there are many times when I yearn for something that is 'in excess of *research*'. But 'what is that wonder?', I hear you ask. And where did it go? Can we get it back? Why do we want it back? How do we generate the very conditions for 'wonder' to take place – whether it's a more philosophical or a critical 'wonder' at the character of archives, art objects, artifacts, whatever, in their specificity and singularity, how they work, mean, fail to be intelligible, etc? These are undoubtedly incisive questions, ones that cut to the pulsating heart of art history. The art of art history. The romance of research. The recreation, in words, of a thoroughgoing visual encounter. Hasn't this visual 'pull' also something to do with aesthetics? Does the act of writing in either art history or visual studies yearn towards a recreation of a visual 'aesthetic' experience, even if there is little or none there to be found? Is the desire to write about a subject the first 'aesthetic' choice? Or does it, rather, lie in our histories?

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