

Going Over the Edge: *COVID-19, the Global Artistic Industrial Complex and NIRIN*

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy has been profound. In addition to major falls on stock markets across the world there have been dramatic increases in general unemployment as a result of enforced reductions in demand for commodities and services. The Dow Jones Industrial Average was, for example, on 11 May 2020 nearly 17% lower than its starting point for the year, and, in spite of improved numbers, on 7 August remained some 2,000 points below its year high in February.¹ The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in the US for April was up from 3.6% in 2019 to 14.7% in 2020, and as of July remains over the Global Financial Crisis peak of 10%.² Without a universally available vaccine and/or effective palliative treatments, management of public health in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to involve, as it has since the first cluster of novel coronavirus infection came to light in the mainland Chinese city of Wuhan on 31 December 2019, societal lockdowns of varying degrees and intermittencies worldwide. The knock-on effect of those lockdowns has already been to stymie human activity and interaction in ways that are massively impoverishing both socially and financially.

Notwithstanding Pollyannish predictions of an immediate post-COVID-19 economic bounce-back (return to normal) – similar to those made erroneously in the midst of the 2008 global economic crisis and upstream of the decade-long period of the austerity subsequently inflicted in many countries – the damage to the world's economy brought about by the pandemic has the potential to be both deep and lasting. The extent and duration of that damage is impossible to measure precisely at present. Nevertheless, early estimates indicate most major economies will see a decrease of at least 2.4% in their gross domestic product during 2020 with further significant potential decreases in relation to the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.³ Comparisons of the global economic crisis of 2008 and the impact of COVID-19 on the world's economy show the latter as having greater negative consequences in some sectors.⁴ Key in this regard is the pandemic's disruption of the pan-global connectivity upon which the world's economy in large part now depends, including international air transport and supply chains. Commodities without any means of distribution have been dumped or languish in storage, among them essential foodstuffs. A combination of mass unemployment and scarcity of available resources presents a major, perhaps long-term, challenge to social well-being worldwide redolent of the Great Depression of the 1930s⁵ compounding the already mounting tragedy of hundreds of thousands of deaths caused by COVID-19. There is also talk of a Cold War 2.0 resulting from China's perceived failure to contain the novel coronavirus, and the re-eruption of peaceful Black Lives Matter protests in many parts of the world taking place alongside opportunist/criminal rioting and looting, after the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis Police on 25 May 2020. The world is, in short, in the midst of significant political and

economic turmoil marking the threshold of potentially millenarian change. As online and other media commentators have been quick to point out, the pandemic has already impacted significantly on the contemporary artworld both in its international and composite sub-/culturally localised manifestations.⁶ In addition to the furloughing and permanent laying-off of countless numbers of art workers worldwide (curators, gallery assistants, researchers and public educators among them) and a curtailing of available public and private funding for the contemporary arts, there has been a widespread suspension or cancelling of physical gallery- and museum-based exhibitions and a consequent shift to virtual/online modes of display. In some territories there have been redeployments of grant funding away from public art projects, in some cases towards support for impoverished art workers. Adding to which is a curtailing of the international movement of artists, art workers and audiences for art brought about by COVID-19's interruption of pan-global connectivity. Employment within the higher education sector supportive of the activities of artists and art workers has also come under threat, not least because of restrictions on the movement of international students and resulting major losses of revenue from course fees.

A contemporary artworld that has called persistently for radical socioeconomic change now has it in unsettlingly large order, albeit outside of its active instigation or control. Without a reinstatement of economic conditions prior to the COVID-19 pandemic it is difficult to see how the contemporary artworld will return to anything like its previous institutional form. This includes the reinstatement of both private funding and financial value generated by the art market in addition to a now widespread public funding of the arts, particularly in liberal-democratic contexts where the cultural sector is not only valued as a source of entertainment but also a means of public education and (supposedly) transformative criticality in the public sphere. Like the global economy more generally, the contemporary artworld is faced by the very real prospect of a lasting depression.

There is therefore a pressing imperative to reflect on the previously established form of the contemporary artworld and its likely future shape in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this text I will pursue two lines of reflection with regard to the potential impact of the pandemic: first, on the vast artistic-industrial complex that has grown up in support of the globalised production, dissemination and reception of contemporary art since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the ending of the first Cold War in 1991; and second, on the institutionalised combination of *technê* (making and doing) and institutionally legitimated meaning which informs the conferring of cultural and financial value on contemporary art in the globalised context. It will be argued that the former's seemingly inexorable physical expansion as part of post-Cold War globalisation will necessarily be rolled back in the face of a major decrease in surplus financial value and reduction in physical pan-global connectivity, and that this will result in an entropic heightening of localised hi-context discursive constructions of the purposes and significances of art running counter to the still West-centric low-context generalising tendencies of the contemporary artworld.

Major paradigm shifts have taken place in the Western(ised) artworld previously in relation to materially changing socioeconomic conditions: for example, the displacing of classical mimesis by avant-garde modernism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in concert with a shift internationally towards industrial capitalism, and the turn toward deconstructive postmodernism during the second half of the twentieth century in conjunction with the emergence of late post-industrial capitalism straddling the ending of the first Cold War.⁷ There is every reason to expect a cognate shift in contemporary artworld thinking and practice as a consequence of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

THE CONTEMPORARY ARTWORLD AND THE GLOBAL ARTISTIC-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

The term “artworld” was initially coined by the philosopher and art critic, Arthur C. Danto in an essay in which he argues that distinctions between art and non-art in light of the combination of the Duchampian readymade and artistic uses of mechanical reproduction, as exemplified in Danto’s view by Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* (1964), are now decided principally by specialists associated with institutions and communities dedicated to art.⁸ This sphere of specialist activity—defined by a shared acceptance that anything and everything can, in principle, be contemplated as art—is named by Danto as the artworld. George Dickie’s “institutional theory of art” posits the artworld similarly as the locus of the systematic legitimation of art.⁹ Viewed through the lens of Foucauldian analysis, the artworld is the institutional locus of discursive formations (relations among signs communicating meaning recursively between and among objects, subjects, and statements) that give significance to art *qua* art and shape the power relations with respect to what can and cannot be enunciated as truthful or meaningful in that regard.

In a later text, Danto elaborates on his idea of the artworld by arguing that art’s historical development can be divided into three successive stages: the first, dominated by ideas of mimesis; the second, involving an ideological contestation of differing styles; and the third, an acceptance that art has no material, ideological or stylistic limitations. On the basis of these divisions—which echo G.W.F. Hegel’s teleological vision of history as developing sequentially towards a totalising consciousness of “spirit” (*geist*)—Danto argues that art has now entered into a post-historical stage wherein, with certain specialist qualifications, pretty much “anything goes.”¹⁰ As such, Danto’s schema is limited to a consideration of the particular concerns and historical developmental trajectory of Euro-American art. Danto’s idea of the artworld is, while intrinsically pluralistic, nevertheless projected paradoxically as universal and within culturally and historically defined limits.

