

declare that today's society showers us with a superabundance of choice; according to him we are overwhelmed with an *'embarras de richesses'* and bathed in an atmosphere of 'widespread pluralism'. He adds: 'With no recognised authority and centre of power many professional groups (and even whole countries) feel victimised by a world culture and market-place that jumps, sporadically, in different directions' (*What is Post-modernism?*).

These 'groups' and 'countries' who anxiously sit at the margins of an unpredictably expanding and contracting postmodern universe – suffering as they do from 'mild paranoia' – just cannot see the pleasures Jencks is trying to point out to them. They see mockery written into Ricardo Bofill's pastiche classical 'Versailles for the masses' and lament the fact that Venturi thinks they 'feel uncomfortable sitting in a square'. Maybe the postmodernist architectural theorists who would have most in common with the woman's reluctant destruction of the utopian modernist project turned élitist, and her unhesitating blasting of the symbols of consumer culture, would be Jameson and Frampton. At least they are still holding on to the notion of postmodern critique which is also a postmodern counter-culture. However, to cite Jameson's concluding words in 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', this idea might have to remain elusive. It does not give us much solid to build on:

We have seen that there is a way in which postmodernism replicates or reproduces – reinforces – the logic of consumer capitalism; the more significant question is whether there is also a way in which it resists that logic. But that is a question we must leave open.

POSTMODERNISM AND ART

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Emerging as a critical tool describing certain characteristics of 'new' art in the 1970s and 1980s, **postmodernism** comes in at least six different versions: as that which resists the apparently all-pervasive power of the mass media through the defence of the inescapable uniqueness and critical authority of high art (the historico-mythological paintings of Anselm Kiefer); as that which, actively embracing popular culture, sets out to escape from the élitism of high culture by engaging with the techniques and technologies of the media (the collaged imagery of David Salle); as that which seeks to embody the desires and aspirations of those social and cultural groups that high culture has marginalized or ignored (the theoretical work of the feminist artist Mary Kelly); as that set of parodic or **ironic** practices which dig deep into the nature of contemporary experience in order to indicate that reality has been assimilated into the endless **simulatory** processes of the communication industries (the '**neo-geo**' paintings of Peter Halley); as that critical practice that wants to define consumption as the endlessly empty but structuring process in our social landscape (the photo-montage images of Barbara Kruger); and finally, as that form of 'demotic' representational art that is resolutely anti-**modernist** in its interests and values (the 'modern mainstream' photo-based figuration of Gilbert and George).

These multiple postmodernisms have enabled artists to attack the allegedly mandarin nature of **modernism**, reorient artistic practice, enlarge the productive range of art and develop an inclusive approach to the use of culture and its objects. Consequently, many artists and critics have seen in this diversification evidence of new cultural energies. But is it possible, one might ask, to see in these 'energies' some attempt to grapple with the social landscape of postmodernity? If so does artistic postmodernism comment upon the new economies of labour, leisure, and consumption? Does it have anything to say about a social realm characterized in terms of the deregulation of financial markets and the consequent mobility of capital, the inexorable growth of privatization, the internationalization of the division of labour, the introduction of 'flexible' manufacturing systems, the development of specialized

product cultures and the ubiquity of 'customized' advertising campaigns? If it is possible to refer to different models of postmodernism, is it possible to make the distinction between a postmodernism which seeks to resist **postmodernity** and a postmodernism which embraces it? Is it possible, one might go on to ask, to distinguish between an oppositional postmodernism and an eclectic postmodernism? And, if we can make such a division, does it enable us to refer to 'good' and 'bad' forms of this art?

We begin to address such matters by returning to the way in which modernism was discussed in the late 1970s and 1980s. The criticisms of modernism, although taking many forms, centred on the belief that it was repressive, clinical and self-possessed. Thus, in opposition to the self-cancelling nature of a modernism condemned by its own conceits, postmodernism, through its redeployment of allegory, parody and narrative quotation, could be associated with the revivification of art itself. Including **installation art**, photography, painting and sculpture, postmodernism has been examined by such critics as Charles **Jencks**, Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp, Craig Owens, Benjamin Buchloh and Achille Bonito Oliva, all of whom were well versed in the writings of **Derrida**, **Foucault** and **Baudrillard**.

