

# Bear Assumptions: Notes On Experimentalism

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Whatever its other defects, the term “experimental” has, at least in the last few decades, been usefully vague. It’s not expected to describe a specific practice with any accuracy. It’s enough that it point at numerous, loosely knit, formal and topical characteristics. Its job is to do some initial sorting by referring to some provinces of artistic production and not others. What the word lacks in precision it makes up for in convenience. More precision would only impair its utilitarian value. In addition to casual conversations about art and film, it stays busy in more institutional sites, like distributor’s catalogues, university and art school courses, and festival application forms, where it helps organize large numbers of diverse works in a small number of categories. There it is often used as a depository for works that would be misrepresented in some other large, equally vague category, like “fiction” or “documentary.”

The instrumental value of the term has not always silenced its detractors. In the 1920s, van Doesburg, himself well known for his seemingly experimental attitudes, derided “mere experimentalists” for their “fantasies.” Film historian Sheldon Renan, writing about work that many would feel comfortable calling experimental, rejected the term, seeing in it a misleading emphasis on “trial and error” which privileges “logical inquiry” over “personal expression.” He also cited artists who object to the perceived insinuation that experimental films are by nature “incomplete.” The problems with terms that are usefully vague become clear the moment anyone breaks the unspoken agreement not to question too deeply what is actually meant.

Van Doesburg, however, was making an important distinction that continues to resonate today. When he attacked experimenters, he was attacking experimentation-for-its-own-sake, unaccompanied by other political or aesthetic goals. His own innovations, on the other hand, were aggressively designed to challenge artistic and cultural values with which he disagreed, in order to replace them with his own. Artists commonly developed *programs* of work, often accompanied by theoretical writings or manifestos. The doctrines and the artworks were part of a larger experimental apparatus. Laissez-faire experimental art practices without doctrinal ambitions, Van Doesburg would contend, were simply unable to contribute to historical debates or progress in any meaningful way. Whatever one otherwise makes of this contention, an important distinction has

been established, with particular relevance for artists working in emerging technologies. Experimentation can be self-justifying, having no other purpose than to keep its particular discipline healthy through a sustained program of innovation, or its accomplishments as innovation are means by which other possibly non-aesthetic goals are attained.

Innovation is the minimal semantic requirement of the concept, if not the practice, of experimentalism. Modernist experimentation was typically more conscious about the process and importance of innovation, committed as it was to the “new.” Paul Griffiths points out, for example, that for the German avant-garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, it would have been “unthinkable” to repeat himself, and that the “new and untried” constituted a self-justifying aesthetic program.<sup>1</sup> John Cage called an experimental situation “one in which nothing is selected in advance, in which there are no obligations or prohibitions, in which nothing is even predictable.”<sup>2</sup> It is not clear that contemporary work, most of which is carefully constructed and has a very specific result and audience in mind, would pass Cage’s criteria. Today, innovation, while appreciated, is not a necessary component of an experimental work, and is not especially visible as an aesthetic or political value. An experimental work might be innovative, but most, being largely familiar in both formal design as well as topical concern, are not. Artists clearly have other concerns. Van Doesburg, himself a type of militant experimentalist, could denounce *laissez-faire* experimentalism at a time when it was common for artists to frame their work competitively and programmatically. (The criteria were not always obvious. His targets included Lissitzky and Rodchenko, who might as easily, it would seem, have reversed the accusation.) Doctrinal conflicts were then out in the open. Today, when doctrinal conflict rarely heats up beyond a comfortable room temperature—indeed, the critical calm which currently prevails over the art world is bizarre in many ways—such differences and disagreements quietly recede into the background.

Yet values of innovation and newness continue to circulate in experimental circles, if in a reduced way, making it reasonable to ask why a work would be labelled experimental if it does not test new avenues of thought and work. Experimental media is primarily identified by a now familiar set of stylistic devices and topical concerns. But by isolating and identifying experimentalism as a set of recognizable conventions, the outlines of a genre are established. And, like any other genre, within this one there are innovations, and innovators. Following a logic that produced the sub-categories “experimental” documentaries and “experimental” narratives, we may yet have a need for “experimental” experimental.

