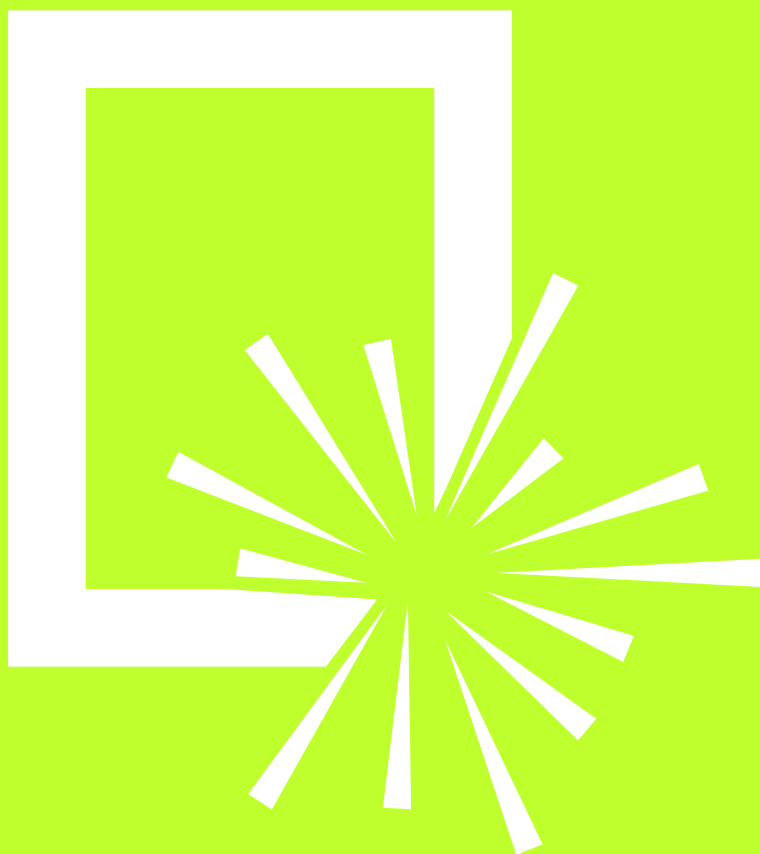


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## AUTONOMY NOW

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PAWEŁ KACZMARSKI, MARTA KORONKIEWICZ

## Embracing Autonomy

The autonomy of art and literature is one of those ideas that virtually everyone on the Left seems to have strong opinions on. It doesn't necessarily imply that there is any degree of consensus on its political importance or even possibility - indeed, there doesn't seem to be a universally accepted account of what autonomy *is* or *could be* - rather, it belongs to a limited set of notions that those of us on the Left seem to take position on almost by default; as if intuitions about the political function and social status of art could be easily derived from a more general set of views or claims. It's not that we are *excited* about autonomy as a theoretical issue anymore - in a positive or negative way - rather, we all seem to have already made up our minds about it, before the conversation can even begin.

This may also explain, at least to an extent, why for the most part the autonomy of art remains in practice an abstract and somewhat ephemeral notion. Its certain canonical instances notwithstanding (see e.g. Taylor 1980), more often than not the long debate on autonomy has been marked by political vagueness, theoretical imprecision, and instances of purely linguistic differences being mistaken for meaningful ones.

In situations like this - when largely intuitive arguments are expressed in consistently unclear terms - it is only a uniquely powerful voice (or perhaps a uniquely significant political event) that can breathe new

life into a stagnant debate, forcing us to update our theoretical framework and reevaluate some of our deeply held convictions. In our opinion, such a voice has emerged in recent years from a group of critics and intellectuals who reconcile Marxist commitments with what is sometimes called an “intentionalist” account of meaning and interpretation. This has resulted in a theoretical framework that encourages precision and clarity, while producing insights that are simultaneously political and aesthetic in nature - what has been variously called a “social ontology of art” or a critique of the “political economy of form”. Indeed, from this standpoint, to assert the autonomy of art is to defend the political as such, while to criticise it is to implicitly endorse market absolutism (see Brown, Bradić 2021). Meanwhile, the political importance of art seems to lie not so much in its role as a socio-political stimulus - its alleged ability to push us towards certain actions - but rather in something like the cognitive dignity of the artwork (Brown 2020a); its ability to reveal, through its very form, the more fundamental structural tensions in the world around us. This allows the very idea of beauty - the ultimate *normative* idea in art and literature - to gain a newfound political importance:

Today, we might speculate, it's only insofar as art seeks to be beautiful—seeks, that is, to achieve the formal perfection imaginable in works of art but not in anything else—that it can also function as a picture not of how, if we behaved better, we might manage capitalism's problems, but rather of capitalism as itself the problem. (Michaels 2015, 42)

This approach to autonomy has been the object of various debates, symposia and polemics (see e.g. Vishmidt 2020, Petrovsky 2020, Durao 2020, CLCWeb 2020, Lotz 2023, Hitchcock 2020). While we believe that a discussion about its deeper foundations is an obviously valid academic pursuit, the aims behind this issue of *Theoretical Practice* - both political and theoretical - are quite different. Instead of investigating the general theoretical framework developed by authors such as Michaels, Brown, and others - and contrasting it with other existing models - we have invited prospective authors to submit articles based around specific *interpretative* claims or insights supported by this particular framework. In choosing such an approach, we seek not only to test the practical applications of the theory, but to push the overall debate forward - past the acknowledged points of disagreement and towards a more interesting conversation on its specific implications. Hence our hope is that this issue of *Theoretical Practice* will contribute

to an ongoing intellectual project - one that we believe to be among the most interesting tendencies on the international Left today.

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The account of autonomy around which this number of *Theoretical Practice* is centred remains rooted in a specific argument on the nature of meaning and interpretation, as well as a particular account of intention itself. In order to facilitate the debate - and to make the articles in this issue more accessible to readers potentially unfamiliar with the original argument - we provide below an outline of the argument's main points. This is followed by a brief summary of the articles in the issue.

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[O]f course, the work of art can also have one thing that the commodity and sheer matter cannot. And that one thing— the only thing about the work of art that is not determined by its buyers, the only thing about it that belongs only to it, the only thing about it that's not reducible to the commodity it otherwise is— is its meaning. (Michaels 2015, 102-103)

This and similar observations made by Walter Benn Michaels in his 2015 book *The Beauty of the Social Problem: Photography, Autonomy, Economy* were, in a way, a logical conclusion to critical, philosophical, and historical work on meaning and intention previously undertaken by himself and others (see e.g. Ashton 2011, Brown 2012, Cronan 2013). According to Michaels' seminal account of meaning and interpretation, which he developed together with Steven Knapp (see e.g. Knapp & Michaels 1982, 1983, 1987), the meaning of the work of art/literature and the intention of its author are necessarily (or by definition) strictly identical – i.e. they are just two names for the very same thing. Essentially, this claim stems from the recognition that only intention allows us to identify text as text, or to define its boundaries: once the reader recognises something as meaningful, they logically have to posit an author behind it; and if they recognise something as accidental, they cannot perceive it as meaningful (anymore). There is no language - or literature, or art - before or outside of intention, which can only mean that the meaning of any given work is entirely and strictly what its author intended. Hence, whenever we acknowledge something as language (or literature, or art),

we simultaneously (if not necessarily consciously) posit an author behind it; and whenever we interpret, we speculate on said author's intention. Crucially, according to Michaels and Knapp, this is not what interpretation *should* look like, but rather, what it *is* - always, by definition - regardless of any theory one may or may not subscribe to.

Michaels and Knapp's argument had a profound impact on a variety of voices across the humanities and social sciences, including ones that merged elements of aesthetics with political theory (many "intentionalist" authors have since affiliated themselves in some way with the academic journal *nonsite*). In *The Shape of the Signifier* (2004) Michaels himself pointed out how a certain theoretical commitment to the material shape of the literary text, and the experience of a reader - at the expense of meaning/intention - entails a political commitment to the primacy of identity over class:

[O]ne way to put what I am arguing here is just to say that the commitment to the materiality of the signifier—the commitment to the idea that the text consists essentially of its physical features—was fundamental not only to the very few people who understood themselves actually to have made that commitment but also to the larger number of people who were critical of the materiality of the signifier and also to a great many people who had never even heard of the materiality of the signifier.

Another more controversial way to put it would be to say that this view of the ontology of the text carries with it—entails—a parallel or complementary view of the position of the reader. I am arguing that anyone who thinks the text consists of its physical features (of what Derrida calls its marks) will be required also to think that the meaning of the text is crucially determined by the experience of its readers, and so the question of who the reader is—and the commitment to the primacy of identity as such—is built into the commitment to the materiality of the signifier. What this means is that figures whose deepest commitments are to categories of racial or cultural difference (e.g., the political scientist Samuel B. Huntington and the novelist Toni Morrison) belong to the same formation as someone like de Man, who couldn't have cared less about culture. To put the point in an implausible (but nonetheless, I will try to show, accurate) form, it means that if you hold, say, Judith Butler's views on resignification, you will also be required to hold, say, George W. Bush's views on terrorism—and, scarier still, if you hold Bush's views on terrorism, you must hold Butler's view of resignification. (Michaels 2004, 13-14)

[I]nsofar as exploitation is at the core of class difference, class difference is ineluctably linked to inequality, where cultural difference, of course, is not.

Cultures, in theory if not always in practice, are equal; classes, in theory and in practice, are not. From this standpoint, the rise of culture, or of the so-called new social movements, or of the problem of identities and identification, or—most generally—of the problem of the subject has functioned as the Left's way of learning to live with inequality. (...) [T]he effort to imagine a world organized by subject positions instead of beliefs and divided into identities instead of classes has of course, under general rubrics like postmodernism or poststructuralism or posthistoricism, been widespread. (Michaels 2004, 17)

In this sense, *The Shape of the Signifier* provided a robust defense of class analysis and (a version of) socialist politics - as well as a critique of identity politics, both in its conservative and liberal version - that was explicitly based on an "intentionalist" account of meaning and interpretation. Later, in *The Beauty of a Social Problem* (2015), Michaels set out to prove that a work of art/literature may - by becoming pointedly, purposefully indifferent to the experience of its audience (and insisting instead on its own meaning, form, and autonomy) - shift our attention away from the inherently liberal politics of experiences, affects, and identities, and towards the structural, i.e. class-based, inequalities that shape the very foundation of capitalist societies. This interest in the relationship of class politics to identity politics has been shared by other *nonsite* authors - crucially among them, Kenneth Warren (see e.g. 2020) and Adolph Reed jr (see e.g. 2001; Reed & Michaels 2023).

Michaels' account of meaning/intention and its relation to experience was influenced to a significant degree by the work of Michael Fried (whose distinctions between art and objecthood (Fried 1998), and theatricality and absorption (Fried 1980), remain among the key points of reference for the articles published in this issue of *Theoretical Practice*). In turn, Michaels' argument has served as an important influence for various other works in the theory and history of art, including the comprehensive account of aesthetic autonomy under late capitalism recently put forward by Nicholas Brown (2019). Offering a fascinating re-reading of Hegel, Adorno, Lukacs, and others, Brown shows that in a market society, in order to assert its (partial) independence from the commodity form, a work of art/literature has to subsume its status as a commodity under its own meaning, as if the former was a part of the work's material support:

That the work of art is a commodity like any other is, from the standpoint of the market, not false. The commodity character of the work of art is indeed part of its material support. The moment of truth in contemporary aesthetic ideology

has been to make this aspect of the support inescapable. After postmodernism, autonomy cannot be assumed, even by works produced for a restricted field. It must instead be asserted. (How much the postmodern period will appear in retrospect to have been shot through with this assertion—how much the postmodern discontinuity will turn out to have been an illusion—is matter for further research.) Since the structure of the commodity excludes the attribute of interpretability, any plausible claim to meaning—to art as opposed to objecthood—will immediately entail the claim not to be a commodity like any other. The originality of the present moment is that the concept of medium or material support must be expanded to include the commodity character of the work. (Brown 2019, 22-23)

This working through, rather than around, the commodity status of the work implies an aesthetic strategy that – being modeled after Hegel's *Aufhebung* rather than a straightforward, and ultimately futile, refusal to engage with the market altogether – is a far cry from naive and elitist fantasies about a potential revival of the “true” high art:

The problem Autonomy is meant to answer (...) is how works of art can insist on a meaning “after modernism”; that is, after restricted fields are no longer credited as deflecting the commodity character of art; when works of art are understood to confront the market directly as commodities; when, in short, aesthetic production is understood to have “become integrated into commodity production generally.” (...) Art that denies its imbrication with the market is, no matter how ugly, just selling you a pretty story; art that fails to account for its imbrication with the market is selling you something else. (Brown 2020b)

What Michaels, Brown and others prove, is that the autonomy of art and literature should be of vital interest to all self-declared socialists and communists today - *precisely* because of its relationship to the market. Their account of autonomy implies a readiness to defend elements of the Modernist tradition - a thought which in itself remains anathema to many allegedly progressive parts of the academia. Just recently, in *Red Aesthetics* (2021), Todd Cronan offered a re-reading of parts of the socialist canon - including Brecht, Eisenstein, and Rodchenko - from an “intentionalist” standpoint, suggesting that “red aesthetics is an explicitly political form of modernism that aims to capture the complex and changing modernity with an equally complex and changing mode of representation”.

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Among the chief implications of the “intentionalist” approach to autonomy is that aesthetic autonomy should be seen, first and foremost, as inherent to the work of art, rather than the work of an artist. What lies beyond the domain of the market is not, as various unwitting heirs to romanticism would see it, the “creative process” – the causal, material process of which the work of art is the ultimate result – but a specific feature (i.e. meaning) that the work of art possesses by its very nature (or by definition). Thus what various “intentionalists” offer is a renewed focus on ontological rather than purely sociological perspective – which in turn seems particularly refreshing in the context of various debates on the contemporary Left, where the issue of autonomy is often reduced to the relationship between an artist and a wider regime of labour.

Moreover, the very blurring of the line between the autonomy of art and the autonomy of the artistic process may be seen as an ideological byproduct of what Stanley Cavell famously called the “bad picture of intention” (Cavell 1976; see also Cronan 2020, Siraganian 2017). This “bad picture” mistakes the meaning of the work for its external cause – by treating authorial intention in purely causal terms – and ultimately reduces the work to its objecthood. In other words, a work of art/literature is seen as nothing more than a material *effect* of its author’s intention. Such an approach may be in turn easily combined with various misguided forms of materialism and egalitarianism to produce a politics of art that is nominally democratic, progressive or socialist, but which nonetheless denies the work of art its basic means of resisting commodification. If this is indeed the case, what is urgently needed – especially among those of us on the Left – is a critique of the kind of allegedly materialist criticism that draws (sometimes unwittingly) on the “bad picture of intention”. Examples of this include Ruth Leys’ critique of “the turn to affect” (2017), Cronan’s critique of “affective formalism” (2021), or Siraganian’s deflationary and demystifying approach to AI-generated “art” (2021).

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While various debates about Brown’s *Autonomy* have so far focused mostly on evaluating the merits and potential flaws of the author’s general approach to autonomy, the upcoming issue of *Theoretical Practice* seeks to focus instead on the logical next step, i.e. a further in-depth

analysis and critique of specific strategies that works of art have historically adopted in order to assert their autonomy under capitalism. While Michaels, Brown, Cronan, and others provide us with plentiful examples of such works and strategies, the list remains by its very nature ever incomplete – and thus we have invited fellow critics and researchers to investigate other important instances of autonomy in its non-trivial form, i.e. the cases in which the works of art and literature have actively reasserted (or rejected, or otherwise thematised) their autonomy, as it relates to the market and their own status as commodities.

Davis Smith-Brecheisen's *The Pivotal Decade Revisited, or the Contemporary Novel of the Seventies* offers a reading of two novels – Percival Everett's *So Much Blue* and Rachel Kushner's *The Flamethrowers* – which share to an extent not just their ostensible subject matter, but also, according to Smith-Brecheisen, the way they thematise art itself, or the relation between certain moments in art history and political history. Specifically, they're both contemporary novels set in the 70s, and both remain interested not just in the political upheavals of the period, but the corresponding aesthetic shift from modernism to postmodernism as well. By identifying literalist/postmodernist positions in the novels in question – and highlighting the ways in which these positions are ultimately criticised within the novels' own logic – Smith-Brecheisen shows that *So Much Blue* and *The Flamethrowers* offer not only a critique of the principles of "indexicality and immediacy" in art, but also a completely different way of conceptualising the relationship between the political and the aesthetic, that goes beyond the idea of art as expressing a certain *experience*: "if speed is something that everyone can understand, and pulling the trigger is something very few can, the point of the argument (...) is that having an account of either would not help us gain a clearer account of the structures of speed and violence that characterize the world system". Drawing on Fried, Brown, Ashton, and Lukacs, Smith-Brecheisen suggests that the resulting reassertion of art's autonomy opens the path to another, better (or more accurate) representation of that historical moment: "No less, if what differentiates these works by Kushner and Everett from those of their contemporaries is the effort to overturn the commitment to unwinding the ontology of the work of art, the assertion of an internal aesthetic logic, or self-legislating form, is the means through which the work of art can render a picture of the period that does not depend on atomized experiences of a world system defined by US financial hegemony."

Sibyl Gallus-Price's *Why Photography Mattered (1847) As Art More Than Ever Before* – with its title an obvious play on Michael Fried's *Why*



*Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, an important point of reference for Gallus-Price – offers an in-depth interpretation of César Aira's *An Episode in the Life of a Landscape Painter*, as well as a wider commentary on the relation between picture/photography and the historical transition from Modernism to whatever it is that comes after. The article is built upon two intertwined arguments or lines of thought: on the one hand, Aira's reflection on the nature of art and the work of an artist (which he offers through the medium of a novel, specifically the story of the painter Johan Mortiz Rugendas' visit to Argentina and his near-death experience); on the other hand, Rosalind Krauss' attack on Modernism, which began with her "mobilizing the indexical qualities of the photograph". Ultimately highly critical of both Aira and Krauss, Gallus-Price highlights the similarities between the two – how Aira recasts a landscape artist as something close to Krauss' photographer – as well as some crucial differences: "Aira, raising the stakes on (...) Krauss's notion of the photograph, imagines an art that coincides not with our ideas or even strictly our experience but an art that coincides with the artificial landscape made internal, one in sync with the cognitive plasticity of our brain, thought in itself arrested in perpetua." This leads Aira, according to Gallus-Price, to abandon the idea of a work (at least in any meaningful sense of the word) altogether – in favour of an account of art that is purely causal and almost automatic: "In writing and forgetting, Aira abandons the work of the novel and the work of art, and like Rugendas, his 19th-century post-accident counterpart, conjures art as a kind of automaticity, an accumulation beholden more to an architecture of aleatory causal forces than to composition. (...) This is what it means to turn the painter — or in Aira's own case, the writer — into a conduit. Each time he writes he's struck by lightning — automatic writing." The politics of such an aesthetics is, as Gallus-Price suggests, ultimately Deleuzian – and entirely compatible with the notion of post-Art.

Eugenio Di Stefano's article on Carlos Reygadas' film *Serenghetti* (*The Rules of the Game in Carlos Reygadas's Serenghetti*) offers both an in-depth interpretation of a single film, as well as comments on the state and theoretical foundations of certain traditions in film criticism. Di Stefano shows how *Serenghetti* – an ostensibly, or superficially, non-fictional movie about a game of football – can, by insisting on a certain idea of fiction (as well as its own fictionality), offer a critique of anti-intentionalism and anti-representationalism that underlies much of slow cinema scholarship (and, more generally, contemporary cultural theory as such). Drawing on Michael Fried's famous distinction between theatricality

and absorption, Di Stefano highlights the ways in which the film in question “mobiliz[es] (...) antitheatrical elements to assert its status as a work of art”; meanwhile, a more critical reading of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s work allows him to draw attention to difference between watching a game and interpreting art. In fact (as Di Stefano points out, while referencing Michaels and Stanley Cavell), it is the very difference between a game and a work of art – and the risk of conflating the two – that ultimately allows Reygadas to reassert the autonomy of his work: “the point is not that Reygadas simply intends to capture a game, but rather that he intends to use the game as a subject matter to transform the film into an independent and unified whole. That is, the idea here is to transform the film from the experience of the game into an object that needs to be analyzed in its status as an artwork.” In this sense, Reygadas’ work offers something like political critique: “*Serenghetti* should not be understood as an escape from neoliberalism in Mexico today, but rather as offering a repudiation of this ideology by emphasizing interpretation over mere experience.”

Adam Partyka’s *The Boundaries of an Organism: Purposefulness and Autonomy* offers both historical and theoretical commentary on the organicist conception of art – and more specifically, the well-known metaphor of the work of art/literature as a living organism. Starting with Coleridge, Partyka shows how the Romantic version of said metaphor did not – perhaps somewhat contrary to our intuitions – imply a severance of the link between the work and the author, but quite the contrary: “Speaking of a work of art in Coleridgean terms of organic unity, one never disarticulates it from the author. Rather, the organic metaphor so conceived is a very means of securing the place of the author, whose task, modelled after the process of divine creation, consists in transferring onto a poem a certain quality, initially characteristic of the creative process—a quality of organic form.” Tracing its subsequent transformations, Partyka then shows how the meaning of the same metaphor was all but reversed, or turned upside down, by New Criticism – where the comparison between a work of art and a living being suddenly came to imply the former’s complete functional independence of the author. Partyka draws on Fried, Ashton, and Michaels to criticise this reversal, before showing how the anti-intentionalist version of organicism was later inherited by postmodernism (or literalism). Finally, Partyka returns to Kant to both highlight the possible roots of Coleridge’s ideas, and to offer a more comprehensive account of the organicist notion of art. Referencing Brown – and drawing parallels between Kant’s “determining idea”, Coleridge’s “internal law”, and Anscombe’s account of intentional

action – Partyka discovers important similarities between all of them: “This is not to say that either Kant or Coleridge defended an Anscombian understanding of intention, or that they shared Fried’s commitment to frame; it is rather to say that they both inquired into how beauty and form are possible, and the notions of purpose, unity and normativity they found indispensable to this task point to the same conceptual dependence of meaning upon intention that is revealed in the writings of Anscombe, Fried, Cavell, and, notably, Michaels. This is why it seems appropriate to say that modern organicism—the one that secured autonomy—was always about frame, and it was always about intention, variously dubbed.” This “intentionalist” version of “modern organicist” aesthetics – notably different from the postmodern version – carries some political importance, to the extent that it furthers our understanding of art’s purposiveness, its autonomy, and its ability to resist the market.

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These four articles are aimed at developing our understanding of autonomy, and pushing the current debate forward. Meanwhile, the last part of the issue is directed specifically to our Polish readers, in an attempt to make the general framework of the debate more accessible to them: it is a Polish translation of the first chapter of Nicholas Brown’s *Autonomy: the Social Ontology of Art under Capitalism* (translated by Łukasz Żurek and edited by Paweł Kaczmarski). We trust this translation – one of the few “intentionalist” works now available in Polish, beyond the flawed 2011 translation of Michaels’ seminal *The Shape of the Signifier* – will encourage our Polish colleagues and comrades to become more invested in the ongoing debate. After all, what is at stake – art’s place in a market society, its irreducibility to commodity status and its ability to signal opposition to market absolutism – is at least as important to the countries of the former Eastern Bloc as it is to everyone else across the world.

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autonomy now





DAVIS SMITH-BRECHEISEN

## The Pivotal Decade Revisited, or the Contemporary Novel of the Seventies

This paper takes up the recent turn in the contemporary novel to the aesthetic and economic debates of the 1970s as ways of thematizing their own aesthetic and political ambitions. Turning to art's legibility within a matrix of global economic relations, I argue for the political importance of two recent novels — Percival Everett's *So Much Blue* and Rachel Kushner's *The Flamethrowers* — that not only dramatize a particular moment of economic violence in the 1970s (the expansion of US hegemony via financial instruments), but formalize the era's aesthetic upheaval (the turn from modernism to postmodernism). In doing so, they offer a vision of the politics of literature not dependent on our experience of capitalism but which looks instead to the formation of a political and economic regime that has come to govern the world system under capitalism in the twenty-first century.

**Keywords:** Modernism, Contemporary Novel, Seventies, Value, Neoliberalism, Experience, art

Since 2013 there has been a notable uptick in novels about the 1970s by some of contemporary fiction's most notable writers: Meg Wolitzer's *The Interestings*, Jonathan Lethem's *Dissident Gardens*, Jhumpa Lahiri's, *The Lowland*, Lauren Groff's *Arcadia*, Rachel Kushner's *The Flamethrowers*, Percival Everett's *So Much Blue*, and to some degree Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, notable among them. Thomas Pynchon returned to the early 1970s with *Inherent Vice* (although maybe he never left it). And Ben Lerner's *10:04* returns to the aesthetic dilemmas of the 1970s, if its political anxieties remain decidedly forward looking. Though this essay's scope is limited to two of these novels — *So Much Blue* and *The Flamethrowers* — its aim is to produce an account of how, by returning to a fraught moment of economic and aesthetic upheaval, contemporary novels focused on the 1970s not only grapple with this history, but potentially revitalize political and aesthetic forms in the present. That economic upheaval is, famously, the moment in the early 1970s when the United States abandoned, as Judith Stein puts it in *The Pivotal Decade*, “factories for finance,” an economic shift both born of crisis and transformative in the kinds of crises it would produce, domestically and globally (Stein 2010). The story is by now familiar: Faced with declining rates of profit and growing expenditures domestically and abroad, policymakers in the United States pursued a series of policies — including floating the dollar and imposing austerity measures — that transformed the United States economy from one rooted in manufacturing to one that relied on the financial sector. In much the same way, United States policymakers seized upon the economic crisis of the early 1970s to justify domestic austerity measures that were crucial to the formation of a neoliberal economic regime that has since become more or less economic dogma, the IMF (underwritten by US banks) was doing the same globally as a way of, in effect, disciplining the global economy into adopting this new economic regime.

The period's aesthetic upheaval — the ostensible abandonment of modernism for postmodernism — proved no less pivotal, if less economically consequential. Here, I mean the rise of a particular ontological problem in this history of art and the history of the novel. In the history of art, it is a problem traceable to two foundational essays, Donald Judd's “Specific Objects” (1965) and Michael Fried's “Art & Objecthood” published two years later. In the history of the novel, it is traceable to what has since become a manifesto for postmodern literature, John Barth's 1967 essay “The Literature of Exhaustion” where he lays out what he would describe as his “mixed feelings” (Barth 1984, 62) about the heady avant-garde arts of the sixties and the dissolution

of high modernism. Beginning with “Specific Objects”, Judd began to codify what Fried called Literalism, but which is more broadly called Minimalism, by insisting that the “rectangular plane” has used up its “given... life span” and thus called for a new kind of art conceived in “actual space” — these works, he believed, were “intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a surface” (Judd 1965). I will shortly return to this debate, but for now it is enough to point out that this shift away from the wall and into “actual space” entailed making the beholder’s experience central to what it meant to make or even conceive of ambitious art. This was no less true for a certain strain of the novel. Sounding a lot like Judd, Barth too points to the “the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities” (Barth 1984, 64) of the novel as a form. And Barth too posits a solution, one that is by now famous: To write novels “which imitate the form of the Novel by an author who imitates the role of the Author” (Barth 1984, 72). This is almost Jameson’s exact definition of postmodern pastiche: As “modernist styles... become postmodernist codes” what’s left is the “the cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion” (Jameson 1992, 17). Or, as Barth puts it, through a kind of recursive framing, the work of the postmodernist writer: “Neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his twentieth-century modernist parents or his nineteenth-century pre-modernist grandparents. He has the first half of [the twentieth] century under his belt. But not on his back” (Barth 1984, 203). What is crucial for the ontological problem as it plays out in the contemporary novel is not pastiche *per se*, but the ways pastiche has historically been leveraged as an appeal to the subjectivized experience of the reader: By ironically framing high modernism (or realism), the postmodernist author indulges a fantasy that, liberated from the demands art might make on its readers, the novel might instead appeal to the reader’s tastes and thus aspire to a “fiction more democratic in its appeal” (Barth 1984, 203). Unlike, their High Modernist forbearers who, Barth argues, could reach only “professional devotees of high art” (Barth 1984, 203) postmodernist authors chart a path forward by reconfiguring the relationship between the work and the reader, such that was once immanent to the work, is conceived (like art in actual space) in a situation with a reader. Notably, there is not all that much disagreement about the aims of postmodern literature: In both Jameson’s and Barth’s accounts the novel is reconfigured with the reader in mind. The disagreement lies instead over the attractiveness of postmodernism’s solution to the felt exhaustion of high modernism — what Jameson laments, Barth celebrates.

The 1970s proved, in other words, pivotal in more ways than one. Economically, the financialization of the US economy fundamentally reshaped the global economy. Aesthetically, the emergence of postmodernism ushered in a set of aesthetic commitments that, in opening the work to the reader, posed an ontological threat to the work of art. This is the economic and aesthetic situation inherited by contemporary novels. Focusing on *So Much Blue* and *The Flamethrowers*, I demonstrate what it might look like for the contemporary novel to tether the period's aesthetic upheaval to its economic one — not only by returning to the socioeconomic restructuring of the era from the standpoint of the present, but by staging the aesthetic conflicts of the period, drawing both into the present. Each of these novels, I argue, affirms a more or less explicit link between the economic restructuring of the mid-1970s and the financial crises that it would produce, while at the same time positing what it means for a work of art to represent that long history.

Jameson, of course, has famously argued that this state of affairs meant that the postmodern novel “can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only represent our ideas and stereotypes about that past” (Jameson 1992, 25). But if it is true that as a result of this meta-historical turn that “we are condemned to seek History by way of our pop images and simulacra of that history”, (Jameson 1992, 25) it is nonetheless true that representations of that history by some recent ambitious novels are illuminating it new ways. As Treasa De Loughry has recently argued, *The Flamethrowers* takes up “Jameson’s spatial revision of Lukacs’s class consciousness” (De Loughry 2020, 14) to address United States’ global dominance, “figuring class revolutions, extractive politics, and uneven displacements” (De Loughry 2020, 172) as belonging to a single structure, even — or especially — when that fact eludes the characters of the novel. Thus *The Flamethrowers* — and I will argue *So Much Blue* as well — grasps what its characters cannot, because the standpoint of the novel is not beholden to any particular experience of the world-system. De Loughry sees this structural relationship between plot and character within the novel as a formal effort that “meta-fictionalises ways of seeing capitalism” and in turn requires “the overview of the world-historical reader” (De Loughry 2020, 172). I will put the point slightly differently, however: Just as this turn to the world-system entails the attenuation of the particularity of the experience of its characters, it no less demands overcoming or suspending the particularity of the “world-historical reader.” It is my argument here that insofar as *So Much Blue* and *The Flamethrowers* are invested in the economic structures themselves — as opposed to our experience of them — the portrait

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of the period that will emerge is one that emphasizes abstract, unseen, and at times, unfelt structures of exploitation. This investment in (and insistence on) a structural view of the world system, I argue, depends on asserting the novel's particularity and legibility within a matrix of global, social and economic forces. It is precisely by framing aesthetic experience rather than appealing to it that these novels assert literary form as the "other to capitalist society," (Brown 2019, 9) offering a vision of the politics of literature that grasps the formation of a political and economic regime that has come to govern the world system under capitalism in the Twenty-First Century.

### So Much Blue

Kevin Pace, painter and narrator of Percival Everett's *So Much Blue*, opens the novel by saying he will "begin with dimensions. As one should" (Everett 2017, 4). The reason to begin with dimensions, he says, is that the "dimensions of an object are independent of the space in which that object is embedded" (Everett 2017, 4). Although the narrator admits that he is not quite sure exactly what this means, it is clear he understands the importance of the shape of the canvas relative to the space it is in: The canvas is "twelve feet high and twenty-one feet and three inches across" (Everett 2017, 4). The three inches, though he cannot explain those either, are, "crucial to the work" (Everett 2017, 4). They are not, however, crucial to the "volume of the room," which is "ten thousand five hundred cubic feet" (Everett 2017, 4). Immediately, then, Kevin sees the particular shape of the canvas as "independent of the space in which it is embedded" (Everett 2017, 4). And it is not just the shape of the canvas that matters to Kevin but the relation of the literal shape of the canvas to the depicted shape on it: when the narrator begins by describing the ways cerulean is "blending" (or perhaps "bleeding") into cobalt in the "upper right hand corner of the painting," (Everett 2017, 4) he suggests that the aim is not only to thematize the plane of the canvas, but, by beginning with the corner of the canvas, its frame against the dimensions and volume of the room (Everett 2017, 4). The point would seem to be to produce a work that is irreducible to the space that houses it.

The relationship posited here, between the canvas and the space in which it is embedded, will unfold throughout the novel in what appears in many respects as an altogether different register — as the relation between the work of art and the world it represents. *So Much Blue* follows

Kevin from his early days as a young art student and revolutionary interloper, to a rising star in the art world in Paris, and ultimately to a disaffected partner, father, and artist. The novel traces these three narratives in three different, largely disconnected strands — what binds and punctuates them is the painting. Told from the novel's present in the mid-2000s, Kevin recalls the stories of two secrets that continue to haunt him. One, set in the early nineties, recounts Kevin's affair with a younger French woman. This cliché is largely unimportant except that it throws into stark relief a categorically different kind of transgression traced in the other narrative. There, the earliest chronologically, Kevin is a young art student in Philadelphia who travels to in El Salvador in May of 1979, on the eve of its military's effort to seize power, to search for the missing brother of his closest friend, Richard. What happens there is the stuff of nightmares as they travel through a countryside riven by violence, escorted by "The Bummer," a Vietnam veteran and war criminal turned mercenary who has agreed to help (for a fee). The horror of the trip culminates when Kevin finds himself caught up in reactionary violence during which he shoots and kills a police officer. That moment of pulling the trigger — though he has no "physical memory" (Everett 2017, 197) of it — is the subject of his painting. More accurately, the painting is intended to index his experience: Its blues are the blues of his nightmare in El Salvador, which Kevin describes as "rich in blues, more cerulean than the blues at home" (Everett 2017, 21) in Philadelphia — perhaps the cobalt of the painting evokes the "the blue... '63 Caddy Coupe de Ville" or the pthalo blue evokes the police officer's "light blue socks" (Everett 2017, 21).

Because the painting is the record of the narrator's secret past, which is the content of the novel, Kevin believes it too must be held in secret. But what happens to art when its meaning is imagined to be a secret, or a matter of private experience? Asking and answering this question, the novel raises a related problem about the limits of viewing history in similarly experiential terms. When it comes to the period in question — the 1970s — politicians, scholars, and critics frequently frame their accounts in experiential or affective terms — from Jimmy Carter's so-called "crisis of confidence" speech to Jefferson Cowie's framing of the economic upheaval in largely cultural terms in history of the era, *Staying Alive*. More recently Nicholas Dames has noted something more than Jameson's historical pastiche in these contemporary novels of the 1970s, suggesting that they imagine "something uniquely vital to the decade, and in fact uniquely to be missed" (Dames "Seventies Throwback Fiction"). What is uniquely vital is what he takes to be fact — that "the

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defeated, demoralized Seventies” were an “open dissolution” (Dames) of, among other things, the economic and political energies of the sixties. What is “uniquely to be missed” is not the era of stagflation, the breakup of the Beatles, oil embargos, and FM radio, but rather a moment of stillness before “the feeling of inevitability” (Dames) that characterizes so much history of the period would set in. Inevitability is, he writes, “neoliberalism’s best ally” (Dames). For Dames, what gives histories of the period their sense of inevitability is the attention to structural causes and what makes the contemporary novels’ return to the period unique is that they grasp something more affective about the dwindling of economic and political possibility. To take one example in brief, he suggests the ambitions of Lauren Goff’s *Arcadia* – a novel about a failed commune in the 1970s – lie in its emphasis on mood, which he describes as one of melancholy and tenderness. Because of this, he writes, it “remains in one sense more supple than the economic theories and social histories that otherwise have such convincing explanations for the meaning of the Seventies” (Dames). And thus, he suggests, it is more alive to the “open dissolution” of the social compact that had governed the postwar order. Dames, however, takes it for granted that the economic events of the 1970s were in fact an “open dissolution” when, in fact, it might be better seen as a re-entrenchment. No doubt the era saw the dismantling of, for example, the global working class and the unions that protected it and, importantly, that dismantling occurred as part of the dissolution of the postwar liberal pact between labor and capital. Despite the fact that the effects of this characterized many people’s experiences of the era, this dismantling was in another very real way less a dissolution of the United States economic order than it was a tightening of the financial industry’s hold on it, a trade between factories and finance that proved to be decisive in the renewal of the imperial project of the United States that began in the wake of World War II.

In other words, what was experienced by some as an open dissolution was for others an economic boon brought about not as a matter of dissolution but as the “solution” to the economic crises of the period. That solution, pursued by politicians and economists in the United States, was to “free” capital from the strictures of gold, and more importantly, labor, so that financial instruments could be treated as an export. Freeing capital meant not only fostering an economy that would allow capital to function as an export, but implementing economic austerity measures — punishing loan terms, wage freezes, relaxed labor laws, and deep cuts to social programs — that have since become economic dogma on the Right and neoliberal Left. The result then, as it was after the

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collapse and bailouts of 2008, was the consolidation of the US financial markets' hold on the global economy and massive upward wealth redistribution. From the standpoint of the individual, what was experienced as an economic nadir in the 1970s as well as in the decade since 2008, was, from the standpoint of the state, a moment of massive economic expansion. And what was experienced as a nadir by poor and middle-class people was experienced by the wealthy as a boon. The fact that the moment was and continues to be described as a felt nadir by observers such as Jimmy Carter and Nicholas Dames only mystifies this fact. By contrast, removing the question of experience from the question of economic violence yields a significantly different portrait of the period, one that doesn't hinge on our nostalgia for it (or any other experience).

This begins to suggest the limits not only of an historical account grounded in the individualized experiences of the moment, but of an aesthetic project that is similarly invested in thinking through this social history in experiential terms. Of course, it would be true of virtually any novel to say that it traffics in the experiences that characters have at a particular historical moment, and thus it is expected to be more alive to the experience of living through economic transitions than an economic theory. Indeed, I have begun to suggest how the experience of history is central to *So Much Blue* in its framing of the violence in El Salvador, as Kevin becomes a participant in the clash between the Salvadoran military and revolutionary groups without having any sense of nature of the conflict. For most of the novel, in fact, the violence plaguing El Salvador exists just outside of the frame as they either follow or flee it. In other words, the novel is less interested in producing an account of history than it is in thrusting its characters into the middle of it. Narratively speaking, the novel makes a point to highlight how little the characters know or care about the revolutionary foment. This too is the point of the painting, which is not an effort to capture the historical circumstances that led to the attempted coup in El Salvador or the US-Backed effort to suppress the revolution but is instead an effort to index Kevin's experiences.

Given that the painting is an index of his experiences, it should be no surprise that its blues evoke the blues of his intervention in El Salvador for him alone, in part explaining why the revelation of the painting at the novel's conclusion is a catastrophe. Kevin has kept the painting, like the incident, a secret from everyone because its significance is so specific that he could not stand for its beholders to impose their own names and stories on it. Given the painting's importance and its particularity, it is both ironic and, in a way, unsurprising that it ultimately



fails to hold the same explanatory power for his wife when he finally does reveal it to her. Tired of living with the hash he has made of his life, in part from carrying the burden of his intervention in El Salvador, Kevin decides to show his wife the painting in lieu of an apology. Her response to the work gives the novel its title: “So much blue,” she says, confused (Everett 2017, 242). Her confusion prompts his explanation of the painting’s significance — “Now you know everything” (Everett 2017, 242). Unsurprisingly, this explanation too fails. It is hard to imagine how the painting could succeed at the impossible task it has been given. To be successful — for it to reveal “everything” — the painting would have to identify and transmit specific experiences of the blues of El Salvador — weather, socks, Cadillacs, and dead bodies — in such a way that the experience of violence could not be mistaken by the beholder. That is, because the painting is indexically linked to and is thus inseparable from the world, it differs from those that are “waiting to be considered, bought, and hung on living room walls or in bank lobbies” (Everett 2017, 4). The suggestion, of course, is that what happens after the work is sold is of no concern to him.

This painting, however, is different because it indexes his experiences and thus, he believes, it is not open to interpretation. This both distinguishes it from an apology which could be misunderstood and accounts for why he shows his wife the painting instead of explaining to her what happened or apologizing. Kevin is “done with apologies,” (Everett 2017, 242) he says, because they are no more than “empty words” (Everett 2017, 242), the very thing the indexical nature of the painting is intended to guard against. The failure of the painting, in this light, is both a tragic-comic conclusion to the novel and a theoretical point about the relationship between beholder and the work of art. Why would one be subject to the emptiness of language and the other not? The narrator is instructive here, when early in the novel he says that he regards the names of the paints he uses as proper names: “Color names” are “proper names” in that “they give us no information about the things named but identify those things specifically” (Everett 2017, 4). To the extent that the name of the color does not refer to any particular feature of the color or denote something about it, but simply is the color, it — like presence of the blues on the canvas — “need not and does not *describe* anything” (Everett 2017, 4). Channeling Gertrude Stein’s reflections on proper names, his point is that because color names “identify” colors specifically rather than denoting anything about them, they can “never make mistakes can never be mistaken” (Stein 1998, 315). In this view, they are not subject to emptiness and thus can never fail because they

are indexically linked to their subject. Insofar as the narrator wants to believe that the painting is not subject to the same kind of indeterminacy or ambiguity as “empty words”, he extends this theory of color names as proper names to the painting itself. The point, then, is that whether the aim is to indulge in the fantasy that the proper name avoids the problems of referentiality (problems such as indeterminacy and emptiness) or to see the world and art as though they are indistinguishable from one another (the blues of the canvas are the blues of political violence), the result in both cases is a commitment on the part of the narrator to art that would insist on the inseparability between the work and the world; to refuse, that is, the gap between signifier and signified entailed by referentiality where the emptiness of language might creep in. Put this way, the painting, as imagined here would neither make mistakes; nor could it be “mistaken.”

But of course, it is mistaken or misunderstood, and in the moment of his failed apology the novel answers the question posed above about what happens to art when its meaning is imagined to be a matter of private experience. Writing around the same moment as Barth and more than 50 years before *So Much Blue* was published, Michael Fried describes this dynamic in “Art and Objecthood,” by arguing that the conflict between modernist works of art and what he calls literalism – or minimalism – depends on the former’s assertion of its own autonomy by “the mutual inflection of one element by another” and the latter’s rejection of it by taking “the relationships out of the work” and imagining the work’s significance in relation to the situation in which the work is encountered. As Fried notes, the minimalist Robert Morris makes this point explicit: “whereas in previous art ‘what is to be had from the work is located strictly within [it]’” in the new literalist art, “the experience... is of an object in a *situation* — one that, virtually by definition, *includes the beholder*” (Fried 1998, 153, italics in original). Here the stakes of Kevin’s theoretical error comes more sharply into view: The work that would achieve its irreducibility by aspiring to, in effect, become the object it represents, whether that object is a pair of socks or the act of violence itself, cannot help but subject itself to the experience of the beholder.

The novel begins with an account of art that intends to assert its irreducibility to the space around it and ends with that same work suspended before a beholder having failed to produce its intended response. It is tempting to say that the cost of retaining its irreducibility is uninterpretability – that without a gesture or appeal, the beholder of the painting is held in a “strange ontological state,” as John Barth put

it a generation before *So Much Blue* was written (Barth). However, in the distance between the narrator's response to the work – his belief that the painting has explained “everything” – and his wife's response – her sense that the painting has explained nothing at all, the novel points to a slightly different problem: The radicalized commitment to indexicality by which the narrator pursues the work's irreducibility erodes the distinction between the work and the world it had intended to secure. Paradoxically, his aesthetic commitment to the inseparability between the world and the work effectively collapses one into the other and thus his project ensures the experience of the beholder is the aesthetic horizon of the work. What the painting's failure at the novel's conclusion makes clear is that from the standpoint of the novel the appeal to the beholder is a problem for art and, in particular, for political art. That his experiences in El Salvador simply fail to produce anything like a coherent or robust account what happened. This seems to me the importance of the novel's tragicomic conclusion when the narrative like the work of art collapses with a single glance. By this I mean *So Much Blue* grasps the limits of historical narratives that valorize the particularized experiences of it, something that observers and commentators of both the 1970s and the present moment of crisis and imperialism rarely do.

### A Trace of a Trace

Like Kevin Pace, the primary narrator of Rachel Kushner's *The Flamethrowers* is a hapless American caught up in the revolutionary affairs of others, finding herself caught in a moment of revolutionary foment in the late 1970s, not in El Salvador in 1979, however, but in Rome in 1977. Unlike Kevin Pace, however, Reno (so called because it is her birthplace) doesn't kill anyone. At least, she doesn't pull the trigger herself. Instead, she helps a leader of the Red Brigades disappear into the Alps from where he likely plans the assassination of Roberto Valera who is the eldest son of a Fascist general (one of Mussolini's), head of Moto Valera (a fictional motorcycle company), and brother to Sandro (an artist and Reno's lover). Reno is not herself a revolutionary any more than Kevin is. Instead, like him, she finds herself embroiled in revolutionary action through a series of personal accidents when, after discovering Sandro in the embrace of another woman, she flees with the Valera's family mechanic into the open arms of the Revolution.

Many commentators have emphasized that this moment galvanizes not only the plot, but Reno's ignorance and fungibility. She is, as Myka

Tucker-Abramson points out, “the idiot of the novel” (Tucker-Abramson 2019, 86), citing above all her passivity in the face of world-historical events. Similarly, James Wood — who describes Reno as “dangerously porous” and the novel as “cunningly alive” to our “mobile, flashing present” (Wood 2013) — suggests that it is this passivity that fashions Reno a kind of narrative technology that allows the world to unfold around her. This tracks somewhat with what Kushner herself has said of Reno, describing her as “something like a medium, the reader’s witness to see and interpret what goes on around her” (Lee 2014). The point would seem to be that as a medium Reno is almost transparent, a vessel through which Kushner conjures a seemingly unmediated view into the art world of the long 1970s — little more than a “conduit,” (Kushner 2013, 30) as Sandro calls her. No doubt Reno’s passivity allows her to drift from the art scene in New York City to a worker’s revolt in Italy without much difficulty and the fact that she fails to grasp the significance of either surely makes her the “the idiot of the novel.” Tucker-Abramson and Wood, however different their readings of the novel are otherwise, suggest that the passivity is the point: It is what allows the novel to “pattern global political and economic shifts” (De Loughry 2020, 184) without the question of mediation getting too much in the way. Rachel Greenwald Smith highlights this as a mistake, however, when she suggests that Reno’s “passive posture” (Greenwald-Smith 2016, 192) as a medium mistakenly affords readings that are not overly concerned “with the questions of mediation and artificiality that it might otherwise highlight, because Reno seems like a reliable and neutral vehicle for the registration of a larger social landscape” (Greenwald-Smith 2016, 192). Her point is that “the illusion of direct, unmediated experience” of art in *The Flamethrowers* is precisely what the novel warns the reader against. This is true politically and aesthetically speaking.

