

# AESTHETICS OF ACCELERATIONISM

AESTHETICS OF



ACCELERATIONISM

# CONTENT

Accelerationist Aesthetics:  
Necessary Inefficiency in Times  
of Real Subsumption  
STEVEN SHAVIRO

pg. 9

pg.25 Abdullah Al-Mutairi  
pg.29 Lauren Devine  
pg.37 Ed Atkins

Negative Aesthetics:  
Pasolini Versus Accelerationism  
FILIPPO TRENTIN

pg. 45

pg.53 Sarah Abu Abdallah  
pg.61 Josh Kline

The Critique of Judgement :  
Critique of Aesthetic Judgement  
IMMANUEL KANT

pg. 69

pg.89 Christopher Thomas  
pg.93 GCC

Avant-Garde and Kitsche  
CLEMENT GREENBERG

pg. 109

pg. 121 Hayden Hunham  
pg. 129 Metahaven

What is Aesthetic Engagement?  
ARNOLD BERLEANT

pg. 141

pg. 145 Ryan Trecartin  
pg. 149 lingscars.com  
pg. 153 Fatima Al Qadiri

Let's Talk About Taste  
CARL WILSON

pg. 161

pg. 169 Dis  
pg. 181 Telfer  
pg. 185 QT





# INTRODUCTION

Recently, sea of branding logos, advertisements, pop music videos, and electronics has been dominating the aesthetic realm. This is due to the accelerationist artists. Accelerationism is a nihilistic view towards the efforts to defeat capitalism. Rather than battling against the capitalism, accelerationists embed themselves to the system itself. Similar to situationist's idea of *détournement*, accelerationists are aware of the self-destructive tendency of capitalism and use the language of the capitalism to accelerate the destruction. Thus accelerationist artists often portray the apocalyptic vision filled with ironic use of popular culture.

Because of its distinct aesthetic and the help of the Internet, accelerationist aesthetic has spread within the artist and designer culture. Yet many times only the aesthetic of accelerationism are used apart from its content. This interested me – why is the aesthetic pleasing to many people? The aim of the accelerationist artists is to question and offend what is shown yet it is attracting numerous artists and designers to appropriate or even mimic the “look” of it. Through several essays from Immanuel Kant to Carl Wilson, this book investigates the reason and the value of accelerationist aesthetics.





# Real Time

**Accelerationist  
Aesthetics:**

**Necessary**

**Inefficiency**

**in**

**Times**

**of**

**Real**

**Subsumption**

**(2013)**

**Steven Shaviro**

Tout se résume dans l'Esthétique et l'Économie politique. Everything comes down to Aesthetics and Political Economy. Mallarmé's aphorism is my starting point for considering accelerationist aesthetics. I think that aesthetics exists in a special relationship to political economy, precisely because aesthetics is the one thing that cannot be reduced to political economy. Politics, ethics, epistemology, and even ontology are all subject to "determination in the last instance" by the forces and relations of production. Or rather, if ontology is not entirely so determined, this is precisely to the extent that ontology is itself fundamentally aesthetic. If aesthetics doesn't reduce to political economy, but instead subsists in a curious way alongside it, this is because there is something spectral, and curiously insubstantial, about aesthetics.

Kant says two important things about what he calls aesthetic judgment. The first is that any such judgment is necessarily "disinterested." This means that it doesn't relate to my own needs and desires. It is something that I enjoy entirely for its own sake, with no ulterior motives, and with no profit to myself. When I find something to be beautiful, I am "indifferent" to any uses that thing might have; I am even indifferent to whether the thing in question actually exists or not. This is why aesthetic sensation is the one realm of existence that is not reducible to political economy.

Of course, this doesn't mean that I am actually liberated by art from worldly concerns. The constraints of political economy can, and do, get in the way of aesthetics. A starving person is blocked from full aesthetic enjoyment. It is only when I am generally well fed that I enjoy

delicacies of cuisine. And it is only from a position of safety, Kant says, that I can enjoy sublime spectacles of danger. Beauty in itself is inefficacious. But this also means that beauty is in and of itself utopian. For beauty presupposes a liberation from need; it offers us a way out from the artificial scarcity imposed by the capitalist mode of production. However, since we do in fact live under this mode of production, beauty is only a “promise of happiness” (as Stendhal said) rather than happiness itself. Aesthetics, for us, is unavoidably fleeting and spectral. When time is money and labor is 24/7, we don’t have the luxury to be indifferent to the existence of anything. To use a distinction made by China Miéville, art under capitalism at best offers us escapism, rather than the actual prospect of escape.

The second important thing that Kant says about aesthetic judgment is that it is non-cognitive. Beauty cannot be subsumed under any concept. An aesthetic judgment is therefore singular and ungrounded. Aesthetic experience has nothing to do with “information” or “facts.” It cannot be generalized, or transformed into any sort of positive knowledge. How could it, when it doesn’t serve any function or purpose beyond itself? And this, again, is why aesthetic sensation seems spectral to us, and even epiphenomenal. It cannot be extracted, appropriated, or put to work.

Analytic philosophers of mind, frustrated by this impossibility, have spent decades trying to argue that aesthetic experience—or what they more often call “inner sensation,” or the experience of “qualia,” or “consciousness” tout court—doesn’t really exist. As Wittgenstein famously phrased it: “A wheel that can be

turned though nothing else moves with it, is not part of the mechanism.”<sup>2</sup> Later thinkers have transformed Wittgenstein’s puzzlement about inner experience into dogmatic denial that it can be anything other than an illusion. But the basic point still stands. Aesthetics marks the strange persistence of what (to quote Wittgenstein again) “is not a Something, but not a Nothing either!”<sup>3</sup> Aesthetic experience is not part of any cognitive mechanism—even though it is never encountered apart from such a mechanism.

What is the role of aesthetics, then, today? I said that beauty cannot be subsumed; yet we live in a time when financial mechanisms subsume everything there is. Capitalism has moved from “formal subsumption” to “real subsumption.” These terms, originally coined in passing by Marx, have been taken up and elaborated by thinkers in the Italian Autonomist tradition, most notably Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. For Marx, it is labor that is “subsumed” under capital. In formal subsumption, capital appropriates, and extracts a surplus from, labor processes that precede capitalism, or that at the very least are not organized by capitalism. In real subsumption, there is no longer any such autonomy; labor itself is directly organized in capitalist terms (think of the factory and the assembly line).

In Hardt and Negri’s expanded redefinition of “subsumption,” it isn’t just labor that is subsumed by capital, but all aspects of personal and social life. This means that everything in life must now be seen as a kind of labor: we are still working, even when we consume, and even when we are asleep. Affects and feelings, linguistic abilities, modes of cooperation, forms of know-how and of explicit knowledge,



expressions of desire: all these are appropriated and turned into sources of surplus value. We have moved from a situation of extrinsic exploitation, in which capital subordinated labor and subjectivity to its purposes, to a situation of intrinsic exploitation, in which capital directly incorporates labor and subjectivity within its own processes.

This means that labor, subjectivity, and social life are no longer “outside” capital and antagonistic to it. Rather, they are immediately produced as parts of it. They cannot resist the depredations of capital, because they are themselves already functions of capital. This is what leads us to speak of such things as “social capital,” “cultural capital,” and “human capital”: as if our knowledge, our abilities, our beliefs, and our desires had only instrumental value, and needed to be invested. Everything we live and do, everything we experience, is quickly reduced to the status of “dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.”<sup>5</sup> Under a regime of real subsumption, every living person is transformed into a capital stock that must not lie fallow, but has to be profitably invested. The individual is assumed—and indeed compelled—to be, as Foucault puts it, “an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself ... being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings.”

This process of real subsumption is the key to our globalized network society. Everything without exception is subordinated to an economic logic, an economic rationality. Everything must be measured, and made commensurable, through the mediation of some sort of “universal equivalent”: money or

information. Real subsumption is facilitated by—but also provides the impetus for—the revolutionization of computing and communication technologies over the course of the past several decades. Today we live in a digital world, a world of financial derivatives and big data. Virtual reality supplements and enhances physical, “face-to-face” reality—rather than being, as we used to naively think, opposed to it. Neoliberalism is not just the ideology or belief system of this form of capitalism. It is also, more importantly, the concrete way in which the system works. It is an actual set of practices and institutions. It provides both a calculus for judging human actions, and a mechanism for inciting and directing those actions.

What does this mean for aesthetics? The process of real subsumption requires the valuation, and evaluation, of everything: even of that which is spectral, epiphenomenal, and without value. Real subsumption leaves no aspect of life uncolonized. It endeavors to capture, and to put to work, even those things that are uneconomical, or “not part of the mechanism.” Affect and inner experience are not exempt from this process of subsumption, appropriation, and extraction of a surplus. For capitalism now seeks to expropriate surplus value, not just from labor narrowly considered, but from leisure as well; not just from “private property,” but also from what the Autonomists call “the common”; and not just from palpable things, but also from feelings and moods and subjective states. Everything must be marketed and made subject to competition. Everything must be identified as a “brand.”

This leads to a veritable Kantian Antinomy of the aesthetic under late capitalism. Aesthetics must be

simultaneously promoted beyond all measure, and yet reduced to nothing. On the one hand, as Fredric Jameson noted long ago,

aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation.

Or as the free market economist Virginia Postrel cheerily and uncritically puts the same argument, “aesthetics, or styling, has become a unique selling point—on a global basis.”<sup>8</sup> In today’s capitalism everything is aestheticized, and all values are ultimately aesthetic ones.

Yet at the same time, this ubiquitous aestheticization is also a radical extirpation of the aesthetic. It’s not just that sensations and feelings are trivialized when they are packaged for sale and indexed upon the most minute variations of product lines. It’s also that the two most crucial qualities of the aesthetic according to Kant—that it is disinterested, and that it is non-cognitive—are made to vanish, or explained away. Aesthetic sensations and feelings are no longer disinterested, because they have been recast as markers of personal identity: revealed preferences, brands, lifestyle markers, objects of adoration by fans. Aesthetic sensations and feelings are also ruthlessly cognized: for it is only insofar as they are known and objectively described, or transformed into data, that they can be exploited as forms of labor, and marketed as fresh experiences and

exciting lifestyle choices. Ironically, then, it is precisely in a time when “affective labor” is privileged over material production (Hardt and Negri), and when marketing is increasingly concerned with impalpable commodities like moods, experiences, and “atmospheres” (Biehl-Missal and Saren), that we enter into the regime of a fully “cognitive capitalism” (Moulier Boutang), guided by the findings of cognitive psychology and cognitive philosophy of mind.<sup>10</sup>

It is under the conditions of real subsumption that accelerationism first becomes a possible aesthetic strategy. It is a fairly recent invention. In the twentieth century, before the developments that I have recounted, the most vibrant art was all about transgression. Modernist artists sought to shatter taboos, to scandalize audiences, and to pass beyond the limits of bourgeois “good taste.” From Stravinsky to the Dadaists, from Bataille to the makers of Deep Throat, and from Charlie Parker to Elvis to Guns N’ Roses, the aim was always to stun audiences by pushing things further than they had ever been pushed before. Offensiveness was a measure of success. Transgression was simply and axiomatically taken to be subversive.

But this is no longer the case today. Neoliberalism has no problem with excess. Far from being subversive, transgression today is entirely normative. Nobody is really offended by Marilyn Manson or Quentin Tarantino. Every supposedly “transgressive” act or representation expands the field of capital investment. It opens up new territories to appropriate, and jump-starts new processes from which to extract surplus value. What else could happen, at a time when leisure and enjoyment have themselves

become forms of labor? Business and marketing practices today are increasingly focused upon novelty and innovation. More rapid turnover is one way to combat what Marx called the tendential fall of the rate of profit. Far from being subversive or oppositional, transgression is the actual motor of capitalist expansion today: the way that it renews itself in orgies of “creative destruction.”

In other words, political economy today is driven by resonating loops of positive feedback. Finance operates according to a transgressive cultural logic of manic innovation, and ever-ramifying metalevels of self-referential abstraction. This easily reaches the point where financial derivatives, for instance, float in a hyperspace of pure contingency, free of indexical relation to any “underlying” whatsoever.<sup>10</sup> At the same time that it floats off into digital abstraction, however, neoliberalism also operates directly on our bodies. Data are extracted from everything we feel, think, and do. These data are appropriated and consolidated, and then packaged and sold back to us.

In such a climate, nothing is more prized than excess. The further out you go, the more there is to accumulate and capitalize upon. Everything is organized in terms of thresholds, intensities, and modulations.<sup>11</sup> As Robin James puts it, “For the neoliberal subject, the point of life is to ‘push it to the limit,’ closing in ever more narrowly on the point of diminishing returns ... The neoliberal subject has an insatiable appetite for more and more novel differences.” The point is always to reach “the edge of burnout”: to pursue a line of

intensification, and yet to be able to pull back from this edge, treating it as an investment, and recuperating the intensity as profit. As James says, “privileged people get to lead the most intense lives, lives of maximized (individual and social) investment and maximized return.”<sup>12</sup>

This is why transgression no longer works as a subversive aesthetic strategy. Or more precisely, transgression works all too well as a strategy for amassing both “cultural capital” and actual capital; and thereby it misses what I have been calling the spectrality and epiphenomenality of the aesthetic. Transgression is now fully incorporated into the logic of political economy. It testifies to the way that, under the regime of real subsumption, “there is nothing, no ‘naked life,’ no external standpoint ... there is no longer an ‘outside’ to power.”<sup>13</sup> Where transgressive modernist art sought to break free from social constraints, and thereby to attain some radical Outside, accelerationist art remains entirely immanent, modulating its intensities in place. As Robin James puts it, in neoliberal art, “life’s intensity, like a sine wave, closes in on a limit without ever reaching it.”<sup>14</sup>

Accelerationism was a political strategy before it became an aesthetic one. Benjamin Noys, who coined the term, traces it back to a certain “ultraleftist” turn in French political and social thought in the 1970s. Noys especially cites Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), Lyotard’s *Libidinal Economy* (1974), and Baudrillard’s *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976). These works can all be read as desperate responses to the failures of political radicalism in the 1960s (and especially, in France, to the failure of the May 1968 uprising). In their different



ways, these texts all argue that, since there is no Outside to the capitalist system, capitalism can only be overcome from within, by what Noys calls “an exotic variant of *la politique du pire*: if capitalism generates its own forces of dissolution then the necessity is to radicalise capitalism itself: the worse the better.”<sup>15</sup> By pushing capitalism’s own internal tensions (or what Marx called its “contradictions”) to extremes, accelerationism hopes to reach a point where capitalism explodes and falls apart.

Evidently, this strategy has not worn well in the decades following the 1970s. Indeed, it has become a classic example of how we must be careful what we wish for—because we just might get it. Starting in the 1980s, “accelerationist” policies were in fact put into effect by the likes of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Deng Xiaoping. The full savagery of capitalism was unleashed, no longer held back by the checks and balances of financial regulation and social welfare. At the same time, what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello call the “new spirit of capitalism” successfully took up the subjective demands of the 1960s and 1970s and made them its own.<sup>16</sup> Neoliberalism now offers us things like personal autonomy, sexual freedom, and individual “self-realization”; though of course, these often take on the sinister form of precarity, insecurity, and continual pressure to perform. Neoliberal capitalism today lures us with the prospect of living “the most intense lives, lives of maximized (individual and social) investment and maximized return” (James), while at the same time it privatizes, expropriates, and extracts a surplus from everything in sight.

In other words, the problem with accelerationism as a political strategy has to do with the fact that—like it or not—we are all accelerationists now. It has become increasingly clear that crises and contradictions do not lead to the demise of capitalism. Rather, they actually work to promote and advance capitalism, by providing it with its fuel. Crises do not endanger the capitalist order; rather, they are occasions for the dramas of “creative destruction” by means of which, phoenix-like, capitalism repeatedly renews itself. We are all caught within this loop. And accelerationism in philosophy or political economy offers us, at best, an exacerbated awareness of how we are trapped.

By all accounts, the situation is far worse today than it was in the 1990s, let alone the 1970s. Indeed, we have moved with alarming rapidity from the neoliberal triumphalism of the 1990s to our current sense—in the wake of the financial collapse of 2008—that neoliberalism is entirely defunct as an ideology. Unfortunately, the intellectual discredit into which it has fallen does not impede its functioning in the slightest. Its programs and processes remain in full force; if anything, at the present moment they are being pushed further than ever before. The system under which we live refuses to die, no matter how oppressive and dysfunctional it is. And we double this systemic incapacity with our own inability to imagine any sort of alternative. Such is the dilemma of what Mark Fisher calls “capitalist realism”: the sad and cynical sense that “it’s easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.”<sup>17</sup>

In this situation, what can it mean to propose an accelerationist aesthetic? Can it turn out any differently than transgression? Can it offer us anything

other, or anything more, than the actually existing accelerationism of our politico-economic condition? The aesthetic case for accelerationism is perhaps best expressed by something that Deleuze wrote in an entirely different context:

It often happens that Nietzsche comes face to face with something sickening, ignoble, disgusting. Well, Nietzsche thinks it's funny, and he would add fuel to the fire if he could. He says: keep going, it's still not disgusting enough. Or he says: excellent, how disgusting, what a marvel, what a masterpiece, a poisonous flower, finally the "human species is getting interesting."

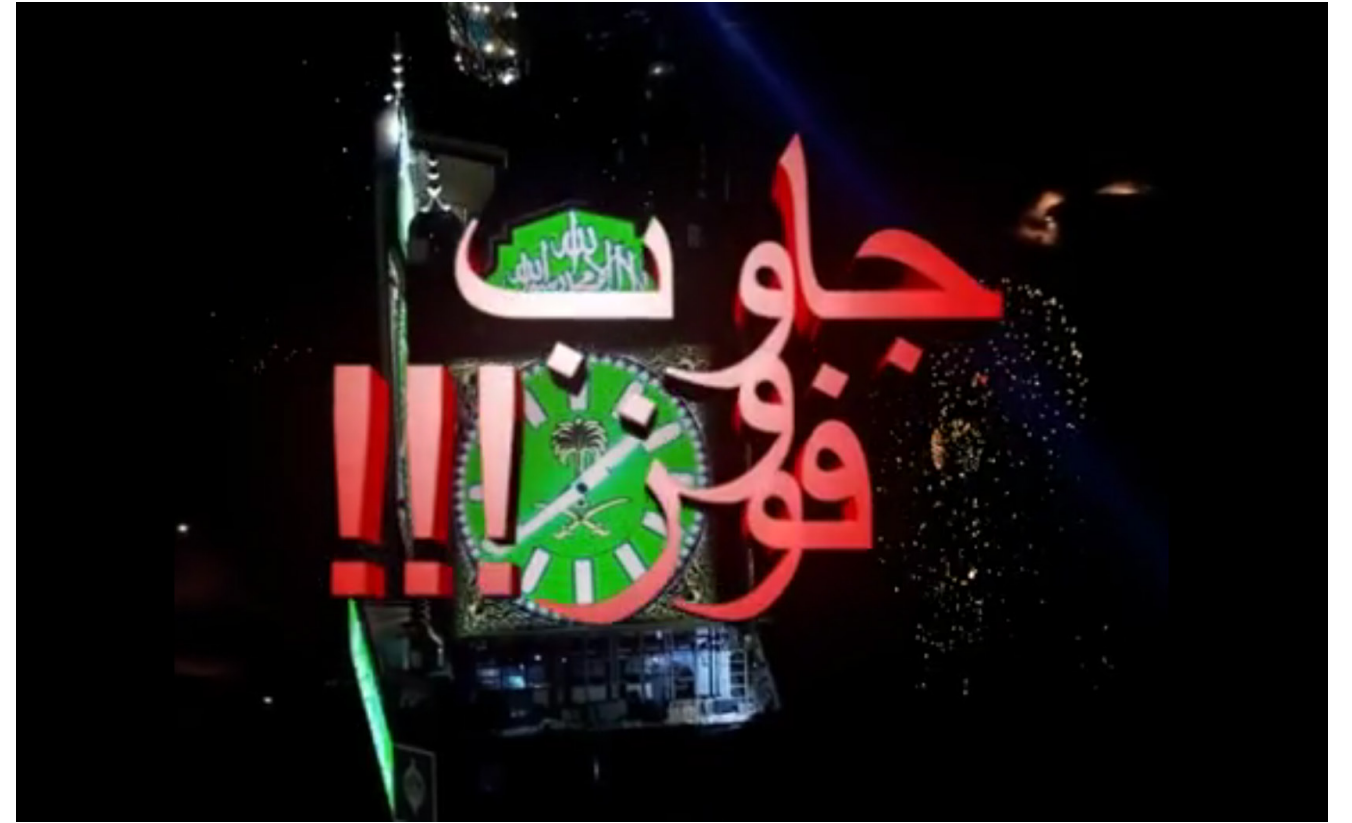
I do not think that this is an accurate evocation of Nietzsche. For Nietzsche does not really have this sort of attitude towards what he sees as the "decadent" bourgeois culture of his own time. Rather, Nietzsche is most often overwhelmed with disgust at what he sees of the world around him. His epic struggle against his own disgust, and his heroic efforts to overcome it, are at the center of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The shrill and stridently repetitious tone of Nietzsche's praise of cheerfulness and laughter indicates that these attitudes did not come easily to him. Nor does he tend to adopt them when confronted with the "sickening, ignoble, disgusting" spectacles of his own culture and society.

Nonetheless, I think that the attitude described by Deleuze is a good fit for accelerationist art today. Intensifying the horrors of contemporary capitalism does not lead them to explode; but it does offer us a kind of satisfaction and relief, by telling us that we have finally hit bottom, finally realized the worst. This is what really animates accelerationist movies like Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor's *Gamer*, or Alex Cox's *I'm a Juvenile Delinquent, Jail Me!*. Such works

may be critical, but they also revel in the sleaze and exploitation that they so eagerly put on display. Thanks to their enlightened cynicism—their finding all these "sickening, ignoble, disgusting" conditions funny—they do not offer us the false hope that piling on the worst that neoliberal capitalism has to offer will somehow help to lead us beyond it.

The difference between this aesthetic accelerationism, and the politico-economic accelerationism analyzed by Noys, is that the former does not claim any efficacy for its own operations.

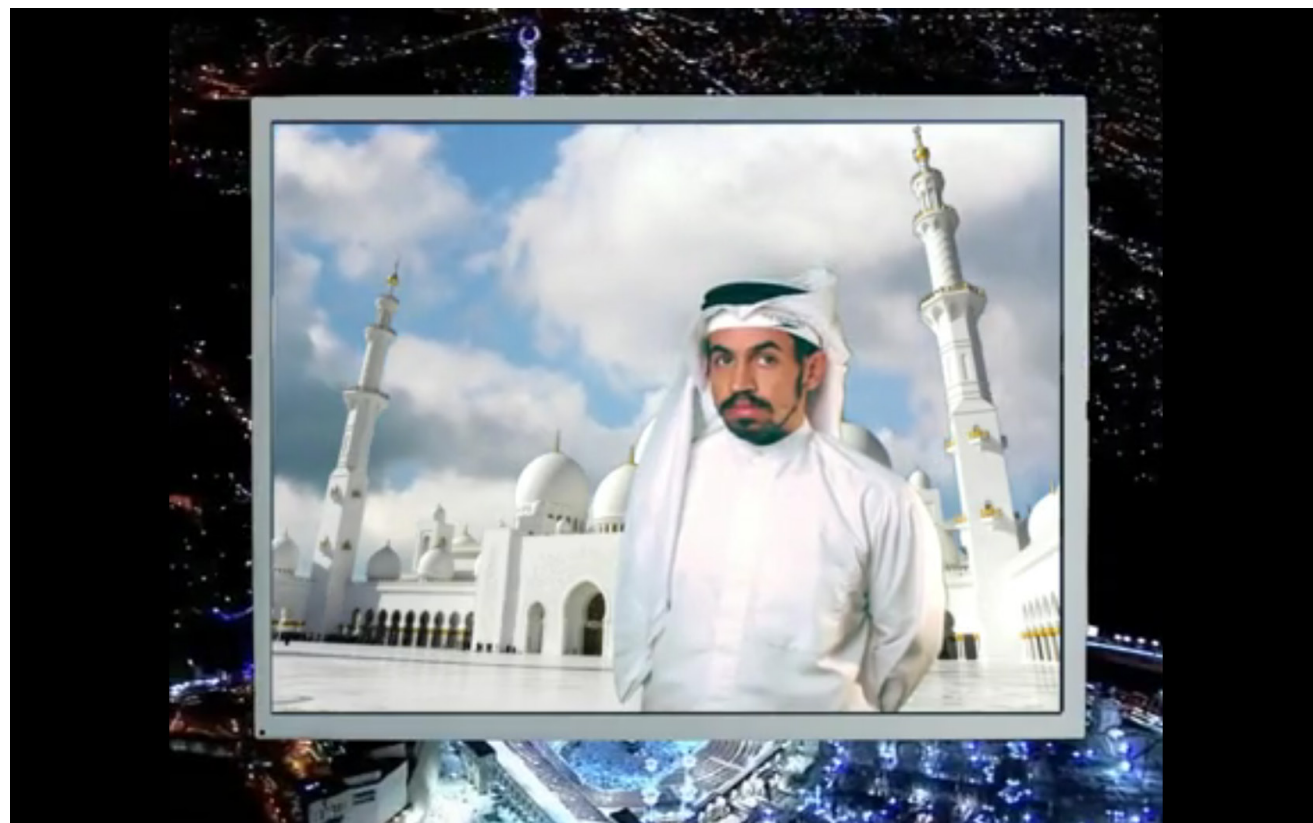
It does not even deny that its own intensities serve the aim of extracting surplus value and accumulating profit. The evident complicity and bad faith of these works, their reveling in the base passions that Nietzsche disdained, and their refusal to sustain outrage or claim the moral high ground: all these postures help to move us towards the disinterest and epiphenomenality of the aesthetic. So I don't make any political claims for this sort of accelerationist art—indeed, I would undermine my whole argument were I to do so. But I do want to claim a certain aesthetic inefficacy for them—which is something that works of transgression and negativity cannot hope to attain today.



