



Illustration from Athanasius Kircher's  
*Arca Noë* (1675).

**FICTION FUNCTION!  
WORLD STAKES/HISTORY  
SHARES: A RULE BOOK  
FOR THE WORLD  
HISTORY GAME (1991)**

Okazaki Kenjirō, Tazaki Hideaki,  
Sawaragi Noi

**IN THE POST-HISTORICAL PERIOD**, there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history. I can feel in myself, and see in others around me, a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed. Such nostalgia, in fact, will continue to fuel competition and conflict even in the post-historical world for some time to come.

—Francis Fukuyama<sup>1</sup>

Francis Fukuyama was all too glib when he penned the above words in his 1989 essay “The End of History?” It needs no pointing out by now that the “history” that was supposed to have come to an end here was really just a “world history” that was credible only within the Cold War structure—a history of forty years at most, and one that certainly does not extend back to Hegel.

The conflict between capitalist and communist blocs: this was only ever a conflict within a single cultural sphere sharing a single world view. The Cold War structure was an elaborate construct for making us believe it was the structure of the whole world, with no other worlds outside it.

Fukuyama describes a posthistorical (post-Cold War) world of caretaking of the museum of human history, and competition and conflict fueled by nostalgia for that history.

But the Cold War was, from the beginning, always a conflict started by those who shared a single “history/narrative” out of their nostalgia for that “history/narrative,” an internal conflict within a single community sharing the same museum. The narrative of “history” is already provided complete at the beginning.

<sup>1</sup> [Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?,” *The National Interest*, no. 16 (Summer 1989): 18.]

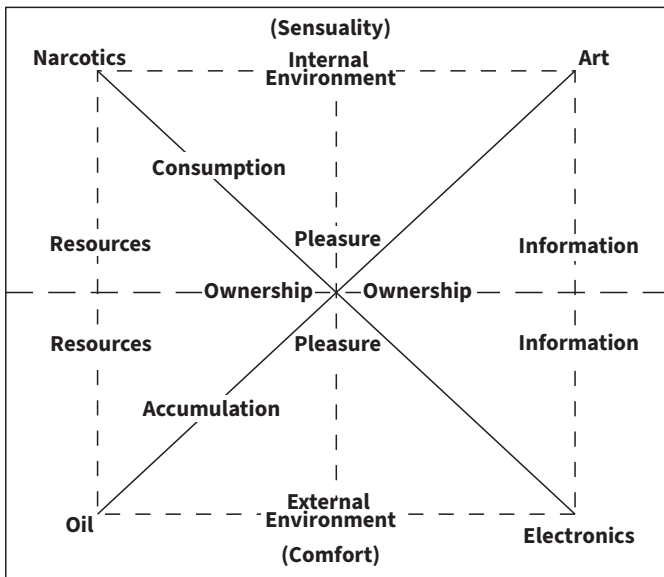


Figure 1

The objective of this chart is to show the floorplan (components) of what Fukuyama would call our world’s shared museum, the longing for which incites confrontations and conflicts and may even prompt ethical debates over its caretaking.

In essence, it is a diagram of the chief global commodities and goods capable of composing the world today. People share the same desire, but the wealth that is its object is unequally divided. If this is the basic condition behind the game of economics, as well as its extreme manifestation, war, then we might also call this chart a game board. It is the configuration of the desires that compose our world, the game board for the exchange game of economics.

The composition of this game board basically began after the Great Depression in 1929 and was completed by the 1950s. In short, this was a process that led to the US dollar occupying the seat of world currency. That is, the components are indeed the main items representing a world, which is to say, 1950s American culture, that is exchangeable for dollars.

Here’s a random list of some of the global commodities that could be triggers—and trump cards—for international disputes at present: oil, narcotics, cutting-edge technology (LSI<sup>2</sup>), and art. Now dispersed across the world, the politico-economic trump cards of the nations of Euro-America, Central and South America, the Middle East, and Japan were originally concentrated behind the dollar. For the dollar to become a world currency, the desire for commodities purchasable only with

2 [Large-scale integration—in essence, microchip technology.]

dollars had to be shared the world over. The American global strategy of the 1930s–1950s was truly a process of shaping global demand for oil, art (culture), electronics, and narcotics.

If the dollar has now lost its power as a world currency, then obviously the reason for and consequence of this are that the dollar has lost its ability to consolidate global commodities, such as the four mutually alienating and complementing items named above—which would mean that the world has lost its center of value and gotten split into four factors. But if these items can still, as ever, become causes of disputes or become weapons, this is precisely because the desire for each object is still shared at present by the antagonists. This means that, even now, we remain in an extension of the 1950s value system. The problem is that since it has no center, these factors (desires and their objects) will always be unequally divided among the members of the world. In other words, disputes will be all the more inevitable.

**Composition.** The game board is composed as above (fig. 1).

First, we have a square described by two opposing axes: internal environment–external environment and resources–information. Internal and external environments are linked by pleasure, resources and information by ownership. Our desires are distributed around these axes, and our world image segmented according to that distribution.

The adjacent factors in the chart complement each other. The exchange and conversion of these reciprocal factors is the existential condition for each. Note the diagonals of the square: say, the one with segments joining the intersection of internal environment and resources (narcotics) with that of external environment and information (electronics). This diagonal could be called the consumption axis. Utility gets consumed at once on this axis. In contrast, the diagonal linking art and oil is accumulation. Here, utility stems from accumulation over time. Of course, the utility of accumulation is measured by consumption, while consumption becomes possible only with accumulation. For example, art gains value from individual experience (narcotic highs), while it is only in being turned into an artwork that a narcotic high becomes an experience that can be exchanged with others. As in binaries such as electronics and oil, art and electronics, or narcotics and oil, the two complement each other.

And so it is that our desires and their objects—or goods—that got split four ways are destined to go on being endlessly exchanged.