Reno is also, like Kevin Pace, an artist. In *The Flamethrowers* it is photography and its relation to Literalism rather than painting that occupies a central place in thematizing the relation between art and politics. Early in the novel, Reno leaves New York City for the Salt Flats of Utah to create a photography series that has its origins in the tracks left in the expansive flats by her speeding Moto Valera. Ideally, she thinks, the photographs would capture the experience of what it means to feel the “milliseconds of life” as her bike raced across the desert. But because Reno’s photographs would merely represent the lines in the dirt made by her Moto Valera bike, themselves indexes of that speed, her images, she worries, “would be nothing but a trace. A trace of a trace” and thus “They might fail entirely to capture... the experience of speed” (Kush-

ner 2013, 30). Reno's hope is that her photographs, as indexes of the lines, will not only capture the trace of her speed, but communicate its experience. She wants, in effect, to make art that cannot be framed, only experienced. Put this way, Reno's aesthetic commitments echo not only Tony Heizer's motorcycle drawing (in *Circular Surface Planar Displacement*), but also the sentiments of Tony Smith, who famously reformed his view on art after a nocturnal drive on the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike. As he describes the scene, the effect of the "dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance... was to liberate [him] from many of the views [he] had had about art... There is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it" (Fried 1998, 158). Likewise, Reno's description of her ride emphasizes this experience: "Nothing mattered but the milliseconds of life at that speed. Far ahead of me, the salt flats and mountains conspired into one puddle vortex" (Kushner 2013, 30). Picking up on this shared concern, Ben Lerner describes Reno's art as "a project Smith would have understood and Fried would have hated" (Lerner 2013). When Smith says of the nocturnal drive on the turnpike, "You just have to experience it" he means that the work's meaning is indistinguishable from one's experience of it. Experience, crucially, is "something everyone can understand," (Fried 1998, 158), not unlike the "experience of speed." So, according to literalists like Smith and Reno, the aim of art is—or should be—to produce the right kind of experience. In an ideal case, like the nocturnal drive on the New Jersey Turnpike or speeding across the Salt Flats, the experience of the beholder becomes indistinguishable from, or continuous with, the work. What makes photography attractive to Reno, then, is what she perceives as both its indexical connection to the world — there are no photographs of lines in the dirt without lines of the dirt — and its address to the beholder, who — if the photographs had not been so "ephemeral" — would have experienced the photographs as the experience of speed itself.

In triangulating this relationship between the work of art, the world, and the beholder's or reader's experience of it, the turn to photography in *The Flamethrowers* is particularly clarifying. Insofar as the question of photography has become emblematic of the inseparability of the work from the world, it has also become, as Walter Benn Michaels has recently argued, "a test case for the effort...nevertheless to separate" (Michaels 2016, 9) the work of art from the world and, no less, from the experience of the beholder. In other words, if what makes photography unique as a medium is the fact of its connection to the world, it is also the case, as *The Flamethrowers* points out, that indexicality is no guaran-

I mean here to point out that *The Flamethrowers*, like *So Much Blue*, exploits the illusion of indexicality and immediacy.

tee of the work's ability to transmit the experience of those lines and certainly not their creation, which is what makes them a "trace of a trace." If this point seems practically obvious, it is no less theoretically a problem for photography, and more immediately for the novel at hand, which pins its success as a work of art on its ability to "frame the liberatory and dangerous energies that attend breaking down the frame that separates art and life" (Lerner 2019).

I mean here to point out that *The Flamethrowers*, like *So Much Blue*, exploits the illusion of indexicality and immediacy. And perhaps even more so than in *So Much Blue* the illusion of immediacy should be readily available, considering that Reno's first-person narrative is not the only narrative perspective in the novel. The novel moves between two time periods — the 1970s and an earlier, pre-Fascist moment in Italy. In the earlier moment leading up to WWII in Italy, T.P. Valera joins a group of Marinetti-esque Futurists, becomes a Fascist, founds Moto Valera, and builds a vast economic empire through what amounts to slave labor in Brazil. In the later moment where Robert Smithson and Gordon Matta-Clark haunt the novel's margins, Reno couples with Valera's son, Sandro, heads to the desert, and becomes an unwitting accomplice in the revolutionary attempt to overthrow the empire the elder Valera built. Notably, the earlier moment is narrated in the third-person and reads more like sketches or vignettes of the life of Valera as he makes the short leap from Futurist to Fascist, while the later moment (Reno's) is narrated in the first person by Reno, marked by the illusion of "neutrality." Despite this narrative difference, the parallels between the two moments are unmistakable. When Reno races into a vortex of mountains and desert, her desire to capture the experience of speed evokes not only Tony Smith's reflections on the New Jersey Turnpike, but Valera's early conversion to Futurism in pre-war Italy: "streaming through the dark...under the glow of argon and neon," his velocity is matched only by his commitment to "smashing and crushing every outmoded and traditional idea...every past thing" (Kushner 2013, 43, 74). As Marinetti suggests, then, "the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed," and no less enriched by violence: Poetry, and as the Futurist project would bear out, all art "must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown" (Marinetti 1909).

No less, in linking these two moments via shared aesthetic project the novel is able not only to move between the Futurist Fascist moment of pre-war Italy and Literalist imperialist moment of the present, but to yoke this shared aesthetic commitment to economic violence. To bear this out, crucially, in the latter moment, Reno's is not the only literalist

project. Sandro, Valera's youngest son, takes up a strand of Modernism Judd understood himself to be inhabiting in "Specific Objects" and that Fried attacks in "Art and Objecthood" to the extent that his aluminum boxes are more or less identical to Judd's milled aluminum works. In this vein, rather than make the appeal to the experience of the beholder explicit, as Reno does, Sandro insists on his desire for works of art that are simply, almost directly quoting Fried, "meant to be the objects themselves" (Fried 1998, 93). Where Reno wants an artwork that is nothing but experience, Sandro wants to make art that is nothing but an object. Despite this apparent difference, however, the aspirations of their art are in a crucial sense indistinguishable insofar as the Literalist work (as I have already argued) "stakes everything on shape as a given property of objects" and thus derives its force from its encounter in "actual space" (Fried 1998, 155) with the beholder. Here again, to speak of objecthood is to speak of the appeal to the beholder and to speak of the experience of the beholder is to conceive of the work in terms of its status as an object. The two most central figures in *The Flamethrowers* — Reno and Sandro — are also its most central figurations of art and in their coupling the novel likewise couples experience and objecthood.

To emphasize Sandro's literalist commitment to the beholder is also to suggest that Sandro and his father — both counter-revolutionaries — are bound as much by an aesthetic genealogy as they are by a familial one. As many critics have pointed out, the novel figures the violence of the post-war economic boom most directly via the history of the Valera company from its strike-breaking production plants in Italy to its slave-labor-based rubber extraction in Brazil. Here, I want to suggest that this regime is no less central to the novel's United States sections and moreover that the link between these two sections is more than contingent. It is, rather, an effort on the part of the novel to grapple with a tectonic shift in the global economy. A number of historians have pointed out how, in the wake of its bankruptcy in 1975, and facing an eroding tax base and default on its debt, New York City turned governance over to an emergency management board that pioneered austerity measures that have become hallmarks of our current economic order: cuts to social programs, privatization, and disciplining labor (Panitch and Gindin 2013, 165). Put simply, the "radical restructuring" of New York in the mid-seventies would lay the groundwork for the radical restructuring of the global economic order around the financial sector.

Thus what binds the Italian and U.S. portions of *The Flamethrowers* is not only the coupling of its principle characters, but the fact that both the "Great Compression" in the United States and the "Italian Miracle"



were likewise coupled by a world-economic system overseen by the United States in the decades following WWII. More accurately, what binds the novel is this postwar economic regime in crisis. Because the United States had ensured the dollar would act as the reserve currency underpinning this system, when United States began to borrow to cover growing domestic (The Great Society) and imperialist (Vietnam) expenditures, it placed tremendous inflationary pressure on the global system, flooding it with dollars.<sup>1</sup> Of course, The United States was forced to borrow not only because of growing expenditures but because rates of manufacturing profit were in steep decline, which is what leads Giovanni Arrighi to argue that deindustrialization and financialization entail one another, arguing that as “profitable niches in the commodity markets” begin to evaporate “capitalist organizations...retreat and shift competitive pressures” to among other areas “the money market” (Arrighi 2003, 51).

What followed from these twinned crises is the by-now-familiar narrative of the pivot from factories to finance in the United States — a transition that I have already begun to suggest was equally pivotal globally, dilating from New York City to the rest of the world. To take advantage of the massive amounts of dollars circulating and the fact that the dollar had become recently “liberated” from gold, two major changes were taking place on Wall Street and globally. First, the SEC began an aggressive program of deregulation to “improve the function of the private financial system” by moving “as far as possible towards freedom of financial markets” (Panitch and Gindin 2013, 149). Second, the decision was made to “make securities an export” (Panitch and Gindin 2013, 148).

1 It is worth noting here that not only had the United States already flooded the global market with dollars when it began to take out loans to finance its deficit spending, but oil also continued to be priced in dollars and was spiking in price. All of those dollars needed a home and likewise found their way into the open arms of a financial industry with renewed political power domestically. As Yanis Varafoukis points out in *The Global Minotaur*, United States policymakers did not oppose with any real seriousness the oil price hikes in part because as long as oil was priced in dollars, it would be a boon to the United States economy. To the extent that the aim of floating the dollar was to finance the United States twin deficits — the fiscal deficit from functioning as a global reserve currency and the trade deficit born from its own successes rebuilding the manufacturing capacity of Japan and Germany — US Policy Makers knew they had to entice a windfall of cash back into the nation’s domestic coffers. Cheaper labor from wage freezes and union busting combined with generous interest rates had already begun by 1973 to make the United States attractive to foreign direct investment.

2 For more on the relation between this turn, the value form, and aesthetics, see Sean O’Brien “Aesthetic of Stagnation: Ashley McKenzie’s *Werewolf* and the separated Society” *Discourse* 40.2, Spring 2018, pp. 208-230.



This meant “nurturing” markets at home and abroad — a task the United States outsourced in practice to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at least insofar as the IMF backed by the US Military could export not only capital in the form of lending, but the conditions that would make that capital profitable. And in 1975-6, the United States pressed the international community to expand the mandate of the IMF so that it included the “surveillance” of individual states to ensure policies designed to secure “a western market-oriented framework,” (Panitch and Gindin 2013, 155) including capital deregulation and trade liberalization. The pivot was not just the transition from factories to finance, but the renewed imperial capacity that followed from it. Arrighi puts the point succinctly when he writes, “the main reason why the monetarist counterrevolution was so stunningly successful in reversing the decline in US power is that it brought about a massive rerouting of global capital flows towards the United States and the dollar” (Arrighi 2003, 53-54). And with that came the ability for the United States to literally rewrite the rules of the global economy and usher in the neoliberal order. It did so, I am emphasizing, both by acting as a place for countries and companies to invest all the dollars that were now circulating globally and then by recycling that capital: As dollars flowed in, banks took advantage of their cash-rich status — and favorable terms imposed by the IMF — by loaning to foreign countries. The result of which, in many cases, was massive debt. According to the Federal Reserve, US commercial banks and other creditors dramatically increased the amounts of loans to Latin American countries: “At the end of 1970, total outstanding debt from all sources totaled only \$29 billion, but by the end of 1978, that number has skyrocketed to \$159 billion. By 1982, the debt level reached \$327 billion (Federal Reserve 1997).”

In pointing to this pivot as central to *The Flamethrowers*, I join a chorus of critics — including, Myka Tucker-Abramson, Andrew Strombeck, and Treasa De Loughry — who have similarly framed the novel. Likewise, these critics have pointed out the ways in which this “fraught and explosive period in which the struggle over the uneven processes of global neoliberalism” is yoked to the “explosion of social and artistic movements that emerged in the lead up to, and fall out from the radical restructuring of New York City as a result of the fiscal crisis of 1974-1975” (Tucker-Abramson 2019, 74-75). To take just one example of the ways in which the novel is bound by the unseen and often unfelt forces of global capitalism, when Sandro laments Italy’s “financial woes,” describing it as a place “applying for an IMF loan,” beset by “inflation, unemployment” and the “oil crisis,” (Kushner 2013, 109) he might well

be describing the United States, which was grappling with all of these things, even an IMF loan in all but name. While Strombeck's analysis is comfortable in relegating the importance of "wide historical forces" (Strombeck 2015, 453) to the structure of the novel, Tucker-Abramson emphasizes the novel's interest in bringing great historical forces "into contact with one another" (Lukacs 1983, 36) and argues that art's role in the novel is to offer "a form capable of mapping and critiquing the modes of development that characterized the shifts and transformations of the 1970s" (Tucker-Abramson 2019, 80). And no doubt one wants to say that this is the case. But in Tucker-Abramson's analysis, the emphasis on the production of the work matters most and thus it is the art of Literalists like Reno and Sandro that does that cognitive work: "Sandro's fascination with industrial objects produced under artisanal conditions stands as an expression of, and rebellion against, the highly exploitative industrial production his family is engaged in that also funds the production of his art" (Tucker-Abramson 2019, 81). And it is because of this relationship that his art, "allegorizes the politics of minimalism's withdrawal from and well as its implicit dependency on, global industrial production" (Tucker-Abramson 2019, 80-81). Likewise, Reno's art, she argues, "literally concretizes" (Tucker-Abramson 2019, 82) not only the experience of speed, but the experience of commodity circulation. Her point is that insofar as it does, or would if it were successful, transmit the experience of speed, it would offer a "site of critique" because it "replicates the processes" (Tucker-Abramson 2019, 82) of capitalism.

I mean, then, to point to the ways that *The Flamethrowers* takes this moment of radical restructuring as its political horizon: The worker uprising in Italy and New York art scene are part of the same punishing economic regime. But it is not the experiential art of literalists like Sandro or Reno that grasp that, but the novel itself, which is, like Reno's art, a "trace of a trace." Or, to come at it from another direction, Reno's art "fails" not because it is a trace of a trace and thus too ephemeral, but because its desire to concretize the experience of speed in fact concertizes the experience of regime of capitalism. This is in part Ben Lerner's point in his review of *The Flamethrowers* when, noting the continuity between Reno's art and literalists like Robert Smith, he offers a sense of what is at stake in the return to the 1970s: If what "to a certain degree all historical avant-gardes...have in common is a desire to collapse art into life," Kushner's impulse is to frame that desire (Lerner 2013) Kushner, then, exploits the fungibility of the novel's narrative perspective to call attention to the fact that the "illusion of direct, unmediated experience" is precisely that, an illusion.

## Forms of Experience

Here the question of Literalism's commitment to experience and modernism's commitment to suspend or defeat that experience take on its explicitly political dimension. If "we are most of us Literalists all of our lives," (Fried 1998, 168) as Fried argues, it is because we are all of us subject to the market all of our lives, a point Nicholas Brown makes explicitly into a point about the experience of art and life under capital: Insofar as Literalism aspires "to project objecthood as such," as Fried says, "the claim made by a minimalist work to be...an object that provokes an experience... manifests the structure of the commodity" (Brown 2019, 7). That is, it manifests, or makes concrete, the logic of those networks of trade and capital flows secured by US economic hegemony. The challenge of the work of art, then, is not to "concretize" social forces for the individual but, as Emilio Sauri has recently argued, to "alter our conception of the concrete itself" (Sauri 2018, 252). This is what Lukacs means, too, when he argues that the work of literature is not to transform history into "*mass experience*" (Lukacs 1983, 23) — that is the world, or history, as it is already given — but to "channel this... historical feeling into a broad objective, epic form" (Lukacs 1983, 36). To channel, that is, mass experience into a form that "affords the means to visualize abstract functions" that "ordinary perception fails to see" (Sauri 2018, 251).

Following not only Lukacs, but Marx's critique of Hegel in *The Grundrisse*, Sauri argues that it is a mistake to place individual (or even mass) experience at the center of one's conception of concrete social forces for precisely this reason: It makes the mistake of treating "the real" material circumstances of history as thought "unfolding itself out of itself, by itself" (Marx 1973, 101). In this mental activity, "thought appropriates the concrete [and] reproduces it as the concrete in the mind" (Marx 1973, 101). In fact, as Marx argues, "the concrete is the concrete because it is concentration of many determinations" (Marx 1973, 101) that are not limited to what is perceptible. Even "the simplest economic category," say, the massive expansion of financial tools and networks in the mid-seventies, "can never exist other than as an abstract, one-sided relation within an already even, concrete, living whole" (Marx 1973, 101). Hegel's error, Marx is arguing, is to mistake "the way in which thought appropriates the concrete" for the concrete itself (Marx 1973, 101). If, in other words, the aim of the novel is to bring "into contact with one another," economic structures that US financial hegemony has wrought and thus to make visible the ways those structures

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continue to exercise control over the global economy, the aim is no less to represent those great “opposing social forces” (Lukacs 1983, 33) — say, a worker’s strike in Italy, looting during a blackout in NYC, and IMF imposed austerity — in such a way that they are represented, not as the province of experience, but as “circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx 2008, 15). Framed in these structural terms, as opposed to experiential or affective relationship, the point is that the appeal to the reader “will not yield a clearer understanding of the concrete” (Sauri 2018, 252). The work of art must not only represent the structures themselves, but “mark the irrelevance of the subject’s experience” (Suari 2018, 252) to them.

So, if speed is something that everyone can understand, and pulling the trigger is something very few can, the point of the argument so far is that having an account of either would not help us gain a clearer account of the structures of speed and violence that characterize the world system. This, I have been arguing, is the structuring logic of *The Flamethrowers*, which posits the limits of what attention to the experience of capitalism might yield at precisely the limits of Reno’s “inaction, observation, and neutrality” (Greenwald-Smith 2016, 192). But it is perhaps *So Much Blue* that more explicitly emphasizes the ways political and aesthetic experience is for art a formal dead end. Kevin, I pointed out at the beginning of the essay, has “no physical memory” of pulling the trigger of the gun that kills the police officer. The entire scene, in fact, is described in ways that disconnect Kevin from the act of killing. The pistol had sent a bullet into [the policeman’s] right cheek and through his head,” he says, “The pistol did it” (Everett 2017, 197). This disconnect is palpable throughout the novel — whether he is describing an affair in Paris or his family’s growing fragility — but it is especially poignant in the El Salvador sections of the novel, especially when it is reflecting on the death wrought by the military. Or more likely, not. In fact, the military and especially an account of why the soldiers and police are marching through the countryside and pummeling the cities is conspicuously absent. The reason, of course, is the U.S. capital-backed military effort to stamp out Left organizing between trade unions, farmers, and students that had been fomenting in the countryside. Not that any of this registers for Kevin; there is no evidence anywhere in the novel that he understands anything about what happened in El Salvador in the first place or when he returns later as part of his late-stage tour of self-discovery. In fact, the silence on the political question seems to be the point: Although the violence has a class character — The United States, driven by efforts to re-establish its economic hegemony in the

region, backed the violent regime because it viewed El Salvador as crucial to market “stability” in the region — attending to Kevin’s experiences in El Salvador won’t yield an account of the world system that is the precondition for that violence. So, rather than an evasion of political content, it is this dialectical movement between the particularity of experience and historical circumstances of that experience that gives the novel its plausibility. And, in turn, this movement allows it to make the question of art’s relationship to its economic and political content central to its form by establishing itself as the other to Kevin’s theoretical mistake. Thus, the violence is nonetheless the spine of the novel, while its plot is galvanized by two competing accounts of the work of art: Kevin’s mistaken Literalist appeal to experience on one hand, and the novel’s effort to attenuate that experience by way of its self-legislating form on the other.

I want to conclude with a final point about what’s at stake in this effort to turn the literalist content of these novels into their frame. Where previous generations of the avant-garde embraced the collapse of art into life, the novels I am discussing mark an effort “to frame the liberatory and dangerous energies that attend breaking down the frame that separates art and life” (Lerner 2013). Framing rather than reproducing the logic of these structures has meant in the present finding new avenues for asserting the unity of the text. As Jennifer Ashton has recently argued, there is no question that postmodernism — what manifests in these novels as literalism — “did indeed consign the idea of modernist autonomy to the past,” it is no less the case that “some version of the commitment to autonomy has survived or reinvented itself” (Ashton 2018, 227). For the novels I am discussing here, this passage through postmodernism is made available in the ways that aesthetic experience becomes the material of the frame.

This aesthetic point is no less a political one. In the contemporary moment, “the return to the commitment to the whole” (Ashton 2018, 227) is, I am arguing, the return to the commitment of grasping (or at least grasping at) the totality of the world system in a way that is both spatial and temporal. It is not just the world system, but the world system through history. This return to the political and aesthetic crises of the 1970s post-2008 ultimately marks an effort to draw a foundational economic shift into the present, not in the sense that this shift is experienced as the present but in the Lukacsian sense that is the precondition of it, “given and transmitted from the past.” By this I mean the financial crisis of 2008 enters these novels obliquely, as its history, traceable from the structural economic crises that emerged nearly 40

years earlier. As I have been tracing this history, the expansion of US global hegemony in the 1970s hinged on the expansion of financial markets by attracting investment back into the United States via Wall Street and then exporting not only that cash in the form of credit, but the austerity measures that would make sure that credit was profit-generating for the United States. The consequences of this — for instance the Latin American debt crisis — are myriad. And it goes almost without saying this meant the fate of nations was tied to American banks so when the bottom fell out in 2008, it did so globally. Yanis Varoufakis puts it succinctly: between 1975 and 2008, “Wall Street had managed to set up a parallel monetary system...underwritten by...capital inflows” to the United States. “The global economy became hooked on that toxic money, which by its nature, divided and multiplied unattainably. So when it turned to ashes, world capitalism crashed” (Varoufakis 2011, 147). And just as it did in the 1970s, this crash precipitated a massive redistribution of wealth upwards as the financial crisis decimated middle-class savings and wages stagnated, despite relatively low unemployment.

No less, if what differentiates these works by Kushner and Everett from those of their contemporaries is the effort to overturn the commitment to unwinding the ontology of the work of art, the assertion of an internal aesthetic logic, or self-legislating form, is the means through which the work of art can render a picture of the period that does not depend on atomized experiences of a world system defined by US financial hegemony. In mediating the world of financial hegemony, these novels not only “alter our conception of the concrete” but make it clear that doing so demands bracketing questions of experience. The novels I have been discussing here thus return to the period neither to elicit nostalgia, nor to evoke sympathy for the victims of class violence of the period, but to formalize the structural shifts in the economy that produced it. So unlike Nicholas Dames who imagines the path to reimagining the period runs through a nostalgic reassessment of its failures, or former President Jimmy Carter who, in a similarly affective vein, characterized the fundamentally economic failures of the period as a “crisis of confidence,” the aesthetic and political vision of these novels is of a world that does not depend on our relation to those structures. It’s not just the New York City blackouts, or the rubber factories, or the worker strikes in Italy that matter, but the structure that binds them. It’s not only the history of violence in El Salvador that matters, but the imperial presence of the United States in Central America — a presence made necessary and possible by its developing

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financial hegemony. And insofar as the novel, as art, is capable of grasping this history, it is not our relation to the work that matters but the particularity of literary form.

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**Tytuł:** Zwrotna dekada raz jeszcze, albo o powieści współczesnej w latach 70.

**Abstrakt:** Niniejszy artykuł podejmuje niedawny zwrot we współczesnej powieści ku estetycznym i ekonomicznym debatom lat siedemdziesiątych jako sposobom tematyzowania ich własnych estetycznych i politycznych ambicji. Zwracając się ku odczytywaniu sztuki w matrycy globalnych relacji ekonomicznych, argumentuję za politycznym znaczeniem dwóch niedawno wydanych powieści - *So Much Blue* Percivala Everetta i *The Flamethrowers* Rachel Kushner - które nie tylko dramatyzują konkretny moment przemocy ekonomicznej w latach siedemdziesiątych (ekspansja hegemonii USA za pomocą instrumentów finansowych), ale także formalizują estetyczny przewrót epoki (zwrot od modernizmu do postmodernizmu). Czyniąc to, oferują wizję polityki literatury, która nie jest zależna od naszego doświadczenia kapitalizmu, ale która zamiast tego spogląda na kształtowanie się politycznego i ekonomicznego reżimu, który zaczął rządzić światowym systemem kapitalizmu w XXI wieku.

**Słowa kluczowe:** modernizm, powieść współczesna, lata 70., wartość, neoliberalizm, doświadczenie, sztuka



SIBYL GALLUS-PRICE

## Why Photography Mattered (1847) As Art More Than Ever Before

In the late 20th-century, landscape photographs that were never meant as art come to play a central role in the critique of one notion of what art is. Rosalind Krauss begins her attack on Modernism by mobilizing the indexical qualities of the photograph, holding up Timothy O'Sullivan's 19th-century landscape photographs as the exemplar. This essay considers Krauss's model in relation to César Aira's contemporary revival of the 19th century landscape painter Johann Moritz Rugendas who is conceived, I argue, under the sign of the photograph. Conceptually recasting the landscape—the locus classicus for the crisis of Modernist art—through Rugendas, Aira transforms the painterly genre into an alternative neuro-aesthetically charged “procedure.” Aira's landscape painter turned photographer serves, I contend, both as an emblem for Aira's own relation to writing and as an artifact of Krauss's post-Art world.

**Keywords:** landscape, photography, César Aira, Rosalind Krauss, Modernism

The English translation of César Aira's *An Episode in the Life of a Landscape Painter* begins "WESTERN ART can boast few documentary painters of true distinction" (Aira 2006, 1), a rendering of "En Occidente hubo pocos pintores viajeros realmente buenos" (Aira 2018b, 7) that both captures its meaning — not only introducing but capitalizing the word ART — and suggests a useful interpretation of it. What Andrews sees is that the *Episode* is less an event in the life of a single painter than in the history of Western art, and what that event is, as Aira himself will present it, is the end of that history, the end of Western art. For what Aira argues in his now published colloquium talk, *On Contemporary Art*, is that not only are we, aesthetically speaking, at "at the end" (Aira 2018a, 13), but that we should begin to consider art's history by "inserting artists from the past into" the "present day" (Aira 2018a, 22). Thus, instead of seeing the landscape painter, Johann Moritz Rugendas, as an art historical figure, we should imagine him as our "Contemporary" (Aira 2018a, 22). This procedure of making the artists of the past present — as Aira would have it — will deliver not just the pleasure that comes with playing a "counterfactual game," (Aira 2018a, 22) but an aesthetic "bonus," the revelation of a "hidden reality in their art" (Aira 2018a, 23). Hence, the episode in the life of a 19th-century landscape painter — the 1847<sup>1</sup> accident made manifest in the lightning strike of the year 2000 — should, therefore, be understood as an episode in contemporary art, one capable of giving us a "reality" that until art's end, had been "hidden."

It's in this context — the end of art reborn as the discovery of a new "reality" — that Aira describes the "mission" of his landscape painter. Rugendas, who embarks on a time-transcendent aesthetic journey, enacts the procedure that "a hundred years later, would have fallen to a photographer: to keep a graphic record of all of the discoveries they would make and the landscapes through which they would pass" (Aira 2006, 2). What's odd about this description, of course, is that it would hardly take a hundred years for this mission to become that of the photographer, but what's made particularly acute—in transposing the figure of the landscape painter with that of the documentary photographer—is the end-of-ART question it raises. For it was precisely such a photographer — Timothy O'Sullivan — (whose 1860s<sup>2</sup> landscape

1 Aira gives two dates for Rugendas's accident — 1847 (the historical) and 1837 (the fictional) — to document his account. Indeed, as we will see, for Aira the historical and the fictional are equivalent, since for him documents and art are indistinguishable.

2 "Buttes near Green River City, Wyoming" (1867-69) Albumen-silver print

photographs were discovered and exhibited alongside benchmarks of Western painting a century later) that would become crucial to what Rosalind Krauss would call the end of Art.

While O'Sullivan's photographs had occasionally landed on the museum walls,<sup>3</sup> it was their inclusion in Peter Galassi's 1981 *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography*, an exhibition establishing the medium's "relationship to the traditional arts" (Galassi 1981, 11) and "its relationship to painting," (Galassi 1981, 12) that secured the landscape photograph's polemical status, one that prompted Krauss to redouble her efforts through O'Sullivan in bringing the "definitive ruptures" in that tradition to light (Krauss 1979, 44). If Galassi's ambition was "to show that photography was not a bastard left by science on the doorstep of art, but a legitimate child of the Western pictorial tradition," (Galassi 1981, 12) Krauss's aim was precisely to leverage photography to discompose that tradition. For Krauss, it was because O'Sullivan was not any kind of painter and because the emergence of the photograph — something guided by causal, indexical relationships — ought not, she thought, be understood as an episode in the history of Art, that the landscape photograph could serve to displace rather than extend that tradition.

And Aira, with his landscape painter turned photographer, takes this intervention one step further upping the ante on Krauss's framing of O'Sullivan by remaking landscape painting as landscape photography. With a lightning strike, landscape painting goes from an art dedicated to the representation of nature to an art that is itself a piece of nature, what Krauss in describing O'Sullivan's photography calls a "natural phenomenon" (Krauss 1982, 314). Indeed, Aira's interest is, as we'll see, in the question of art and forces, in particular what inhuman actions

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from a glass negative 10 1/2 x 77/8 no.69a, 69b, and 69c were the photographs by O'Sullivan featured in Peter Galassi's 1980 show.

3 While this wasn't the first time Sullivan's photographs were included in exhibitions at the MoMA, having been featured in the "Edward Steichen Photography Reinstallation," (1979), "Artist as Adversary," (1971), "Photographs Before Surrealism," (1968), "Steichen Gallery Reinstallation," (1967), "Art in a Changing World: 1884: Edward Steichen Photography Center," (1964), "The Photographer and the American Landscape," (1963), "Photograph From the Museum" (1958-1959), "Then and Now" (1952), "The Museum Collection of Photographs," (1945-1946), "Art in Progress: 15th Anniversary exhibitions: Photography" (1944), "Photographs of the Civil War and the American Frontier" (1942), and "Photography" (1937), Galassi's 1981 exhibit was the first to explicitly make the argument that these and other photographs were part of the tradition of Western art forged previously by painting.

— “lightning bolts serving as cues in a game of meteoric billiards” (Aira 2006, 33) — might do to an artist and his art. So, although Rugendas will begin in the spirit of Humboldt, in the tradition of the history of art, an accident that disfigures and neurologically impairs him — getting struck twice by lightning only seconds apart — will discharge him from that tradition and that history.

The accident makes Rugendas, like the photograph, coextensive with the forces and the “natural growth” (Aira 2006, 6) he is tasked with capturing, reduced to the mere material of its incidental unfolding. Through its “pure action,” (Aira 2006, 32) the lightning strike — both the instrument and embodiment of causal forces — transfers its properties to Rugendas. No longer an artist but reborn as a meteoric outgrowth, the painter begins to “feel himself being pulled, stretching (the electricity had made him elastic), almost levitating, like a satellite in thrall to a dangerous star” (Aira 2006, 35). And while the violent “concatenation” and totalizing “action” (Aira 2006, 32) of the lightning certainly injures Rugendas — reducing him to “a bloody bundle” (Aira 2006, 35) with “a swollen, bloody mass,” in place of a “face” (Aira 2006, 36) — what’s crucial for Aira is the painter’s metamorphosis, the displacement of his actions with “nonhuman forces” (Aira 2006, 37). Indeed, Aira’s emphasis on Rugendas’s transformation rather than the gravity of his injuries suggests that despite the severity of the accident, it’s not the loss of his physical well-being but the “exceptional alterations” to the painter’s “atomic and molecular structure” (Aira 2006, 34) that will come to matter. Certainly, the morphine treatment he receives as consequence only furthers this transformation and its effects as the artist’s intention gives way to a “perception, enveloped with the Edenic light” of “a morphine landscape” (Aira 2006, 42). And as Aira points out, the “amorphous” (Aira 2006, 42) feelings induced by his chemical state point not only to a “curious verbal coincidence: amorphous, morphine,” (Aira 2006, 42) but to the way the force of the drug reduplicates the metamorphosis already inscribed in the painter’s body.

After the accident, therefore, Rugendas’s landscape paintings will no longer function as representations that “apprehend the world” (Aira 2006, 5) but as a world recorded in Rugendas. Where landscape painting and the artist’s invocation of its traditions prompt a looking back by way of art’s history, lightning and the processes of natural phenomena channeled as sensation incite a severing from the very notion of the artist and his painting from the meaning of that history. Aira’s lightning strike — synecdoche for art’s condition — is no longer just a visible phenomenon the painter looks at or merely feels, but a charge that registers

Where landscape painting and the artist’s invocation of its traditions prompt a looking back by way of art’s history, lightning and the processes of natural phenomena channeled as sensation incite a severing from the very notion of the artist and his painting from the meaning of that history.

in the materiality of his body: a “perception” made “abnormally acute” (Aira 2006, 32). Rugendas’s lightning strike — which “bypassed his senses and went straight into his nervous system” (Aira 2006, 32) — recasts the artist not according to the logic of composition but in terms of causal forces. Thus, here in Aira’s *Episode* Rugendas’s paintings are no longer composed of forms but conscripted by force, a “procedure [...] operating through him” (Aira 2006, 88).

Hence Rugendas’s post-accident paintings come into being not as attempts at painterly composition but as a response to stimuli triggered in him by the lightning. Rugendas, who “represented the meeting of science and art on equal terms, but not the confusion” of the two (Aira 2006, 13), himself becomes the site of their synthesis: “*Mutatis mutandis*, the same thing happens with a painter and the visible world. It was happening to Rugendas. What the world was saying was the world” (Aira 2006, 78). Rugendas’s body, like a lightning rod, absorbs the charge that incites his metamorphosis from a painter who makes pictorial art, a landscape that he captures, into a painter literally made part of the landscape, one that happens through him. Indeed, for Rugendas and for art after the end of art this is precisely the problem, that art and life have converged. So, while Aira’s depiction of Rugendas begins as we’d expect, with a landscape painter who sets out to document Latin America, the lightning transforms him into a conduit whose art — a composition of impressions turned records of triggered responses — is transmitted through him.

It’s precisely for this reason that Aira’s traveling artist approximates a living camera. After the accident Rugendas traverses the landscape with a mantilla covered face, the purpose of which is not to hide the damage, but “to filter the light” (Aira 2006, 60). The nerve damage and the efforts to mitigate it — “opium in a bromide solution” (Aira 2006, 51) — make the mantilla a necessity in modulating Rugenda’s reaction to stimuli, since “[D]irect sunlight tormented his poor addled head and his shattered nervous system. His pinpoint pupils could not contract any further” (Aira 2006, 60). Rugendas’s condition, then, set in motion by the nerve damage and the narcotics “accumulating in his brain” (Aira 2006, 42) turns his eyes into apertures consistent with the shutter speed of landscape photography: “In the depths of that mantled night the pinpricks of his pupils woke him to the bright day’s panorama. And powdered poppy extract, a concentrated form of the analgesic, provided sleep enough for ten reawakenings per second” (Aira 2006, 64). Indeed, Aira only amplifies this condition at the end of the episode when Rugendas registers “the touch” (Aira 2006, 83) of a bat “brushing gently aga-

inst his forehead, at “barely a hundredth of a second,” (Aira 2006, 84) as if the shutter speed or exposure time necessary to register movement were in some way made internal to him. In effect, the images that Rugendas generates are not merely pictures of the landscape but painted landscapes with the character of photographs, records of his “attacks of vertigo and cerebral short-circuiting” (Aira 2006, 54); in other words, a “procedure [...] operating through him” (Aira 2006, 88). So, while initially “[T]he bulk of the work” he performs consists in “preliminary: sketches, notes jottings” whose “exploitation [...] in paintings and engravings was reserved for a later stage,” (Aira 2006, 11) post-accident Rugendas produces images with the automaticity of a photograph, “one sheet to the next, like a lightning bolt striking the field” (Aira 2006, 86). Rugendas executes his post-accident landscapes, therefore, not in the tradition of art but, like a photograph, as a “transfer or trace.” (Krauss 1977b, 59).

Indeed, it was the notion of the index, something that “arises as the physical manifestation of a cause” (Krauss 1977b, 59) that guided the newly central role of the photograph in conversations about what art was in the late 70s (a role whose centrality would be noted and extended in, for example, the title of Michael Fried’s 2008 book, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*.) And, as we’ve seen, it’s not just any photograph, but the landscape photograph that was held up as the exemplar. Indeed, it’s through a critique of art (after the end of art) mobilized in questions raised by landscape photography that works like O’Sullivan’s *Tufa Domes* (1868), would, by the early 1980s, come to occupy the central axis of the art-critical debate and the Modern – Post-modern divide.

This intervention guided by Krauss’s pair of essays — “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America” (1977) and “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America. Part 2” (1977) — deploys photography’s inherent indexical quality as a way to attack the tradition of art in more general terms, while sharply targeting what for critics like Fried was already a much-defeated Modernism. Krauss borrows the index from American philosopher and logician Charles Sanders Peirce who theorized it alongside the icon and the symbol as part of his triadic semiotic model, the index constituting the most basic relationship between the object and the sign. While symbols refer and icons resemble, an index is defined by a cause-and-effect relationship — where there’s smoke there’s fire. The indexical, Peirce explains, “signifies its object solely by virtue of being really connected to it” (Peirce 1933, 3.361). Hence smoke, indexically and physically speaking, signifies fire in a way that a painting of



fire, Goya's *Fire at Night* (1793), never could. For Peirce, then, paintings like *Fire at Night* (1793) or Rugendas's *Equestrian Portrait of a Pehuenche Chief* (1837) are icons because they hinge on likeness — they look like what they're of. Where the portrait carries a relation to the thing it's of, the photograph, in indexical terms, bears a kind of evidence of its existence, a causal relationship or "a physical imprint" (Krauss 1977a, 75) of "*having-been-there*" (Barthes qtd Krauss 1977b, 65). And although a photograph can be an icon insofar as it looks like what it's of, it's necessarily indexical because, like "a physical imprint," that likeness is caused by what it's of.

It's this notion of causality that constitutes the photograph's central attraction for Krauss, a record of the world that could make the artist's painterly relation to her subject obsolete. And it's this same quality that motivates Krauss to declare photography not only a "sub- or pre-symbolic," medium free of Modernist art's epistemological burden, but one that in "ceding the language of art back to the imposition of things" becomes a model of possibility for an alternative (Krauss 1977a, 75). Krauss sees the photograph as "an uncoded event" (Krauss, 1977b, 60) tantamount to "a kind of trauma of signification," (Krauss 1977a, 78) in other words, a trauma for one notion of art (Modernist) but an opportunity for another (Postmodern).<sup>4</sup> Hence Krauss's notion of the photograph and its aesthetic technological intervention — the click of the button — not only does away with the artist and the masterpiece but becomes the nail in the coffin to any lingering Modernist art since doing away with the obstacle of representation offers the infinite possibility of "the filling of the 'empty' indexical sign with [...] presence," and by extension our experience (Krauss 1977a, 80).

The outcome of Krauss's commitment to the photograph's indexicality becomes clear in her article, "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View" (1982), a critical rejoinder to Peter Galassi's MoMA show, *Before Photography* (1981), on display one year earlier. Galassi's exhibit featured 18th-century landscape paintings alongside otherwise forgotten or unknown photographers of the 19th-century showcasing, as we've seen, the discovery of would-be artist and civil war era photographer Timothy O'Sullivan. Here, with O'Sullivan's *Tufa Domes* (1867) as the exemplar, Krauss ups her attempt to mobilize photography as a refusal of autonomous art, in the effort to correct the artworld's impulse to aestheticize what, she argues, belongs to "the discourse of geology,"

<sup>4</sup> In fact, as Krauss lays out in "Part 2," photography is "the operative model for abstraction."

an “empirical” (Krauss 1982, 311) and “topographical” (Krauss 1982, 313) “geographic order” (Krauss 1982, 315). Though Galassi sought to elevate O’Sullivan’s photographs to art in his 20th-century exhibit, by putting them next to their painterly counterparts, they weren’t meant to be seen only as landscapes, Krauss argues, but to be experienced as “stereoscopic views” (Krauss, 1982, 314); in other words, they were comparable to documentary landscape views rather than painted ones. Indeed, the “*view*,” whose character is phenomenological rather than logical or epistemological, Krauss contends, “rises up to confront the viewer, seemingly without the mediation of an individual recorder or artist, leaving ‘authorship’ of the views to their publishers, rather than to the operators” (Krauss, 1982, 314). What Krauss wants to emphasize here is that the attempt to make photographers authors (and by extension, artists) is misdirected, since “authorship is [...] a function of publication,” a matter of copyright — “©Keystone Views” (Krauss 1982, 314). Hence, it’s not only the photograph’s indexicality, but the production of the photos themselves, according to Krauss, that marks them as documents.

Indeed, for Aira it’s not the “documentary status” (Krauss 1977b, 59) of landscape paintings he seeks to critique, since it’s precisely their failure as documents he calls into question, but rather, like Krauss, it’s the very notion of the artist and the tradition of art that he seeks to evacuate. So, in addition to his paintings, it’s the artist himself who is rendered radically indexical here. After the lightning strike, Rugendas goes from “the order” of the artist, in which he depicts his impressions of the “natural world,” to “the order” of the indexical, in which “the order of the natural world [...] imprints itself” in him (Krauss 1977b, 59). This transfer of force not only inscribes itself on the painter’s face, as we have seen, but transforms his cells into “universal plasma” (Aira 2006, 39), the “sensation of having electrified blood” (Aira 2006, 33). Here Aira’s play on blood as “plasma,” a state of matter associated with lightning, extends indexicality to the cellular, molecular level, what Krauss calls a “Brownian motion of the self” (Krauss 1977b, 59). And while it contributes little to the description of the accident, it calls attention to Aira’s “fantasy of total self-presence,” (Krauss 1977b, 58)<sup>5</sup> turning the artist into what Krauss describes as “a literal manifestation

5 Rugenda’s “Electrified blood” is reminiscent of the example of indexicality Krauss draws on in her second essay on the index in which Deborah Hay’s dance performance amounts to delivering a standing monologue, and in which she explains to the audience that the dance they’re witnessing is “the movement of every cell in her body (59).

of presence,” something that works “like a weather vane’s registration of the wind (Krauss 1977b, 59). What’s significant here, as in Krauss’s example, is the insistence on indexical relationships “out of reach of [...] the convention that might provide a code” (Krauss 1977b, 59). And for Aira the index isn’t just tied to a visible physical trace but to the invisible traces of physics guiding Rugendas, a transfer of force that renders him more object than subject and more “Puppet” (Aira 2006, 34) than painter. The post-accident landscapes, then, are no longer acts of painterly virtuosity meant to fulfill the genre’s conventions or an artist’s vision but rather the manifestation of “uncoded” relationships set in motion by the lightning: mere presence. So, while Aira’s *Episode* opens with “a genre painter” whose “genre was the physiognomy of nature” (Aira 2006, 5) — a landscape painter who paints the face of the world — the lightning remodels him as an articulation of that world, an artist whose work could no longer be understood as a representation of the landscape but, like any other phenomena, as “the physical manifestation of a cause” (Krauss 1977b, 59).

To hammer the point home, Aira turns “the founding father of the art of pictorial presentation of the physiognomy of nature” (Aira 2006, 6) into someone whose own physiognomy has been destroyed by nature: “Rugendas’s face had been seriously damaged. [...] One blow and it was broken forever like a porcelain vase” (Aira 2006, 40–41). In fact, Aira goes out of his way to emphasize the singularity of the damage: “The only thing that had changed was Rugendas’s face” (Aira 2006, 44). The painter, treating nature as if it were a person and making a portrait of its face, is here transformed into someone whose own face is nothing but the consequence — a “physical imprint,” to use Krauss’s Peircean description of the photograph — of natural forces. It’s not just his face that’s destroyed but the very idea of physiognomy, of the artist and the work of art. What we get instead is the cause and effect of photographic indexicality, the intervention of forces “recorded indelibly” as “sensations impinging on the raw, pink flesh of his head” (Aira 2006, 38). Indeed, as the lightning extends to his brain, reconnecting “the nerve ending [...] more or less at random, to a node in the frontal lobe” (Aira 2006, 39), Rugendas himself becomes nothing but a record of sensations, his body reduced to forces and his face to a literal topography. It’s no accident that the artist’s loss of expression to the constant “paroxysm” (Aira 2006, 79) of “ghastly nervous tics,” (Aira 2006, 58), is rivaled only by the loss of his identifying features, the “distinctive aquiline form of his Augsburg nose” rendered “unrecognizable” under the mass of “swollen, bloody” flesh and “bone” (Aira 2006, 36). Displacing the biographical

for the biological and the model of the painting for the photograph, Aira activates the portrait only to expose its death, “ceding the language of art back to” what Krauss calls, “the imposition of things.”

Positioning Rugendas’s art as an indexical procedure, as Aira does, not only attempts to sever the painter from the tradition of landscape but to render the traces of the landscapes he produces “visually and conceptually [...] free from any specific locale” (Krauss 1977b, 63). Just as for Krauss “the absoluteness” of the photograph’s “physical genesis” — “a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface” — has the potential “to short-circuit or disallow those processes of schematization or symbolic intervention that operate within the graphic representations of most paintings,” (Krauss 1977a, 203) so too for Aira does the “pure action” of the lightning bolt’s “nonhuman forces” — “a physical imprint transferred by” the lightning strike into Rugenda’s damaged body — become a way to bypass the “symbolic intervention” of the European landscape painter or any notion of painterly representation.<sup>6</sup> Thus, a landscape painter conceived under the sign of the photograph not only dispatches with the question of art in relation to place, what it means to make Western art or a national Argentine literature, but questions about the internal conflict raised in producing that art and that literature — its competing aesthetic and documentary aims. Krauss’s argument made discursive in Aira’s story of the South American excursion by German painter, Johann Moritz Rugendas, one of the “few documentary painters of true distinction” (the designation itself already posing a kind of problem) puts an end to the question of whether Rugendas’s work belongs to an empirical order, meant to document South America, or an aesthetical one, a painter meant to represent it. In fact, what we can see is that after the accident, Rugendas loses the capacity to do either.