More recent discussions of the artworld have diverged from Danto’s Euro-American-centric endist outlook by drawing attention to differing historical and contemporary cultural constructions of aesthetic experience as well as the sub-cultural interconnectedness of art institutions and communities made conspicuous as a result of post-Cold War neo-liberal globalisation.¹¹ A significant aspect of which is the ever-growing series of international survey exhibitions, biennials and triennials staged over recent decades dedicated to the showcasing of a contemporary post-West” global art/visual culture, beginning with *Magiciens de la Terre* at the Centre Pompidou and Parc de la Villette in 1989. In this postmodern view there is a multiverse, rather than a universe, of dynamically differing and intersecting (deferring) artworlds without readily definable cultural and historical limits.

At the same time, and in spite of a shifting of the axes of geopolitical and economic power as a result of globalisation, major artworld centres such as New York, Paris, Berlin and London have remained hugely influential in their upholding of established Euro-American economies of production, dissemination and reception as a reproducible standard facilitating the infrastructural workings of what might be thought of as a global artistic-industrial complex connecting the contemporary artworld and the art market. Included in this is the adaptive metastasising of the so-called “white cube” which, in spite of the proliferation of supplementary modes contextualised by postmodernism, has become a reproducible standard for global public museums, commercial galleries and art fairs. Also included are the workings of the international art market rooted in the principles of liberal capitalism first developed in Europe, and modes of critical discourse developed in relation to the Euro-American philosophical tradition. The global artistic-industrial complex can thus be seen as a major contributor to the endlessly positive spectacle¹² of contemporary neo-liberalism.

It has therefore become necessary to conceive of a conspicuously diverse post-Cold War worldwide archipelago of individuals, institutions and communities dedicated to the production, dissemination and reception of art that nevertheless shares in an entanglement with the horizons of the Euro-American artworld paradigm referred to by Danto. That entanglement facilitates the contemporary artworld's pluralistic trans-national productivity while also being open to critical interpretation as a residual manifestation of Euro-American imperialism.

Throughout the nineteenth, and much of the twentieth century successive and intersecting artistic discourses and praxes within Euro-American contexts, associated variously with radical idealism, romanticism, aestheticism, politicised avant-garde modernism, and high-modernism, set out differing interpretations of the aesthetic as a locus of modernising sociocultural transformation categorically distinct from and mediating between scientifically informed practice and ethics. Late nineteenth century Euro-American aestheticism's desire to establish an entirely autonomous aesthetic contrasts, for example, with that of the politicised historical and neo-avant-gardes of the early and mid-twentieth century to bring art and the life-world synthetically together as a means of dialectically reworking the disciplining means-end rationality of the latter along the more playful lines of the former.

With the shift within those same Euro-American contexts during the second half of the twentieth century towards postmodernist sensibilities, categorical progressivist-modernist distinctions between tradition and modernity, art and society, and high and low culture were brought deconstructively into question.¹³ Instituted in their place are modes of artistic criticism that sought to radically expand and diversify artworld thinking and practice, not least in the direction of already receptive post-/de-colonially oriented artworlds within and outside Euro-America. Distinctions within postmodernism have been made between poststructuralist and neo-conservative tendencies, with the former highlighting the profound uncertainty of a supposedly immanent postmodern condition in contrast to the latter's continued espousal of established Euro-American humanist ideas of coherent subjectivity and agency.¹⁴ Any absolute distinction between poststructuralist and neo-conservative postmodernism is however suspended from the deconstructivist point of view of the former. The immanence of the postmodern condition has also been brought into question by post-/de-colonial discourses which see it as a specifically Euro-American post-industrial phenomenon.¹⁵

Although Derridean deconstruction '*propre*' suspends the rationalising spatio-temporal distinctions underpinning a critically oppositional Euro-American post-Enlightenment modernism, in practice the contemporary artworld has, with a view to its continuing efficiency, continued to uphold those distinctions in conjunction with a general counter-authoritarian sense of deconstructivist uncertainty-lite (a conjunction sometimes referred to as metamodernism¹⁶). It has also added a further critical distinction between what are perceived as a colonial-imperial Euro-American artworld and resistant de-colonially-oriented others as the revised basis for a diversified socially progressive art. In short, the contemporary artworld can be understood to uphold general traces of the Euro-American post-Enlightenment idea of critically oppositional aesthetic modernity while at the same time overwriting those traces with thinking supportive of its particular expansively diversified outlook; an overwriting buttressed in part by a move away from the profound uncertainties of poststructuralist postmodernism and a return to workable, often simplistic, ideas of dialectical opposition ushered in by the so called "social-turn" within the contemporary artworld during recent decades.¹⁷ The contemporary artworld continues to share generally in ideas of critical distancing instituted by Euro-American post-Enlightenment aesthetic modernity even as it qualifies the latter

through the upholding of a myriad of other cultural outlooks whose conceptions of the significance and function of the aesthetic now intersect but paradoxically do not always entirely accord with those of Euro-American post/modernism; a condition referred to by Peter Osborne and others as “contemporaneity.”¹⁸

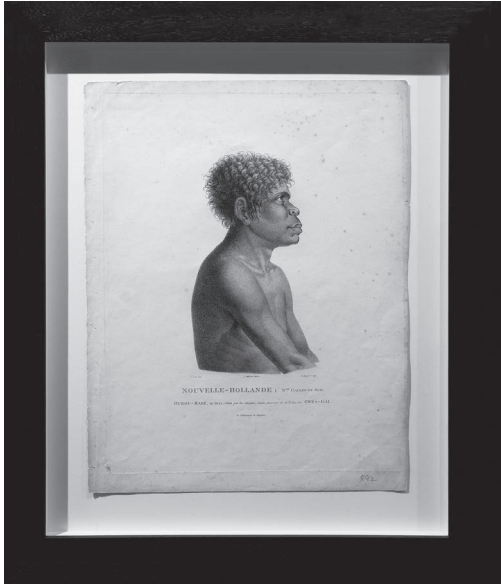
Crucially, the value conferred institutionally on modernist, postmodernist and contemporary art, both culturally within the Western(ised) artworld and financially on the international art market, has become dependent on durable perceptions of its critically transformative use-value kept distinct in some way or other from sociocultural objects of criticism. This contrasts with Euro-American art in the classical mimetic tradition whose cultural and financial value was attributed conventionally to its perceived worth as a source of aesthetic pleasure, use-value as an adjunct to religious and aristocratic ritual, the preciousness of materials used in its production, and/or investments of skilled craftsmanship on the part of artists and artisans. In the case of modernist, postmodernist and contemporary art after the proposal of the Duchampian readymade, none of those classical measures of value necessarily apply. With regard to all of which, it is possible to expand on Danto’s and Dickie’s visions of the artworld by seeing the institutional confirmation of modernist, postmodernist and contemporary art’s value as a locus of transformative criticality in an interactive relationship with the conferring of financial value on the international art market, whereby both impact iteratively /symbolically upon the other.