The contemporary “new” is different from the modernist “new.” Being not absolute but relative, contemporary newness is a secondary or subor-

dinate value, a variation or modification of existing themes and practices. A new work or practice is not brand new, it is a new something-or-other, the something-or-other being already there. This newer, adjectival new is non-competitive, refraining from making the triumphalist claim that it consigns other, now “older” or obsolete forms to the ashcan of history. In his seminal book “Experimental Music,” Michael Nyman stated that asking what was experimental about experimental music was both “futile” and “tortured.”<sup>3</sup> It’s hard to disagree (even if Nyman then proceeded to produce a rigorous definition of experimental music, distinguishing it from its avant-garde counterparts). For those who endorse the cordial flexibility of the term and its wide range of imbedded assumptions, it is more useful to describe how its historical conditions have changed than to grind out definitions. Experimentalism, after all, was born in modernism, where it still looks more intelligible as a concept.

In the 1960s Clement Greenberg was said to have surveyed the rapidly expanding art scene with dismay, noting that everyone had become an avant-garde. Various groupings, or “schools,” could still be identified, but they would mostly disappear in the seventies and eighties. After decades of radical attacks against the definition of art, a state of pluralism settled into place. And what, after all, could experimentalism mean in an age of pluralism? How would one recognize it? A customary motivation to experiment is the judgement that existing forms are inadequate, accompanied by the desire to supersede them, or at least improve or modify them. But the central tenet of pluralism is that no method is inherently better or worse than any other. Judgements about artworks look no further than the needs of the individual work and its local conditions. The van Doesburgs, or Vertovs, making overarching claims about the historical relevance of their *program* of work, are extremely rare. Those that do are taken only as seriously as pluralism will allow. Pluralism is hegemonic, and forbids any particular program under its endlessly expanding umbrella from having hegemonic ambitions. It’s a meta-doctrine, the set of sets.

Pluralism emerges when debates regarding basic historical and artistic principles become unresolvable. Pluralism can continue to tolerate such debates, provided that they continue to provide more evidence of pluralism. But pluralism does not present the best conditions for such debates, and they will necessarily take a back seat to pluralism’s proper vocation: proliferation and diversity in the absence of fixed categories. If no reigning doctrines are permissible, then there is no point in experimenting in order to find one; and if there are no grounds on which to claim that one program is better than another, there are diminishing rewards in trying to improve or replace existing methodologies or to improve on existing styles. Pluralism itself is non-utopian, even if utopianism, like anything

else, can nonetheless carve out a position for itself among a constellation of other alternatives. This is one of the difficulties confronted by political experimentalisms, particularly those seeking to argue for their programmatic historical relevance and agency; pluralism is clearly a more congenial environment for some aesthetic ideas than others.<sup>4</sup>

Experimentalism has lost some of the special status it once enjoyed while in the protective embrace of a modernism that believed in the future. It must now argue its case alongside, or perhaps in conjunction with, a more capricious pluralism. This does not mean that the great projects or claims of experimentalism—that it struggles against commodification, that it critiques reactionary forms of representation, that it invents new ways of thinking and wondering and expressing, that it throws its lot in with the struggle for personal, social and sexual freedoms, for example—are any less valid. But the skepticism about utopian goals isn't the only factor restricting the political scope of experimental work. Few doubt any more that the role that art plays in changing life and society varies from very small to negligible, and that to think otherwise is a “dangerous illusion.”<sup>5</sup>

Things can happen to knock pluralism from its currently ascendant position. A fatigue with pluralism, though, now expressed often enough from largely but not exclusively conservative quarters, seems unlikely to prevail; nor is the suspicion that the diversity (if not “permanent revolution”) thought to be constitutive of pluralism, appearing as it does in a highly institutionalized art world, is actually producing a bland neo-conceptual sameness. An historical trauma powerful enough to shock us into engaging more specific criteria and a more focussed zone of practice might be enough, although it seems now certain that September 11 was not that trauma. But pluralism is unlikely to be dislodged any time soon, for the simple reason that artists won't allow it. One can safely guess that most artists dislike some of its associated problems, not the least of which is the significant transfer of power from individual artists to institutions, curators, and programmers. Nonetheless, the prospect of returning to abstract expressionism-like hegemonies backed by Clement Greenberg-like critics armed with a few unyielding criteria is more than enough to compel artists to the ramparts.