Is the division between a 'monolithic', 'universal', or 'closed' modernism and a 'diverse', 'pluralistic' and 'open' postmodernism, a division that is so apparent in Jencks's popular account of this new art, entirely accurate? This question is important because the critical power and value of postmodernism is entangled with its critique of modernism. We can get some purchase on this subject by examining in closer detail the nature of this reading of the development of modern art.

The dominant model for the explanation of modernist art has alleged that this is an art 'about' art. In the case of painting this meant the progressive uncovering of the formal essence of the medium. When the early modernist critic Clive Bell, writing in 1914, declared that all great painting registered significant form, he meant that such works possessed their own values and had to be judged by aesthetic criteria. This reading of modernism claims that, in the case of painting, the history of modern art is the history of self-purification by the eradication of all 'external' influences until we are confronted with absolute form in the pristine and spartan clarity of post-painterly abstraction.

This position, first articulated in explicitly philosophical terms by the American critic Clement Greenberg, became classic modernist dogma in the 1960s. For Greenberg, writing in *Modernist Painting* (1961), modernism, in establishing its autonomy of expression, generates the

conditions for the emergence of a pure art that pursues its own unique agenda. In painting this meant that 'authentic' work would be made by drawing upon its own specific material nature. Thus Greenberg predicted that the modernist painter would devote more and more time to the nature of his medium: to the flatness of his canvas, to the physical reality of the picture-plane, to the luminosity or the opacity of his colour, to the shape of his support, to the presence of the frame. Organizing itself as an inward-looking practice, this form of modernism was to develop through the rigorous elimination of all decorative and ornamental elements. This celebration of the ineluctable uniqueness of modernism – its capacity to establish artistic value without making any critical engagement with social and political matters – became the dominant method of appreciating contemporary art practice; and in many ways Greenberg, who was the first critic to recognize the significance of Jackson Pollock's work, became the most important figure associated with this modernist model after the implosion of abstract expressionism in the late 1950s. It is notable that 'classic' American modernist artists of this period, such as Jules Olitski, Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Frank Stella and Dan Flavin, deployed versions of this Greenbergian rhetoric to justify the nature of their artistic experimentation.

Greenberg's success in offering a theory for the development of modern art as a process of internal development should not blind us from the realization that modernism has a far more complex history than this model allows. Indeed, it should come as no surprise that Greenberg's model of modernism found no place for Dada, surrealism and constructivism, all of which sought to connect art and politics in order to generate visions of social and cultural emancipation. In all three cases modernism involved disputing and contesting the shape and nature of modern society: criticizing the nihilism of capitalism; questioning the social management of ordinary experience; generating utopian visions in which art is integrated with the social fabric of modern life.

By assimilating all forms of modernist art into the Greenbergian model of modernism, postmodernist artists and critics contested the established cultural orthodoxy by developing three different strategies in the late 1970s and 1980s. Through these 'engagements' it became possible to claim that postmodernism was iconoclastic and radical. These attacks comprised: the presentation of a variety of text-based practices as radical examinations of the institutional machinery of the art world; the definition of the artist as the conduit for the

dissemination of an impure but healing art; and the identification of **appropriation art** as a way of trumping the idea of the unity and uniqueness of the art object.

What were the motivations behind these three moves? First, the site-specific works of the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers and the German artist Hans Haacke are supposed to reveal the framing devices used by museums and art galleries. Second, the new figuration of the German painter Anselm Kiefer, in its identification of the picture-plane as a violent space where the **signs** of history are compressed and contorted, is taken to question modernism's residual commitment to the idea of beauty as truth. Third, in its most vivid form, that of the New York neo-geo or **simulationist** artist Peter Halley, the appropriation of modernist 'icons', such as Piet Mondrian and Barnett Newman, is seen as a way of tackling the relationship between modernism and the social, cultural and economic institutions of the modern capitalist state.

As these three moves are interrelated – the first deals with the idea of the governmental agencies of art, the second is concerned with the communicative and expressive qualities of painting, and the third addresses the flow of power within a 'globalized' economy – this essay will be organized around three different case-studies drawn from each of these practices.