Of course, the concern of any typical 19th century “documentary painter” (Aira 2006, 4) isn’t the end of art, but the “science of landscape,” (Aira 2006, 5) collapsing the vistas of Brazil into commercially successful handheld books like *Picturesque Voyage Through Brazil*, or enlisting them to pattern “wallpaper” or “to decorate Sèvres china” (Aira 2006,

6 In fact, we see this issue come up in Rugendas’s use of the mantilla to cover his face after the accident. While this use of the mantilla seems odd or out of place, it’s actually a practice typical of Pehuenche men, a group indigenous to the Andes, a point that’s emphasized when his host in delivering the mantilla calls herself “Madame pehuenche” (Aira 2006, 59). And so, both in becoming a conduit and covering his face with the mantilla, a chain of events set in motion by the accident, Aira marks Rugendas’s figurative indigenouness as literal.

12). These views transported to Europe, small enough to hold in the hands of Frenchmen or to line parlor walls, are meant to recreate the experience of having been there. Prior to his episode, like most any landscape painter, looking for views and finding a way to reproduce them comprises Rugendas's primary concern. And while reproducing astonishing views of the landscape is what's required of the landscape painter, it's through the illusion of a painting, applying Humboldt's model of forms in representing that landscape that he endeavors to do so. Thus 19th century European landscape painters who attempted to "apprehend the world in its totality," in situ did so "in conformity with a long tradition," one that through "vision," (Aira 2006, 5) and "a personal myth of Argentina" (Aira 2006, 21) represented Latin America through European models and forms.

But what we get in Aira's *Episode* is not — as we would in the 19th-century landscape painting — a vision of Latin America or the experience of having been there, but a "mysterious emptiness" (Aira 2006, 5) devoid of meaning. And for Aira, it's precisely this "mysterious emptiness" — not just a problem for the landscape painter, but a problem for art — that will call the act of documenting and art's ontology into question. How do you document emptiness and endlessness? How can you capture nothing but views?

Here Aira calls up a view perpetually in medias res, not a perspective that "registers" the "singularity" of a "focal point, as one moment in a complex representation" (Krauss 1982, 315) — a "dramatic insistence on the perspectively organized depth" — (Krauss 1982, 314) but rather one "which could greatly exceed the dimensions of" any "picture" (Aira 2006, 42-43). To be sure, the landscape Aira calls up in his *Episode* isn't one that's "perspectively organized" but one phenomenologically suspended in the middle of things. And so, what Rugendas and his assistant Krause<sup>7</sup> encounter is not a view, but something more like its decomposition, a "changeless world" (Aira 2006, 13) whose unending sameness flattens their senses as they struggle toward an "impossible midpoint" (Aira 2006, 24). With nothing to look at, the painters' perception melds

How do you document emptiness and endlessness? How can you capture nothing but views?

7 The landscape painter and artist Robert Krause accompanies Rugendas the landscape painter here in *Un episodio*, modeling itself on the actual events. After meeting Rugendas in Chile, Krause befriended Rugendas and headed off to Argentina with him in 1837. During this trip Rugendas was severely injured in a fall from a horse that Krause documented in his diaries. In fact, Krause has since been discovered as a writer and whose journal closely resembles or the title of the novel, *Intimate diary of the German landscaper*. But, of course, Aira's reference points to another Krauss, Rosalind.

into a kind of singularity. Movement becomes reduced to a feeling of circularity and stasis, and as they attempt to advance temporal and spatial distinctions melt away. In other words, the more they move forward, the more the infinite emptiness of the pampas encircles them, making “each day [...] larger and more distant” (Aira 2006, 9). Here the unceasing landscape doesn’t function as a metaphor for Argentina’s futurity, as it does in, let’s say, the country’s earliest national literary tradition,<sup>8</sup> but as infinitude imagined as the end of art, an assault on the view that renders any painterly dispositions obsolete.

What they encounter is an endless situation, not Krauss’s “stereoscopic” experience of a photographic landscape, but a view they inhabit, a landscape made nothing but experience. While O’Sullivan’s photographs served as a kind of crucible for the problem of the artwork and its relation to landscape, it was Tony Smith’s prophetic insight on the New Jersey Turnpike in 1951 (not by coincidence around a hundred years after Rugendas’s episode) that had (in retrospect) already conceived of both the landscape’s role in the end of Modernist art and the beginning of an alternative model grounded in the experience:

[T]he road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn’t be called a work of art [...] It seemed that there had been a reality there that had not had any expression in art. The experience of the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that’s the end of art. Most painting looks pretty pictorial after that. There’s no way you can frame it. You just have to experience it. Later I discovered some abandoned airstrips in Europe — abandoned works, Surrealist landscapes, something that had nothing to do with any function, created worlds without tradition. Artificial landscapes without cultural precedents began to dawn on me (Smith 1968, 384).

8 Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s *Facundo* (1845), one of the earliest Romantic *criollo* accounts of the landscape, inaugurates a national literary vision of the landscape in what Ricardo Piglia calls “the first page of Argentine literature” (Piglia 1994, 131). This national vision links Argentina’s historical and literary beginnings to “the physiognomy of the soil” (Sarmiento 1996, 1) imagining the “pampa” as a metaphor for Argentina’s “infinite” potential (Sarmiento 1996, 1). [my translation].

Smith's terms would come to constitute the mantra for a new kind of art taking hold in the decades to follow, and as we've seen with Krauss, not an art to behold but a situation to experience. Envisioned as "something vast," these "artificial landscapes," themselves functionless, "created worlds without tradition," could rise to a "scale and monumentality" in sync with the limitlessness of our experience,<sup>9</sup> and against the expanse of such a landscape, pictorial art would register more like what Aira calls "trinkets," (Aira 2013) or as Smith puts it "the art of postage stamps" (Smith 1968, 384).

The landscape Aira furnishes, then, is not, like Humboldt's, a pictorial vision of the land "you can frame," or reproduce in handheld books like the *Picturesque Voyage Through Brazil*,<sup>10</sup> but rather like Smith's, one the painters "just have to experience." The "sheer optics of superimposed heights and depths" (Aira 2006, 9) induced by the "infinite orography" (16) and "the radical flatness" (Aira 2006, 27) of "expanses resonant with emptiness" (Aira 2006, 28) incite not only visual interference in the painters but a kind of epistemological blindness. Thus, in the face of nothing but views, mountains and plains that take on the character of Tony Smith's highway, Rugendas and Krause can only submit passively to their experience. The interminable view registers not pictorially but conversely as sensation in the body "on their faces, in their arms, their shoulders, their hair, and heels [...] throughout their nervous system" (Aira 2006, 16). The "scale and monumentality" Rugendas encounters can't be captured "through vision" but as the relentless reflex of "pure optics,"<sup>10</sup> (Aira 2001, 9) not exactly like seeing something but sensing it. So, while these landscapes as "pictures were worthless" (Aira 2006, 10) making poor use of the "physiognomic types" (Aira 2006, 5) Humboldt envisions for a genre meant to capture "an aesthetic understanding of the world" (Aira 2006, 5) they are precursors for a new kind of art, direct impressions of the painters' sensations.

In producing nothing but views Aira displaces pictorial art, the "totality of vision," with post-art, the totality of experience. Pictorial visions of clouds arranged above the horizon of a blue sky revert to the indistinguishable totalizing effect of natural forces: clouds, "so low they almost land [...] the slightest breeze would whisk them away [...] others from bewildering corridors [...] seemed to give the sky access to the center of the earth" (Aira 2001,9). As the painters move through the

In producing nothing but views Aira displaces pictorial art, the "totality of vision," with post-art, the totality of experience.

9 Indeed, by the late seventies, the tendency toward, what Rosalind Krauss in her 1979 essay calls the "expanded field," testifies to the scale that an art placed in the realm of both landscape and sculpture could demand.

10 This is my translation of the original "pura óptica."



atmospheric instability, indexical conditions of the lightning, they are assaulted by flashes of appearance and disappearance, “magical rotations” and “dreamlike visions”<sup>11</sup> (Aira 2001, 13) overwhelming their senses and rendering their “physiognomic” principles useless. These clouds are not the pictorial visions we might imagine in a landscape, a way to envision Argentina, but rather here they act as traces that obscure the view. Turning the landscape from picture to presence, Aira literalizes the “journey towards the truly unknown” (Aira 2006, 24) as if in each step the painters move from an epistemological vision of the world toward an infinite, “sub- or pre-symbolic” experience of a phenomenological horizon. The painters don’t just experience a highway like Smith’s, a “landscape” that’s “not socially recognized,” but one that’s not recognizable as a landscape. In entering its all-encompassing terrain, they begin to submit to what the post-accident Rugendas would fully surrender: a “phenomenal revelation of the world” (Aira 2006, 51).

“How” then, as Aira posits, “could these panoramas be made plausible?”<sup>12</sup> (Aira 2001, 17). These unremitting views, which exceed the “mind’s eye” (Aira 2006, 16) and impede any pictorial register, amount instead to what Rugendas calls “[A] series of studies in vertigo” (Aira 2006, 15). While these paintings fail to document the view, they succeed as phenomenological imprints. In escalating Smith’s “artificial landscape” and Krauss’s “stereoscopic views,” Aira delivers a landscape that displaces painting’s views with records of sensation.

And what we can begin to see is that for Aira traveling forward means traveling in reverse, moving away from a history of art toward “*An Episode*” in the history of sense. Aira’s artificial landscape conjures an emptiness hostile to painting’s forms (8) and to the painter’s “capacities” (Aira 2006, 12), a lifeless “terrifying void,” (Aira 2006, 29) and a “universe of rock” (Aira 2006, 17) with “[N]ot a bird to be seen in the sky” nor “guinea pigs or rheas or hares or ants” to be seen “on the ground” (Aira 2006, 17). In fact, not only does Aira’s landscape not project forward, it points backwards to “other geological eras, perhaps even before the inconceivable beginning of the universe” (Aira 2006, 24). With a move that calls up Krauss’s indexical “sub- or pre-symbolic” epistemological refusal, Aira’s *Episode* renders the pampas geologically inert, a post-extinction, post-art event offering only a trace of former

11 This is my translation of the original “mágicas alternancias,” “visiones de ensueño,” “producía un rumor que sonaba lejos, ecos del sistema,” “en los umbrales de la audición.”

12 This is my translation of the original “¿Cómo hacer verosímiles esos panoramas?”



life. Here the landscape — a “planet’s peeling crust [that] seemed to be made of dried amber” (Aira 2006, 29) — assumes a cosmic geologic temporal and spatial scale, a lifeless “selenite ocean”<sup>13</sup> (Aira 2001, 30) so desiccated that the “earth crumbled at a touch” (Aira 2006, 28). Thus, in Aira the “artificial landscape” functions along the lines of what Krauss (in O’Sullivan) calls a “geological” order, (Krauss 1982, 312) a landscape reduced to a record of “pure silica” (Aira 2006, 29) indexing some former unsignifying world emptied of life and meaning. Here in the transparent “selenite” emptiness of the infinite “silica” pampa it’s not the blank canvas Aira produces, but a phenomenological world infinitely suspended, a trace as such arrested in medias res.

On one hand, such a maneuver seems to divorce Aira from Humboldt, freeing him from the multitiered baggage of the European views and nationalist *criollo* accounts that reduced Latin America to its physiognomy. But on the other, in his commitment to a model grounded in experience, Aira reproduces that logic, committing to what Jorge Luis Borges in his poem “Sarmiento” prophetically calls “long vision.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, it’s in privileging an aesthetics of phenomenology over art’s epistemology, I argue, that links something like Humboldt’s tropical romanticism (Latin America seen through the eyes of Europe) and later Latin American romanticism<sup>15</sup> (the privileging of national ties to the land) to Aira’s moment (the crisis of autonomous art). If in one sense *An Episode* seems to return to landscape painting’s origins, it’s not to reaffirm them as a kind of beginning but, like Aira’s landscape painter, to reduce them to traces, “[A] ruse against Orphic disobedience” (Aira 2006, 24) to “obliterate all that lies behind” (Aira 2006, 25). Mobilizing the Argentine landscape as the critique of art, Aira attempts to revise the physiognomically inflected vision inherited from Humboldt by embracing the critique and dissolution of (Modernist) art cultivated in Smith and Krauss once again through the question of the landscape. And to do this, Aira must transform his painter from a traveling artist who traverses a landscape into a series of processes “operating through him” (Aira 2006, 88).

13 This is my translation of the original “océano selénita.”

14 Borges, in his poem “Sarmiento,” projects the writer and politician as the receptacle of a kind of “long vision,” the “crystal that withholds at once three faces,” as Borges puts it, “of time which is after before now/ Sarmiento, the dreamer keeps on dreaming us” (Borges 2016, 208).

15 In the case of Argentina, it’s Sarmiento’s *Facundo*, as Madan contends, that shifts Humboldt’s vision of “writing the earth” to the *criollo* project of “writing the nation” (Madan 2011, 260).

The landscape, then, for Aira is a kind of alternative model to the pictorial, one that seeks to overcome the history of the artwork, and by extension the picture of Latin America inherited from the painterly traditions inspired by Humboldt. The landscape “without cultural precedents” that Aira strives for in *An Episode* is, like Smith’s, completely artificial. And this is what it means for Rugendas’s landscapes to become more “strange” and more “interesting”<sup>16</sup> (Aira 2001, 28), to approach the condition of Smith’s “Surrealist landscapes [...] that had nothing to do with function.” But unlike the New Jersey Turnpike or the many physical structures that would come to fulfill Smith’s aesthetic epiphany, an art “you just have to experience,” the landscape forged in Rugendas’s perpetually altered state — art as a “psychic activity” (Aira 2006, 86) — is something that exceeds our external experience. What constitutes the landscape recorded by Rugendas is not just a response to the infinitude of the pampas and the Andes but the “infinite plasticity” (Aira 2006, 48) of the mind. Rendered a kind of record of sensation as such, Rugendas’s paintings no longer adhere to the logic of art or composition but submit completely to sense: a landscape where “medium could become life itself” (Aira 2006, 43).<sup>17</sup> And what we get with Rugendas is not a man reduced to a camera, but a man, who through the lightning is reduced to responding, not distinct from the world but made one with its materiality. Aira, in imagining the “stereoscopic view” as a kind of infinite regress, calls up a landscape not that we understand, see, or merely experience, but one whose “infinite plasticity” happens through us. Here it’s not only the “infinite plasticity” of art but an art rendered according to the “plasticity” of sensation, an artwork emanating in concert with our response. And while perhaps such a condition might point to a kind of evolution in our sensing abilities (one that like the mantis shrimp or future digitophiles far exceeds our own), it says little about art or our understanding of it. Aira, raising the stakes on Smith’s artificial landscape and Krauss’s notion of the photograph, imagines an art that coincides not with our ideas or even strictly our experience but an art that coincides with the artificial landscape made internal, one in sync with the cognitive plasticity of our brain, thought in itself arrested in perpetua.

So, while on the surface *An Episode* seems to possess the characteristics of most conventional novels, things we might arguably describe as

16 This is my translation of the original “extraño” and “interesante.”

17 Indeed, this is the whole theoretical point Deleuze seeks to map out in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*.

setting, character, plot, description, or even dialogue, what the text reveals is that these seemingly literary elements made causal function more like plane, figure, and motion. In other words, these aren't elements composed in the service of producing a text beholden to meaning but indices of the procedures populating an artificial situation. Aira's characters are never the real people they seem to represent, and in fact, they're not even characters. They are ready-mades borrowed wholesale from history, from literature, from art, from anywhere — actors in situations. These situations are from top to bottom artificial, an "imposition of things" cut and pasted, embellished, or rearranged.

What we get then is not a portrait of Rugendas or the problems of 19th century Argentina, but a writing that extends beyond what's merely suggested in its pages, something more like Smith's "artificial landscape." Rugendas, himself more an index in a situation than a character in a plot, supplies Aira with a web of speculative directions: his paintings, his life, his connection to Humboldt, his visit to Latin America, his accident. And everything that touches the painter and his experiences produces a similar effect of expansiveness in *An Episode*: "Everything," as Aira emphatically puts it, is "documentation!" (Aira 2006, 51). Humboldt, Rugendas, the Pehuenche, the Andes and the pampas contribute to this indexical landscape — real but free from history or any determined meaning — that expands out uncontained and unbound. This is what it means for Aira to produce the "episode" (Aira 2006, 1) of a traveling artist, the history of art rendered episodes of sense. Through Rugendas, Aira not only points out the artificiality of the cultural diegesis, he turns it into an art of experience, a new history of sensation. And in doing so he raises profound questions about what it means to write in and about Latin America, and what a writing that renders the world a ready-made can come to mean for art.

Aira's writing, itself an end-of-art refusal in favor of a situational practice, commits to what in "The New Writing" he terms: "the procedure" (Aira 2013). So rather than turning to the model of the novel or the artwork more generally, Aira directs the practice of writing against the artwork and against medium: "What do we need works for? Who wants another novel, another painting, another symphony?" (Aira 2013). What we get in Aira's *Episode* then is not Greenberg and Fried's commitment to medium specificity, in Fried's terms, an artwork that succeeds by and through its commitment to composition or the particularity of its medium — a painting that succeeds as a painting or a novel that succeeds as a novel — but a text that sidesteps those matters in toto. Moving beyond the masterpiece, an art he sees reduced to the status of

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“trinkets,” Aira embraces, just as Krauss does with photography, “the procedure to make works, without the work” — “works” without the art and by extension, without the artist (Aira 2013).

Neither post Boom nor strictly Postmodern, Aira imagines himself as part of a post-art post-medium vanguard where innovation is coextensive with the situation. Writing at each sitting, Aira pieces together his experiences, each in itself a kind of document of the event. Here, Aira, his own “pintor viajero”<sup>18</sup> produces his texts in situ at cafes: “At around ten in the morning I go to a nearby café with a notebook and a pen [...] I write for a while, never more than an hour, and I never end up with more than a page. Back at home I type it up and then print it. That’s it” (Aira 2024). In each of these episodes Aira advances his project to “make works, without the work,” and like his landscape painter turned photographer, discovers “the work as a documentary appendix that serves only to deduce the process from which it emerged” (Aira 2013). In patterning “the work as a documentary appendix” of his own procedure, striving to divorce “making works” from the “work” and as such the act from meaning, Aira calls up a writing not that he does but that happens through him. And this is what it means to imagine the landscape painter as a photographer, not an artist that makes works, but one, that like the camera, channels a causal, indexical procedure.

In writing and forgetting, Aira abandons the work of the novel and the work of art, and like Rugendas, his 19th-century post-accident counterpart, conjures art as a kind of automaticity, an accumulation beholden more to an architecture of aleatory causal forces than to composition. The chain of events set off by the lightning strike in Rugendas consecrates a model of art guided by causal forces of “pure action,” — not a poesis, an art he makes, but a kind of autopoiesis, a self-producing art that happens. This is what it means to turn the painter — or in Aira’s own case, the writer — into a conduit. Each time he writes he’s struck by lightning — automatic writing. Quilting together these episodes, Aira produces a kind of writing beyond the limits of the novel: the redescription of writing as a photograph. In his attempt to extend what Krauss mobilizes in photography, the anti-art and anti-medium, Aira explores the possibilities of “the other side” of “art,” (Aira 2006, 5) what Modernists like Fried rejected and what Postmodernists, in their response to Modernism (in succumbing to the exhaustion of form and the bankruptcy of language) failed to sustain. The painter turned photographer

18 Here I refer to Aira’s original Spanish title which uses “pintor viajero” or traveling painter instead of “Landscape painter.”

in *An Episode*, then, is a kind of emblem for Aira's own relation to writing, a novelist that operates with the automaticity of the photograph: not an art that responds to a tradition of art or the aftermath of Modernism, the Postmodern, but one that reacts to the aftereffects of its death and the death of meaning, art as a "phenomenal revelation of the world."

But here it's not as a renewal of art but a kind of transformation, something that pairs art with a manifest destiny of an ever-expanding, unchartable sensation, an art that not only depends on presence and the beholder's relation to it, but one that happens through us. (Indeed, the success of *An Episode* depends on its ability to court the reader, in other words, to produce a text that relies on a kind of readerly gestalt where gaps exist.) The historical facts that Aira seemingly calls on are not facts but traces. Just as his characters are merely figures, *An Episode* is not a text but a situation he inherits. In fact, like many of the other biographical or historical scraps Aira calls on, the novel registers here only as a trace. Hence, it's through what we might call a literature of "sensation," a kind of blind call and response to his own writings (meant to invoke the same response in his readers) — the escalation of the situation — that Aira comes to chart the phenomenological revelations of a new kind of aesthetic terrain.

So just as Krauss would in the landscape photographer find a way to tear through the tradition of art disposing with its history, Aira, in the landscape painter turned photographer — the transformation of the artist who makes art into an instrument whose art happens through him — would discover "the other side of his art," (Aira 2006, 5) the "hidden reality" lying beyond that history. For Aira the landscape paintings produced by Rugendas "*mutatis mutandis*" might just as easily have been photographed by O'Sullivan, and it's in this "game of repetitions and permutations" (Aira 2018a, 43) called up as a kind of equivalence between the two that he imagines the "hidden reality in their art" might be discovered. Approaching art as the apprehension of a new "reality" Aira addresses it not in the context of its own history but as part of a spontaneous self-generating history — what Modernist art critic Michael Fried would register as the "almost the *natural* history — of sensibility" — in which the "repetitions and permutations" of the landscape painter and the landscape photographer like the landscape itself surface only as "part of the universal pattern of echoes" (Aira 2006, 10). Aira equips his 19th-century landscape painter with the "quandaries" (Aira 2018a, 17) of the contemporary envisioning landscape painting and the landscape photography not as distinct moments arising consecutively in and informing art's history, but rather as episodes permanently in medias

res perpetually arranging and rearranging themselves outside of that history — much the way Fried, in adverse terms, would describe literalist art's "*position*" and Krauss, in more favorable terms, redescribing literalist art as indexical art, would characterize its "situation."

The "other side" of "art" that connects Smith, Krauss, and Aira is not an "expression" of art, but something more like a theoretical position. For Fried:

From its inception, literalist art has amounted to something more than an episode in the history of taste. It belongs rather to the history — almost the natural history — of sensibility; and it is not an isolated episode but the expression of a general and pervasive condition. Its seriousness is vouched for by the fact that it is in relation both to modernist painting and modernist sculpture that literalist art defines or locates the position it aspires to occupy. (This, I suggest, is what makes what it declares something that deserves to be called a *position*.) (Fried 1998, 148-9).

Aira transposes Rugendas with a photographer not as a way to displace painting for photography but to dislodge an epistemological view of art for a phenomenological one, and as such the history of art for the "almost natural history — of sensibility." Imaging the history of art as a position—by "inserting artists from the past into" the "present day"—approaches art not through its own logic and its own history but instead stages itself as a kind of "infinite plasticity," the evolution of our sense reception and recognition, in and through a kind of "natural history." (Much like Heidegger would do in "The Ontology of the Work of Art" in erasing the distinction between art and philosophy, erasing the divide between art and sensibility turns art into an "episode," in other words, an event.)

But, of course, even in the mind, the interior landscape and perception of the self is something we experience; neurologically speaking; it's sense. For the post-accident Rugendas, actions are severed from meaning, and as such from his ability to mean. And really, as Aira presents it, the only way to do this is to reduce intentional action to causality, in other words, to "pure action," something Aira discovers in the lightning. While we can understand uncertainty as the imperfect, sense always in medias res, meaning exists only as completion, composed in and of the act (a revelation whose components are always entailed in it): not "presence" but what Fried calls "a continuous perpetual present" (Fried 1998, 167). This "[P]resentness" as "grace" Fried refers to isn't one that arises in submitting passively to the forces of a natural god and the forces of

sensibility, for Kant the mind and for Aira its “infinite plasticity,” but to art, the logic of its structure and composition (Fried 1998, 168). It’s not the rivalry of two theoretical positions, “an episode in the history of taste” that’s at stake in the crisis of Modernist art, but rather its ability to mean and its ability to matter — an intention already united with that interiority. For Fried, an artist like Caro is exemplary not only because his work means something, but precisely because it embodies “meaningfulness *as such*” (Fried 1998, 119) — that “*at every moment the work*” through its syntax (or internal relations) is “*itself is wholly manifest*” (Fried 1998, 167). By contrast for Krauss and for Aira, unseating the logic of those relations in favor of sense means likewise striving to jettison the question of meaningfulness. This is why for Aira in particular Deleuze is so central. Like Aira, the philosopher doesn’t imagine painting according to a logic of composition — an artwork whose “presentness” (Fried 1998, 168) demands our interpretation — but rather according to the “logic of sensation,” a “presence” that acts “directly on the nervous system” (Deleuze 2003, 44). For Deleuze and for Aira the whole point of sensation is that it refuses understanding, like the post-accident Rugendas who “could not understand,” “nor did he want to” (Aira 2006, 35). And it’s in this way that for Aira post-accident becomes the condition of post-Art. Put another way, for Deleuze and for Aira “the logic of sensation” is precisely not the logic of Modernism, an art whose evaluation was no longer exterior to it but ontologically and historically by necessity made internal to it. Indeed, it’s not something like Kantian taste but the alignment of evaluative and normative claims embodied in art that displayed a kind of meaningfulness as such, as in Caro, a demand made by art, that matters for Fried. In fact, Deleuze’s “logic of sensation” looks a lot more like taste, a biologized or psychologized gestalt, a response we all share. And while it’s true that creating an art that collectivizes our response might in some way seem to undermine our private feelings about it, it nonetheless depends on a kind of automatic invocation that undermines any epistemological claim art might make. The point of the model of a photograph is not that it makes us experience the unified collective sensation of one view, something like gestalt, but rather that in producing a kind of view that exceeds viewing, it finds a way to overcome the problem of the view altogether.

The crisis of Modernist art is not an “episode in the history of taste,” but instead an ontological crisis about what art is. For painting, it’s not the paint — its merely material qualities — nor even its illusionism that’s at the center of why it matters, but rather that a painting is in one way or another a picture of something. And this is how photography’s

The crisis of Modernist art is not an “episode in the history of taste,” but instead an ontological crisis about what art is.



indexicality could come to matter for Fried, since part of photography's attraction is its literalness, the "ontological guarantee" that it was not intended by the photographer (Fried 2005, 553). The photograph requires a referent, so it is undoubtedly a picture of something; in other words, there's "no photograph without something or someone," as Barthes puts it, "the referent adheres" (Barthes 2010, 6). That same observation, expanded by Fried, would become crucial for art's ability to matter. Even while the photograph is subsumed by a "pure deictic language" (Barthes 2010, 5), there's the possibility for the artist to mobilize that language (something Stein had long discovered). It's the frame that revives art's capacity to be a picture, both on account of and despite its indexicality, the guarantee that its logic could extend to every part of it including its frame. The photograph, something literal, could mark its relation to the world through its frame — the mark that it wasn't only an index of the world but also the intention of the artist. Structurally speaking, the frame guarantees the photograph's separateness from the world and its "meaningfulness *as such*." And it's the photograph's ability to reinstate that possibility, betraying "presence" by displacing it with "presentness" that allows it to succeed as art. While for Barthes, like Krauss and Aira, the question of art and meaning is always personal and experiential (a condition and a position) for Fried the question of art can only ever be historical and ontological (history and meaning). For Fried and for Modernism there is only one side to art — the picture. The other side is (just) the infinite horizon of the world.

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**Tytuł:** Dlaczego fotografia znaczyła (w 1847) jako sztuka więcej niż kiedykolwiek wcześniej?

**Abstrakt:** Pod koniec XX wieku fotografie krajobrazowe, które nigdy nie miały mieć charakteru artystycznego, zaczęły odgrywać centralną rolę w krytyce pewnego pojęcia sztuki. Rosalind Krauss rozpoczyna swój atak na modernizm od przywołania indeksalnych cech fotografii, stawiając za wzór dziewiętnastowieczne fotografie krajobrazowe Timothy'ego O'Sullivan. Niniejszy esej rozważa model Krauss w odniesieniu do tego, w jaki sposób Césara Aira przedstawia XIX-wiecznego malarza pejzażystę Johanna Moritza Rugendasa – stawiając, jak sądzę, w centrum problem fotografii. Konceptualnie przekształcając pejzaż – *locus classicus* kryzysu sztuki modernistycznej – za pośrednictwem postaci Rugendasa, Aira przekształca gatunek malarski w alternatywną, nacechowaną neuroestetycznie „procedurę”. Malarz-pejzażysta Aira staje się fotografem i służy, jak sądzę, zarówno za symbol własnego stosunku Airy do pisania, jak i za artefakt postartystycznego świata Krauss.

**Słowa kluczowe:** pejzaż, krajobraz, fotografia, César Aira, Rosalind Krauss, modernizm

EUGENIO DI STEFANO

## The Rules of the Game in Carlos Reygadas's *Serenghetti*

At first glance, Mexican filmmaker Carlos Reygadas' *Serenghetti* (2009) appears to be a documentary, capturing nothing more than an amateur women's soccer match filmed in Santo Domingo Ocotitlán (Morelos, Mexico). Commentary on the film has focused on social issues such as urban development, anthropocentrism, and sport as spectacle. This essay, however, argues that *Serenghetti* is much more interested in examining the aesthetic dimension of cinema, or what Reygadas calls the film's "fiction." In some respects, *Serenghetti* recalls Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno's *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* (2006), as both movies record complete soccer matches. But where Gordon and Parreno's film engages, as Michael Fried contends, with the issue of absorption in contemporary art, this essay suggests that Reygadas's film is concerned with contesting an anti-representational account of cinema, particularly the question of time, which has been central to how slow cinema scholarship has understood his work. Indeed, since his Cannes award-winning film *Japón* (2001), Reygadas' films have been labeled as slow cinema—films that are understood less as a representation of time than as what Thiago de Luca calls "duration itself." This essay proposes that through the concept of the soccer game, *Serenghetti* not only asserts itself as fiction but also, in doing so, provides a reading of cinematic time that challenges many political and aesthetic fantasies endorsed by contemporary cultural criticism.

**Keywords:** Slow cinema, Contemporary art, consumerism, Autonomy of art, Indexicality, Sport, Neoliberalism, Latin American Film, Mexican Film

In art today, any attempt to establish a connection with the audience risks reducing art to a mere tool for satisfying consumer desires. This challenge is heightened within the film industry where the concern often revolves around producing films that cater to consumer demands, aiming for profitability. It is in response to this dilemma—the degree to which every viewer is seemingly and unavoidably also a consumer and every work of art a commodity—that I would like to frame Carlos Reygadas's<sup>1</sup> *Serenghetti* (2009); at first glance, the film seems to have little to do with the status of the work of art, let alone art's relationship to the consumer.<sup>2</sup> The subject of the film is rather straightforward; it consists of a recording of an amateur football match between two women's teams, shot in what seems to be a rather isolated area near the Sierra de Tepoztlán in Santo Domingo Ocotitlán (Morelos, Mexico) in 2008. The 72-minute

1 I want to express my gratitude to Carlos Reygadas for generously providing access to several of his films, including *Serenghetti*, which greatly aided in conducting my research.

2 The film was commissioned by the Rotterdam Film Festival for their Urban Screens project in 2009 and played in several theaters and galleries since then. Unlike Reygadas's narrative films, very little has been written about *Serenghetti*. The synopsis of the film at the Rotterdam Film Festival frames the film in this way:

Reygadas (a great soccer fan) made a football film for his urban screen. The game between two women's elevens takes place on a pitch in the middle of a surrealistic mountain landscape where corrosion has done its job. The game has all elements of a professional match as these are generally seen on TV: colourful club kits, camera recording from all possible angles, statistics, the score, slow motion repeats, a preview, interviews with the players etc. A greater contrast between the daunting mountain landscape and the clean urban façade on which this is screened is almost inconceivable. Add to that the mixture of two almost incompatible worlds - that of commercial football broadcasts on TV and the artistic cinema of Reygadas - and a special viewing experience is born. (Rotterdam n.d.)

Since it played at the festival's Urban Screens project, *Serenghetti* has been framed as a commentary on urban development and anthropogenic environmental damage. In this case, the title of the film, a reference to Serengeti National Park in Tanzania, could be understood as a metaphor for those issues. Indeed, the addition of the added 'h' and 't' playfully draws the title closer to the word 'spaghetti' and perhaps gestures to the great folly of human destruction on Earth, as humans trample on it, much like football players on the pitch, with little regard for the consequences. Other possible readings could draw on a parodic critique of sport as a spectacle. My reading of the title, instead, sees the alteration in the title as another means in which Reygadas takes on the real and the indexical and insists on remaking it into something aesthetically its own.

film is almost exclusively a recording of the football game, which is divided by 30-minute halves with some added injury time.<sup>3</sup> There are also eight cameras, which are placed around the field, offering different perspectives of the action on the pitch, while also glimpsing the sublime mountainous landscape that surrounds it. And yet, as I will argue later, this rather straightforward description of a simply shot, roughly cut football game will reveal a deeper engagement with the presence of the consumer as a kind of obstacle to overcome or defeat in the contemporary moment.

For now, however, what should be highlighted is precisely how ordinary this football game is: there is really nothing extraordinary about it. There are no star players or records to be broken; no explicit political statements made, or important events that surround it. The viewer doesn't know whether the teams are vying for first or last place because there are no commentators or voiceovers that could provide a compelling backstory. Nor does the film care who wins or loses the game.<sup>4</sup> *Serenghetti*, simply put, lacks the kind of drama that one is accustomed to experiencing when watching a televised sporting event, which seems to be part of its point. The ordinariness of the game also appears to be confirmed in the lack of supporters who are there to watch it. The viewer of the film glimpses several spectators, no more than twenty, who stand on the sidelines, and whose presence is almost rendered invisible by the trees and brush immediately behind them. (One probably wouldn't be wrong to speculate that those who are there are mostly family and friends).<sup>5</sup> But insofar as the lack of fans signals a certain irrelevance of the sporting event as televised or filmed drama, it also immediately raises for the viewer a series of questions about the film itself. Perhaps the most imme-

3 The game includes an opening sequence, several instant replays throughout, and intertitles at the beginning, halftime, and fulltime, which account for the remaining minutes of the film.

4 The two teams playing are La Hoja of Tepoztlán, Morelos and Amatlán (Amatlán, Morelos); Amatlán wins 1-0.

5 The personal or intimate aspect of the film, where a few family members and friends attend the game, may also remind one of Barthes's claims about the famous Winter Garden photo of his mother which doesn't appear in his book *Camera Lucida* because he believes it has no importance to those who do not know her. But by not showing it, Barthes is also saying something deeper about the ontology of photography, particularly the distinction between the *studium* and the *punctum*. In a similar fashion, the fact that *Serenghetti* captures a game, which draws very few fans but rather family and friends raises the question of the ontology of film. What does *Serenghetti* tell us about the filmic medium? What does it say about the filmic medium's relationship to the audience?

diate question would be: Why should this game warrant one, let alone eight, cameras to capture it?

No doubt, Reygadas is an unconventional director, but even this biographical note doesn't resolve the marked difference between *Serenghetti* and his other films. Indeed, *Serenghetti* represents a departure from his other films such as *Japón* (2002), *Batalla en el cielo* (2005), *Stellet Licht* (2007), *Post Tenebras Lux* (2012), and *Nuestro tiempo* (2018). The most obvious difference is that those movies are narrative films, with recognizable fictional conventions in plot development, themes, and conflicts. Those conventions are more aligned with auteur- rather than commercial cinema, but they are nevertheless recognizable as fiction. And yet, what is striking about *Serenghetti* is that Reygadas himself doesn't see the film as a documentary, but rather calls it a "fiction," which undoubtedly raises other questions, the most immediate of which is what exactly he means by the term.<sup>6</sup> One can begin to answer this question by pointing out that there are aspects of *Serenghetti* that recall Reygadas's other films, such as shooting in natural light, working with non-actors, filming in non-urban settings, and recording ambient sounds (horses neighing, flies buzzing). But these aspects seem somewhat unsatisfactory since they are, after all, characteristics of the filmmaker's style and creative interests. That is, there is still a notion of fictionality in these other films that is entirely absent in *Serenghetti*.

Another characteristic that *Serenghetti* shares with these other films is its slow pace, which would perhaps place it within the genre of "slow cinema." In a previous article on Reygadas's first feature, the Cannes-award winning film *Japón*, I noted that slow cinema scholars often attributed the importance of Reygadas's films to how they blur the lines between art and life by emphasizing the camera's indexical relationship with the world and capturing life as it is (Di Stefano 2019, 63-64). The camera, on this account, is not representing but rather recording reality.

6 It is true that Reygadas finds the divisions between genres to be somewhat beside the point, but this is because, ultimately, it is the medium of cinema that must shine through, not a particular category in which it is defined. In an interview with José Castillo about whether *Serenghetti* is in a "documentary vein," Reygadas responds as follows:

I shot a match in a nearby soccer field, but it's not a documentary. In my own experience, the difference between genres has vanished. My film is "fiction," though I used "real" materials. *Silent Light* could be seen as a better documentary on Mennonites in Mexico than one produced by National Geographic. They'll tell you the whereabouts and indexes of Mennonites in Mexico, but you'll never see them making love, having an intimate conversation, bathing with their families in a pool, or dying. (Castillo 2010)

By insisting on this indexical relationship between the camera and what is the reality caught, this scholarship, I argued, sought to push aside not only the status of fiction, but also the filmmaker's intention to create an artwork. Often what is being applauded, instead, is the films' ability to record the contingent, the spontaneous, and the authentic lives of those who live outside the Global North by minimizing or disavowing the notion of the filmmaker who, much like any director, is simply creating a film that tells a fictional story. What I argued in that piece is that this de-differentiation of art, the interest in blurring what is and what isn't fiction, is completely at odds with Reygadas's own intention, which is less about capturing contingency and spontaneity and more about building what he calls "a new world, a whole, complete self-contained world" ("Conversation"). What this "self-contained world" entails, in other words, is the creation of an autonomous object that wasn't there before the film existed. That is, it is the creation of a work of art.

There is, undoubtedly, a political reading that accompanies this anti-intentional and anti-representational position, which sees this slowness, or what Tiago De Luca terms, "duration itself," as a means to challenge an aesthetics of neoliberalism or what Song Hwee Lim calls "capitalist-modernist ideology" (De Luca 2016, 28-29; Lim 2014, 24). I contested this political reading by suggesting that it is quite compatible with neoliberal logic, by which I meant that it offered a conception of the world where questions about intentions, beliefs, and disagreements (about the work) were redescribed as experiences, options, and interests which ultimately reinforce the neoliberal world of consumers and commodities. In this way, I contended that slow cinema criticism supported a neoliberal worldview that seeks to eliminate all disagreements by disavowing a normative conceptual logic to neoliberalism.

In what follows, I propose that *Serenghetti* should be read less as a departure than as an intensification of Reygadas's commitment to establishing a "fiction" or a "whole, complete self-contained world" as a way of rejecting this anti-intentional and anti-representational logic that is at the center of contemporary theory, as exemplified in slow cinema scholarship. What this means is that *Serenghetti* will approach these aesthetic and political concerns with a degree of seriousness. However, in contrast to his previously mentioned films, which remain tethered to narrative conventions, *Serenghetti's* football game offers an opportunity for a more intentional investigation into the challenges central to contemporary cultural theory, including anti-representational and anti-intentional accounts of space and time in art and the emphasis on the consumer. One of the primary challenges, as we will see, is the very

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inability to conceptually distinguish between the viewer/spectator and the consumer precisely because both are determined in part by the experience of the subject. For this reason, we can say that for Reygadas the assertion of “a whole, complete self-contained world,” will require something closer to the absence of the spectator as a means to distinguish art from nonart—and, by extension, from a commodity.<sup>7</sup> As such, Reygadas’s notion of “fiction,” I will argue, reflects the filmmaker’s intent to create an autonomous work by way of negating the viewer’s experience.

But if the assertion of aesthetic form serves as a means to repudiate the neoliberal logic, which aims to transform all objects into commodities that satisfy consumers’ wants and desires, it makes sense to understand this consumer logic within in the particular context of Mexican cinema. No doubt, Reygadas is an outlier when contrasted with other Mexican filmmakers from his generation, namely Alejandro González Iñárritu, Alfonso Cuarón, and Guillermo del Toro. The contrast between their commercial and his more experimental films may raise questions about whether “New Mexican Cinema,” the term used since the turn of the century to classify their works, should be applied to him.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, there are notable commonalities among their films. These filmmakers, for instance, show a certain unease, or exhaustion, with the notion of *mexicanidad* [Mexicanness], which played such a primary role in Mexican culture and politics until the 1990s.<sup>9</sup> Instead, they embrace

7 For a brilliant account of that distinction, see Nicholas Brown’s, *Autonomy: The Social Ontology of Art under Capitalism*.

8 Indeed, Reygadas is an outlier in this conversation about New Mexican Cinema, an auteur who has been vocal about his anathema to Hollywood cinema, and equally vocal in his insistence on creating what he calls “real cinema” (Higgins 2005); for which he means an ontological account of cinema that centers on its visual elements, and its opposition to other media, especially literature and theater. For this reason, the conventional critical narrative understands Reygadas and filmmakers such as Iñárritu in oppositional terms (commercial vs independent cinema); or if they are brought together, it is primarily within a sociological paradigm, where both simply satisfy market demands, (mainstream vs niche market). In my larger project on the topics I analyze here, I bring them together within the aesthetic realm to argue that their shared interest in the viewer is motivated by a desire to assert or even deepen the understanding of the medium, especially against a theatrical project that ultimately considers art as nothing more than an opportunity to affirm the presence of the consumer.

9 Prior to the 1990s, Mexican cinema often endorsed the philosophy of *mexicanidad*, which aimed to establish a more uniform concept of Mexican identity. However, this concept was deeply problematic and often aligned with the state ideology of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). *Mexicanidad* specifically focused on the national myth of the mestizo, which emerged as the



a more global, innovative style, often experimenting with narrative structures, visual techniques, and storytelling approaches that depart from the more melodramatic and political themes that informed earlier Mexican cinema. There is also a raw and gritty form of realism, notably present in Iñárritu's work, that highlight the accidental, spontaneous, and contingent.<sup>10</sup>

Another crucial shared aspect among these filmmakers is their approach to film financing. Mexican cinema, for most of the 20th century, heavily relied on state subsidies. This meant that Mexican cinema was characterized by substantial budgets and a star-system, with the government's ownership of the largest film studio granting it the power to approve all major productions. However, in the 1980s, Mexico experienced a profound transformation as it embraced neoliberal measures, replacing the national-developmental model that had previously governed film funding. By the 1990s, during the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the Mexican film industry had been deregulated, as the state also divested itself of the state-owned studio. Undoubtedly, the national-developmental model had limitations, such as political censorship and the perpetuation of a hegemonic discourse surrounding *mexicanidad*, which despite its apparent inclusivity, often upheld conservative and reactionary state policies. Nevertheless, the national-developmental model provided certain safeguards that protected the industry from the free market. From this standpoint, the neoliberal model

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dominant identity in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. The Revolution sought to bring significant economic and social changes to those who had been marginalized since the period of conquest and colonialism. From the 1940s onward, the concept of *mexicanidad* increasingly aligned with market-oriented policies, displacing more progressive initiatives such as land reform that had emerged from the Revolution. See both Legrás (2008) and Epplin (2012) for a more detailed account of the limitations of *Mexicanidad*.

10 In an excellent article on the Mexican "new wave," Jeff Menne writes that many films, including what is regarded as the first Mexican new wave film, Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Amores Perros*, depict "characters that are both cross-hatched by... international influence and prospects, free markets, and private enterprise — and formed by contingency." For Menne, what is important about the term "new wave" is the "self-contemplative" aspects of the film as it is related to "the national in the onslaught of the global" (Menne 2007, 72-73). And yet, what needs to be stressed here is that the new wave is also a "self-contemplative" engagement with past national and global films; and thus, films such as *Amores perros* mark a developing recognition of the importance of contingency in the history of the medium. For an brilliant study on this same period in Mexican film, see Sánchez Prado (2014); for another article on the importance of contingency in New Mexican Cinema, see Baer and Long (2004).

In *Serenghetti* the consumer becomes a paramount formal concern that must be overcome or defeated within the film itself.

of film financing represented a significant departure from the national-developmental model in Mexico, as the objective now became less about endorsing the vision of the party in power, and more about satisfying the demands of the consumer. In short, the new model is primarily concerned with creators producing products for consumers.

I do not mean to suggest that films were not commodities in previous eras. Nor do I want to argue in this essay that *Serenghetti* offers a direct critique of neoliberalism by challenging this model of film financing. All of Reygadas's movies, and, in fact, nearly all New Mexican Cinema films, are privately financed. Nor am I proposing that this critique of the market is driven by a kind of anti-capitalist ethos that permeates Reygadas's films, which would imagine that Reygadas is somehow rejecting neoliberalism by making films that do not sell as many tickets as his peers. The point is neither about the attitude of the director nor about the cultural capital of those who purchase tickets. Instead, what I want to argue here is that in *Serenghetti* the consumer becomes a paramount formal concern that must be overcome or defeated within the film itself. This entails a keen aesthetic awareness on the part of Reygadas regarding the viewer's complete identification with the consumer. In other words, as consumer demands increasingly drive investment, what comes to be understood as a key element in *Serenghetti* is the film's ability to assert its aesthetic form as a way of negating the consumer's experience.

From this same economic and political standpoint, one can begin to make sense of Reygadas's use of sports as a subject in the film. Indeed, roughly in the same period, professional sports, especially football, undergo a similar restructuring that occurs in the film industry. This restructuring includes the push to monetize all aspects of the game, including, but not limited to, sponsorship, pay-per-view, and digital platforms.<sup>11</sup> The fact that *Serenghetti* also focuses on a women's football

11 The point of the piece is not to provide a leftist analysis of the sports, where, for example, football is regarded as a distraction, or what Terry Eagleton understands as the opiate of the masses. For a more positive notion of sport in the neoliberal period, see Peter Kennedy and David Kennedy (2017). This essay, instead, aims to understand the football game at the center of *Serenghetti* as deeply concerned with the medium of film, which in the last section of the essay, I align with a leftist critique today. Nor does this mean that I wish to present a sociological reading of sports, where sports become a reflection of one's class tastes. One is reminded of Bourdieu's essay "How Can One Be a Sports Fan?" where his approach to sport becomes almost interchangeable with art, as nothing more than a reflection of cultural capital. Bourdieu, for example, notes that "It is doubtless among the professions and the well-established business bourgeoisie that the health-giving and aesthetic functions are combined with social functions; there,

game invites consideration of how women in sports have been largely excluded from these developments in men's sports, both as national and economic projects, and how this is now experiencing a transformation. In fact, in recent years, women's football has grown globally, and in Mexico, the creation of La Liga Mexicana de Fútbol Femenil in 2007 and Liga MX Femenil in 2016 has led to aspirations for the same gains in TV rights and sponsorship. It also prompts us to uncover the histories of women's football that have been ignored. For example, women's football also gained popularity in the 1960s and 1970s across Europe and Latin America, including Mexico.<sup>12</sup> In 1971, Mexico hosted the Women's World Cup; the final, which saw Denmark defeat Mexico, drew over 110,000 fans.<sup>13</sup> It holds the record for the highest attended women's sporting event, even though FIFA only recently recognized it. The boom of this period had much to do with women's rights movements, the development of grassroots programs, and the support of the Mexican media itself. There was also plenty of money to be made from it.<sup>14</sup>

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sports take their place, along with parlour games and social exchanges (receptions, dinners etc.), among the 'gratuitous' and 'disinterested' activities which enable the accumulation of social capital" (Bourdieu 1999, 439). What this passage highlights is how the uniqueness of the work of art essentially becomes interchangeable with other objects of taste. Hence, even Bourdieu's idea of "relative autonomy" can never go far enough to provide an accurate account of what makes the work of art unique.