Let me add that economic exchange always arises out of an excess of desire. For instance, the basic necessity of food is excluded from the chart because there is a fixed quantity of its demand (desire). For an object to become an exchange good, there has to be an occurrence of excess (unlimited) desire for it, but then there will be no surplus desire unless one intentionally produces a lack of the object in relation to a fixed quantity. Which means it's just a surplus as minus—nothing more than a temporary excess.

Religion originally occupied the place that art holds now. Keep in mind that religious confrontations (exchanges) are always about the lands, relics, texts, and icons that are the counterparts of religion in reality. Faith and its objects. Art happens in the gap between the two. It gives value mainly to culture. With no world religion, it is faith in art as a universal value that unitarily gives value to cultural products (almost all kitsch).

We can assume that the place of narcotics is generally situated by luxury goods. Fragrances, pigments, precious metals. Tobacco, alcohol. These are indeed art materials. If oil is raw material for electronics, narcotics are raw material for the mind. Whereas for the Romantics of the Industrial Revolution era, alcohol was the crutch, for the twentieth-century avant-garde, it was narcotics. The innovation of avant-garde art: discovering that art making is not labor but selection. That is, if all it took for any object to become art was to change how it is seen, then we can get a sense of the avant-garde's reliance on narcotics for that mental transformation.

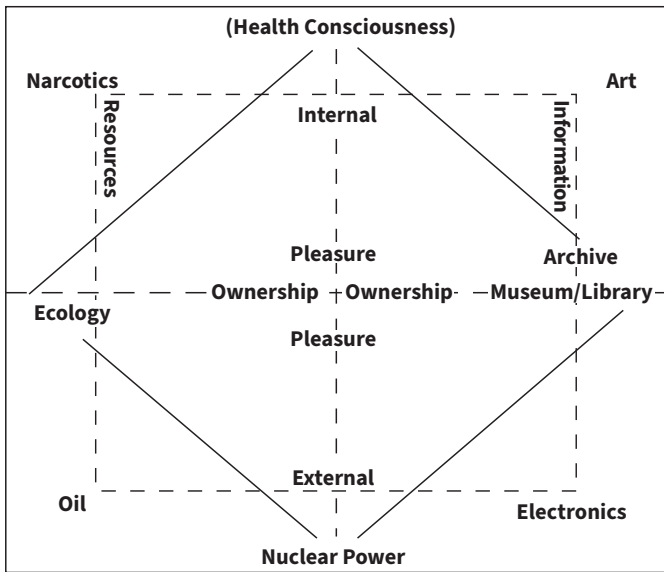


Figure 2

**Prediction and Control.** War and economics are easy enough to contain as long as they are carried out within the scope of this game board. The world will always be safe so long as exchange keeps running smoothly. Which means the imbalance in the chart is recuperated by the cyclicity that also belongs to imbalance itself. This thinking becomes apparent in the post-Cold War world image represented by Fukuyama. With essentialist conflicts now resolved, everything is staked on the caretaking of the existing world. And so we can come up with four factors, each in the middle of a side of the square, that sublimate the oppositions (fig. 2): health consciousness, ecology, nuclear power, and museum/library. Once the control and maintenance of existing values and the splitting of values, that is, the splitting of the world, comes to an end, all that remains is to control and preserve the world in its optimal state. The stopping of exchange and of production—it may look like the sublation of value splitting, but in fact it is merely the covering up of contradictions. Never-ending monitoring and control so as to maintain one's own boundaries, as we find with nuclear power. Should we fail, the world itself may melt down and collapse. Beneath such stability is an outside constantly about to burst forth. One day, the prediction will be off, the boundary broken.

The Museum of Modern Art opened in New York in 1929, the year of the Great Depression. This little museum developed while responding with impressive alacrity to shifts in the economic and political topography, and its history is, in itself, the story of a single world's formation.



Las Vegas: Gambling in the Desert.

In 1932, barely two years after MoMA's launch, museum director Alfred Barr Jr. held the "international style" exhibition, curated by Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock.<sup>3</sup> The hidden ambition of this exhibition was to rewrite the history of modern architecture by boldly grouping all the avant-garde architecture of the period—namely, that of the Europeans Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Alvar Aalto, and Walter Gropius, along with Frank Lloyd Wright—into a single tendency, and formally defining it as an "international style" as yet unrecognized by anybody else. As we all know, the exhibition did in fact go on to determine the history of architecture thereafter. On top of this, MoMA's Cubism and Abstract Art exhibition of 1936 ended up schematizing twentieth-century art history after Cubism in a highly explicit way. In setting the paradigm for modern art, this in turn constrained the history

<sup>3</sup> [Okazaki gives the year 1931 in the Japanese. He is likely thinking of *Built to Live In*, the pamphlet announcing the exhibition, published in March 1931. Officially titled *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*, the exhibition was held from February 9 to March 23, 1932.]



The 1990 Gulf Crisis: Gambling with the Desert.

that followed. American Abstract Expressionism, which dominated world art in the 1950s, was anticipated from the start as a blank space in the chart of twentieth-century art history that Barr drew in 1936. That is, it was the blank space that would sublimate the opposition between geometric and biomorphic<sup>4</sup> abstraction.

There's no doubt that Barr, and MoMA, had a powerful ambition for a new consolidation of history. We can say that he was at least aware of the strategic significance of how museums function. Put simply, this was a quite Duchampian realization: not *artwork, ergo museum*, but *museum, ergo artwork*. And the fact is there were only a handful of works in the collection at the time of MoMA's inauguration. (Okazaki)

<sup>4</sup> [Okazaki uses the word *yūki* 有機 here. In his chart, Barr uses the term “non-geometrical abstract art.”]

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## ENERGY NEUROSIS

A system is stable only when its energy intake and waste discharge run smoothly.