2013 (video Stills) ,اناعم ت ح بر !!!

Abdullah Al-Mutairi





26



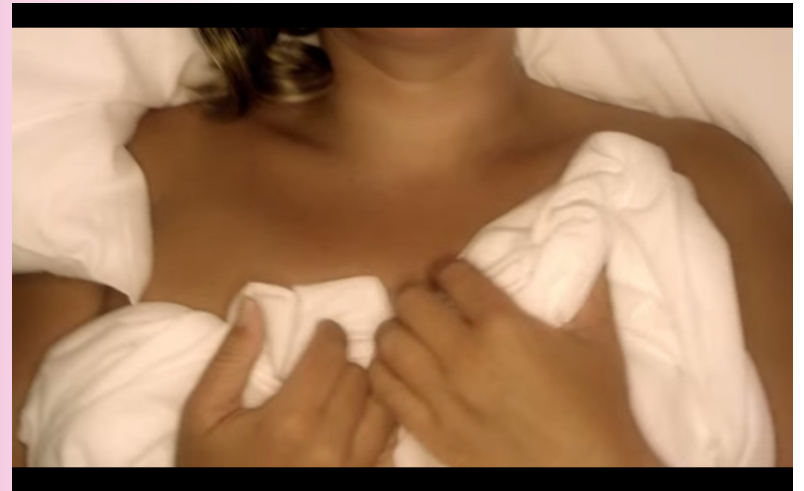
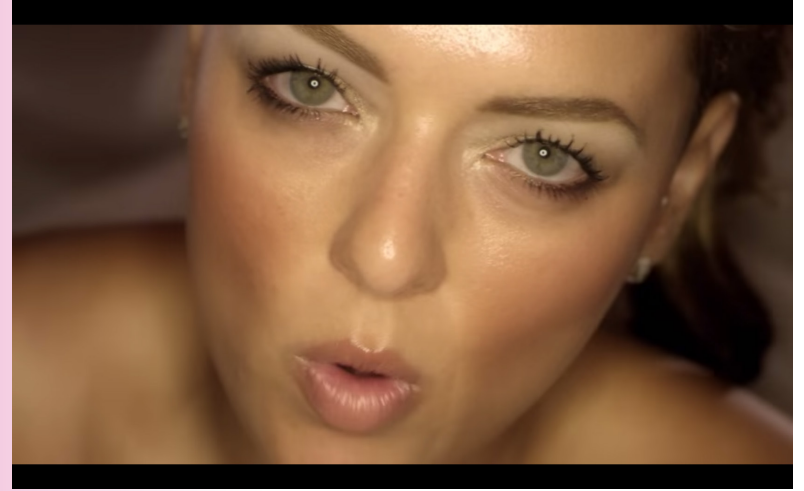
27



Lauren Devine

END

Try Sexual, 2013 (Video Stills)









This is How We Do Dubai,  
2012 (Video Stills)



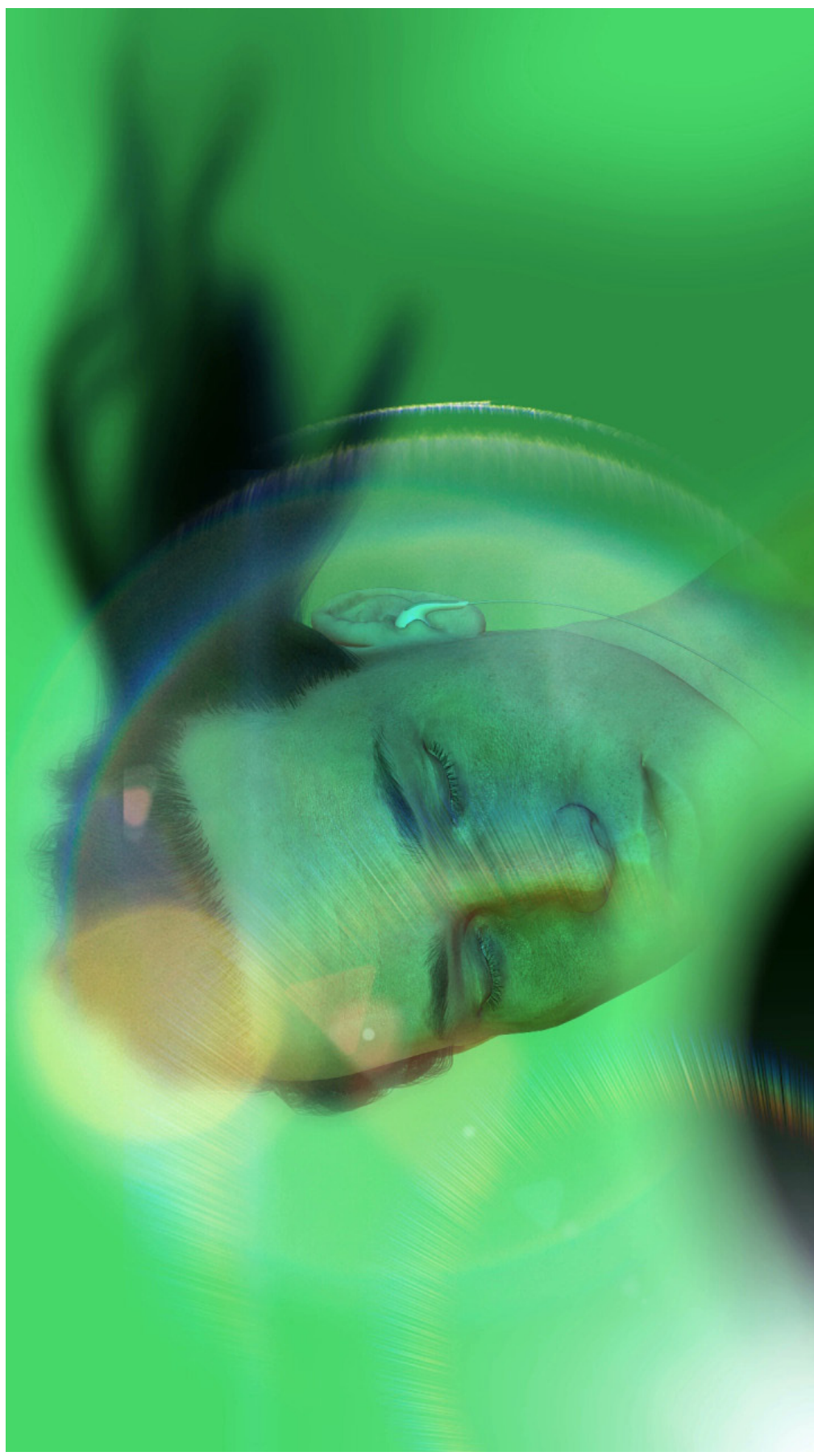
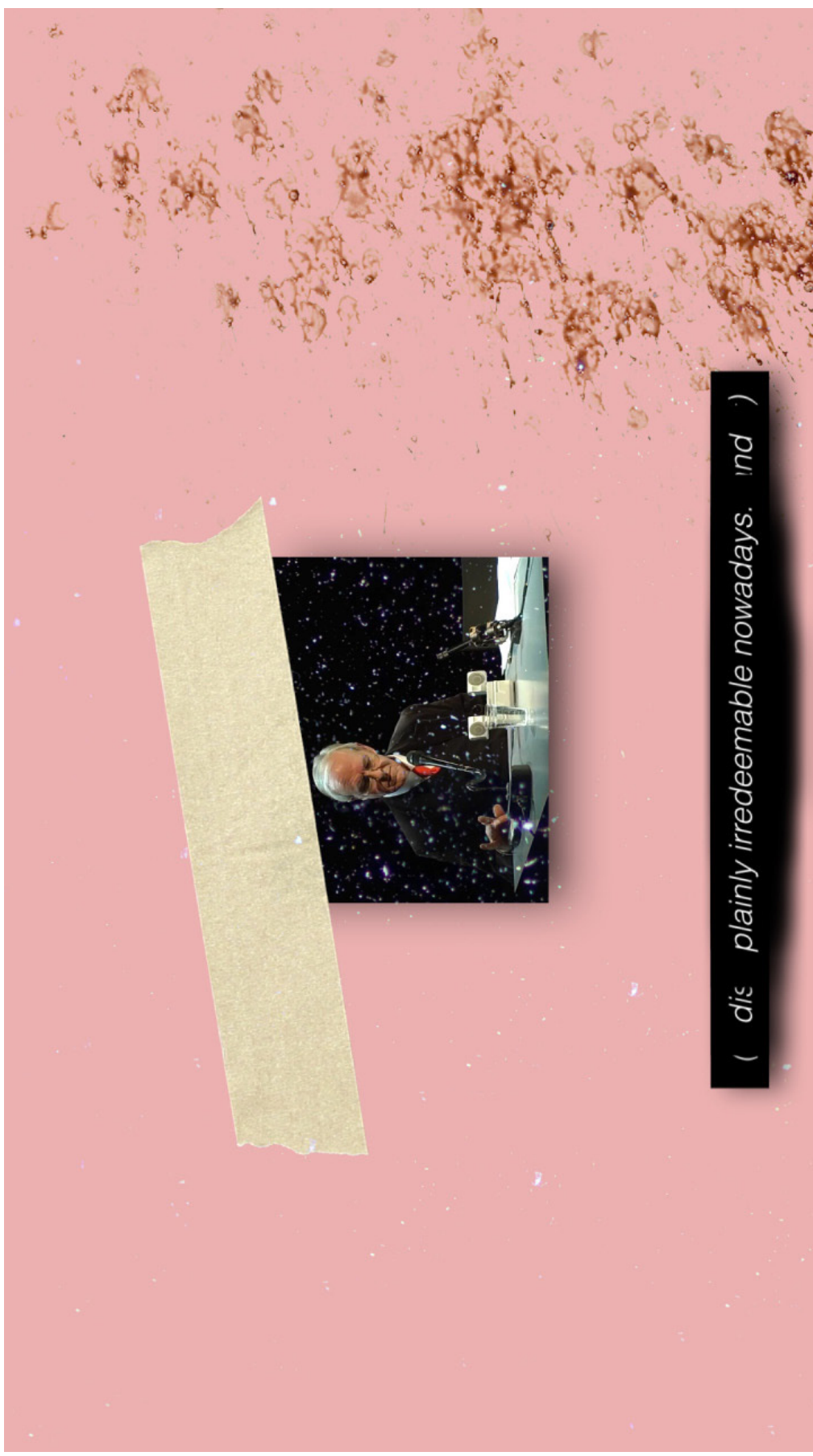
Ed Atkins















## Negative Aesthetics: Pasolini Versus Acceleration

I have to start by partially amending the topic of my presentation today, which will be weighted slightly more towards an attempt to define the concept of 'negative aesthetics' in opposition to recent debates on 'accelerationism' and 'accelerationist aesthetic' than on an extensive discussion of Pasolini's late work. In other words, I will try to put in productive tension with each other two aesthetic strategies of resistance to neoliberalism which are 'accelerationism' and 'negativity'. Before starting, I would also like to contextualize this paper within the framework of my current research project which is entitled 'Negative Aesthetics'.

Put simply, the aim of this on-going research project is to revisit and ultimately reconceptualize the relationship between art and politics beyond the schema Critical Theory versus Cultural Studies, and in light of recent academic work on neoliberalism. The way in which I read together the work on neoliberalism of political philosophers like Wendy Brown, Étienne Balibar or Giorgio Agamben and of queer theorists like Leo Bersani, Jasbir Puar and Liz Povinelli among others is based on their shared recognition of the increased difficulty, in late capitalist societies, to imagine models of relationality, ways of thinking and acting which challenge that sort of "regime of the necessary" which is an intrinsic element of neoliberal governmentality. What interests me is the way in which this kind of neoliberal ontology affects and influences the aesthetic sphere, which I under-

stand in Rancière's definition as 'the distribution of the sensible', or 'the specific mode of being of whatever falls within the domain of art' (p. 10). In this regard, though I believe that the role of art cannot be thought in any way as external to the economic order, I am interested in exploring new possibilities of conceptualizing the importance of art's critical edge.

In order to frame what I think remain at stake in the under-theorized relationship between aesthetics and neoliberal politics, let me start by quoting a couple of passages from Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval's *The New Way of the World: On Neoliberal Society*, published in English in 2013 and probably the most extensive account of neoliberalism so far:

Neo-liberalism is not merely destructive of rules, institutions and rights. It is also productive of certain kinds of social relations, certain ways of living, certain subjectivities. In other words, at stake in neoliberalism is nothing more, nor less, than the form of our existence [...]. For more than a third of a century, this existential norm has presided over public policy, governed global economic relations, transformed society, and reshaped subjectivity. (p. 8)

Neo-liberalism, far from being an ideology or economic policy, is firstly and fundamentally a rationality, and as such tends to structure and organize not only the action of rulers, but also the conduct of the ruled. The principal characteristic of neo-liberal rationality is the generalization of competition as a behavioural norm and the enterprise as a model of subjectivation. (p. 9)

I think that this definition of neoliberalism as a global rationality rises important questions for those of us studying aesthetic works. Some of the questions that I have been asking myself are: In what way does the neoliberal rationality affect the aesthetic sphere? Can we conceptualize the existence of a neoliberal aesthetic, and reversely, of an anti-neoliberal aesthetic — an aesthetic which reacts to the neoliberal thrust for acceleration, normalisation and consensus? Furthermore: how do aesthetic works relate to the neoliberal production of relationalities and forms of life? Do they merely reproduce such sovereign dynamics or do they challenge them? If neoliberalism is not simply an ideology but a proper rationality which structures the action of both rulers and ruled, how does the aesthetic regime react to the supposed biopolitical colonization of the subject? To synthesise, the broader issue which hangs over this project is how to move beyond a certain disinterest for art's critical edge without falling in the modernist trap — without appealing to a transcendent and idealistic idea of the aesthetic as something 'authentic' which resists to the inauthentic culture industry.

A good starting point is to recognize that the absorption of the aesthetic in the economic does not occur in any facile or docile way, in that the aesthetic, together with the sexual, is one the few human activities which ontologically resist to the process of total subsumption into the economic regime. This problem has recently been at the center of the debate on accelerationism and 'accelerationist aes-

thetics', which I would like to briefly introduce here. Stimulated by Benjamin Noys's book *The Persistence of the Negative* (2010), various academic groups gravitating around the Historical Materialism network in the UK have started, since 2010, to organize conference panels, workshops and research seminars on the notion of accelerationism. If you allow me to simplify the matter, accelerationism denies the viability of oppositional and negative attitudes towards capitalism, and affirms that only by accelerating its fragmentary, and self-destructing tendencies we will be able to finally overcome it.

In order to frame better what is at stake here let me read the passage from Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* which led to Noys's critical formulation of the term 'accelerationism':

But which is the revolutionary path? Is there one? To withdraw from the world market, as Samir Amin advises Third World countries to do, in a curious revival of the fascist 'economic solution'? Or might it be to go in the opposite direction? To go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and a practice of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to 'accelerate the process', as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven't seen anything yet. (pp. 239-40).

The possibility of a political revolution here is dislocated from a position outside the capitalist system and relocated within the

folds of capitalism. Accelerationism is conceptualized as a dynamic of replication of the market's movement which by intensifying its de-territorializing features will bring its dissolution. The attempt to shift the attention from the politics of accelerationism to its aesthetics was first undertaken by Steven Shaviro in his *Post-Cinematic Affect* (2010), before becoming one of the main concerns for the editorial board of the online journal *e-flux*, which in 2013 published a special issue entitled 'Accelerationist Aesthetics', with contributions from Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, Patricia McCormack and Shaviro himself, among others. Here I quote two passages, one from the conclusion of Shaviro's book, the other from the editorial introduction to the *e-flux* special issue:

accelerationism is a useful, productive, and even necessary aesthetic strategy today — for all that is dubious as a political one. The project of cognitive and affective mapping seeks, at the very least, to explore the contours of the prison we find ourselves in. This is a crucial task at any time; but all the more so today, when that prison has no outside, but is continuous with the world as a whole. (Shaviro, p. 168)

Accelerationism aims to rev up crisis and render it unsustainable, to pipe even more energy into processes of social fracture, to exacerbate the fragmentation of experience, and to intensify sensorial overload and subjective dispersal in order to drive masochistically toward an incompatibility between capitalism and forms of excess it can't accommodate. (Gaen Moreno, editorial introduction on 'Accelerationist Aesthetics', *e-flux*, June 2013).

As these quotations suggest, 'accelerationist aesthetics' aim to challenge neoliberal fundamentalism by saving 'whatever critical edge art production can still muster' (Gaen Moreno). Before addressing the implications of this argument, let me just linger for a couple of minutes on one of Shaviro's examples of aesthetic accelerationism, which is the film *Boarding Gate*, released in 2007, and directed by Olivier Assayas. The film, which stars Asia Argento and Michael Madsen as lead actors, is shot in Paris and Hong Kong, and aims to offer us a picture of that social class living at the threshold between illegal activities and global financial capitalism. The main characters are Sandra, a former prostitute and a drug dealer and Miles, a wealthy businessman who is trying to sell the company that he owns and relocate his activities somewhere else in Asia. The clip that we are going to see shows Sandra inside Miles's 'glassy and glossy' flat:

Sandra, this 'post-cinematic diva', is a damaged subject which is trapped in the world of late capitalism and is described by the director as the representative of the impossibility to find a way out of it. She acts quickly, and, in order to survive, does what powerful men around her ask her to do. This convulsive situation is replicated stylistically in the film through the almost complete absence of still shots, and by the constant oscillation of the camera, which alternates rapid vectorial movements with the use of rack focus shots. As Shaviro writes, 'the camera is always restlessly moving, zooming in and out, reframing, panning



laterally and horizontally' (p. 65). This underlines a certain willingness to adhere to a situation which we are pushed to believe as disorienting and inescapable at the same time. The profilmic is indeed dense, hyper-layered, difficult to frame and constantly reflected and reflected by glasses and mirrors. The characters are constantly moving, planning plots and counter-plots, and operating some sort of laborious activity. The indexical quality of *Boarding Gate*'s image could thus be defined as glutinous and hyperactive, in that it seems impossible to get out from the sticky web of relations inherent in the neoliberal setting that it captures. For Shaviro, all these characteristics make of *Boarding Gate* a paradigmatic example of 'accelerationist aesthetics', in that they offer us the possibility 'to endure - and perhaps also to negotiate — the "unthinkable complexity" and the unrepresentable immensity and intensity of "the world space of multinational capital' (p. 170).

What I find interesting and worth dwelling on in the notion of accelerationist aesthetics is the attempt to redefine the political meaning of the work of art. However, what I would contest is the modality in which this operation is carried out. What this notion seems indeed to assume is that 'the aesthetic regime' is completely subsumed by neoliberal biopolitics, and thus that art's critical edge — the political potential of the aesthetic — is directly connected to its capacity to adhere to the accelerationist tendencies of capitalism. This is not an easy issue to deal with because once we take seriously the legacies of French poststructuralism and of

Italian autonomist thought, then it becomes very hard to think of the aesthetic as something not completely absorbed, or subsumed by the social structure. The radical 'immanence' of Deleuze and Guattari, of Negri and Hardt, seems to lead us to a purely positive conception of the aesthetic, in which artworks — high-brow, middle-brow or low-brow, it doesn't matter — are the products of a creative 'general intellect' which, once channelled in the right way, can contribute to free us from the chains and the discontents of late-capitalism. Using Marx's language, here we have the collapse of the superstructure onto society's base structure, or, in Negri and Hardt's terminology we have the complete subsumption of the aesthetic sphere within the biopolitical sphere. Aesthetic work is not just labour, but it's biopoliticized labour. In this account art can only affirm the structure from which it stems, never questioning it. With all the consequences in terms of conception of subjectivity, identity and forms of relationality and being.

The aim of my project on negative aesthetics is coterminous and at the same time oppositional to the debate on accelerationism. While it emphasizes the need to reconceptualize the relationship between art and politics in relation to neoliberalism, it also favours negative and inoperative aesthetic strategies instead of affirmative and operative ones. In an attempt to read together the notion of negativity and anti-relationality as elaborated by queer theorists Lee Edelman and Leo Bersani, and Giorgio Agamben's concepts of inoperativity, impotentiality and destituent power,

I investigate aesthetic strategies which react by subtraction to the neoliberal 'regime of the necessary'.

In this discourse Pasolini's post-68 work occupies an important position, in that it can be read as an attempt to imagine strategies of interruption and suspension of the progressive temporality of late capitalism. In this regard, I would like to spend the last couple of minutes by outlining the idea of a 'negative aesthetics' through a commentary of *Porcile*'s last scene.

*Porcile* was released in 1969, in the aftermath of the '68 protests, and can be conceptually described as a film about the impossibility to escape sovereign forms of power in advanced capitalist society. This impossibility materializes in the incapacity of the main character — called Julian — to enter history either on the side of the fathers, or in that of the students' protests. Instead of demonstrating with the students or conforming to his father's will, Julian decides not to choose any 'necessary' option and favours a masochistic strategy of disappearance in the pigsty, which is located at the threshold of the forest that surrounds his father's villa.

If *Boarding Gate* is characterized by a constant movement of the camera, which operates very laboriously by chasing the hyper-accelerated movements of the neoliberal subject, *Porcile* is characterized by a lack of labour and of movement — in a few words here the camera is almost inoperative, it stubbornly lingers on the image, it tries to excavate it in order to look for potential flaws and voids in the surface of things. In this regard, Joan Copjec's point that in *Salò*, or

the 120 of *Sodom* '[t]he balanced compositions [...] remove every bit of dynamism from the image' (p. 225) seems perfectly fitting as a description of *Porcile*'s aesthetics as well. The lack of energy, the loss of kinesis of the indexical quality of the image, the geometrical symmetry of the scenes, and the soberness of the acting style are aesthetic strategies which contribute to render in-operative the affirmative and accelerationist tendency which are intrinsic in the neoliberal temporality. In this regard the indexical quality of *Porcile*'s image is antithetical to the glutinous one of *Boarding Gate* because it dissolves and congeals forms of haptic attachment into a frozen aesthetics. It de-activates and disconnects the accelerated temporality intrinsic in the neoliberal order instead of reproducing it. In other words, *Porcile*, like *Salò*, is a paradigmatic example of 'negative aesthetics' in that it breaks any kind of negotiation with the regime of the necessary and the accelerative tendencies of neoliberalism, rather providing us with a sort of anti-relational politics, which finds its symbol in Julian's decision to abandon himself to the pigsty.

The discursive traces of this anti-relational ethos of *Porcile* can be found in Julian's final monologue:

Io devo entrare nella vita, per evitarla nei suoi aspetti più meschini, quelli sociali, quelli a cui io sono legato prima per nascita... e poi per obbligo politico, conservazione o rivolta [...] Che cosa resta? Tutto ciò che non mi appartiene. Che non è ereditario, o possesso padronale, o naturale dominio almeno dell'intelletto: ma,

semplicemente, un dono'. Among the things that he lists are 'La natura, i contadini, l'orgasmo, i diversi colori del mondo, la luce, il porcile. (p. 625).

I have to immerse myself in life, in order to avoid its most miserable aspects, the social ones, those that I belong to first by birth, and secondly for political obligations, for conservation or insurrection. What is left? Everything that is not mine. Everything which is not hereditary, or paternal ownership, or natural dominion of the intellect: but simply, a gift. [...] Nature, peasants, orgasm, the different colours of the world, the light, the pigsty].

Julian's masochistic and suicidal decision to be eaten by the pigs appears therefore as an act which undoes and de-activates the 'regime of the necessary' of neoliberalism, and which is here captured through the image of the merging between old and new capitalism (represented by the merging between Julian's father and Herditz's companies). Julian's abandonment of his social position and his subsequent sexual abandonment to the pigsty makes of him a figure of queer non-relationality that materializes in his refusal to be part of the normative relational system that he belongs to by birth. Let's just focus a little bit more on Julian's words:

questo segreto mi immerge nella vita. Sì, perché senza la vita, esso non potrebbe avere luogo, io non potrei avere rifugi, clandestinità, pretesti, silenzi e tutte queste cose' (p. 623).

[This secret submerges me in life. Yes, because without life, it could not take place, I could not have refuge, secrecy, excuses, silences and all of these things].

Or again:

cercavo, lungo l'orlo del marciapiede, e lungo quelle pozzanghere, piene d'una luce di altri luoghi di altre vite [...] qualcosa' (p. 625).

[I was looking for — along the border of the sidewalk, and along those puddles, full of a kind of light coming from other places and other lives — something].

This emphasis on refugees, silences and voids, this insistence on undergoing a quest for 'something' which can potentially break through the dense fabric of the neoliberal society reveals Julian's antisocial ethics. In other terms, Julian's abandonment to the pigsty represents a way of rediscovering the self outside the self which recalls Lee Edelman's *sinthomes* or Leo Bersani's anti-social hero. While anti-sociality could be read in terms of pure individualism — as it has often been done in relation to the anti-social debate in queer theory — I think it would be more interesting to explore the possibility of conceiving it in terms of a strategy which might lead to the de-activation of the reproductive and progressivist order of neoliberalism. Bersani's anti-relationality converges then with Agamben's definition of inoperativity.