There are also several notable changes to the vocabulary of formal expression. One is the steep decline of self-reflexivity as a yardstick of critical worth. It should be remembered that only thirty-five years ago, a major experimental approach, “structural” film, was built primarily on the scaffolding of this most eminent modernist principle. From its early articulations—the making strange of Viktor Shklovski or Brecht's alienation techniques, Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera* (1929)—self-reflexivity has been a stalwart ally in the ongoing defining of critical work, and has

frequently played centre stage. Its largely ignominious fate is to have been shunted aside by one of its sub-categories, intertextuality, which, at least in its dominant Tarantino-like or David Letterman-like form, has been most successful in playing on its twin attributes of familiarity and recognition in the production of new stylistic pleasures.

The surprising decline of self-reflexivity suggests that its critical legacy was overestimated in the first place; perhaps structural film burned up what little credit remained. Self-reflexivity, once critical by default, is now uncritical by default. Still, the very reason for its decline—the uncritically self-reflexive, self-parodying, vertiginously intertextual character of television and commercial cinema—might just as easily be construed as a reason for its renewed relevance.

The fate of collage frames a second major transformation in the landscape of experimentalism. This classically radical anti-realist innovation of the last century has become, with considerable historical irony, the realism of this one. Walter Benjamin's enthralling descriptions of a mind critically transformed by the shock and interruption of collage mean little to the contemporary consciousness for whom the formal conditions of such experiences are a familiar part of daily routine. Some more ambitious contemporary works, of course, fulfill Benjamin's critical expectations (Abigail Child's *Mayhem* comes to mind). Yet like self-reflexivity, ninety years of familiarity has made the critical effects of collage praised by the modernists considerably more difficult for contemporary artists to achieve.

And the culture industry, again. The "integration of art into life" was a common modernist refrain, whose goals were explicitly associated with the progressive transformation of the political and social spheres. Even though these utopian projects, along with the avant-garde that spawned them, are now almost uniformly discredited, the integration of art and life—and the consequent assumption that the high art/low art barrier must be therefore expunged—remains highly persuasive. The reasons, however, are not those professed by the historical avant-garde. They range from a passion for popular culture and the artist's recognition of its profound cultural significance and influence, to a dread of "elitism" and cultural ghettoization.<sup>6</sup> The result, it is hoped, is a net increase in cultural democratization. But because our democracy is everywhere constrained by its capitalist framework, some substance is given the growing alarm that art is being refashioned as a specialized branch of the entertainment industries.<sup>7</sup> There have even been scattered reports of artists and theorists rereading Adorno and Horkheimer.

Experimental art practice is not exactly science, but it's not exactly not science either. Buried within the obvious differences are surprising points of convergence. In standard scientific practice, an experiment is preceded

by an hypothesis. The hypothesis is then verified—or not—by the experiment. Verification is usually desirable, but it is not the sole sign of success. Disproving an hypothesis may prove just as productive for a research program. There is disagreement about how important a role the hypothesis plays in the making of experiments—must it be specific and rigorous, or loose and heuristic in nature? Ian Hacking cites two contrary examples: the physicist George Darwin, who claimed that one should occasionally do a completely crazy experiment, like “blowing the trumpet to the tulips every morning for a month” in the hope that something unexpected might come of it; and Justus von Liebig, who said: “An experiment not preceded by theory, i.e. by an idea, bears the same relation to scientific research as a child’s rattle does to music.” (It’s amusing to imagine how John Cage might have responded to von Liebig’s analogy.)