COVID-19 AND THE CONTRACTION OF THE GLOBAL ARTISTIC-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

Since the mid-twentieth century there has been a prodigious increase in the number of practising artists as part of the development of the contemporary artworld and associated global artistic-industrial complex, initially, in Western(ised) contexts and in relation to the ending of the first Cold War, worldwide. As Brandon Taylor¹⁹ indicates, in the US during the 1940s there were “perhaps only a score” of regularly exhibiting modern(ist) artists. This contrasts sharply with an estimated 150,000 professional and quasi-/semi-professional artists working in New York City during the mid-1980s.²⁰ Research published by the National Endowment for the Arts shows in 2011 there were 210,000 fine artists of professionalised standing working predominantly in New York and California.²¹ An unpublished Gulbenkian Foundation enquiry concludes that in 1977 there were at least 20,000 “professional artists” working in the UK.²² Analysis of access to and take-up of grants from the UK arts councils estimates that in 2011 there were as many as 30,500 working artists, an increase of around 30% on the figure arrived at by the Gulbenkian Foundation enquiry.²³ Another study estimates that in 2019 there were around 60,000 artists working in the UK, a 30% increase on an estimated figure of 40,000 for 2011.²⁴ Supplementing those figures for the US and UK would have been numerous practising quasi- and semi-professional artists excluded from the published statistics. While related mostly to those Euro-American artworld contexts, a cursory examination of the vast and growing body of literature and online postings on the subject of contemporary art gives ample indexical evidence of comparably prodigious increases in the number of artists worldwide.

Growth in the number of artists globally since the mid-twentieth century has been accompanied by an exponential worldwide increase in the number of exhibition spaces and in the size of audiences for art. Statistical information for these increases is less partial. As Taylor also indicates, in the US during the 1940s there were only a “mere handful of galleries catering for the new art of abstract expressionism.”²⁵ By the mid-1980s there were some 680 galleries²⁶ and by 2019 an estimated 1,500 galleries²⁷ dealing with art in New York City alone, many dedicated to the showing

Going Over the Edge: *COVID-19, the Global Artistic-Industrial Complex and NIRIN*



and selling of post/modern and contemporary art. Over the period 2008-2014 there was a worldwide average 10.2% increase in visitor numbers for art museums that did not undergo renovation and an average 14.1% for those that did.²⁸ Attendances at Tate Modern in London, for example, grew from 4,441,225 in 2004 to 5,868,562 in 2018.²⁹ As the result of its prodigious centrally-driven building program, the number of museums in the People's Republic of China, including art museums, has risen from 349 in 1978 to more than 5,100 in 2019.³⁰ Audiences for modern and contemporary art in the PRC have grown in recent years but are relatively small by global measures and principally within metropolitan spaces, such as Shanghai. The China Art Museum, Shanghai, one of the biggest museums of contemporary art in Asia, nevertheless reported impressive annual visitor numbers of 2,550,000 in 2018.³¹ There was a significant and as yet unexplained dip in the number of visitors to some art museums and galleries during the second decade of the twenty-first century, most notably in the US.³² However, prior to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, attendance figures had rebounded in some instances and remained buoyant globally.

Such statistics do not give a comprehensive numerical picture of how large the growth in the number of artists, sites of public display and the size of audiences for art has actually been worldwide since the mid-twentieth century. The contemporary artworld and associated global artistic-industrial complex thus remain in effect mathematically sublime entities. Their Leviathan-like scale and interconnectedness are, nevertheless, beyond any reasonable doubt. The global growth in the number of artists and galleries and in audiences for art since the mid-twentieth century is of course neither autonomous nor accidental. During the same period there has been significant global economic growth, albeit subject to intermittent boom and bust, that has provided substantial public and private finance in support of the production, showing and reception of art; much as New World gold was used to underwrite an expansion of Catholic church art in Spain during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The greater majority of that growth has come about as a consequence of post-Cold War globalisation in tandem with wider processes of societal modernisation, including the development of a diverse international cultural sector brought together by increased physical pan-global connectivity and the Internet. With regard to which it is perhaps important to reflect on Taylor's observation that the productivity of the academic artworld in France during the nineteenth century far outstripped market demand.³³ The same, as many artists and artworkers will confirm, is the case today with respect to the contemporary artworld. Art market value is sustained as ever by continuing artworld distinctions between good and not so good art in addition to the perceived rarity of the former, even as the expansive global diversity of art as a whole is supported ideologically by the contemporary artworld.

While it is important not to uphold an entirely deterministic mono-valent relationship between the surplus financial value generated by post-Cold War globalisation and the establishment of the contemporary artworld and related global artistic-industrial complex—wider factors relating to socio-cultural development and localised self-determination are, as indicated above, also in play—it would be misleading to see the latter as detached causally from the former. The damage wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic on the world's economy, including restrictions on international travel and supply chains, will therefore almost certainly result in a significant long-term physical contraction of the global artistic-industrial complex. As responses to the existing impact of the pandemic on the contemporary artworld by art workers worldwide shows, a likely consequence will be an increased shifting of activities online. Artists as well as commercial galleries and museums have already taken that turn as a means of sustaining the visibility of their practices for global as well as local audiences.

A further likely consequence of that contraction will be a greater reliance on the material as well as institutional-discursive workings of localised artworlds both as supports to the making and showing of art and paradigmatic constructions of its functions and meanings. As debates related to the concept of contemporaneity have already recognised,³⁴ the emergence of the contemporary artworld and associated global artistic-industrial complex since the late-twentieth century has been characterised by an increasingly conspicuous plurality of localised sociocultural outlooks intersecting with while diverging from those of Euro-American modernism and postmodernism. If the physical interconnectedness of the contemporary artworld decomposes long-term as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as seems likely, the siloed plurality of contemporaneity will almost certainly become more entrenched. Still internationally dominant Euro-American artworld discourses, whose global influence was in any case already waning in the context of contemporaneity, will be overwritten in an accelerated way, in the absence of any ready substitute, by a plethora of memetic variations developed in greater isolation from one another.

AESTHETIC POST/MODERNITY, CONTEMPORANEITY AND *TECHNĒ*

By extension, such overwriting may lead to a breaking down of existing institutionalised relationships between *technê* and meaning that give both cultural and financial value to contemporary art in the globalised context. Those relationships are themselves a kind of connective tissue deriving from Euro-American modernism and postmodernism that identify contemporary art as 'contemporary' while at the same time enabling intersections between differing artworlds in the context of contemporaneity. Key in this regard is the use of defamiliarisation, collage-montage and allegory as signature practices of avant-garde modernist, postmodernist and contemporary art.

Characteristically, defamiliarisation, collage-montage and allegory involve re-presentations of texts, images, objects and/or actions within novel settings wherein they take on new and unexpected significances. Defamiliarisation derives principally from the Russian formalist idea of "*ostranenie*" – presentations of the familiar in strange ways so as to heighten consciousness of the commonplace – considered essential to artistic/poetic expression. The artistic use of collage-montage derives in large part from the cutting out and decorative re-mounting of printed materials and objects highly popular in nineteenth century Europe,³⁵ as well as the accretive visual spectacles of industrialised European towns and cities. The earliest known examples of the former being collages produced by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque circa 1911-12,³⁶ for example, Picasso's *Still Life with Chair Caning* (1912), which combines oil cloth overprinted with a photographically reproduced representation of chair caning with newsprint, rope and oil painting on canvas to signify the intoxicating effects of the then in France popular psychotropic drink, absinthe, and by metaphorical extension the similarly disorientating/euphoric effects of modernity as an ecstatic unsettling of tradition by the new.