12 In their book *Futbolera: A History of Women and Sports in Latin America*, Brenda Elsey and Joshua Nadel write that

By the end of 1970, women's football was a regular part of the sporting scene, both in terms of media coverage and play. In the Mexico City area alone, the Liga América had over forty teams in three separate divisions. The Valley of Mexico had its own league, with sixteen teams, while Cuernavaca had a fourteen-team championship. Naucalpan, Veracruz, Puebla, and Ciudad Juárez all had leagues, some of which began to affiliate with the AMFF. As mentioned earlier, Monterrey had over two hundred teams. In Mexico City, the Liga Iztaccíhuatl had over fifty teams. (Elsey and Nadel 2019, 230-231)

13 There are several documentaries that have been released in the last year about this event, including James Erskine and Rachel Ramsay's *Copa '71* (2023) and Carolina Gil Solari and Carolina Fernández's *México '71* (2023).

14 In their last chapter, "The Boom and Bust of Mexican Women's Football," Elsey and Nadal speak to the importance and support of the media in Mexico, "Media attention was paramount to attract spectators to games" (Elsey and Nadal 2019, 206). In particular, the newspaper *El Heraldo de Mexico*, often showed photos where the crowd was present and cheering for these players (Fig.6). It is also interesting to note the rise of football in this period was framed within the national discourse of *mexicanidad* (Elsey and Nadal 2019, 215), where the success of football was framed as a national success.



Fig. 6. *El Herald de México*, December 28, 1969. Cited in Brenda Elsey and Joshua Nadel's *Futbolera: A History of Women and Sports in Latin America* (2019)



Fig. 6. A photo that captures a well-attended Mexico vs. Italy at the second women's world football championship, 1971. *El Sol de México*, August 30, 1971. Cited in Brenda Elsey and Joshua Nadel's *Futbolera: A History of Women and Sports in Latin America* (2019)

This rise in the popularity of women's football in Mexico was followed by a decline, which can also be explained by continuing sexism and economic exploitation. Indeed, for much of the boom period, women football players were not paid, but starting in 1971, they began to demand payment for their work. Once these demands were made, the national and international support for women's football in Mexico mostly disappeared. Certainly, these economic and sociological questions offer a productive political, social, and ideological basis for comparison, serving as key material to consider in relation to the game at the center of Reygadas's film.<sup>15</sup> Having now discussed the material significance of the neoliberalization of films and sports, which both directly and indirectly shapes the content of the film, we will shift our focus to the aesthetic project at the core of *Serenghetti* in order to grasp its aesthetic significance.

It might initially seem odd to look to sports as a space not only to reflect on but to insist on the work of art. Nonetheless, sports and art share a long history, exemplified not simply in representations of sports in art, but also in aesthetic terms, such as beauty, elegance, and grace, that are used to talk about sports. Football, after all, is called "o jogo bonito" [the beautiful game]. Furthermore, watching sports can generate emotional responses that often are characterized as aesthetic. In his book *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, Hans Gumbrecht holds that there is, in fact, a deep affinity between sports and art; even claiming that viewing sports today is the "most popular and potent contemporary form of aesthetic experience" (Gumbrecht 2006).<sup>16</sup> Later, we will explore Gumbrecht's claims in more detail. But for now, what is important to highlight is that if sports can be associated with these emotionally charged responses, what is significant about *Serenghetti* is how the question of these intense reactions is largely bracketed by Reygadas's decision to record an ordinary amateur football game, rather than, say, a Women's World Cup game. Thus, as a point of entry into the film, we might simply make clear that Reygadas's interest in the game, as a subject to explore the intersections between art and sports, is not one that follows the aesthetic notion of affective intensity; much less, in what Gumbrecht would understand as the popularity and potency that sports elicit. Rather, I will suggest that the turn away from affective responses, such as excitement, drama, tension, in *Serenghetti* becomes the first indication of

15 The area where *Serenghetti* was filmed has a strong presence of women's football as depicted in the ESPN's series, *Greenland*.

16 The citation is found in the book description.

Reygadas's concern to negate or neutralizing the type of shared immersive experience that in the neoliberal moment is increasingly often allied with sports and art. We might simply say that by focusing on the amateur game, Reygadas is asserting a sense of aesthetic meaning that can't be reduced to the kind of effects that are often associated with not just sports but spectacles of all sorts, including Hollywood blockbusters.

To be sure, *Serengheti* is not the only film that has used football as a subject of aesthetic creation and exploration. Indeed, one can see Reygadas's film following a clear line of art films on sport, and football in particular, such as Hellmuth Costard's 1971 *Fussball wie noch nie* (Football as Never Before) and more recently, Douglas Gordon and Phillipe Parreno's *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* (2006).<sup>17</sup> In a brilliant reading of *Zidane*, Michael Fried suggests that Gordon and Parreno's film continues an antitheatrical tradition that began in French painting in the middle of the 18th century.<sup>18</sup> Certainly, for Fried, the term "portrait" serves as one of the initial indicators that the film is precisely concerned with the status of the work of art. More specifically, the focus is on absorption, as Zidane immerses himself in the game,

17 While *Fussball wie noch nie* undoubtedly revolves around a star player, the English footballer George Best, it places less emphasis on the question of spectatorship. Instead, by focusing primarily on his movements and not the surrounding action, it often seems as if he is wandering aimlessly across the field. One could argue that this evokes a sense of being adrift, even suggesting a profound existential inquiry. A good point of comparison between *Zidane* and *Fussball*, which are very much committed to deepening our understanding of the philosophy of art, is Spike Lee's *Kobe Doin' Work* (2009), which offers a prime example of a documentary that aims mostly to capitalize on the commodification of the cult of the figure by giving viewers an all-access pass into the day in the life of a star player.

18 This reading is presented in Fried's *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, a text that, in addition to photography, delves into the realm of film. However, the concept of absorption is first elaborated in his book *Absorption and Theatricality*, where Fried explores eighteenth-century paintings through the critical lens of Denis Diderot. Fried contends that, according to Diderot, "the most ambitious paintings rested ultimately upon the supreme fiction that the beholder did not exist, that he was not really there, standing before the canvas; and that the dramatic representation of action and passion, and the causal and instantaneous mode of unity that came with it, provided the best available medium for establishing that fiction in the painting itself" (Fried 1980, 103). While the traditional absorptive project in painting comes to an end toward the close of that century and into the 19th century, other antitheatrical devices emerge. These devices are primarily explored in two other masterful works, *Courbet's Realism* (1990) and *Manet's Modernism* (1996), ultimately aiming to assert the status of the work of art and defeat theatricality.



despite his acute awareness that 80,000 fans are watching, cheering, and filming his every move. For this reason, according to Fried, the film makes available “a possibility of sustaining absorption under a condition of maximum publicity” (Fried 2014, 2016).<sup>19</sup>

But if *Zidane* presents a world in which the work can be sustained “under a condition of maximum publicity” because there are 80,000 spectators, *Serenghetti* seems to be suggesting something different precisely because there aren’t. Indeed, one might consider that the absence of a star player like Zidane and the choice to film an ordinary amateur game instead of a spectacle like a Champions League final or World Cup match as motivated by Reygadas’s desire not to draw a crowd of spectators. It is also a plausible reason why Reygadas chooses a women’s team over a men’s team, since, as Doyle suggests in her examination of media broadcasting in women’s sport, “the elements that make the men’s game feel spectacular are totally absent from feminist engagements with the sport” (Doyle 2019, 125).<sup>20</sup> Thus we can begin to see that the lack of a crowd in *Serenghetti* is both acknowledging and responding to the centrality of the viewer in the contemporary moment, and the degree to which every viewer is unavoidably also a consumer. Indeed, what brings all these points together, I want to suggest, is that they are all motivated by the attempt to overcome the real threat that the consumer poses. The lack of spectators in *Serenghetti*, in other words, is not a claim about evasion but rather an attempt to repudiate a logic which turns the work into a situation or product to affirm the consumer’s experience.

Which is just to say that *Serenghetti* is less interested in the issue of absorption than committed to mobilizing other antitheatrical elements to assert its status as a work of art.<sup>21</sup> From this position, one can consider certain visual features of the film, including how the film denies the movie viewer’s field of vision, which is apparent in the film’s opening shot. Rather than, for instance, an open, sweeping aerial shot of the stadium and field, as we are accustomed to seeing in conventional live TV sporting broadcasts, what appears is a static extreme close-up of blades of grass swaying in the wind, which lasts nearly thirty seconds before the shot finally comes to focus on a football pitch and the two teams present (fig.1). In contrast to the conventional aerial view,

*Serenghetti* is less interested in the issue of absorption than committed to mobilizing other antitheatrical elements to assert its status as a work of art.

19 Although found in Fried’s text *Another Light*, this reference is to Fried’s reading of *Zidane* in *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*.

20 To be sure, with the rise in the popularity of women’s football in recent years, this “absence” of the spectacle has also changed.

21 For a more in-depth discussion on antitheatricity in photography and film, see again Fried’s *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*.



Fig. 1 Stills from *Serengeti*



*Serenghetti*'s opening shot suggests a blocking or denial of the spectator's visual field. This negation also plays out in other shots throughout the film. There are long shots that are so distant that it is difficult to see the action on the field (fig.2); close-ups with handheld cameras that are so uncomfortably close that Reygadas actually interferes with the player's movements (fig.3). There are many shots, in fact, where the ball is entirely out of the frame.



Fig. 2 Still from *Serenghetti*



Fig. 3 Still from *Serenghetti*

Considering this denial of seeing the game, it is important to take into account the features that do appear on the screen. In the frame, throughout the film, we see both the score of the game and the time, which is standard enough, but what is unusual here are the retro graphics (fig.4), which are clearly a throwback to 1980s and 1990s live sports broadcasting or even video games. Normally the function of graphics in televised sports is to inform and immerse viewers into the spectacle of sports. Jennifer Doyle notes that “Especially in the televised sports spectacle, media itself becomes the platform through which the spectator experiences his passion for the sport. Glossy production, rapid edits, dynamic graphics, and elaborate sound effects theatricalize spectatorship in terms of technology and, implicitly, gender” (Doyle 2019, 125).<sup>22</sup> We will return to Doyle’s account below, but for now it is important to signal that in *Serenghetti* the appearance of graphics ultimately serves to raise more questions (Why are the retro graphics needed? Why this particular font?) than to immerse the viewer into the game.



22 In her reading of women’s sports and spectacle, Doyle continues “Statistical forms of analysis turn bodies into arrows, diagrams, and numbers. The distance between the visual experience of watching a World Cup match and the visual geometry of a game like EA Sports’ FIFA decreases with each revolution in product development (moving now toward VR and 3-D). Such technological rituals organize an enormous amount of attention and desire around the male athlete’s body, for the pleasures of the presumed male spectator/consumer” (Doyle 2019, 132).

As I will note below, Reygadas’s film, in part, emphasizes the soccer game as a kind of analogy of the work of art. The focus on a women’s soccer game in the film is a further attempt to make this point. I do not suggest, however, that this aesthetic claim can be reduced to a question of gender. Nor is my point that women’s soccer is outside of commodity production. Within neoliberal logic, the recent rise of women’s soccer doesn’t offer an alternative to the market but rather affirms that money can also be made in women’s football.



Fig. 4 Still from *Serengeti*

The soundscape has a similar effect. For instance, the sounds of horses neighing, and donkeys braying are more noticeable than the cheers from the crowd. Regarding this crowd, as noted, there are only a few people who surround the field, rendered even smaller by the mountains that envelop them. The film's most exciting moment arises when a goal is scored from a set piece, and as the ball crosses the goal line, it strikes Reygadas, who is recording the game, in the head (Fig. 5). Everybody laughs, including Reygadas. All these aspects complicate the viewer's relationship to the football game; it's as though Reygadas were not asking the viewer to see or feel the game but to refuse that position as a possibility. And that awareness of a certain absence of effects automatically gives rise to a series of questions about the meaning of the film itself. Or put differently, in place of emotions, we are left with only interpretive questions. Why does the opening shot begin with blades of grass? What do the outdated graphics on the screen mean?

Certainly, if Reygadas's film aims to raise questions about its meaning, it also serves to underscore the distinction between watching a film and watching a game, that is, between interpreting a work of art, and experiencing an event. To discern this dissimilarity, one can revisit Gumbrecht's assertions regarding the "aesthetic experience" in sport, where he contrasts two dimensions: "meaning" and "presence" (Gumbrecht 2006, 62).<sup>23</sup> For him, meaning is associated with the cognitive and interpretive, which does play a role in aesthetic appreciation, but cannot, according to him, account for what makes watching sports enjoyable. Instead of cognition, it's the performance and the presence of bodies that makes us appreciate this form of beauty. Gumbrecht writes that, unlike cognition, "[i]n the presence dimension ... [i]t would not occur to a soccer player to ask himself what the ball could possibly 'mean'" (Gumbrecht 2006, 62); and this lack of meaning also extends to the spectator's own gratification: "people feel that they are part of and contiguous with objects in the physical world" (Gumbrecht 2006, 62). This "presence dimension" stresses not just the relationship between bodies on the pitch and in the stands, but also the immediacy between

23 There are limitations to Gumbrecht's account of aesthetics. Nevertheless, his framework does begin to tease out an aesthetics of sports. It also gives us another point of entry to grasp certain tendencies within contemporary cultural theory; namely, the tendency to treat art as an event or situation to be experienced affectively rather than understood critically. This emphasis on experience is fundamental to how many scholars have approached the discourse of slow cinema, especially when framed as a political intervention. For a refutation of this approach to slow cinema, see Di Stefano (2019).



these bodies (Gumbrecht 2006, 64). It's not only that the notion of presence is contrasted with meaning and cognition, but rather that it is constitutive of the subordination of meaning and cognition. For the spectator, for instance, to ask what the player's intention is when she kicks the ball is, according to Gumbrecht, to take away from the immersive experience which would otherwise bring the player and spectator together.

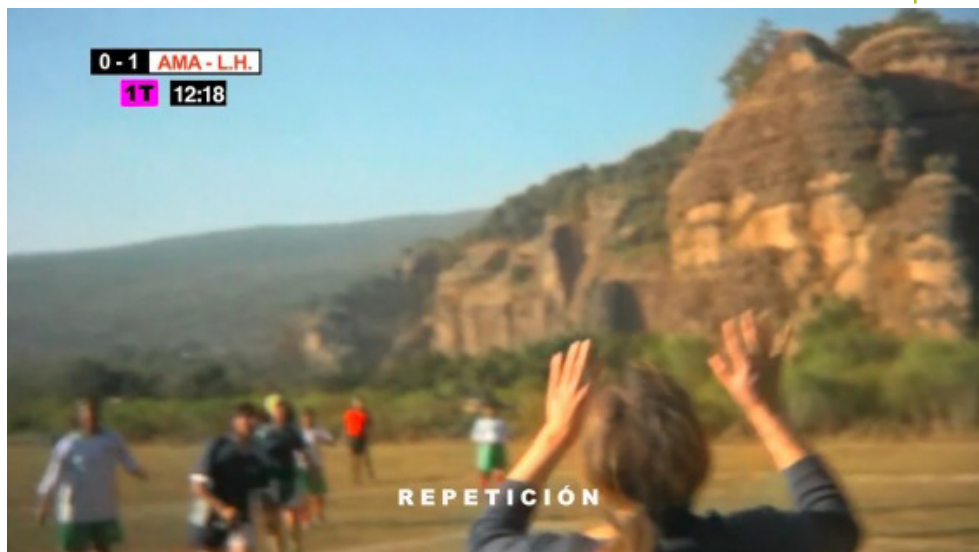


Fig. 5 Still from *Serengetti*

What Reygadas is attempting to make appear is something like the structure of intentionality, which becomes visible by examining the conceptual difference between experiencing a game and interpreting a film.

The point here, of course, is not to imply that players don't have intentions, a topic I will return to shortly when talking about the rules of the game. Instead, the notion is that posing such questions hinders the ability to fully immerse oneself in the game. But if these types of questions, as we are already beginning to see, take away from immersing oneself in the game, they are at the center of Reygadas's film, since all the interpretive questions posed above (Why does the opening shot begin with blades of grass? Why are there outdated graphics on the screen? etc.) cannot be answered without recourse to the question of intentionality. What I mean is that, unlike watching a football game, what Reygadas's film is deeply interested in is creating a fictional film where viewing the film itself cannot escape the question of intention. The aim of the film, in short, is to take what is seemingly an anti-intentional event and transform it into something that is *aesthetically meaningful*. Indeed, what I want to argue later is that what Reygadas is attempting to make appear is something like the structure of intentionality, which becomes visible by examining the conceptual difference between experiencing a game and interpreting a film.

For now, however, it is important to stress the extent to which the insistence on experience or presence effectively renders irrelevant the concept of fiction, and the question of art more generally. This is what Gumbrecht himself suggests when he claims that "[n]othing is ever fictional in the presence dimension, even a sports event such as Hulk Hogan's 'wrestling'" (Gumbrecht 2006, 66). Of course, in a certain way, this can simply mean that part of enjoying or immersing oneself means feeling as if it isn't fiction but something immediate and real. But it also entails something more radical about the idea of 'presence' or 'force,' which is that once what is primary is the experience one feels, it matters very little whether that object is a work of art, a sporting event, or a walk in the park. Indeed, the whole point of presence is not the object but rather the experience one has regardless of the object. No doubt, Gumbrecht is interested in the question of beauty in sports, and thus there must be a cognitive level of distinction, but the force of presence as a theoretical question is the complete irrelevance of the object, and in this case of the art object, and the type of interpretive questions that are raised by the object.<sup>24</sup>

24 It should be stressed that Gumbrecht's claim on presence point directly to certain limitations to Gumbrecht's aesthetic reading of sports, a reading that very much aligns athletic beauty with other beautiful things, including skies, rivers, flowers, animals, and people. What I mean here is that Gumbrecht's aesthetics is less an account of a particular object, than of one's subjective experience

From this position, we can discern not only a distinction between interpreting a film and watching a sporting event, but also a contrast between Reygadas's film and a current scholarly perspective on slow cinema, which redescribe Reygadas's works of art as events, and the interpretive questions these works of art pose, as affective responses and experiences. Tiago de Luca, who has written extensively on Reygadas's films, maintains that slow cinema is defined by its uncomfortably long and static takes that ultimately stress "silence, stillness, minimalism, and an emphasis on duration itself" (de Luca 2016, 28-29). Examining Reygadas's *Japón*, de Luca underscores the film's indexical quality, notably showcased through its extensive use of long takes and pans. These techniques not only capture unintentional elements but also inadvertently seize unanticipated aspects (de Luca 2015, 224). By insisting on these contingent and accidental aspects, de Luca insists that *Japón* confirms what Mary Anne Doane calls "a denial of the frame as boundary and hence promised access to a seemingly limitless vision" (Doane 2002, 154).<sup>25</sup> This denial of the frame and the "emphasis on duration itself," rather than a representation of time, signal not only the de-differentiation

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regardless of the object (trees, rivers, sports, etc.) These same aesthetic limitations are not unique to Gumbrecht's aesthetic account and can be found as far back as Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1750). Instead, it is only with Hegel that we see the clearest attempt to examine the notion of aesthetics in its distinct relationship to the work of art. In the opening paragraph of his *Aesthetics*, Hegel makes this point clear when he notes that his study is not an examination of "the beautiful as such but simply with the beauty of art" (Hegel 1975, 1). And an art object, unlike a natural object, requires a notion of authorial intent. In short, while Gumbrecht's reading provides us with an aesthetic theory, he doesn't offer us a philosophy of art. In my reading of *Serenghetti*, I attempt to address the limitations of the former to offer a better account of the latter. Furthermore, the general lack of serious engagement with the ontology of the work of art in the 1980s and 1990s is crucial to the rise of cultural studies and the seemingly paradoxical commitment to a post-Kantian aesthetics of failure, residues, and fragments. What I mean here is a doubling down on the subjective (and largely aesthetic) side of the relationship and an almost complete irrelevance of the objective, ontological one. The turn to cultural studies, in this way, is very much committed to seeing all objects as mere opportunities to affirm the subject's experience. The slow cinema scholarship noted above is nothing more than a continuation of this project. But insofar as slow cinema scholarship eliminates the aesthetic object, it also forces one to acknowledge that Gumbrecht's own aesthetic examination of sport presents perhaps an intensification of the same contemporary interest in criticism, not only disavowing the work of art but also emphasizing the notion of presence, immediacy, and anti-intentionalism that ultimately aligns athletic beauty with other beautiful things, including skies, rivers, flowers, animals, and people.

25 Doane's text is cited in de Luca (2015, 225).

of art, but also a desire to imagine the shared experience between the film and the viewer (de Luca 2016, 28-29). Unlike Reygadas's idea of a "self-contained world," the importance of slow cinema, for de Luca, is found precisely in its ability to overcome the aesthetic "frame," so the film and the viewer come to experience same space and time (de Luca 2015, 225).

By emphasizing not only the unintended, but also the spontaneous, contingent, and material aspects of the film, de Luca argues not only for the elimination of the aesthetic frame between film and viewer but also for a political reading of the film which makes visible a more egalitarian ecocritical perspective on society that seeks to "relativize and diminish human presence in relation to the nonhuman world" (de Luca 2015, 224). By no means is de Luca the only scholar who believes that this blurring of the line between art and life by way of insisting on the materiality of time (instead of the aesthetic representation of it) challenges or undermines the status quo. For example, in his reading of slow cinema, Song Hwee Lim believes that the "excessive temporality" of slow cinema "points to that extratextual space beyond the frame to raise questions about the politics of time, the value of speed, and the material forms in which different temporalities manifest their ideological investments" (Lim 2014, 33).<sup>26</sup> What he means here is that slow cinema overcomes the frame, and thus challenges "capitalist-modernist ideology" (Lim 2014, 24). In a similar manner, the film scholar Richard Miské notes that slow cinema's commitment to dead time fosters an "ethics," as it involves "an appreciation of the fact that time is not under our control" (Miské 2010, 778). From this position, this lack of control frees cinematic time from its aesthetic constraints, liberating this temporal experience, and giving rise to what Rancière refers to as "configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity" (Rancière 2004, 9).<sup>27</sup>

All these readings treat the work of art as nothing more than a situation or opportunity that brings the screen and viewer into the same physical space. To be sure, slowness is a product of cinematic form, but for these scholars what is crucial is precisely the effect that quickly gives way to an intensification of the viewer's experience. In other words, the force of slow cinema for them is located in how the preservation of other "temporal structures" gives rise to a vision of film that "quickly exhausts the image's representational dimension," enabling the emergence of a new-

26 Ibid, 33.

27 Rancière is cited in Lim (2014, 32).



found “collective situation” (de Luca 2015, 38-39).<sup>28</sup> We will return to the political implications of this scholarship later on, but for now, it should be noted that this conceptual account of slow cinema is strikingly similar to Gumbrecht’s aesthetic experience of watching a game, where “people feel that they are part of and contiguous with objects in the physical world” (Gumbrecht 2006, 62). Indeed, it provides an account of the “presence dimension” that effectively eliminates the notion of fiction, and the work of art, more generally. But more importantly still, this insistence on the subject’s experience obfuscates Reygadas’s intent to create a work of art; that is, to create an autonomous object that stands independent of the viewer’s experience.

And as I have been arguing, the women’s football game in *Serenghetti* functions as a motif to assert this autonomous space that not only repudiates the spectacle of watching a sporting event but also stands outside of the experience of the spectator as such. In her essay, Doyle notes that “Because [women’s soccer] is less mediatized, access to the game is less mediated;” what this means, from the standpoint of this essay, is that the filmmaker’s intention to capture a woman’s soccer game can also be understood as an opportunity to focus on the concept of game itself (Doyle 2019, 130). That is, insofar as the game is less mediatized, it brings us one step closer to the main objective of the film which develops the notion of the game as an element to assert the cinematic medium.

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28 I have written more about de Luca’s account in my essay “Toward an Aesthetics of Dead Time in Carlos Reygadas’s *Japón*.” I cite a portion of it below to point to his commitment to experience, and the effect of boredom in particular. For example, De Luca asserts that:

the discomfort or boredom provoked by extended shots of characters wandering pointlessly from one place to another, which stubbornly delay narrative gratification, may prompt the spectator to look around and see whether such feelings are being shared by other spectators or make one wonder what other viewers within the same site are making of such a film. (de Luca 2015, 38-39)

Although it may seem that this account goes against de Luca’s frameless vision proposed above, it ultimately ends up reinforcing the primacy of the beholder’s experience. Politics in this reading, in other words, is conceived as redescribing representation as a situation, which, in turn, “provides the conditions for an ethical spectatorship” (de Luca 2015, 41-42). For de Luca, the politics of slow cinema has less to do with the representation of time than with an experience that affords a “collective situation.” But this also means that the force of slow cinema is located in how the slowness in the film “restores a sense of time and experience” outside of the film (de Luca 2015, 41). In short, slow cinema, on de Luca’s account, wishes to overcome the film’s status as film in order to become an object that gives rise to a shared temporal experience between film and spectator.

Indeed, it is precisely because of the lack of spectators in *Serenghetti* that we can begin to trace in the game itself a deeper commitment to creating an antitheatrical work of art, or what Reygadas names as a “whole, complete self-contained world.”

Hence, the need at this point to consider the notion of the game itself as an affirmation or a thematization of what it means to be a work of art. We can begin by noting that games, like art, are rule governed, which also means that without these rules, they become indistinguishable from other types of play. But, of course, different sports have different rules. Reygadas’s deliberate choice of a football game is significant in several key ways, especially when it is considered in light of contemporary slow cinema scholarship, which wishes to disregard temporal constraints, and understand itself as an “emphasis on duration itself” (de Luca 2016, 28-29). Indeed, football is regimented by an exact time that determines the beginning and end of the contest. When the time is up, the game is over.<sup>29</sup> This is not the case with other sports, such as boxing, tennis, or baseball, where time is secondary to determining the contest’s end. In *Serenghetti*, Reygadas places the formal feature of the clock at the center left of the screen, which renders visible the importance of time not only to the game, but also to cinema as an aesthetic medium.

As such, *Serenghetti* creates a built-in critique of slow cinema’s immersive fantasy of film as a continual emptying out of presence or “a denial of the frame as boundary and hence promised access to a seemingly limitless vision.” (Doane 2002, 154).<sup>30</sup> (In this way, it makes sense to think of *Serenghetti* as a kind of aesthetic manifesto against slow cinema.) In fact, part of this slow cinema fantasy is to imagine time breaking through the aesthetic frame, as if the time of the film and time in the actual world were materially one. From this position, the notion of a rule governed game in *Serenghetti* serves as a way of insisting on aesthetic autonomy, as a means of marking a difference between not only meaning and effect, but also the work and the spectator. What I mean here is that while football games need players to be a game, they do not need spec-

29 Of course, there is injury time in football, but it’s not as if injury time somehow deconstructs or problematizes the status of the game as such. Which is just to say, it is accounted for in the rules of the game.

30 Doane’s text is cited in de Luca (2015, 225). It’s crucial to highlight that the slow cinema claims made by de Luca, or even Gumbrecht’s concept of “presence,” bear a remarkable resemblance to the idea of ‘presence’ in literalism (minimalism) criticized by Fried in “Art and Objecthood.” Indeed, as Fried argues, the temporal point of literalism is “essentially a presentment of endless, or indefinite, duration” (Fried 1988, 166).

tators. That is, the identity and legibility of the game is maintained regardless of whether a spectator attends. In short, spectators are secondary.<sup>31</sup> In this way, one can push the analogy a bit further by noting that the absence of spectators also renders visible something essential about the medium of cinema itself. Part of what it means to be a film, as Stanley Cavell reminds us in the *World Viewed*, is that it allows “the audience to be mechanically absent” (Cavell 1979, 25). What one can draw from Cavell’s point is that the action on the screen, much like the action of the game, maintains a certain structural indifference in regard to the presence of the spectator. Thus, by making the game the subject of his film, Reygadas brings to bear a notion of the cinematic medium that acknowledges a fundamental division between the action on the screen and the viewer’s absence from it.

But, of course, this analogy between the game and the medium of film only goes so far before it begins to break down, reducing Reygadas’s desire to create a cinematic world to a mere indexing of a rather uninteresting game. It breaks down not because of the boringness of the game, or any effect for that matter. The analogy doesn’t hold instead because it effectively erases the notion of authorial intent, which is just as essential to “fiction” as it is irrelevant to the game itself. This marked difference between a meaningful work of art, and the non-intentional game, is made clear by Cavell when he suggests that: “Games are places where intention does not count, human activities in which intention need not generally be taken into account. Because in games what happens is described solely in terms set by the game itself, because the consequences one is responsible for are limited a priori by the rules of the game” (Cavell 2002, 236). My idea here is not to suggest that players do not have intentions, they surely do, but rather that these intentions are merely descriptive here. One doesn’t have to know what the player means

31 At the same time, the game as “rule-governed” also evokes the idea that art is a self-constituting or self-legislative object, reintroducing the concept of the work’s autonomy. Brown observes that “To claim that something is a work of art is to claim that it is a self-legislating artifact, that its form is intelligible, but not by reference to any eternal end. Since it is fundamentally true of artworks that their contingent material substrate is legible as being uncontingently assumed—that is what it means to be self-legislating—works of art are sites at which some of the most controversial claims of the dialect are thematized as holding sway” (Brown 2019, 31). In *After the Beautiful*, Robert Pippin explicitly connects the two in his reading of Hegel’s *Aesthetics* when he suggests that “[Art] norms are collectively self-legislated over time; in other words, in the same basic way that the rules for a game could be formulated collectively over time” (Pippin 2013, 43).

when she is passing the ball because the objective of the game itself renders those intentions beside the point. Using the analogy of a chess game, Walter Benn Michaels makes a similar point about the rules of the game: “No one cares what you meant by moving your rook four spaces to the left—you don’t need to mean to checkmate your opponent in order to do it. (You can just as effectively, although not just as easily, do it by accident.) And if the meaning of your move is irrelevant to the question of whether your opponent has been checkmated, your opponent’s understanding of the meaning is equally irrelevant. Indeed, this point can be put more generally just by saying that the moves in a game don’t have any meaning. Which is just to say ... that they have force” (Michaels 2004, 189).

I’d like to suggest that it is Reygadas’s acknowledgement of the risk of conflating art and the game (or even the risk of conflating art and life as such) that we can turn again to several moments in the film as attempts to make intentionality legible. That is, the point is not that Reygadas simply intends to capture a game, but rather that he intends to use the game as a subject matter to transform the film into an independent and unified whole. That is, the idea here is to transform the film from the experience of the game into an object that needs to be analyzed in its status as an artwork. Perhaps the most illustrative examples of this point are to be found in the appearance of Reygadas himself in the film; for example, as noted, there are moments where Reygadas is so physically close to the players that he risks interfering with the play (fig.3). Or when Reygadas accidentally gets hit on the head by the ball. The reason he is hit, in part, is because he is so absorbed in filming the game. But more importantly here is not the accident or the laughter that it produces, but that the event is replayed four times from four different camera angles, the last from Reygadas’s own (fig. 5). What I mean is that Reygadas is drawing our attention to the idea of cinematic editing, which clearly problematizes the notion of cinema as simply contingency, chance, or accident that is so prevalent in the fantasy of slow cinema; and he does so precisely to neutralize this sense of contingency, chance, and accident. Or perhaps better said, the sequence thematizes the conceptual transformation from contingency into cinematic meaning. The same desire to transform actual life into cinematic meaning also finds form in the appearance of the game clock on the screen, which mechanically tracks the time of the game, but doesn’t correspond to the duration of the film itself. The game and the film, in short, are irreducible.<sup>32</sup> All

The point is not that Reygadas simply intends to capture a game, but rather that he intends to use the game as a subject matter to transform the film into an independent and unified whole.

32 The assertion of cinematic meaning is already registered in *Serenghetti* in

these choices become a way of affirming that the filmmaker's hand and head is everywhere in the film. That is, the difference between watching a rule-governed game and interpreting a work of art is not found from without, but rather is constitutive of the filmmaker's intention to make the work meaningful.

At the same time, what *Serenghetti* all but forces the viewer to recognize is the difference between effects and meaning, where effects are primary to watching the game (and even more so to the broadcasting of a game), they are secondary to interpreting the work of art. The virtual absence of the spectator in *Serenghetti* points to this logic, but it is, as it were, there every time one engages with art. That is, the truth that the film lays bare is that interpretation is something that is demanded by the work of art as an intentional object. Which is just to say that we would somehow be missing the point of *Serenghetti* if we were upset by the quality of play of one of the teams, or the lack of focus of a player, or disappointed that a coach subbed off a player. In short, we would be missing the point if we treated *Serenghetti* as if it were like watching a game. Instead, what we find ourselves doing is asking questions about the meaning of *Serenghetti* as a film. Why does Reygadas decide to film these teams? What do these camera angles mean? Why does Reygadas decide to put himself in the film? These types of questions that art brings forth, instead, are completely unlike watching a sporting event since their interpretation excludes an *a priori* claim about one's experience. From this position, we might simply conclude by noting that the camera in *Serenghetti*, and cinema as art, does not simply record what is there, but rather is an extension of the filmmaker's intention to create a work of art.

But this theoretical point about the work of art also lays bare a political claim for the Left in the neoliberal moment. The political importance of film is found not in the recognition of the consumer's experience, but rather in the assertion of the work's meaning. The rise of neoliberalism in Mexico and its continued global expansion is supported by the claim that there is no alternative to capitalism. In 1991, Francis Fukuy-

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the temporal disjuncture between watching a live football game and watching this film in a movie theater or gallery. *Serenghetti* was created with an idea that it would not be transmitted as a live broadcast; that is, from its conception, it is meant to be viewed at a later moment. The film is past, which already subtracts from the kind of immediacy that one may experience when watching a game live on TV. As such, *Serenghetti* already begins to assert a notion of the cinematic, which rejects the type of immediacy and presence that live sports offer, and a Blockbuster movie aims at achieving.

ama made this point when he stated that “the triumph of the West, of the Western idea, is evident first of all in the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism” and free market capitalism (Fukuyama 1989, 3). Michaels reminds us that the neoliberal world is one in which ideological disagreements are increasingly redefined as mere differences of subject positions. When elucidating the distinction between disagreements and differences in subject positions, Michaels employs, as noted above, the analogy of a game. He posits that two opposing players can differ without necessarily disagreeing. “In chess, for example, the person playing white doesn’t think the person playing black is mistaken; the conflict between them is not about who is right but who will win: what matters in a game is not what you believe to be true but which side you’re on” (Michaels 2004, 32). And he goes on to note that

The whole point of posthistoricism (the whole point, that is, of the commitment to difference) is to understand all differences as differences in what we are and thus to make it seem that the fundamental question—the question that separates the postideological Left from the Postideological Right—is the question of our attitude toward difference: the Left want to insist on it, the Right wants to eliminate it. (Michaels 2004, 32)

Michaels’s argument, of course, goes beyond politics and extends to the realm of art, where interpretive disagreements are transformed into differences of perspectives or experience.

Throughout this essay, I have argued that one of the primary means of insisting on this difference of perspective is through the redescription of fiction or a “self-contained world” as a situation or an event. This approach replaces the idea of the interpretation of the work as right or wrong and instead fosters an immersive notion that eliminates the question of right or wrong by turning these normative claims into an affective relation where “people feel that they are part of and contiguous with objects in the physical world” (Gumbrecht 2006, 62). This same logic lies at the core of de Luca’s analysis of slow cinema, where the denial of the frame presents an opportunity to redefine interpretation as an experience or situation. The advantage of this notion of experience is that, while interpretations can certainly be wrong, experiences cannot. What distinguishes experience is not what you believe but where you stand. From my position, I might see or hear one thing, and you might perceive another, but it would be inaccurate to say that I am right or you are wrong when discussing

those experiences. What holds value with experiences is that everybody has one, and it is uniquely yours.

The other point that Michaels makes is that the commitment to experience in politics and aesthetics is not truly a critique of capitalism but rather deeply compatible with it. Undoubtedly, Latin American cultural production offers a plethora of films that directly and transparently criticize modern-day capitalism or the devastating effects of past dictatorships. However, what I want to suggest is that more than the explicit politics portrayed in these films, their aesthetics should be considered within and against the backdrop of this neoliberal logic which redefines disagreements as difference. In fact, in many ways these films, along with the scholarship that supports them, demand to be understood as eradicating the division between the film and the audience, so that the viewer can no longer be understood as someone who interprets what the film means, but rather as someone who witnesses, or even comes to share the pain of the victim. According to this point of view, films do not represent but *simply are* events or situations, and they are for those who witness them as well.<sup>33</sup> This implies that contemporary cultural logic is deeply committed to envisioning art as determined by experience rather than the interpretive disagreements that arise from the artwork itself. As such, *Serenghetti* should not be understood as an escape from neoliberalism in Mexico today, but rather as offering a repudiation of this ideology by emphasizing interpretation over mere experience. To be clear, my point about *Serenghetti* is not just to insist that my interpretation is right while others are wrong, but rather to acknowledge that this normative structure of agreement versus disagreement is inherent in the very assertion of a work's status as art. While these disagreements are not reducible to politics, they do define the normative structure that also characterizes politics itself. Which is just to say, if one aims to offer an alternative to neoliberal ideology from within art, it is important to recognize in this contemporary neoliberal moment a notion of disagreement from which such a claim could, at least in theory, be made.

33 For an extensive conversation on Latin American cultural production, especially on the question of human rights as a cultural logic that pushes aside questions about aesthetic form and economic equality, see Di Stefano (2018).



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**Tytuł:** Zasady gry w *Serenghetti* Carlosa Reygadasa

**Abstrakt:** Na pierwszy rzut oka *Serenghetti* (2009) meksykańskiego reżysera Carlosa Reygadasa wydaje się filmem dokumentalnym, rejestrującym jedynie amatorski mecz piłki nożnej kobiet w Santo Domingo Ocotitlán (Morelos, Meksyk). Dotychczasowa recepcja filmu koncentrowała się na kwestiach społecznych, takich jak rozwój miast, antropocentryzm i sport jako widowisko. Niniejszy esej dowodzi jednak, że *Serenghetti* jest o wiele bardziej zainteresowany badaniem estetycznego wymiaru kina lub tego, co Reygadas nazywa „fikcją” filmu. Pod pewnymi względami *Serenghetti* przypomina film *Zidane: Portret XXI wieku* (2006) Douglasa Gordona i Philippe’a Parreno, ponieważ oba filmy rejestrują pełne mecze piłki nożnej. Jednak podczas gdy film Gordona i Parreno angażuje się, jak twierdzi Michael Fried, w kwestię absorpcji w sztuce współczesnej, niniejszy esej sugeruje, że film Reygadasa dąży do zakwestionowania antyreprezentacyjnego ujęcia kina, w szczególności kwestii czasu, która była kluczowa dla tego, jak badacze zajmujący się slow cinema rozumieli jego twórczość. Rzeczywiście, od czasu nagrodzonego w Cannes filmu *Japón* (2001),

filmy Reygadasa są określane jako *slow cinema* - filmy, które są rozumiane mniej jako reprezentacja czasu, a bardziej jako to, co Thiago de Luca nazywa „samym trwaniem”. Niniejszy esej sugeruje, że poprzez koncepcję gry w piłkę nożną *Serengheti* nie tylko ustanawia się jako fikcję, ale także, czyniąc to, zapewnia odczytanie czasu kinowego, które podważa wiele politycznych i estetycznych fantazji wspieranych przez współczesną krytykę kulturę.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *slow cinema*, sztuka współczesna, konsumpcjonizm, autonomia sztuki, indeksalność, sport, kino południowoamerykańskie, kino meksykańskie

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## The Boundaries of an Organism: Purposefulness and Autonomy

In this article I want to argue that the organic metaphor—most commonly associated with the Romantic notion of an artwork being analogous to a living being—served throughout the last two centuries as a means of conceptualising autonomy, remaining in a dialectical relation to the latter concept: the structure of the metaphor posited within different critical traditions influenced the theorists', critics' and artists' ideas of what it meant for an artwork to be autonomous, while itself being shaped and modelled by their expectations and beliefs regarding the ontology of the artwork and the possibility of the latter's autonomy. Over this time the metaphor has undergone substantial modifications, supporting both art's claim for autonomy, and an attempted denial of the latter. In order to illustrate these shifts, I will discuss three theoretical and critical moments in the history of the organic metaphor: Romantic organicism, centred on the concept of the principle of life, New Critical formalist organicism, which turns out to shadow forth what Michael Fried called literalism, and postmodern organicism, as exhibited by the environmental humanities and ecocritical discourses. The brief outline of the recent history of the organic metaphor is intended to offer an aid to understand-

ding the origins of contemporary organicism, and to show that its reluctance towards the idea of aesthetic autonomy stems from the characteristically postmodern notion of organic form. Finally, I propose to show how the concept of organic form can be fruitfully reinterpreted in light of Kant's considerations on teleological judgement and Anscombe's views on intention.

**Keywords:** autonomy, purposefulness, organicism, literary criticism, romanticism, ecocriticism

## Organic growth and organic origin—the Romantic imagination

The organic metaphor is probably the most basic and widespread conceptual device in modern aesthetic thought; it permeates practically every attempt at literary criticism and forms the implicit or explicit basis of the considerations regarding the nature of a work of art formulated within various critical traditions. It is at work not only when we say that an artwork is (or should be) like a living being—this is probably the most widely recognised version of organicism, associated primarily with German idealism and Romanticism—but every time when we claim to recognize an *inner principle* that governs it *from within*. What we theorise about in such cases is the artwork's autonomy—conditions on which it exists as a distinct, individual thing, separated from its environment, and, moreover, independent from it to some degree thanks to a quality that is intrinsic to it. This is the most basic and rough characterisation of aesthetic organicism, which, in the course of the last two centuries in particular, was contested, augmented and reformulated, resulting in a wide variety of theoretical and artistic propositions that can be linked to this term.

For the sake of the argument I want to develop, it is apt to look first at Romantic organicism, developed foremostly in Germany and in England and predicated on the analogy between a work of art and a living being—most often a plant. Having appeared as a response to 18th-century psychological theories of association, this species of organicism was first and foremost concerned with developing an alternative to a mechanistic view of life in general, and of the human imagination in particular—and, as a consequence, also of the creative process. As Armstrong argues, within the Romantic tradition “organicism is not understood as a fact of nature or as a merely aesthetic phenomenon..., but rather as a grounding systematics for understanding all holistic structures. It is, to put matters simply, a way of thinking meaningfully about wholes” (Armstrong 2003, 2). According to one of the most famous formulations of the problem, in which Samuel Taylor Coleridge repeats after A.G. Schlegel,

The form is mechanic when on any given material we impress a predetermined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material, as when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish it to retain when hardened. The organic form, on the other hand, is innate; it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form (Coleridge 1960a, 198).

Organic form was thus a normative concept: artworks could be judged with regard to the degree to which they were able to instantiate it.

The main difference between a mechanical and organic process was, according to Coleridge, the source of the power perpetuating the growth and of the principle governing it; in the case of a mechanism it was external, in the case of an organism—internal. What an organism possessed was therefore a kind of sovereignty, which coincided with a condition of organic unity, described by Coleridge in Kantian terms as a quality exhibited by the entities in which the parts are “so far interdependent that each is reciprocally means and end” (Coleridge 1854, 388).

There was a certain normative aspect to organicist aesthetics, which was twofold. First, the Romantic critics required that every artwork *strived* for the condition of organicity, which was, in their view, desirable and which marked a genuinely successful piece. The numerous passages where Coleridge tries to show that Shakespeare’s dramas do exhibit organic qualities testify to the conclusion that the Romantics viewed organicity as a supreme goal that all art should try to achieve. Organic form was thus a normative concept: artworks could be judged with regard to the degree to which they were able to instantiate it. For Coleridge the notion of organicity provided criteria for aesthetic evaluation, which involved open-endedness, heterogeneity, blurriness, richness and boundedness (see Abrams 1953, 220-221).

But once an artwork succeeds in fulfilling these requirements, another normativity comes into play. If an organic work of art should approximate in its constitution a natural organic entity, its regulatory principle must, as in the case of the latter, be set from within, not from without, as in the case of a mechanical structure. This means that it achieves an autonomy similar to that entertained by an organism—an autonomy which consists in the fact that it is able to establish its own normativity, or, in other words, to itself make the law according to which it should be judged. Intrinsic purposefulness becomes intrinsic lawfulness, and the latter constitutes the superiority of an organic work. It is evident in the criticism of Coleridge, who values organically devised texts far more than the mere associative clusters of different elements, because in the case of the latter the only unifying factor is an arbitrary decision of the artist that doesn’t find support in the nature of the elements used, while the unity of an organic text is absolute—it does not exist except in the very form it assumes, nor do its elements, which wouldn’t retain their identity if severed from the text’s body or otherwise disassembled. An organic poem is thus autonomous insofar as it establishes the meaning of every its element without any external aid; in fact, it is inconceivable that the meaning of any of its elements could be established otherwise, for what these very elements are is constituted



by their partaking in the whole of the text. This is what Lee Rust Brown calls “semantic self-reliance” and what he views as the largest of the “extreme claims about relations between texts and their meanings” (Brown 1991, 235) made by organicism.