In Agamben's own words 'Inoperativity does not mean inertia, but names an operation that deactivates and renders works (of economy, of religion, of language, etc) inoperative. [...] This essential inoperativity of man is not to be understood as the cessation of all activity, but as an activity that consists in making human works and productions inoperative, opening them to a new possible use'

Julian's abandonment to the pigsty and Porcile's frozen imagery appear thus as visual signatures of this anti-relational inoperativity which converge in Pasolini's aesthetics as modalities of de-activation of sovereign models of relationality and subjectivity — and this is a possibility which will always remain unthinkable unless we allow ourselves to think in subtractive rather than affirmative ways. To conclude, Porcile's negative aesthetics and Julian's anti-sociality keep open the idea of an outside even when it seems unconceivable to think about an outside, they point to the existence of 'something' still impotent and inoperative which awaits to become potential and operative, as in a weak and nonteleological form of messianism.

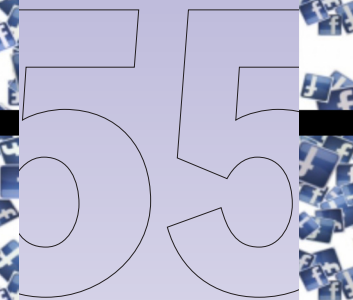
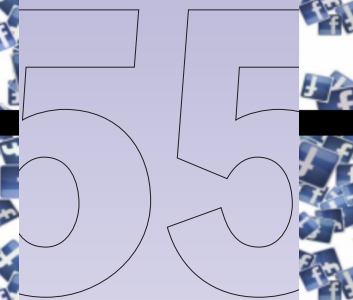


# Sarah Abu Abdallah



54

## Hide From Timeline #1, 2014 (Video Stills)



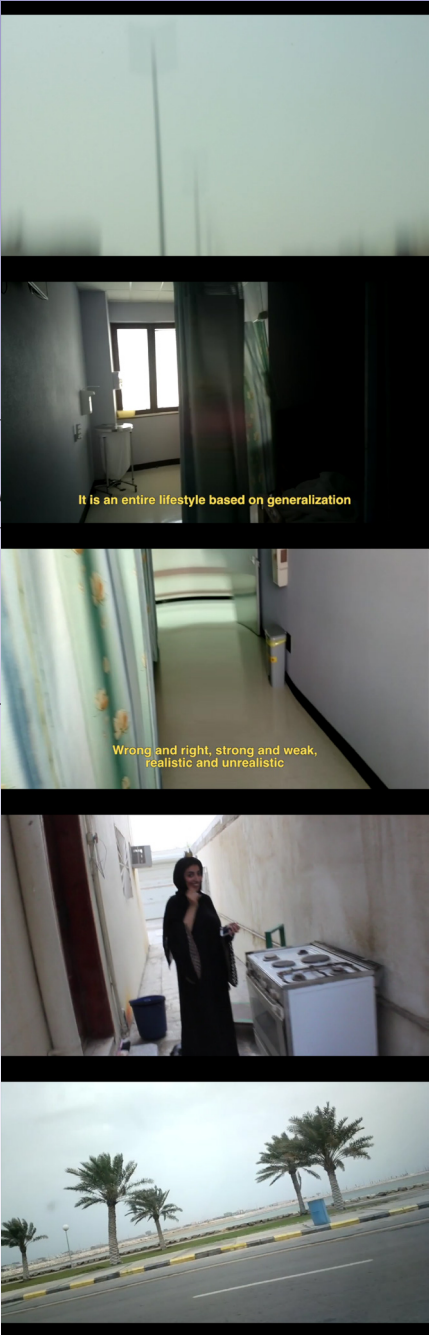


Sarah Abu Abdallah

Sarah Abu Abdallah

The Salad Zone,  
2014 (Video Stills)

56



57



Saudi Automobile,  
2012 (Video Stills)

58



33



**JOSH KLINE**



JOSH KLINE



Packing for Peanuts Head with Knit Cap  
2014

JOSH KLINE



Packing for Peanuts Head with Knit Cap  
2015





It's clean, it's natural, we promise  
2011



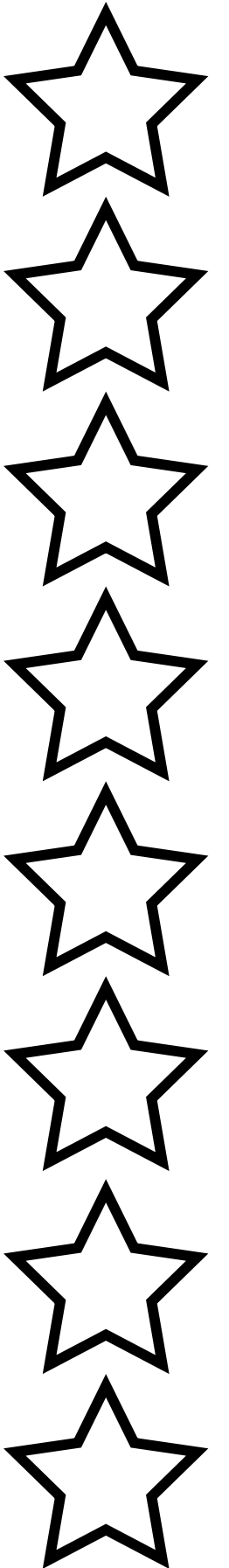
Share the Health (Assorted Probiotic Hand Gels)  
2012



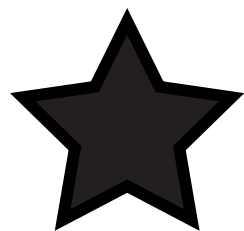
# The Critique of Judgement : Critique of Aesthetic Judgement

(Of the Judgement of Taste: Moment of Quality.)

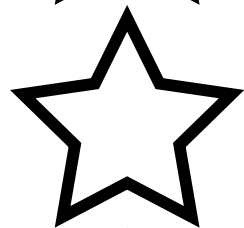
Immanuel Kant





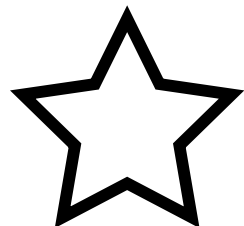
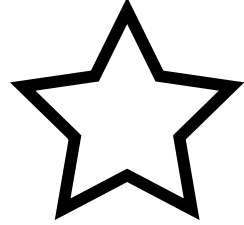
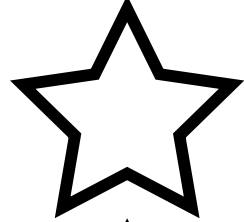
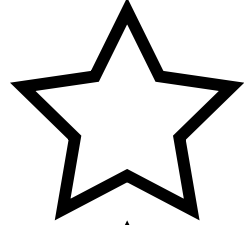
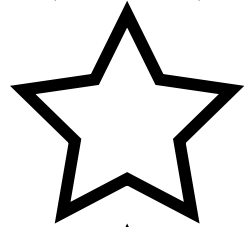


# 1. The judgement of taste is aesthetic.

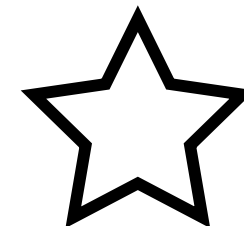
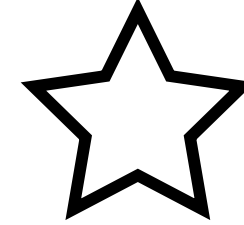
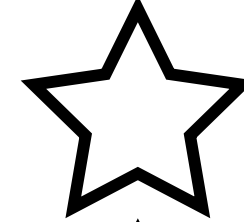
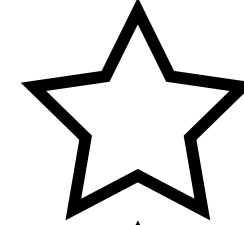
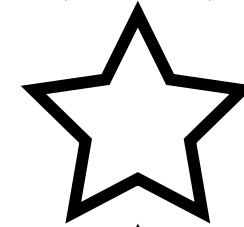
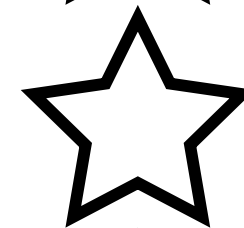
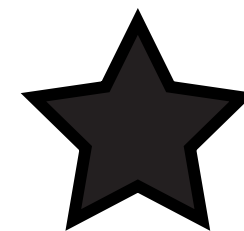


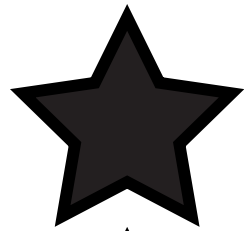
If we wish to discern whether anything is beautiful or not, we do not refer the representation of it to the object by means of understanding with a view to cognition, but by means of the imagination (acting perhaps in conjunction with understanding) we refer the representation to the subject and its feeling of pleasure or displeasure. The judgement of taste, therefore, is not a cognitive judgement, and so not logical, but is aesthetic which means that it is one whose determining ground cannot be other than subjective. Every reference of representations is capable of being objective, even that of sensations (in which case it signifies the real in an empirical representation). The one exception to this is the feeling of pleasure or displeasure. This denotes nothing in the object, but is a feeling which the subject has of itself and of the manner in which it is affected by the representation.

To apprehend a regular and appropriate building with one's cognitive faculties, be

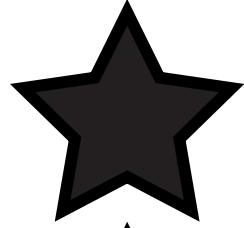


the mode of representation clear or confused, is quite a different thing from being conscious of this representation with an accompanying sensation of delight. Here the representation is referred wholly to the subject, and what is more to its feeling of life under the name of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure and this forms the basis of a quite separate faculty of discriminating and estimating, that contributes nothing to knowledge. All it does is to compare the given representation in the subject with the entire faculty of representations of which the mind is conscious in the feeling of its state. Given representations in a judgement may be empirical, and so aesthetic; but the judgement which is pronounced by their means is logical, provided it refers them to the object. Conversely, be the given representations even rational, but referred in a judgement solely to the subject (to its feeling), they are always to that extent aesthetic.

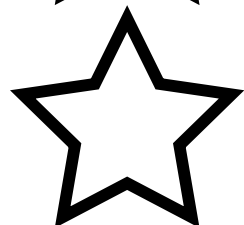
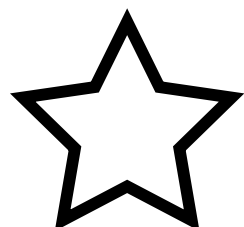
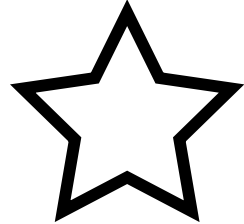
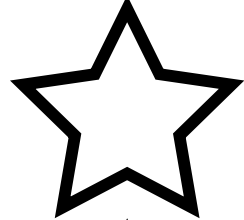
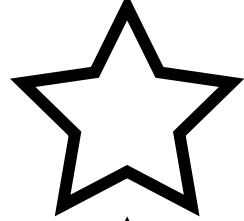
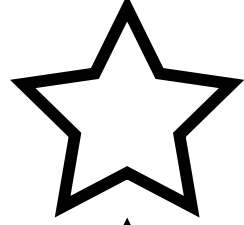




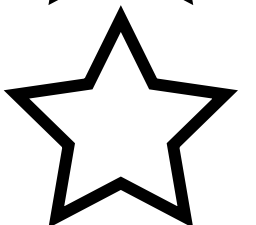
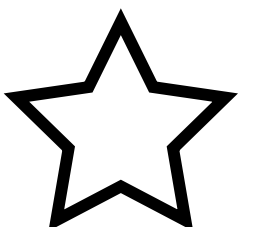
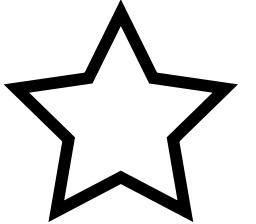
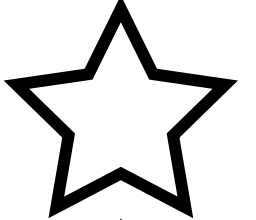
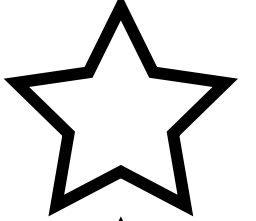
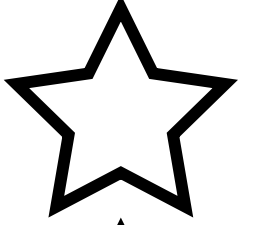
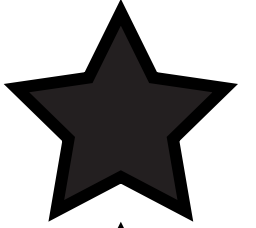
2. The delight which determines the judgement of taste is independent of all interest.

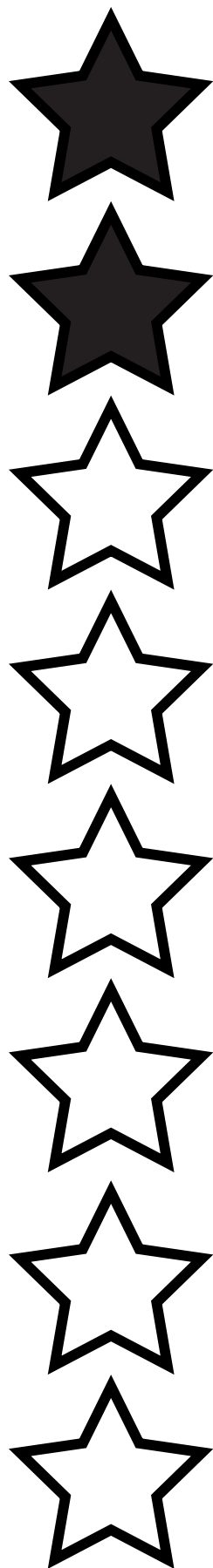


The delight which we connect with the representation of the real existence of an object is called interest. Such a delight, therefore, always involves a reference to the faculty of desire, either as its determining ground, or else as necessarily implicated with its determining ground. Now, where the question is whether something is beautiful, we do not want to know, whether we, or any one else, are, or even could be, concerned in the real existence of the thing, but rather what estimate we form of it on mere contemplation (intuition or reflection). If any one asks me whether I consider that the palace I see before me is beautiful, I may, perhaps, reply that I do not care for things of that sort that are merely made to be gaped at. Or I may reply in the same strain as that Iroquois sachem who said that nothing in Paris pleased him better than the eating houses. I may even go a step further and



inveigh with the vigour of a Rousseau against the vigour of a great against the vanity of the people on such superfluous things. Or, in fine, I may quite easily persuade myself that if I found myself on an uninhabited island, without hope of ever again coming among men, and could conjure such a palace into existence by a mere wish, I should still not trouble to do so, so long as I had a hut there that was comfortable enough for me. All this may be admitted and approved; only it is not the point now at issue. All one wants to know is whether the mere representation of the object is to my liking, no matter how indifferent I may be to the real existence of the object of this representation. It is quite plain that in order to say that the object is beautiful, and to show that I have taste, everything turns on the meaning which I can give to this representation, and not on any factor which makes me dependent on the real existence of the object. Every one must allow that a judgement on the beautiful which is tinged with the slightest interest, is very partial and not a pure judgement of





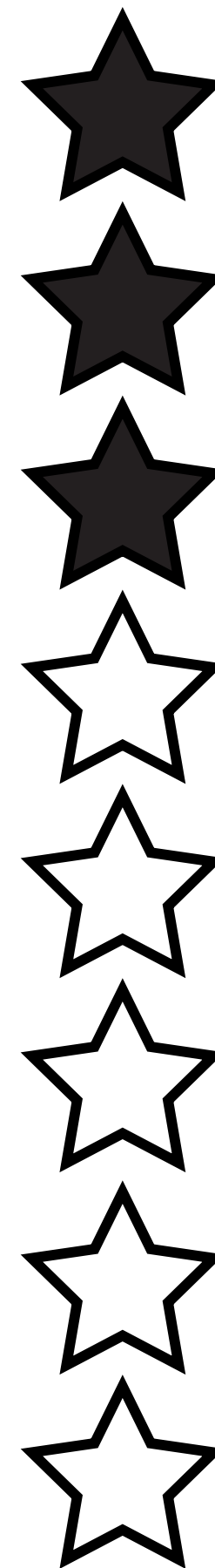
taste. One must not be in the least prepossessed in favour of the real existence of the thing, but must preserve complete indifference in this respect, in order to play the part of judge in matters of taste.

This proposition, which is of the utmost importance, cannot be better explained than by contrasting the pure disinterested<sup>7</sup> delight which appears in the judgement of taste with that allied to an interest – especially if we can also assure ourselves that there are no other kinds of interest beyond those presently to be mentioned.

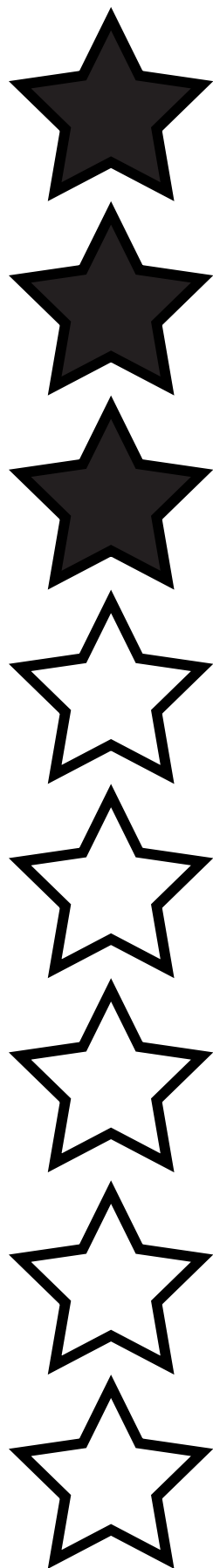
<sup>7</sup>A judgement upon an object of our delight may be wholly disinterested but withal very interesting, i.e., it relies on no interest, but it produces one. Of this kind are all pure moral judgements. But, of themselves judgements of taste do not even set up any interest whatsoever. Only in society is it interesting to have taste—a point which will be explained in the sequel.

### 3. Delight in the agreeable is coupled with interest.

That is agreeable which the senses find pleasing in sensation. This at once affords a convenient opportunity for condemning and directing particular attention to a prevalent confusion of the double meaning of which the word sensation is capable. All delight (as is said or thought) is itself sensation (of a pleasure). Consequently everything that pleases, and for the very reason that it pleases, is agreeable – and according to its different degrees, or its relations to other agreeable sensations, is attractive, charming, delicious, enjoyable, etc. But if this is conceded, then impressions of sense, which determine inclination, or principles of reason, which determine the will, or mere contemplated forms of intuition, which determine judgement, are all on a par in everything relevant to their effect upon the feeling of pleasure, for this would be agreeableness in the sensation of one's state; and since, in the last resort, all the elaborate work of our faculties must issue in and unite in the





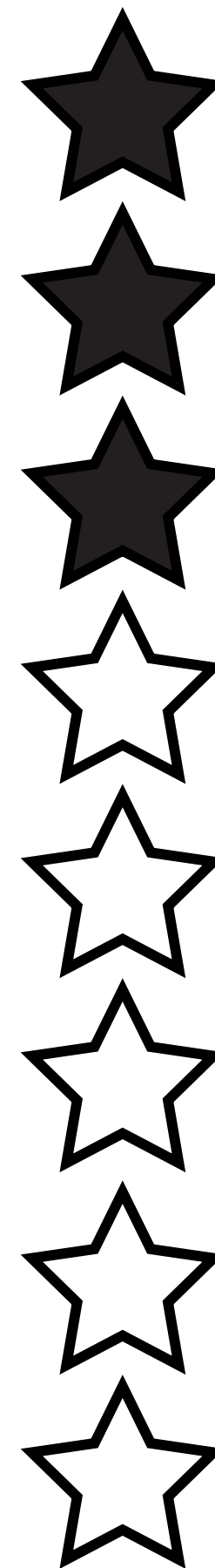


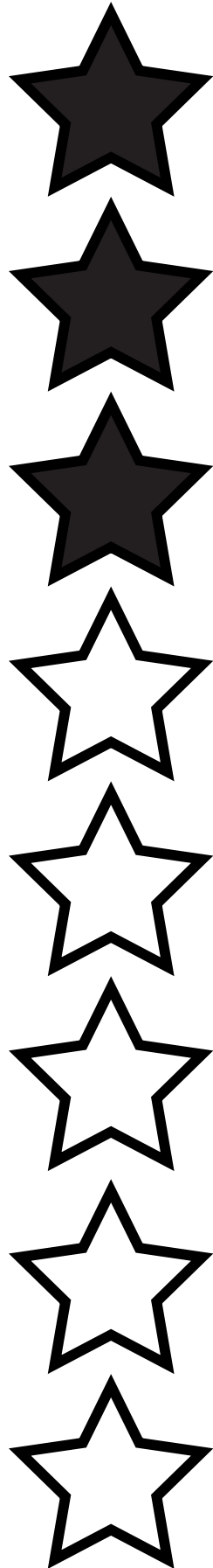
practical as its goal, we could credit our faculties with no other appreciation of things and the worth of things, than that consisting in the gratification which they promise. How this is attained is in the end immaterial; and, as the choice of the means is here the only thing that can make a difference, men might indeed blame one another for folly or imprudence, but never for baseness or wickedness; for they are all, each according to his own way of looking at things, pursuing one goal, which for each is the gratification in question.

When a modification of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure is termed sensation, this expression is given quite a different meaning to that which it bears when I call the representation of a thing (through sense as a receptivity pertaining to the faculty of knowledge) sensation. For in the latter case the representation is referred to the object, but in the former it is referred solely to the subject and is not available for any cognition, not even for that by which the subject cognizes itself.

Now in the above definition the word sensation is used to denote an objective representation of sense; and, to avoid continually running the risk of misinterpretation, we shall call that which must always remain purely subjective, and is absolutely incapable of forming a representation of an object, by the familiar name of feeling. The green colour of the meadows belongs to objectivesensation, as the perception of an object of sense; but its agreeableness to subjective sensation, by which no object is represented; i.e., to feeling, through which the object is regarded as an object of delight (which involves no cognition of the object).

Now, that a judgement on an object by which its agreeableness is affirmed, expresses an interest in it, is evident from the fact that through sensation it provokes a desire for similar objects, consequently the delight presupposes, not the simple judgement about it, but the bearing its real existence has upon my state so far as affected by such an object. Hence we do not merely say of the agreeable that it



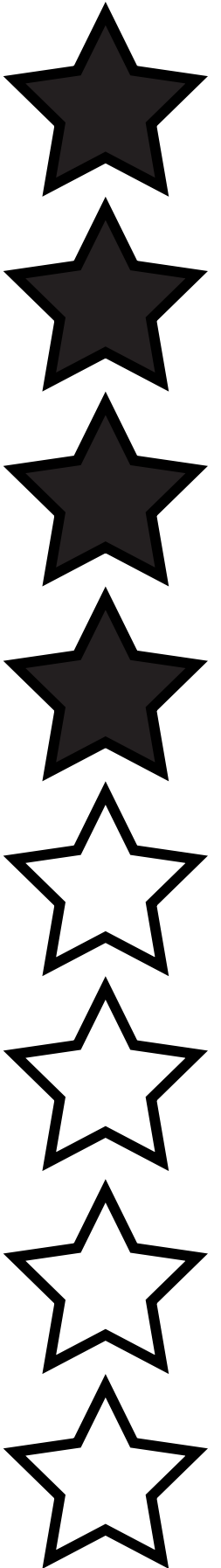


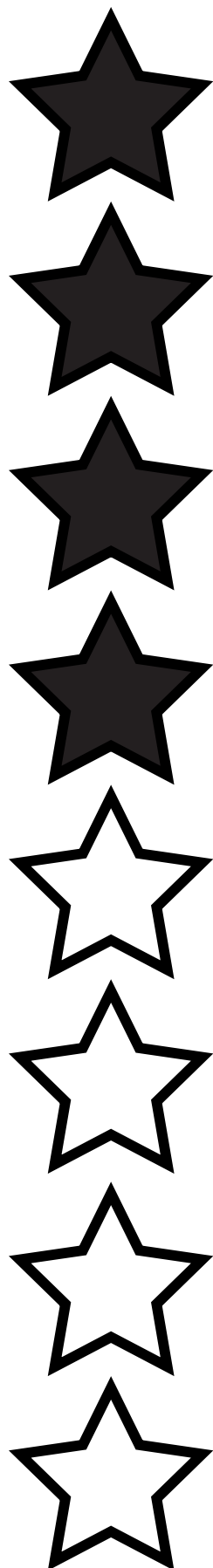
pleases, but that it gratifies. I do not accord it a simple approval, but inclination is aroused by it, and where agreeableness is of the liveliest type a judgement on the character of the object is so entirely out of place that those who are always intent only on enjoyment (for that is the word used to denote intensity of gratification) would fain dispense with all judgement.

#### 4. Delight in the good is coupled with interest.

That is good which by means of reason commends itself by its mere concept. We call that good for something which only pleases as a means; but that which pleases on its own account we call good in itself. In both cases the concept of an end is implied, and consequently the relation of reason to (at least possible) willing, and thus a delight in the existence of an object or action, i.e., some interest or other.