The first of our case-studies involves the subject of installation art, which in the work of Broodthaers and Haacke questions the belief in the purity and self-defining nature of the modernist art object. Broodthaers' work, which developed a new intensity after the radical events of 1968, attempts to circumvent the intellectual division of labour that sustains and reinforces the authority of art galleries. Identifying himself with an imaginary museum – the Musée d'Art Moderne – he wrote accounts of his art from the position of the curatorial and cultural establishment. By conflating the realms of creativity and criticism he could make art 'speak' against the institutional languages that framed it. In this sense his denial of the division of labour established by the museum also challenged the articulation of cultural authority in cognate institutions.

In the work of Haacke it is not only the art object but the system that frames, manages and organizes the social networks of culture that is of importance. Thus he sets out to interrogate the institutions of modern art. By producing works that focus on the relationship between the art gallery and the corporations which sponsor them, he wants to examine the way in which business legitimizes itself through cultural patronage. He asks: what purpose does art serve in modern society and what interests are masked by corporate patronage? Two examples of this

process are germane to this case-study. In 1971 the Guggenheim Museum cancelled Haacke's exhibition because the artist declined an offer to remove a couple of controversial pieces that dealt with the practices of some of its trustees. Entitled *Real Time Social Systems*, these works comprised diagrams, maps and photographs which constituted a visual 'plan' of the interplay between economic power and cultural identity. The 'plan' detailed the methods by which slum landlords transformed themselves into respectable figures by buying into the realm of culture. Examining the flow of capital from 'private' to 'public' spaces, the work addressed the relationship between the accumulation of different forms of authority and prestige.

Three years later Haacke was invited to exhibit at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne. Once again, in drawing attention to the management of culture within capitalist society, his work met with suppression by the cultural managers of this institution. On this occasion Haacke's installation art involved the production of a detailed history of Manet's 'Bunch of Asparagus', which the museum had recently acquired from a local industrialist. This history took the form of inverting the relationship between the object and its elucidation: the 'art' comprised a series of wall panels, each one of which traced the history of the ownership of the Manet. These biographical vignettes concluded with an account of Hermann J. Abs, trustee of the museum and former owner of the Manet. Because his final wall panel drew attention to Abs's relationship with the industrial and economic policies of the Third Reich, the museum required Haacke to remove his installation.

Acting as the mediator between installation art and our second case-study, the so-called postmodernist *trans-avant-garde*, we find the anarcho-spiritual performance art of Joseph **Beuys**. For Beuys's art, as the embodiment of pure consciousness, is the dynamic force that will regenerate the social and material realm. This Beuysian pursuit of the mystic union of self and world is a noticeable feature of the work of his most celebrated student, Anselm Kiefer. Kiefer, echoing Beuys, is always in the process of declaring the redemptive quality of his art. Where Beuys's oracular rhetoric conflates the mystical version of Dada and the theatrical nature of performance art, Kiefer's art returns to German romanticism in order to confront its disturbing legacy. Like his teacher, Kiefer identifies the power of art as a form of magical fertility; the surfaces of his paintings are mobile forests of marks, wounds and growths. These skeins of paint – drifting, dripping and forming nomadic traces across the canvas – are forever entangled with new surfaces, new

spaces and new morphologies. Evidently Kiefer identifies the authority of painting with its capacity to translate narrative into the transfiguring intensity of his materials. In such a scenario painting becomes a form of incantation and enchantment: it will raise the darkness of Teutonic mythology in order to face its primitivism and irrationality. This turning away from the 'universalism' of high-modernism is characteristic of the other main figures associated with this mode of postmodernism. The belief that the return to painting involves the return to the mythologies of national culture can be seen in the work of Kiefer's compatriots Markus Lupertz and Georg Baselitz, both of whom invoke Germanic culture in their work. Although less impressed by Beuys's sibylline utterances on the nature of art, they, like Kiefer, transform his 'post-modernism of immediacy' from the theatrical forms of 'body art' into a violent expressionistic style that hovers between 'myth' and biography.