The chummy proximity of artwork and theory has been a familiar feature of modernist and postmodernist art alike. Manifestos can be helpful, as they are often closer to the thought process of the artists themselves, but are by no means necessary. A good part of the theory guiding modernist experimentalism was as experimental as the artistic practice it was guiding. Picasso spoke of his work with Braque as “laboratory research.” They had ideas regarding what they wanted (reality should be in the painting, not the object) and what they didn’t (Impressionism), and then made lots of paintings, in order to see what would come of it. Until recently, most of the theory that informed art-making was assumed to come largely from professional philosophers. Artists would read them (a weighty component of graduate art school training), and employ that research in any number of ways. This process was particularly prominent in the 1980s, but by the early nineties artists could be heard grumbling about the consequences of what looked like an alliance between unequals. It seemed that theoretical models (often the same ones) were continually trumping the artwork, which was then held up as evidence of an abstract metaphysical or psychoanalytic proposition. Academic writers used artworks—rich with ignored detail—as examples or illustrations of the theoretical models they had worked so hard to master. It seems hardly surprising that artists would come to question this relationship; the “anti-intellectualism” often perceived among “young artists” is, in part, a welcome reaction against this most anti-pluralistic state of affairs.<sup>8</sup>

For the scientist, on the other hand, the experiment is linked to something more modest and more local than a theory: an hypothesis. Rarely is any one experiment thought to be evidence enough to prove or disprove a theory. For that, a considerable amount of experimental data is necessary, requiring many experiments. Sometimes the theory only emerges long after a nexus of isolated, un-theorized experimental “laws” has been

established.<sup>9</sup> The experiments themselves, both artistic and scientific, are notable for their exacting and subtle attention to detail. To those for whom what really matters is the theory, the experiments that prove it or illustrate it are indeed subordinate.

The more experimental of experimental artists, however, advance or embody hypotheses; they do not illustrate theories. Good criticism helps articulate these hypotheses by working with the concrete details, the minutiae of the artwork, and avoiding the reductive and refamiliarizing proclivities of pre-existing theory. The more appropriate analogy with scientific practice may be with the scientist's use of computer models, in which it is not always clear if the computer simulation designates the process of constructing an hypothesis, or the carrying out of an experiment. Similarly, the hypothesis-artwork form does not describe two temporally distinct stages, but two interdependent, co-present parts of a larger process; the hypothesis emerges from the artwork as much as the artwork emerges from the hypothesis.

Science too has its advocates of experimental pluralism. Paul Feyerabend claims that there is no unifying method in science, but rather science is, and should be, a heuristic and open-ended amalgam of loosely associated procedures whose goal is not methodological clarity, but the production of scientific results.<sup>10</sup> This "epistemological anarchy," Feyerabend claims, always was and still remains the natural state of science. Anthropology, to take a related example, is viewed quite differently by George Marcus and Michael Fischer.<sup>11</sup> Like the human sciences in general, anthropology is roiled by fractious debates, which both occasion and are fuelled by increasing experimentation in written and visual ethnographic representation. But rather than a natural state, this experimentalism is, according to Marcus and Fischer, temporary, a "period" situated "betwixt and between periods of more consolidated research conventions." Their concern is that this "moment" of experimentation in anthropology, crucial as it is for renewing a research apparatus whose larger project has lost much of its legitimacy, will be "foreclosed prematurely, that some experiments will be mistaken for models." According to this view, the "crisis of representation" which inflamed anthropology's current experimental period will be replaced by a renewed field of research, with a narrowed but more coherent array of methodological procedures. "The motivating spirit of experimentation," they claim, "is thus anti-genre." But once the "crisis" has been critically reflected in emerging methodologies, the need for experimentation will dissipate. In some areas, the goal of experimentation is to eliminate the conditions that provoked it into existence, as van Doesburg had once envisioned for progressive art.