It is easy to see why such a view of the autonomy of art poses a problem for any aesthetic thought. As Abrams notes, “if a growth of a plant seems inherently purposeful, it is a purpose without alternative, fated in the seed, and evolving into its final form without the supervision of consciousness” (Abrams 1953, 173). In a somewhat exaggerated manner, he describes the organic transition in aesthetics as a “historical shift from the view that the making of a work of art is a supremely purposeful activity to the view that its coming-into-being is, basically, a spontaneous process independent of intention, percept, or even consciousness” (187). Fogle repeats this objection, adding that “the spontaneous growth of the plant from its seed is predetermined and inevitable, so that if the figure is identical with the theory there is no room for will, judgement, understanding—in short, for ‘art’ in general. ‘Nature’ usurps the whole domain” (Fogle 1962, 66). What is so hard to swallow here is that in the light of the spontaneous growth thesis an author is practically devoid of agency. If the autonomy of a work of art consists in its absolute self-sufficiency, the artist serves as no more than a passive medium; a tool for the expression of the transcendent natural logic which operates on equal rights both when it comes to the development of natural forms, and with regard to artistic invention—a process of the development of ideas, which for Goethe is “a process of nature within the realm of mind” (Abrams 1953, 206). Although the issue of authorship within organicism phrased in such simplifying terms might seem irresolvable, in fact the structure of the Romantic organic metaphor didn’t force Coleridge to endorse any of the undoubtedly counterintuitive implications. In order to see this, one has to realise that the whole enterprise of committing literary criticism to the peculiar image of the spontaneous appearance of the artwork in the mind of an unconscious genius rested on a particular assumption about the place of man within the universe of life; an assumption that is best expressed by Coleridge’s parallel concepts of life and beauty.

Life for Coleridge is essentially “the principle of unity in multity” (Coleridge 1854, 387), and what it entails is the tendency to individuation—a dialectical relation of the forces of attraction and repulsion, which together constitute the polarity inherent to nature, responsible for the processes of “perpetual reconciliation, and ... perpetual resurgence of the primary contradiction, of which universal polarity is the result

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and exponent” (403). This tendency accounts for the simultaneous continuity and discontinuity of nature and manifests itself in “an ascending series of intermediate classes, and of analogous gradations in each class,” resulting in a spectrum of forms of various complexity, each of them nevertheless equally endowed with the quality of life, all of them being “degrees and different dignities of one and the same tendency” (387). The arrangement of these classes of forms is such that in every higher class the simpler powers are not merely employed, but assimilated by the higher.

life, in general, be defined *vis ab intra, cuius proprium est coadunare plura in rem unicam, quantum est res unica*; the unity will be more intense in proportion as it constitutes each particular thing a whole of itself; and yet more, again, in proportion to the number and interdependence of the parts, which it unites as a whole. But a whole composed, *ab intra*, of different parts, so far interdependent that each is reciprocally means and end, is an individual, and the individuality is most intense where the greatest dependence of the parts on the whole is combined with the greatest dependence of the whole on its parts (388)

If so, then, as Fogle notes, “the highest degree of life is the intensest unity, which is also intensest individuality” (Fogle 1962, 19).

Natural forms exhibit different degrees of unity; the lowest class is constituted by metals, then come crystals, then rocks, and then plants and animals, of which the highest is man, “that last work, in which Nature did not assist as handmaid under the eye of her sovereign Master, who made Man in his own image, by superadding self-consciousness with self-government, and breathed into him a living soul” (Coleridge 1854, 412). In the case of man “the individuality is not only perfected in its corporeal sense, but begins a new series beyond the appropriate limits of physiology” (390). The phrase “new series” refers to the spiritual, or supernatural aspect of man, the ascent to which, as Fogle argues, can be accounted for in terms of evolution, similar to the one occurring in the progression from the inorganic to organic structures, resulting from the process of assimilation of the lower forms by the higher—despite the fact that the supernatural obviously comes from God.

Coleridge’s allusions to life treat it indifferently as animal or as spiritual, and depending upon the context either as immanent or as transcendent, within or above, or both; for, according to the point of view, it may be the body informed by it, or the informing principle, or the reconciliation of the two, the higher power always informing the lower. Life as subject is always conceived as anterior to life as object, or organization (Fogle 1962, 27).

This “life as subject” can be identified with the aforementioned principle of life, which, importantly, does not supervene on an organised living object—the “life as object”—but realises itself in it; it is not a function of organisation, but a transcendent tendency that characterises both physical and spiritual domains.

This which, in inanimate Nature, is manifested now as magnetism, now as electricity, and now as chemical agency, is supposed, on entering an organized body, to constitute its vital *principle*, something in the same manner as the steam becomes the *mechanic* power of the steam-engine, in *consequence* of its compression by the steam-engine.... Now this hypothesis is as directly opposed to my view as supervention is to evolution, inasmuch as I hold the organized body itself, in all its marvellous contexture, to be the PRODUCT and representant of the power which is here supposed to have supervened to it (Coleridge 1854, 400-401).

Moreover, each living being is a reconciliation of the two opposite directions of this principle, the one coming *ab intra*—the force of assimilation and ascension—and the other coming from above in the form of the God’s designing intellect, which allows for the appearance of consciousness and soul, fully present only in man, but in fact penetrating the whole of nature. Every organic unity—which for Coleridge might comprise a plant or animal, or a society, or an idea, or a work of art—must therefore “reconcile matter with spirit, and substance with form”, and, due to the primacy of the principle of life that is the condition of possibility of an organic structure, “it is a real thing, but is never wholly objective or self-contained” (Fogle 1962, 28). Organic forms—including artworks—never emerge and develop by themselves and out of themselves; they clearly cannot do this, for then the principle of life would simply be a name for their physical self-sufficiency, while the most perfect unity—the highest degree of interdependence of parts on the whole—is precisely equivalent to the highest *dependence* on a principle of life, and the latter comes as much from the inside, as from the outside, because it consists in a reconciliation of what’s internal and emergent and what’s universal. This is why an organic artwork is never “objective or self-contained”, or at least not absolutely, and it is not reducible to “shape”, or dead form: “Remember”, Coleridge writes, “that there is a difference between form as proceeding, and shape as superinduced;—the latter is either the death or the imprisonment of the thing;—the former is its self-witnessing and self-affected sphere of agency” (Coleridge 1907b, 262).

Beauty, defined by Coleridge analogically to life as “Multeity in Unity,” (232) also varies in degree, and in its highest form it approaches the condition of organic life.

It [beauty—A.P.] is, in the abstract, the unity of the manifold, the coalescence of the diverse; in the concrete, it is the union of the shapely (*formosum*) with the vital. In the dead organic it depends on regularity of form, the first and lowest species of which is the triangle with all its modifications, as in crystals, architecture, & c.; in the living organic it is not mere regularity of form, which would produce a sense of formality; neither is it subservient to anything beside itself (257).

Because in the case of living beings beauty does not consist only in “regularity of form”—it is not a matter of the physical shape, but, as we have already learned, it has to do with the principle of life—the imitative enterprise of art cannot rest on the task of imitating the *natura naturata*, the arrangement of elements. An artist has to “master the essence, the *natura naturans*, which presupposes a bond between nature in the highest sense and the soul of man” (257). This “bond” is just another name for the continuity of natural and supernatural life discussed above, and in art this fundamental affinity is revealed; the existence of fine art requires the relation between matter and spirit, and the successful work of art testifies to the continuity of the conscious and unconscious in nature.

In man there is reflexion, freedom, and choice; he is, therefore, the head of the visible creation. In the objects of nature are presented, as in a mirror, all the possible elements, steps, and processes of intellect antecedent to consciousness, and therefore to the full development of the intelligential act; and man’s mind is the very focus of all the rays of intellect which are scattered throughout the images of nature. Now so to place these images, totalized, and fitted to the limits of the human mind, as to elicit form, and to superinduce upon, the forms themselves the moral reflections to which they approximate, to make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature,—this is the mystery of genius in the Fine Arts. Dare I add that the genius must act on the feeling, that body is but a striving to become mind,—that it is mind in its essence! (257-258)

That man can grasp the essence of nature is due to the fact that nature and mind are fundamentally similar in kind, just different in degree. In a work of art a reconciliation of nature and mind—of subject and object—is at once revealed and enacted.

[I]n every work of art there is a reconciliation of the external with the internal; the conscious is so impressed on the unconscious as to appear in it ... He who combines the two is the man of genius; and for that reason he must partake of both. Hence there is in genius itself an unconscious activity; nay, that is the genius in the man of genius (258).

The faculty mediating between the conscious and unconscious, or, the active and passive powers of mind, is imagination, described by Coleridge as “essentially *vital*, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead”, and as a power which “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify” (Coleridge 1907a, 202). If the “vital” in an organism—and in a work of art—is what supersedes its literal shape and makes the former irreducible to the latter, and if, at the same time, imagination is “vital” inasmuch as it transforms fixed ideas and images and allows for the emergence of a unity analogous to that observed in an organism, then “organic unity” in Coleridge’s aesthetics is not so much the name for the self-sufficiency of a work of art, as it is a name for the relation between an artist and his creation—the former’s ability to render the literal shape a life. An organic form is a living form, because, unlike the mechanical, dead aggregate of elements, it involves a reconciliation of the subjective and the objective. A principle of imagination—a species of a principle of life—transferred onto the material that undergoes artistic refinement results in a principle of life fused into a work of art—an organic unity with which the work is consequently endowed. The success of this transfer is equivalent to the degree to which a principle embodied in a work of art is really *its own principle*—and according to this degree it can be critically evaluated.

To the idea of life victory or strife is necessary; as virtue consists not simply in the absence of vices, but in the overcoming of them. So it is in beauty. The sight of what is subordinated and conquered heightens the strength and the pleasure (Coleridge 1907b, 262-263).

The artist’s striving to subordinate the material to the “form as proceeding”, or to reconcile matter and spirit, becomes the artwork’s striving to realise its own organic potential. Aesthetic judgement is therefore not inconsistent with an organic theory of art, and assessing a poem, as Fogle says, “according to its harmony, or to its unity, or to its fidelity to its own living principle,” (Fogle 1962, 69) is precisely assessing an artist’s performance in the task of making “the external internal, and internal external”. Speaking of a work of art in Coleridgean terms of organic

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unity, one never disarticulates it from the author. Rather, the organic metaphor so conceived is a very means of securing the place of the author, whose task, modelled after the process of divine creation, consists in transferring onto a poem a certain quality, initially characteristic of the creative process—a quality of organic form.

James Benziger points to the same conclusion when he notices that part of Coleridge's admiration for Shakespeare had to do with the idea of "freedom of dramatic characters" (1951, 38). Commenting on *The Tempest*, Coleridge praised Shakespeare for evincing the power of "introducing the profoundest sentiments of wisdom, where they would be least expected, yet where they are most truly natural," as a result of which in his dramas "separate speeches frequently do not appear to have been occasioned by those which preceded, or which are consequent upon each other, but to have arisen out of the peculiarity of the speaker" (1960b, 131). Unlike an ordinary writer, who develops the dialogues by means of mechanical association, a "vital writer, who makes men in life what they are in nature, in a moment transports himself into the being of each personage, and, instead of cutting out artificial puppets, he brings before us men themselves" (132). A literary character so understood seems analogous to a work of art in that in Coleridge's view both are immanently vital by virtue of a peculiar transfer that occurs in a creative act and that makes the freedom of an artist immanent also to the work of art. In this way Romantic organicism attempts to resolve the contradiction that Benziger sees as central to the whole modern organicist doctrine: it manages to tell the artwork apart from the mind of the author (to make the distinction between "the poet's idea and his expression of that idea") by making the quality that characterises the creative act—that is, freedom—part of the work itself.

#### The literal organism of a poem—New Critical organicism

Thinking of a work of art in terms of dependence—in the case of Romanticism, on the principle of life—is the exact opposite of the position advanced by the New Critics, who developed their own notion of organicism, stressing the work's variously understood *independence*. A canonical version of this notion was expressed by William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley in *The Intentional Fallacy*, where they explicitly renounced the Romantics for adopting the overly intentionalist image of literary creation: "It is not so much an empirical as an analytic judgment," they wrote, "not a historical statement, but a definition, to say

that the intentional fallacy is a romantic one” (Wimsatt & Beardsley 1946, 471). In place of criticism concerned with the question of “what he intended” (468), posed by critics looking for “external” and at the same time “private or idiosyncratic” evidence (“revelations ... about how and why the poet wrote the poem—to what lady, while sitting on what lawn, or at the death of what friend or brother”; 477-478), they proposed focusing on what is “internal” and at the same time public: “discovered through the semantics and syntax of a poem, through our habitual knowledge of the language, through grammars, dictionaries, and all the literature which is the source of dictionaries, in general through all that makes a language and culture” (477). In this perspective

The poem is not the critic’s own and not the author’s (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge (470).

The above implicates a different view of the task of criticism:

Judging a poem is like judging a pudding or a machine. One demands that it work. It is only because an artifact works that we infer the intention of an artificer. “A poem should not mean but be.” A poem can *be* only through its *meaning*—since its medium is words—yet it *is*, simply *is*, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant (469).

Taking *The Intentional Fallacy* as a starting point, R. Jack Smith developed an account of what a formalist notion of meaning implies for organicist thinking, and, at the same time, what an organic metaphor could mean for a formalistically oriented critic—and what this account foremostly involved was rejecting an element of purposiveness, which is “alien to the organic nature of poetry” (Smith 1948, 626). A short list of theses that Smith considered fundamental to organicism—of which MacLeish’s dictum “the poem must not mean but be” he took to be a “representative slice”—included three statements:

1. A poem is essentially an object, not a message. 2. A poem, as an object, is as separate from the poet as a brooch is from a jeweler. 3. A poem, as an object separate from the poet, has a structure that is organic and complete (626).

From this follows for him that “purposiveness ... has no place in our thinking about such a structure. In fact, if we give full value to the

metaphor implicit in the word ‘organic,’ we can see that purposiveness in poetry is identical with teleology in science” (626). He went on to say that

Poetry does not have “intention” or “purpose” in any usual meanings of those words; it has instead a pervasive and vital unity brought about by the convergence of all its elements into a fused wholeness (632).

To correct the teleological mistake of intentionalist criticism, Smith proposed replacing the talk of intention—or purpose—with a far more neutral notion of “organic centre”, itself being just a version of “general intention” adopted by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, which was used to designate “the *poem’s* intention, not the poet’s”, and which for Smith was unfortunate only because it misleadingly suggested a species of purposiveness.

Perhaps we also need a new metaphorical representation of the way a poem works. Perhaps we could free ourselves even further of purposive notions by employing a more abstract, diagrammatic metaphor in describing its essential structure. It might be useful for us to think of the elements of a poem as having direction and, in an intensive sense, velocity. Then the concept of organic fusion might be represented as the convergence of these vectors upon a central but spatially non-existent point within the poem. Where these elements came together would be found the very center of the “meaning” of the poem, the very crux of its organicity (631-632).

Translated onto critical practice, such an approach would involve “examining relationships [within the poem—A.P.] in the light of some hypothesis”, which would not include any stipulations about authorial intention, but instead take note of the poem’s establishing “the norms of its realm” (627) and thus “reveal the vital interplay of all the parts of the poem” and “bring the whole poem into synthesis” (628). Such a method, similarly to Romantic metaphysical organicism, would allow for there being different degrees of organicity, and deliver criteria for the evaluation of the poem’s success in achieving an organic condition, such as e.g. “the amount of the material taken up into the organic whole” (629).

In light of Smith’s as well as Wimsatt and Beardsley’s remarks it becomes clear that what the New Critics saw as a foundation of an artwork’s autonomy was precisely its *shape*—the same feature that Coleridge disavowed as an opposite of a living *form*, or as inferior to it and demanding to be rendered alive in order to count as a substance of

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a successful work—the combination of objective qualities of the artwork as a thing, similar to a “brooch” or a “pudding”. The formalist transition thus turned the organic metaphor upside down; intended by the Romantics as a means of de-naturalising art and de-objectifying an artwork—an endeavour inspired by analogous attempts in biology—it eventually yielded an opposite outcome. The New Critical image of the world was a causal image—Wimsatt and Beardsley went to great lengths to deny that either causes or effects were relevant to the poem’s meaning, but causes and effects were nevertheless all they saw—while what the organic metaphor allowed from its very conception was precisely escaping causality and introducing immanent purposiveness in its place. When it was equated with mere formal arrangement, it lost its chief function of explaining why formal features cannot decide on semantic features—why the principle that constitutes the meaning cannot appear out of nothing.

What the formalist transition then entailed—and what went unnoticed both by the New Critics and by the postmodern writers that claimed to subvert the formalist paradigm—was abandoning the autonomy of art and embracing its objecthood. Jennifer Ashton carefully follows this transition, concluding that “by treating the objecthood of the text as if it were equivalent to the meaning of the text, the New Critical commitment to the heresy of paraphrase cannot help but entail a commitment to the affective fallacy—if the meaning of a text is reducible to the text’s objecthood, it can only consist of the reader’s affect” (Ashton 2005, 10). The conclusion is inspired by the arguments of Michael Fried—repeated by Walter Benn Michaels in *The Shape of the Signifier* (2004)—who in his *Art and Objecthood* (1998) pointed to the fact that once we remove the frame that delimits the artwork, approach it as an object, not as a representation, and put the *situation* of beholding it at the centre of aesthetic attention, there is nothing other than the beholder’s experience that can constitute the artwork’s meaning. The experience may change from situation to situation, and we are deprived of any normative element that could tell us which experience is *correct* and which is not, hence there is no way the beholder can *misunderstand* the artwork. This condition, characteristic for the postmodernist, as opposed to modernist aesthetic thought, Fried calls *objecthood*, and the aesthetic ideology that underwrites it he refers to as *literalism*. Both foreclose the work’s claim to autonomy, which would necessarily involve the irrelevance of the beholder to the work’s meaning—the irrelevance of what Michaels will call the “subject position”. The New Critical independence turns out to be a peculiar kind of dependence on the reader’s

experience—the dependence that postmodern aesthetics will readily employ in its search for an infinite, unbounded work.

### Organism without borders—postmodern organicity

That postmodernism defied the notion of organic unity is widely recognised as almost definitional of it. Rosalind Krauss in her influential writings on postmodern art identified the organic metaphor—one that urges us to pay attention to “formal features that preserve and protect the life of the organism, such as unity, coherence, complexity within identity, and so on” (1985, 4)—to be one of the modernist myths. Dismissing the organicist doctrine that viewed an artwork as “profound” (3), and the “call for unity” that “assumes that it is possible to draw boundaries around the aesthetic organism”, she proposed that the emergence of meaning within art should be theorised within the structuralist paradigm as resulting from “a system of substitutions” where “there are only differences without positive terms” (4). The revolution in the visual arts that Fried lamented, and that Krauss happily welcomed—and the revolution in literary theory that Ferdinand de Saussure initiated and Jacques Derrida brought to its logical conclusion—can be seen as a pivotal point in the history of the organicist option. If from the 1960s on a new paradigm demands that a successful work of art recognise Smith’s lesson learned during a car ride on the unfinished Jersey Turnpike—and thus strive towards delivering an experience so unbounded that “there is no way you can frame it” (Fried 1998, 158)—what should “organic” mean, if it is to mean anything at all?

A possible way of incorporating a species of organicism into the postmodern worldview—one that follows Krauss’s reliance on structuralism and its theoretical implications—was suggested by Richard Shusterman in his somaesthetics manifesto, *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (2000), where he challenges the dominant (in his view) analytic tradition in Western philosophy of art, and tries to formulate an alternative inspired foremostly by works of John Dewey, but also of Jacques Derrida, among others. An influence of that last figure, and of the poststructuralist theoretical framework more generally, is clearly discernible when Shusterman discusses the notion of organic unity as one of the aesthetic prejudices that should be amended. And although he declares that he proceeds by “pitting deconstruction against analytic philosophy” as two “rival philosophies” that remain in a “deadlock” (64) that can be overcome only by assuming a pragmatist outlook (defending and updating

pragmatism is the goal of the book), he visibly sides with deconstruction, not only as a logical consequence of the fact that the whole book is written against analytic philosophy (so deconstruction is treated as an enemy of an enemy), but also because Shusterman, critical of the deconstruction's hyper-relativist and pan-textualist agenda as he is, does nevertheless seem to unhesitatingly adopt the picture of meaning as emerging from "language's play of differences" (70).

Surprising as it may seem, according to Shusterman, deconstruction, despite opposing the notion of organic unity on the surface, "at a much deeper logical level, it is itself fundamentally committed and inextricably wedded to one central (originally Hegelian) sense of organic unity" (64). This commitment becomes clear when one considers the notion of *différance* as it appears in Derrida's thought. What it entails is that the identity and meaning of any object of discourse is constituted by its differential relations with other objects (and by "object of discourse" we really mean any object, since "all the objects and concepts of our world are linguistically mediated"), so "what any thing is, is essentially a function of what it is not", and nothing is ever "fully present in itself or constituted simply by (or for) itself" (71). Now compare this, Shusterman says, to Hegel's idea of organic unity, refuted by G. E. Moore and other analytical philosophers. Moore criticised Hegel for assuming an understanding of an organic dependence of parts and whole as not only causal—so that no part can survive without the other parts—and emergent—so that "the properties of the whole are different from the sum of the properties of its individual parts and not reducible to them" (67)—but also logical. This logical understanding of organic unity entails that "just as the whole would not be what it is but for the existence of its parts, so, the parts would not be what they are but for the existence of the whole" (Moore 1959, 33). Moore rejects this as self-contradictory (if we were to satisfy the requirements posed by this understanding, we would have to for example assume that parts are at the same time distinct from the whole and including the whole; see Moore 1959, 34–36), but, Shusterman points out, his rejection stems from some deeply internalised notions of the "reality of self-identical particulars or logically independent individuals" (69), which are themselves just prejudices (here again Shusterman aligns with poststructuralism).

It is not hard to see, Shusterman concludes, that *différance* and the "radical concept of organic unity" (69) are essentially the same: both assume that "each part derives its meaning from its relations to the whole's other parts" (72), the whole, in Derrida's case, being the "system or structure of linguistic differences" (71–72). Now if we take decon-

struction's arguments against organic unity as an aesthetic notion—most notably the assertion that a work of art is constituted by what has been excluded outside its frame—we can see that these arguments follow the radical organic logic mentioned above. Although Derrida would not be keen to agree with such statement (it bears too visible a trace of the metaphysical thinking he steadfastly worked to repudiate), deconstruction rests on a picture of the “world as a totality of interrelated and reciprocally defined elements” (Shusterman 2000, 80): every whole can in turn be regarded as part of a larger whole, and *ad infinitum*.

A species of this radical notion of organic unity is what seems to be organising the theoretical imagination of contemporary environmental humanities. It is especially visible in ecocritical discourse, whose proponents can be said to share the understanding of organicity—if they use this concept—that associates this notion not with unity, wholeness and boundedness, but with relationality, penetrability and flux. Margaret Ronda, linking the recent poetic attempts to rethink the notion of organic form with a wider discourse of plastic and plasticity, highlights their difference from late modernist and avant-garde traditions, such as those developed by the Black Mountain poets:

“while midcentury writers such as Levertov, Olson, Duncan, and Richards consider poetic form in relation to natural materials (plants, cells, and animal life, as well as wood, clay, and stone) and portray systematicity through ideas of unity, wholeness, and balance, practitioners of contemporary ecopoetics enact these portrayals of systems under the sign of toxicity, pollution, and global climate change” (Ronda 2021, 122).

Inviting thinking in terms of interfusion and dependency, “plastic has become a particularly central locus of ecopoetic meditation and an extension, in new directions, of these conceptions of organic form” (123). Lynn Keller, sharing the same intuitions, suggests that the contemporary “poetics of interconnection”, as represented for example by Adam Dickinson and Evelyn Reilly, stresses “the permeability between what has conventionally been considered the bounded inside and outside; and the thorough interrelation of living things with one another and with substances in their environments” (2017, 61).

Postmodern ecocritical organicism, similarly to its Romantic predecessor, situates itself “in opposition to the mechanistic view of nature which assumed that things could be broken down to smaller elements and then examined, as if each element existed independently of all the others” (Fiedorczuk 2020, 229). But while it is committed to the Cole-

ridgean idea of fundamental “continuity of life within and outside the human being” (230)—the unity of man and the rest of organic and inorganic nature—it simultaneously denies the former the privileged status as the “head of the visible creation” that Coleridge was inclined to grant him. Inheriting the “romantic distrust of instrumental rationality,” (231) these aesthetic enterprises are manifestly hostile to the idea of man’s exceptionality stemming from either consciousness, agency, or language. According to Ewa Domańska and her summary of the premises of the different strains within this tendency,

Ecological humanities is critical towards the traditional paradigm based on mechanistic science on the one hand, and on patriarchal values on the other (patriarchism is understood here as the domination of man over nature). In its perspective, the world is seen again in terms of the organism; or rather an organic system. This species of humanities is based on the structural metaphor of organicism, which entails its characteristic preference for ontology of connectivity, relational approaches and the so-called flat alternatives that consider things in interconnectedness and interdependence. In the production of knowledge within the ecological humanities we encounter key concepts characteristic of organicism, such as: integration, wholeness, holism, coherence, combining and inclusion, connections and relationships (Domańska 2013, 19–20).

Autonomy, viewed as an elitist and dangerously anthropocentric idea, is amongst the concepts notoriously contested within the postmodern organicist paradigm. In what can be regarded as one of the canonical manifestos of Polish ecocriticism, Julia Fiedorczuk writes:

one of the most fundamental gestures performed by ecological criticism is the contestation of the high modernist idea of the autonomy of a work of art, including a literary work. Drawing inspiration from biosemiotics and new materialism, ecocriticism rejects the dichotomous ontology juxtaposing humans (as conscious, active agents) to (passive and meaningless) “nature” or “matter.” As a result, literary texts are understood not as unique phenomena resulting from exceptional human creativity but rather as belonging to a complex mesh of co-emergent material entities (Fiedorczuk 2020, 228–229).

In the light of preceding considerations on Romanticism and New Criticism both passages might come as a surprise, but on a closer examination it is difficult not to see them as a logical and inevitable consequence of the postmodern turn in 20th-century aesthetics. After Minimalism the categories such as interconnected, interdependent, or holistic cannot apply to a work of art, or at least not in the way they

did, because that would stress the work's boundedness. The concept of organic whole, if it is to retain its applicability, must refer to a work that is holistic but not delimited; unitary but infinite. The only such thing can be the whole of nature, which, in the view of postmodern organicism, cannot help but become an enormous work of art, dissolving the art-specific notions such as purpose and intention altogether. Reiterating Wendy Wheeler's new materialist thesis that matter "is not merely a passive substratum but a *meaning-bearing* field of agency," (Wheeler 2014, 70) Fiedorczuk goes on to agree that the "linguistic activities of human beings, including poetry, are not qualitatively different from other creative acts," (Fiedorczuk 2020, 251) because "non-human creative acts—rivers shaping landscapes, bacteria gathering into collectives in order to form new organisms, bees dancing so as to communicate the location of nectar—are like poems" (253). Symmetrically, the meaning of the poem, as Alfonso D'Aquino's texts remind us, is "like crystal, is always in the act of becoming, it is never final, it has no preordained aim, and in this it resembles all the other biological processes... If halite is a text that can be read like poem, a poem can grow like crystal" (273).

This is why autonomy is precluded from the new materialist and ecocritical image of the world; although in its deliberations on the continuity and similarity between works of art and natural entities postmodern organicism much resembles the Romantic belief in the uninterrupted progression of forms, it effaces in the work of art the only factor that could allow for its autonomy; namely, *form*. What was necessary to make an entity autonomous for Coleridge was the principle of life—manifesting itself variously as imagination, beauty, genius or organic unity—because it transformed shape into form, thus not only making the organism or an artwork *alive*, but also *delimiting* it: it was the principle that produced an organic unity and determined its identity, specifying with what being, within what boundaries, we are dealing with. The example of New Criticism helped us see why it is so important: an attempt to establish the form of the poem—and so consequently its meaning—by appealing to the "public" rules of language results in us seeing in its place an object that can be different for different readers. An account exclusively resting on public norms quietly introduces experience into the picture; a "public" frame, Fried would say, is no frame, and a frameless poem indeed does "grow like a crystal"—it is virtually infinite, and it is hard to imagine how—and why—an infinite entity is supposed to be autonomous. Bearing in mind the literalist roots of contemporary organicism, it is easier to see

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that the—now widespread—celebration of posthumanist and relational organicity is a way of celebrating objectified, nonautonomous art.

Objective purposiveness and the necessity of form—Kant's aesthetics

In order to grasp the importance of the notion of form for the theorising about the autonomy of art, and to unpack the relation of the original Romantic organic metaphor to the former, it is worth taking a step back to Kant and his considerations on aesthetic judgement which greatly inspired Coleridge. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, Kant introduces two species of purposiveness, formal and real—or, subjective and objective—the first being the one we appeal to when judging art, and the second being appropriate to studying nature. The power of judgement, which is applicable in both cases and which, in most general terms, can be described as “the faculty for thinking of the particular as contained under the universal” (Kant 2000, 66; 5: 179)<sup>1</sup>, contains in itself a legislative *a priori* principle of its own for seeking laws:

the particular empirical laws, in regard to that which is left undetermined in them by [the understanding, which prescribes universal laws to nature], must be considered in terms of the sort of unity they would have if an understanding (even if not ours) had likewise given them for the sake of our faculty of cognition, in order to make possible a system of experience in accordance with particular laws of nature (67–68; 5: 180).

The hallmark of Kant's aesthetics is precisely this operation of positing an auxiliary teleology for the sake of reflection, that results in us treating natural entities *as though* they were purposeful, even if we know we cannot claim that they *really* are. “The unity of nature in accordance with empirical laws and the possibility of the unity of experience”—the correspondence of nature and our mental faculties—although it is contingent, it must be assumed by the power of judgement “as an *a priori* principle for its own use”, because otherwise “no thoroughgoing inter-

<sup>1</sup> The first number indicates the relevant page in the contemporary edition of the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (see the Bibliography section below); the number after the semicolon refers to the pagination of the standard German edition of Kant's works, *Kant's Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Royal Prussian (later German) Academy of Sciences (Berlin: Georg Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1900–).

connection of empirical cognitions into a whole of experience would take place” (70; 5: 183).

Still, all this is just subjective purposiveness—seeming purposiveness in relation to our mental faculties, which enables us to pass aesthetic judgements about beauty that can be universally valid on the basis of the assumption that we all share the same psychic organisation, but does not allow for deciding whether any actual purposiveness, independent of our mental faculties, does indeed exist. If we are to pass judgements about the *objective* purposiveness of things, so to judge them as *ends of nature*, something more is required.

Experience leads our power of judgment to the concept of an objective and material purposiveness, i.e., to the concept of an end of nature, only if there is a relation of the cause to the effect to be judged, which we can understand as lawful only insofar as we find ourselves capable of subsuming the idea of the effect under the causality of its cause as the underlying condition of the possibility of the former (239; 5: 366-367).

In an end of nature (a thing possessing real or objective purposiveness) “the idea of the effect” must be part of its cause; whatever produced it must have operated according to an idea, so, in other words, “lawfully”—being guided by some principle. What is more, the existence and the causal dispositiveness of such an idea must be necessary, or, such a thing must be *possible only as an end*:

In order to see that a thing is possible only as an end, i.e., that the causality of its origin must be sought not in the mechanism of nature, but in a cause whose productive capacity is determined by concepts, it is necessary that its form not be possible in accordance with mere natural laws (242; 5: 369-370).

Kant gives an example of such a thing:

If someone were to perceive a geometrical figure, for instance a regular hexagon, drawn in the sand in an apparently uninhabited land, his reflection, working with a concept of it, would become aware of the unity of the principle of its generation by means of reason, even if only obscurely, and thus, in accordance with this, would not be able to judge as a ground of the possibility of such a shape the sand, the nearby sea, the wind, the footprints of any known animals, or any other non-rational cause, because the contingency of coinciding with such a concept, which is possible only in reason, would seem to him so infinitely great that it would be just as good as if there were no natural law of nature, consequently no cause in nature acting merely mechanically, and as if the con-



cept of such an object could be regarded as a concept that can be given only by reason and only by reason compared with the object, thus as if only reason can contain the causality for such an effect, consequently that this object must be thoroughly regarded as an end, but not a natural end, i.e., as a product of art (*vestigium hominis video*). 242-243 (5: 370-371)

While the above conclusion is pretty clear, it is at the same time not quite convincing. To say that the “contingency of coinciding” with a concept is “infinitely great” is not the same as to say that such coincidence is impossible. In the picture given by Kant we do not deal with necessity, but with probability—in the *physical shape* that we encounter on the beach there is nothing that *forces* us to connect it with “a concept that can be given only by reason”, or in general with any other cause that might have brought it about (we do not know how and why it has appeared there). Although Kant phrases the problem in terms of causes—and claims that in certain circumstances we have to view an object as caused by a concept—a closer look at the categories he uses reveals that in fact it is not a special kind of causality that has to be looked for. Yet if we introduce a slight amendment to this image, we can both fix the fishy notion of causality, and arrive at the necessity that is missing there.

Let us first take a look at two kinds of relationship between causes and effects that Kant distinguishes in context of aesthetic and teleological judgement: the nexus of efficient causes (*nexus effectivus*) and the nexus of final causes (*nexus finalis*). The causal nexus is always descending: it “constitutes a series (of causes and effects)” such that that “the things themselves, which as effects presuppose others as their causes, cannot conversely be the causes of these at the same time” (244, 5: 372). In contrast, a purposive nexus, “conceived in accordance with a concept of reason (of ends)”, involves “descending as well as ascending dependency, in which the thing which is on the one hand designated as an effect nevertheless deserves, in ascent, the name of a cause of the same thing of which it is the effect” (Ibidem). Kant also calls the first the “connection of real causes”, and the second the “connection of ideal [causes]” (244, 5: 373).

But in what sense can a concept be an “ideal cause” of a thing? Indeed, it is hard to imagine what an immaterial causality should look like. Rather, we would be more inclined to say that if something is seen as a cause of the work, it is always a material cause—and as such, as Wimsatt and Beardsley rightly note, it does not tell us anything about its meaning. Such a conclusion seems even more pressing in light of

Unity is always an abstraction posited as a basis for our cognition; something we cannot experience in the world, but is nevertheless required to be assumed as a principle for a meaningful experience to take place.

Kant's account of the nature of concepts. The key term in the above cited passage is the "unity of the principle". One of the crucial distinctions in the considerations on the power of judgement is between the manifold and the unitary. The power of judgement, which, again, "in general is the faculty for thinking of the particular as contained under the universal" (66, 5: 179), the latter consisting in e.g. "the rule, the principle, the law" (66-67, 5: 179), in dealing with a manifold of the empirical data, must assume "as an *a priori* principle for its own use that what is contingent for human insight in the particular (empirical) laws of nature nevertheless contains a lawful unity, not fathomable by us but still thinkable, in the combination of its manifold into one experience possible in itself". Unity is always an abstraction posited as a basis for our cognition; something we cannot experience in the world, but is nevertheless required to be assumed as a principle for a meaningful experience to take place. In the above example a mathematical figure of a hexagon is a concept given by reason, which was then instantiated by a shape in the sand, and so consequently the shape can be judged as purposeful according to the concept. The judgement assumes a unity that is not actually observed—the unity of the concept of a hexagon—and treats an object (which can come in a manifold of actual physical shapes) in light of this assumption.

What this "unity" might more precisely mean is suggested by Kant's seminal remarks on the objective teleology of nature—the idea of an organism as a natural end that inspired Coleridge's definition of organic unity. According to Kant, "a thing exists as a natural end if it is cause and effect of itself". Using an example of a tree, he goes on to explain that this peculiar kind of causal reciprocity occurs when an entity is (1.) capable of reproducing itself in the form of offspring, and so sustaining a species, (2.) of generating and preserving itself as an individual, and when (3.) "one part of this creature also generates itself in such a way that the preservation of the one is reciprocally dependent on the preservation of the other" (243, 5: 371). For what is required for a natural object to be an end "without the causality of the concepts of a rational being outside of it" is that

its parts be combined into a whole by being reciprocally the cause and effect of their form. For in this way alone is it possible in turn for the idea of the whole conversely (reciprocally) to determine the form and combination of all the parts: not as a cause—for then it would be a product of art—but as a ground for the cognition of the systematic unity of the form and the combination of all of the manifold that is contained in the given material for someone who judges it (245, 5: 373).

Such an “organized and self-organizing being” (245, 5: 375), if we are to understand its structure, should be judged according to a maxim, which says that “nothing in it is in vain, purposeless, or to be ascribed to a blind mechanism of nature” (248, 5: 376). This arguably strange assumption follows from the concept of natural end, which

leads reason into an order of things entirely different from that of a mere mechanism of nature, which will here no longer satisfy us. An idea has to ground the possibility of the product of nature. However, since this is an absolute unity of the representation, while the matter is a multitude of things, which by itself can provide no determinate unity of composition, if that unity of the idea is even to serve as the determining ground *a priori* of a natural law of the causality of such a form of the composite, then the end of nature must extend to everything that lies in its product (248, 5: 377).

It is here that we can grasp the meaning of Kant’s use of the term “unity”. We cannot disagree that in fact there *obviously* are contingent elements in an organised living being, and most certainly an infinite multitude of them, but once we decide to regard it as an organic whole—to treat it *as though* it was determined by an idea (even if we know that “in reality” it is not)—we assume that everything there is in this being is regulated by this idea. To phrase it differently, the act of delimiting an organism is precisely an act of specifying what counts as a part of it (on this particular teleological account). The reason for that is the reciprocal relation of the whole and the parts that occurs in an organism: if the parts are “possible only through their relation to the whole” (245, 5: 373), then they are *necessarily* the parts of this particular whole and not another. Therefore an organism can be said to possess not only a physical shape, but also a *form*, which, like an idea, is unitary and necessary—by recognising an object’s form, we recognise it as a purposeful object, and once we do this, we conclude that everything that is purposeful in this object can be accounted for through an appeal to its form.

It is worth noting that in such a picture of an organised being an idea is by no means a *cause*—it is not prior to the emergence of an organism, but immanent to it: it is a way (for Kant the only possible way) of accounting for the existence of an organism as a natural end. Now this fact is particularly interesting with regard to Kant’s remarks on art. Although he acknowledges that both natural organisms and artworks are objectively purposeful—they are both “possible only as an end”—and that in the case of an organism it means that the guiding

idea must “determine *a priori* everything that is to be contained in it” (245, 5: 373), he does not recognise the consequences of these claims that follow for art. If we keep in mind an analogy between organisms and works of art, we can rethink the *nexus finalis*—the relation of a concept to the work of art—and offer a slightly modified and more convincing version of it. A “concept”, seen as something “ideal” (as in Kant’s account of *nexus finalis*), should not be considered a cause of the work, but a part of an account of it as a purposive object, in which nothing is contingent with regard to this concept—in other words, it should be treated in the same way Kant treats an “idea” when he speaks of natural organisms. Such an image of an artwork as immanently purposeful would be in certain respects similar to how Elizabeth Anscombe views intentional action. When speaking of meanings, she sharply distinguishes the domain of physical events and the domain of “the question ‘Why?’”.

Of course we have a special interest in human actions: but what is it that we have a special interest in here? It is not that we have a special interest in the movement of these molecules—namely, the ones in a human being; or even in the movements of certain bodies—namely human ones. The description of what we are interested in is a type of description that would not exist if our question “Why?” did not. It is not that certain things, namely the movements of humans, are for some undiscovered reason subject to the question “Why?” So too, it is not just that certain appearances of chalk on blackboard are subject to the question “What does it say?” It is of a word or sentence that we ask “What does it say?”; and the description of something as a word or a sentence at all could not occur prior to the fact that words or sentences have meaning (Anscombe 2000, 83).

Intentionality is not a matter of a certain arrangement of things and bodies, or of a peculiar kind of causal relations, but a matter of a “form of description of events” (84). What is more,

in describing intentional actions as such, it will be a mistake to look for *the* fundamental description of what occurs—such as the movements of muscles or molecules—and then think of intention as something, perhaps very complicated, which qualifies this. The only events to consider are intentional actions themselves, and to call an action intentional is to say it is intentional under some description that we give (or could give) of it (29).

If the same goes for purposefulness, we might add to what has been said above that there are not two kinds of causality—material and ideal—but two kinds of explanation that we may harbour when talking about

a creative process; two possible accounts of a work of art. Within the causal explanation—the account of a work as a material object—we can invoke a variety of factors that entered the physical process of the appearance of a work, both material (a painter moving his hand, a poet sitting on the lawn, and so on) and “ideal” or “conceptual” (a painter intending to express an idea, a poet thinking of a lady or a friend), which will nevertheless be irrelevant to the meaning of the work, if only because we have no criteria for choosing the relevant (the “real”) ones. Looking back at Kant’s example of a hexagon on the beach, we notice that, in the causal perspective, what seems to him to be accountable only in terms of “concept that can be given only by reason”, in fact can be accounted for solely in terms of the mechanical laws of nature as well; is it not true after all that whoever draw that shape in the sand, displaced the grains of sand with the moves of their arm that were caused by the neural activity of their brain—and that all that was subject to the laws of physics? None of these things, including what can sometimes be called (in this case misleadingly) “intentions”—in Kant’s vocabulary, “concepts”—is nonetheless interesting from the point of view of the meaning of the work, or the purpose of an object.

Within the purposive explanation—which, if I am right, should be more appropriately called an intentional explanation—on the other hand, what we deal with is not a cause of a thing, but a form of its description; in other words, not something that preceded it, but something that is immanent to it. In the amended version of Kant’s aesthetics a work of art is not something that we can conceive of only as caused by a concept (as Kant does in an example of a hexagon drawn in the sand), but something we can conceive of only as intentional—an object for the appearance of which we *can* provide an intentional account (apart from an infinite number of causal accounts that are just as appropriate), and we *must* provide it in order to grasp it as a work of art. What is more, once we provide it, the intention that we posit becomes the “determining idea”—determining not in a causal, but in a conceptual sense—through which we can apprehend it as purposeful. Therefore, “the same action can be intentional under one description and unintentional under another,” (28) but the description under which it is intentional will not be a causal description. If we view Kant’s aesthetics through the lens of Anscombe’s considerations on intention, we might say that, by means of an analogy with natural entities, he elaborates on the role a “concept”—which in such a case is equivalent to intention—plays in the emergence of an artwork. We might also say that while he speaks of concepts and ideas, he might as well be speaking of meaning and inter-

pretation; and in the picture he gives, asking what a work means would not involve finding empirical evidence (a cause), but providing a convincing account of it as intentional.

An ability to give such an account is equivalent to asserting that a work possesses not only a shape, but also a form—that apart from being caused by multiple factors it was also intended to be this way and not another. It is here that we find the necessity that Kant's considerations on teleology called for from the very outset. Viewing intention as immanent to the work—and as providing it with purposefulness that can be said to be “internal”—is also, as I would like to suggest, a way of understanding the consequences of Coleridge's “principle of life” that for him was a means for finding an element of lawfulness in organic entities—either living beings or works of art—and that was the basis of the autonomy of a Romantic work of art. The requirement that the principle of growth of an organism—the form—comes from within, and at the same time subordinates the matter contained in it, is indebted to Kant's organicism that consisted in thinking of certain objects as immanently purposeful. And if the Kantian “determining idea” is seen as a prefiguration of the Coleridgean “internal law” according to which an organic artwork was supposed to be judged, then tracing this indebtedness might help understanding the normative aspect of Romantic organicism. An organic artwork possesses intrinsic normativity because in light of the account of it as purposeful (its intentional description) the idea (or the principle of life) *necessarily* guides everything that is contained in it—or, more precisely, everything that counts as meaningful. For both Coleridge and Kant, then, the notions of purposefulness and normativity were tied to the act of *delimiting* an organic entity: setting the boundaries within which “nothing ... is in vain, purposeless, or to be ascribed to a blind mechanism of nature”.

Now compare this notion of an organic entity in which “nothing ... is in vain” to what Stanley Cavell says about an artist, who is “responsible for everything that happens in his work—and not just in the sense that it is done, but in the sense that it is *meant*” (Cavell 1976, 236). At first it may seem counterintuitive to hold an artist responsible for every single detail that appears in the body of the work; surely, some of them may have appeared there by accident—unintentionally, we would say. Or, rather, considering the immense multitude of physical elements that constitute the materiality of the work, some of them *must* have appeared there by accident; it is impossible to fully control an array of chemical particles on a canvas or on a page. But bare materiality is exactly what Cavell is *not* interested in. Paying careful attention to “what is *there*” in

the work may lead us to the New Critical scepticism about intention only if we forget that, indeed, “what counts is what is *there*”, but “everything that is there is something a man has *done*”. And the question about what has been done is the ultimate question of criticism and interpretation—one that reveals an alternative between “what is there” and “what is intended” to be a false alternative. “Intention is no more an efficient cause of an object of art than it is of a human action; in both cases it is a way of understanding the thing done, of describing what happens” (236). Therefore, while an artwork may not be fully intentional in the material sense—and a constatation that it is not is somewhat trivial—it is fully intentional as something that was meant, which is the same as to simply say that it is a result of an intentional action. To understand what was done (to understand the action) is to understand what is there. Inquiring about intention and inquiring about the work is one and the same thing.

Cavell’s insistence on the full responsibility of an artist with regard to the content of their work, predicated on his understanding of the relation of intentional action—the “what was done”—and meaning—the “what is there”—bears some similarity to Fried’s insistence on the full *instantaneousness* of the meaning that stems from his understanding of the role of frame in modernism. The difference between a minimalist (or, literalist) and a modernist work of art is, in Fried’s view, that while the former aims to elicit an experience that “persists in time” (Fried 1998, 166) and creates a sense of endlessness, in case of the latter “at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest”. Preoccupation with duration—or, more precisely, with an *indefinite* duration—is what amounts to minimalism’s ultimate theatricality—that is, to its foregrounding of the viewer’s perspective and abandonment of its own autonomous claim to meaning—and what makes it antithetical to modernism. And this is not to say that modernist paintings and sculptures do not exist in time, for they obviously do; and it is not to say that a beholder can actually perceive a modernist painting (not to mention sculpture) *instantly*, for they clearly cannot—it is both physically and psychologically impossible. But an experience of a modernist artwork “is not incomplete ... simply because one has seen it only from where one is standing” (167), because the proper mode of the experience of a modernist artwork is not interest, but conviction. Within the minimalist paradigm, as Donald Judd writes, “a work needs only to be interesting” (1964, 184), and art that aspires to be interesting by very definition involves temporality: it has to elicit interest and sustain it. By contrast, art that aspires to convince makes temporality irrelevant, for conviction is not a matter

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of time; therefore, a modernist artwork can be treated “as though if only one were infinitely more acute, a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it” (1998, 167). Where minimalist art emphasises *presence*—the physical “being there” in its monumental or uncanny materiality that continues in time and that is designed to disturb the viewer and make him unable to ignore it—modernism strives for achieving *presentness*: a kind of “perpetual creation of itself” (167) whereby all the meanings it bears can be said to be there at once. Even if, physically and psychologically, such full meaning cannot be perceived or attended to simultaneously, when it is grasped, it subsumes the physical and psychological process of the viewer’s contact with the materiality of the work—just like Cavell’s inquiry into “what is there” subsumes the (trivial and void) inquiry into what is physically present in the work, and Kant’s “idea” subsumes everything that is contained in an organism.