The idea that the mystical totality of art forms a separate magical kingdom is also expressed by the Italian wing of this *trans-avant-garde* where Francesco Clemente and Sandro Chia led the return to the conventional media of oil painting and fresco. For the Italian critic Achille Bonito Oliva, the leading champion of this style, by rejecting the uniformity of modernism, these 'nomads' produce an art of 'desire' which battles against the repressive forces of 'the Law'. This re-introduction of 'painting into art', a reintroduction which includes descriptive and decorative elements, enables Oliva to claim that these artists are at once radical *and* traditional. According to Oliva, such work 'intentionally lacks character, does not hold heroic attitudes and does not recall exemplary situations'. Thus, it is the humbleness of this 'weak' work that establishes its 'healing' powers.

The idea that the artist acts as a spiritual or cultural healer, or that the resulting work is original because of its manipulation of mythological and classical sources, is firmly rejected by the figures associated with appropriation art, the third of our case-studies.

Instead of relying on practices that are supposed to merge the artist with the artwork, a marked characteristic of the romanticized mythology of the *trans-avant-garde*, Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman, Peter Halley, Haim Steinbach, and Jeff Koons, all of whom came to prominence in the late 1970s and early 1980s, produce work that resists the idea of individual **authority** and artistic creativity.

Levine and Sherman emerged in 1977 when their simulatory art was identified as a breakthrough in the formation of postmodernist aesthetics. Douglas Crimp, the recently appointed managing editor of *October*, the most important journal concerned with reframing art

theory through the use of **poststructuralist** ideas, contrived a show entitled 'Pictures', which was held at the alternative gallery Artists Space in Lower Manhattan. This event was to be seminal because Crimp's catalogue essay, republished in expanded form in *October* in 1980, argued that the figures he had picked for this event subscribed to the notion that our experience of reality is organized and determined by the images we make of it. The importance of his exhibitors lay in their capacity to understand that the real is composed of the pictures we elaborate and assimilate in and through our dealings with the institutions of contemporary society. He asserted: 'to an ever greater extent our experience is governed by pictures, pictures in newspapers and magazines, on television and in the cinema. Next to these pictures, firsthand experience begins to retreat, to seem more and more trivial.' Thus the paradoxical power of work by Levine and Sherman was revealed in its capacity to assert that it *lacked* all authority: it registered that photography was always a *representation*. Furthermore, their self-conscious photography, which resisted the idea that **representation** could announce originality, was postmodernist because it confirmed the mythological status of 'authorship'.

Sherman's 'Untitled Film Still No. 21' is a classic example of her early technique. The female figure (it is Sherman herself), photographed in black and white, seems to have been taken from a film. The image, then, is made 'filmic' because Sherman seems to embody a moment in a sequence: she appears to be anxious; she is caught from an odd, almost elliptical, angle; there is something 'brooding' about this urban topography which bears down on the female subject. The image is neither portrait nor documentary narrative: it performs no 'ceremonial' function; it fails to delineate a story or depict a real situation. The image demonstrates something about how we perceive the social environments in which we move; and when we realize that it was part of an extensive sequence of images in which Sherman is shown in different scenarios, it becomes apparent that we are being asked to consider how female identity is established in our culture.

This denial of the referential nature of the photographic image is continued by Sherrie Levine. In her appropriation of canonical images by Edward Weston and Walker Evans, we see the same conflation of the idea of simulation and gender politics. It is certainly the case that these images declare that art is a representation of itself; that the burden of all art is its inescapable attachment to tradition; that it is somehow radical to criticize those conventions that claim to represent external reality. Here photography does not provide a window looking out into the

world: it is a mirroring process that reflects its own conventionalized and normalized techniques for recording and framing the world. This interest in the 'fictive' quality of originality was continued in her 1984 show at the Nature Morte Gallery in New York, which comprised copies of drawings by Schiele and Malevich, the 'expressionistic' and 'classic' wings of early modernism.