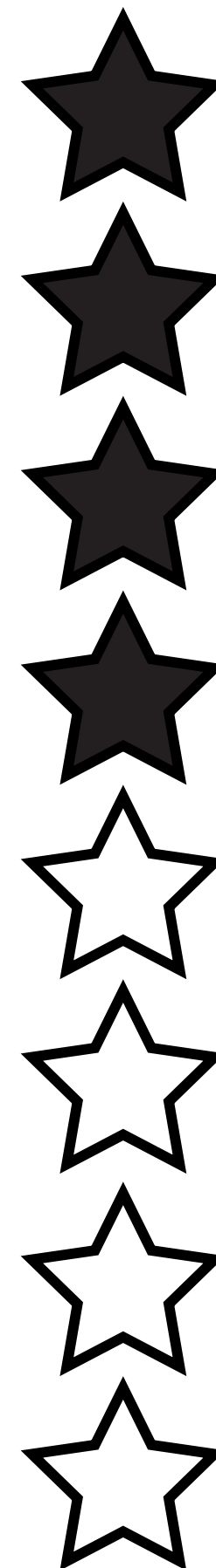
To deem something good, I must always know what sort of a thing the object is intended to be, i. e., I must have a concept of it. That is not necessary to enable me to see beauty in a thing. Flowers, free patterns, lines aimlessly intertwining—technically termed foliage—have no signification, depend upon no definite concept, and yet please. Delight in the beautiful must depend upon the reflection on an object precursory to some (not definitely determined) concept. It is thus also differentiated from the agreeable, which rests entirely upon sensation.



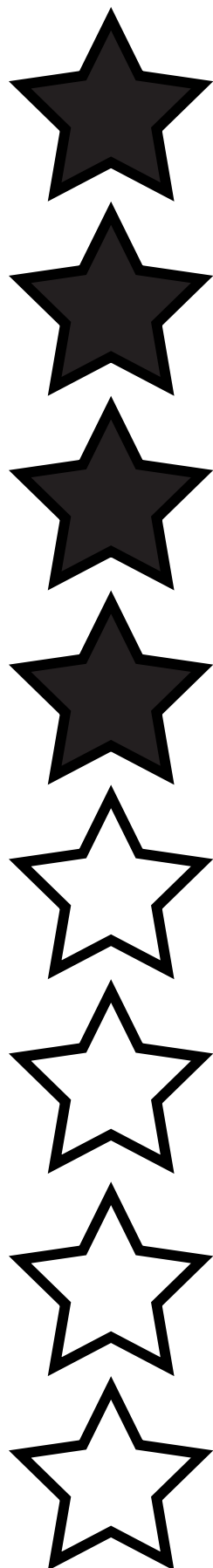


In many cases, no doubt, the agreeable and the good seem convertible terms. Thus it is commonly said that all (especially lasting) gratification is of itself good; which is almost equivalent to saying that to be permanently agreeable and to be good are identical. But it is readily apparent that this is merely a vicious confusion of words, for the concepts appropriate to these expressions are far from interchangeable. The agreeable, which, as such, represents the object solely in relation to sense, must in the first instance be brought under principles of reason through the concept of an end, to be, as an object of will, called good. But that the reference to delight is wholly different where what gratifies is at the same time called good, is evident from the fact that with the good the question always is whether it is mediately or immediately good, i. e., useful or good in itself; whereas with the agreeable this point can never arise, since the word always means what pleases immediately – and it is just the same with what I call beautiful.

Even in everyday parlance, a distinction is drawn between the agreeable and the good. We do not scruple to say of a dish that stimulates the palate with spices and other condiments that it is agreeable owning all the while that it is not good: because, while it immediately satisfies the senses, it is mediately displeasing, i. e., in the eye of reason that looks ahead to the consequences. Even in our estimate of health, this same distinction may be traced. To all that possess it, it is immediately agreeable—at least negatively, i. e., as remoteness of all bodily pains. But, if we are to say that it is good, we must further apply to reason to direct it to ends, that is, we must regard it as a state that puts us in a congenial mood for all we have to do. Finally, in respect of happiness every one believes that the greatest aggregate of the pleasures of life, taking duration as well as number into account, merits the name of a true, nay even of the highest, good. But reason sets its face against this too. Agreeableness is enjoyment. But if this is all that we are bent on, it would be foolish to be scrupulous about the means





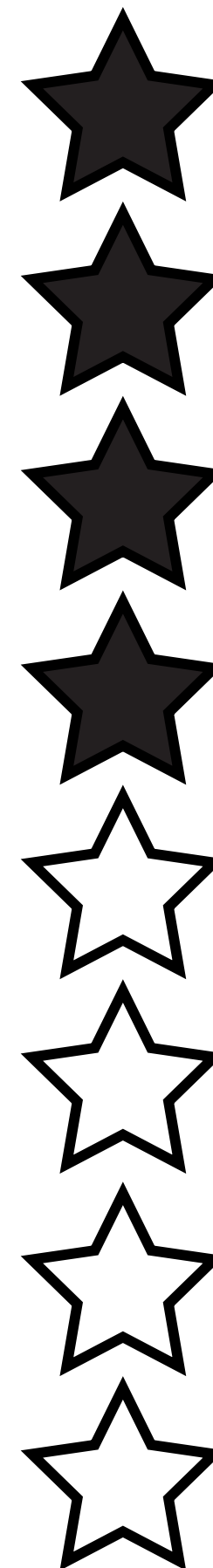


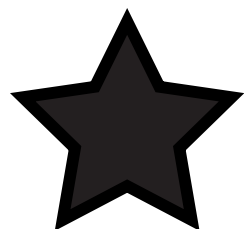
that procure it for us—whether it be obtained passively by the bounty of nature or actively and by the work of our own hands. But that there is any intrinsic worth in the real existence of a man who merely lives for enjoyment, however busy he may be in this respect, even when in so doing he serves others—all equally with himself intent only on enjoyment—as an excellent means to that one end, and does so, moreover, because through sympathy he shares all their gratifications—this is a view to which reason will never let itself be brought round. Only by what a man does heedless of enjoyment, in complete freedom, and independently of what he can procure passively from the hand of nature, does he give to his existence, as the real existence of a person, an absolute worth. Happiness, with all its plethora of pleasures, is far from being an unconditioned good.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>An obligation to enjoyment is a patent absurdity. And the same, then, must also be said of a supposed obligation to actions that have merely enjoyment for their aim, no matter how spiritually this enjoyment

may be refined in thought (or embellished), and even if it be a mystical, so—called heavenly, enjoyment.

But, despite all this difference between the agreeable and the good, they both agree in being invariably coupled with an interest in their object. This is true, not alone of the agreeable, § 3, and of the mediately good, i. e., the useful, which pleases as a means to some pleasure, but also of that which is good absolutely and from every point of view, namely the moral good which carries with it the highest interest. For the good is the object of will, i. e., of a rationally determined faculty of desire). But to will something, and to take a delight in its existence, i.e., to take an interest in it, are identical.





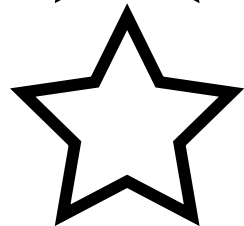
## 5. Comparison of the three specifically different kinds of delight.



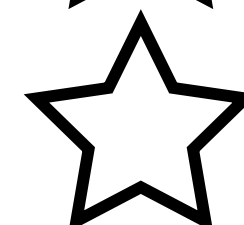
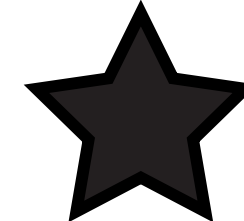
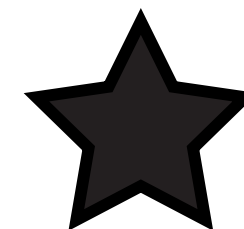
Both the agreeable and the good involve a reference to the faculty of desire, and are thus attended, the former with a delight pathologically conditioned (by stimuli), the latter with a pure practical delight.

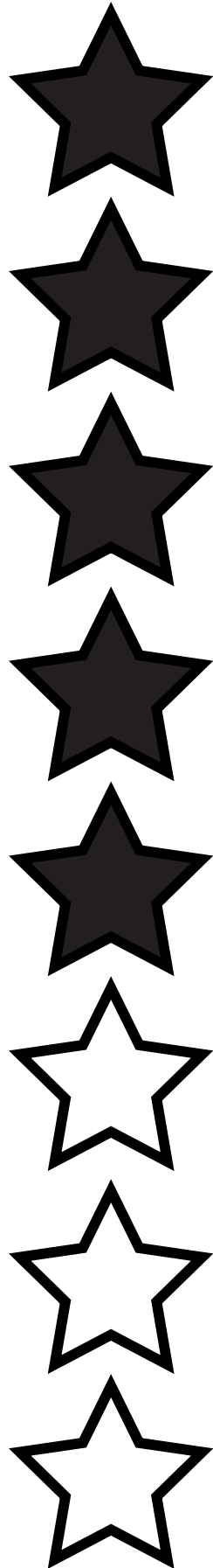


Such delight is determined not merely by the representation of the object, but also by the represented bond of connection between the subject and the real existence of the object. It is not merely the object, but also its real existence, that pleases. On the other hand, the judgement of taste is simply contemplative, i. e., it is a judgement which is indifferent as to the existence of an object, and only decides how its character stands with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure. But not even is this contemplation itself directed to concepts; for the judgement of taste is not a cognitive judgement (neither a theoretical one nor a practical), and hence, also, is not grounded on concepts, nor yet intentionally directed to them.



The agreeable, the beautiful, and the good thus denote three different relations of representations to the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, as a feeling in respect of which we distinguish different objects or modes of representation. Also, the corresponding expressions which indicate our satisfaction in them are different. The agreeable is what GRATIFIES a man; the beautiful what simply PLEASES him; the good what is ESTEEMED (approved), i.e., that on which he sets an objective worth. Agreeableness is a significant factor even with irrational animals; beauty has purport and significance only for human beings, i.e., for beings at once animal and rational (but not merely for them as rational—intelligent beings—but only for them as at once animal and rational); whereas the good is good for every rational being in general—a proposition which can only receive its complete justification and explanation in the sequel. Of all these three kinds of delight, that of taste in the beautiful may be said to be the one and only disinterested and free delight; for, with it, no interest, whether of sense or

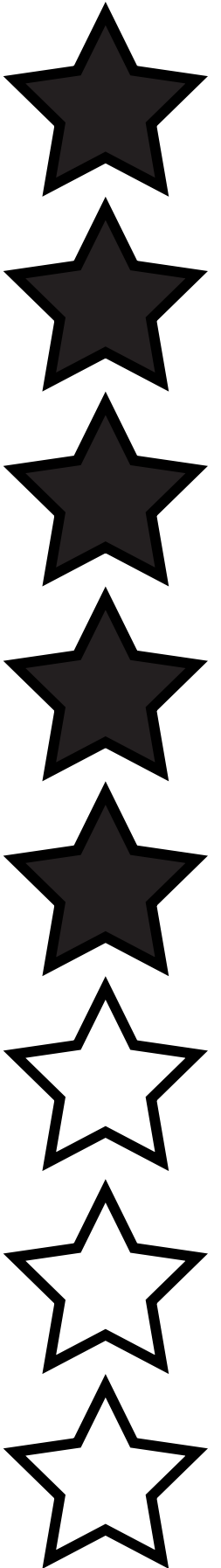




reason, extorts approval. And so we may say that delight, in the three cases mentioned, is related to inclination, to favour, or to respect. For FAVOUR is the only free liking. An object of inclination, and one which a law of reason imposes upon our desire, leaves us no freedom to turn anything into an object of pleasure. All interest presupposes a want, or calls one forth; and, being a ground determining approval, deprives the judgement on the object of its freedom.

So far as the interest of inclination in the case of the agreeable goes, every one says “Hunger is the best sauce; and people with a healthy appetite relish everything, so long as it is something they can eat.” Such delight, consequently, gives no indication of taste having anything to say to the choice. Only when men have got all they want can we tell who among the crowd has taste or not. Similarly there may be correct habits (conduct) without virtue, politeness without good—will, propriety without honour, etc. For where the moral law dictates, there is, objectively, no room left for free choice as to what one

has to do; and to show taste in the way one carries out these dictates, or in estimating the way others do so, is a totally different matter from displaying the moral frame of one’s mind. For the latter involves a command and produces a need of something, whereas moral taste only plays with the objects of delight without devoting itself sincerely to any.

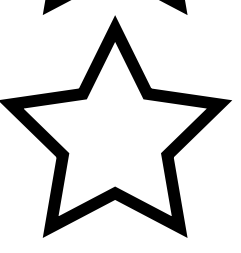
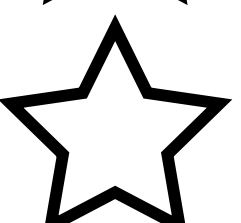
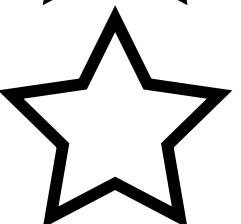
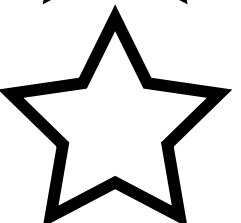
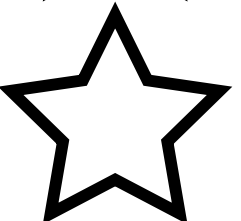
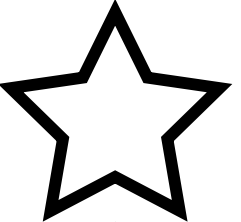
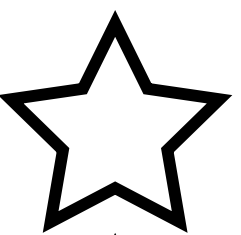
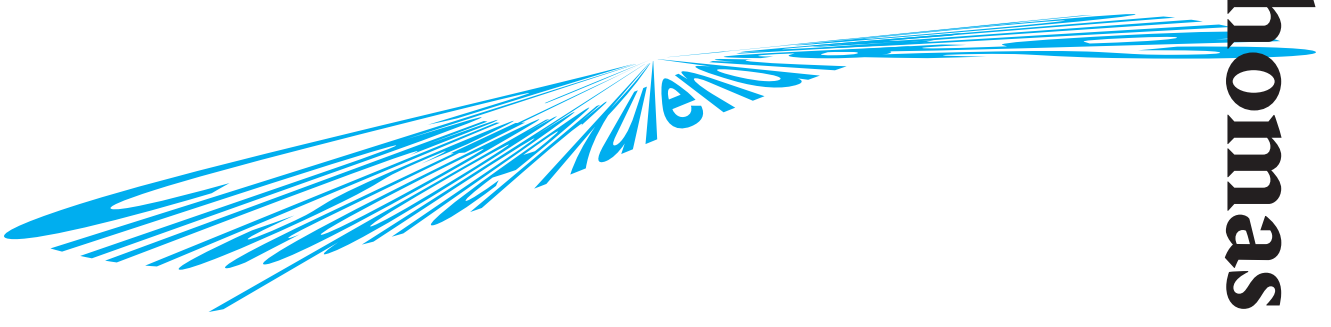
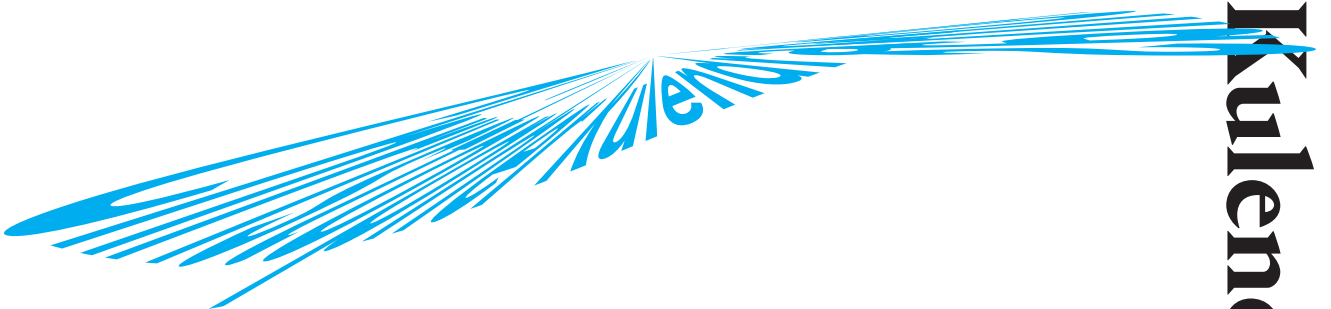




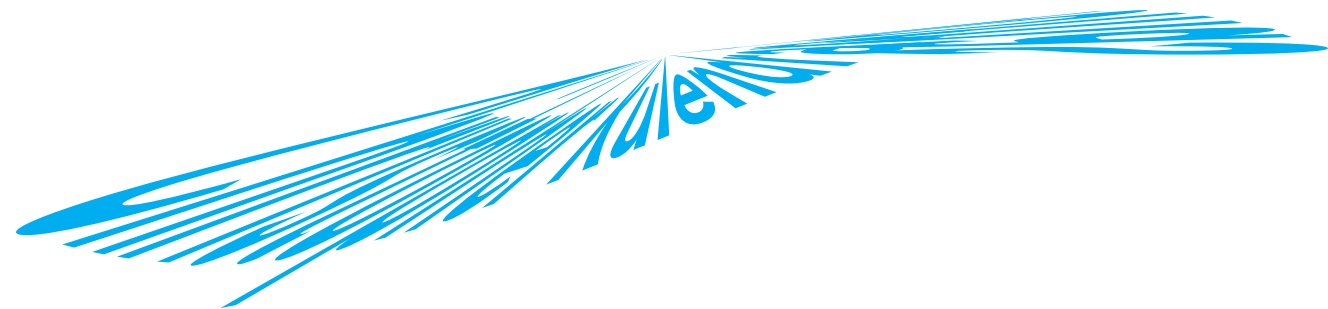
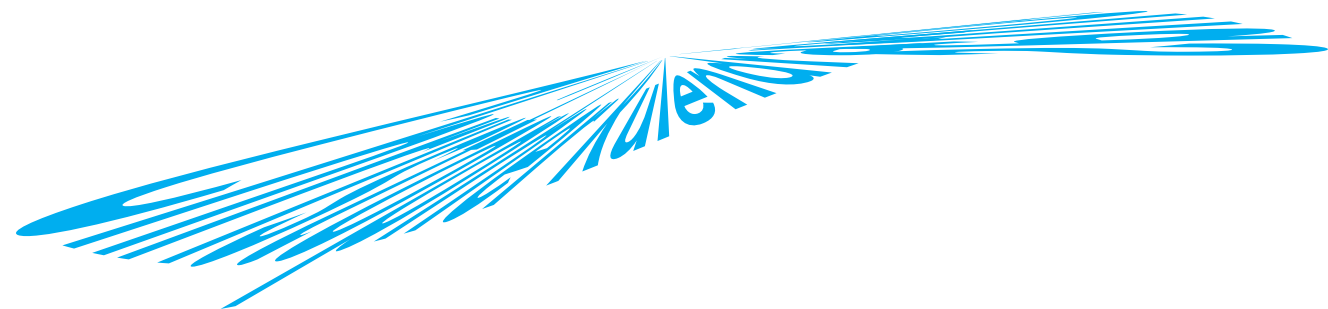
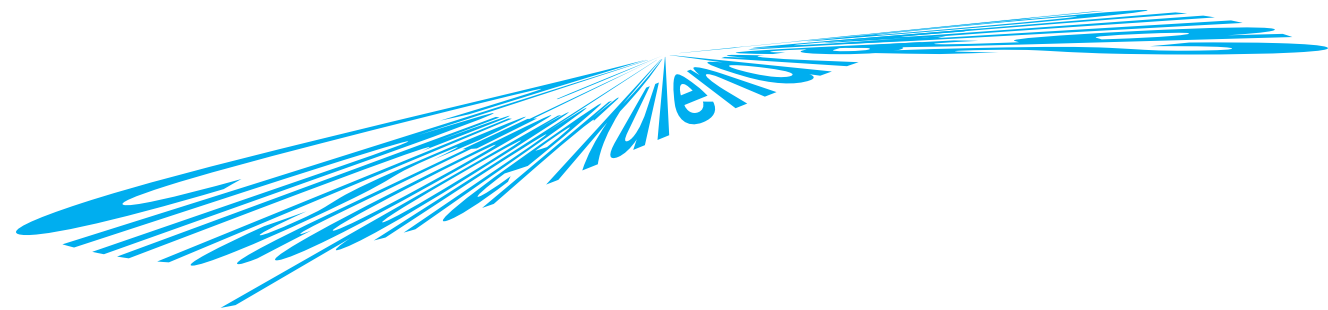
**Christopher**

**Kulendran**

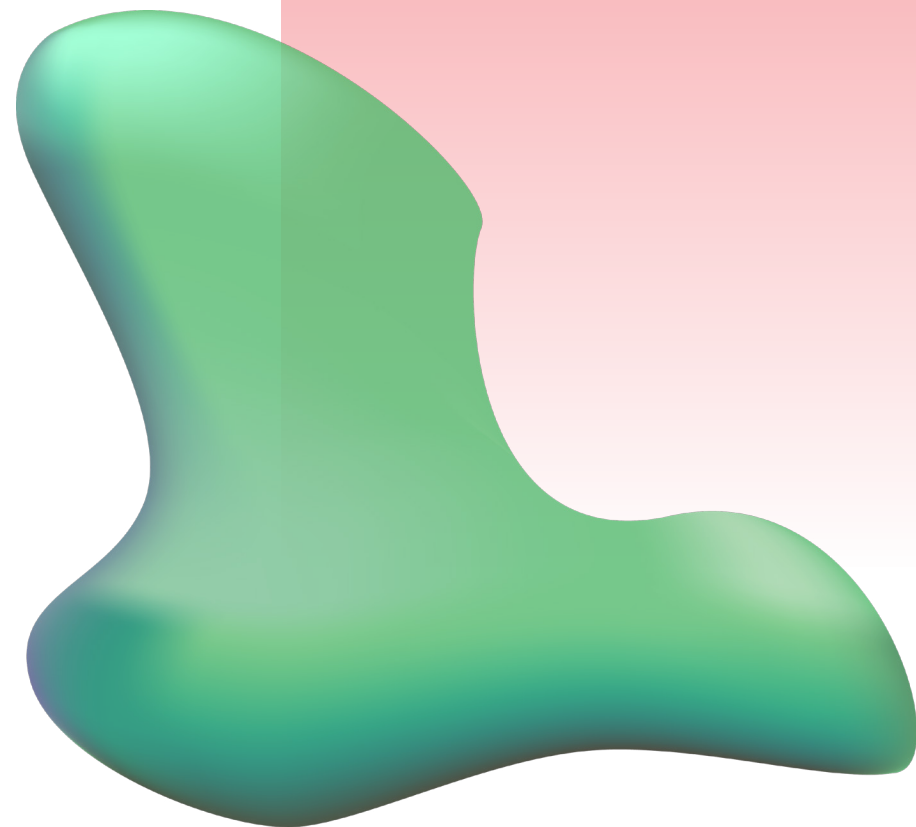
**Thomas**







gcc







GCC



GCC



GCC



GCC





GCC



100

GCC



101

GCC



102

GCC



103



GCC



104

GCC



105



GCC



106

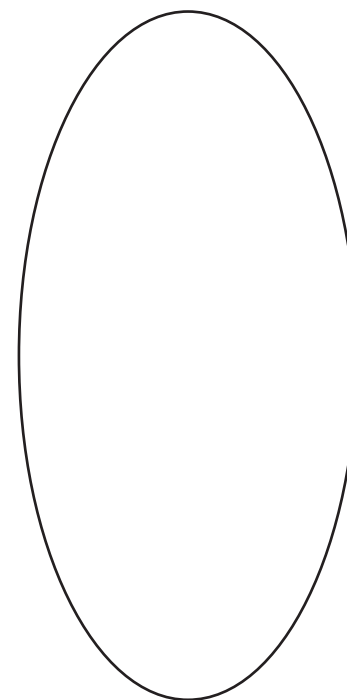
GCC



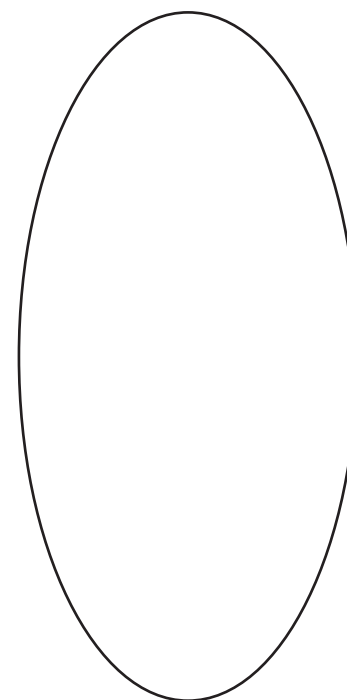
107



**Avant-Garde**



**and**



**Kitsch**

One and the same civilization produces simultaneously two such different things a poem by T. S. Eliot and a Tin Pan Alley song, or a painting by Braque and a Saturday Evening Post cover. All four are on the order of culture, and ostensibly, parts of the same culture and products of the same society. Here, however, their connection seems to end. A poem by Eliot and a poem by Eddie Guest – what perspective of culture is large enough to enable us to situate them in an enlightening relation to each other? Does the fact that a disparity such as this within the frame of a single cultural tradition, which is and has been taken for granted – does this fact indicate that the disparity is a part of the natural order of things? Or is it something entirely new, and particular to our age?

The answer involves more than an investigation in aesthetics. It appears to me that it is necessary to examine more closely and with more originality than hitherto the relationship between aesthetic experience as met by the specific – not the generalized – individual, and the social and historical contexts in which that experience takes place. What is brought to light will answer, in addition to the question posed above, other and perhaps more important questions.