Such a take on the issue might help explain what Benziger considers the chief problem of the modern organicist doctrine, one that leads “right to the heart of the matter” (1951, 28); namely, the relation between the author and the work. On one hand, Benziger writes, if we were to reformulate Coleridge’s famous definition of organic form (a form that is innate and that “shapes as it develops itself from within”) in modern terms, we would say that “the organic poet thinks immediately in terms of his medium, and his thoughts are inseparable from their expression” (24). On the other hand, the practical discourse of criticism nevertheless requires organicists to make the distinction between thoughts and expressions, or else they would not be able to define the object of their inquiry—they are to judge expressions, not thoughts, after all. So the contradictory task organic critics face is to reintroduce into the picture “the very distinction which their theory regards as inadmissible” that is, “the distinction between the poet’s idea and his expression of that idea” (25). And in Benziger’s view this is a task that the Western philosophical thought faced many times before, for example with regard to the idea of God, who, within certain theological discourses, was considered at the same time as being “both everywhere in the created universe and as being quite external to it” (28). But, as Benziger goes on to say, the doctrine of the transcendence of the Creator, held by the “orthodox Christian philosophers”, by the end of the eighteenth century started to lose traction within philosophy, and the founding fathers of the modern organicism like Herder, Moritz, Schelling or Schlegel were more inclined to “stress the immanence of the Divine Spirit only” and



to deny or forget the transcendental nature of the Divine. As a consequence, the imaginary relation between the Creator and the creation changed, and together with it the relation of the idea and the expression, which was modelled on the former. In the earlier philosophical tradition the human soul was considered to transcend the body—just like the Creator transcends the creation and the idea transcends the expression—and to differ in this regard from the “individuals souls” (or entelechies, or life principles, or substantial forms, as they came to be variously called) of other living beings which were “not thought of as destined to exist outside their physical habitation”. Within this “new aesthetic” of Romanticism this difference waned, and as a consequence the entelechy of, say, a tree could be considered a “sufficient analog to the poem and its idea”; because “the idea was not thought of as transcending the poem, but as being identical with it” (34). (An example of such thinking, we should add to Benziger’s narrative, was evident in Coleridge’s treatment of the hierarchy of forms that for him differed only in the degree of their unity, not in kind, for all of them possessed the principle of life, variously distributed throughout the universe). Now if we take this analogy to be explicable in terms of the notion of purposefulness suggested above, and think of the resemblance that a poem bears to a tree as a matter of it being internally purposeful—that is, immanently intentional—the identity of “idea and expression” that posed a problem for Benziger can be readily assimilated to the model of intentional expression. Within this model “idea” and “expression” are indeed one, because the idea is another name for what has been expressed; just as in Kant what does not belong to the “determining idea” is just not part of the organism, so in an intentional expression what does not belong to intention just has not been expressed.

This is not to say that either Kant or Coleridge defended an Anscombian understanding of intention, or that they shared Fried’s commitment to frame; it is rather to say that they both inquired into how beauty and form are possible, and the notions of purpose, unity and normativity they found indispensable to this task point to the same conceptual dependence of meaning upon intention that is revealed in the writings of Anscombe, Fried, Cavell, and, notably, Michaels. This is why it seems appropriate to say that modern organicism—the one that secured autonomy—was always about frame, and it was always about intention, variously dubbed. Postmodern organicism, which inherits the minimalist reluctance towards frame (the unwillingness to acknowledge the boundaries of the work) stemming from the New Critical reluctance towards intention (the unwillingness to see it as immanent to the work)

Organicist aesthetics in the course of the 20th century changed sides and acquiesced in the market reality, surrendering the claim to autonomy that was crucial to modernism.

is in fact its exact opposite. But a theoretical shift within the critical discourse on the ontology of the work of art does not change the ontology itself. What it does, though, is point to the way in which organicist aesthetics in the course of the 20th century changed sides and acquiesced in the market reality, surrendering the claim to autonomy that was crucial to modernism. For the logic of an unbounded entity that postmodernism introduced as a blueprint for construing the work of art is to a large extent the logic of the commodity.

When discussing Kant's aesthetics, Nicholas Brown distinguished two modes of existence an artwork assumes in the conditions of market economy, or, two aspects it possesses. First, it is a commodity—this stems from its material constitution. As long as it is a material object, it has a use value, and “use values, in societies whose metabolism takes place entirely through the exchange of equivalents, are immediately subject to the logic of consumer sovereignty” (Brown 2019, 38)—every object is exchangeable, therefore its use value yields to its exchange value. But at the same time it is something more; namely, it is a meaningful entity, and its meaning does not change along with the different uses it is put to. This is a difference between a work of art—which is always *also* a commodity—and a *mere* commodity, such as a hammer or a stool. If you use a stool as a slicing board or a flower stand, you are not actually misusing it, because it has no normative dimension to it; there is no way that you *should* be using it in a strong sense (apart from different weak senses of the word “should”, which are implied by facts such as that people usually use it that way not another, or that you are told it is appropriate to use it that way not another, etc.). This is primarily because its use value manifests to its producer only via exchange value, that is, by virtue of the fact that it has a use value for someone else. The producer is indifferent to the way in which you use it, as long as you want to buy it, because it is not intended by him to be used in any particular way, rather, it is intended to be bought—and “the less he legislates what its actual use value should be, ... the happier he is” (4). A work of art, on the other hand, boasts that very normativity that a mere commodity lacks; because it is made to be exactly that way and not another (not like commodity, which is made just the way that would sell best), it possesses an internal purposiveness—one that Brown calls after Kant “purposiveness without external purpose” (13), that is, without any use it should be put to, or an end it is to serve. It has a form that is meant.

At this point one may begin to see that the unbounded liberty of a commodity is in a way similar to an unbounded infinity that postmodern organic theorists are willing to attribute to an artwork. Both have

virtually no boundaries; just as there is no limit to the uses a commodity can be put to (which all reside in its very nature and none of them is in fact inappropriate), so similarly there is no limit to the meanings a postmodern work of art can be construed as having (since, according to organic theorists, it emerges out of the meaningful fermentation that occurs in every bit of matter in the universe, and that no one intends). Again, it is not that a postmodern work *actually* is that way—it continues to be an intentional artefact, no matter what we imagine it to be—but an effort to imagine it as equal to the effects of non-intentional natural processes is parallel to an effort to imagine a work of art that could be *just* a commodity, devoid of the normative dimension.

What does “organic” mean today, then, and what could it mean? Well, a notion of organic unity, just like in the times of Coleridge, can be used as an evaluative tool—as a means for telling the good artworks from the bad ones—that designates certain features we expect or demand an artwork to possess. Be it the features that modernism valued—such as internal coherence, justifiability of form, or freedom from arbitrariness—or the ones that are likely to satisfy the ecopoetry writers of today—features found probably in the artworks that uncover the interdependence between man and his environment or bring to mind associations with natural forms. But there is a more important bearing that the notion of organic form or organic unity can have on our understanding of art. For the adjective “organic” seems also to name something that an artist indeed *can* achieve and *does* always achieve, not by virtue of some special formal decisions (such as Coleridge’s or Fiedorczuk’s), but because of the nature of the very act they engage in. We can say that an artwork is always already organic in a Kantian sense, which means it cannot be comprehended otherwise than as an intentional object. As long as it is intentional, it is also at least to some degree autonomous, which means that it is neither reducible to its physical shape nor, as a consequence, to its exchange value. It is worth remembering that the organicist aesthetics, despite its later postmodern shift, is at least partly rooted in the Romantic striving to understanding an artwork’s autonomy in terms of its internal purposiveness—and that this perspective can be useful in conceptualising the possibility of art’s at least partial independence from the market economy today.

We can say that an artwork is always already organic in a Kantian sense, which means it cannot be comprehended otherwise than as an intentional object.

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**Abstrakt:** W artykule chcę wykazać, że metafora organiczna – najczęściej kojarzona z romantycznym pojęciem dzieła sztuki jako analogicznego wobec żywej istoty – przez ostatnie dwa stulecia służyła jako środek konceptualizacji możliwości uzyskania przez dzieło sztuki autonomii, a związek pomiędzy nimi miał charakter dialektyczny – struktura metafory organicznej zakładana w ramach poszczególnych tradycji krytycznych warunkowała wyobrażenia na temat tego, co może oznaczać autonomia estetyczna, sama jednocześnie kształtując się pod wpływem przekonań dotyczących ontologii dzieła sztuki i możliwości uzyskania przez nie autonomii. W tym czasie sama metafora uległa modyfikacjom na tyle istotnym, że w różnych momentach historycznych mogła posłużyć uzasadnieniu przeciwstawnych sobie postaw teoretycznych i estetycznych: wykorzystywano ją zarówno w obronie autonomicznego statusu dzieła sztuki, jak i w charakterze argumentu przeciw autonomii jako pożądanemu punktowi dojścia działań artystycznych. Aby zilustrować te zmiany, omówię trzy momenty w historii metafory organicznej: organicyzm romantyczny, skupiony na pojęciu zasady życiowej, formalistyczny organicizm Nowej Krytyki, który, jak się okaże, zapowiada to, co Michael Fried nazwał literalizmem, oraz postmodernistyczny organicyzm, charakterystyczny dla humanistyki środowiskowej i dyskursów ekokrytycznych. Krótki zarys niedawnej historii metafory organicznej ma za zadanie pomóc w zrozumieniu genezy współczesnego organicyzmu i pokazać, że jego niechęć do idei autonomii estetycznej wynika z charakterystycznie postmodernistycznego pojęcia formy organicznej. W zakończeniu artykułu zarysowuję możliwą interpretację pojęcia formy organicznej w świetle rozważań Kanta na temat sądu teleologicznego oraz poglądów Anscombe na temat intencji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** autonomia, celowość, organicyzm, krytyka literacka, romantyzm, ekokrytyka





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## O sztuce i formie towarowej<sup>1</sup>

Przekład obszernego wstępu do książki Nicholasa Browna *Autonomy. The Social Ontology of Art under Capitalism*. W punkcie wyjścia swoich rozważań badacz umieszcza oczywistą obserwację, że współcześnie dzieło sztuki co do zasady jest również towarem, czyli funkcjonuje lub może zacząć funkcjonować na rynku w podobny sposób, co reszta towarów. W kontrze do tego, co uznaje za dominującą ideologię estetyczną współczesności, czyli zrównywania dzieła ze wszystkimi innymi towarami, Browna interesuje to, czy między dziełem sztuki a całą resztą produktów cyrkulujących na rynku, między dziełem a kapitalistycznym towarem, możemy stwierdzić jakąś niezbywalną (niesprowadzalną do różnic punktów widzenia, opinii itp.) ontologiczną różnicę. Jak przekonuje za Marksem, Heglem, Kantem oraz Walterem Bennem Michaelsem, tym czymś, co pozwala odróżnić dzieło sztuki od reszty towarów, jest jego znaczenie, tożsame z intencją jego autora, którego nie sposób sprowadzić do wartości użytkowej. Takie ujęcie różnicy między dziełem sztuki a towarem pozwala następnie Brownowi bronić centralnego dla jego książki rozumienia autonomii estetycznej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** autonomia, forma towarowa, dzieło sztuki, znaczenie, intencja

1 Wstęp do książki Browna *Autonomy: The Social Ontology of Art Under Capitalism*, Durham: Duke University Press 2019. W przekładzie usunięto (krótkie) fragmenty opisujące całość książki lub odnoszące się do jej poszczególnych rozdziałów.

Poniższa książka próbuje odpowiedzieć na pytanie, które po raz pierwszy zadał ponad wiek temu György Lukács: „dzieła sztuki istnieją – w jaki sposób jest to możliwe?” (Lukács 2011, 99)<sup>2</sup>. Konkretny rozpatrywany przez niego wariant tego problemu – wciąż istotny dla współczesnych dyskusji na temat afektów, tożsamości i formy – nie zmuszał jednak Lukácsa do zmierzenia się z faktem „całościowej redukcji kultury do towaru” (Eagleton 2016). Zjawisko to – krytykowane przez lewicę, podczas gdy prawica wykazuje się „bardziej przychylnym stosunkiem do komercjalizacji kultury” (Cowen 2000, 1) – jest ostatecznie przedmiotem jednoznacznej afirmacji wszystkich stron, „jak najgorliwiej zapewniających, że sztuka jest, zawsze była lub od niedawna stała się niczym więcej niż towarem” (Beech 2015, 1). W takim społeczeństwie jak nasze, słusznie ignoruje się – jako dowód beznadziejnej naiwności – roszczenia do funkcjonowania poza cyrkulacją towarową. Wiemy, że dzieło sztuki to towar jak każdy inny. Mniej jasne jest jednak, czy wiemy, co właściwie mamy na myśli, kiedy to mówimy.

To, czy para butów jest kapitalistycznym towarem – albo towarem przedkapitalistycznym, „prostym”, lub w ogóle nie-towarem – nie ma żadnego wpływu na samo ich istnienie jako pary butów (o ile nie mówimy o Heideggerowskich chłopskich butach). To samo dotyczyć będzie młotków, soli drogowej, tapet. Jeśli utowarowienie butów (albo młotka, soli, tapety) stanowi problem, to nie w kontekście statusu tego przedmiotu jako pary butów, lecz z perspektywy procesu pracy – tzn. tego, co dzieje się w ukrytym warsztacie produkcji, „na którego drzwiach czytamy: *No admittance except on business* [Wstęp tylko dla interesantów]” (Marks 1968, 203). W produkcji towarów kulturowych nie brakuje oczywiście wyzysku – należałoby go jednak rozpatrywać w dokładnie ten sam sposób, co w wypadku każdej innej branży. Wykluczwszy Heideggerowski wyjątek, lamentowanie nad „całościową redukcją butów do towaru” byłoby przecież czymś dość osobliwym. Dlaczego więc utowarowienie dzieła sztuki miałoby być problemem – dlaczego miałoby mieć znaczenie dla jego statusu jako dzieła sztuki – podczas gdy towarowy charakter młotka czy buta nie jest istotny dla ich statusu jako młotka czy buta?

Odpowiedź możemy znaleźć w Marksowskiej dygresji na temat fenomenologii rynku. Skoro „towary nie mogą same udać się na rynek i same się wymieniać”, musimy „zwrócić się do ich opiekunów, posiadaczy towarów” (Marks 1968, 97):

2 Przekład zmodyfikowany (przyp. tłum.).

Tym zwłaszcza różni się posiadacz towaru od towaru, że dla towaru każde inne ciało towaru stanowi tylko formę przejawiania się jego własnej wartości. Jako urodzony leveller i cynik towar zawsze jest gotów wymienić z każdym innym towarem nie tylko duszę, ale i ciało, choćby ten miał więcej cech odrażających niż Maritorna. Towarowi brak zmysłu dla oceny konkretnych cech ciała towaru; brak ten uzupełnia posiadacz towaru za pomocą swych pięciu i więcej zmysłów. Jego towar nie ma dla niego bezpośredniej wartości użytkowej. W przeciwnym razie nie zaniósłby go na rynek. Towar ten ma wartość użytkową dla innych. Dla niego ma bezpośrednio tę tylko wartość użytkową, że jest nosicielem wartości wymiennej i dzięki temu środkiem wymiany. Dlatego chce go zbyć w zamian za towar, którego wartość użytkowa zaspokaja jego potrzebę. Żaden towar nie jest wartością użytkową dla swego posiadacza; wszystkie są wartościami użytkowymi dla tych, którzy ich nie posiadają. Muszą więc powszechnie przechodzić z rąk do rąk. Ale to przechodzenie z rąk do rąk stanowi wymianę, a wymiana ustosunkowuje je wzajemnie jako wartości i realizuje je jako wartości. Towary muszą się więc najpierw zrealizować jako wartości, zanim będą się mogły zrealizować jako wartości użytkowe. (Marks 1968, 98–99)

To zawiły fragment (którego polityka genderowa jest, na szczęście, nie całkiem czytelna w tłumaczeniu). Jego zawiłość i – nazwijmy to – „literackość” wydadają się nieproporcjonalne do podejmowanego tematu. Czy odróżnienie towaru od posiadacza towaru nie powinno być najłatwiejszą rzeczą na świecie? Czy ustawienie problemu poprzez spersonifikowanie towaru – a następnie symulowanie kłopotu z odróżnieniem owej personifikacji od faktycznej osoby – nie wydaje się raczej dziwnym, zbędnym naddatkiem? Operacja, której dokonuje Marks, przebiega jednak w przeciwnym kierunku. W poprzednim akapicie powiedziano nam, że „ekonomiczne maski osób są tylko uosobieniami stosunków ekonomicznych” (Marks 1968, 98). A zatem nie tylko towar jest personifikacją; jest nim również jego właściciel (łatwiej bowiem mówić o towarze *per* „ona” niż o jego posiadaczu *per* „to”). Różnica przebiega więc między dwoma logicznymi stanowiskami – co czasem trudno dostrzec, ponieważ jedno z nich zajmuje byt obdarzony świadomością – i sprowadzić ją można właściwie do następującej obserwacji: ze stanowiska towaru wszystkie towary są jakościowo obojętne. Jeśli wyobrazić sobie rynek bez kupujących i sprzedających, zostajemy z masą towarów, które są wymienialne w różnych proporcjach, ale spośród których żaden nie jest niewymienialny – tzn. żaden z nich nie posiada jakości niedającej się wyrazić jako ilość. (Podstawowy argument na rzecz owej jakościowej obojętności Marks rozwija we wcześniejszym rozdziale – w tym miejscu nas to nie interesuje). Jednakże ze stanowiska posiadacza towaru – który

jest zarówno kupującym, jak i sprzedającym, ponieważ posiada towar, a nie jakąś inną rzecz – jego towar jest jakościowo różny od wszystkich innych towarów w tym sensie, że sam w sobie nie ma żadnych jakości. Ujmując rzecz ściślej, jedyną jakość towaru, która liczy się dla jego posiadacza, to jego brak jakości – jego jakościowa równość wobec innych towarów, tj. jego wymienialność<sup>3</sup>.

Wszystkie inne towary – te, które posiadacz napotyka raczej jako kupujący niż jako sprzedający – są dla jego „pięciu i więcej zmysłów” pełne jakości. Jakość, wartość użytkowa, liczy się dla niego jako dla kupującego. W przeciwnym razie nie chciałby kupować. Jakość, wartość użytkowa, nie liczy się dla niego jako dla sprzedawcy. W przeciwnym razie nie chciałby sprzedawać. Oczywiście, jako sprzedawca wie, że towary, które przynosi na rynek, muszą „dowieść tego, że są wartościami użytkowymi, zanim będą mogły zrealizować się jako wartości” (Marks 1968, 99). „Ale”<sup>4</sup> – mamy tu do czynienia z Hegłowskim „ale”, spójnikiem zmieniającym wszystko, co powiedziane wcześniej – „czy jest ona [wydatkowana na nie praca ludzka] użyteczna dla innych, czy więc jej produkt zaspokaja cudze potrzeby, to może jednak okazać się tylko w wymianie” (Marks 1968, 99). Znaleźliśmy się więc w pętli pytania z rodzaju „jajko czy kura” – wartość wymienna poprzedza wartość użytkową poprzedzającą wartość wymienną poprzedzającą wartość

3 Przedstawiona tutaj logika pozwala odróżnić heglowsko-marksowski koncept stanowiska od współczesnego pojęcia punktu widzenia. Znaczenia obu słów w języku angielskim [tak samo, jak i w polskim – Ł.Ż.] są mniej lub bardziej tożsame, ale „stanowisko” w tradycji heglowsko-marksowskiej oznacza coś zupełnie innego niż to, co zazwyczaj rozumiemy przez punkt widzenia. „Stanowisko” odnosi się do pozycji logicznej wewnątrz systemu pozycji logicznych, w którym nie zakłada się apriorycznej niepoznawalności systemowych relacji. Skoro stanowiska to pozycje logiczne, mogą być przyjmowane wedle woli, nawet wtedy, gdy, empirycznie rzecz biorąc, są powiązane z taką czy inną pozycją społeczną. W dialektyce Pana i Sługi, relacja pomiędzy tymi dwoma stanowiskami staje się jasna jedynie w naprzemiennym ruchu wahadłowym między nimi. Można jednak przyjąć również nie-ludzkie stanowisko: państwa u Hegla i proletariatu u Lukácsa. Z kolei punkt widzenia mogą mieć wyłącznie ludzie. Marksowskie rozróżnienie na T-P-T i P-T-P, które przyda się za chwilę, również dotyczy stanowisk, skoro oba są wyłącznie fazami stanowiącego jedność procesu wymiany. „Drobny handlarz” doświadcza wymiany jako T-P-T, zaś właściwy kapitalista jako P-T-P, ale różnicy między tymi stanowiskami nie da się zredukować do pozycji podmiotowych lub punktów widzenia. A zatem: towar może posiadać stanowisko tak samo, jak kapitalista, ale ten drugi może mieć również punkt widzenia. Celem Marksowskiej „personifikacji” kapitalisty jest więc podkreślenie, że punkt widzenia, o ile różni się od stanowiska, jest nieistotny.

4 Wskazywany przez Browna „heglowski” spójnik jest nieobecny w polskim przekładzie *Kapitału* (przyp. tłum.).

użytkową – którą Marksowski hipotetyczny posiadacz towaru nie jest zainteresowany: „chce on zrealizować swój towar jako wartość (...) niezależnie od tego, czy jego własny towar ma wartość użytkową dla posiadacza tamtego towaru, czy też nie ma” (Marks 1968, 99).

W społeczeństwie takim jak nasze, jawiącym się jako „olbrzymie zbiorowisko towarów” (Marks 1968, 39), każda wartość użytkowa jest w punkcie wyjścia możliwa do wymiany. I odwrotnie – jedynie poprzez wymianę wartość użytkowa zostaje społecznie zatwierdzona. A zatem, dla posiadacza towaru liczy się jedynie wymienialność – niezależnie od tego, jak bardzo frustrować może go fakt, że wartość użytkowa liczyła się jedynie we wcześniejszym kroku. Jeśli sprzeda ci więc salaterkę, a ty użyjesz jej jako nocnika, będzie to wyłącznie twoja sprawa. Z perspektywy sprzedawcy, wartość użytkowa „jego” towaru jawi się jedynie jako wartość wymienna: „czy jest ona [praca] użyteczna dla innych, (...) to może się okazać tylko w wymianie”. Sprzedawca chce zrealizować wartość wymienną swojego towaru produkując coś, co posiada wartość użytkową dla innych. Nie interesuje go ani regulowanie tego, czym powinna być wartość użytkowa sprzedawanego przezeń towaru, ani nawet posiadanie wiedzy na ten temat; nie wie nawet, czy jego towar ma w ogóle wartość użytkową, dopóki go nie sprzeda. Można wręcz powiedzieć, że im więcej potencjalnych użytkowników posiada dany towar – kroi, szatkuje; jest maszyną do pisania, szafką na buty, symbolem statusu oraz fotoplastykonem – tym mniej sprzedawca reguluje, czym powinna być jego rzeczywista wartość użytkowa, i tym jest szczęśliwszy.

Gdyby jednak taki stan rzeczy był jedynym możliwym, nie byłoby sensu podkreślać jego osobliwości. Czym jest więc inny „społeczeństwa wytwórców towarów”? (Marks 1968, 91). We wcześniejszym rozdziale Marks podsuwa nam kilka możliwości: Robinson Crusoe, średniowieczna pańszczyzna, wiejska rodzina, wzmianki o różnych społeczeństwach niekapitalistycznych znanych z historii i wreszcie słynny „związek wolnych ludzi pracujących za pomocą wspólnych środków produkcji i świadomie wydatkujących swe liczne indywidualne siły robocze jako jedną społeczną siłę roboczą” (Marks 1968, 90). To wszystko inni kapitalistycznej produkcji towarów; jednak innym *określonym*, innym, którego kapitalistyczny rynek wytwarza jako swoją ramę wewnętrzną, jest bezpośrednio przywoływany przez Marksa Hegłowski obraz pracy kolektywnej. Najwyraźniej pojawia się on u Hegła w wyidealizowanym odwołaniu do greckiego życia etycznego; przy czym nie chodzi o to, jak faktycznie wyglądało greckie *polis* – albo nawet jak wyglądało w wyobraźni Hegła – lecz o immanentny horyzont owego życia, o pewien ideał, który normy i zwyczaje greckiego życia musiały zakładać, ale który urzeczy-

wistniany mógł być jedynie w niesatysfakcjonujący, wewnętrznie sprzeczny i niestabilny sposób:

*Praca jednostki dla zaspokojenia własnych potrzeb jest w równej mierze zaspokojeniem potrzeb cudzych, jak własnych, a zaspokojenie potrzeb własnych osiąga ona tylko dzięki pracy innych jednostek.*

Tak jak jednostka w swojej pracy *jednostkowej* wykonuje *nieświadomie* jakąś pracę *ogólną*, tak z drugiej strony wykonuje ona pracę ogólną jako coś, co jest jej własnym *świadomym* przedmiotem. Całość staje się *jako całość* dziełem jednostki; jej składa jednostka siebie w ofierze, ale też dzięki temu otrzymuje siebie samą od niej z powrotem (Hegel 1963, 1:398–99).

Problem zaspokojenia „uniwersalnych” lub społecznych potrzeb poprzez pracę jednostki, poprzez nieredukowalnie partykularne zdolności i pragnienia, wygląda tak samo u Marksa i Hegla (choć Marksowska „pełna samoświadomość” wskazywać będzie na kluczową różnicę między nimi). Marks podchodzi jednak do tego problemu od strony innej formacji społecznej – kapitalizmu – gdzie to, co wytwarzane, nie jest związane z normami i zwyczajami, a w tym, kto wytwarza, nie ma nic indywidualnego; gdzie, jak już widzieliśmy, wymiana poprzedza użycie. W Marksowskiej wersji – „czy jest ona [wydatkowana na nie praca ludzka] użyteczna dla innych, czy więc jej produkt zaspokaja cudze potrzeby, to może jednak okazać się tylko w wymianie” – dwa zdania podrzędne wydają się mówić to samo. Funkcją drugiego z nich jest bowiem podkreślenie przejścia od neutralnych „innych” do „cudzych” (*fremde*) – wskazanie na specyfikę wymiany towarowej, w której „cudze potrzeby”, brane za pewnik w Hegłowskiej wersji życia według norm i zwyczajów, zostają zredukowane do szyfru, którego kluczem jest wymienialność. Jak przypomina Lukács, logika alienacji (*Entfremdung*) u Marksa jest głęboko związana z Hegłowską eksterioryzacją (*Entäußerung*) (Lukács 1980a; zob. też Jameson 2014). Innym lub negatywnym horyzontem wymiany towarowej jest to, co Hegel nazywa *die Kraft der Entäußerung*, siła eksterioryzacji, siła, „by uczynić siebie rzeczą” (Hegel 1965, 2:261)<sup>5</sup>.

Wiele napisano o motywie Pana i Sługi w *Fenomenologii ducha*; nie ma powodu, aby wracać tutaj do tego wątku, nawet jeśli relacja kupującego do sprzedawcy – w której logicznie zawierają się dwa momenty: obojętności i rozdrażnienia – ironicznie go przywołuje, gdyż kompletnie nie potrafi ona wytworzyć czegoś, co przypominałoby podmiotowość (zamiast podmiotowości tworzy rynek, na którym obie strony mogą

<sup>5</sup> Wyrażenie to przewija się przez całą *Fenomenologię*..., pojawia się także u Hegla w innych miejscach (zob. Hegel 1987, 189).

bezpiecznie stanąć naprzeciwko siebie, raczej ze sobą związane niż wobec siebie antagonistyczne). Istotne jest to, w jaki sposób ostatecznie wychodzimy z tej dialektyki. Jak wiadomo, umożliwia to praca Sługi, który formując i nadając kształt rzeczy – eksterioryzując samego siebie przy tworzeniu świata zarówno dla siebie, jak i dla swojego Pana – odnajduje w tym świecie swoją własną, a nie pańską, siłę:

Forma [produktu pracy], przez to, że została przez nią [świadomość] ustanowiona *poza nią samą*, nie staje się już dla niej czymś innym niż ona sama; albowiem właśnie ta forma jest jej czystym bytem dla siebie, który staje się jej prawdą. Świadomość służebna nabiera *dla siebie własnego sensu* [Sinn] poprzez *siebie samego*, a dzieje się to właśnie w pracy, w której zdawała się realizować tylko *obcy sens* (Hegel 1963, 1:227; 2002, 140)<sup>6</sup>

Oto Hegłowski materializm – na marginesie: dokładne przeciwieństwo materializmu przyczynowego, wulgarnego czy „zorientowanego przedmiotowo” (*object-oriented*) – który stanowi rodzaj ideologicznego jądra *Fenomenologii*... Co istotne, przedmiot kształtowany przez Sługę jest nie tylko przez niego tworzony – Marksowski towar również jest produktem pracy – lecz także zamierzony: to cel, do którego Sługa dociera własnymi środkami. „Eksterioryzacja” nie jest zatem psychologiczną projekcją, lecz kwestią społecznej inskrypcji. Obiekt wytworzony przez Sługę nie jest szyfrem, którego użycie jest określane przez jego wymianę, lecz użyciem, którego przeznaczenie jest czytelne, tzn. normatywne. Pan może znaleźć dla niego inne zastosowanie (co najprawdopodobniej zrobi), jednak będzie to potencjalnie generować konflikt. Natomiast posiadacz towarów nie dba o to, do czego jego towaru użyje nabywca – o ile tylko ktoś ów towar kupi.

W ten sposób docieramy do rozróżnienia pomiędzy formułami wymiany T-P-T (towar-pieniądz-towar lub Hegłowskie *Sittlichkeit* – zaspokojenie indywidualnych potrzeb jako uniwersalne zaspokojenie potrzeb poprzez społeczny metabolizm, gdzie wartość użytkowa podlega wymianie poprzez medium pieniądza) a P-T-P (pieniądz-towar-pieniądz) – to znaczy tą samą relacją, rozumianą jednak w drugim wypadku jako

6 W przekładzie Browna cytat z Hegla brzmi następująco: „Thus the form [of the product of labor], set outside himself, is not an other to him, for this form is precisely his own pure being-for-self, which to him becomes the truth. What he rediscovers, precisely through labor that appears to harbor only an alien purpose, is nothing other than his own purpose, arrived at through his own means”. Przetłumaczyłem przekład Adama Landmana w oparciu o przekład *Fenomenologii*... autorstwa Światosława Floriana Nowickiego i przekład samego Browna tak, aby wydobyć to, o co chodzi badaczowi (przyp. tłum.).



sedno kapitalizmu w ogóle, gdzie wartość użytkowa jest jedynie znikającym punktem w waloryzacji kapitału. To rozróżnienie pomiędzy obiektem, którego użycie (cel, znaczenie) zostało normatywnie wpisane w sam obiekt – tak, że jego znaczenie jest uniwersalne w rozumieniu Hegłowskiego *allgemeine*, tj. dostępne dla każdego, a zatem niebędące sprawą prywatną – a obiektem, którego użycie z pewnego stanowiska jest kwestią obojętną, z innego zaś stanowi przedmiot prawdopodobnie intensywnego, lecz nieuchronnie prywatnego zainteresowania; pomiędzy bytem, który ucieleśnia i wymusza pewne przekonania, a bytem starającym się wzbudzić zainteresowanie u odbiorcy – a raczej różne rodzaje zainteresowania u różnych odbiorców. Dotarliśmy – w niewątpliwie niecodzienny sposób – do rozróżnienia między sztuką a przedmiotowością.

To zaś rozróżnienie autorstwa Michaela Frieda – stało się jednak centralne dla całej debaty nad dominującym nurtem współczesnej produkcji kulturalnej, czy też, mówiąc ściślej, dominującym nurtem produkcji kulturalnej z bardzo niedalekiej przeszłości, to znaczy z okresu, który nazwać można by choćby „postmodernizmem”. Mimo iż wybrane aspekty Friedowskiej krytyki można odnieść do całej gamy zjawisk, w oryginalnym kontekście rozróżnienie między sztuką a przedmiotowością służyło mu do skrytkowania pewnych założeń leżących u podstaw minimalistycznego czy „literalistycznego” dzieła sztuki – tj. założenia, że dzieło nie jest niczym ponad konkretny przedmiot, którym jest. Takie twierdzenie prowadzić miało ostatecznie do stworzenia swego rodzaju teatru, w którym najważniejszym punktem odniesienia jest nie forma przedmiotu, lecz doświadczenie odbiorcy. Utrzymywanie przez minimalistyczne dzieło, że jest ono dosłownie tym przedmiotem, którym jest – przedmiotem wywołującym doświadczenie, a nie formą domagającą się interpretacji – ujawnia obecną w nim strukturę towaru, który domaga się prywatnego przywiązania raczej niż publicznych przekonań. Właściwie wszystko, co nie podoba się Friedowi w pseudoartystycznych „obiekтах” – dążenie do przypodobania się odbiorcy, odrzucenie kategorii wewnętrznej spójności, nieskończona powtarzalność podlegająca dryfowi, a nie rozwojowi – jest absolutnie na miejscu w przypadku określonej, dobrze nam znanej klasy przedmiotów, tj. towarów. Idąc dalej, można by powiedzieć, że Friedowskie „formalistyczne” rozróżnienie między sztuką a najnowszą nie-sztuką jest również rozróżnieniem historycznym (*historicism*), które da się w pełni wyprowadzić z Marksowskiego problemu „realnej subsumcji pracy pod kapitał”.

Wróćmy więc do *Kapitału*. Jak widzieliśmy przed chwilą, analizę Marksa można zrozumieć w ten sposób, że w wymianie towarowej sposób funkcjonowania celu lub intencji ulega zmianie. Jeśli robię miskę



dla samego siebie, to jest tak, *ponieważ* chciałem zrobić miskę, w związku z czym będę zainteresowany różnego rodzaju konkretnymi właściwościami, jakie miska może posiadać. Moja intencja będzie wpisana w samą rzecz: to, czy miska jest płytsza czy głębsza, raczej drewniana niż metalowa, wszystkie jej właściwości – jej celowość – są takie, jakie są, ponieważ chciałem, aby takie były. Jesteśmy w świecie Hegłowskiej eksterioryzacji. Jeśli robię miskę z myślą o rynku, to przede wszystkim interesuje mnie tylko jeden atrybut – wartość wymienna, tzn. popyt na miski. Ów popyt (a więc i wszystkie konkretne atrybuty, stanowiące jego współczynniki) ustalany jest zaś gdzie indziej – na rynku. Intencja realizuje się w wymianie, lecz nie zostaje zapisana w przedmiocie. Mimo iż wciąż podejmuję decyzje dotyczące moich misek, te decyzje nie liczą się jako intencje nawet dla mnie, ponieważ zostały w całości podporządkowane mniej lub bardziej trafnym domysłom dotyczącym pragnień innych ludzi. Teoretycy wolnego rynku opiewają to zjawisko jako „suwerenność konsumenta”<sup>7</sup>.

Kantowska formuła sądu estetycznego, która otworzyła drogę dla koncepcji sztuki stanowiącej o koherencji ponad dwóch wieków praktyki artystycznej, to percepcja „celowości bez celu” (Kant 1986, 124). Sądy estetyczne u Kanta są bowiem formułowane poza domeną zewnętrznych zastosowań, zarówno idiopatycznych (preferencje, sądy przynależne rynkowi), jak i praktycznych (cele, sądy przynależne państwu). W sądzie estetycznym uznajemy coś za „piękne” – co stanowi w tym wypadku termin specjalistyczny, którego współrzędne są u Kanta wyznaczone nie przez odniesienie do brzydoty lub trudności, lecz w opozycji do sądów idiopatycznych i konceptualnych na jednej osi oraz do wzniosłości na drugiej – ale jesteśmy obojętni na istnienie tego czegoś. Dzieło sztuki jest więc – o tyle, o ile jest dziełem sztuki – wyjęte z domeny wartości użytkowej. Jednocześnie jako bezsprzecznie niemagiczna rzecz posiada wartość użytkową, co oznacza, że posiada także wartość wymienną – a w społeczeństwie, którego metabolizmem rządzi rynek, wartość wymienna jest logicznie wcześniejsza, jako *Zweck* lub cel. Nie stanowi to problemu dla młotków. Firma Estwing osiąga swój cel (zarabianie pieniędzy poprzez produkowanie młotków) pomagając mi osiągnąć mój (kucie młotkiem). Problemy pojawiają się poza rynkiem, w procesie produkcji.

Tymczasem dla dzieła sztuki jego towarowy charakter stanowi problem. Jeśli dzieło sztuki jest nie tylko towarem – jeśli moment autono-

7 „Suwerenność konsumenta” została zdefiniowana przez Williama Harolda Hutta jako „władza kontrolująca, jaką wolne jednostki sprawują przy wyborze [spośród] potrzeb nad depozytariuszami zasobów danej społeczności” (Hutt 1940, 66).

mii względem formy towarowej jest analitycznie dostępny, jeśli w dziele istnieje coś, o czym można powiedzieć, że zawiesza jego towarowy charakter – to wówczas ma sens podchodzić do niego z narzędziami interpretacyjnymi. Skoro forma dzieła sztuki jest kwestią intencji, to odpowiada ono na interpretację, *de facto* domaga się jej. (We wcześniej cytowanym fragmencie z Hegla – „*swój własny sens poprzez siebie samego*” – wieloznaczne słowo *Sinn*, przetłumaczone tutaj jako „sens (przeznaczenie)”, mogłoby równie dobrze zostać przetłumaczone jako „znaczenie”. Co więcej, w dalszej części *Fenomenologii ducha* immanentny dla normatywności uformowanego obiektu konflikt przerodzi się, na gruncie sceptycyzmu i stoicyzmu, w zwykły konflikt interpretacji. Ale to całkiem inna historia). Jeśli jednak dzieło sztuki jest tylko towarem, narzędzia interpretacyjne nagle przestają mieć sens. Jeśli bowiem jedyną intencją ucieleśnioną w formie jakiegoś obiektu jest intencja wymiany, owa forma musi być określona poza miejscem jego powstania: tzn. przez mniej lub bardziej przemyślane domysły na temat rynku. Nie chodzi jednak o to, że produkcja artystyczna jest ze swej natury prekapitalistyczna; na pewno nie bardziej niż Hegłowska eksterioryzacja. Nostalgiczno-tragiczna pokusa, by postawić sprawę w ten sposób, jest dla marksizmu jednym z najmniej przydatnych spadków po wczesnym romantyzmie. Jak zobaczymy, rzecz ma się tymczasem dokładnie na odwrót: dzieło sztuki nie jest archaicznym przeżytkiem, lecz wewnętrznym, dyskretnym innym kapitalistycznego społeczeństwa. Celem jest więc raczej podkreślenie szczególnego charakteru towaru – oraz konsekwencji wynikających z założenia, że dzieła sztuki są takimi samymi towarami, jak wszystkie inne. Jeśli bowiem faktycznie by tak było, pragnienia reprezentowane przez rynek mogłyby stanowić przedmiot analiz i wyjaśnień, lecz próba interpretacji samego dzieła byłaby bez sensu.

Teza, iż towar artystyczny jest nieinterpretowalny, może wydać się absurdalna – pomyślmy jednak przez chwilę o filmie science-fiction Jamesa Camerona *Avatar*, który do dziś stanowi swego rodzaju szczytowe osiągnięcie spektaklu przemysłu kulturalnego. Z pewnym rozbawieniem można by przypomnieć, że krytycy pozostawili po sobie całą masę kompletnie wzajemnie nieprzystawalnych – a jednocześnie, zdałoby się, całkiem prawdopodobnych – interpretacji; zresztą zjawisko to nie umknęło uwadze ich samych. Owa empiryczna obfitość nie jest istotna sama z siebie; wszystkie interpretacje (albo wszystkie prócz jednej) mogły być po prostu błędne. Istnieje jednak inna możliwość: skoro w *Avatarze* chodzi wyłącznie o to, aby wyprodukować serię sprzedawalnych efektów, nie może on jednocześnie wytworzyć minimalnej, wewnętrznej spójności, której wymaga znaczenie. Co więcej, sam Cameron daje jasno do

zrozumienia, że tak właśnie jest; zapytany, dlaczego samice Na'vi mają piersi, odpowiada: „Od początku mówiłem: «Ona musi mieć ccyki», mimo że nie ma to sensu – jej rasa, Na'vi, nie należy do łożyskowców” (Rushfield 2009). Cameron może wykazywać się większą precyzją, niż mu samemu się wydaje, gdy mówi, że „nie ma to sensu”. Dopytywany o tę kwestię w innym wywiadzie, odpowiedział, że samice Na'vi mają piersi, „ponieważ to film dla ludzi” (Lipton 2010). Innymi słowy, ludzie – a przynajmniej dostateczna ich liczba – zapłacą, aby zobaczyć piersi, więc piersi trafiają do filmu. Ten zabieg jednak „nie ma sensu”: interpretacja byłaby bezcelowa, ponieważ istotne jest nie to, że Cameron chciał umieścić piersi Na'vi w filmie, lecz to, że sądził, iż wiele innych osób chciałoby je w nim zobaczyć. Na podobnej zasadzie całą szalenie niespójną ideologię jego filmu tworzą łatwo sprzedające się ideologemy, które razem nie mają żadnego sensu. Nie znaczy to, że wszystkie artystyczne towary są niespójne w podobny sposób. Pewna część publiczności zapłaci za ideologiczną, narracyjną lub estetyczną spójność, dzięki czemu mamy politycznie zaangażowane filmy dokumentalne, kino środka [*middlebrow cinema*] oraz kino niezależne. Tego rodzaju spójność nie przekłada się jednak na znaczenie – to, co przypomina znaczenie, jest jedynie odwołaniem do niszy rynkowej. Nie chodzi o to, że nie można konsumować towarów artystycznych z przyjemnością, czy też rozumiejąc ich (spójne bądź niespójne) przesłanie; rzecz raczej w tym, że gdy zauważymy, że kształt dzieła jest zdeterminowany przez oczekiwania co do wyników sprzedaży – a samo dzieło nie wydaje się w przekonujący sposób owego nacisku przezwyciężać – wówczas trudno podtrzymać dotychczasową askrypcję znaczenia.

To wszystko jednak nic nowego; to raczej bardzo stara linia krytyki, którą można odnaleźć przede wszystkim w krytyce przemysłu kulturalnego Theodora Adorna (Horkheimer i Adorno 2010b). Jej zarys jest dobrze znany; dla naszych celów wystarczy przypomnieć, że w swoim eseju Adorno nie zajmuje się eksplikacją dzieł, ponieważ w kulturze komercyjnej nie ma ani dzieł podlegających krytycznej analizie, ani znaczeń. Przemysł kulturalny u Adorna jest prostszy niż jego współczesna, znana nam wersja – zróżnicowany, zdąłoby się, jedynie werbykalnie, nie pocięty na potencjalnie nieskończone społeczno-estetyczno-kulturowe nize. Istotnym problemem jest jednak dla nas sam towar artystyczny. „Zróżnicowane wartości produkcyjne przemysłu kulturalnego nie mają zgoła nic wspólnego z merytorycznymi, ze znaczeniem produktu” (Horkheimer i Adorno 2010b, 126)<sup>8</sup>, ponieważ różne wartości produkcyjne

8 Tak tutaj, jak i w innych przekład z *Dialektyki...* przekład został dostosowany

są obliczone raczej na różne rynki niż podyktowane różnymi celami, a zasada ta stanowi „sens wszystkich filmów, niezależnie od wybranej akurat przez kierownictwo fabuły” (Horkheimer i Adorno 2010b, 127). Towarom artystycznym można zadać interesujące pytania socjologiczne (dlaczego niektórzy młodzi mężczyźni lubią krwawe horrory?), podczas gdy pytania interpretacyjne (dlaczego w środku *Trzech dni Kondora* jest scena miłosna?) nie dają interesujących odpowiedzi<sup>9</sup>.

W warunkach heglowskiej eksterioryzacji znaczenie jest tożsame z intencją – jak zobaczymy, to bardziej skomplikowana teza, niż mogłoby się początkowo wydawać – podczas gdy w warunkach rynkowych „znaczenie” jest po prostu tym, co można powiedzieć o przyswajaniu towarów. Na pytania socjologiczne można odpowiedzieć, niekoniecznie biorąc pod uwagę intencje; tego wymagają dopiero pytania interpretacyjne. Oczywiście, dane socjologiczne lub innego typu również podlegają „interpretacji”. To samo słowo nazywa tu jednak dwie różne rzeczy – znaki naturalne i znaki intencjonalne domagają się bowiem odmiennych procedur poznawczych: z jednej strony podążanie za przyczynami, z drugiej za znaczeniami. Można próbować zatrzeć tę różnicę – mimo iż w życiu codziennym stanowiłoby to formę szaleństwa – ale czyniąc tak, po prostu usunęlibyśmy jedno znaczenie interpretacji na rzecz drugiego. Taka operacja nie jest niemożliwa do pomyślenia. Co więcej, teza głosząca, że dzieło sztuki jest takim samym towarem, jak każdy inny, implikuje właśnie zatarcie różnicy między tymi dwoma.

Jednocześnie zrównanie znaczenia i intencji w żaden sposób nie zagraża marksistowskiej koncepcji<sup>10</sup>. Mocna teza o tożsamości intencji

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wany do brzmienia autorskich przekładów Browna (przyp. tłum).

9 Pytanie „dlaczego w slasherach pojawiają się chłopięce bohaterki kobiece?” jest interesujące, ale wbrew pozorom – nie jest pytaniem interpretacyjnym. Nie sposób na nie odpowiedzieć poprzez bliskie czytanie *Tęsańskiej masakry pilną mechaniczną*, której „znaczenie” zostało w całości podporządkowane żądaniom publiczności co do konkretnego typu konwencji narracyjnych. Na odpowiedź naprowadza nas *de facto* badanie publiczności, a nie filmu, w efekcie czego dowiadujemy się czegoś o niej, a nie o nim. (zob. Clover 1993). Mimo iż Clover ma jasność co do nieistotności poszczególnych filmów dla jej przedmiotu badań (z wyjątkiem najbardziej zdystansowanego, folklorystycznego poziomu), narzędzia, za pomocą których można odczytać pragnienie widzów, pozostają doraźne: połączenie wywiadów, obserwacji widzów, teorii psychoanalitycznej i spekulacji.