Allegory is a rhetorical device established since European classical Antiquity whereby texts or visual images are used to symbolise complex spiritual, moral or political significances in addition to their simpler ostensible meanings. Examples of allegory in European art include Johannes Vermeer's painting *The Art of Painting*, *The Allegory of Painting*, or *Painter in His Studio* (1666-68), a symbolic representation of history and poetry as the chief sources from which classical painting conventionally draws its subjects. Allegory accompanies a comparably ironicising tradition of literary satire initiated in classical Antiquity by writers such as Juvenal, revisited as part of the neo-classical revival in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Since the early twentieth century, defamiliarisation, collage-montage and a further revisiting of classical allegory have become staples of artistic production within Euro-American and other Westernised artworld contexts. Widely considered pivotal in this regard is not only Picasso's development of collage-montage, but also most tellingly Marcel Duchamp's associated development of the readymade. Following experimentation with impressionist, post-impressionist and cubist /futurist painterly idioms,³⁷ around 1913-14 Duchamp began to toy with the idea of found objects as artworks; early examples of which include *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) and *Bottlerack* (1914), kept initially by Duchamp for private contemplation in his studio.³⁸ The idea of the readymade may have originated from Duchamp's visit to an industrial exposition in Germany in 1912.³⁹ Picasso's initial development of collage-montage and Duchamp's use of readymades pointed the way to an expanded field of visual expression beyond established mimetic/naturalistic forms of painterly and sculptural representation in which objects could in effect represent themselves in the context of art.⁴⁰ Of major significance in this regard is the development of mechanical forms of reproduction including still photography, moving film and mass-printing that share in the dislocating effects of defamiliarisation and collage-montage.⁴¹

That seminal shift in artistic languages away from mimesis towards defamiliarisation, collage-montage and allegory has been subject to changing interpretations. The adoption of defamiliarisation and collage-montage techniques by the politicised modernist avant-gardes of the early twentieth century came to be interpreted initially in two significant ways. Progressivist Marxian discourses tended to see both as loci of dialectical struggle⁴² – viz. Sergei Eisenstein's conception of cinematic montage. Eroded by that action was the categorical status of the aesthetic, signified by the Dadaistic ideas of anti-art and the anti-aesthetic.⁴³ Related Surrealistic conceptions of art, developed by André Breton and his circle, extended such thinking to a dialectical blurring of boundaries between conscious experience of the material world and the unconscious, given signature expression by Max Ernst's surrealist collage-novel *Une Semaine de Bonté* (1933),⁴⁴ where dreamwork-like non-rationality is envisaged as a site of expanded un-/consciousness and the revolutionary uncaging of erotic desires otherwise constrained by a socially disciplining bourgeois-capitalist morality.⁴⁵ In both cases, the ostensible strangeness of defamiliarisation and collage-montage is considered as means towards the revealing of realities masked by the false consciousness of capitalist ideology. Both interpretations have cast long and, in many respects, misleading shadows over some quarters of the Western(ised) artworld up to the present day.

With the shift from modernist to postmodernist sensibilities in Euro-American contexts from the 1950s onwards, a differing interpretation of defamiliarisation and collage-montage emerged. This was prefaced by Peter Bürger's⁴⁶ assessment of the avant-garde's dialectical blurring of the boundary between art and life as one that by the mid-twentieth century had been effectively recuperated by capitalism and mainstream culture. Countering the apparent endism of that assessment were readings of defamiliarisation and collage-montage as means towards serially incomplete multiplications of significance. Gregory Ulmer, for example analyses collage-montage as an *avant-la-lettre* form of "post-critical" deconstructive practice negative of authoritative meaning not through dialectical opposition but, instead, illimitable semiotic productivity,⁴⁷ a position echoed by, among others, Craig Owen's identification of allegory as a signature characteristic of a deconstructivist postmodernist art,⁴⁸ and Hal Foster's later vision of a post-avant-garde with the capacity to continually shape-shift and diversify beyond the snares of mainstream dialectical recuperation.⁴⁹

In light of these poststructuralist postmodernist interventions, it becomes possible to rethink Duchamp's proposing of the readymade beyond Marxian dialectics as an immanent locus of deconstruction *avant-la-lettre*; including what might be seen as a performative demonstration of the fundamentally Eucharistic basis of artistic economies of production, display and reception within predominantly Judaeo-Christian Euro-American artworld contexts, wherein art is performatively upheld as such in the context of a consecrated artworld with its various specialist initiates and credulous audiences. By putting forward an industrially manufactured urinal for exhibition as the artwork *Fountain* at the New York Society of Independent Artists exhibition in 1917, signed pseudonymously, "R. Mutt", Duchamp invited audiences to witness and acknowledge their faith in the transubstantiation of an otherwise ineluctably base object into one that was divinely inspired with the transcendental idea/spirit of art. The resulting deconstructive undecidability of *Fountain* as both a urinal and a work of art, and consequently wholly neither, revealed art, for those receptive to Duchamp's intervention, as relying for its significance not on a capacity to represent (an) ideal being more or less truthfully, as classical mimesis would have it, but on a mystical sleight of hand; the latter involving an acknowledgement of art and the aesthetic's social-semiotic constructions as arbitrary categories of *technê* and feeling.

The chess-like pin or skewer enacted by the Duchampian readymade is profoundly problematic. As the chess-playing Duchamp knew, in the game of chess a "pin" describes an attack on a defending piece where the latter cannot be moved without exposing another more valuable defending piece to capture. A "skewer" is in effect a reverse pin involving an attack on a valuable defending piece whose movement exposes a less valuable piece to capture. In both cases, the defending player is faced with a dilemma in which the consequences of their next move are dependent on how the game as a whole unfolds; in the wider context of the game, the giving up of a more valuable piece may prove to be shrewd. *Fountain* presents viewers with a similar dilemma in the institutionalised context of art. To decide *Fountain* as a work of art or, as non-art sustains the idea of art as a definable category; to give up *Fountain* as art negatively preserves the valuable status of the latter. The alternative is to witness the deconstructive implications of *Fountain* as something whose status as art or non-art remains undecidable. In short, one is invited to give up the valued classical ideal of art in favour of something richer and more complex that is also practically impossible. The dilemma presented by the Duchampian readymade and its derivatives can be understood to have been taken up by Danto and others (e.g. Douglas Crimp⁵⁰), if not as an end, then an unresolvable suspension of (Euro-American) art's conventionally assumed status *qua art*; one that encompasses by il/logical extension the institutionalisation of Duchamp's intervention as a substitute *mise en abyme* (viewed retroactively through the lens of Derrida's writing, the readymade's deconstruction of art runs to the readymade itself as a supplement to Eucharistic mimesis).

LOW- AND HIGH-CONTEXT ARTWORLDS

Although intellectually enlightening, the implications of the Duchampian readymade do not accord with the necessary pragmatism of the artworld more generally, where institutional managerialism and a democratising desire to engage widened public audiences demands something far more clear-cut. In practice, an expanded contemporary artworld has continued to deploy readymades as well as cognate forms of defamiliarisation, collage-montage and allegory as standard means of production /representation across a wide and growing range of artistic media. Even traditional modes of artistic production, such as painting and sculpture, are now conducted beyond the postmodernist critical

PAUL GLADSTON



turn self-consciously *sous rature*. A significant contributory factor to which is the diversification of the artworld to include cultural outlooks and artistic practices divergent from those of Euro-American aesthetic modernity and postmodernity. It is thus possible to view the use of defamiliarisation and related *technês* as a readily reproducible signature imputing a shared identity to contemporary art, albeit one without clearly definable spatio-temporal limits.