The first energy supply crisis appeared with the population concentration that accompanied urbanization. With wood fuel unable to keep up with demand, the stability of the ecological system breaks down. Enter coal as an “alternate energy.” Although originally problems such as smoke and toxic gas or ash disposal—more so than the cost of mining—held back the use of coal, this was the beginning of the true coal era.

The popularization of the steam engine caused a massive leap in demand for coal beyond necessities such as heating and cooking. Another power source aside from humans and animals was on the

scene. The steam engine's existence compromised the rhythm of human movements in the labor process. What determined the speed of human actions was no longer humans—though that speed stayed just within a humanly controllable reaction rate.

What slows the steam engine down is the work of feeding it with the energy source—coal—and discharging the combustion byproduct—ash. Ultimately, humans have to intervene on occasion in order to keep the energy transformation of coal—combustion—steam expansion—motion running smoothly.

This speed limit was overcome by oil and the internal combustion engine.

First, in terms of extraction costs, there's no need to input constant labor, since the crude oil gushes up on its own due to internal pressure once the well has been drilled. That means that once the rights are obtained, a stable supply of oil is possible at far lower cost than coal—though that's also why it entails direct political entanglement.

Then with easily vaporized liquid fuel—and on top of that, a combustion byproduct that almost entirely gasifies—an internal combustion engine can be used to directly extract kinetic energy as the fuel explodes. With an internal combustion engine that burns fuel directly in the cylinder, it's easy to set it up so that the system regulates the intake of fuel and discharging of gas byproduct on its own. Plus, since there's one less step in energy transformation than with an external combustion engine, less energy loss—waste heat—means better efficiency.

Thus human speed having been exceeded, the system still operates stably without humans.

Nuclear power takes the stage as a new energy source after World War II. Although its most pragmatic use is for bombs, nuclear power was pressed into an impossible role in the name of postwar “peaceful use”: nuclear power generation. With nuclear power, the reaction byproduct—“death ash”—can never be allowed to escape. So it ends up employing the old-fashioned external combustion model of pouring water on the reactor to produce steam to spin the turbine. Moreover, it can't be miniaturized, safety issues make it hard to run anything

	<b>Energy Source</b>	<b>Power Mode</b>	<b>Stabilizing Element</b>	<b>Drug Dependency</b>	<b>Art</b>	<b>Disease</b>
<b>19th century (Industrial Revolution)</b>	Coal	External combustion	Labor	Alcohol	Impressionism, Futurism	Tuberculosis
<b>1914– (World War I onward)</b>	Oil	Internal combustion	Oil itself	Hallucinogens	Dada, Surrealism	Cancer
<b>1945– (World War II onward)</b>	Nuclear power	External combustion	Monitoring	Stimulants	Simulationism	AIDS?

directly with the turbine, and there’s no other way of extracting energy but in the form of electricity. This is a major loss in energy efficiency. In other words, a lot of energy is discarded as waste heat.

Nuclear power generation differs from coal in that it can go for a long time without refueling once the fuel is in place. But since it works by reengineering nuclear bombs, you have to always take care, on the other hand, not to let it get out of control. And given the crudeness of the energy conversion method in addition to the large number of interfaces it involves, the reactor needs to be watched around the clock for breakdowns.

In short, the nuclear power system requires constant human monitoring of all kinds of processes that may be half-autonomous, but which occur at reaction rates far beyond what humans can respond to. Even the slightest system error—often happening in an interface of some sort—can cause catastrophic results.

Thus the factors enabling smooth system operation differ for coal, oil, and nuclear power.

With coal, there’s a need to invest human labor power into energy feeding and waste disposal, which is what substantiated Industrial Revolution-era theories of labor-embodied value.

With oil, the stable supply of oil is itself what stabilizes the system—call this the oil axiology.

Humans come back into play with nuclear power. But not as direct/



The epitome of coal art: J.M.W. Turner, *Rain, Steam and Speed—The Great Western Railway* (1844), 91 x 122 cm.

productive labor power and rather as bystander to a system that runs on its own: a bystander who is there to monitor the system for any loss or failure in the interfaces—where the transformation of energy and information occurs—connecting all the subsystems. Monitoring becomes a value. Humans, as though all turned existentialist, are no longer permitted to sleep.

We can think of a corresponding drug dependency for each system.

In the coal system, where humans are essential as labor power, the thing people turn to in order to endure the rhythms of simple machines is alcohol. Its numbing of the senses and slight impairment of consciousness make reality somewhat bearable. (The effects of dependency, such as hallucinations, are not the main concern here.)

With oil, where the system determines its own autonomous performance and humans can give themselves up to it, the altering of perception—spectacularization—that we find in cars and airplanes is also sought in drugs: hallucinogenic drugs—LSD being the prime example.

What distinguishes the nuclear power system, to which there is no securely entrusting ourselves whether the system runs autonomously or not, are drugs with stimulant effects, such as cocaine.

Once we look at it in this way, we see that in the case of hallucinogens, they simulate the pleasure delivered by the system, whereas in other cases, drugs are necessary to compensate for the fatigue produced by the system.