A society, as it becomes less and less able, in the course of its development, to justify the inevitability of its particular forms, breaks up the accepted notions upon which artists and writers must depend in large part for communication with their audiences. It becomes difficult to assume anything. All the verities involved by religion, authority, tradition, style, are thrown into question, and the writer or artist is no longer able to estimate the response of his audience to the symbols and references with which he works. In the past such a state of affairs has usually resolved itself into a motionless Alexandrianism, an academicism in which the really

important issues are left untouched because they involve controversy, and in which creative activity dwindles to virtuosity in the small details of form, all larger questions being decided by the precedent of the old masters. The same themes are mechanically varied in a hundred different works, and yet nothing new is produced: Statius, mandarin verse, Roman sculpture, Beaux-Arts painting, neo-republican architecture.

It is among the hopeful signs in the midst of the decay of our present society that we – some of us – have been unwilling to accept this last phase for our own culture. In seeking to go beyond Alexandrianism, a part of Western bourgeois society has produced something unheard of heretofore: avant-garde culture. A superior consciousness of history – more precisely, the appearance of a new kind of criticism of society, an historical criticism – made this possible. This criticism has not confronted our present society with timeless utopias, but has soberly examined in the terms of history and of cause and effect the antecedents, justifications and functions of the forms that lie at the heart of every society. Thus our present bourgeois social order was shown to be, not an eternal, “natural” condition of life, but simply the latest term in a succession of social orders. New perspectives of this kind, becoming a part of the advanced intellectual conscience of the fifth and sixth decades of the nineteenth century, soon were absorbed by artists and poets, even if unconsciously for the most part. It was no accident, therefore, that the birth of the avant-garde coincided chronologically – and geographically, too – with the first bold development of scientific revolutionary thought in Europe.

True, the first settlers of bohemia – which was then identical with the avant-garde – turned out soon to be demonstratively uninterested in politics. Nevertheless, without the circulation of

revolutionary ideas in the air about them, they would never have been able to isolate their concept of the “bourgeois” in order to define what they were not. Nor, without the moral aid of revolutionary political attitudes would they have had the courage to assert themselves as aggressively as they did against the prevailing standards of society. Courage indeed was needed for this, because the avant-garde’s emigration from bourgeois society to bohemia meant also an emigration from the markets of capitalism, upon which artists and writers had been thrown by the falling away of aristocratic patronage. (Ostensibly, at least, it meant this – meant starving in a garret – although, as we will be shown later, the avant-garde remained attached to bourgeois society precisely because it needed its money.)

Yet it is true that once the avant-garde had succeeded in “detaching” itself from society, it proceeded to turn around and repudiate revolutionary as well as bourgeois politics. The revolution was left inside society, a part of that welter of ideological struggle which art and poetry find so unpropitious as soon as it begins to involve those “precious” axiomatic beliefs upon which culture thus far has had to rest. Hence it developed that the true and most important function of the avant-garde was not to “experiment,” but to find a path along which it would be possible to keep culture moving in the midst of ideological confusion and violence. Retiring from public altogether, the avant-garde poet or artist sought to maintain the high level of his art by both narrowing and raising it to the expression of an absolute in which all relativities and contradictions would be either resolved or beside the point. “Art for art’s sake” and “pure poetry” appear, and subject matter or content becomes something to be avoided like a plague.

It has been in search of the absolute that the avant-garde has arrived at “abstract” or “nonobjective” art – and

poetry, too. The avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape – not its picture – is aesthetically valid; something given, increate, independent of meanings, similars or originals. Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself.

But the absolute is absolute, and the poet or artist, being what he is, cherishes certain relative values more than others. The very values in the name of which he invokes the absolute are relative values, the values of aesthetics. And so he turns out to be imitating, not God – and here I use “imitate” in its Aristotelian sense – but the disciplines and processes of art and literature themselves. This is the genesis of the “abstract.”(1) In turning his attention away from subject matter of common experience, the poet or artist turns it in upon the medium of his own craft. The nonrepresentational or “abstract,” if it is to have aesthetic validity, cannot be arbitrary and accidental, but must stem from obedience to some worthy constraint or original. This constraint, once the world of common, extroverted experience has been renounced, can only be found in the very processes or disciplines by which art and literature have already imitated the former. These themselves become the subject matter of art and literature. If, to continue with Aristotle, all art and literature are imitation, then what we have here is the imitation of imitating. To quote Yeats:

*Nor is there singing school but studying  
Monuments of its own magnificence.  
Picasso, Braque, Mondrian, Miro,*

Kandinsky, Brancusi, even Klee, Matisse and Cézanne derive their chief inspiration from the medium they work in.(2) The



excitement of their art seems to lie most of all in its pure preoccupation with the invention and arrangement of spaces, surfaces, shapes, colors, etc., to the exclusion of whatever is not necessarily implicated in these factors. The attention of poets like Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Valéry, Éluard, Pound, Hart Crane, Stevens, even Rilke and Yeats, appears to be centered on the effort to create poetry and on the “moments” themselves of poetic conversion, rather than on experience to be converted into poetry. Of course, this cannot exclude other preoccupations in their work, for poetry must deal with words, and words must communicate. Certain poets, such as Mallarmé and Valéry (3) are more radical in this respect than others – leaving aside those poets who have tried to compose poetry in pure sound alone. However, if it were easier to define poetry, modern poetry would be much more “pure” and “abstract.” As for the other fields of literature – the definition of avant-garde aesthetics advanced here is no Procrustean bed. But aside from the fact that most of our best contemporary novelists have gone to school with the avant-garde, it is significant that Gide’s most ambitious book is a novel about the writing of a novel, and that Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* seem to be, above all, as one French critic says, the reduction of experience to expression for the sake of expression, the expression mattering more than what is being expressed.

That avant-garde culture is the imitation of imitating – the fact itself – calls for neither approval nor disapproval. It is true that this culture contains within itself some of the very Alexandrianism it seeks to overcome. The lines quoted from Yeats referred to Byzantium, which is very close to Alexandria; and in a sense this imitation of imitating is a superior sort of Alexandrianism. But there is one most important difference: the avant-garde moves, while Alexandrianism stands still.

And this, precisely, is what justifies the avant-garde’s methods and makes them necessary. The necessity lies in the fact that by no other means is it possible today to create art and literature of a high order. To quarrel with necessity by throwing about terms like “formalism,” “purism,” “ivory tower” and so forth is either dull or dishonest. This is not to say, however, that it is to the social advantage of the avant-garde that it is what it is. Quite the opposite.

The avant-garde’s specialization of itself, the fact that its best artists are artists’ artists, its best poets, poets’ poets, has estranged a great many of those who were capable formerly of enjoying and appreciating ambitious art and literature, but who are now unwilling or unable to acquire an initiation into their craft secrets. The masses have always remained more or less indifferent to culture in the process of development. But today such culture is being abandoned by those to whom it actually belongs – our ruling class. For it is to the latter that the avant-garde belongs. No culture can develop without a social basis, without a source of stable income. And in the case of the avant-garde, this was provided by an elite among the ruling class of that society from which it assumed itself to be cut off, but to which it has always remained attached by an umbilical cord of gold. The paradox is real. And now this elite is rapidly shrinking. Since the avant-garde forms the only living culture we now have, the survival in the near future of culture in general is thus threatened.

We must not be deceived by superficial phenomena and local successes. Picasso’s shows still draw crowds, and T. S. Eliot is taught in the universities; the dealers in modernist art are still in business, and the publishers still publish some “difficult” poetry. But the avant-garde itself, already sensing the danger, is becoming more and more timid every day that passes. Academicism and

commercialism are appearing in the strangest places. This can mean only one thing: that the avant-garde is becoming unsure of the audience it depends on – the rich and the cultivated.

Is it the nature itself of avant-garde culture that is alone responsible for the danger it finds itself in? Or is that only a dangerous liability? Are there other, and perhaps more important, factors involved?

### II

Where there is an avant-garde, generally we also find a rear-guard. True enough – simultaneously with the entrance of the avant-garde, a second new cultural phenomenon appeared in the industrial West: that thing to which the Germans give the wonderful name of *Kitsch*: popular, commercial art and literature with their chromeotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics, Tin Pan Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies, etc., etc. For some reason this gigantic apparition has always been taken for granted. It is time we looked into its whys and wherefores.

*Kitsch* is a product of the industrial revolution which urbanized the masses of Western Europe and America and established what is called universal literacy.

Prior to this the only market for formal culture, as distinguished from folk culture, had been among those who, in addition to being able to read and write, could command the leisure and comfort that always goes hand in hand with cultivation of some sort. This until then had been inextricably associated with literacy. But with the introduction of universal literacy, the ability to read and write became almost a minor skill like driving a car, and it no longer served to distinguish an individual’s cultural inclinations, since it

was no longer the exclusive concomitant of refined tastes.

The peasants who settled in the cities as proletariat and petty bourgeois learned to read and write for the sake of efficiency, but they did not win the leisure and comfort necessary for the enjoyment of the city’s traditional culture. Losing, nevertheless, their taste for the folk culture whose background was the countryside, and discovering a new capacity for boredom at the same time, the new urban masses set up a pressure on society to provide them with a kind of culture fit for their own consumption. To fill the demand of the new market, a new commodity was devised: ersatz culture, *kitsch*, destined for those who, insensible to the values of genuine culture, are hungry nevertheless for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide.

*Kitsch*, using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility. It is the source of its profits. *Kitsch* is mechanical and operates by formulas. *Kitsch* is vicarious experience and faked sensations. *Kitsch* changes according to style, but remains always the same. *Kitsch* is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. *Kitsch* pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money – not even their time.

The precondition for *kitsch*, a condition without which *kitsch* would be impossible, is the availability close at hand of a fully matured cultural tradition, whose discoveries, acquisitions, and perfected self-consciousness *kitsch* can take advantage of for its own ends. It borrows from it devices, tricks, stratagems, rules of thumb, themes, converts them into a system, and discards the rest. It draws its life blood, so to speak, from this reservoir of accumulated experience. This is what is really meant when it is said that the popular art and literature of today were once the daring,

esoteric art and literature of yesterday. Of course, no such thing is true. What is meant is that when enough time has elapsed the new is looted for new “twists,” which are then watered down and served up as kitsch. Self-evidently, all kitsch is academic; and conversely, all that’s academic is kitsch. For what is called the academic as such no longer has an independent existence, but has become the stuffed-shirt “front” for kitsch. The methods of industrialism displace the handicrafts.

Because it can be turned out mechanically, kitsch has become an integral part of our productive system in a way in which true culture could never be, except accidentally. It has been capitalized at a tremendous investment which must show commensurate returns; it is compelled to extend as well as to keep its markets. While it is essentially its own salesman, a great sales apparatus has nevertheless been created for it, which brings pressure to bear on every member of society. Traps are laid even in those areas, so to speak, that are the preserves of genuine culture. It is not enough today, in a country like ours, to have an inclination towards the latter; one must have a true passion for it that will give him the power to resist the faked article that surrounds and presses in on him from the moment he is old enough to look at the funny papers. Kitsch is deceptive. It has many different levels, and some of them are high enough to be dangerous to the naive seeker of true light. A magazine like the New Yorker, which is fundamentally high-class kitsch for the luxury trade, converts and waters down a great deal of avant-garde material for its own uses. Nor is every single item of kitsch altogether worthless. Now and then it produces something of merit, something that has an authentic folk flavor; and these accidental and isolated instances have fooled people who should know better.

Kitsch’s enormous profits are a source of temptation to the avant-garde itself, and its members have not always resisted this temptation. Ambitious writers and artists will modify their work under the pressure of kitsch, if they do not succumb to it entirely. And then those puzzling borderline cases appear, such as the popular novelist, Simenon, in France, and Steinbeck in this country. The net result is always to the detriment of true culture in any case.

Kitsch has not been confined to the cities in which it was born, but has flowed out over the countryside, wiping out folk culture. Nor has it shown any regard for geographical and national cultural boundaries. Another mass product of Western industrialism, it has gone on a triumphal tour of the world, crowding out and defacing native cultures in one colonial country after another, so that it is now by way of becoming a universal culture, the first universal culture ever beheld. Today the native of China, no less than the South American Indian, the Hindu, no less than the Polynesian, have come to prefer to the products of their native art, magazine covers, rotogravure sections and calendar girls. How is this virulence of kitsch, this irresistible attractiveness, to be explained? Naturally, machine-made kitsch can undersell the native handmade article, and the prestige of the West also helps; but why is kitsch a so much more profitable export article than Rembrandt? One, after all, can be reproduced as cheaply as the other.

In his last article on the Soviet cinema in the Partisan Review, Dwight Macdonald points out that kitsch has in the last ten years become the dominant culture in Soviet Russia. For this he blames the political regime – not only for the fact that kitsch is the official culture, but also that it is actually the dominant, most popular culture, and he quotes the following from Kurt London’s *The Seven Soviet Arts*: “. . . the attitude of the masses both to the old

and new art styles probably remains essentially dependent on the nature of the education afforded them by their respective states.” Macdonald goes on to say: “Why after all should ignorant peasants prefer Repin (a leading exponent of Russian academic kitsch in painting) to Picasso, whose abstract technique is at least as relevant to their own primitive folk art as is the former’s realistic style? No, if the masses crowd into the Tretyakov (Moscow’s museum of contemporary Russian art: kitsch), it is largely because they have been conditioned to shun ‘formalism’ and to admire ‘socialist realism.’”

In the first place it is not a question of a choice between merely the old and merely the new, as London seems to think – but of a choice between the bad, up-to-date old and the genuinely new. The alternative to Picasso is not Michelangelo, but kitsch. In the second place, neither in backward Russia nor in the advanced West do the masses prefer kitsch simply because their governments condition them toward it. Where state educational systems take the trouble to mention art, we are told to respect the old masters, not kitsch; and yet we go and hang Maxfield Parrish or his equivalent on our walls, instead of Rembrandt and Michelangelo. Moreover, as Macdonald himself points out, around 1925 when the Soviet regime was encouraging avant-garde cinema, the Russian masses continued to prefer Hollywood movies. No, “conditioning” does not explain the potency of kitsch.

All values are human values, relative values, in art as well as elsewhere. Yet there does seem to have been more or less of a general agreement among the cultivated of mankind over the ages as to what is good art and what bad. Taste has varied, but not beyond certain limits; contemporary connoisseurs agree with the eighteenth-century Japanese that Hokusai was one of the greatest artists of his time; we even agree with the ancient Egyptians

that Third and Fourth Dynasty art was the most worthy of being selected as their paragon by those who came after. We may have come to prefer Giotto to Raphael, but we still do not deny that Raphael was one of the best painters of his time. There has been an agreement then, and this agreement rests, I believe, on a fairly constant distinction made between those values only to be found in art and the values which can be found elsewhere. Kitsch, by virtue of a rationalized technique that draws on science and industry, has erased this distinction in practice.

Let us see, for example, what happens when an ignorant Russian peasant such as Macdonald mentions stands with hypothetical freedom of choice before two paintings, one by Picasso, the other by Repin. In the first he sees, let us say, a play of lines, colors and spaces that represent a woman. The abstract technique – to accept Macdonald’s supposition, which I am inclined to doubt – reminds him somewhat of the icons he has left behind him in the village, and he feels the attraction of the familiar. We will even suppose that he faintly surmises some of the great art values the cultivated find in Picasso. He turns next to Repin’s picture and sees a battle scene. The technique is not so familiar – as technique. But that weighs very little with the peasant, for he suddenly discovers values in Repin’s picture that seem far superior to the values he has been accustomed to find in icon art; and the unfamiliar itself is one of the sources of those values: the values of the vividly recognizable, the miraculous and the sympathetic. In Repin’s picture the peasant recognizes and sees things in the way in which he recognizes and sees things outside of pictures – there is no discontinuity between art and life, no need to accept a convention and say to oneself, that icon represents Jesus because it intends to represent Jesus, even if it does not remind

me very much of a man. That Repin can paint so realistically that identifications are self-evident immediately and without any effort on the part of the spectator – that is miraculous. The peasant is also pleased by the wealth of self-evident meanings which he finds in the picture: “it tells a story. “ Picasso and the icons are so austere and barren in comparison. What is more, Repin heightens reality and makes it dramatic: sunset, exploding shells, running and falling men. There is no longer any question of Picasso or icons. Repin is what the peasant wants, and nothing else but Repin. It is lucky, however, for Repin that the peasant is protected from the products of American capitalism, for he would not stand a chance next to a Saturday Evening Post cover by Norman Rockwell.

Ultimately, it can be said that the cultivated spectator derives the same values from Picasso that the peasant gets from Repin, since what the latter enjoys in Repin is somehow art too, on however low a scale, and he is sent to look at pictures by the same instincts that send the cultivated spectator. But the ultimate values which the cultivated spectator derives from Picasso are derived at a second remove, as the result of reflection upon the immediate impression left by the plastic values. It is only then that the recognizable, the miraculous and the sympathetic enter. They are not immediately or externally present in Picasso’s painting, but must be projected into it by the spectator sensitive enough to react sufficiently to plastic qualities. They belong to the “reflected” effect. In Repin, on the other hand, the “reflected” effect has already been included in the picture, ready for the spectator’s unreflective enjoyment.(4) Where Picasso paints cause, Repin paints effect. Repin predigests art for the spectator and spares him effort, provides him with a shore cut to the pleasure of art that detours what is necessarily difficult in genuine art. Repin,

or kitsch, is synthetic art.

The same point can be made with respect to kitsch literature: it provides vicarious experience for the insensitive with far greater immediacy than serious fiction can hope to do. And Eddie Guest and the Indian Love Lyrics are more poetic than T. S. Eliot and Shakespeare.

### III

If the avant-garde imitates the processes of art, kitsch, we now see, imitates its effects. The neatness of this antithesis is more than contrived; it corresponds to and defines the tremendous interval that separates from each other two such simultaneous cultural phenomena as the avant-garde and kitsch. This interval, too great to be closed by all the infinite gradations of popularized “modernism” and “modernistic” kitsch, corresponds in turn to a social interval, a social interval that has always existed in formal culture, as elsewhere in civilized society, and whose two termini converge and diverge in fixed relation to the increasing or decreasing stability of the given society. There has always been on one side the minority of the powerful – and therefore the cultivated – and on the other the great mass of the exploited and poor – and therefore the ignorant. Formal culture has always belonged to the first, while the last have had to content themselves with folk or rudimentary culture, or kitsch.

In a stable society that functions well enough to hold in solution the contradictions between its classes, the cultural dichotomy becomes somewhat blurred. The axioms of the few are shared by the many; the latter believe superstitiously what the former believe soberly. And at such moments in history the masses are able to feel wonder and

admiration for the culture, on no matter how high a plane, of its masters. This applies at least to plastic culture, which is accessible to all.

In the Middle Ages the plastic artist paid lip service at least to the lowest common denominators of experience. This even remained true to some extent until the seventeenth century. There was available for imitation a universally valid conceptual reality, whose order the artist could not tamper with. The subject matter of art was prescribed by those who commissioned works of art, which were not created, as in bourgeois society, on speculation. Precisely because his content was determined in advance, the artist was free to concentrate on his medium. He needed not to be philosopher, or visionary, but simply artificer. As long as there was general agreement as to what were the worthiest subjects for art, the artist was relieved of the necessity to be original and inventive in his “matter” and could devote all his energy to formal problems. For him the medium became, privately, professionally, the content of his art, even as his medium is today the public content of the abstract painter’s art – with that difference, however, that the medieval artist had to suppress his professional preoccupation in public – had always to suppress and subordinate the personal and professional in the finished, official work of art. If, as an ordinary member of the Christian community, he felt some personal emotion about his subject matter, this only contributed to the enrichment of the work’s public meaning. Only with the Renaissance do the inflections of the personal become legitimate, still to be kept, however, within the limits of the simply and universally recognizable. And only with Rembrandt do “lonely” artists begin to appear, lonely in their art.

But even during the Renaissance, and as long as Western art was endeavoring to perfect its technique, victories in this realm could only be signalized by success

in realistic imitation, since there was no other objective criterion at hand. Thus the masses could still find in the art of their masters objects of admiration and wonder. Even the bird that pecked at the fruit in Zeuxis’ picture could applaud.

It is a platitude that art becomes caviar to the general when the reality it imitates no longer corresponds even roughly to the reality recognized by the general. Even then, however, the resentment the common man may feel is silenced by the awe in which he stands of the patrons of this art. Only when he becomes dissatisfied with the social order they administer does he begin to criticize their culture. Then the plebian finds courage for the first time to voice his opinions openly. Every man, from the Tammany alderman to the Austrian house-painter, finds that he is entitled to his opinion. Most often this resentment toward culture is to be found where the dissatisfaction with society is a reactionary dissatisfaction which expresses itself in revivalism and puritanism, and latest of all, in fascism. Here revolvers and torches begin to be mentioned in the same breath as culture. In the name of godliness or the blood’s health, in the name of simple ways and solid virtues, the statue-smashing commences.

### IV

Returning to our Russian peasant for the moment, let us suppose that after he has chosen Repin in preference to Picasso, the state’s educational apparatus comes along and tells him that he is wrong, that he should have chosen Picasso – and shows him why. It is quite possible for the Soviet state to do this. But things being as they are in Russia – and everywhere else – the peasant soon finds the necessity of working hard all day for his living and the rude, uncomfortable circumstances in which he lives do not allow him enough leisure, energy and comfort to train for the enjoyment of Picasso. This needs, after all,



a considerable amount of “conditioning.” Superior culture is one of the most artificial of all human creations, and the peasant finds no “natural” urgency within himself that will drive him toward Picasso in spite of all difficulties. In the end the peasant will go back to kitsch when he feels like looking at pictures, for he can enjoy kitsch without effort. The state is helpless in this matter and remains so as long as the problems of production have not been solved in a socialist sense. The same holds true, of course, for capitalist countries and makes all talk of art for the masses there nothing but demagoguery.<sup>(5)</sup>

Where today a political regime establishes an official cultural policy, it is for the sake of demagoguery. If kitsch is the official tendency of culture in Germany, Italy and Russia, it is not because their respective governments are controlled by philistines, but because kitsch is the culture of the masses in these countries, as it is everywhere else. The encouragement of kitsch is merely another of the inexpensive ways in which totalitarian regimes seek to ingratiate themselves with their subjects. Since these regimes cannot raise the cultural level of the masses – even if they wanted to – by anything short of a surrender to international socialism, they will flatter the masses by bringing all culture down to their level. It is for this reason that the avant-garde is outlawed, and not so much because a superior culture is inherently a more critical culture. (Whether or not the avant-garde could possibly flourish under a totalitarian regime is not pertinent to the question at this point.) As a matter of fact, the main trouble with avant-garde art and literature, from the point of view of fascists and Stalinists, is not that they are too critical, but that they are too “innocent,” that it is too difficult to inject effective propaganda into them, that kitsch is more pliable to this end. Kitsch

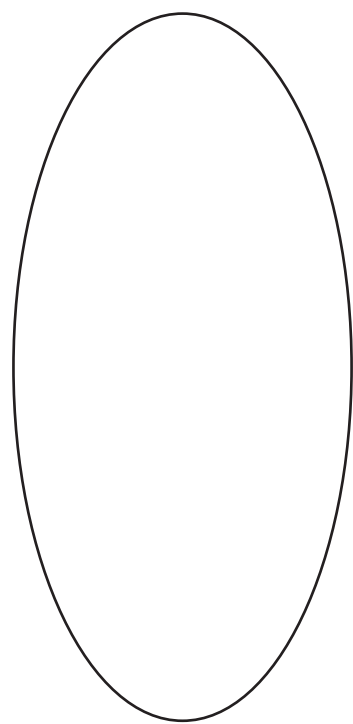
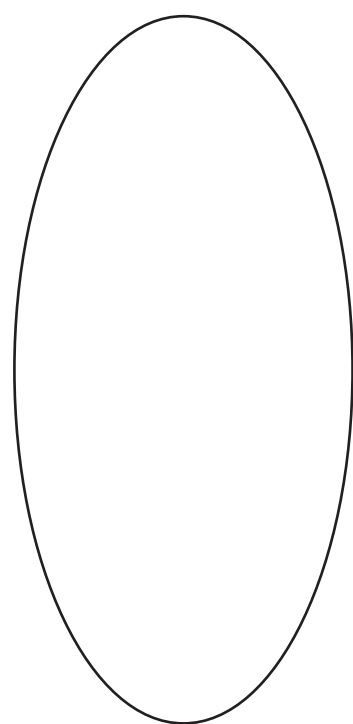
keeps a dictator in closer contact with the “soul” of the people. Should the official culture be one superior to the general mass-level, there would be a danger of isolation.

Nevertheless, if the masses were conceivably to ask for avant-garde art and literature, Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin would not hesitate long in attempting to satisfy such a demand. Hitler is a bitter enemy of the avant-garde, both on doctrinal and personal grounds, yet this did not prevent Goebbels in 1932-1933 from strenuously courting avant-garde artists and writers. When Gottfried Benn, an Expressionist poet, came over to the Nazis he was welcomed with a great fanfare, although at that very moment Hitler was denouncing Expressionism as Kulturbolschewismus. This was at a time when the Nazis felt that the prestige which the avant-garde enjoyed among the cultivated German public could be of advantage to them, and practical considerations of this nature, the Nazis being skillful politicians, have always taken precedence over Hitler’s personal inclinations. Later the Nazis realized that it was more practical to accede to the wishes of the masses in matters of culture than to those of their paymasters; the latter, when it came to a question of preserving power, were as willing to sacrifice their culture as they were their moral principles; while the former, precisely because power was being withheld from them, had to be cozened in every other way possible. It was necessary to promote on a much more grandiose style than in the democracies the illusion that the masses actually rule. The literature and art they enjoy and understand were to be proclaimed the only true art and literature and any other kind was to be suppressed. Under these circumstances people like Gottfried Benn, no matter how ardently they support Hitler, become a liability; and we hear no more of them in Nazi Germany.