10 Teza o tożsamości intencji i znaczenia została ogłoszona z całą mocą przez Waltera Benna Michaela oraz Stevena Knappa w ich kluczowym eseju *Against Theory* (Michael i Knapp 1982). Początkowo nie dostrzegłem siły ich argumentu, ponieważ sądziłem, że można być agnostykiem w kwestii intencji bez poświęcania jakiegokolwiek ze spostrzeżeń sformułowanych w obrębie tego, co rozumiałem przez „teorię” (której reprezentantami byli dla mnie nie Paul de Man i Stanley

i znaczenia sama z siebie zakłada istnienie tego, co społeczne. Medium znaczenia jest to, co uniwersalne, czyli (w heglowskim sensie) maszyna społeczna, konkretna znacząca sieć – taka jak sama literatura czy kultura błyskotliwego dowcipu (*culture of wit*) końca XVIII w. Nie ma znaczenia poza znaczącą siecią albo maszyną społeczną: znaczyć coś jest równoznaczne z byciem uwikłanym w tą sieć. (Znaczenie jest społecznie symbolicznym aktem)<sup>11</sup>. Same znaczenia istnieją *sub specie aeternitatis*, ale – co aż nazbyt oczywiste – media oraz maszyny społeczne, w których znaczą, są już historyczne. Jeżeli rozumiemy znaczenie *sensu stricto* jako eksterioryzację, musimy zacząć od opisu maszyny społecznej. (Zawsze uhistoryczniaj)<sup>12</sup>. Skoro każdy akt intencjonalny można opisać w kategoriach niedostępnych w samym momencie intencji – weźmy niekończące się opisy przeskakiwania przez barierkę, zakręcania kranu czy gotowania wody w rozdziale „Itaka” z *Uliksa* Jamesa Joyce’a – nic nie stoi na przeszkodzie, abyśmy w analizie intencji jednocześnie nie śledzili tego, co znaczenie może implikować jako logicznie konieczną konsekwencję (w przeciwieństwie do efektu) lub tego, co stanowi jego warunek możliwości (w przeciwieństwie do przyczyny), nawet jeżeli nie zostały one zamierzone. Tak właśnie robi Marks w omawianym przez nas roz-

Fish, lecz Lukács, szkoła frankfurcka oraz ich spadkobiercy, przede wszystkim Roberto Schwarz i Fredric Jameson). Okazało się, że nie na tym to polega, z powodów, które powinny stać się zrozumiałe w tym rozdziale oraz w dalszej części książki. Jednakże zasadnicza zgodność Michaelsowsko-Knappowskiego opisu znaczenia z postkantowskim rozwojem estetyki jest do utrzymania jedynie przy uściśleniu, że „intencja” nie oznacza wydarzenia w umyśle artysty, lecz jest czymś zrealizowanym w samym dziele: tak dookreślona intencja stanowi więc nazwę dla immanentnej celowości. Michaels mocniej tematyzuje to uściślenie w swoich ostatnich pracach, ale tak naprawdę było dla niego kluczowe od samego początku (taki był *de facto* cel utożsamienia ze sobą znaczenia i intencji). Kwestia Jamesonowskiej alegorii jest podobnie skomplikowana, z podobnych przyczyn. Tak długo jak alegoria oznacza zewnętrzną intencję, będzie stanowiła problem, ponieważ kryteria, według których można oceniać taką intencję, muszą być arbitralne (Rozumiem „silne przepisanie” obecne w Jamesonowskim opisie interpretacji alegorycznej jako określenie na przekonujące przypisanie dziełu znaczenia; w przeciwnym razie ta koncepcja również jest problematyczna). Jeśli jednak alegorię da się opisać jako wynikającą z dyspozycji samego materiału, jako sposób ujęcia materiału społecznego konstituujący taki rodzaj stwierdzenia o nim, który można ocenić pod kątem wiarygodności – tzn. raczej na podstawie koherencji jego prawdziwych implikacji niż zgodności z faktami – to ponownie jesteśmy na terytorium immanentnej celowości. (...)

11 Parafraza podtytułu *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* Fredrica Jamesona (przyp. tłum.).

12 Kryptocytat z pierwszego zdania *The Political Unconscious* Jamesona, czyli „Always historicize!” (Jameson 1981, IX) (przyp. tłum.).

dziale. Przyszły kapitalista, na razie będący po prostu właścicielem towarów, chce sprzedać należące do niego dobra. To wszystko. „W tej kłopotliwej sytuacji nasi posiadacze towarów myślą jak Faust: «Na początku był czyn». Dlatego też działali, zanim jeszcze pomyśleli” (Marks 1968, 99). Nigdzie w umyśle kapitalisty nie znajdziemy logicznych zawirowań (zakłopotania czy zażenowania – *Verlegenheit* – właścicieli towarów, ich ideologii) ucieleśnionych w akcie wymiany. Stanowią one raczej logicznie konieczny warunek samego aktu wymiany. W takim heglowsko-marksowskim sensie, nieświadomość jest po prostu wszystkim tym, co – wynikając z danego działania lub będąc przez nie założonym – jest niedostępne dla świadomości w trakcie samego działania. W *Fenomenologii ducha* taką implikacją jest np. to, że działanie musi wejść w interakcję z uniwersalnością, w której zachodzi. Z owych interakcji wyłania się prawdziwie heglowski typ ironii: weźmy np. los człowieka rozsądnego w Heglowskiej wersji *Kuzynka mistrza Rameau* (albo współcześnie – artysty tworzącego *outsider art*), który konfrontuje się z kulturą błyskotliwego dowcipu w sposób konieczny obracającą każdą próbę prostego mówienia prawdy w jej przeciwieństwo. Intencja wymusza odniesienie do takich przesłanek czy implikacji. (Tożsamość intencji i znaczenia implikuje istnienie politycznego nieświadomego)<sup>13</sup>.

Z uznania tożsamości znaczenia i intencji nie da się, wreszcie, wyprowadzić żadnego poglądu na atrakcyjność czegoś w rodzaju studiów kulturowych, jeśli rozumieć przez nie socjologiczne studia nad produkcją, dystrybucją i konsumpcją kultury. Wymusza ono natomiast rozróżnienie między takimi badaniami a interpretacją (te pierwsze okażą się kluczowe dalej, dla socjologicznego zrozumienia sfery uniwersalnej, w której rozwija się współczesna sztuka). W części *Fenomenologii...* dotyczącej „przedmiotu rozważań”, relacja pomiędzy socjologiczną motywacją (ambicją) a naukowym celem (*die Sache selbst*, rzeczą samą czy Sprawą)<sup>14</sup>,

13 Może być tak, że u Jamesona freudowska pozytywność nieświadomości jest relatywnie nieistotna i może zostać przepisana na kategorie negatywnej, heglowsko-marksowskiej nieświadomości, ale ustalenie tego wymagałoby pewnego wysiłku. Kiedy Jameson pisze na przykład o świadomości klasowej u Wyndhama Lewisa, chodzi mu o to, że drobnomieszczańska świadomość klasowa logicznie zakłada świadomość klasy robotniczej i bez niej jest niepotrzebna i niemożliwa do pomyślenia, a Lewis nie jest świadomy tego wynikania i przypuszczalnie by się go wyparł. Nie oznacza to jednak, że jakaś sekretna część mózgu Lewisa jest tego świadoma. Jakikolwiek freudowski „powrót wypartego” musiałby zatem być rozumiany jako heglowski „podstęp rozumu” – przykład tego, że logiczne wynikanie jest prawdziwym wynikaniem. Nie twierdzę tutaj, że Jameson nigdy nie polega na pozytywnej nieświadomości, ale że podążając jego śladami, lepiej oprzeć się na negatywnej.

14 W przekładzie Landmana *die Sache selbst* to „rzecz sama” lub „rzecz

jest, podobnie jak u Pierre’a Bourdieu, nie do rozstrzygnięcia: zawsze istnieje możliwość, że prywatna motywacja napędzająca dane przedsięwzięcie jest jego istotną treścią, a to, co jawi się jako znaczenie – czymś nieistotnym. Ale właśnie ta nierozstrzygalność sprawia, że nie można powiedzieć nic ostatecznego o relacji ambicji do dzieła. Intencja jako zdarzenie w umyśle jest niedostępna nawet dla umysłu, w którym rzeźbiono się wydarza. Jak zobaczymy za chwilę, jedynie poprzez zwrócenie bacznej uwagi na to, co rozważamy (na „rzecz samą”), można przypisać temu czemuś intencję. W kwestii znaczenia w ścisłym sensie – czyli tego, co znajduje się w samym dziele; w odróżnieniu od jego implikacji oraz warunków możliwości, które mają wymiar zarówno pozytywny (jako coś produktywnego), jak i negatywny (jako pewne ograniczenie) – niczego nie da się bowiem wywróżyć z badań socjologicznych.

Kantowska „celowość bez celu” stanowi skrót dłuższego sformułowania: „Piękno jest formą celowości danego przedmiotu, o ile zostaje ona w nim spostrzeżona bez wyobrażenia jakiegoś celu” (Kant 1986, 117)<sup>15</sup>. Właśnie ten dłuższy fragment cytuję, mniej lub bardziej dokładnie<sup>16</sup>, Hegel w swoich uwagach o kantowskim przełomie estetycznym (Hegel 1964, 101–2)<sup>17</sup>. Podczas gdy Kanta zajmuje jednak przede wszystkim rodzaj percepcji (przypis w jego tekście odsyła nas do tulipanów i kamiennych narzędzi, które uznajemy za piękne nie na podstawie tego, czy służą jakiemuś celowi, lecz tego, czy przypisujemy im cel w akcie sądu), glosa Hegla odsyła do osobliwego charakteru samego dzieła sztuki: „[p]iękno nie powinno nosić na sobie celowości jako jakiejś formy zewnętrznej; celowościowa zgodność strony wewnętrznej i zewnętrznej powinna być immanentną naturą pięknego przedmiotu” (Hegel 1964, 102). Nie chodzi tu o zwykłe przesunięcie akcentów, lecz o zdecydowaną zmianę znaczenia owego pierwotnie Kantowskiego sformułowania; nie mówimy już o pewnym rodzaju percepcji, lecz o pewnym rodzaju celowości w samym przedmiocie: „W celowości o charakterze skończonym [tzn. zwyczajnej, codziennej] cel i środek są w stosunku do siebie czymś

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umysłowa”, w przekładzie Nowickiego – „Sprawa” lub „sprawa”, a u Browna – „the matter in hand” (przyp. tłum.).

15 Wersję skróconą można znaleźć w: Kant 1986, 100 i 222.

16 „Po trzecie, piękno powinno mieć formę celowości tylko o tyle, o ile celowość tę postrzega się w przedmiocie bez wyobrażania sobie jakiegoś celu” (Hegel 1964, 101). Tak tutaj, jak i w następnych cytatach z *Wykładów...* przekład został dostosowany do brzmienia autorskich przekładów Browna (przyp. tłum.).

17 Cały omawiany fragment znajduje się na tych stronach. Jak wiadomo, *Wykłady o estetyce* stanowią kompilację notatek do wykładów samego Hegla oraz transkrypcji notatek jego studentów, więc nie ma sensu skupiać się na precyzyjnym sformułowaniu, którego użył filozof.



zewnątrznym (...) W tym przypadku wyobrażenie celu wyraźnie odróżnia się od przedmiotu, w którym został on zrealizowany“ (Hegel 1964, 102). Jak podpowiada zdrowy rozsądek, cel dowolnego przedmiotu jest czymś innym niż sam ten przedmiot: zaspokojenie mojego głodu jest celem zewnętrznym wobec quesadilli. „Piękno natomiast istnieje jako celowe w sobie samym, przy czym środek i cel nie występują odrębnie jako różne jego strony” (Hegel 1964, 102). Kantowska formuła „celowości bez celu” zostaje przeformułowana w sposób zasadniczy – na „celowość bez zewnętrznego celu”. W głosie Hegla, w odróżnieniu od stanowiska Kanta, mowa jest o specyficznym rodzaju celu – tulipan to nie martwa natura – lecz tego celu nie sposób oddzielić od środków służących jego osiągnięciu. Innymi słowy, celu dzieła sztuki nie da się oddzielić od samego dzieła. Jakikolwiek rozróżnienie na cele i środki, cel dzieła i samo dzieło, może przejawiać się jedynie jako sprzeczność wewnątrz dzieła. Droga do znaczenia nie wiedzie na zewnątrz, ku intencji rozumianej jako zdarzenie w umyśle artysty, lecz do wnętrza immanentnej celowości dzieła. Znaczenie nigdy nie jest zatem kwestią rozstrzygniętą, lecz publicznym przypisaniem intencji. Ten zestrój immanentnej, intencjonalnej formy – celowość bez zewnętrznego celu – jest, jak powiedziałby Stanley Cavell, raczej faktem dotyczącym dzieł sztuki w ogóle niż interpretacją. Jest prawdą odkąd istnieje sztuka (czyli krócej, niż można by sądzić). Gdyby zaś nie mówił prawdy o dziełach sztuki, wówczas dzieła sztuki – jako specjalna klasa rzeczy, domagająca się osobnej nazwy – w ogóle by nie istniały.

Jak mogliśmy jednak zobaczyć, forma towarowa stwarza problem dla dzieła sztuki; jeśli byłoby ono takim samym towarem, jak każdy inny, nie mogłoby posiadać struktury przypisanej mu przez Hegla. Celowość towaru jest bowiem podporządkowana wymianie, zewnętrznemu celowi – co znaczy tyle, że popełnialibyśmy błąd przypisując dziełu sztuki znaczenie. Wróćmy zatem do towaru artystycznego i jego innego. Dla Adorna towar artystyczny posiadał przekonujący horyzont negatywny – modernizm (mimo iż zazwyczaj w *Przemysle kulturalnym*... mówi się o nim zbiorczo jako o istniejących dawniej „burżuazyjnych dziełach sztuki”) – w którym wciąż dochodzi do Hegłowskiej eksternalizacji; kompensacyjnej, tragicznej, ale mimo wszystko eksternalizacji. Adorno uzasadnia możliwość takiego horyzontu, mówiąc o fenomenie rezydualnych dopływów w obrębie kapitalizmu – przestrzeni nieobjętych jeszcze ekspansją kapitału. Uporczywe trwanie tego typu przestrzeni „wzmocniło sztukę w tej ostatniej fazie – stała się odporna na werdykty podaży i popytu, odporna nawet bardziej, niż faktyczna protekcja [państwa] stwarzała po temu warunki” (Horkheimer i Adorno 2010b, 135). Cho-



ciaż Adorno całe życie zainteresowany był specyfiką estetyki, jej szczególnym czy odrębnym charakterem, w tym miejscu przyjmuje zasadniczo socjologiczny pogląd na autonomię dzieła sztuki. To prawda, że istnienie sztuki w jej nowoczesnym sensie da się pomyśleć jedynie w ramach całościowej logiki rozwoju kapitalizmu – jednak Adorno zakłada tutaj, że jest to możliwe jedynie w konkretnych okolicznościach społecznych, tzn. pod warunkiem przetrwania nieutowarowionych przestrzeni wewnątrz nieustępliwej logiki utowarowienia. Jak zobaczymy za chwilę, Bourdieańskie rozumienie owych okoliczności właściwie pod każdym względem przewyższa Adorniańskie; co ważniejsze, interpretacja Adorna doprowadziła go do przyjęcia zasadniczo tragicznej narracji, skazując krytyka na desperackie poszukiwanie owych przestrzeni nieutowarowienia. Istotne jest jednak to, że Adornowski przemysł kulturalny stanowi pierwowzór dla samoreprezentacji naszego momentu kulturowego; nawet jeśli współczesne nastawienie krytyki kultury do jej przedmiotu jest równie często ludyczne, stoickie, cyniczne czy triumfująco-zrezygnowane, co tragiczne. Z kolei Adornowski przemysł kulturalny od samoreprezentacji naszej współczesności odróżnia to, że dziś towar artystyczny rzekomo nie posiada już swojego innego. Fredric Jameson, przybliżając problem ledwie przedwczoraj, ujął to w prosty sposób: „dziś produkcja estetyczna została wbudowana w ramy ogólnej produkcji towarów” (Jameson 2011, 5). Wszystko inne wynika z tej obserwacji.

Logika owego przejścia widoczna jest już u Marksa, w szkicu rozdziału do pierwszego tomu *Kapitału*, który nie był dostępny na Zachodzie aż do lat sześćdziesiątych. Tekst ten ma często fragmentaryczny charakter, ale podstawowe dla *Rezultatów bezpośredniego procesu produkcji* rozróżnienie na „formalną subsumcję” i „realną subsumcję pracy pod kapitał” jest jasne (Marks 2020)<sup>18</sup>. W warunkach formalnej subsumcji, sektor lub proces produkcji zostają włączone w kapitalistyczną gospodarkę, jednak „[w] samym sposobie produkcji nie zachodzi tu jeszcze żadna różnica” (Marks 2020, 96). Z kolei w warunkach „realnej subsumcji” sam proces produkcji ulega zmianie tak, że producenci nie sprzedają już kapitałście nadwyżkowych produktów, lecz swoją siłę roboczą, a kapitalista zostaje w końcu skłoniony do całkowitej reorganizacji procesu produkcji. (Produkcja, podobnie jak wymiana, ma zarówno formę T-P-T, czyli „zwyczajową” w sensie Hegłowskim, jak i formę P-T-P, czyli kapitalistyczną. Ta druga nawiedza pierwszą aż do momentu przejścia do fazy kapitalizmu właściwego, kiedy to pierwsza zaczyna nawiedzać drugą).

18 Rozróżnienie to pojawia się w innych miejscach w *Kapitale*, zwłaszcza w: Marks 1968, 604.

Dystans między formalną a realną subsumcją jest niewielki (podobnie jak T-P-T i P-T-P, które stanowią ten sam proces oglądany z różnych stanowisk), ale status wytworu pracy, a ostatecznie także samego procesu pracy, w obu przypadkach jest diametralnie różny. Jak już zapewne widać, „formalna subsumcja” pozwala podtrzymać Hegłowską eksternalizację w kapitalizmie, skoro w jej warunkach sprzedaje się np. tylko przypadkową nadwyżkę: „Milton wyprodukował *Raj utracony*, tak jak jedwabnik wytwarza jedwab – było to działanie wypływające z *jego* natury. Później sprzedawał ten produkt za 5 funtów i o tyle stał się handlarzem towarów” (Marks 2020, 119). Dla kontrastu, w warunkach realnej subsumcji od razu znajdujemy się w świecie Marksowskiego oddzielenia, gdzie cały proces produkcji zorientowany jest na wymianę. Ta logiczna bliskość oznacza jednak, że „kapitalistyczna produkcja zmierza do podboju wszystkich (...) gałęzi przemysłu, w których zaszła na razie jedynie *subsumcja formalna*” (Marks 2020, 108). Aby formalna subsumcja mogła przetrwać i stabilnie funkcjonować w danej niszy, musi zostać objęta pewnym stopniem protekcji: temu służą cechy zawodowe, etaty badawcze na uniwersytetach, dobrze dofinansowane państwowe instytucje kultury (Adorno) lub, jak zobaczymy za chwilę, coś w rodzaju pól ograniczonej produkcji w rozumieniu Bourdieu.

W pewnych sektorach przemysłu kulturalnego logika rozwijana przez Marksa we fragmencie o *Rezultatach*... znajduje bezpośrednie zastosowanie. Animatora postaci w firmie produkującej gry wideo wykonuje bezpośrednio produktywną pracę, która podlega zarówno wyzyskowi w Marksowskim sensie, jak i *deskillingowi*, automatyzacji oraz wszystkim innym sposobom degradacji pracy, do których prowadzi kapitalistyczna produkcja. Jednak w wypadku znacznej części produkcji artystycznej

produkcję kapitalistyczną można zastosować jedynie w małym stopniu. Ludzie ci, o ile nie utrzymują jako sculptors [rzeźbiarze] itp. czeladników itp., pracują najczęściej (jeśli nie samodzielnie) dla kapitału kupieckiego, np. księgarzy. Ten stosunek tworzy jedynie właściwą formę przejścia do *formalnie* tylko *kapitalistycznego sposobu produkcji* (Marks 2020, 124).

We wcześniejszym fragmencie Marks mówi nam, że „[ś]piewaczka, która ma głos niczym ptak, jest robotnikiem nieprodukcyjnym” (Marks 2020, 119). „Nieprodukcyjność”, termin często wywołujący nieporozumienie, znaczy tyle, że praca śpiewaczki nie waloryzuje kapitału: produkuje ona piękno, lecz nie bierze udziału w procesie wytwarzania wartości dodatkowej. „Jeśli sprzedaje swój śpiew za pieniądze, to jest pracownikiem najemnym albo handlarzem towarami” (Marks 2020, 119), w zależno-

ści od tego, czy jest zatrudniona przez lidera zespołu, czy np. pracuje niezależnie. „Ale ta sama śpiewaczka, którą angażuje entrepreneur [przedsiębiorca], jest produkcyjnym robotnikiem, ponieważ bezpośrednio *produkuje* kapitał” (Marks 2020, 119). Jedynie na tym ostatnim etapie dotyczy jej subsumcja pod kapitał „sposobu pracy rozwiniętego przed pojawieniem się stosunku kapitału (...) [którą] nazywamy *formalną subsumcją pracy pod kapitał*” (Marks 2020, 90). Pracodawca może przedłużyć jej dzień roboczy – zmusić ją do częstszego występowania za te same pieniądze – ale Marksowi trudno jest wyobrazić sobie, żeby miał zainwestować część zysków w przemianę „realn[ej] natury procesu pracy [śpiewaczki] i jego realn[ych] przesłan[ek]” (Marks 2020, 106) – automatyzację, *deskilling* itd. Dopiero zaś wtedy, gdy mamy do czynienia z taką przemianą, „następuje *realna subsumcja pracy pod kapitał*” (Marks 2020, 106), i dopiero za sprawą realnej subsumcji rozpoczyna się nieustanne rewolucjonizowanie kapitalistycznego sposobu produkcji.

Jednakże proces produkcji towaru muzycznego – płyty CD, pliku do pobrania, subskrypcji – podążał i wciąż podąża trajektorią znaną z reszty pierwszego tomu *Kapitału*, czyli oszczędzania pracy (zmniejszania jej ilości) poprzez zwiększanie składu technicznego procesu produkcji. Oszałamiająca ilość wiedzy muzycznej została przerzucona na maszyny, zaś dystrybucja – według Marksa raczej ostatni etap produkcji niż pierwszy etap cyrkulacji – wymaga dziś ułamka tego nakładu pracy, który trzeba było na nią przeznaczyć jeszcze dekadę temu. To, że zawód wykonywany przez naszą śpiewaczkę jest dla nas wciąż rozpoznawalny – a pojawienie się autotune’a stanowi łatwo słyszalne przypomnienie, że nawet w tym przypadku prawda nie jest taka oczywista – pozostaje nie bardziej istotne dla statusu towaru, który wyłania się z procesu produkcji jako właściwy towar kapitalistyczny, niż to, że operatorów maszyn rozpoznajemy wciąż jako operatorów maszyn.

Wspomniane zmiany w procesie produkcji pozostawiają ślady – niekiedy bardzo głębokie – na produkcji pracy muzycznej. Nie jest to jednak bezpośrednio istotne dla naszego problemu (co może frustrować, biorąc pod uwagę, ile czasu mu właśnie poświęciliśmy). Jak widzieliśmy wcześniej, unikalnym problemem, z jakim konfrontuje się dzieło sztuki w kapitalizmie, nie jest proces produkcji – który oczywiście jest problemem, ale nie specyficznym dla sztuki – lecz rynek. Rynki istniały przed kapitalizmem, podobnie jak towary – Marks do nazwania tych ostatnich nie używa nawet wyspecjalizowanego słowa; to po prostu *Ware*, dobra – mogłoby się więc wydawać, że marksistowska krytyka towaru artystycznego stwarzać będzie pewien problem. Powinniśmy pamiętać jednak o tych fragmentach *Grundrisse* i *Manifestu komunistycznego*, które

opisują konieczną ekspansję rynku – zarówno intensywną, jak i ekstensywną – będącą korelatem i warunkiem możliwości procesu realnej subsumcji:

Wszelka granica okazuje się barierą, którą trzeba pokonać. Wprzód trzeba podporządkować wymianie każdy moment samej produkcji (...) *Handel* nie występuje już jako funkcja służąca wymianie nadwyżek między samodzielnymi produkcjami, lecz jako istotna wszechogarniająca przesłanka i moment samej produkcji (Marks 1986, 314–15).

To właśnie tendencja do uniwersalizacji rynku jako jedynego organu społecznego metabolizmu stanowi o oryginalnym charakterze jego kapitalistycznej wersji. Neoklasyczna ideologia „suwerenności konsumenta” jest zgodna z rozpoznaniem Marksa dotyczącym tego, że przy produkcji towaru preferencja konsumenta poprzedza intencję wytwórcy, która pozostaje w całości podporządkowana celowi (*Zweck*) wymiany. „Generalnie im bardziej produkcja rozwija się jako wytwarzanie towarów, tym bardziej każdy musi i chce być *handlarzem towarami*, robić pieniądze, czy to ze swojego produktu, czy też ze swoich usług (...) *robienie pieniędzy* jawi się jako ostateczny cel wszelkiego rodzaju aktywności (...)” (Marks 2020, 115). Współczesna ideologia estetyczna jest dogmatyczną reprezentacją właśnie tej tendencji: gdy środki dystrybucji zostają w całości subsumowane pod kapitał, to, co w pracy artysty rzeczywiście nie poddaje się asymilacji, przestaje odgrywać jakąkolwiek istotną rolę; artystka, jeśli nie jest bezpośrednio pracownicą kultury, musi postrzegać samą siebie jako przedsiębiorczynię samej siebie; wszelkie pozostałe obszary autonomii *de facto* przestały istnieć z racji braku dostępu do dystrybucji – jeśli zaś go otrzymają, przestaną funkcjonować jako autonomiczne w jakimkolwiek sensie.

Adorno nie miał problemu z pomyśleniem wciąż niekompletnej realnej subsumcji – czyli przemysłu kulturalnego – oraz modernizmu jako ostatniego przyczółku wyłącznie formalnej subsumcji<sup>19</sup>. Z kolei dla Jamesona realna subsumcja pracy kulturalnej pod kapitał jest już faktem dokonanym. Gdy opisuje on „rozpad autonomicznej sfery kultury”, równoznaczny z tym, że „kultura rozpozczęła imponujący podbój rzeczy-

19 Notatki Marksa o formalnej i realnej subsumcji nie były dostępne, gdy Adorno i Horkheimer pisali *Dialektykę oświecenia*, ale sama logika, obecna w kilku miejscach w opublikowanym tekście *Kapitału*, jest także obecna u Adorna (zob. przede wszystkim rozdział „Bezwzględna i względna wartość dodatkowa”, tytułowe pojęcia z grubsza odpowiadają pojęciom „formalnej i realnej subsumcji”, które również pojawiają się na moment w tym rozdziale).

wistości społecznej”, ów koniec autonomii bezpośrednio implikuje dla niego koniec modernizmu (Jameson 2011, 48). Jeśli kanoniczny modernizm postrzegał sam siebie w kategoriach autonomii – „dystansu krytycznego”, który zdaniem Jamesona „w nowej przestrzeni postmodernizmu został całkowicie zniesiony” razem z „autonomiczną sferą kultury” – to współcześnie mamy skłonność do uznawania tego krytycznego dystansu po prostu za ideologię estetyczną modernizmu (Jameson 2011, 48)<sup>20</sup>. Modernistyczne dzieła sztuki są przecież takimi samymi towarami, jak każde inne.

Nikt nie był bardziej sceptycznie nastawiony do samoreprezentacji modernizmu niż Bourdieu. A jednak w swojej teorii dwóch pól produkcji estetycznej autor zaproponował opis socjologicznego źródła modernizmu, czyli rozwoju „pola ograniczonej produkcji”, które odpowiada za zdolność artystów do „afirmowania, zarówno w praktyce, jak i jej reprezentacjach, nieredukowalności dzieła sztuki do statusu prostego towaru” (Bourdieu 1971a, 52–53). Ta podwójna afirmacja odgrywa kluczową rolę, ponieważ ideologiczna reprezentacja autonomii znajduje swój odpowiednik w realnej autonomizacji praktyki estetycznej, w walce artystów o ustanowienie „pola ograniczonej produkcji”, wymuszającego zastąpienie „nieprzewidywalnych werdyktów anonimowej publiczności” – suwerenność konsumenta, problem sprzedawcy towarów – przez „publiczność złożoną z równych sobie rywali” (Bourdieu 1971a, 54, 58). Innymi słowy, ustanowienie pola ograniczonej produkcji wymusza wyodrębnienie strefy formalnej subsumcji z pola wielkoskalowej produkcji, które z kolei jest faktycznie i w całości subsumowane pod kapitał. (Ograniczone pole nie jest rynkiem w żadnym istotnym sensie. Sądy kolegów i koleżanek po fachu oraz walka o znaczenie konkretnej interwencji artystycznej są dokładnym przeciwieństwem transakcji rynkowych – te ostatnie nie mogą być przedmiotem niezgody, ponieważ, jak widzieliśmy, w punkcie wyjścia nie zakładają zgody). W bardziej doraźnej wersji hipotezy dwóch pól – w wydaniu Adorna – ograniczone pole postrzega się co prawda raczej jako przestrzeń rezydualną niż emergentną, jednak autora *Dialektyki negatywnej* łączy z Bourdieu przekonanie, że zdekomodifikowane strefy są konieczne dla produkcji znaczenia.

Zgodnie z logiką Bourdieu, ustanowienie takiego pola musi wiązać się z założeniem, że produkowana w jego obrębie sztuka będzie ciążyła ku zagadnieniom formalnym, ku stopniowemu przepracowywaniu pro-

20 Bynajmniej nie jest oczywiste, że subsumcja pracy estetycznej pozostaje efektem triumfalnego pochodzenia kapitalizmu, a nie konsekwencją coraz bardziej desperackiego poszukiwania przez niego zysków w momencie, gdy właściwa dla kapitału przemysłowego stopa zysku zaczęła się zmniejszać: zob. (Brenner 2006).

blemów specyficznych dla danego medium. Tym, co wspólne dla wąskiej publiczności składającej się (na przykład) z malarzy, krytyków malarstwa oraz koneserów malarstwa, jest przecież ekspercka wiedza na temat malarstwa. „Tym samym malarstwo zaczęło podążać w kierunku świadomego oraz eksplicytnego wprowadzenia w życie najbardziej swoiście malarskich zasad malarstwa, co od razu równało się zakwestionowaniu tych zasad, a więc zakwestionowaniu, w obrębie malarstwa, samego malarstwa” (Bourdieu 1971a, 66). Innymi słowy, malarstwo zaczęło podążać w kierunku modernizmu: „Zwłaszcza od połowy XIX wieku sztuka zmienia się podług zasady, którą jest ona sama, jak gdyby historia była czymś wewnętrznym dla systemu sztuki, jak gdyby rozwój form reprezentacji i ekspresji był jedynie produktem logicznego rozwoju systemów aksjomatów właściwych poszczególnym sztukom” (Bourdieu 1971a, 126). Z wyjątkiem charakterystycznego „jak gdyby” – sugerującego, że mamy do czynienia z wyobrażoną relacją, pod którą w rzeczywistości kryje się logika ograniczonego pola – słowa te mógłby napisać Clement Greenberg<sup>21</sup>; i rzeczywiście, sam Bourdieu uważał ograniczone pole za warunek możliwości modernizmu jako takiego, warunek możliwości Hegłowskiej troski o „rzecz samą” we w pełni rozwiniętym kapitalizmie.

Wraz z upadkiem modernistycznego pola ograniczonej produkcji, wraz z realną subsumcją pracy estetycznej pod kapitał, nagle znika możliwość czegoś, co cechowałoby się podobieństwem rodzinnym do modernizmu. Dotychczas w centrum znajdował się problem, którym należało się zająć (problem, którym rynek, z racji bycia rynkiem, nie był zainteresowany); potencjalne stare rozwiązania były zaś wykluczone nie dlatego, że nie nadawały się do powieszenia na ścianie lub nie były miłą lekturą, ale dlatego, że wciągano je w grę produkowania nowych rozwiązań. Jednak ta skokowa, dialektyczna, modernistyczna gra – w której każda próba rozwiązania centralnego problemu reprezentowanego przez dane medium staje się nową wersją tego problemu dla wszystkich pozostałych artystów – z czasem podlega coraz większej hermetyzacji i staje się coraz trudniejsza. Nie sposób nie zauważyć, że izolacja autonomicznego pola jawi się w tym kontekście nie tylko jako warunek możliwości produkcji jakiegokolwiek dzieła sztuki (w społeczeństwie rynkowym), lecz także

21 „Istota modernizmu tkwi, tak mi się przynajmniej wydaje, w zastosowaniu charakterystycznych dla danej dyscypliny metod do krytyki tej dyscypliny (...) Szybko okazało się, że wyjątkowy i właściwy każdej ze sztuk obszar kompetencji odpowiada temu, co jest unikalne dla jej medium. Zadaniem samokrytyki stało się zatem wyeliminowanie z każdej ze sztuk tych efektów, które mogły być uważane za zapożyczone od innych sztuk i od innych mediów” (Greenberg 2006, 47–48) (przekład cytatu zmodyfikowany – tłum.)

jako okoliczność prowadząca do coraz większych trudności w wytwarzaniu znaczenia lub, mówiąc ściślej, do coraz większej formalizacji samego znaczenia. Znaczenia stają się możliwe dzięki autonomizacji, ale coraz częściej są znaczeniami tylko formalnie – to znaczy są czytelne jako intencje, ale przekazują jedynie znaczenia specyficznie malarskie, muzyczne, pisarskie itd. Ta sama dynamika, która czyni modernizm możliwym, jednocześnie ogranicza zakres jego ruchów do coraz węższego obszaru. Dlatego to, co wydaje się stratą ze stanowiska autonomii, jest jednocześnie ogromnym wyzwoleniem energii formalnej, możliwym właśnie dlatego, że od starych form nie wymaga się już odpowiedzi na pytania interpretacyjne.

Wraz z realną subsumcją sztuki pod kapitał i końcem modernistycznej gry, wszystkie stare „rozwiązania”, z których każde zostało unieważnione przez rozwiązania następujące po nich, nagle stają się ponownie dostępne. Możliwy jest też pewien historyzm – postmodernistyczny pastisz Jamesona – który okazuje się jednak pusty, przynajmniej jako historyzm, ponieważ wytwarza coś, co właśnie nie jest historią. Pęka jednak z podekscytowania, że pozwolono mu poddać galwanizacji wielką galerię martwych form, które nagle stają się kandydatami do reanimacji. W tym momencie uwolniona zostaje również Friedowska „przedmiotowość”: istotność reakcji widza lub konsumenta zwiększa się wraz z postępującym zawężaniem problemu formalnego, przed którym staje artysta.

Jak dotąd rekonstruowaliśmy wyłącznie logikę leżącą u podstaw powszechnie podzielanego poglądu, że dzieło sztuki jest takim samym towarem, jak każdy inny. Na tym etapie jest już chyba oczywiste, że wyzwolenie z rygorów starych modernistycznych gier oznacza jednocześnie podporządkowanie się czemuś innemu – mianowicie „anonimowemu rynkowi”, z którego autonomiczne pole wyrwało pewien stopień autonomii. Jeśli dzieła sztuki mogą od teraz korzystać ze wszystkich dawnych stylów (a nawet stawać się przedmiotami), to nie jest jasne, po co w ogóle nazywać je dziełami sztuki – stary, pocziwy towar artystyczny od samego początku był w stanie korzystać z dawnych stylów (a nawet być przedmiotem) właśnie dlatego, że pozostawał bardziej zainteresowany byciem atrakcyjnym dla rynku (efektem, jaki wywierał na publiczności) niż jakimikolwiek problemami formalnymi. Innymi słowy, nie ma nic nowego w bezkrytycznym zapożyczaniu się w wielkiej galerii martwych form czy w teatralnym odwołaniu do pragnień konsumentów. W rzeczywistości procedury te stanowią normę. Innowacyjność postmodernistycznego pastiszu – z definicji – nie ma charakteru formalnego, lecz wynika z zapadnięcia się sztuki w *status quo* całej kultury. Innowacyjność postmodernizmu polega właśnie na usunięciu różnicy między przemy-



słowym spektaklem – koktajlem ideologicznym Camerona – a Jamesonowskim postmodernistycznym obiektem artystycznym, składającym się z „mieszmasz[ui], rupieciarni[] pełn[ej] rozłącznych podsystemów, przypadkowych surowców i najrozmaitszych impulsów” (Jameson 2011, 31).

Oczywiście, właśnie o usunięcie tej różnicy chodzi. Nie ma nic nieprawdopodobnego w scenariuszu, wedle którego dzieła sztuki jako takie znikają i zostają całkowicie zastąpione przez towary artystyczne, zaś badania nad dziełami wyparte zostają przez badania nad recepcją i użyciami sztuki, nad pragnieniami dającymi się wyczytać z rynku itd. W takiej wizji kryje się głęboko egalitarna obietnica, ponieważ kwestie formalne podejmowane przez dzieła sztuki na ogół stanowią przedmiot zainteresowania wąskiej grupy odbiorców. Wobec braku silnego systemu edukacji publicznej, z konieczności są one interesujące tylko dla tej grupy. Świat, w którym dzieło sztuki jest towarem jak każdy inny, jest jednak światem, w którym według ideologów współczesnego kapitalizmu już żyjemy i zawsze żyliśmy, światem, w którym wszystko jest (a jeśli nie jest, to powinno być) rynkiem. Dawna awangardowa obietnica zrównania sztuki i życia – która była postępowym impulsem tylko wtedy, gdy „życie” rozumiano jako coś innego niż *status quo* – staje się teraz głęboko konformistyczna. Na tle tego rynkowego konformizmu afirmacja estetycznej autonomii, choć jawi się może jako niewiarygodna, nabiera nowego życiodajnego potencjału.

Jak zatem przydać jej wiarygodności? Jeśli dzieła sztuki istnieją, w jaki sposób są możliwe? Czy opisując upadek modernistycznych ograniczonych pól nie potwierdzamy tak naprawdę powszechnej opinii, że dzieło sztuki jest towarem jak każdy inny? Przeciwnie – to właśnie twierdzenie o uniwersalnej heteronomii wobec rynku okazuje się nie do utrzymania. Rynki – co zostało dostrzeżone przez niektóre dyskursy będące prekursorami neoliberalizmu, który w odróżnieniu od instytucji sztuki jest projektem utopijnym – są zależne od mnóstwa nierynkowych aktorów i instytucji, nawet jeśli rynek stanowi jednocześnie zagrożenie dla tych instytucji<sup>22</sup>. Dla przykładu: konsekwencją odkrycia przez Bourdieu ogra-

22 Nawet najbardziej leseferystyczne teorie rynku wymagają co najmniej jednej instytucji nierynkowej – na przykład pieniądza. Wykłady Foucaulta na temat neoliberalizmu stały się *locus classicus* dla rozumienia neoliberalizmu jako przekonania, że brak interwencji w mechanizmy rynkowe wymaga silnego oddziaływania na warunki rynkowe. W wykładzie z 14 lutego 1979 roku Foucault parafrazuje Waltera Eukena, cytowanego w przypisach w następujący sposób: „Działania państwa w dziedzinie polityki gospodarczej powinny zmierzać do całościowego kształtowania porządku gospodarczego, nie zaś do sterowania samym procesem gospodarczym” (Foucault 2011, 153, 346 n211). Neoliberalna utopia jest w rzeczywistości nową wersją bardziej naiwnej utopii Hegla z *Filozofii prawa*,



niczonych pól było wykazanie, że samo pole wielkoskalowej produkcji kulturowej – jako charakteryzujące się pastiszowością – zależy właśnie od ich trwałości (Bourdieu 1971b, 81–100, zwłaszcza 90). (Choć nie byłoby motywu z czołówki *Star Treka* bez pierwszej i siódmej symfonii Mahlera, to jednak przeszłe osiągnięcia mają ograniczoną przydatność dla współczesnych artystów jako skończony magazyn pomysłów i technik. Kiedy zmarły geniusz pop-funku Prince obwiniął upadek jazz fusion za stagnację w muzyce popularnej, był przekonany nie tyle o wybitności Weather Report czy Chick Corea Elektric Band, ile o istotności zbliżonego do popu idiomu muzycznego, który nie byłby bezpośrednio podporządkowany wynikom sprzedaży na rynku. Tę bliskość można dostrzec zarówno w niektórych spośród tych albumów Prince’a, które odniosły największy sukces rynkowy, jak i w projektach, które nigdy nie miały zostać poddane pseudoocenie anonimowego rynku (zob. Petridis 2015)). Co najważniejsze, nawet jeśli dawna modernistyczna autonomia okazała się ostatecznie ideologią estetyczną, nie znaczy to jeszcze, że współczesna wierność heteronomii opiera się na prawdzie. Obstawanie przy estetycznej heteronomii (podobnie zresztą jak modernistyczne przywiązanie do autonomii) jest bowiem produktywną ideologią – pozwala artystom zajmować się czymś innym niż uczestniczeniem w starych modernistycznych grach (jak zobaczymy, otwiera wręcz drogę do nowych modernistycznych gier) i umożliwia im pracę w przemyśle kulturalnym bez narażania się na zarzut sprzedajności (co obecnie wydaje się faktycznie anachronicznym oskarżeniem).

Jak widzimy, sztuka, która byłaby towarem jak każdy inny, nie byłaby sztuką w żadnym istotnym sensie. Przywiązanie do heteronomii sztuki wyraża jednak – by użyć starego sformułowania Althussera – wyobrażony stosunek do rzeczywistych warunków istnienia. Subsumcja sztuki pod kapitał nie jest uniwersalną cechą pola artystycznego. Jak mogliśmy jednak zobaczyć na przykładzie muzyki popularnej, rzeczywiście dochodzi do niej w niektórych poddziedzinach sztuki – a związane z nią podporządkowanie znaczenia odbiorcy przypisuje się (normatywnie bądź hegemonicznie) sztuce poczynawszy od późnych lat sześćdziesiątych. Tym niemniej chociaż *a posteriori* da się wskazać socjologiczne warunki, które

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w której zasadniczo pozwala się kapitalistom akumulować tyle, ile chcą – Hegel bowiem uważa, że w kapitalizmie bogactwo kapitału jest bogactwem narodów – tak długo, jak nie uzurpują sobie roli intelektualistów, do których należy podejmowanie decyzji dotyczących całości. Ani Hegel, ani neoliberalni utopiści nie widzą jednak, że bogactwo samo w sobie jest władzą, która może być skierowana przeciwko aparatowi regulacyjnemu. Pewien stopień tego, co ekonomiści nazywają „przechwytywaniem regulacyjnym”, jest implikowany przez samą koncepcję regulacji.

doprowadziły do powstania konkretnych dzieł, nie mówią one nic o tym, czy te dzieła stanowią sukces lub porażkę właśnie jako dzieła sztuki. Udana sztuka wyprodukowana w bezpośrednio heteronomicznych polach są rzadkością, ale istnieją; z kolei dzieła nieodróżnialne od towarów (ponieważ wykluczają znaczenie) nietrudno znaleźć w polach ograniczonej produkcji. Decydująca jest zatem nie bezpośrednia relacja do produkcji towarowej, ale raczej skuteczne (lub nieskuteczne, anulowane, zawczasu skazane na porażkę) zabieganie o ścisłą uwagę interpretacyjną. Zabiegając o nią dzieło musi stawić czoła zagrożeniu bycia zredukowanym do towaru, niezależnie od tego, czy groźba realnej subsumcji jest rzeczywista, czy jest tylko warunkiem rzekomej nieinterpretowalności dzieła spod znaku teorii afektu, *écriture*, *punktum*, emancypacji widza, sposobów używania sztuki, estetyki relacyjnej, a nawet – w większości, ale nie we wszystkich przypadkach – sztuki politycznej. Dzieło musi potraktować to zagrożenie jako przeszkodę do pokonania.

W swoich rozważaniach nad Grupą Laokoona, Lessing wyrażał irytację komentarzem sugerującym, że można przeskoczyć do interpretacyjnych wniosków, nie zatrzymując się nad specyfiką medium. Zdaniem Lessinga, nie jest prawdą, że – jak pisał Winkelman – w porównaniu ze współczesnymi cierpiącymi Grecy okazują „przy wielkich namiętnościach duszę wielką i stateczną”; prawdą jest natomiast to, że rzeźbiący Laokoona twórca musiał poradzić sobie z problemem dziury, której wymaga przedstawienie krzyku<sup>23</sup>. Ze stanowiska rynku stwierdzenie, że dzieło sztuki to towar jak każdy inny, nie jest fałszywe. Towarowy charakter dzieła sztuki w istocie stanowi część jego materialnej podstawy [*material support*]. Momentem prawdy we współczesnej ideologii estetycznej było uczynienie tego aspektu niemożliwym do pominięcia – po postmodernizmie autonomia nie może być domyślnie zakładana, nawet w przypadku dzieł produkowanych w ograniczonym polu; zamiast tego trzeba ją potwierdzić. (Osobną kwestią pozostaje to, jak bardzo z perspektywy czasu okres postmodernizmu okaże się przesycony afirmacją autonomii, jak bardzo postmodernistyczna nieciągłość okaże się iluzją). Ponieważ struktura towaru wyklucza interpretowalność, każde przekonujące roszczenie dzieła do posiadania znaczenia – do sztuki, nie przedmiotowości – natychmiast pociąga za sobą roszczenie do nie bycia zwy-

23 „Rozpatruję wymienione przyczyny, dla których twórca Laokoona zachować musiał umiarkowanie w wyrazie bólu fizycznego, i znajduję, że wszystkie razem wywodzą się ze szczególnego charakteru sztuki, z jej nieodzownych ograniczeń i wymogów. Trudno byłoby przeto którąś z tych przyczyn zastosować do poezji”. (Lessing 2012, 18). Cytat z Winkelmanna – (Lessing 2012, 6). (polski przekład nieznacznie zmieniony – tłum.)

kłym towarem. Wyjątkowość obecnego momentu polega więc na tym, że pojęcie medium lub materialnej podstawy dzieła musi zostać rozszerzone tak, aby uwzględnić również jego towarowy charakter.

Weźmy np. serial BBC *Biuro* (*The Office*) i jego amerykański remake, które wydają się w oczywisty sposób przykładami tego samego medium. Począwszy od pierwszego odcinka amerykańska wersja systematycznie nadpisuje jednak niezręczne sytuacje obecne w oryginale. Decyzje, przed którymi stają bohaterowie brytyjskiego *Biura*, zazwyczaj wymagają – rzecz jasna w minimalnym stopniu – wyboru między wzajemnie wykluczającymi się opcjami: z jednej strony awansu, z drugiej strony zachowania szacunku do samego siebie. W amerykańskim remaku' u szkody wyrządzone przez takie decyzje zostają sprowadzone do dziwactwa, a każde dziwactwo jest ostatecznie pretekstem do utożsamienia. W skrócie, amerykańskie *Biuro* to *Zdrówko* (*Cheers*), gdzie każdy zna twoje imię<sup>24</sup>. Kusi, by wyprowadzić stąd wnioski na temat różnic między kulturą Stanów Zjednoczonych i Wielkiej Brytanii lub amerykańskim i brytyjskim poczuciem humoru<sup>25</sup>. Materialistyczna intuicja prowadzić może jednak do zgoła przeciwnych konkluzji: różnica między *Biurem* a jego remakiem nie sprowadza się do różnicy między zgorzkniałymi brytyjskimi pracownikami biurowymi a ich dziwacznymi, ale lepiej przystosowanymi do pracy biurowej amerykańskimi kolegami, lub między agresywnym brytyjskim humorem a jego łagodniejszą amerykańską odmianą, lecz między polem kultury wspieranym przez krajowy podatek od abonamentu telewizyjnego (co pozwala na pewien margines autonomii względem rynku) a polem kultury, którego jedyną, nieuchronną funkcją jest sprzedaż czasu antenowego reklamodawcom.