The difficulty with that signature is that its generalising reiteration ultimately reneges on the deconstructive immanence embodied by the Duchampian readymade. Instituted instead is the use of defamiliarisation and related *technês* as vehicles for the conveying of particular discursive viewpoints and associated truth-claims in accordance with the siloed pluralism of contemporaneity. In short, contemporary artworks have been made open to interpretation across a spectrum of viewpoints, including those disposed towards deconstructivism and others assertive of resistant essentialisms. That renegeing is of course, entirely understandable given the sheer impossibility of an “non-/art” ushered in by the Duchampian readymade. However, it also involves a paradoxical attachment of workable significances to *technês* that otherwise performatively resist authoritative meaning of any kind. With regard to which, there is a widespread misprision of the implications of deconstruction within the contemporary artworld.⁵¹ Consider the following statement issued by the Ronchini Gallery, advertising an Instagram conversation with the artist Berndnaut Smilde:

*Best known for his Nimbus series, Smilde’s work consist of installations, sculptures and photos. Using his daily surroundings and spaces as motives, Smilde is interested in the temporal nature of construction and deconstruction. His work refers to both the physical state of a building and objects as well as a moment of revelation that depicts either hope or fragility. Smilde analyses spaces and their appearance and takes them apart to investigate their unique details and features. His artistic point of view often centres on duality.*⁵²

Notwithstanding the sweeping assertion that Smilde’s work involves epiphanies of hope or fragility (of what and in what ways?)—whose vagueness is typical of contemporary shopfront artworld discourses more generally—the glaring difficulty of this statement lies in its pairing of construction and deconstruction along a solely temporal axis. The term “deconstruction,” as coined by Jacques Derrida, not only connotes construction as an aspect of the undecidably negative-productive (destructive-constructive) consequences of signification but also the interchangeability of the temporal and the spatial (as signified by Derrida’s use of the terms “temporisation” and “trace”).⁵³

To make significances stick, so to speak, the contemporary artworld has in the absence of any shared cultural-discursive legacy given a laboured role to various forms of contextualisation enabling the semiotic anchoring of meanings to artworks as empty signifiers; for example, through the proliferation of meta-texts, such as museum and gallery captions and articles in artworld magazines that surround artworks and to which audiences are invited to refer in readerly pursuit of meaning. Consider, for example, works of “art” produced using waste plastics presented online at the PlasticPollutionCoalition website, claimed rhetorically as putting “the spotlight on single-use plastic” and having the potential to “inspire action to stop plastic pollution.”⁵⁴ Setting aside the unimpeachable correctness of the political messages conveyed and questions of aesthetic sophistication—most of the works presented—are crashingly obvious and therefore dull in terms of their making and received symbolic significance—those attributed meanings are less technically embodied by the artworks concerned than illustrated by them with regard to the activist stance

taken by the coalition, whose principal end lies not so much with the promotion of the particularities of art and the aesthetic but an injunction for visitors to their site to “Take the pledge to refuse single-use plastic” and to “Join our global Coalition”; an accretive co-opting of the aesthetic to the political rather than a Benjaminian politicisation of the aesthetic, if you will. This is not to deny the role that art can play as a vehicle for politicised messaging; artistic propaganda has always done much the same. It is, though, to point out how the use of art in this way is by no means a guarantor of the sort of critically challenging aesthetic complexity exemplified by the Duchampian readymade. A similar problematic exists in relation to critical meanings institutionally legitimised by the contemporary artworld. Institutionalised critical discourses within Western(ised) artworld contexts – downstream of the high-tide of poststructuralist/postcolonialist postmodernism a quarter of century and more ago – remain widely sceptical of all totalising forms of identity: indicative of which is Donna Haraway’s idea of a continuum of “naturecultures” de-centering of colonialist, patriarchal and capitalist agendas.⁵⁵

The exact basis of such cosmopolitan thinking – whose appeal to diversity echoes earlier trans-nationalisms, internationalisms and trans-culturalisms associated variously with romanticism, anarchism, revolutionary socialism and the counterculture, including a formative embracing of cultural diversity by the progressive Left in Europe as a secular-communitarian substitute for organised religion during the late nineteenth century in the face of the godlessness of Darwinian thought⁵⁶ – is, however, placed persistently *sous rature* by an ineluctably cacophonous/asynchronous spectrum of divergent views on what rightly constitutes community; culturally, socially, politically, economically and ethically. The dilemma presented by the readymade is by no means exclusive to art in the Euro-American tradition; it can be understood to extend to any exclusory realm of cultural-linguistic representation. Assertions of resistant essentialism do not obviate the demonstrable uncertainties of cultural-linguistic representation, including rationalising conceptions of deconstruction – viz. the statement by the Ronchini Gallery cited above.

To remain coherent, contemporary cosmopolitanism has therefore installed what are now referred to as “politically correct” limitations on acceptability and truthfulness congruent with the unimpeachable *prima facie* justness of Euro-American liberalism as a basis for the espousal of a generalising culturalist diversity. The difficulty posed by the installation of those limitations, particularly when seen from non-Western discursive positions, is that they can be understood to institute what amounts to a culturally partisan managerialist containment⁵⁷ rather than a pervasively transcultural upholding of differences in and of themselves.⁵⁸ A containment – further buttressed by the lingering traces of identarian⁵⁹ postcolonialist postmodernism’s paradoxically colonising projection of Third Space indeterminacy as an immanent condition of identity,⁶⁰ as well as related ideas of strategic essentialism⁶¹ – that arguably resonates with Nietzsche’s identification of a moralistic critically debilitating herd instinct. As a statement issued by the journal *Third Text* in response to the global black Lives Matter Protests of 2020 makes clear, the institutionalisation of postmodernist cosmopolitanism by a still West-centric artworld can, in addition, be understood to have fallen well short of its *prima facie* goals.

Decades of liberal demands for 'diversity' have failed to change the artworld's devotion to the civilisational accomplishments of the West or undo the mechanisms of exclusion. The artworld's dependency on developmentalist, evolutionist, racial teleology mirrors the propagation of a labour aristocracy in a world ruled by imperialism. This global state of affairs justifies precarity and wages that impoverish, immiserate and expose racially differentiated workers to duress, distress and death. And not least, it recruits workers for fascisms, old and new. We have watched as 'diversity' became an emollient for the globalisation of art markets according to geographically partitioned 'regions' rather than the basis for ending its reliance upon philanthrocapitalism.⁶²

The critical challenges once posed by postmodernist cosmopolitanism are now institutionalised in ways that not only constantly diffuse criticism but that can also be seen to mask the continuation of systemic prejudice, making them sitting targets of contemporaneity's cacophonous criticality. Meta-textual attachments of meaning to art are by no means new or in any way aberrant. As the Duchampian readymade performatively demonstrates, the significances of art, including that of its categorical standing *qua art*, are never inherent or given but always-already socioculturally constructed. Art of the past or, of another culture, no matter how seemingly culturally familiar, are always dislocated from the immediate sociocultural context(s) of their production. The significance of art, or perhaps more accurately, visual culture, is thus made persistently open to unsettling spatio-temporal diffractions. The meta-textual anchoring of meaning by the contemporary artworld is a largely low-context form of signification exercised as an expedient for multi-cultural audiences with only a generally shared sociocultural outlook. In contrast to high-context cultural settings where there is significant sharing in discursive outlooks and therefore little necessity for additional anchorage of meaning, low-context cultural settings require constant reinforcements of meaning. In practice, cultural significance is not divided categorically between the two but takes place variously over time along a spectrum running from high- to low- contexts ultimately commingling of both.