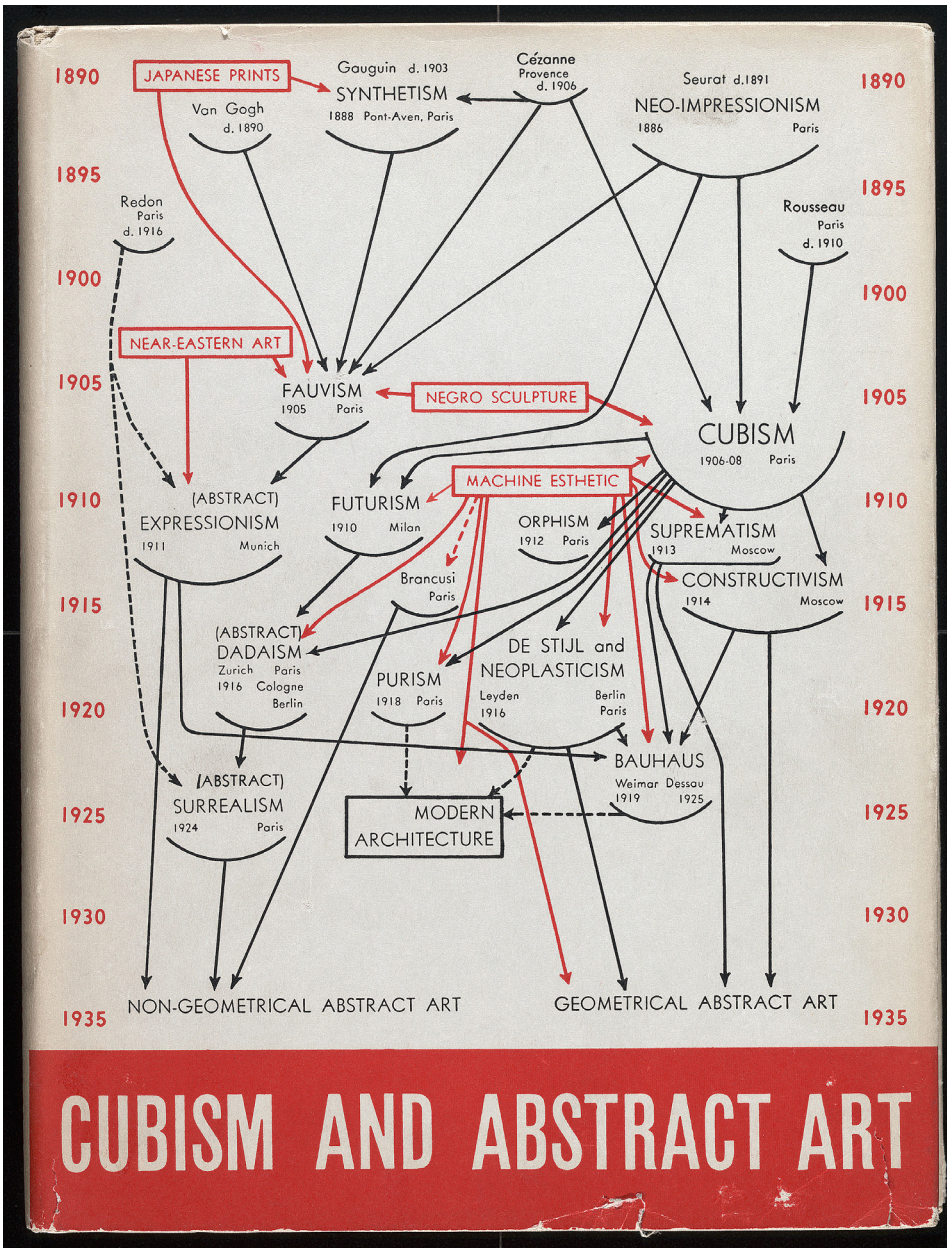


Readymade as oil art: Marcel Duchamp, *Bicycle Wheel* (1913). © Association Marcel Duchamp / ADAGP, Paris & JASPAR, Tokyo, 2021 E4022. All rights reserved.

In terms of art, the neurotic tendency to try to catch up with and control the speed of the system defines art up to Turner and Impressionism and on to Futurism. We could justifiably call this “coal art.”

So what counts as “oil art”? Surrealism, which discovered the system of the unconscious and left everything up to it. Pop art, which made its subject the automatism of the system of mass-consumption society and the altered perceptions of those caught up in it. And, above all, think of American contemporary art as a whole, which discovered the system of art and fully exploited the museum as a perception-altering apparatus—institutionalized LSD. We might even say that, compared with the museum as institution, Surrealism as a movement—at any rate, the one Breton devoted himself to—was a search for a natural high.

Well then, what about “nuclear power art”? Something that assumes the institution of “art” to be an autonomous system yet never lets up in its monitoring of the system. Simulationism? (Tazaki)



The development of abstract art: Alfred Barr Jr's MoMA chart. Alfred Hamilton Barr Jr. (1902–1981), cover of the exhibition catalogue *Cubism and Abstract Art*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1936. Offset, printed in color, 7 3/4 x 10 1/4' (19.7 x 26 cm). The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York. MA143. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.

Don't forget that following MoMA's launch, the 1930s were a time when everything, including money, was relativized and the world was more multipolar than ever. The idea of a single world was invalidated. In art, too, the avant-garde lost its purpose, classicism made a comeback, and multiple styles were adrift without a center.

The relationship between museum and artwork is like that between bank and money, oil field and oil, in that it is only in passing through the one that the other's value and credit as a good can be formed. It doesn't matter whether it's the product of actual labor. Just as oil automatically gushes up out of the oil field (whereas coal can be extracted only by labor, oil requires no labor—see above), so too a mere

object can automatically become art once it is certified as such by the museum. You could say Barr knew that commodities are produced not by actual labor but by credit: museum as oil field. He held the mineral rights to the oil of art. In the 1930s, the seven major international oil companies fought tooth and claw over oil rights in the Middle East. But at the time, demand for oil was far below production. That would be reversed in the 1950s. The groundwork laid in the 1930s paying off in the 1950s: art and oil truly have parallel histories.

You might also say the 1930s were essentially when value production was transferred to the management and credit system. Barr grasped this as keenly as anybody. (Okazaki)



Alexander Kosolapov, *Lenin and Co-  
ca-Cola* (1982), 100 x 180 cm.

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## THE ANTISURREALIST DESERT

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That many of the exponents of Simulationism were formerly (and sometimes still are) the holders of Marxist positions—this is a queer thing. This queer feeling only gets stronger when you consider that Simulationism is generally considered the style that “commoditized” Conceptual art under the late capitalist system. What does this say about the relations that can be crossed between being a Marxist and being a commoditist?