To rozróżnienie jest oczywiście bardzo istotne *a posteriori*, nie zastępuje jednak interpretacji. Układ instytucjonalny publicznej telewizji nie tylko niczego nie gwarantuje – nie każda komedia BBC była przecież do wytrzymania, a co dopiero wewnętrznie spójna – lecz także wiąże się z koniecznością brania pod uwagę zarówno państwa, jak i potencjalnie jeszcze bardziej artystycznie tłamszącego zapotrzebowania na abstrakcyjną „jakość”, rozumianą jako zewnętrzny cel sam w sobie. Czy jesteśmy natomiast gotowi powiedzieć *a priori*, że żaden pop-towar nie może być sztuką? *Biuro* przezwycięża swój towarowy charakter – wbudowany w formę sitcomu – nie dlatego, że warunki produkcji, w których serial

24 Aluzja do piosenki tytułowej z serialu noszącej tytuł *Where Everybody Knows Your Name* (przyp. tłum.).

25 W oryginale „between humor and humour”. Pierwszy zapis jest rozpoznany w amerykańskim angielskim, a drugi – w brytyjskim angielskim. (przyp. tłum.)

powstał, automatycznie ratują jego treść przed logiką towaru, lecz za sprawą swojej budowy formalnej. Wytwarza autonomię względem widza – bez której, niezależnie od warunków produkcji, byłoby wyłącznie zbiorem komediowych efektów – poprzez włączenie w obręb reprezentacji jego pełnomocnika (*proxy*), kamery, w sposób bezpośrednio wpływający na to, co reprezentowane. O to właśnie chodzi w serialowej fikcji dokumentalnego kadru, który staje się formalną zasadą – wewnętrznym ograniczeniem dla tego, co i w jaki sposób może się wydarzyć – a tym samym wprowadza wewnętrzne kryterium oceny wiarygodności fikcji. Uznając kamerę za postać, *Biuro* przewycięża przezroczystość telewizyjnego oka, wprowadza kryterium, według którego można ocenić wiarygodność serialu, i ponawia „roszczenie do odzwierciedlenia w swych granicach całości, nieuchronnie wysuwane przez każde, nawet najbliższe dzieło” (Horkheimer i Adorno 2010a, 146).

Z kolei w amerykańskim remake’u wędrująca kamera i inne chwytły bardzo szybko stają się elementami pozbawionej znaczenia konwencji, zaś strukturyzująca fikcja – czysto dekoracyjną ramą. W obu serialach bohaterowie od czasu do czasu ujawniają na przykład, że są świadomi obecności sprzętu; łamią tzw. czwartą ścianę, patrząc bezpośrednio w kamerę. W oryginalnym serialu dzieje się to w wyjątkowo napiętych sytuacjach – spojrzenia bohaterów przywołują kamerę w charakterze świadka lub zwracają na nią uwagę jako na coś prowokującego, wprowiadającego w konsternację. W obrębie fikcji *Biura*, wydarzenia są nie tylko rejestrowane, ale też wywoływane przez kamerę. Natomiast w remake’u takie momenty zostają podporządkowane komediowemu timingowi, przez co przypominają niemal reakcje Skippera na zwariowane wyczyny Gilligana<sup>26</sup>. W czwartym odcinku spójność narracyjna, a nawet wiarygodne położenie kamery zostają już całkowicie zignorowane – odtąd dominuje sitcomowy sentymentalizm. Nie chodzi o to, że serial BBC jest w abstrakcyjnym sensie „lepszy”. Amerykańska wersja była zabawna, a efekty pozwalające na utożsamienie się z bohaterami zostały w niej zrealizowane po mistrzowsku. Nie znaczy to też, że warunki produkcji charakteryzujące prywatną sieć telewizyjną są co do zasady niemożliwe do przewyciężenia za pomocą środków formalnych – choć w praktyce mogą się takie okazać. Remake nie podejmuje jednak żadnej próby przewyciężenia swojego bezpośrednio zewnętrznego celu – tj. sprzedaży czasu antenowego reklamodawcom – który osiąga poprzez bycie bardziej atrakcyjnym dla widzów niż konkurenci emitowani w tym samym cza-

26 Aluzja do bohaterów popularnego w Stanach Zjednoczonych sitcomu *Gilligan’s Island*, emitowanego w latach 1964-1967 (przyp. tłum.).

sie. Jeśli amerykańskie *Biuro* ma jakieś znaczenie, to jest to znaczenie socjologiczne, domyślna ideologia – czyli ideologia samego sitcomu, oferująca „nie, jak sama twierdzi, ucieczkę od zepsutej rzeczywistości, lecz ucieczkę przed ostatnią myślą o oporze, jaka istnieje” (Horkheimer i Adorno 2010a, 146). Wskazanie na socjologiczną różnicę między amerykańską a brytyjską telewizją nie zastępuje interpretacji. Wręcz przeciwnie: tylko dzięki bliskiej, uważnej interpretacji możemy stwierdzić, czy i w jaki sposób determinujący kontekst medium został zawieszony lub nie. Cee-Lo Green i Bruno Mars, obaj niesamowicie utalentowani, funkcjonują w tym samym polu kulturowym i czasem korzystają – na pierwszy rzut oka – z podobnych procedur artystycznych. Póki co jednak tylko jeden z nich tworzy muzykę, która wynagradza skupienie uwagi na jej immanentnej celowości.

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„Społeczna ontologia” to paradoksalne określenie. Z jednej strony immanentna celowość odróżnia dzieło sztuki od innych rodzajów bytów. To fakt dotyczący dzieła jako takiego – tylko dzięki niemu istnienie znanych nam dyscyplin artystycznych i hermeneutycznych ma sens. Z drugiej strony jest to fakt uwarunkowany historycznie. Twierdzenie, że dzieła sztuki (w nowoczesnym sensie tego słowa) są szczególnymi rodzajami rzeczy, nie ma związku z twierdzeniem, że grecka świątynia w Paestum podlega tej samej logice społecznej, co obraz van Gogha. Wyczerpujące uhistorycznienie procesu wyłaniania się dzieł sztuki jako szczególnego rodzaju rzeczy wykraczałoby znacznie poza zakres tematyczny tej książki. Niemniej jednak warto pamiętać, że zdaniem Hegła namysł nad „prawdziwą koncepcją dzieła sztuki” rozpoczyna się wraz z *Krytyką władzy sądu* Kanta w 1790 roku i do czasu wykładów Hegła na temat sztuk pięknych w 1823 roku zostaje zakończony – filozof miał twierdzić coś podobnego również w 1818 roku w swoich wykładach o sztuce. Nie licząc pewnych kluczowych poprawek, rozwinięć i historycznych przemian, można powiedzieć, że ogólny zarys tej koncepcji dzieła sztuki, która uspołnia naszą współczesną praktykę – tłumacząc, dlaczego mówimy o dziełach jako o rzeczach do zinterpretowania nawet wówczas, gdy wydaje nam się, że argumentujemy za ich pospolitością – został opracowany w okresie niecałych trzech dekad, w latach 1790–1818.

Natomiast rozwój faktycznych dzieł sztuki jako samostanowiących się artefaktów to znacznie bardziej skomplikowana historia. Przebiegał nieregularnie w różnych dziedzinach artystycznych oraz narodach i kul-

turach. Czasami dzieło sztuki przybierało pełnoprawną formę w najbardziej zróżnicowanych okolicznościach tylko po to, by ponownie zniknąć, zdałoby się bez śladu. Z tego powodu historią sztuki można zajmować się na całym świecie – wstecz aż do arbitralnie określonej daty. Niemniej jednak jawna, samodzielna historia sztuki – w przeciwieństwie do jej znanej z przeszłości, bardziej doraźnej czy implicytnej wersji wywodzi się niemal tautologicznie z tego samego momentu historycznego, co narodziny dzieła sztuki, tzn. z Niemiec w cieniu rewolucji burżuazyjnej. Pisma Lukácsa o Goethem, Schillerze, Hölderlinie i młodym Heglu są wciąż najbardziej subtelными rozważaniami na temat polityki tego okresu historycznego, której charakter określił przede wszystkim bolesny proces dostosowywania rewolucyjnych ideałów inspirowanych rewolucją francuską do cementującego się właśnie porządku burżuazyjnego (Lukács 1980b; 1968). Prawdopodobnie najlepszym tego przykładem jest gorączkowa, ambiwalentna polityka Schillera – naraz poety (w awangardzie praktyki poetyckiej) i kluczowego, choć niesystematycznego teoretyka sztuki (Lukács 1969). Dzieła sztuki, których dyskretna odrębność od burżuazyjnego porządku rodzi się z popiołów rewolucyjnego pragnienia, w kapitalizmie okazują się szczególnym rodzajem rzeczy: bytami wymagającymi sądów niepodporządkowanych ani upodobaniom, ani kryterium adekwatności względem zewnętrznych pojęć. Jest to prawda tak samo w Lagos w 1964 r., jak i w Jenie w 1794 r., jednak tylko w określonych okolicznościach – w społeczeństwie, w którym sądy formułuje się między państwem a rynkiem. W prawdziwie rewolucyjnych momentach nowoczesnej historii – kiedy z podlegających zmianie stosunków społecznych i nowopowstających kontrinstytucji wyłaniały się alternatywy dla państwa i rynku – kultura mogła rozkwitać bez konceptualnego szkieletu samouprawomocniającego się dzieła. Za chwilę powrócimy do tej możliwości, dziś ma ona jednak niewielkie znaczenie praktyczne.

Nie można tego samego powiedzieć o powszechnie podzielanym przekonaniu, że ontologiczna różnica właściwa dziełu sztuki albo zanika, albo od początku była wyłącznie mistyfikacją. To z tego przekonania biorą się twierdzenia, wedle których sztuka jest lub powinna być towarem jak każdy inny. Tego typu tezy, sformułowane w spójny sposób, okazują się tezami o końcu sztuki; niezależnie zaś od stopnia spójności, współcześnie mają – jak widzieliśmy – na wskroś konformistyczny charakter. Sednem problemu nie jest to, że podobnych twierdzeń nie wysuwano w innych momentach historycznych, lecz to, że obecnie stanowią rodzaj *common sense'u*. Właśnie dlatego – niezależnie od ich spójności lub niespójności, historycznego ugruntowania lub jego braku – można owe tezy odrzucić, ale nie można ich zignorować.

Zgodnie z przedstawianym tutaj stanowiskiem, poprawnie uhistoryczniony argument Petera Bürgera z *Teorii awangardy* byłby zasadniczo niekontrowersyjny:

Intencją historycznych prądów awangardowych nazwałem zniszczenie instytucji sztuki jako dziedziny wycofanej z praktycznego życia. Znaczenie owej intencji nie polega na tym, że instytucje sztuki w społeczeństwie burżuazyjnym uległy faktycznemu rozbiciu, a tym samym sztuka przekształciła się bez zapośredniczenia w praktyczne życie. Chodzi raczej o uwidocznienie istotności instytucji sztuki w określaniu rzeczywistego społecznego oddziaływania poszczególnego dzieła. (Bürger 2006, 107)<sup>27</sup>

Pisząc „po wydarzeniach maja 1968 roku i porażce ruchu studenckiego na początku lat siedemdziesiątych”, Bürger analizuje historyczną awangardę ze stanowiska jej porażki. Ta perspektywa tworzy mocną ramę dla rozumienia zarówno późnego modernizmu, jak i instytucjonalnych pseudo- czy neoawangard końca XX wieku (Bürger 2017, 123). Powinniśmy jednak rozważyć awangardowe pozycje również ze stanowiska ich sukcesu.

Mimo iż wolnościowe motywacje przyświecające niszczeniu instytucji sztuki nie zostały urzeczywistnione, to nieufność względem autonomicznych instytucji czy uniwersaliów jest zasadniczą cechą współczesnego życia społecznego. Podobnie jak inne możliwe genealogie współczesności, przesłedzenie historycznego związku między duchem 1968 roku a współczesną ideologią rynkową wykracza poza zakres tej książki (zob. jednak Zamora 2014). Tym niemniej w takich społeczeństwach jak nasze, antyinstytucjonalny impuls pozbawiony zorganizowanej, własnej podstawy społecznej (tj. bez faktycznej zmiany stosunków społecznych i nowopowstających kontrinstytucji) może co najwyżej przyczynić się do oczyszczenia gruntu dla zastanej podstawy społecznej, czyli kapitalistycznych stosunków rynkowych; samoświadomością tego faktu jest afirmacja towarowego charakteru dzieła sztuki, od której wyszliśmy. Innymi słowy, tylko w kontekście wyłaniającej się alternatywy dla społeczeństwa kapitalistycznego heteronomizacja niesie w sobie jakąkolwiek obietnicę wolności. Jeśli zaś ta możliwość znika – lub jeśli nigdy nie istniała – wówczas heteronomizacja może skutkować nie tylko pełną sprzecznością pseudoheteronomią zinstytucjonalizowanej awangardy (Bürger), lecz także nieartystyczną heteronomią towaru artystycznego.

Uwagi Bürgera na temat Brechta dobrze ilustrują specyfikę tego nowego stanowiska. W ujęciu Bürgera, Brecht jest pozytywną anomalią,

27 Przekład cytatu zmodyfikowany – przyp. tłum.



ponieważ zamierzał nie tyle zniszczyć aparat teatralny, ile raczej wykorzystać go do nowych celów. To z pewnością prawda, jednak nie sposób bronić wniosków, jakie wyciąga z tego Bürger. Problemem, przed którym stał Brecht, nie była bowiem autonomiczna instytucja oddzielona od praktyki życiowej, lecz instytucja-przemysł, nieoddzielona w żaden istotny sposób od praktyki życiowej. Nawet eskapizm – jako towar – jest bezpośrednio społeczny. Choć Brecht – konfrontując się z teatrem w takiej kondycji, w jakiej go zastał – widział wyraźny problem w determinującym wpływie wywieranym nań przez instytucję, to jednak determinujący wpływ rynku był dla niego problemem podstawowym. Aktualność Brechta nie wynika zatem z podjętej przez niego próby ocalenia przestrzeni instytucjonalnej autonomii przy jednoczesnym paradoksalnym wykorzystaniu tej strefy do heteronomicznych celów (Bürger), lecz z faktu, iż (...) próbował (często z sukcesem) wytworzyć w heteronomicznej strefie produkcji towarowej uniwersalnie czytelny moment autonomii.

Czym w świetle tego wszystkiego jest autonomia, tak jak rozumie się ją w poniższej książce? Nie jest metafizyczną niezależnością od zewnętrznych okoliczności, niezależnością, którą byłoby bardzo trudno udowodnić. Autonomia – „negatywność” w idiolekcie Hegła – oznacza natomiast, że właśnie te zewnętrzne okoliczności są przez nas aktywnie ujmowane na różne, nieredukowalnie normatywne sposoby. Rzekomo materialistyczny slogan głosi: „materia waży” [*matter matters*]. Rzeczywiście tak jest, ale w tym stwierdzeniu interesuje nas przecież ważność materii – ważność, która sama w sobie jest nie tyle materialna, ile zależna od osądu. Jak lubił podkreślać Hegel, ponieważ „materia” w takiej postaci, w jakiej pojawia się w sporach teoretycznych jest sama w sobie ideą, w nazwie „materializm” nie ma nic, co odróżniałoby go od idealizmu. Koniec końców idealizm zawsze wydaje się prześlizgiwać z powrotem tylnymi drzwiami – ale tak naprawdę od początku chodziło o coś istotnego normatywnie.

Podczas gdy sama interpretacja jest spontaniczną, codzienną czynnością, dyscyplina interpretacji taka nie jest. Twierdzić, że coś jest dziełem sztuki, to twierdzić, że coś jest samostanowiącym się artefaktem, że jego formę da się zrozumieć (choć nie poprzez odwołanie do jakiegokolwiek zewnętrznego celu). Ponieważ zasadniczą prawdą o dziełach sztuki pozostaje to, że ich przygodne podłoże materialne jest odczytywane jako przyjęte nieprzygodnie – to właśnie znaczy samostanowienie – to właśnie w dziełach potwierdzenie znajdują niektóre z najbardziej kontrowersyjnych tez dialektyki. Tezy mówiącej, że materia nigdy nie jest po prostu materia, lecz jest zawsze aktywnie ujmowana w określony



sposób, nie da się dowieść bez długiej dyskusji; natomiast w twierdzeniu, że w dziele sztuki materia nigdy nie jest po prostu materia, lecz jest zawsze ujmowana w określony sposób, nie ma nic kontrowersyjnego. (Upieranie się, że owinięte w celofan cukierki, składające się na *Portret Rossa w L.A.* Félix'a Gonzáleza-Torresa, nie są niczym więcej niż tylko cukierkami – lub że ich materialne cechy (waga, słodycz, jadalność) są ważne w jakimkolwiek inny sposób niż ten, który został uruchomiony przez samo dzieło – byłoby nie tyle podstawą dla zasadniczej filozoficznej dysputy, ile oczywistą bzdurą). Immanentna krytyka niespecjalnie przydaje się w chemii czy w Kongresie; tymczasem pytanie o to, czy dzieło sztuki spełnia ambicje, które samo sobie stawia, jest jednocześnie całkowicie naiwne i całkowicie uprawnione. Zastanawianie się, czy dzieło jest udane, nierozzerwalnie łączy się z próbą ustalenia, co właściwie chce osiągnąć. Dyscyplina interpretacji to zatem praktyka odkrywania i stosowania tych wewnętrznych norm. Literaturoznawstwo i krytyka literacka określają tę praktykę staromodnie jako „uważne czytanie” [*close reading*], ale słowo „uważne” jest tylko metaforą, która ma więcej wspólnego z próbą uchwycenia istoty dzieła niż z dbałością o najdrobniejsze szczegóły. Ponieważ zewnętrzne kryteria oceny nie istnieją, dyscyplina interpretacji nie jest poszukiwaniem pewników, ale raczej wspólnym (można by powiedzieć, że normatywnym lub instytucjonalnym) zobowiązaniem do przypisywania dziełu znaczenia w przekonujący sposób. Takie wypowiedzi askryptywne zawsze podlegają dyskusji; dowód jest zawsze dostępny dla każdego.

Spór może mieć jednak miejsce tylko wtedy, gdy chodzi o coś normatywnego. Istnienie lub prawomocność normatywnego pola – znaczenia jako tego, co zakładane w akcie interpretacji jako stawka interpretacji – stanowiło cel ataków ze strony najbardziej samoświadomych przedsięwzięć intelektualnych ostatnich trzydziestu lat XX wieku; podobny rodzaj sceptycyzmu pozostaje hegemoniczny także na początku XXI wieku (mimo iż ma dziś bardziej nawykowy niż prowokacyjny charakter). Rzucane przezeń wyzwanie, potraktowane jako rodzaj sprawdzianu, jest jak najbardziej pożyteczne. Niniejsza książka jest w dużej mierze pomyślana jako odpowiedź na ten sprawdzian. Próbuję w niej pokazać, że zobowiązania, do których dzieła sztuki nieustannie się odwołują – zobowiązania będące warunkami ich możliwości – jakkolwiek przygodne, ostatecznie istnieją i mają sens tylko pod warunkiem zaakceptowania pewnej wersji autonomii estetycznej. To rozpoznanie z konieczności implikuje spór m.in. z socjologami literatury i literaturoznawcami zajmującymi się neuronauką, spekulatywnymi realistami i nowymi materialistami, zdystansowanymi czy-

telnikami [*distant readers*] i czytelnikami powierzchniowymi [*surface readers*], althusserianistami i innymi spinozjanistami, teoretykami afektów i liberalnymi obrońcami sztuki.

Chociaż stawiane tu tezy są istotne przede wszystkim dla dyscyplin hermeneutycznych, mają również implikacje polityczne. Przykładowo, zarzut elitaryzmu – klasowego rozwarstwienia odbioru estetycznego – stosowałby się raczej do tezy o uniwersalnej heteronomii niż do tezy o autonomii sztuki. Jeśli nic zasadniczego nie odróżnia sztuki od nie-sztuki – a jakieś rozróżnienie jest niezbędne, aby słowo „sztuka” odsyłało do czegośkolwiek (i aby dało się wlać coś w owe istniejące już instytucje, które sztukę chronią, przekazują i uświęcają) – to pozostaje jedynie rozróżnienie na drogą/tanią sztukę albo sztukę, do odbioru której potrzebne są drogie/tanie środki i zasoby. (Zamiast afirmować wprost status dzieła sztuki jako kolejnego dobra luksusowego – którym bez wątpienia po części jest – łatwiej jest zapewne powiedzieć, że heteronomia stanowi po prostu krytykę autonomii. Oznaczałoby to jednak afirmację znaczenia – które, jak widzieliśmy, z konieczności pociąga za sobą roszczenie do autonomii względem rynku nawet tam, gdzie takie roszczenie jest deklaratywnie odrzucane). Rozróżnienie między sztuką a nie-sztuką nie ma zatem klasowego charakteru. Opowieść o podróżach w czasie może mieć tylko jedno z dwóch zakończeń: historię można zmienić albo nie; wybieramy *Powrót do przyszłości* lub *Filar*. Film o podróżach w czasie staje więc przed problemem, jak podtrzymać te dwie, nieprzystające do siebie możliwości aż do samego końca – a jeśli to możliwe, nawet dłużej, tak by umożliwić produkcję *sequela*. Ze względu na tę odkrytą logikę gatunku, James Cameron może wypracować takie rozwiązanie dla problemu filmu o podróżach w czasie, które jednocześnie stawia film o podróżach w czasie jako problem, na który to rozwiązanie odpowiada. Oznacza to, że Cameron może stworzyć film, którego cechy formalne wywodzą swoją spójność z immanentnych możliwości logiki gatunku, a nie z potrzeb przypisywanych konsumentom – *Terminator* może więc być dziełem sztuki, podczas gdy *Avatar* jest jedynie towarem artystycznym.

Co więcej, afirmacja estetycznej autonomii ma współcześnie charakter polityczny. (Oczywiście w minimalnym stopniu). Nie zawsze tak było. W okresie modernizmu przekonująca afirmacja autonomii tworzyła, tak jak teraz, swoistą nierynkową przestrzeń w kapitalistycznym polu społecznym; dystans historycznego modernizmu względem rynku nie miał jednak naturalnej wartości politycznej, ponieważ modernizm nie rozwijał się w warunkach tak daleko idącej dominacji ideologii rynkowej. Autonomia od państwa i instytucji państwopodobnych była często *de*

*facto* bardziej palącą kwestią<sup>28</sup>. (Łatwiej było wówczas pomylić autonomię osobistą z autonomią estetyczną; dziś opozycja między nimi jest jasna. Autonomia, którą można afirmować jedynie na warunkach istniejącego pola normatywnego – instytucji, aparatu lub maszyny społecznej – nie ma związku z wolnością czy kreatywnością. O ile nie jest roszczeniem immanentnym dla samego dzieła, twierdzenie o autonomii pozostaje hasłem reklamowym). Modernizm bywał wrogi wobec rynku kultury, jednak najróżniejsze polityczne stanowiska (od Heideggera po Adorno) bywają wrogie wobec rynku. Lisa Siraganian sugeruje, że u podstaw wielości modernistycznych radykalizmów leży tak naprawdę nic innego, jak głębokie przywiązanie do klasycznego liberalizmu politycznego, do przestrzeni deliberacyjnej autonomii (Siraganian 2015). Modernistyczna wrogość wobec rynku zyskuje konkretną polityczną wartość dopiero po samym modernizmie, kiedy twierdzenie o uniwersalności rynku staje się – tak jak dziś – głównym ideologicznym narzędziem przemocy klasowej, jaką jest redystrybucja bogactwa z dołu do góry. W obecnej sytuacji byłaby ona nie do pomyślenia bez tej broni. Cała

28 Choć wiemy z listów, że James Joyce był wrogo nastawiony do rynku wydawniczego, to od początku wyobrażał sobie, że nad nim góruje, co czyni jego wrogość tak interesującą. Poważniejszymi zagrożeniami dla autonomii są u Joyce’a kościół i naród, choć ten drugi tak naprawdę zagraża autonomii estetycznej, a nie osobistej. Co zadziwiające, ta sama logika działa u południowoafrykańskiego pisarza Es’kia Mphahlele. Mphahlele jest zdeustowany południowoafrykańskim przemysłem wydawniczym i swoją pozycją w nim, frustruje go również stała „południowoafrykańska «kościółkowość»” w kraju, w którym do 1953 r. cała edukacja czarnych uczniów odbywała się w szkołach misyjnych (Mphahlele 1971, 210). RPA doby apartheidu w niczym nie przypominała państwa neoliberalnego, ponieważ wymagała ogromnej biurokracji do zarządzania apartheidem i utrzymywania niskiego bezrobocia wśród białych; w ramach apartheidu rynek nie jest najbardziej oczywistym zagrożeniem. Zadziwiające jest to, że pomimo niemal niewyobrażalnego upokorzenia, jakim jest życie w tym systemie, Mphahlele wyjeżdża z RPA nie tylko z powodu apartheidu („Nie mogę uczyć [po tym, jak zostałem objęty zakazem nauczania], a chcę uczyć”), ale z powodu zagrożenia dla autonomii estetycznej reprezentowanej przez ruch oporu, z którym w pełni sympatyzuje („Nie mogę tu pisać, a chcę pisać”). Nie może pisać nie dlatego, że został objęty zakazem, ale dlatego, że sama sytuacja, nagła potrzeba politycznego działania, która dla Mphahlele’a ma charakter zarówno wewnętrzny, jak i zewnętrzny, stanowi „paraliżujący bodziec” (Mphahlele 1971, 199). Nie chodzi tutaj o wspieranie decyzji podjętej przez Mphahlele’a kosztem innych możliwości, ale o wskazanie, że Adorniański wybór między zaangażowaniem a autonomią – silna wersja opozycji „heteronomia/autonomia”, której obie strony są prawdopodobnie atrakcyjne dla lewicy, ale która zakłada, jak podkreśla przykład Mphahlele’a, istnienie czegoś, co może być podporządkowane heteronomii – nie jest wyrazem staroświeckich obaw i nie można go przewyciężyć na zawołanie.

ideologia naszej współczesności opiera się przecież na twierdzeniu, że redystrybucja „w górę” jest zarówno wytwarzana przez konkurencyjny rynek, jak i stanowi dla tego rynku warunek wstępny.

Kapitalizm to jednak sposób produkcji, a nie ideologia, i jest całkowicie prawdopodobne, że redystrybucja z dołu do góry oraz jej ideologiczne uzasadnienie są tylko symptomami głębszego kryzysu w samej formie wartości. Innymi słowy, może być tak, że kapitalizm nie jest już w stanie wytworzyć masy wartości wystarczającej do zaspokojenia społecznych potrzeb znormalizowanych na wcześniejszym etapie rozwoju – i żadna ilość ideologicznej pracy nie sprawi, że żądania te będą osiągalne<sup>29</sup>. To jeszcze niekoniecznie powód, by przestać je wysuwać, ponieważ niezdolność kapitalizmu do ich spełnienia – jako historyczny rezultat, a nie teoretyczny postulat – sama w sobie daje do myślenia. Ideologiczna siła autonomii dzieła sztuki nie każe nam jednak powrócić do tego rodzaju żądań, lecz wysuwa żądanie zupełnie innej natury. Jak widzieliśmy, właściwy dla towarów tryb formułowania sądów jest ze swej natury prywatny, partykularny i fragmentaryczny. Tryb formułowania sądów właściwy dla dzieła sztuki jest natomiast subiektywny, ale uniwersalny. Innymi słowy, ma publiczny charakter i strukturyzuje go spór, a nie stratyfikacja klasowa lub partykularyzm ciał i tożsamości. Rozwarstwienie w odbiorze dzieł sztuki (podobnie jak w przypadku nauki) – niewątpliwie głębokie – zawdzięczamy nie samej koncepcji sztuki, lecz społeczeństwu, które tylko nielicznym zezwala na luksus zdeinstrumentalizowanej wiedzy. Koncepcja dzieła sztuki wymaga zatem nie tylko powszechnego dostępu do dobrej edukacji (ten dość często wysuwany postulat może nie być do zrealizowania w społeczeństwach takich jak nasze), lecz także dezinstrumentalizacji samej edukacji (co z kolei w społeczeństwach takich jak nasze – których systemy edukacji nastawione są na produkcję pracowników o coraz bardziej spolaryzowanych poziomach umiejętności wymaganych przez gospodarkę – na pewno nie jest do zrealizowania). Zauważenie, że taki postulat nie jest realistyczny, nie jest równoznaczne z jego krytyką, lecz ze sformułowaniem skargi wymierzonej w warunki czyniące go nierealistycznym. Tak długo, jak możliwość dążenia do nieinstrumentalnej wiedzy jest zarezerwowana tylko dla nielicznych, humanistyczne narzekania na temat edukacji pozostają złośliwą kpina z samych siebie. Ale fakt, że tych narzekań jest coraz mniej, pokazuje, jak bardzo przestaliśmy udawać, że nasze społeczeństwa nadają się do życia.

29 Coś takiego twierdzi m.in. szkoła *Wertkritik* w Niemczech (zob. Larsen i in. 2014). Szczególnie istotny jest rozdział Ernsta Lohoffa *Off Limits, Out of Control* (Lohoff 2014).

Twierdzenie, że dzieło sztuki jest lub nie jest towarem, to nie analogia lub wyrażenie figuratywne – wszystko jest w jakiś sposób podobne lub niepodobne do wszystkiego innego. Tymczasem dzieło sztuki nie jest *jak* towar; ono nim *jest*. (Nie jest również tak, że pokrewne twierdzenie o podporządkowaniu znaczenia widzowi jedynie przypomina tezę, że dzieło sztuki jest zwykłym towarem. Należą one raczej do tego samego typu twierdzeń). Pytanie brzmi: czy dzieło sztuki jest towarem jak każdy inny, czy też może zawiesić w sobie samym logikę towaru, czytelnie potwierdzić moment autonomii względem rynku? Mimo iż roszczenie do autonomii ma dziś tylko minimalnie polityczny charakter, samo to pytanie nie jest mimo wszystko trywialne. Wiarygodne roszczenie do autonomii – do działań, które można przypisać intencji, a nie przyczynowym uwarunkowaniom – jest w rzeczywistości warunkiem wstępnym jakiegokolwiek polityki innej niż *status quo*.

Jak zatem wyjaśnić to, co jawi się paradoksalnie jako współczesne pragnienie heteronomii? Każde działanie, bez względu na stopień intencjonalności, pozostaje uwarunkowane przez niezliczone procesy – względem których ma heteronomiczny status – i wywołuje też niezliczone niezamierzone skutki. Gdy zaczniemy zliczać i nazywać te procesy, od praw fizyki po biologię ewolucyjną, ekonomię polityczną i systemy instytucjonalne, nie wspominając o aleatorycznym (czyli po prostu: niesproblematyzowanym) zbiegu wszystkich tych procesów, po stronie heteronomii znajdzie się zdecydowana większość z nich. A przecież trudno uznać, że Hegel, absolutyzując autonomię w *Fenomenologii ducha* – „ogromna potęga negatywności, energia myśli, energia czystego Ja” (Hegel 1963, 1:43) – ignoruje ten fakt. Wręcz przeciwnie, *Fenomenologia...* wielokrotnie tematyzuje sprzeczność między intencją z jednej strony, a jej warunkami i skutkami z drugiej. Oczywiście, nie ma nic bardziej banalnego niż ta sprzeczność, żadna teoria intencjonalnego działania nie może nie zdawać sobie z niej sprawy. Pytanie dotyczyłoby więc różnicy stanowiska: czy dane działanie należy rozumieć w kategoriach podporządkowania heteronomicznym procesom zewnętrznym, czy też jego autonomii względem nich?

Ujęcie dialektyczne, jakie proponuję w tym miejscu, obejmuje oba stanowiska. W polemice napisanej przez Marksa – gdy miał dwadzieścia kilka lat, a „młodohegliści” zdobywali właśnie rozgłos – pod pojęciem idealizmu rozumie się oddzielenie pracy intelektualnej (*geistige*) od pracy materialnej, tak że w konsekwencji ta pierwsza „jawi się jako coś odrębnego od powszedniego życia, coś znajdującego się poza i ponad światem”

(Mars i Engels 1961, 42)<sup>30</sup>. Zamiast tak rozumianego idealizmu Marks proponuje tezę mówiącą, że „[l]udzie są wytwórcami swoich wyobrażeń, idei, itd., ale są to ludzie rzeczywiści, ludzie działający, uwarunkowani przez określony rozwój ich sił wytwórczych” i stosunków produkcji (Mars i Engels 1961, 27)<sup>31</sup>. Przedmiotem Marksowskiej krytyki jest zatem taka próba zrozumienia sposobów ujmowania świata, która nie bierze pod uwagę świata, który ujmuje – to, co warto podkreślić, z gruntu Hegłowska myśl (nawet jeśli Hegel, chcąc pokazać, że świadomość jest zdolnością aktywną, a nie tylko bierną, dał niektórym swoim pośmiertnym zwolennikom na lewicy w latach czterdziestych XIX wieku powód, by sądzić inaczej).

Niemarksistowski „materializm” popełnia jednak ten sam błąd, tyle że od drugiej strony. Marksowska krytyka materializmu z tego okresu jest zatem identyczna z jego krytyką idealizmu: „Głównym brakiem wszelkiego dotychczasowego materializmu (...) jest to, że przedmioty, rzeczywistość, zmysłowość ujmował on jedynie w formie *obiekty* czy też *oglądu* [*Anschauung*], nie zaś jako *ludzką działalność zmysłową, praktykę*, nie subiektywnie” (Marks 1961, 5). Jeśli krytyka młodoheglistów w wykonaniu Marksa dotyczy tego, że są niewystarczająco materialistyczni, to Marksowska krytyka materializmu dotyczy tego, że jest on niewystarczająco heglowski. W często przywoływanym w tym kontekście liście, napisanym do Ludwiga Kugelmanna w 1870 roku – czyli trzy lata po publikacji *Kapitału*, w momencie, gdy hegemonia heglizmu zdecydowanie zdążyła przeminąć – Marks pisze: „Lange w swej naiwności mówi, że «poruszam się z niezwykłą swobodą» wśród materiału empirycznego. Nie ma on najmniejszego pojęcia o tym, że owo «swobodne poruszanie się wśród materiału» jest niczym więcej jak parafrazą *metody* obróbki materiału – mianowicie *metody dialektycznej*” (Marks i Engels 1973, 747).

Hegłowskie uprzywilejowanie autonomii w ramach powyższej dialektyki ma charakter polityczny; nie można go rozumieć poza otwartą przez Rewolucję Francuską (którą filozof oglądał z dużym zainteresowaniem, ale z daleka i w stosunkowo zacofanych warunkach polityczno-gospodarczych) możliwością świadomego tworzenia własnej historii przez ludzką zbiorowość. Hegłowi nie chodzi o lekceważenie heteronomii, lecz o zrozumienie, że uwarunkowania przyczynowe – mimo iż nie przestają być faktycznie determinujące – można poddać subsumcji pod

30 Przekład obu cytatów z *Ideologii niemieckiej* nieznacznie zmodyfikowany (przy. tłum.).

31 Bardziej znane ujęcie tej dialektyki pochodzi z początku *Osiemnastego Brumaire’a*.

stanowisko autonomii. Tak jakby możliwe było postawienie kroku w taki sposób, aby jednocześnie wybrać prawo grawitacji, masę Ziemi i stawy we własnych kończynach. To opis tańca, ale i polityki. Warunki, w których działamy, nie zostały przez nas wybrane; polityka nie oznacza jednak po prostu życzenia sobie, wyczekiwania czy wyobrażania innych warunków działania (nawet jeśli takie myślenie życzeniowe jest powszechnie celebrowane przez dzisiejszą lewicę intelektualną – przypomnijmy bohatera *10:04* Bena Lerner'a (...), awatara współczesnego lewicowego stoicyzmu, który spędza całą powieść na łapaniu przebłysków świata takiego jak nasz, ale jednocześnie istniejącego magicznie „przed” kapitalizmem lub „po” nim). Polityka wymaga podjęcia decyzji odnośnie interwencji w istniejących warunkach – wybrania tego, czego się nie wybiera. *Hic Rhodus, hic salta*. Opisując Hegłowskie uwznioślenie autonomii jako uwarunkowane koniecznymi iluzjami niemieckich radykalnych demokratów z przełomu XIX i XX wieku, przekroczyliśmy już ją samą – zidentyfikowaliśmy jednak również jej moment prawdy: żadna polityka nie może obejść się bez absolutnie minimalnego momentu autonomii, którym jest sam wybór własnej heteronomii względem teraźniejszości – czy, mówiąc dokładnie to samo, ujęcie teraźniejszości jako pola działania. Trudno się dziwić, że wśród zwolenników *status quo* znajdują się radykalni krytycy autonomii. Zaskakujące jest natomiast to, że ci krytycy – „materialiści” przypisujący sprawczość temu, co w pełni zdeterminowane – obecnie uważają się za lewicę.

Dzieło sztuki również wybiera swoją heteronomię. Być dziełem sztuki oznacza wkroczyć w instytucję sztuki, będącą z kolei społeczną podstawą dzieła – tym, co sprawia, że dzieło się liczy. Warto to podkreślić. Jak sugerowałem wcześniej, autonomia nie ma nic wspólnego z wolnością osobistą; gdyby było inaczej, nie warto byłoby o niej dyskutować. Autonomia sztuki konkretnie od rynku i od państwa ma zasadniczo instytucjonalny charakter; tylko przez powołanie się na instytucję sztuki – maszynę społeczną, do której wliczają się zarówno praktyki doświadczane jako spontaniczne (interpretacja), jak i zorganizowane instytucje (muzea, czasopisma naukowe, wydziały na uniwersytetach) – dzieło może potwierdzić swoją autonomię, która (podkreślmy raz jeszcze) istnieje wyłącznie w ramach dzieła, przyjmując formę immanentnej celowości. W momencie, w którym dzieło sztuki wyrzeka się instytucji sztuki – przy czym ich krytyka jest raczej formą zaangażowania niż odrzucenia – staje się całkowicie heteronomiczne wobec tych sił, które sprawują nad nim władzę jedynie przygodnie i zewnętrznie. Tymczasem „względna autonomia” jest od zawsze pustym pojęciem. Absolutna heteronomia wobec instytucji sztuki to warunek absolutnej autonomii dzieła.



Dzieło sztuki nie jest więc samo w sobie emancypacyjne. W przeciwieństwie do związków zawodowych czy partii politycznych, dzieła sztuki nie są same z siebie politycznie skuteczne; roszczenie do autonomii nie jest ani polityką, ani jej substytutem. Jednak w obecnych warunkach implikuje ono pewną politykę. Dla Schillera zasada estetyczna była zarówno utopijnym projektem społecznym (sztuka miałaby poprzez edukację wyprowadzać ludzkość z barbarzyństwa ówczesnych stosunków społecznych), jak i, niejako w drugą stronę, rekompensatą za brak utopijnego projektu społecznego (miałaby rekompensować samo barbarzyństwo ówczesnych stosunków społecznych) (zob. Schiller 1972). Podobne poglądy są tak samo nie do utrzymania teraz, jak i w XIX wieku. Nie chodzi jednak o to, by stawiać przesadnie wzniosłe tezy o wpływie sztuki na społeczeństwo – czy to w trybie radykalnym, czy liberalnym. Chodzi raczej o podkreślenie odrębności sztuki – i określenie, po czyjej jest stronie.

Paradoksalnie, sztuka zawierająca bezpośredni polityczny przekaz stanowi problem – o ile jej znaczenia nie zostają zapośredniczone i zrelatywizowane przez formę dzieła jako całości, a więc o ile nie znaczą czegoś innego niż to, co mówią bezpośrednio. Po pierwsze, ujęte bezpośrednio jawne intencje polityczne tworzą pęknięcie między formą a treścią. Środki artystyczne i polityczne cele należą do różnych porządków. Jeśli oceniany treść polityczną dzieła, wówczas środki artystyczne wydają się nieistotne. Jeśli z kolei oceniamy formę, wówczas to polityczne cele wydają się nieistotne. Oczywiście, można by powiedzieć, że zarówno forma, jak i treść są ważne, skoro w udanym dziele sztuki nie sposób ich od siebie odróżnić. Ale znaczy to tylko tyle, że dzieło wymaga uważnej interpretacji, a w tej sytuacji bezpośredni polityczny przekaz stanowi fałszywy trop. Po drugie, przekaz to zewnętrzny cel. Powtórzmy: zewnętrzny cel to wartość użytkowa; wartości użytkowe, w społeczeństwach, których społeczny metabolizm odbywa się w całości za pośrednictwem wymiany ekwiwalentów, są z zasady podporządkowane logice suwerenności konsumenckiej. Bezpośredni polityczny przekaz – w odróżnieniu od dzieła sztuki – nie może być udany bądź nie. Opinie polityczne są za to, podobnie jak marki butów, popularne lub niepopularne w tej czy innej niszy rynkowej. Gdy sztuka polityczna znaczy po prostu coś, co stwierdza bezpośrednio, to nie ma innego znaczenia poza tym, które posiada dla konsumującej ją osoby.

Powyższego nie należy traktować jako sugestii, że dzieła sztuki ograniczają się do czysto formalnej, ogólnej polityki dzieła sztuki, nakreślonej na ostatnich kilku stronach. Gdyby tak było, omawianie poszczególnych z nich nie miałyby sensu (skoro koniec końców mówiłyby zawsze



to samo). Chodzi raczej o to, że nierozdzielność formy i treści stanowi wewnętrzne kryterium, które ratuje politykę poszczególnych dzieł przed byciem jedynie wyrazem opinii ich twórców. W momencie, w którym znaczenie – polityczne bądź nie – okazuje się wyłaniać z mózgu artysty, przestaje być przekonujące; uznajemy je po prostu za przyjemne lub nieprzyjemne, co jest innym sposobem na powiedzenie, że równie dobrze mogło wyłonić się z niewidzialnej ręki rynku. Podczas gdy cynizm rzemieślniczym czasem produkuje coś wartościowego, szczerłość jako atrybut artysty – a nie jego dzieła – jest od cynizmu nieodróżnialna. (...)

W chwilach prawdziwych politycznych przewrotów, dyskretna negatywność dzieła sztuki może wydawać się dekadencją ideą w porównaniu z projektem budowy świata bez głodu i bez policji – w tym właśnie kluczu należy rozumieć niecierpliwość historycznych awangard wobec instytucji sztuki, którą chciały zniszczyć. Przywołajmy np. Ferreira Gullara, wielkiego teoretyka brazylijskiej szkoły konkretyzmu z Rio w jej wysokomodernistycznej fazie, który w okresie poprzedzającym nieudaną rewolucję w Brazylii dość zasadnie sugerował, że konkretyści powinni zorganizować wystawę końcową, na której zniszcziliby wszystkie swoje prace – później, znowu dość zasadnie, zrewidował to stanowisko (zob. Gullar 2002). W kontekście instytucji politycznych i kulturalnych, sojuszy oraz sił skupiających się wokół niego na początku lat sześćdziesiątych, Gullar mógł twierdzić – z perspektywy czasu ma to pewne historyczne uzasadnienie – że „kultura popularna”, mająca zastąpić autonomiczne pole skupione na przewyżnianiu problemów formalnych, „(...) jest, bardziej niż cokolwiek innego, rewolucyjną świadomością” (Gullar 2002, 23).

Szaleństwem byłoby wierzyć w to samo dzisiaj. Jak już sugerowaliśmy, poza kontekstem podobnego przewrotu politycznego, zniecierpliwienie dyskretną oddzielną instytucji sztuki ma biegunowo odmienny charakter. Neoawangardy z drugiej połowy lat sześćdziesiątych i późniejsze, z właściwym ich czasom naciskiem na to, że instytucje jako takie są „ideologicznymi aparatami państwa”, występują zarówno przeciwko państwu, jak i instytucji sztuki; jednak ostatecznie – padając ofiarą podstępnej historii – jedynie narażają w ten sposób swoją treść na (zarówno rzeczywistą, jak i wyobrażoną) subsumcję pod formę towarową. Tymczasem stanowisko krytyki formy towarowej wytwarza opis estetyki spójny z samą tą krytyką. Nie powinno to dziwić, ponieważ sama estetyka – instytucja sztuki, rozumiana nie w sensie czysto socjologicznym, lecz jako zestaw normatywnych zobowiązań, w ramach których możliwe są dzieła sztuki – wytwarzana jest równolegle do kapitalizmu jako jego dyskretny inny. W poniższej książce nie chodzi zaś o to, że estetyka może

czegoś nauczyć marksizm, lecz o to, że marksizm może czegoś nauczyć estetykę.

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### Cytowanie

Brown, Nicholas. 2023. „O sztuce i formie towarowej”. Tłum. Łukasz Żurek, red. Paweł Kaczmarek. *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 4(50): 145–190.  
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**Author:** Nicholas Brown

**Title:** On Art and Commodity Form

**Abstract:** A translation of the substantial introduction to Nicholas Brown's book *Autonomy. The Social Ontology of Art under Capitalism*. At the starting point of his reflections, the author places the obvious observation that a contemporary work of art is, in principle, also a commodity, that is, it functions or may begin to function on the market in a similar way to the rest of commodities. As a counter to what he sees as the dominant aesthetic ideology of modernity, i.e., equating the work of art with all other commodities, Brown is interested in whether we can establish some inalienable (not reducible to differences of viewpoints, opinions, etc.) ontological difference between the work of art and all the rest of the products circulating on the market, between the work of art and the capitalist commodity. As he argues after Marx, Hegel reinterpreting Kant and Walter Benn Michaels, the element that allows us to distinguish a work of art from the rest of commodities is its meaning, which is the same as the intention of its author and could not be equated with the use value. This account of the difference between a work of art and a commodity then allows Brown to defend the understanding of aesthetic autonomy that is central to his book.

**Keywords:** autonomy, commodity form, artwork, meaning, intention