It's easy to identify two concepts of experimentalism in art practice. Experimentation-for-its-own-sake, not substantially different than what one might find in other endeavours that value the inherent qualities of the "creative process," like cooking, or marketing; and experimentalism as a genre, having some of the characteristics that anthropology entered a period of experimentation precisely to expunge. Neither of these forms foresee a self-annihilating moment of consummation, nor are they roused to action by the prospects of attaining specific goals.

But these two cases don't exhaust the matter. There remains the question of art's self-transformation. Pluralism or not, there are many artists who think about the consequences of their practice for Art. The parameters of one's practice can be as much the object of aesthetic reception as the art object itself. Whether working with unions, or tucked away in the solitary confines of one's studio, the model or the process of art production matters; it's the hidden programmatic nature of artistic desire.<sup>12</sup> For now, they all get a predictably pluralist twist—each one is chalked up as just another art practice in the wacky world of anything-goes. But it's possible that the currents of art's self-transformation are more powerful than is presently recognized. If so, the familiar insouciance of pluralism may experience disruptive energies it cannot so easily envelope.

No single theory is capable of encompassing the vast body of experimentalist work. There are, though, lots of fine, tentative techniques and motivating hypotheses, which are to be found in great abundance among artists' statements and commentaries, even if one suspects that further analysis would show them to conform to just a few general archetypes. Like their counterparts in the academic world they always evoke themes of play, regeneration, or the production of the new. Here are two examples, one from a source quite obscure, the other prominent.

The first is from Alexius Meinong, a German phenomenologist and experimental psychologist, found principally in his book of 1905, *On Assumptions*. The "assumption" is part of a larger set of terms which includes "ideas," "judgements," and "surmises," but it is against the "judgement" that the experimental character of the assumption best emerges. To judge, said Meinong, is to be convinced of something, to believe. Furthermore, to judge is to be convinced of something definite; a thing has or has not a particular property; it is, or is not, good. To judge is to be possessed of *conviction*. To assume, on the other hand, is also to take a definite position, but unlike the judgement, one does so without conviction. We provisionally "take" something to be the case, quite independently of whether we actually believe it to be the case.

The importance of the assumption to thought as well as play is immediately apparent. Assumptions are experimental in nature, permitting one to



momentarily bracket conviction in order to see where the experimental moment might lead. Assumptions cannot then be wrong in an orthodox sense, although they can be unproductive. Meinong thought that the assumption was essential in order to explain practices like art and children's play. The thinker says, "let's assume that such and such is the case," in order to test an hypothesis; the child says, "let's pretend that such and such is the case" in order to test an experience. When reading a novel, we assume that certain characters do certain things in certain ways; we assume, while having no conviction about the existence of what we are assuming. The attitude of assuming, Meinong says, "...is not influenced in the slightest by the presence of a contrary conviction."

By requiring that we momentarily set aside personal conviction, assuming allows us to occupy the position of someone other than ourselves. Assumptions are, in Meinong's words, "imaginary beliefs." Even though we do not believe, we agree to either occupy the position of someone who does, or pretend for a time that we ourselves are someone who holds a particular belief.

Any combination of assumptions and judgements is possible in an artwork, and the viewer can then in turn either assume or judge what they find there. But conviction is rarely absent for long. According to a familiar model of reception, assumptions, whatever else they do, are there to serve judgements. The assumption does its job, and conviction is restored. One goal of the assumption is to improve the quality of our judgements. In either case, whether the work's form of expression is organized principally around the judgement or the assumption, there is typically judgement-in-the-last-instance, for as Meinong points out, there undoubtedly exists a bias in favour of conviction.

But it is not always clear if what one perceives in the work are themselves assumptions or judgements; that is, the viewer may not know if conviction is present or not, and this ambiguity can have important implications for the work's reception. Some experimental works inhibit the conversion of assumptions into judgements, in order to prolong and enhance the activity of assuming among viewers. The purpose of using the assumption as a form of expression, in this case, is not to promote higher quality judgements, but higher quality assumptions. The viewer is asked to pretend better, in order to explore other possibilities for living and thinking.