We can see then that although from one point of view the personal philistinism of Hitler and Stalin is not accidental to the roles they play, from another point of view it is only an incidentally contributory factor in determining the cultural policies of their respective regimes. Their personal philistinism simply adds brutality and double-darkness to policies they would be forced to support anyhow by the pressure of all their other policies – even were they, personally, devotees of avant-garde culture. What the acceptance of the isolation of the Russian Revolution forces Stalin to do, Hitler is compelled to do by his acceptance of the contradictions of capitalism and his efforts to freeze them. As for Mussolini – his case is a perfect example of the *disponibilité* of a realist in these matters. For years he bent a benevolent eye on the Futurists and built modernistic railroad stations and government-owned apartment houses. One can still see in the suburbs of Rome more modernistic apartments than almost anywhere else in the world. Perhaps Fascism wanted to show its up-to-dateness, to conceal the fact that it was a retrogression; perhaps it wanted to conform to the tastes of the wealthy elite it served. At any rate Mussolini seems to have realized lately that it would be more useful to him to please the cultural tastes of the Italian masses than those of their masters. The masses must be provided with objects of admiration and wonder; the latter can dispense with them. And so we find Mussolini announcing a “new Imperial style.” Marinetti, Chirico, et al., are sent into the outer darkness, and the new railroad station in Rome will not be modernistic. That Mussolini was late in coming to this only illustrates again the relative hesitance with which Italian Fascism has drawn the necessary implications of its role.

Capitalism in decline finds that whatever of quality it is still capable of

producing becomes almost invariably a threat to its own existence. Advances in culture, no less than advances in science and industry, corrode the very society under whose aegis they are made possible. Here, as in every other question today, it becomes necessary to quote Marx word for word. Today we no longer look toward socialism for a new culture – as inevitably as one will appear, once we do have socialism. Today we look to socialism simply for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now.’



**Hayden  
Hunham**



Installation View  
2014

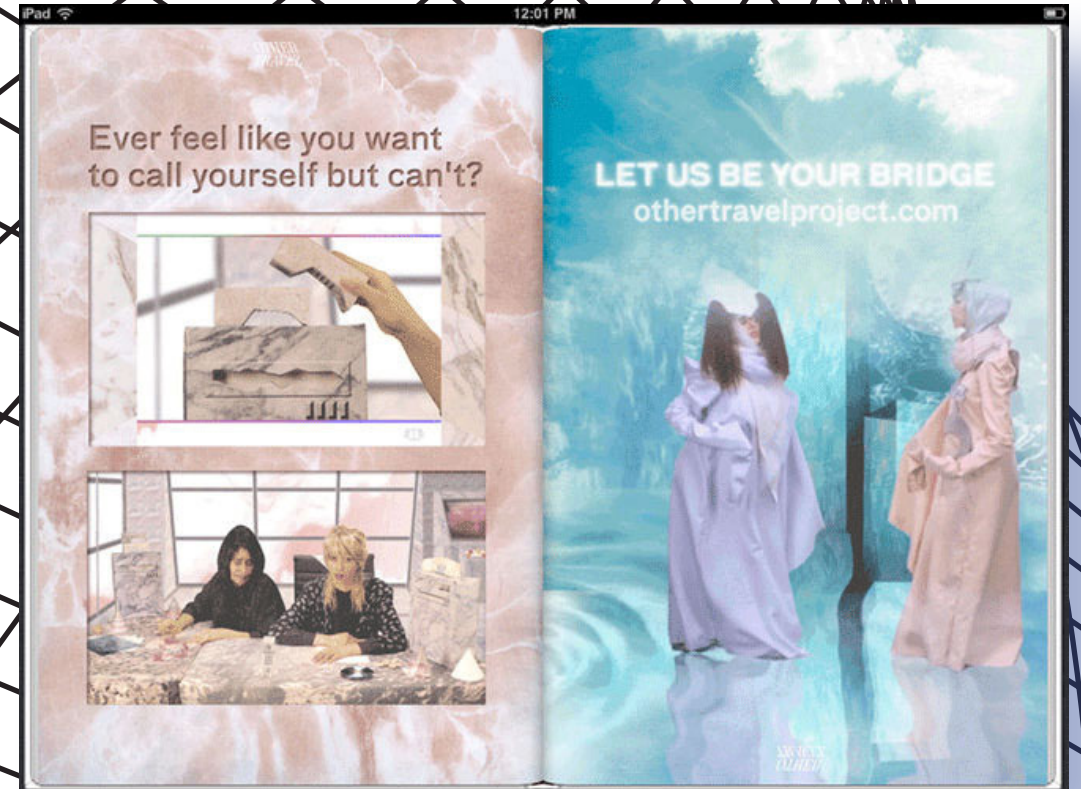


Sublimation Station  
2014





Trasparent Uploads  
2012



Other Travel for BFFA3AE "Ad Book"  
2013

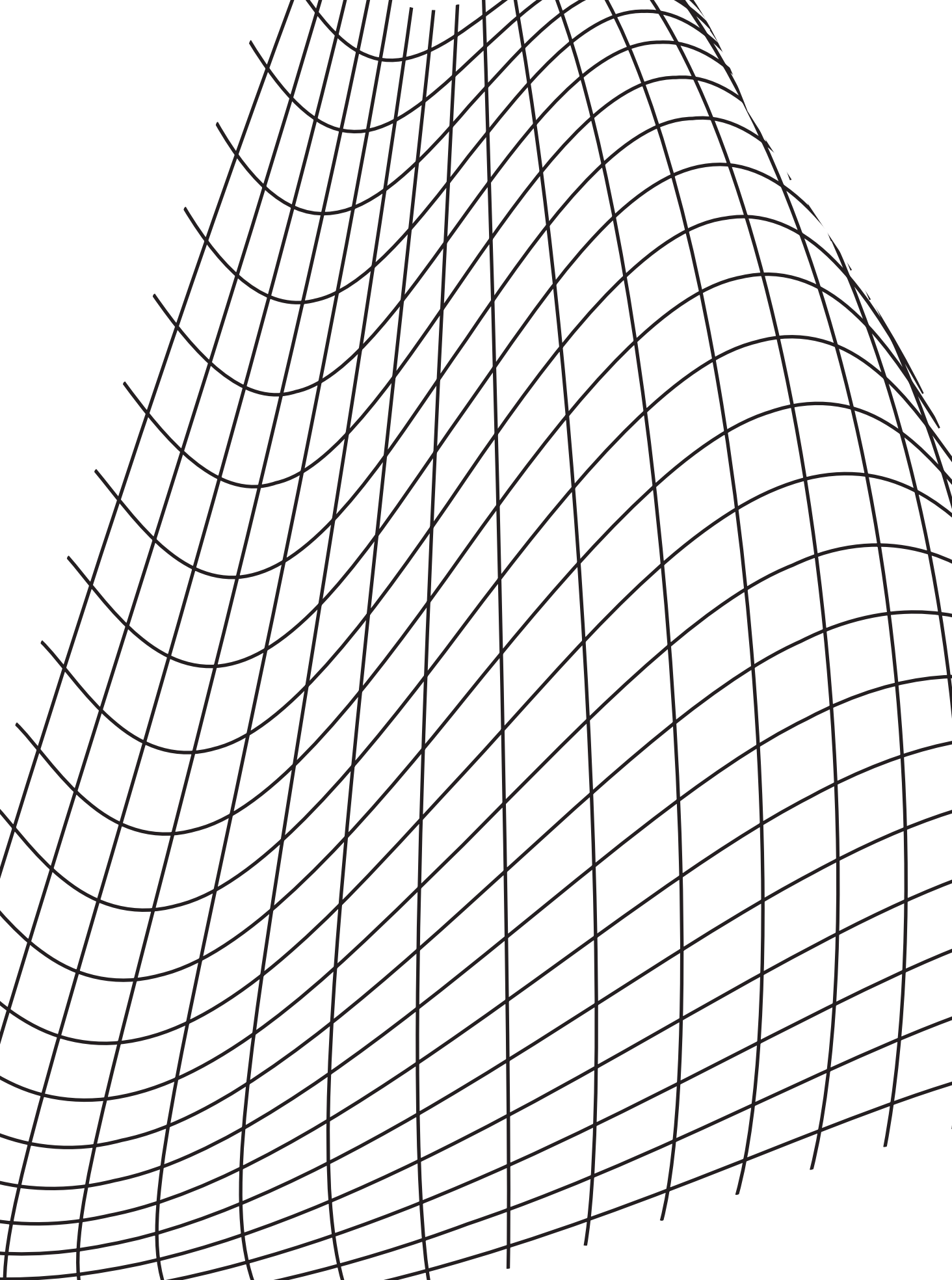




Technology Cover (iPhone)  
2013

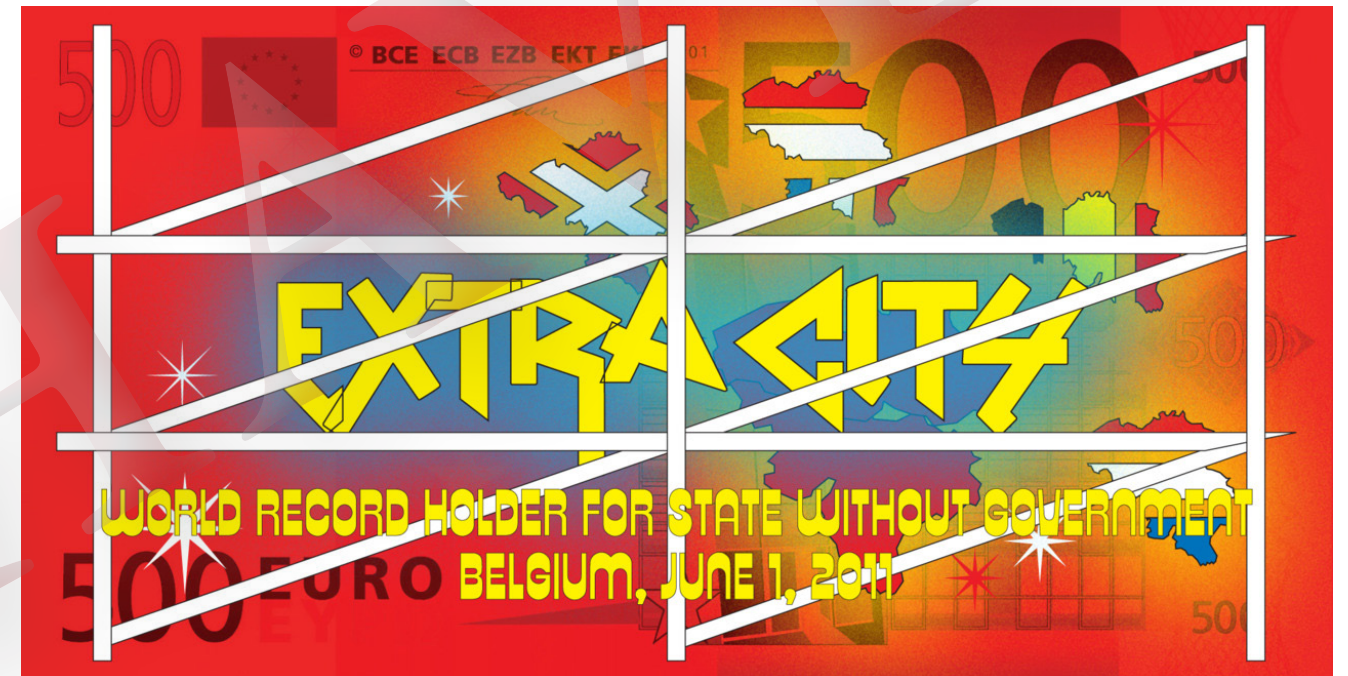


Technology Cover (iPad)  
2013



METAHAVEN





data / saga #Snowden [Close](#)

# TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SKYPE

## #NSA



Come to Iceland. Bring Data.

data / saga #NSA [Close](#)



**HI! I'M AEROFLOT FLIGHT SU 150,  
ON THE TARMAC AT MOSCOW'S  
SHEREMETYEVO AIRPORT.  
I'M NOT FLYING TO REYKJAVÍK,  
AND EDWARD SNOWDEN IS  
NOT ON BOARD.**

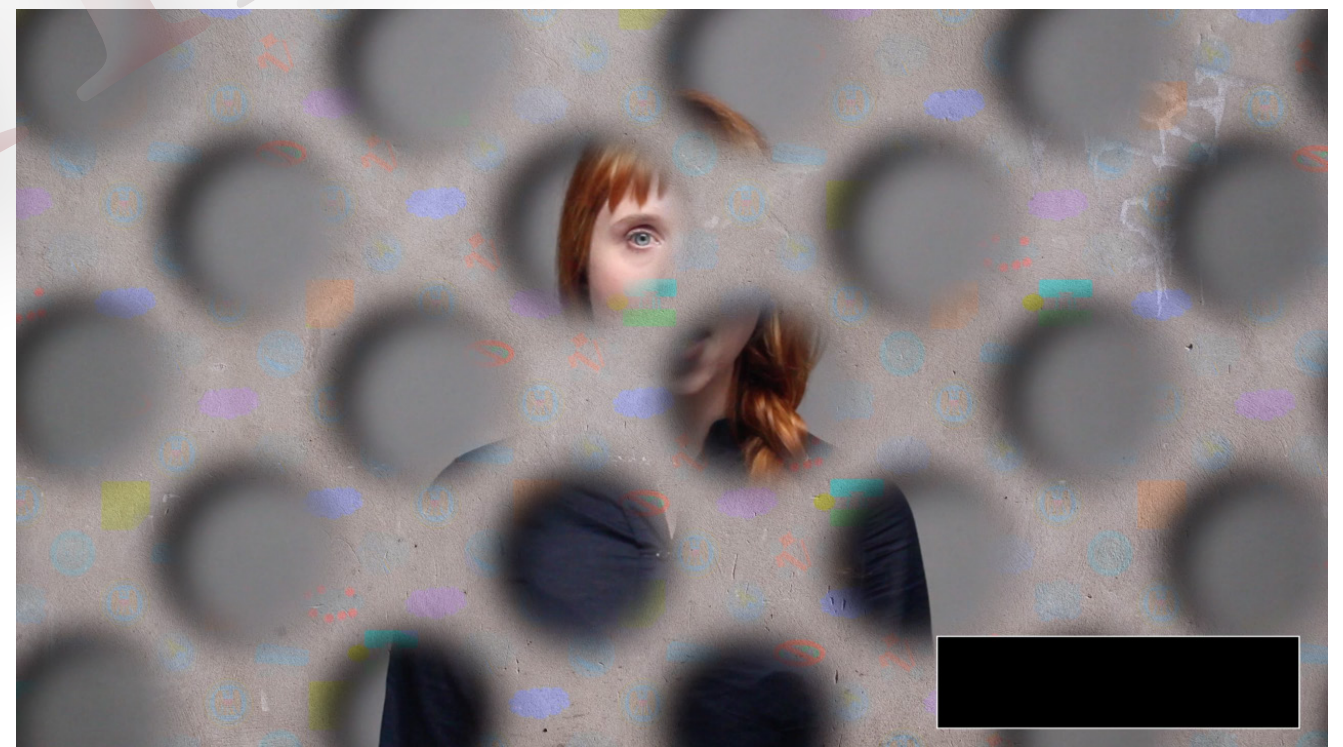


Come to Iceland. Bring Data.



**“amazing”**







I ♥ TUMBLR  
AND CARL  
SCHMITT

I ♥ BIG DATA  
AND HANNAH  
ARENDT

**ANARCHY IN THE UK TOUR**  
**2010**  
**facebook**  
**twitter** AND FROM THE USA **You Tube**

With Special Guests  
**flickr™**

**THE TOUR DATES**

Fri 3 Dec	Norwich University	Mon 13	Colston Hall Bristol
Sat 4	Kings Hall Derby	Tue 14	Top Rank Cardiff
Sun 5	City Hall Newcastle on Tyne	Wed 15	Apollo Glasgow
Mon 6	Leeds Polytechnic	Thu 16	Caixa Hall Dundee
Tue 7	Village Bowl Bournemouth	Fri 17	City Hall Sheffield
Wed 8		Sat 18	Kursaal Southend
Thu 9	Electric Circus Manchester	Sun 19	Guildford Civic Hall
Fri 10	Lancaster University	Mon 20	Birmingham Town Hall
Sat 11	Liverpool Stadium	Tue 21	Woods Centre Plymouth
Sun 12		Wed 22	The 400 Ballroom Torquay

TICKETS AVAILABLE FROM  
**Conservatives** Virgin Records

Arnold Berleant

*What is*

*Aesthetic*

*Engagement?*



Developments in the arts associated with modernism began in the latter part of the nineteenth century with Impressionism and Post-impressionism. These movements were followed by a succession of stylistic innovations that came to a head in the second half of the twentieth century. In the 1960s and '70s, a proliferation of artistic practices emerged that trespassed conventional boundaries. Innovative practices gave rise to new perceptual features in the arts, breaking out of the frame of the canvas and extruding from its flat surface, descending from the proscenium stage into the audience, and other such modifications of appreciative experience that discarded the traditional separation of audience and art object. Not only did the arts incorporate new materials and practices; they reached out to incorporate surprising subject-matters. All the arts began to intrude on the formerly safe space of the spectator by demanding active involvement in the appreciative process. Audience participation became overt and necessary for the fulfillment of the art, not only in the visual arts but in theater, fiction, sculpture, and other art forms. The traditional separation between the sequestered, contemplative experience of art and the world of ordinary experience was deliberately breached.

Aesthetics was in a quandary and, for a time, became obsessed with the problem of defining art that had far exceeded its customary bounds. Moreover, traditional ways of characterizing appreciative experience, in particular a contemplative, distancing attitude joined with Kantian disinterestedness, seemed inappropriate and irrelevant to the world of art that had emerged. This was the context in which attention began to shift for some theorists away from a focus on the art object, which came to be called by the assumptive term 'artwork,' and to the appreciative experience of art. In a series of papers and books beginning in the mid-1960s, the American philosopher Arnold Berleant began to develop a theoretical account that could accommodate these challenging developments in the contemporary arts. The central concept to emerge in this inquiry was the idea of 'engagement,' later specified as 'aesthetic engagement.' Aesthetic engagement became the central concept of an aesthetic that emerged as an alternative to the aesthetic disinterestedness that was central to traditional aesthetic theory.

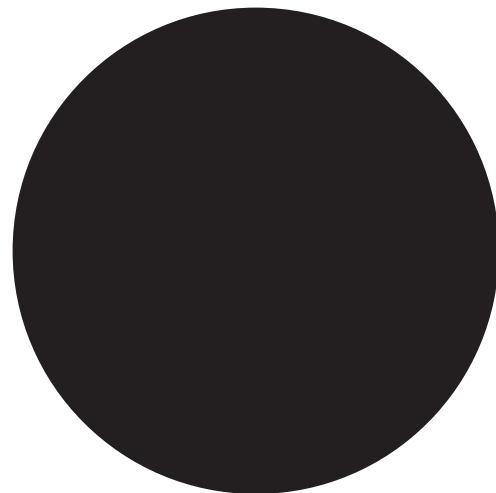
Aesthetic engagement rejects the dualism inherent in traditional accounts of aesthetic appreciation and epitomized in Kantian aesthetics, which treats aesthetic experience as the subjective appreciation of a beautiful object. Instead, aesthetic engagement emphasizes the holistic, contextual character of aesthetic appreciation. Aesthetic engagement involves active participation in the appreciative process, sometimes by overt physical action but always by creative perceptual involvement. Aesthetic engagement also returns aesthetics to its etymological origins by stressing the primacy of sense perception, of sensible experience. Perception itself is reconfigured to recognize the mutual activity of all the sense modalities, including kinesthetic and somatic sensibility more generally.

The concept of aesthetic engagement, then, epitomizes a holistic, unified aesthetics in place of the dualism of the traditional account. It rejects the traditional separations between the appreciator and the art object, as well as between the artist and the performer and the audience. It recognizes that all these functions overlap and merge within the aesthetic field, the context of appreciation. The customary separations and oppositions between the functions of artist, object, appreciator, and performer disappear in the reciprocity and continuity of appreciative experience. Thus it is no longer necessary to maintain the fiction that turns different functions into opposed entities. They become aspects of the aesthetic process rather than discrete objects or actions, and the appreciative experience becomes perceptually active, direct, and intimate. Aesthetic engagement recognizes that beauty, or aesthetic value more generally, inheres not in the object or in the perceiver but is rather the leading feature of the reciprocal process of perceptual participation between appreciator and object.

Understood in this way, aesthetic engagement is a valuable concept for understanding and appreciating recent developments. At the same time, it reinvigorates our experience of the traditional arts. Aesthetic engagement has a transformative effect when applied to seventeenth century Dutch landscape painting and portraiture, to the classical canon of music, to poetry and the novel, as well as to the modern arts. Moreover, aesthetic engagement lends itself particularly well to the wide interest in environmental

aesthetics, where engagement offers a more appropriate description of environmental appreciation that has descended from the contemplative distance of a scenic outlook to tramping along a woodland trail or paddling a meandering stream. Aesthetic engagement is useful, too, for the still more recent interest in everyday aesthetics where, again, the Kantian model of disinterested contemplation becomes irrelevant.

The central issue now is not the difference between art and non-art but between aesthetic and non-aesthetic. Both for its theoretical value in accommodating artistic innovations, for its ability to encompass developments in aesthetic appreciation that extend to ordinary life and activity, and for its ability to provide a unified theory of the arts and the aesthetic appreciation of nature, aesthetic engagement has proved particularly useful. What is needed now are specific studies of the arts and other occasions of aesthetic value that will demonstrate its capacity to illuminate the experience of appreciation.



# RYAN TRE CARTIN



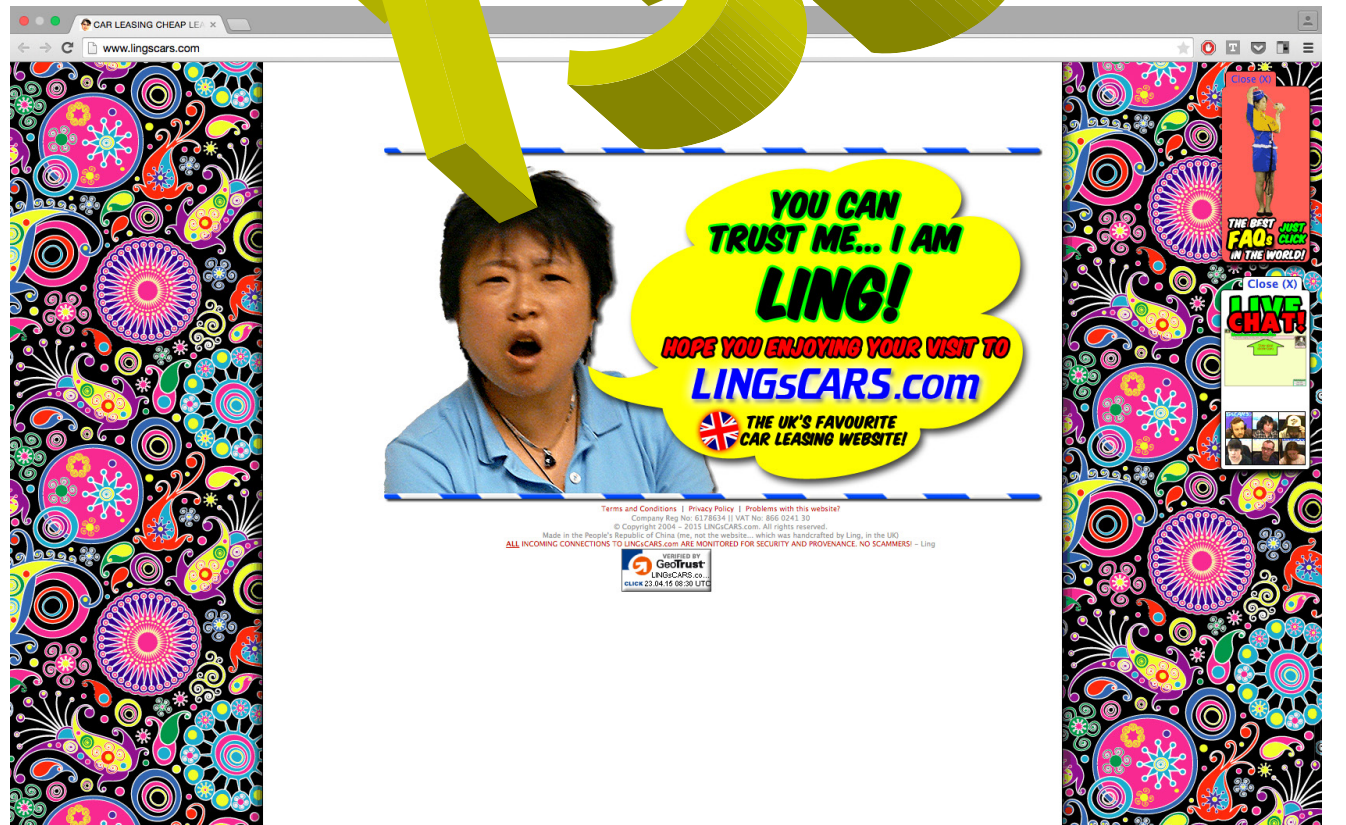
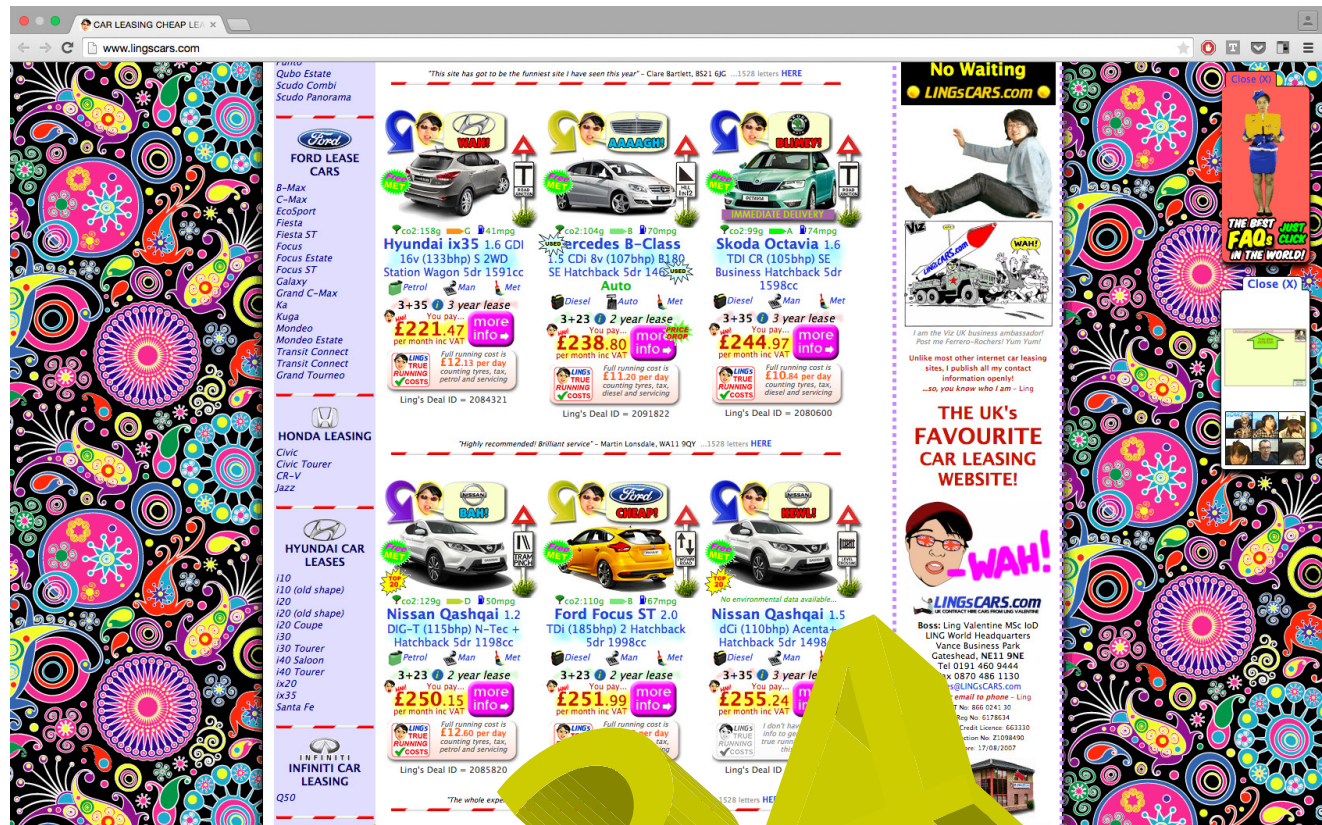