On the one hand, the fact that so much of the new Soviet art enabled by perestroika shares many commonalities with Simulation art is thought-provoking. Although people often say that communist-type Simulationism is an imitation enabled by the opening of information



Jenny Holzer, from the Survival series (1983). ©Jenny Holzer / ARS, New York / JASPAR, Tokyo, 2021 4022. All rights reserved.

about New York-based capitalist-type Simulationism, I cannot at all endorse this view. As exemplified by Eduard Gorokhovsky, communist-type Simulationism was led by radical reformists who advocated the commoditization of art in tandem with the opening of the market, and in that sense, we can say it also came with the internal necessity of the reformists' own expression. As evidence that they were not necessarily imitating capitalist-type Simulationism, we might note the fact that what could be called the prototype of communist-type Simulationism, Sots art, was already established by the early 1980s. This is because it was also actually a resistance strategy enabled precisely by the state repression of capitalism in the pre-perestroika Soviet Union.

Thus we find that between communist-type and capitalist-type Simulationism, there was no imitating by one of the other after a time lag. The two were actually making work based on completely different motives. One was a style of resistance against communism, whereas the other was, in fact, a style of resistance against capitalism.

It's only once you grasp this that an explanation for the queer sensation I laid out at the beginning is possible. The impossibility of being a Marxist while also being a commoditist under the capitalist system achieved the barest possibility once the exponents of the latter style committed to "announcing" Marxism's defeat under the capitalist system. Having lost hope in the ideals of Marxism, they cynically and nihilistically commoditized this very lost hope along with their own weakness at being unable to totally renounce their Marxism. And that very weakness was the one resistance left to them.

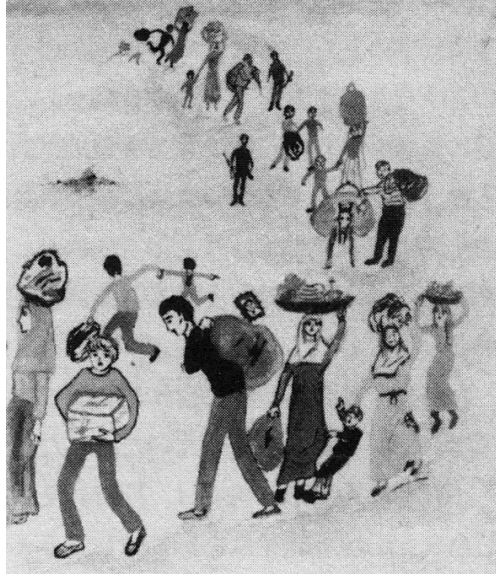
But with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the coming of the



Children being trained by the  
Palestinian Liberation Front.

end of the Cold War structure, the “lament” of this capitalist-type Simulationism (think Jenny Holzer) vanished from the market with the suddenness of a retreating wave. In place of the cynicism of capitalist-type Simulationism, the optimism of a variant of communist-type Simulationism championed by the Americans was on the rise in the New York art scene. Jeff Koons might be the best illustration of this process. Koons wanted to expose the recklessness of the unequal exchanges conducted in the name of art under the capitalist system (which is precisely why his works needed to be as close as possible to ordinary commodities), and in that sense, he was a typical capitalist-type Simulationist. But in its unquestioning immersion and faith in capitalistic hedonism, the *Made in Heaven* (1990–91) series he did with Cicciolina around the time of the Wall’s fall is work of a character that is in fact better termed communist-type Simulationism.

On the other hand, Soviet communist-type Simulationism was fully established in the world art market—and was all the more entrenched there by the Venice Biennale. This correspondence shows us that it was in fact capitalist-type Simulationism that was absorbed into communist-type Simulationism. The latest mode of American art being defeated by the defeat of communism—this will only grow in significance, though now is not the occasion for getting into it. Be that as it may, all that needs to be minimally acknowledged here is that it was American art that met its defeat with the collapse of the Cold War structure. Staying with this thought, we find that it reminds



Salwa Assarihi, *Escape*.

us that American art (capitalist art) was in one aspect really driven by anticapitalists, while also announcing that the best part of Soviet art (communist art) was driven by anticommunists.

For instance, the American global art strategy that started at the conclusion of World War I would get sublimated specifically in the product of Abstract Expressionism, but it could well be noted that the stance taken by the one who theoretically championed Abstract Expressionism, Clement Greenberg, bears a strong resemblance to the split mentality of capitalist-type Simulationism under the late capitalist system. Greenberg was actually a Trotskyist Marxist. Even if it may have externally appeared to be due to the Red Scare, his championing of formalism, which at first glance looks like a renunciation of Marxism, could be said to harbor the ambiguous question of whether he also renounced it internally or not. Internationalism as a consequence of the modernism contained in formalism is a concept with a highly world-revolutionary character—even without reference to its international roots in Marxist terminology. It was a principle for painting that was supposed to be applicable to all people equally, regardless of locality or history, and at the same time it was set up as a kind of utopia to which all painting was eventually headed. Don't you think this was an attempt at (Marxistically) liberating flatness as the painterliness that makes painting *painting*, exploited to that point by the bourgeois phantom of illusion?

Andy Warhol's communistic Pop art strategy was handled more

deftly and strategically. If, as is commonly held, his subjects were all symbols of American mass-media society of the time, then for all his painting of Monroe, Presley, and Coca-Cola, why was Warhol so indifferent to Gary Cooper, Audrey Hepburn, Paul Newman, and even America's first celebrity astronaut, John Glenn? Citing the fact that Warhol named his studio the Factory, the critic Shinoda Tatsumi offers the following response to this question.

There was an anticapitalist class consciousness latent in Warhol's intuitive sympathy for the Russian Formalist and Brechtian lineage. More than Warhol's self-identification, this might better be called the self-critical sympathy latent in the masses. And the paradox lurking behind the popular assumption that Warhol depicted American symbols that are archetypes of capitalism is at once the paradox of Warhol while also being the paradox of a modernism that could not but nullify socialism in progressively integrating it into capitalist society.<sup>5</sup>

Once you recognize this, it becomes obvious what a shallow analysis it is to merely see in Warhol a reflection of mass commodity circulation under the capitalist system.