Within the contemporary artworld, the expedient of low-context meta-textual anchoring has displaced/eclipsed the culturally located embodiment of meaning by *technê* usual in high-context cultural settings. Consider here with regard to the latter Duchamp's use of the readymade to performatively reveal the transubstantial sleight of hand constitutive of art in the classical European mimetic tradition. Or, Masaccio's prior, classically mimetic embodiment of a Eucharistic state of communion between the earthly and the divine in the fresco painting known as the *The Trinity* (1427-28), whose innovative use of geometric perspective supports the depiction of a transcendent heavenly state behind the picture plane made seemingly contiguous with an illusory materiality projected virtually in front (notionally) as part of the physical space occupied by viewers. Or indeed, to shift the cultural register, a shared understanding of literati-Confucian *shan-shui* (mountains and water) ink and brush painting within Chinese cultural contexts as an enactment of the capacity of its makers to bring the otherwise chaotic human mind into spontaneous accord with nature and therefore to administer society harmoniously, and contemporary neo-futurist media art in the context of Japanese culture which seeks to enact notions of reciprocity between the artificial and the natural redolent of historical East Asian Zen Buddhist aesthetics – viz. the work of Yoichi Ochiai.⁶³ That is not to accept those signified meanings hypostatically as fundamentally real or authentic, but rather to acknowledge their perceived embodiment as discursive réalités by *technês* within localised high-context cultural settings, wherein little in the way of recursive semiotic anchorage is required.

In the case of a post-Duchampian contemporary art, it has become normal to uphold artworks, physical or otherwise, that have little or no embodied connection to their imputed meanings. Anchorage, rather than embodied *technê*, has become a principal vector of messaging. Anything goes, as long as it accords meta-textually with the meanings legitimated institutionally by the contemporary artworld, which have in many cases become, as the PlasticPollutionCoalition website shows, more important than the artworks themselves. With the contraction of the physical infrastructure and connectivity of the globalised artworld in the face of COVID-19, contemporary art's generalising low-context presentation on the international stage will most likely be subordinated to artistic economies of production, showing and reception within localised high-context artworlds. The latter are of course, as contemporaneity acknowledges, already operative. The advent of COVID-19 does not of necessity mean the end of the low-context contemporary artworld (its perpetuation is insured, at the very least, online), but instead a tilting towards an entropic state of high-context localism. That tilting may be, by no means, an entirely bad thing. It does though indicate the necessity of a just attention to rather than managerialist containment of differing constructions of community and the aesthetic, some of which will be distasteful to an established and generalising Euro-American artworld cosmopolitanism. Exemplary in this regard is the historical prevalence of Confucian aesthetics in high-context Chinese cultural settings supportive of an oblique criticality reciprocally immanent to rather than distant from social governance established centuries prior to Euro-American aesthetic modernity.⁶⁴

NIRIN

A possible marker of the transition to high-context localism in relation to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic are events surrounding *NIRIN*, the 22nd Biennale of Sydney: a major international showcase of the work of 101 artists and collectives scheduled to take place in major venues and public spaces across the city from 14 March to 8 June, 2020. The 22nd Biennale of Sydney is the first to have been organised under the stewardship of an artistic director of Australian-aboriginal heritage, Brook Andrew. As a nation-state born out of and still heavily impacted upon by the legacy of British colonialism-imperialism, Australia has yet to establish an entirely just relationship with its indigenous people. Andrew's appointment as artistic director is therefore of enormous social, political and cultural significance, both within Australia and internationally, not least in the emerging context of renewed Black Lives Matter protests worldwide; a status further confirmed by the sheer diversity of the individuals and collectives invited to take part in an avowedly artist-led survey exhibition, including, among others, artists from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Brazil, Madagascar, Canada, and Japan, as well as Australia.

As part of the general social lockdown enforced by the Australian government in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, *NIRIN* was closed to the public on 24 March. Like many other exhibitions curtailed by the impact of the pandemic, *NIRIN*'s was represented virtually after its initial closure through images and texts online.⁶⁵ *NIRIN* was reopened to the public in stages in June and its run extended following a nationwide lifting of the COVID-19 lockdown. An impromptu satellite exhibition, *NIRIN NAARN* was programmed to be installed at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne but was abruptly postponed after the reimposition of lockdown restrictions in the state of Victoria during July.

The title *NIRIN*, is a word derived from the language of Australia's indigenous Wiradjuri that can be translated into English as "edge". In an introductory press release, Andrew describes *NIRIN* as proposing "that creativity is an important means of truth-telling, of directly addressing unresolved anxieties that stalk our times and ourselves," and as marking out "a place from which to see the world through different eyes, to embrace our many edges and imagine pride in ecologically harmonious and self-defined futures"; sentiments open to interpretation by turns as being in accord with those of an established globalised artworld cosmopolitanism and a more factional contemporaneity. Giving additional direction to the staging of *NIRIN* are a constellation of inspirational themes referenced by its organisers from aboriginal culture that indicate an intended intervention with the dominance of Euro-American artworld principles. These include: *Dhaagun* (Earth: Sovereignty and Working Together); *Bagaray-Bang* (Healing); *Yirawy-Dhuray* (Yam-Connection: Food); *Gurray* (Transformation); *Muriguwal Giiland* (Different Stories); *Ngawaal-Guyungan* (Powerful-Ideas: The Power of Objects); and *Bila* (River: Environment).⁶⁶ In the context of Australian aboriginal culture such ideas inform the use of visual representation as something embedded within communities as part of a ritualised coexistence and identification with land/nature in ways that do not coincide with rationalising Euro-American categorisations of art and the aesthetic, as well as related economies of artistic production, display and consumption/reception.

In the wake of the colonisation of Australia, traditional aboriginal visual culture (for want of a better term) has been drawn into an entanglement with the Euro-American artworld through its display within the context of museums and galleries as a set of aestheticised objects of both cultural and financial value.⁶⁷ This includes the commodification of aboriginal painting by commercial galleries and implicit/explicit engagements with aboriginal culture and history by Australian modernist, postmodernist and contemporary artists locally and on the international stage.⁶⁸ An effect of that entanglement has been to diffract the significances of aboriginal "art" towards meanings and modes of feeling readily recognisable by Western(ised) audiences in ways that bely their historical uses and significances in relation to high-context aboriginal cultural settings (the latter only being retrievable imperfectly for others through explanatory anchorage of one sort of another). Andrew's intervention can be understood as an attempt to draw artworks from across the globe onto aboriginal cultural ground, and in doing so diffract their significances away from institutionalised Euro-American dominated contemporary artworld expectations.