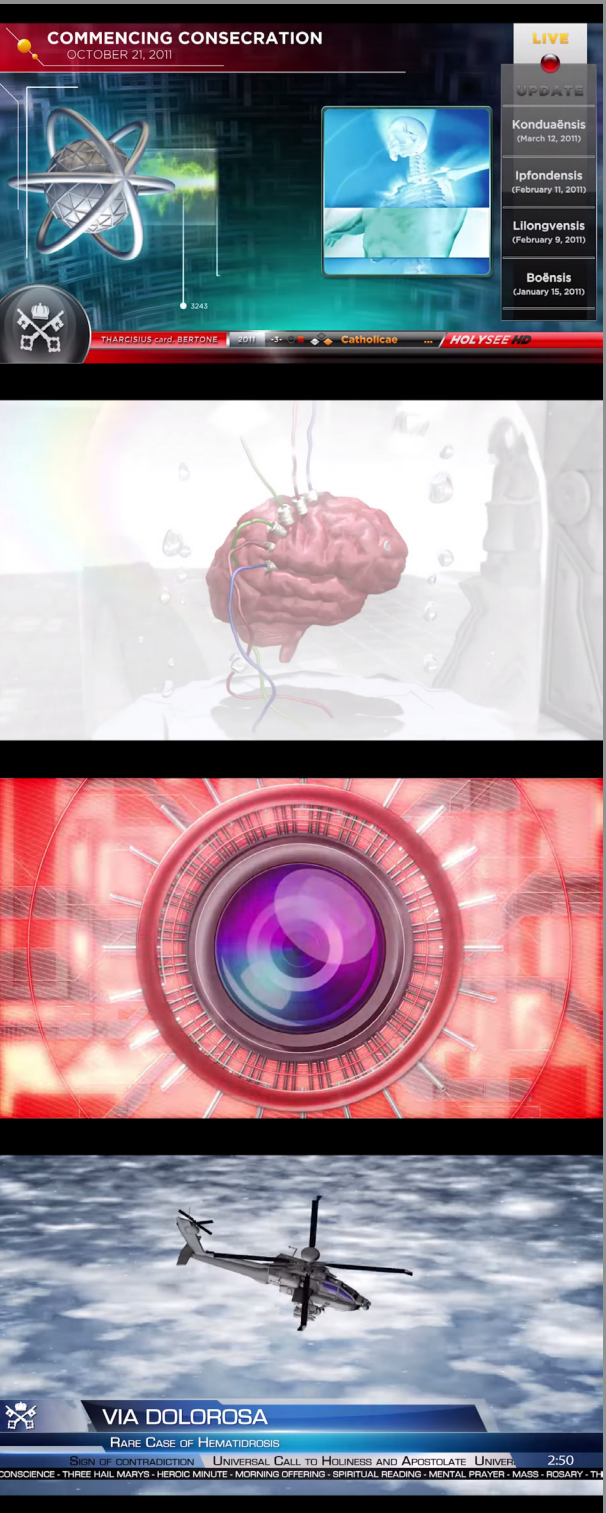


[newcars.com](http://newcars.com)

Fatima  
Al  
Quadiri



Vatican Vibes (2011)



Đâté (2010)





Tissue Stock (2012)





# LET'S TALK ABOUT TASTE



CARL WILSON

So far I've been re-examining global pop, schmaltz, big-voiced singing and other aspects of Céline's career from unaccustomed angles, finding thirteen ways of looking at a songbird, circling to try to find a more objective standpoint. But is there any objectivity to be found in artistic taste? The debate over whether beauty lies solely in the eye of the beholder runs through cultural history. It arises every time a critic makes a top ten list: Am I just naming the movies or books or albums I liked most in the preceding year, or am I asserting these ten works somehow were in fact the best or most significant? Do I dare to say the two claims are related?

Less trivially, "objectivity" is in play whenever there is a court case of censorship that results in art experts being summoned to testify to the "merit" of the transgressing work. These opinions are treated as evidence, as if they came from a forensic report – except that the prosecutors also bring out their own professors, curators or critics to argue that the accused creation is in fact devoid of redeeming aesthetic or social value. The verdict often turns on which experts have more prestige, making their tastes more believable: If one set comes from small Christian schools and the other from Harvard and Oxford, you can guess the outcome. A string of such spectacles took place in the late 80s and early 90s when neoconservatives took aim at record companies for putting out heavy metal and rap albums that offended "family values" and at the National Endowment for the Arts for granting public funding to "obscene" art. These "culture wars" preoccupied arts advocates for nearly a decade. They could as easily have been called taste wars.

One of the most trenchant responses came from a duo of immigrant artists, Russian expatriates Vitaly Komar and Alexandir Melamid: If the problem is what standards of taste ought to prevail in a diverse and democratic society, they asked, why not decide by democracy's best approximation of "objectivity," a popular vote? Since a taste election is difficult to imagine, Komar and Melamid (previously known for their satires on official Soviet socialist-realist art) settled for other thermometers of the public temperature: opinion polls and focus groups. They commissioned an \$80,000 "People's Choice" poll asking Americans what they liked and didn't like in art – sizes, styles, subjects, colors – and proceeded to make two paintings: "America's Most Wanted" and "America's Most Unwanted."

The poll spoke loud and clear: America liked the color blue, and images of natural landscapes, historical figures, women and children and/or large mammals on mid-sized canvases. So Komar and Melamid produced a "dishwashersized" picture of rolling hills, blue skies and blue water beside

which a family is picnicking while George Washington, a deer and a hippopotamus stand idly by. The "Most Unwanted" painting is a small, sharp-angled geometric abstract in gold and orange. They conducted smaller polls around the world: every country wanted a blue landscape.

The laughs here aren't just at the expense of popular taste. As Melamid said in an interview in the book *Painting by Numbers*: Komar and Melamid's *Scientific Guide to Art* (1997):

There's a crisis of ideas in art, which is felt by many, many people. ... Artists now – I cannot speak for all, but I have talked to many artists who feel this way – we have lost even our belief that we are the minority that knows. We believed ten years ago, twenty years ago, that we knew the secret. Now we have lost this belief. We are a minority with no power and no belief, no faith. I feel myself, as an artist and as a citizen, just totally obsolete. ... Okay, it can be done this way or that way or this way, or in splashes or smoothly, but why? What the hell is it about? That's why we wanted to ask people. For us – from our point of view – it's a sincere thing to understand something, to change the course. Because the way we live we cannot live anymore. I have never seen artists so desperate as they are now, in this society.

Added Komar, in his accented English:

Also, art world is not democratic society, but totalitarian one. It does not have checks and balances. Individuals who create its laws and criteria are also its main decision makers. This conflation of executive, legislative and judiciary is hallmark of totalitarian society.

In collaboration with New York composer and neuroscientist Dave Soldier, they also conducted a smaller scale, Internet survey to produce the *Peoples Choice Music*. The uproarious *Most Unwanted Song* turned out to be, as dictated by the poll, more than twenty-five minutes long, included accordions, bagpipes, a children's choir, banjo, flute, tuba and synthesizer (the only instrument in both the most wanted and most unwanted tunes) and mashed up opera, rap, Muzak, atonal music, advertising jingles and holiday songs. The *Most Wanted Song*, the song that would be unavoidably and uncontrollably liked by seventy-two percent, plus or minus twelve percent, of listeners, was a five-minute R&B slow jam, a male female duet with guitar, sax, drums, synths and strings. Critics often described it as sounding like .. Céline Dion. And they all claimed to like the *Most Unwanted* much better.

Is Céline Dion's music a dishwasher-sized blue landscape And if a statistically solid majority of the Earth's people, plus or minus twelve percent, wanted to fill the world with sappy love songs, what would be wrong with that? Who gets to say? Komar

and Melamid were addressing a widespread collapse of faith in all regimes of taste that previously guided not only the reception but the making of art. As refugees from a totalitarian state, they were earnest about democracy; as artists, they understood (as their project inevitably demonstrates) that the mechanisms of democracy are hopeless for art. No individual person would actually want the *Most Wanted Painting*, a ridiculous jumble of incongruent elements. It was a sincerely painful joke about art and democracy – as is the history of taste, for anyone who takes both democracy and art seriously.

Komar and Melamid's pseudoscientific project is a reminder that science so far has little to say about taste. Evolutionary theorists propose the blue landscape ideal may derive from an embedded longing for the primeval savannah, and that admiration for musical virtuosity has to do with its function as sexual status display, like a bird's bright plumage. Anthropology finds social music (for dancing, religious rites, parties, relating stories) in all human cultures; music for pure listening is an anomaly. And brain science has shown how musical pleasure is structured by expectation and familiarity, in a particular song (when will the pattern resolve, and how), between songs (is this music like other music we know and like) and between genres (do you know the rules of this kind of music). Balancing repetition and novelty is crucial: some songs feel too complicated to enjoy (like the *Most Unwanted Song*) and others too clichéd to hold interest (as critics found the *Most Wanted*). There's little explanation, though, of why people gravitate toward different ratios of surprise to familiarity. Going by the patrons of experimental music concerts, people who like formally unpredictable art are not especially prone to drive fast cars, bungee jump or even talk to strangers. But they do seem more likely also to be reading obscure novels or looking at weird paintings. Is there a risk gene for artistic adventurousness? The new discipline of musical neurobiology, well outlined in Montreal researcher (and ex-record producer) Daniel Levitin's *This Is Your Brain on Music* (2006), hints that the brain might be built to prefer consonance to dissonance, steady rhythms over chaotic ones and so forth. However, these penchants seem to be malleable, as science journalist Jonah Lehrer says in *Proust Was a Neuroscientist* (2007). There's a network of neurons in the brain stem specifically geared to sort unfamiliar sounds into patterns. When they succeed, the brain releases a dose of pleasure-giving dopamine; when they fail, when a sound is too new, excess dopamine squirts out, disorienting and upsetting us. Lehrer suggests this explains events such as the 1913 riots at the Paris premiere of Igor Stravinsky's dissonant *The Rite of*

Spring. But these neurons also learn. With repeated exposure, they can tame the unknown, turn noise back into music. Thus, a year later, another Parisian audience cheered for *The Rite of Spring* and in 1940, Walt Disney put it in a children's cartoon, *Fantasia* (appropriately enough, the dinosaurs and evolution sequence). The problem with this parable is that it isn't really about repeated exposure. Maybe the brains of children in *Fantasia*'s audience were readied by having heard music influenced by Stravinsky. But what about the 1914 audience? It seems implausible it was mainly the rioters returning to give him a second chance. No, it would have been the hipsters of 1914, lured by the success de scandale and eager to be shocked, to take the dopamine overdose. Their neurons were prepared without ever hearing the sounds. The picture is fuzzy unless we can measure the effect of received concepts and social identifications on private neuro auditory processes.

Still, the field is young. I wouldn't be surprised if variances in individual brain chemistry help explain taste predilections: if Céline fans and I disagree on whether her music is fresh, maybe my brain is a bigger dopamine junkie. Likewise, that the ranks of music aficionados are so full of the socially awkward suggests their nonconformism may not be entirely by choice. (Artistic, autistic watch your pronunciation.)

But the bias that "conformity" is a pejorative has led, I think, to underestimating the part mimesis – imitation – plays in taste. It's always other people following crowds, whereas my own taste reflects my specialness. A striking demonstration of the mimetic effect comes from a group of Columbia University sociologists, who took advantage of the Internet as a zone in which you can conduct large scale simulations of mass culture behavior, isolated from advertising and other distorting factors. They set up a website (as researcher Duncan J. Watts explains in a 2007 *New York Times Magazine* article) called *Music Lab*, where 14,000 registered participants were asked to listen to, rate and, if they chose, download songs by bands they had never heard of. One group could see only song titles and band names; the rest were divided into eight worlds, and could see which songs in their world were most downloaded. In these social influence worlds, as soon as a song generated a few downloads, more people began downloading it. Higher rated songs did do somewhat better, but each world had different hits, depending which songs caught on there first. They called the effect cumulative advantage, a rule that popularity tends to amplify exponentially. (In the control group, quality ratings and popularity usually matched.) Does this mean people are lemmings? No, just that we're social: we are curious what everybody else is hearing, want to belong, want to have things in



common to talk about. We are also insecure about our own judgments and want to check them against others. So songs might in part be famous simply for being famous. Intriguingly, as Watts notes, Introducing social influence into human decision making .. didn't just make the hits bigger it also made them more unpredictable.

Perhaps cumulative advantages semi randomized conformity helps explain why the history of art is not all blue landscapes. When "early adopters" help make a Picasso famous, his reputation becomes self-inflating the mutation becomes the mainstream, even though few people immediately like his paintings. Tastes insecurity turns out to be the prerequisite for artistic growth.

Aesthetics is the discipline created to contend with this insecurity, but considering that philosophy of art has been underway for at least three centuries (since the Enlightenment, and much longer if you include Aristotle, it comes up quite short on accounting for taste. It has analyzed elegantly the myriad ways the elements of art function, but when it confronts conflicts of taste, it engages in more retroactive rationalization than convincing illumination and its verdicts on "good taste" often conveniently align with the taste the writer happens to hold.

In one landmark essay, Of the Standard of Taste(1757), David Hume describes the tasteful person in terms that seem intuitively right: Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty. But that's a job description for critics, not a standard of taste. For that, Hume can only appeal to authority: the tasteful person will give approbation to works that stand the test of time – the works still approved by tasteful people later. Its a tautological, survival-of-the-fittest view that's no help in resolving quarrels of taste in our own lifetimes. His stipulation that the critic be credentialed with wide knowledge and experience could itself be described as a prejudice – a bias in favor of tradition, which may punish deviation from the "highest" standards and obstruct the creation of new ones. Exactly this kind of prejudice kept most high-culture Brahmins from accepting pop music or film as art at all until the 1960s. Hume acknowledges the need for artistic change, but he underestimates how determinedly his elite of taste aristocrats would resist it: the demand to be at once expert and unbiased is enough of a paradox that you could say Hume's ideal critic by definition cannot exist.

Aesthetic philosophy's other great-granddaddy is Immanuel Kant. His Third Critique, The Critique of

Judgment (1790), like Hume's essay, begins from the dilemma that people can disagree on what is beautiful. But the parts of the Third Critique that dazzle are its limnings of the nature of beauty and of the sublime, and its subtly kinetic account of how reason, imagination and perception interact in "free play" to produce aesthetic judgment: Kant seems almost to intuit, two centuries in advance, how disparate chambers of the brain light up simultaneously when we listen to music, as recounted in Levitin's book. When he tries to account for how these processes produce opposing judgments, however, Kant falls back on a fantasy that there's a *sensus communis*, a "common sense" of beauty that would generate a consensus if only there were "ideal" conditions – including ample education, leisure, etcetera. Aesthetic agreement only eludes us because circumstances distort some peoples perceptions. A modern reader can't help noticing that Kant's ideal conditions suspiciously resemble being an educated eighteenth-century gentleman in cultured Königsburg. This "common sense" is not only unconvincing from a contemporary, diversity-oriented viewpoint - it doesn't even sound desirable.

But some of his insights still seem crucial. Kant was the first to say that aesthetic judgments are by nature unprovable they can't be reduced to logic. Nevertheless, he pointed out, they always feel necessary and universal: when we think something's great, we want everyone else to think its great too.

Not long after Kant and Hume, whose contributions were only the weightiest in a more widespread dispute, the veracity of taste was largely put on the philosophical shelf. The "man of taste" tended to become a caricature a figure out of Molière or Oscar Wilde, the dandy who lavishes more care on niceties of form and style than on deeper values. (In fact the clinching portrait of such a character was drawn even in the thick of the Enlightenment, in Denis Diderot's extraordinary Rameau's Nephew) Many writers (Nietzsche among them) have lambasted Kant, in particular, for saying the appreciator of beauty must be "disinterested," adopting a personal distance from the origins, content and implications - the meaning, if you will - of the work of art.

The great American art critic Clement Greenberg, one of the rare later thinkers to take up the question, suggested that Romantic ideology raised art to such a sacred status in the nineteenth century that it seemed gauche to call attention to the process of evaluating it. Following Kant, Greenberg offered brilliant descriptions of the mental "switch" that is flipped when we regard something aesthetically – as we can do with anything, he argued, not just art, by contemplating an object or scene or person as "an

end in itself," apart from any other role or use – echoing Kant's definition of beauty as purposiveness without purpose. Greenberg was also lucid on Kant's insinuation that to enjoy art is also to judge it - you like it because it gives pleasure, but it can't give you pleasure if you don't like it.

Greenberg's answer to taste conflict, however, was the same as Hume's: we know there is objective taste because, over time, a consensus is reached on the great works of the past. (Never mind that anything ruled out by previous generations' consensus is probably lost and unlikely to come messing with the current consensus.) The most objective taste in the present, he said, belongs to those who know that canon deeply but are also open to novelty. Which (surprise, surprise) sounds a lot like Clement Greenberg, although his openness seemed to ebb by the mid-1960s, when he began trashing new art movements as a decline from the modernism on which he'd made his critical reputation a vivid case of the contradiction between mandarinism and flexibility. And that's not even to mention his dismissal of mass culture as, first, "kitsch" and, later, "middlebrow" - either way, the enemy of "genuine" culture.

Rather than by science or philosophy, the story of how aesthetic judgment reached the crisis felt by Komar and Melamid is best understood as a product of western art itself. To oversimplify wantonly, the disenchantment begins with the severing of visual art and music in particular from their religious role, in which the Church (and, rhetorically, God) is the ultimate art critic. After the Enlightenment, art gradually moves from an aristocratic status to a bourgeois one. The Romantics, in reaction, celebrate artistic genius as an autonomous agent of revelation, proudly outside society. Modernism gives that outsider status a harder edge: Arts mission becomes not just to reveal higher truth but also to attack social falsehood. The very idea of "beauty" becomes a second-rate capitulation to bourgeois values - now ugliness, obscenity, formlessness and randomness all can be in the best of taste. Innovation becomes the yardstick, as artists continually attempt to outpace taste, to violate its terms or render it irrelevant. The belief is that to bring about a higher consciousness, its necessary not just to delight with newness but also to mount a shock attack on the old, bourgeois, decadent consciousness. As critic Boris Groys puts it, Now it is not the observer who judges the artwork, but the artwork that judges – and often condemns its public." The motivations are varied - for some, its a psychoanalysis-inspired faith in the irrational; for others, it is revolutionary politics or plain misanthropy; for most, it's just what bohemians do. And improbably, they succeed. Not that taste comes to an end, but the expectation of consensus withers.

This is possible because attacks on conventional taste have been mounted from several directions. Its an outcome of the disillusioning course of the twentieth century, as sounded in Theodor Adorno's question of how to write poetry after Auschwitz. But mainly its a more upbeat, good-humored attack from the paradoxical partnership of capitalism – which seeks to remove any barriers to reaching all possible marketplaces – and democracy, which fosters the view that elite opinion is no better than anyone else's. (Today they've been supplemented by their advanced outgrowths, globalization and identity politics.) The most powerful vehicle for that alliance is mass culture. Pop songs and movies and genre fiction and magazines are so appealing, achieve so much aesthetically for so many people, that snobbery cannot hold the line against them. With Pop Art, camp aesthetics and rock 'n' roll, the notions of highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow – which from nearly the dawn of mass culture dominated discussions of taste (see historian Michael Kammen's *American Culture, American Tastes*) – start to fall apart. By the early twenty-first century, almost no one believes in them.

Among artists themselves, the continual process of violating limits seems to reach an endpoint or at least exhaustion, and anything-goes eclecticism takes its place (critic and philosopher Arthur Danto calls this "the end of art history" or "post-art"). Among audiences, a growing fragmentation and subculturization accomplishes similar ends: though indie-rock and classical listeners, science-fiction fans and architecture buffs, rockabillys and swing kids, hip-hop heads and salsa dancers may believe strongly in their own tastes, in aggregate they are acclimatized to the notion that separate "taste worlds" can coexist peacefully, without need for external, official inspection and verification.

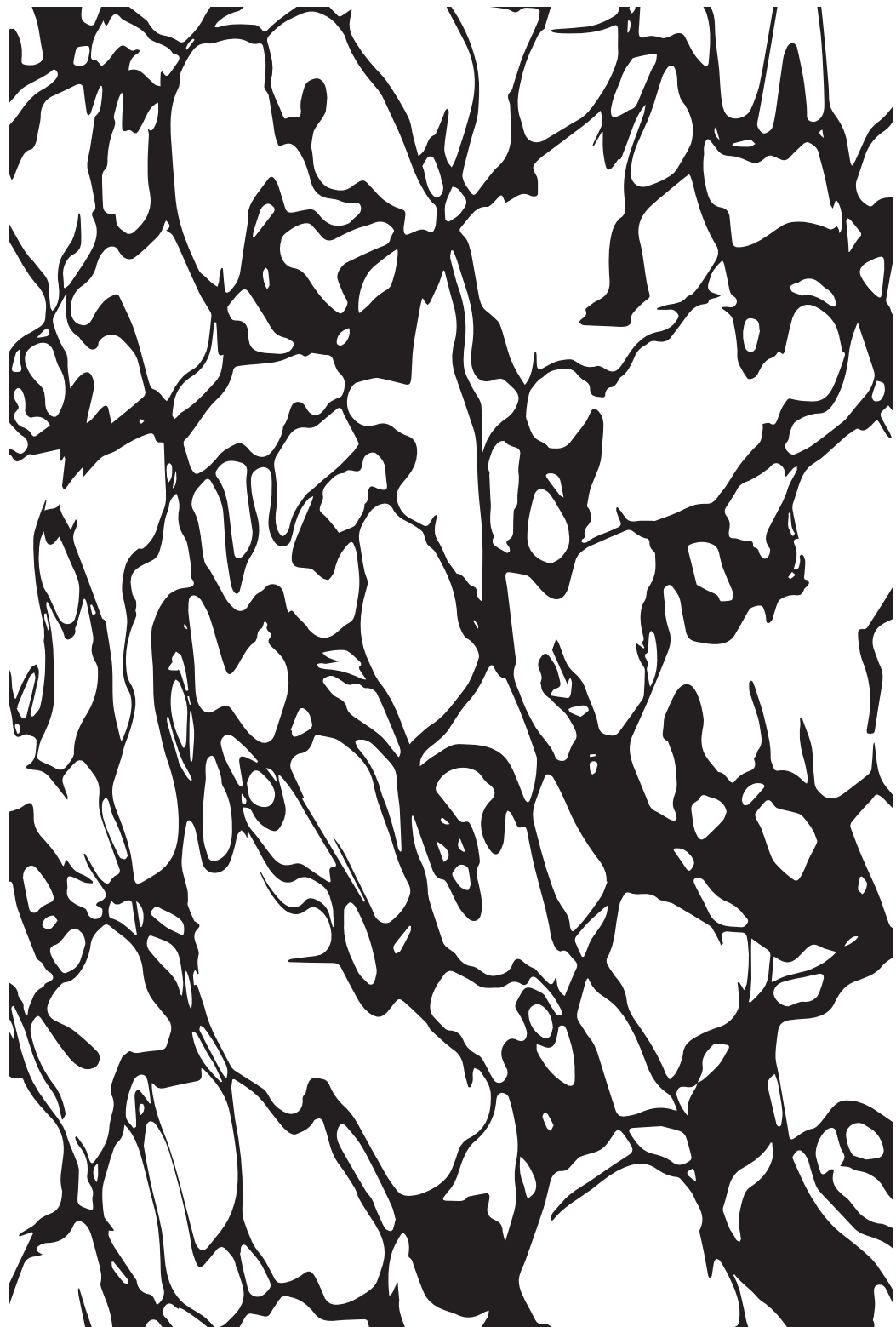
Early on, this shift brought pop-culture criticism into its own. While there had been a few serious commentators on movies and jazz, the treatment of pop and mass culture in North America was mainly confined to light journalism until the advent of writers such as Pauline Kael and Andrew Sarris on film (as well as their equivalents in France) and the "counterculture" press that created rock criticism, with writers such as Robert Christgau, Greil Marcus, Lester Bangs and Ellen Willis. While film critics usually made the case that film deserved appreciation on a par with high art, rock criticism began with a more radical stance against elite taste, arguing no work was too humble for aesthetic contemplation – that a form's most "low" or "impure" qualities could be its strengths. As the field grew, that attitude was watered down: some writers reintroduced traditional hierarchies in updated forms; a rough idea of a pop/rock canon

began to coalesce in books like the Rolling Stone Record Guides; other fans and critics, especially after punk, adopted a harsh line on “selling out” to an entertainment industry that, like Greenberg or Adorno before them, they considered a capitalist scheme to foist brainless product on a beclouded public; and so on. The debates over “rockism” and “popism” are symptoms of present unease about standards and subjectivism, as is, of course, this book. But the mandate to dethrone taste orthodoxies remains part of pop criticism’s legacy, so much so that it may help bring its own extinction: Within what more than one writer has called “No-Brow” culture, who needs professional critics? What do they offer, if not objectivity?