In any case, American art is on the decline. And under these circumstances, what is it that is seeking to overturn the superiority of America-driven American art, and to establish the superiority of European art in tandem with the integration of the European Community, but French cultural strategy—in other words, the “world art” order? Its genesis was on display in the exhibition Jean-Hubert Martin organized last year for the Centre Pompidou, *Les magiciennes de la terre*.<sup>6</sup> There, all the isms that were supposed to have been ranked by American art were negated and leveled out by their being exhibited in the same dimension as works by “magicians” that looked for all the world like folk art rounded up from South America, Africa, Asia, and everywhere in between. We could say that this ethno-ism deployed in the name of deconstructing Eurocentrism was itself a product of Eurocentrism. Edward Said would call it orientalism, but in any event, it's not like the aesthetic experiences particular to non-

<sup>5</sup> Shinoda Tatsumi, “Shakai shugi yūtopia to Warhol” [Socialist utopia and Warhol], *Eureka* 22, no. 10 (September 1990): 156.

<sup>6</sup> [The exhibition was held at the Centre Pompidou and the Grande halle de la Villette in Paris from May 18 to August 14, 1989.]

Western regions were going to have their functions get colonialistically exploited in *Magiciennes de la terre* as being the other of the products of Western intellect—as being outside reason—as is so often the case. Rather, Martin quantified art’s complex functions on a qualitative level with the concept of “magic,” by which the aesthetic products of the West and non-West could be equalized, ultimately, in the intellectual dimension of “magic.” But we could also call this itself a sort of paradigm of Eurocentric postmodernism. For this attempt at severing aesthetic products from their historical contexts to quantify them on a shared horizon is in that sense one that stands on a Hegelian horizon from which social contradictions and political struggles have vanished, predicated on a heterogeneous “end of history.”

If you’re going to use the word *magician*, it should come as no surprise to glimpse the shadow of Surrealism behind it. Not only that, but you could do worse than to say that the world art order is actually a neo-Surrealist order. Seeking to secure the terms of cultural strategy according to the “trans-European” order of the EC, the Germans in charge of documenta 9 have installed Jan Hoet as their chief curator—and in the exhibition that would seem to be Hoet’s concept model, 1989’s *Open Mind* in Ghent,<sup>7</sup> the parts corresponding to “magic” in *Magiciennes de la terre* were replaced with “madness.”

Ideas such as “magic” and “madness” that are represented as being outside reason have a tendency to look to the desert for their model, as exemplified by Surrealism. Rimbaud’s desert, Artaud’s Mexico, Dali’s mania for the desert horizon immediately come to mind, but the Surrealists excelled at setting up the desert as the zero-degree space of rationality, situating the horizon on the far side of the desert as the liminal point between reason and madness, and presenting the sky spreading yet further beyond the horizon as the rationally unknowable “thing-in-itself” in landscape form. The three elements of zero space, liminal boundary, and unknowable territory are the visual postulates that determine Surrealist painting. Although Surrealism cannot be called simple colonialism insofar as it tries to comprehend reason as if it were irrational, a naïve exoticism toward non-Western societies—a sort of Eurocentric orientalism—is still clearly latent within it.

But actually the desert is no zero space—at least inasmuch as it is where oil is produced. The very site of social contradiction and political

<sup>7</sup> [The exhibition is also known as *Open Mind (Gesloten Circuits)* and as *Open Mind (Closed Circuits)*. It was held from April 15 to June 25, 1989, at the Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst (now the SMAK), Ghent.]

struggle itself, the desert in that sense allows no room for exotic magic or madness to intervene. In our time, the desert in fact invalidates Surrealism. Sure, and wasn't art always supposed to have something surrealistic to it?

If we see the oil-producing countries of the Middle East as the “desert,” then the formation of the anti-art desert took place following World War I, when our main engine power was totally supplanted by internal combustion. Since being able to politically and physically secure the fuel for engine power on land, sea, and air meant obtaining a global advantage, it's no stretch to imagine how seriously the Americans took their policies on this matter. And it was with the stability of crude oil prices as its essential base that the superiority of Abstract Expressionism—pushing American art could come about. In fact, there are temporal parallels between the process of America's steady procurement of access to Middle Eastern oil and that of the formation of American art's global superiority (it was in 1953 that the seven major international oil companies were reported to be in control of 92 percent of the world's oil reserves<sup>8</sup>), and in that sense, there are numerous shared elements between the decline of American art and the situation in the Middle East that are hardly coincidental.

On October 6, 1973—on the Jewish Day of Atonement itself, when soldiers were withdrawn from the front line—Egypt crossed the Suez Canal to invade Israel, starting the Yom Kippur War. Held right as this was happening, that year's OPEC meeting in Vienna took on a highly political tenor that went beyond mere negotiations over raising oil prices as a deterrent to American military aid to Israel. Not surprisingly, negotiations got bogged down, and the Arab oil embargo triggered the first oil crisis, letting all the world know that the basis for American prosperity was established solely on the stability of oil prices.