Artists develop strategies for blocking the premature formation of judgements. A common one is the careful use of *abstract relations*. If one juxtaposes a chair and a table, the relation is perceived as "natural." The relation between a chair and a rock, however, is abstract, provided that their association is given no explanation. The presence of abstract relations has a corrosive effect on conviction. A fine example is Luis Buñuel's

*The Exterminating Angel*. The haute bourgeoisie of Mexico City convene in a palatial home for an after-opera soirée. For reasons that are never explained, the guests are unable to leave the dining hall; a hidden force prevents them from walking through an otherwise open doorway. Much fun is then had at the expense of the upper classes, whose good breeding quickly evaporates. Then a bear appears, ambling inexplicably through a lower passageway. Is this a reference to the “Soviet Union,” as some commentators, requiring that the bear mean something, have wondered? Who knows; Buñuel’s films have never fit well with the symbolism of the European art film. Certainly the shock of the bear’s appearance sends a ripple of humorously abstract uncertainty through the film. Doorways which are not doorways and impertinent bears are enough to keep the film’s assumptions in play.

A second example comes from the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who produces and himself embodies an image of the joyful, experimental life. “Experiment,” he said, “never interpret.”<sup>13</sup> He would have been dismayed to see Buñuel’s beautiful bear, freed to stray into unexpected places, recaged as a symbol, and he defended the works of many artists against such domesticating responses. Deleuze’s balance sheet of agreement with general contemporary tendencies is mixed. He rejects all avant-gardes, which would find little disagreement in the contemporary art world; but he also rejects genres (the contemporary equivalent of artistic “schools”), which would receive stiff resistance. But it is Deleuze who has made it possible to talk about that old modernist ally the “new” again without blushing. Keeping the disciplines distinct, philosophers invent new “concepts,” while artists invent new “affects.” Experimentation produces the “...new, remarkable, and interesting,” which replaces “the appearance of truth” and is “more demanding than it [truth] is.”<sup>14</sup> One should not solve problems, as do those whose concern is the truth, but continually formulate new problems. So free must the experimenters be from existing patterns of thought and morality that they will have “no principles.”<sup>15</sup>

Accordingly, this process of experimentation is “non-dialectical”; one is not to advance into the new by discursively critiquing existing positions, concepts, or methods in order to refute them. That would be “reactive.” The experimentalist, on the other hand, creates the new, and is therefore “active.” The reactive-dialectical process of critique and refutation is designed to eliminate ideas understood to be flawed, an evaluative procedure which is necessarily predicated on judgement. The familiar questions of who judges and according to which foundational rules emerge once more. But such tired problems cannot penetrate the Nietzschean heights of the Deleuzian experimental world, which, resembling children’s play as it does, is not predicated on communication. It is a ludic model; the goal is

not communication, but creation. This resembles in turn many artists' work, the reception of which is often distorted by the mistaken assumption that because it is an artwork, its primary desire must be to *say* something.

The Deleuzian experimental process shares many superficial similarities with pluralism, particularly the perpetual addition of new ideas (...and...and...and..., as Deleuze says), proliferating in a critique-free landscape. This resemblance is unfortunate, as Deleuze's experiments are both rigorous and politically subtle. Articulating the distinctions between today's pluralism and Deleuze's experimentalism, on the other hand, could be very helpful to those wishing to sort out, critically, what is worth keeping and what isn't in our current environment. But Deleuze's approach raises many questions, some of which are quite familiar. Is it only available to the Nietzschean few? Is this just another in a series of unrealizable avant-garde utopian overtures? Or even when successful instances appear, is the frenetic world of pluralism just too unfavorable an environment for such experiments to come fully into view?