The impact of Andrew's intervention is impossible to assess with any degree of finality at present (if ever). It is though arguably immediately undercut, to some extent at least, by a continued reliance on the standard format of the recurring international survey exhibition. Both in actuality and when viewed online, *NIRIN* is experienced much like any other international survey exhibition as a bringing together of institutionally legitimised, information-conveying artworks under the now dubiously shared *techné* of post-Duchampian defamiliarisation/collage-montage/allegory. Amid such circumstances, low-context meta-textual semiotic anchorage as a means of imputing meaning to *NIRIN* and its collected artworks remains paramount and problematic, and the promise of a significantly diffractive critical intervention into established contemporary artworld conventions consequently only partially realised. Andrew's proposed intervention is critically laudable as a way of pointing to a multi-dimensional poly-cacophonous ontology of possible artworlds (again for want of a better term). However, one is left wondering whether its critically inverse entanglement with the contemporary artworld has been entirely efficacious (inversion only gestures in the direction of a pervasive, mutually assured deconstruction). Does the particular realm of cultural expression and

feeling indicated by *NIRIN* require such close liaisons (*dangereuses*) with the contemporary artworld and global artistic-industrial complex, not least their recuperative connections to the endless positivity of spectacular national/city brand-building and cultural tourism/dilettantism? Is it not possible to develop something that is more critically challenging? While the contemporary artworld and global artistic-industrial complex are connected in no small part by a seemingly unimpeachable (and, from a Nietzschean perspective, crypto-religious) cosmopolitanism, that sharing is arguably in its present form, as indicated above, a continuation of rationalising Euro-American imperialism by the back door and, as such, by no means entirely agreeable to all. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic may precipitate a more negative-productive serially incomplete state of post-West dis-/entanglements commensurate with a paradoxical reciprocity/*différance* between continuing, albeit shifting, cultural differences identified by contemporaneity.

The impact of the pandemic presents a doubly-enforced injunction to embrace the virtual and/or high-context localism as a response to the potentially long-term physical waning of artworld globalism. This is, of course, yet another unavoidable pin/skewer for the globalised contemporary artworld and its constituent localised artworlds to contend with. The virtual keeps global and local artworld connectivity going while holding out the promise of novel forms of aesthetic(ised) experience. Although *NIRIN WIR*, the 22nd Biennale of Sydney's program of public events, was suspended during and after lockdown until "further notice", digital programming engaged more than 600,000 people world-wide in purportedly "new ways", over 45% of whom were international and 25% under 35.⁶⁹ This compares very decently under the circumstances with record physical audience numbers of 850,000 for the 21st Biennale of Sydney in 2018.⁷⁰ Virtual connectivity can, however, only ever be a (potentially deconstructive) supplement to and not a complete substitute for materially shared aesthetic experiences; indeed, in its present recuperated form it may continue to serve largely as a conduit for the reproduction/reinforcement of low-context artworld generalisations. A recourse to localism places a renewed emphasis on the high-context embodiment of meaning by *technê*. It does, though, run the risk of retreats into essentialism/exceptionalism. Institutional-managerialist artworld decision-making will no doubt be pragmatic in addressing those dilemmas; whose vexing implications were always-already spectrally immanent to the contemporary artworld – viz. contemporaneous critical responses to the staging of *Magiciens de la Terre*⁷¹ – and brought back unsettlingly to the fore by the impact of COVID-19 in the context of contemporaneity. How successful that decision making will be, and on what terms, is another matter.

Notes

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² Statista, 'Monthly Unemployment Rate in the United States from April 2019 to April 2020'; <https://www.statista.com/statistics/273909/seasonally-adjusted-monthly-unemployment-rate-in-the-us/>; accessed 2 May 2020 and 7 August 2020

³ Statista, 'Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic on the Global Economy: Statistics and Facts'; <https://www.statista.com/topics/6139/covid-19-impact-on-the-global-economy/>; accessed 2 May 2020

⁴ Ashutosh Pandey, 'Corona Virus Shock v. Global Financial Crisis-the worse economic disaster?', *Deutsche Welle*; <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-shock-vs-global-financial-crisis-the-worse-economic-disaster/a-52802211>; accessed 28 May 2020

⁵ Graeme Wearden and Jasper Jolly, 'IMF: Global economy faces worst recession since the Great Depression-as it happened', *The Guardian*; <https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2020/apr/14/stock-markets-china-trade-global-recession-imf-forecasts-covid-19-business-live>; accessed 28 May 2020

Going Over the Edge: *COVID-19, the Global Artistic-Industrial Complex and NIRIN*

⁶ See for example, numerous articles posted at *Hyperallergic*; <https://hyperallergic.com>

⁷ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London: Verso, 1991

⁸ Arthur C. Danto, 'The Artworld', *Journal of Philosophy* LXI, 1964, pp. 571-584

⁹ George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis*, Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1974

¹⁰ Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998

¹¹ See Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1982

¹² Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, New York NY: Zone Books, 1994

¹³ Jameson, op cit.

¹⁴ Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Benjamin Buchloh and Yves-Alain Bois, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Anti-modernism, Postmodernism*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2004, p. 597

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 599

¹⁶ See Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 2(1), 2010, pp. 1-14

¹⁷ See Gregor Jansen, Matthias Hübner, Alain Bieber, Pedro Alonzo and Robert Klanten, *Art and Agenda: Political Art and Activism*, Berlin: Die Gestalteten Verlag, 2011 and Peter Weibl (ed.), *Global Activism*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2015

¹⁸ Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: The Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, London: Verso, 2013

¹⁹ Brandon Taylor, *Modernism, Post-Modernism, Realism: a critical perspective for art*, Winchester: Winchester School of Art Press, 1987, p. 77

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78

²¹ National Endowment for the Arts, 'New Research Note on Artists in the Workforce'; <https://www.arts.gov/news/2011/nea-announces-new-research-note-artists-workforce>; accessed 20 April 2020

²² Padwick Jones Arts, 'Are Their Too Many Artists?'; <http://www.padwickjonesarts.co.uk/are-there-too-many-artists/>; accessed 20 April 2020

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Statista, 'Total number of artists in the United Kingdom (UK) from 2011 to 2019'; <https://www.statista.com/statistics/319264/number-of-artists-in-the-uk/>; accessed 20 April 2020

²⁵ Taylor, op cit., p. 77

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Howard Halle, 'Best art galleries in New York City', *Timeout New York*; <https://www.timeout.com/newyork/art/best-art-galleries-in-new-york-city-galleries>; accessed 21 April 2020

²⁸ Julia Halperin, 'If you build it, they will come—at least for a while', *The Art Newspaper, Special Report 278*, V; <https://www.museus.gov.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Visitor-Figures-2015-LO.pdf>; accessed 22 April 2020

²⁹ Association of Leading Visitor Attractions (UK), '2008 Visitor Figures'; <https://www.aecom.com/content/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Theme-Index-2018-5-1.pdf>; accessed 22 April 2020