Fascination with the nature of representation is also a marked feature of Peter Halley's work. Deploying cells and conduits within a grid-like geometric field, his art is informed by his reading of Foucault and Baudrillard. For Levine and Sherman, working through the photographic medium, representation never refers back to some pristine state of being in nature; compositions are imprisoned by the tradition which shapes, patterns and frames them; images are entangled within visual systems from which it is impossible to escape; photographic works are copies of copies. To this interest in representation-as-repetition, Halley, the main painter and theorist in this group, brings his concern with the relationship between representation and power. Looking at modernism is to see models, networks, movements, and flows of matter and energy. Thus Stella's aluminium 'grid' paintings of the late 1950s, generally regarded as the zenith of late modernism, are made to reveal the massive interstate highways which traverse America.

Halley concentrates on the idea of geometry in order to ask why modern society associates it with freedom, light, reason and truth. In 'Notes on Painting' (*Collected Essays* (1987)) abstraction is identified as a form of confinement: non-representational art, hollowed out of its utopian rhetoric, is assimilated into the visual languages of multinational corporations. The modernist artefact has become part of the logic of late monopoly capitalism: in its geometrical and grid-like forms Halley discovers social, governmental and financial networks. Modernism's search for absolute visual purity is no longer 'innocent': instead of its association with idealist aesthetics, Halley locates it in the imprisoning spaces of consumer capitalism. Thus he claims that his paintings 'are a critique of idealist modernism. In the "colour field" is placed the jail. The misty space of Rothko is walled up.'

Far from being a process of social enlightenment, geometry is, in fact, an instrument of social control. Therefore he links the geometric sign to what he sees as the dominant image of surveillance: the grid. He writes: 'On the grid, there are no monuments. Only the grid itself is a monument to its own endless circulatory nature . . . On the grid there is only the presentness of unending movement, the abstract flow of goods, capital and information.' Public space has been hollowed out and

private space has collapsed into a zone of endless, empty consumption. It is in this context that we should approach a painting such as 'Day Glow Prison' (1982). Deliberately disorienting, it seems to combine elements of kitsch and abstraction, that is junk-culture and high modernism. On the one hand there is the garish, electric light colour, on the other the rigour of geometric modernism.

This is a weird mutation: it is as if the colour scheme of suburbia has entered the 'pure' space of modern art. By appropriating the day-glow colour scheme of Stella's work from the early 1960s, he affirms that such apparently pure art is an echo of the social furniture of modern life. By including Roll-a-tex, a mock-stucco, to 'adorn' the square figure that commands the image, colour becomes coloration: it is that which is produced and reproduced by instruments and that which registers the nature of its own reproduction. Colour does not 'refer' to nature but to Roll-a-tex. If the structure of the image, collapsing form and content, deals with the imprisonment of experience in the techniques of 'advertising', it eschews the hedonistic qualities of pop, which, in many ways, embraced the consumer culture that Halley criticizes. In opposition to say, Warhol, who endlessly repeats the look of consumer images, Halley engages with the multiple styles of modernism in order to criticize it. If, like Warhol, he replaces the cult of originality with the practice of repetition, he does so in order to confront the reproductive technologies which inform the social and political systems of **post-industrial** society.

The presentation of postmodern art as something which emerges from the networks of leisure and consumption in contemporary society is continued in the work of Haim Steinbach and Jeff Koons. If Halley sees the geometric sign as the essence of modernity, both these artists are fascinated with the world of shopping; and it is the objects of consumption that they replicate. In the case of Steinbach, shopping becomes a form of urban tourism in which commodities act as souvenirs: by buying something an attempt is made to hang on to the experience which compelled the purchase in the first place.

This simulated art takes as its reference point that most contemporary of environments: the shopping mall. A parade of parody and pastiche, in which historical and cultural styles are knitted together in 'unique' configurations, the shopping mall is the fabricated space of pure fantasy. Reproducing shopping as a leisure 'experience' through the articulation of 'themed' spaces, the shopping mall blends the 'ordinary' and the 'exotic', transforming consumption into something 'exciting'. Here shopping becomes the fantasy of escape, the fantasy of

holiday. Shopping, we might say, contains and recreates the world: shopping is tourism.