Yet Deleuze's optimism notwithstanding, it's difficult to fathom how any of the experimental desires currently expressed by artists can be materially realized in the social sphere without a lot more critical self-reflection than is presently taking place. This is clearly true of the anti-capitalist experimentalisms, which carry a tradition of political art as symbolic of an ideal social field. But so unstable is the current environment that even the corporate-friendly, innovation-for-its-own-sake artists can't rely on their accommodationist conservatism and their "thinking-outside-the-box" talk to open doors automatically for them. The corporate world is plenty experimental in its own right, and has limited use for "artists."

And where are the critics? There are many disappointed ones wandering around, disappointed either that the avant-garde failed, or that it was so embarrassingly deluded to begin with. Another type has become exasperated with what remains of the avant-garde's political project. For these latter critics, artists who talk politics, particularly socialist politics, have crossed a threshold of self-exile, joining a motley group composed of anti-globalization protesters, and social critics like Noam Chomsky and Edward Said, who just aren't getting with the new program. Hal Foster has identified another category, the "poet-critic," which has filled the void left by the decline of the more politicized approaches of the "*Artforum* critic" and the "*October* critic" (of which he was one) in the 1980s and 1990s. The new poet-critic "waxes lyrical about the necessary return of Beauty and Spirituality as the essential objects of art."<sup>16</sup> Foster observes that the decline of the earlier forms of critique were displaced by "a new nexus of dealers, collectors and curators for whom critical evaluation, let alone theoretical analysis, was of little use. Indeed, these things were usually deemed

an obstruction, and many managers of art actively shun them, as do many artists, sadly enough.”<sup>17</sup> Experimentalism presently covers both sides of this spiritual/critical divide. Perhaps it’s time for some debate.

#### Notes

- 1 Paul Griffith, *A Concise History of Avant-garde Music: From Debussy to Boulez* (New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1978), 151.
- 2 John Cage, *For The Birds: John Cage in Conversation with Daniel Charles* (Boston and London: Marion Boyars Press, 1981), 77.
- 3 Michael Nyman, *Experimental music: Cage and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xv.
- 4 Benjamin Buchloh describes in an appropriately urgent tone what forms of art production fare less well in that part the contemporary pluralist environment modified by corporate sponsorship, as well as the “desperation” of some artists who resist those conditions. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Critical Reflections,” *Artforum* (January 1997): 68-9, 102.
- 5 Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories* (London: Routledge, 1995), 98.
- 6 The tendency to see the European avant-garde as the well-spring of all culturally revolutionary ideas has been fairly consistent. Eric Hobsbawm provides a different perspective, which might explain in part the contemporary artist’s complex allegiances. “Industrialized mass entertainment revolutionized the twentieth-century arts, and it did so separately and independently of the *avant-garde*. . .,” he writes. “The truly ‘contemporary’ art of this century developed unexpectedly, overlooked by the guardians of cultural values, and with the speed to be expected of a genuine revolution. The arts of the twentieth century were therefore revolutionized, but not by those who set themselves the task of doing so.” Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 241-242.
- 7 “...it has become indisputable that the sphere of social production traditionally called ‘avant-garde art’ and the one called, since 1947, the ‘culture industry’ have performed a successful merger.” Buchloh, 68.
- 8 Many artists of course willfully position themselves in this artwork-as-illustration-of-theory structure, making works which would seem custom-made to elicit specific theoretical responses. An early seminal example is “Your gaze hits the side of my face,” a photo-text work by Barbara Kruger. Critics armed with a good knowledge of gaze theory then did what was expected of them. For discussions of artworks that illustrate but do nothing to otherwise challenge existing theoretical models, see Daniel Herwitz, *Making Theory/Constructing Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 294-297.
- 9 Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening; Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 164-166.
- 10 Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (London: NLB, 1975).
- 11 George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 42.
- 12 This resembles an important concept developed by David E. James, the “allegories of cinema.” See David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 3-28, and *Power Misses: Essays Across (Un)popular Culture* (London and New York: Verso Books, 1996), 10-16.
- 13 Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 48.
- 14 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 111.
- 15 Deleuze and Parnet, 55.
- 16 Hal Foster, “Art Agonistes,” *New Left Review* (March/April 2001): 149.
- 17 *ibid.*