³⁰ Many Zuo, 'China has opened thousands of new museums, but who wants them?', *South China Morning Post*; <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2182876/china-ordered-thousands-new-museums-they-were-built-exhibits-and>; accessed 21 April 2020

PAUL GLADSTON

³¹ Theme Index Museum Index; <https://www.aecom.com/content/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Theme-Index-2018-5-1.pdf>; accessed 22 April 2020

³² Seph Rodney, 'Is Art Museum Attendance Declining Across the US?', *Hyperallergic*; <https://hyperallergic.com/421968/is-art-museum-attendance-declining-across-the-us/>; accessed 25 April 2020

³³ Taylor, p. 77

³⁴ See Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, op cit. and Paul Gladston, *Contemporary Chinese Art, Aesthetic Modernity and Zhang Peili: Towards a Critical Contemporaneity*, London: Bloomsbury, 2019

³⁵ Eddie Wolfram, *History of Collage: an Anthology of Collage, Assemblage and Event Structures*, London: Studio Vista, 1975, pp. 7-14

³⁶ Brandon Taylor, *Collage: the Making of Modern Art*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2004, pp. 11-15; Diane Waldman, *Collage, Assemblage, and the Found Object*, London: Phaidon, 1992, pp. 16-23 and Wolfram, *ibid.*, pp. 15-18

³⁷ Matthew Affron, *The Essential Duchamp*, New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2018, pp. 7-53

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-59

³⁹ Thierry De Duve, 'Resonances of Duchamp's Visit to Munich', in Rudolf E. Kuenzli and Francis M. Naumann eds, *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century*, Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1989

⁴⁰ Gregory L. Ulmer, 'The Object of Post-Criticism', in Hal Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture*, London: Pluto Press, 1985, pp. 83-110

⁴¹ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Harry Zohn trans., *Illuminations*, London: Fontana Press, 1973, pp. 211-244

⁴² Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984

⁴³ Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-art*, 2nd revised ed.; London Thames and Hudson, 1965

⁴⁴ Max Ernst, *Une Semaine de Bonté: a Surrealistic Novel in Collage*, Mineola NY: Dover Publications, 1976

⁴⁵ Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros 1938-1969*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2005

⁴⁶ Bürger, op cit.

⁴⁷ Ulmer, op cit.

⁴⁸ Craig Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism, Pt 1', *October* 12, 1908, pp. 67-86, and 'Pt 2', *October* 13, 1980, pp. 58-80

⁴⁹ Hal Foster, *Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1966

⁵⁰ Douglas Crimp, 'The End of Painting', *October* 16, 1981, pp. 69-86

⁵¹ One has grown used to unintentional abuses of the term "deconstruction" in the context of the culinary world, where it is now used widely to describe dishes disassembled into their constituent elements on the plate. Artists and art workers actively aligned with critical discourses should know better

⁵² Ronchini Gallery, 'In Conversation with Berndnaut Smilde', email announcement 23 May 2020

⁵³ Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 1-27

⁵⁴ Plasticpollutioncoalition, '12 Inspiring Works of Art on Plastic Pollution'; <https://www.plasticpollutioncoalition.org/blog/2017/5/2/10-inspiring-works-of-art-about-plastic-pollution>; accessed 20 May 2020

Going Over the Edge: *COVID-19, the Global Artistic-Industrial Complex and NIRIN*

⁵⁵ Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, Chicago IL: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003

⁵⁶ Norman MacKenzie and Jean Mackenzie, *The First Fabians*, London: Quartet Books, 1979

⁵⁷ Sarat Maharaj, Chang Tsong-Zung and Shiming Gao, *Farewell to Post-Colonialism: The Third Guangzhou Triennial*, Guangdong, Guangdong Museum of Art, 2008

⁵⁸ See for example, a recent (2020) call for papers by the journal *Art+Australia* towards a special edition on 'Multinaturalism': "This issue of *Art+Australia* is dedicated to non-anthropocentric perspectives and practices that exist within a continuum of naturecultures (Donna Haraway), whether from Indigenous or other epistemologies which de-centre colonial, patriarchal and capitalist agendas. In what has also rightly been called the Plantationocene (Anna Tsing), we are wary of reproducing 'monocultures of the mind' (Vandana Shiva) and seek a 'polyculture of complementary knowledges'(Kimmerer)." [our emphasis]. Here, there is a typically glib contemporary artworld combination of discursive exclusivity (anthropocentrism is peremptorily dismissed) and an assumption of remaining complementarity (polyculture). While anthropocentrism is, with justification, upheld critically, there is no reciprocal questioning of the residually romantic-Rousseauian ideal of the Plantationocene. As scientific studies show, pre-modern cultures do not always live definitively in accord with nature; see for example, *Smithsonian Insider*, 'Study reveals environmental impact of American Indian farms centuries before Europeans arrived in North America'; <https://insider.si.edu/2011/05/native-americans-were-changing-environment-in-north-america-long-before-european-settlers-arrived/>; accessed 26 April 2020

⁵⁹ A qualified distinction should be made in this regard between Third Space postmodernist identitarianism, as supportive of the idea that identity is constructed performatively and is therefore both indeterminate and dynamic, and identitarianism, as an essentialist political ideology asserting the rights of particular ethnic or racial groups to land and culture

⁶⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994

⁶¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: a Reader*, New York NY: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, pp. 66-111; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1995, and Anthony Appiah Kwame, 'Philosophy and Necessary Questions', in Safo Kwame (ed.), *Readings in African Philosophy: An Akan Collection*, Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1995, pp. 1-22

⁶² *Third Text*, 'Statement from the Editors of Third Text: On the Murder of George Floyd and the Demand for Racial Justice', issued by email 23 June 2020

⁶³ NHK World-Japan, 'We, in the Time of Corona: Yoicji Ochiai, Media Artist, Computer Scientist'; <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/ondemand/video/6033002/>; accessed 29 May 2020

⁶⁴ See Paul Gladston, *Contemporary Chinese Art, Aesthetic Modernity and Zhang Peili: Towards a Critical Contemporaneity*, op. cit.

⁶⁵ 22nd Biennale of Sydney, *NIRIN*; <https://www.biennaleofsydney.art>; first accessed 1 April 2020

⁶⁶ Brook Andrew, 'Curatorial Statement'; <https://www.biennaleofsydney.art>; accessed 1 April 2020

⁶⁷ For example, the exhibition of the work of the aboriginal artist John Mawurndjul staged at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, in Sydney in 2018, which displayed works by Mawurndjul in largely unadapted white cube settings. Clothilde Bullen, et al. eds, *John Mawurndjul: I am the Old and the New*, Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2018

⁶⁸ Penny Coleing, *Venice Biennale 1980, Australia Art from 1968-1980*, Sydney: Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, 1980

⁶⁹ 22nd Biennale of Sydney, 'eNEWSLETTER', 27 May 2020

⁷⁰ 21st Biennale of Sydney, 'Superposition: Equilibrium and Engagement'; <https://bos-prd.s3.amazonaws.com/media/dd/documents/51003085b18847c856588d5f6a0d857e.pdf>; accessed 25 May 2020

⁷¹ Julia Friedel, 'Exhibition Histories: Magiciens de la Terre', *C&*; <https://www.contemporaryand.com/magazines/magiciens-de-la-terre/>