Aside from the aftereffects of the Vietnam War, we can clearly sense in the stagnation of American art in the mid-1970s a mistrust of Minimalist absoluteness stemming from the social unrest caused by the oil crisis. The approaches to amorphous and fluid forms in what could be called Post-Minimalist or Process art were a reflection of this state of the world, and today, with the Simulationism boom, it is this very art that is undergoing a revival in parallel to another Middle East crisis. It is by now self-evident that talk that “art is dead” reinforces the notion of a “dead art boom,” but the death of the dead art boom will be real only

<sup>8</sup> [Sawaragi may be thinking of a 1952 Federal Trade Commission report that states: “In 1949, the seven international petroleum companies owned 65 percent of the world's estimated crude reserves. . . . Outside the United States, Mexico, and Russia, these seven companies, in 1949, controlled about 92 percent of the estimated crude reserves.” *The International Petroleum Cartel: Staff Report to the Federal Trade Commission, Submitted to the Subcommittee on Monopoly of the Select Committee on Small Business, United States Senate*, August 22, 1952 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1952), 23, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP57-00384R000700130001-2.pdf>.]

once the art has been physically destroyed—along with its museums.  
And who’s going to say they can guarantee it won’t happen? (Sawaragi)

9 [Hanada Kiyoteru, “Sabaku ni tsuite” [On the desert], in *Shichi, Sakuran no ronri, Futatsu no sekai* [Seven, Delirious logic, Two worlds] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1989), 227. First published in *Shisaku*, no. 7 (Autumn 1947): 69–80.]

## THE DESERT LIVES

The desert is not all sand and wind. . . . for thousands of years it has sounded with the rhythmic footfalls of the [caravan’s] camels, and resonated with the ringing of the bells dangling from their necks. As research by Buxton and Colbert also makes clear, there are countless plants and animals that live there as well.  
—Hanada Kiyoteru, “On the Desert”<sup>9</sup>

### I. Oblivion of the Boundary: Formalism

The avant-garde is the last resort for keeping a culture moving even in its last phase when, society having fully matured, all the ideologies and objectives that pulled the culture in the same direction and justified it lose their ground and no longer obtain consent.

So Clement Greenberg posits the function of the avant-garde in his 1939 essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch.”

The last phase of culture, where objectives lose their justification and all that culture can do is go on grimly repeating and maintaining itself. This is when academicism and kitsch run rampant as infinite self-replication.

“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.”<sup>10</sup>

In other words, *kitsch is the further cultivation of the academicized simulacra of genuine art.*

A surfeit of academic and kitsch simulacra; self-replication. The cultural situation Greenberg faced in 1939 is, of course, quite familiar to us and not just the talk of fifty years ago. But neither could we call it a particularly contemporary phenomenon. For from what we know, culture already appears as imitation once it is perceived as such. Simulacra, overrunning mature culture as copies of themselves. Genuine art exists solely as a reminiscence—something no longer *here*. The reminiscence is itself what drives the production of simulacra.

Greenberg states that counter to this, avant-garde arts such as abstract art and pure poetry have the potential to keep culture moving even when it gets stuck in self-repetition. But he does not say that the avant-garde is free from the cul-de-sac of self-replication.

“That avant-garde culture is the imitation of imitating—the fact itself—calls for neither approval nor disapproval.”<sup>11</sup>

The problem is the substance of that duplication.

“If the avant-garde imitates the processes of art, kitsch, we now see, imitates its effects.”<sup>12</sup>

The avant-garde replicates the production process, not the effect. This is important. In other words, Greenberg is saying that what the avant-garde produces is by no means received as effect.

Then what is an effect? It is subject matter, meaning, form. Essentially, whatever can be immediately understood by the masses, whatever can exert an effect on the masses—that is effect. This is also the very definition of a simulacrum. In other words, the direct effect caused by the masses, i.e., whatever projects the desires of the masses exactly as they are is a simulacrum. Kitsch is popular with the masses for imitating and cultivating simulacra—whereas the avant-garde imitates not simulacra as such but the simulacra production process.

The imitation of the production process: Greenberg calls this not repetition but reflection. Instead of reproducing simulacra as the product or effect of the system, the avant-garde feeds directly from the

<sup>10</sup> [Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 11.]

<sup>11</sup> [Greenberg, 8.]

<sup>12</sup> [Greenberg, 15.]

production system itself. It is parasitic. And Greenberg says that this parasitism is what prompts the critique—reflection—of the closed system.

Keep in mind that this is still Greenberg's theory of the avant-garde from 1939. It should come as no shock if, far from modernism, it turned out to be much closer to postmodernism. All it means is that the discourse of postmodernism is itself a sham. But the problem goes further than that.

A copy of the production process itself, a production that produces no effect for society, one which, ouroboros-like, swallows its own tail because it has no one else's to catch, the avant-garde could surely be called a reflection on the system by the system itself. But for all that, it will never be more than an unproductive parasite on society. One that inevitably ends in social isolation.

Yet what if the society itself already constituted a closed sphere with no exit? In its swallowing up the boundaries of that closed culture, isolation within such a society would simultaneously have the function of obliterating the limits of the culture. The avant-garde obliterates the simulacrum by swallowing the simulacrum.

This is the true significance of Greenberg's statement that the avant-garde is what keeps a culture moving once it has reached its limits. Inverted like a Klein bottle, isolation in isolation is a program for eradicating the boundaries between in and out by joining the two together. And so, as with a black hole, a dead-end culture must obliterate its limits and sustain its movement by continuously swallowing its own limits within itself.

Resistance to—and the elimination of—simulacra. Plus the realization of a never-ending, indefinite space in a finite area. That's one way of summing up Greenberg's program in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." The logical framework that he applied to culture in total probably holds equally for his artwork analysis.

That's right, Abstract Expressionism. It's well known that Greenberg's problematic for Abstract Expressionism was indeed the contradictory task of first eliminating all figures from inside the picture plane (a figure being something that is grounded in the associations of the one looking at it, i.e., a simulacrum), and then realizing inside that frame a purely optical space that expands indefinitely without drawing attention to the boundary/frame physically limiting the picture plane itself.

But for every time Greenberg's program displayed its impressive unity, the problem had already been through multiple reversals.

That is, based on the assumption that the only space provided in advance is one whose outward circuits are severed, one that is closed (has reached its limits) with no other space outside it, Greenberg's argument was validated by its axiomatization of that assumption. The task of realizing an expansive space that transcends limitation depended on this assumption.

Greenberg was oblivious to the outside from the start. Concealing its limitedness and locality, he made up the space he belonged to as if it were the world entire. That's another take on Greenberg's program.