Steinbach, who in a 1986 panel discussion which included Halley and Koons, opined 'in a sense the media have been turning us into tourists and voyeurs outside our own experience . . . in my case I spend a lot of time shopping', creates objects and microenvironments. Or more accurately, he manages products. Placed on Formica shelves resembling plinths, these products are the very commodities we purchase in shopping malls.

The products produced by Steinbach play games with the way in which we use, collect and value ordinary commodities. His achievement is to connect two realities – the shopping mall and the home – and to express the way in which the experience of both is built around a comforting, homely, tranquilizing banality. If in such a world the objects of consumption, the commodities we buy, have become the modern equivalent of primitive totems, this may be because in our world shopping has become a kind a religion, a dream of purity. At the same time there is an inescapable emptiness here, a great void which cannot be redemptive precisely because consumerism is based on the idea of endless consumption. **Desire** is aroused but never satisfied and the commodity generates a sense of loneliness which must be overcome by yet more consumption.

In Britain a self-consciously whimsical or quirky attitude to appropriation is found in the work of Tony Cragg, Bill Woodrow and Edward Allington, all of whom make reference to forms of mass-production, although the allusions to the world of commerce and kitsch tend to be 'poetical' rather than 'political'. Elsewhere the camp, sentimental militarism of Gilbert and George assimilates the iconic powers of medieval art and Soviet socialist realism, generating tableaux which are obsessed with masculinity, fecundity and death. Does this appropriated iconography, which reduces the world to a series of pictograms or isotypes, confirm that we are dealing with banal art or art about banality? Appropriation of a different kind is found in the work of the young 'Brit-pack' artist, Damien **Hirst**. From his dead cows and sheep, which allude to such sources as Rembrandt's 'The Flayed Ox', to his recent 'dot' paintings, which allude to Peter Taaffe's simulation of Op Art during the 'golden-age' of New York simulationism in the 1980s, Hirst's work has acknowledged the endless entangling of 'high' and 'low' subjects in the iconography of European art.

At the beginning of this essay it was asked whether there is anything of value to be gained by coupling artistic postmodernism with social

postmodernity. Well, if there are no simple alignments between the processes of cultural heterogeneity and social fragmentation – alignments that enable us to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' art – we can at least conclude our investigation by confirming that some forms of contemporary practice establish more interesting and more critical dialogues with modernism and the social landscape of late monopoly capitalism than others. In the case of the American sculptor Richard Serra we find works that confront those public spaces that 'shopping mall' postmodernism declares to have vanished into the simulated spaces of replication and miniaturization. The sheer physicality of Serra's sculptures, which tend to inhabit the open-air urban environment, encourage spectators to reflect upon the nature of the lived experience of built space. That the nature of this art could be something other than an emphatic embrace of postmodernist consumer culture can be seen in the controversy surrounding his 'Tilted Arc', a work that was destroyed after its removal from New York's Federal Plaza in 1989.

In its combination of brute matter and indomitable form the 'Tilted Arc' resisted the idea that public art should decorate, adorn or aestheticize public space. There was nothing about the 'Tilted Arc' to suggest it supported the rhetoric of 'urban renewal'; nothing that resembled the bovine pastoralism of much contemporary public art. The object was in no sense charming or pleasing. Indeed, its capacity to block any real sense of spatial orientation was an insistence that people should be obliged to address its bulky ugliness. To be sure, the work denied people the opportunity to scan or survey the immediate environment. To this should be added the ghostly nature of the thing: here the matter of industrial engineering returns to a deindustrialized governmental, financial and consumer sector of the city, bringing with it the buried history of industry. This registration of the uncanny was compounded by the dimensions of a work that suggested both vertigo and claustrophobia: this was an object whose presence was both ubiquitous and elusive; at once inviting the individual to 'merge' with its form and resisting the idea of absorption.

It was the unhomey nature of the object – its ability to resist urban assimilation by its insistence on the inescapable strangeness of urban space – that brought this postmodernist work back to one of the central themes of literary and philosophical modernity: that consciousness is marked by its sense of transcendental homelessness. In the writings of Schlegel, Baudelaire, Kierkegaard, **Benjamin**, Kafka, **Adorno** and **Heidegger** we find the idea that being is a form of alienation; that life is a form of exile or the registration of an inescapable and catastrophic