The one bothersome matter in this anarchic taste universe (a utopia or dystopia, depending on your ideology, but one that cannot be wished away) is the persistence of a mainstream – what Greenberg or his contemporary Dwight Macdonald would have called “middlebrow” culture, the politely domineering realm where Céline Dion is queen, unattached to any validating subculture. Middlebrow is the new lowbrow — mainstream taste the only taste for which you still have to say you’re sorry. And there, taste seems less an aesthetic question than, again, a social one: among the thousands of varieties of aesthetes and geeks and hobbyists, each with their special-ordered cultural diet, the abiding mystery of mainstream culture is, “Who the hell are those people?” Perhaps Komar and Melamid are right: the way to the heart of taste today may be through a poll.





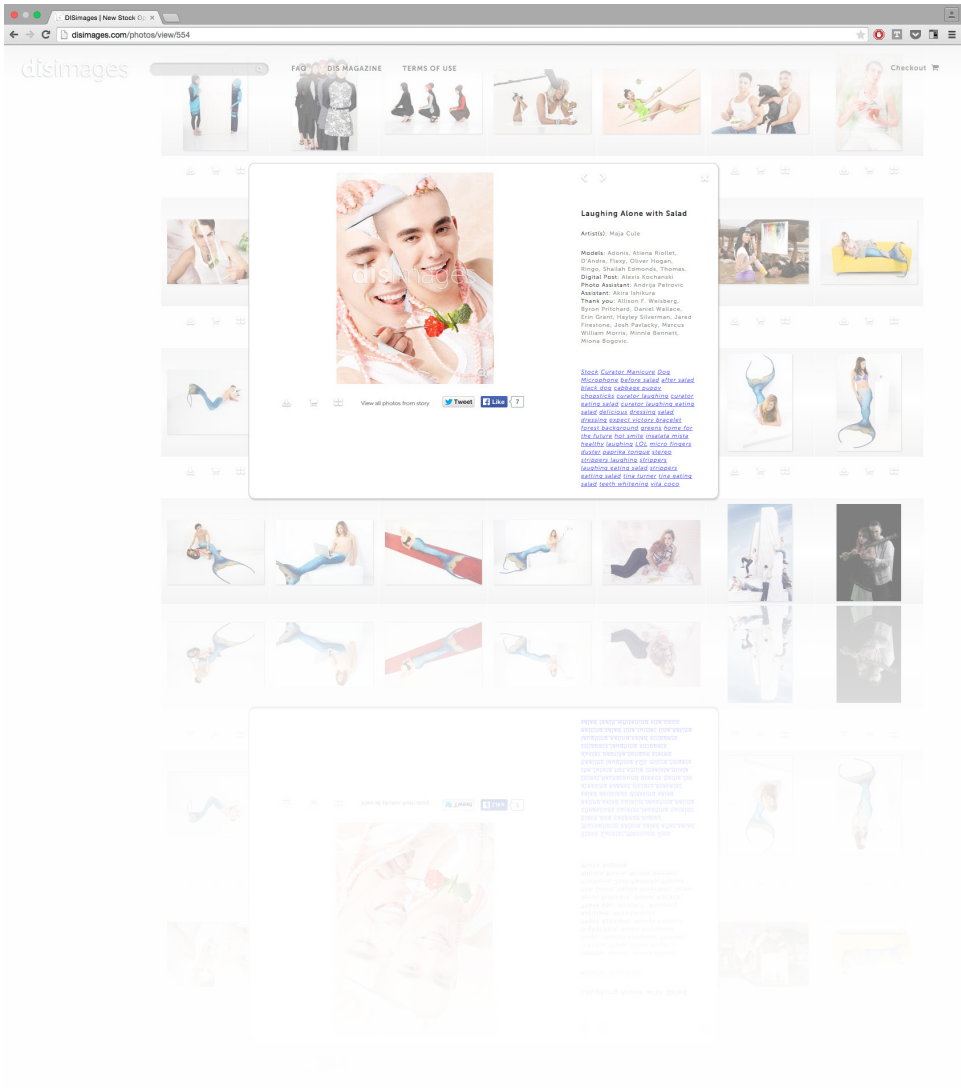
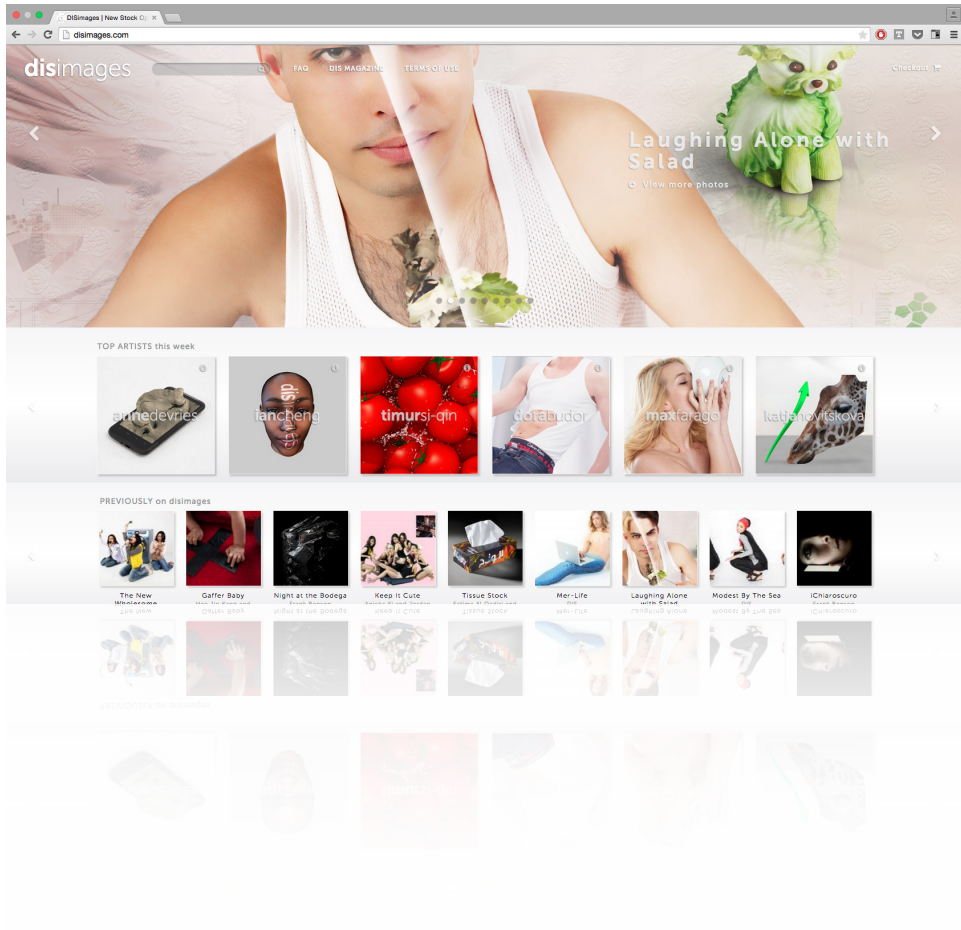


DIS

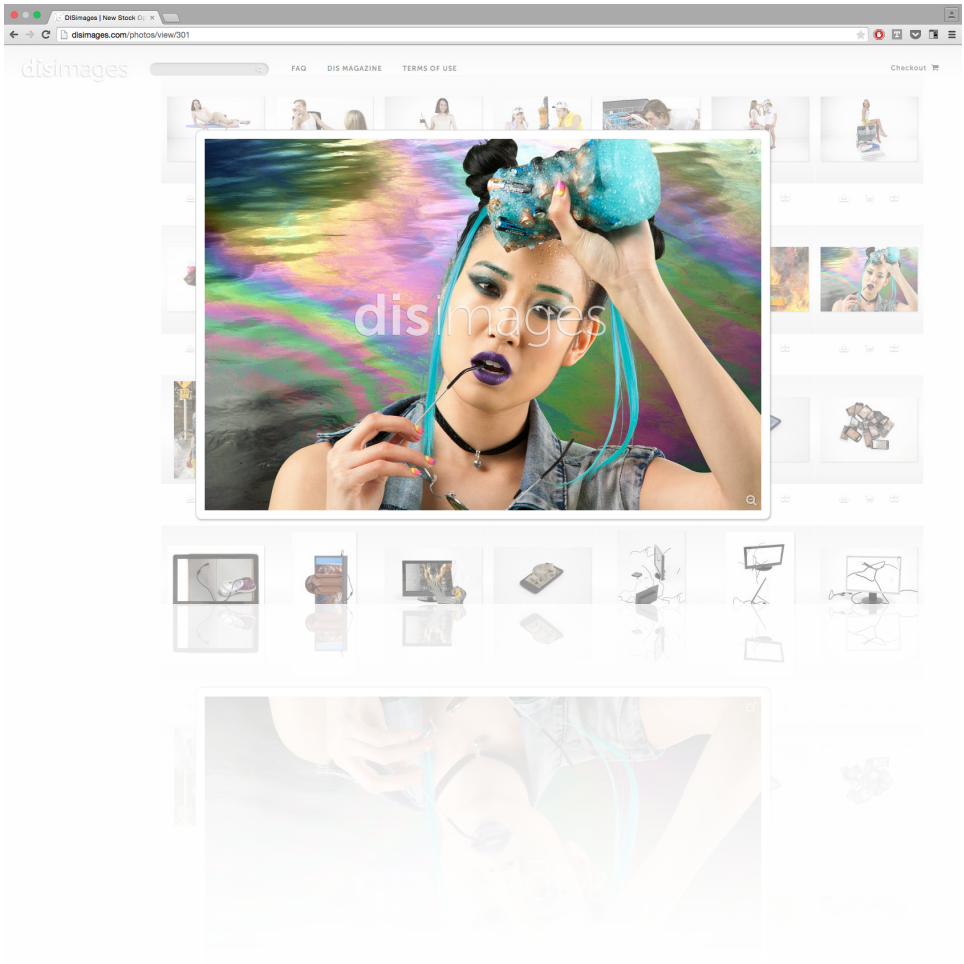
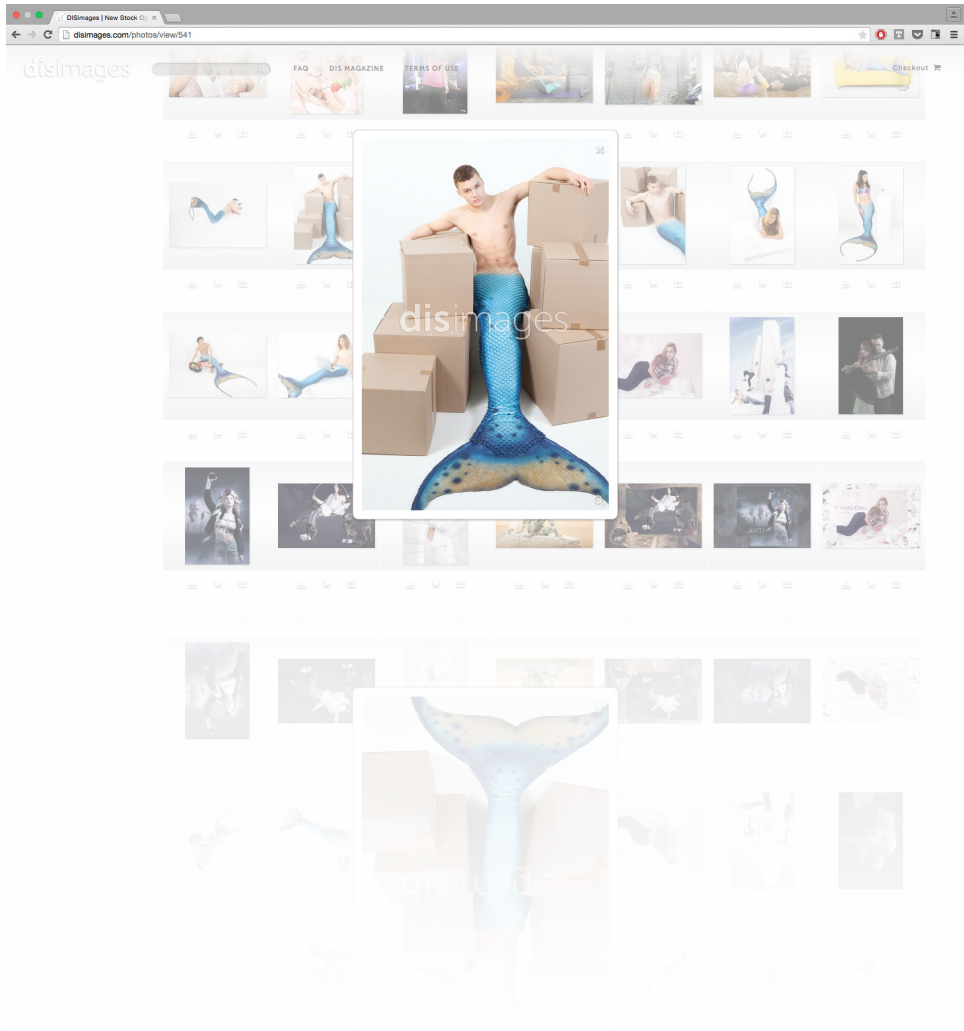


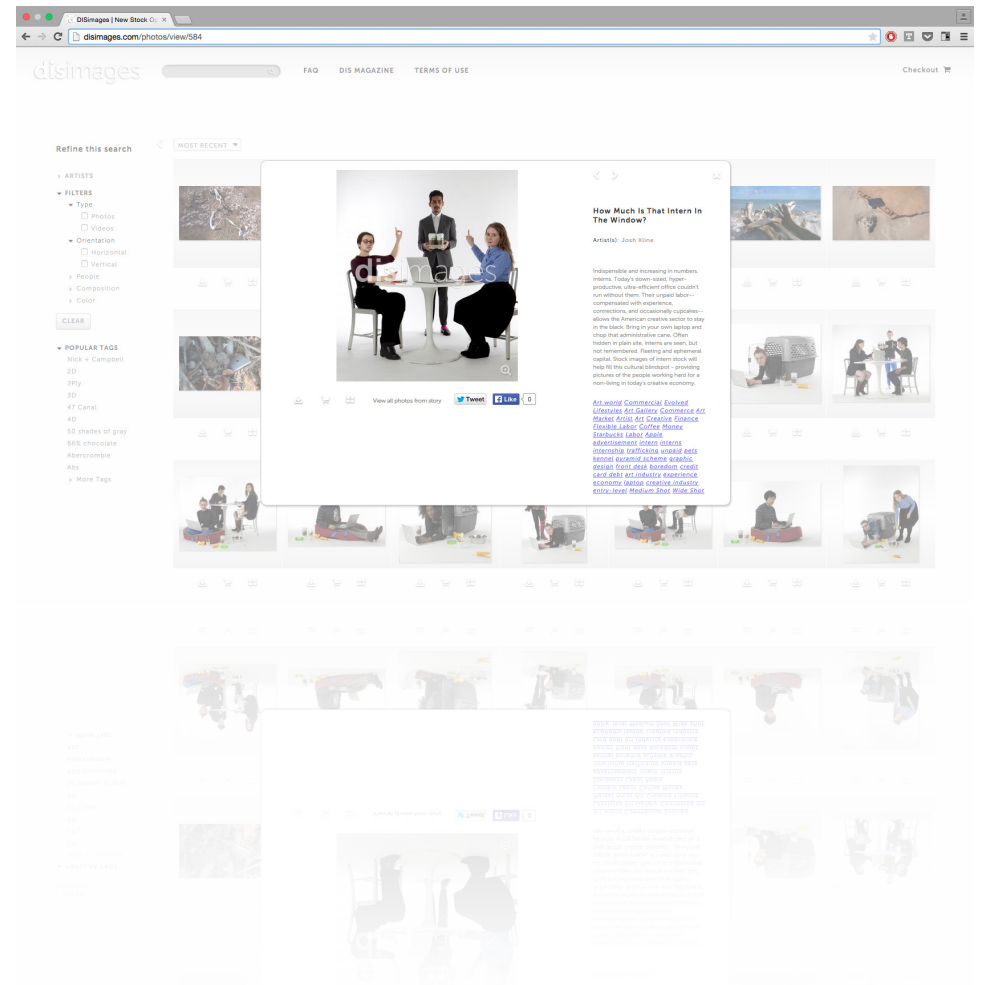
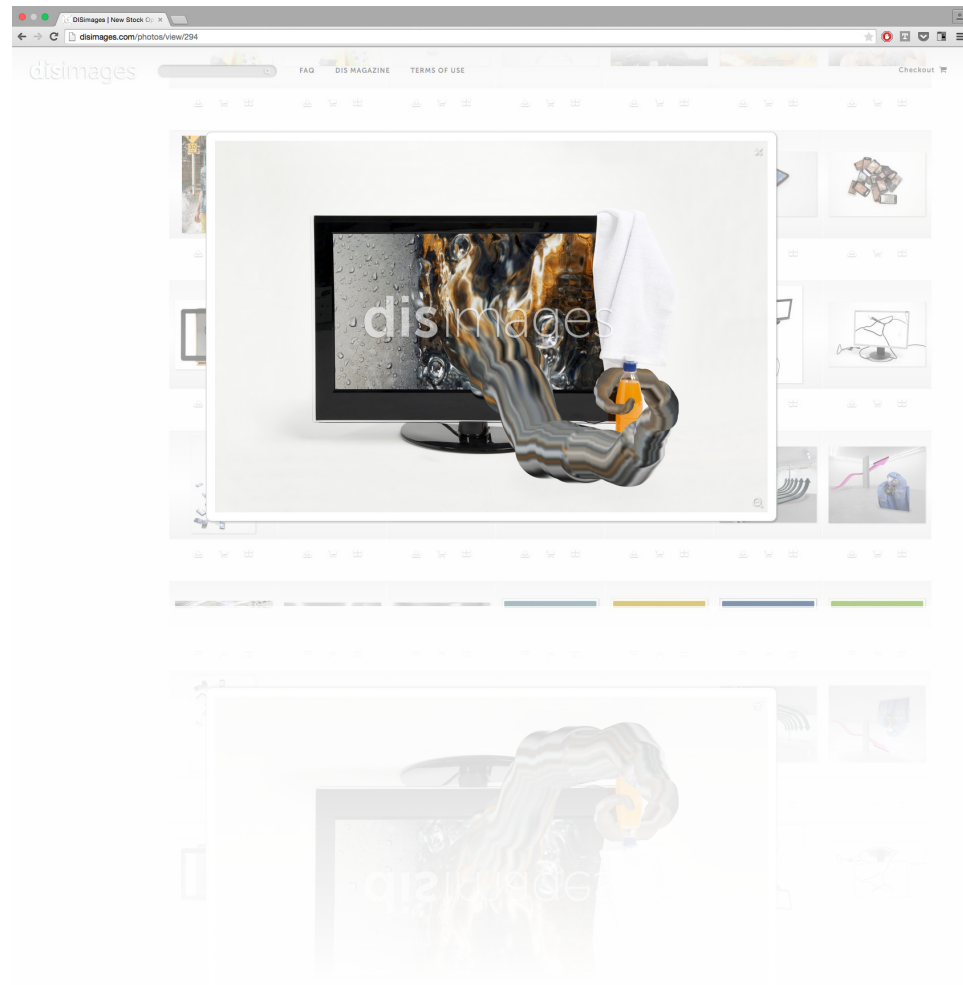














dis

世界

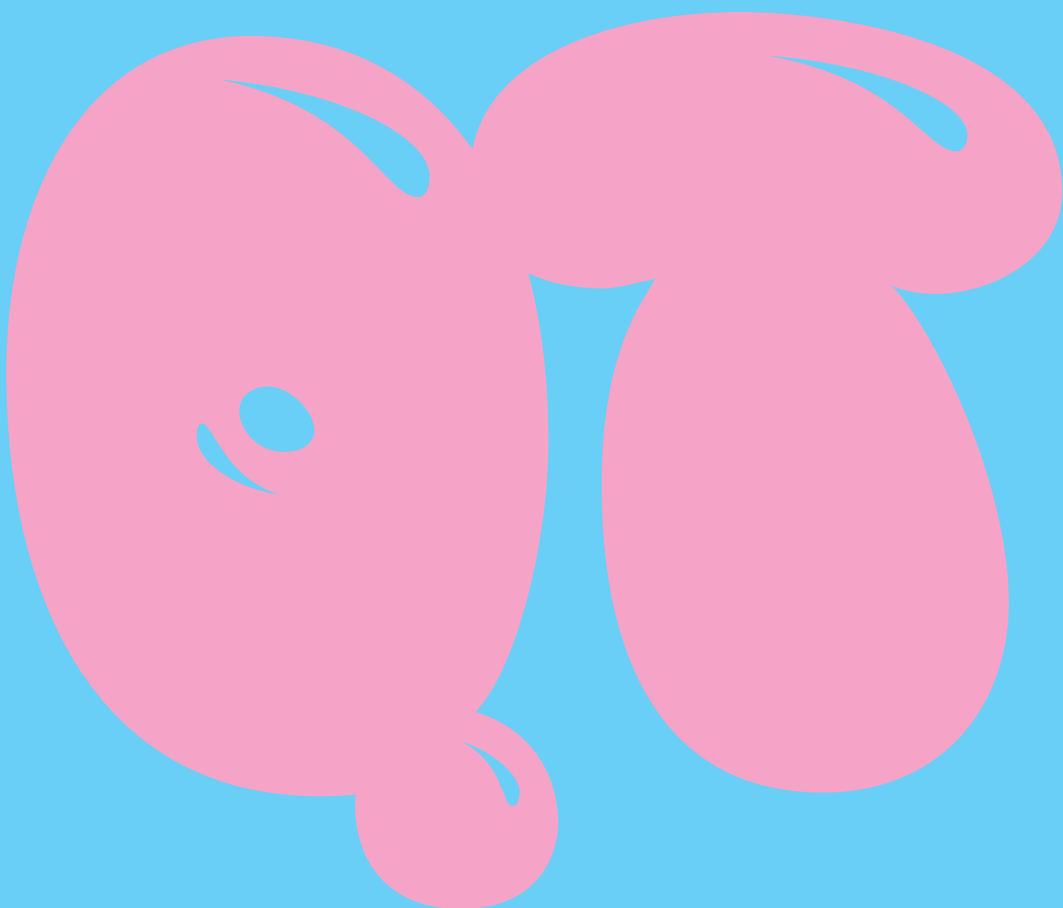
REVEAL



REVEAL



THE

















# Colophon

# Typefaces Used

(in order of appearance)

Apercu light  
Akzidenze Grotesque Extended Bold  
Farnham Display  
Dear Sir/Madam  
Reader  
Akkurat  
Franklin Gothic Condensed  
Amerigo  
Portrait  
GT Walsheim  
Austin  
Acta  
Belwe  
Garamond  
Value  
Clairvaux  
Trajan  
Minion Pro  
Helvetica  
Avenir  
Blow Up

RISD

Graphic Design

Typography 3

Benjamin Shaykin

2015

Catalogue Project

YEON HAK RYOO



Copyright © 2010 by Yeon Hak Ryoo

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at the address below.

2 College St, #1395  
Providence, RI  
02903

Printed in the United States of America