And its collapse came about as follows.

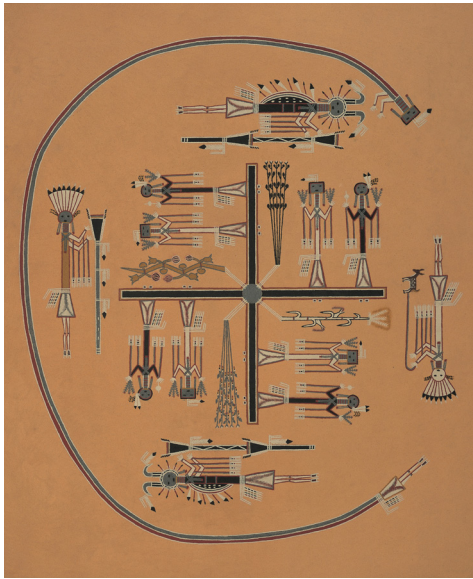
A painting space with no center, beginning, or end—the crisis triggered by the realization of which is that as a matter of course this painting space itself appears as a figure, i.e., a rectangular form. The moment you eliminate interior figures, that itself emerges as a figure. Figure is the appearance of the self as seen (objectively) from the perspective of the other. And object refers to the figure of the self as perceived by the other.<sup>13</sup>

The oblivion of the figure/boundary: what Greenberg ultimately threw himself into eradicating was the external gaze that could relativize painting, and his culture itself, as being just another local figure/object. The internalization of the external gaze, i.e., the swallowing of the outside into the inside. This is how internal limits come to be perceived as world limits. There is nothing else to know there but a vastly expanding desert-like space.

## II. Oblivion of the Boundary: Surrealism

Needless to say, Greenberg's formalism stood on the overcoming (suppression) of Surrealism. But once we realize that the logic at the base of Surrealism was a critique of the real world by internal desires, i.e., one that aimed at the subversion of a unified reality (simulacralized reality) by taking external desires/figures themselves to be the residue of the processing of multiple drives and then tracing those perverse unconscious processes, we can also acknowledge the remarkable

<sup>13</sup> Minimal art starts from the acceptance of this fact. If you were to follow Greenberg's definition of modern painting to its logical conclusion, you would arrive at a theoretical contradiction that establishes the thesis of the noun *painting* itself. See also my "Kako no seisan" [Past production], in the September 1984 issue of *Gendai shichō*.



Left: Navajo sand painting.

© Horniman Museum and Gardens.



Right: Yves Tanguy, *The Furniture of Time* (1939).

concordance between Greenberg’s problematic and that of Surrealism, despite their superficial conflicts. In essence, they both call for the domination of the exterior by the interior, or in Breton’s words, “the trial of the real world.”<sup>14</sup>

What Surrealism ultimately sought was a space where images would be completely voided. Images would lose their topos for orientation, and both topos and image would vanish at the same time. The only thing left would be void. And the unconscious was a void.

In typical Surrealist paintings, say those by Tanguy and Dali, this idea of the void is represented as a persistently recurring landscape (desert?) that is all horizon. A landscape in which incongruous images collide (coexist), a landscape that is always identical without being anywhere. This vastly expanding landscape, or desert, is secretly connected to the desert of Abstract Expressionism. (We might say that it was really Abstract Expressionism that realized the ideals of Surrealism.) The desert is not the end of the world. It is precisely the extremity of the inside—the end of the inside—that is the desert. Or the internalized exterior, trace of the exterior’s eradication by the interior. This is where the idea of a barren land, the desert, makes its appearance.

### III. Oblivion of the Boundary: Socialism

The logics of Greenberg and of Surrealism were both based on the absolutization of the existing culture, the inner self (the unconscious).

<sup>14</sup> What Greenberg attacked as a reactionary tendency to reclaim “outside” subject matter was really the so-called fantastic painting like Dali’s that was an offshoot of Surrealism, whereas he was ambivalent toward the two main stylistic lineages, automatism and objet trouvé (*dépaysement*). The relationship between automatism and Abstract Expressionism needs no remarking—and what was the objective of *dépaysement* in the first place but image critique, or the dismantling of simulacra? Greenberg said that in contrast to the avant-garde’s imitation of the medium’s process, Surrealism was an imitation of the self’s unconscious process, but as pointed out above, the two are indistinguishable. In essence, Surrealism and Greenberg were both supposed to be grounded in the argument that the only thing we can be conscious of is effect and that process exists as a zone where matter (medium) and unconsciousness merge. Which is where outside and inside become one.

The belief that these were themselves an already complete, whole world. What they really feared was the breach and violation of that closed sphere. And so they turned to socialism. “Today we no longer look toward socialism for a new culture. . . . Today we look to socialism simply for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now.”<sup>15</sup>

Socialism for the perpetuation of a complete society. Yet as is now evident, socialism is not the opposite of capitalism, but indeed *capitalism predicated on a closed system*—in other words, the closedness of the market.

If we’re saying that capitalism is already perfected and everything has been closed into a single world where desert is all that remains to the outside, then we must be thinking we have suddenly made the transition to socialism. But of course, just as there’s no such thing as a barren desert, neither is the world yet complete.<sup>16</sup> (Okazaki)

<sup>15</sup> [Greenberg, 21.]

<sup>16</sup> The ideal desert—to impose this on the real desert is itself the greatest crime and act of violence conceivable. To be sure, history is provided complete. But to the outside of that history there is always another history, which would still be unknowable to us even if it were to demolish, ruin, and then look back at the given history. All that the glimpsing of a lost crisis can bring about is melancholy, and that is what gives birth to violence.

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This text was originally published as “Fikushon fankushon! Sekai no kakekin, rekishi no haitō: Sekaishi gēmu no tame no rūru bukku” in *Frame*, no. 2 (1991): 5–17. Translated by Andrew Maerke.

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