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ART IN PUBLIC SPACES: NEW ROLES FOR ART AND CURATING IN TIME OF TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY

The roads of rage and ruin: contemporary art and its publics after the global

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ABSTRACT

This essay will consider the possibilities for contemporary art and culture in the current age of anger, the post-public condition, the historical phase of deglobalization, and the demise of the international artworld and contemporary art as we knew it. First of all, I will outline how contemporary art came to be structurally and historically after 1989, and how this was aligned with the central notion and economy of globalization itself. In the second half, I will describe how this historical formation is changing, and arguably disappearing, and consider what can and will replace it. I will do so through a reading of Walter Mignolo's outline of five options for the future: decoloniality, rewesternization, reorientation of the Left, dewesternization, and spiritual reawakening. To these, I will then add and consider a sixth option: neo-fascism, drawing upon the work of Rastko Močnik, which also provides a road map for the present and future.

ARTICLE HISTORY

KEYWORDS

Globalization; contemporary art; post-public; deglobalization; populism; westernization

Nationalism, like culture, is a moving base—a *socle mouvant* (to quote Foucault again)—of differences, as dangerous as it is powerful, always ahead or deferred by definitions, pro or contra, upon which it relies. Against this, globality—or post-nationalist talk—is a representation—both as *Darstellung* or theatre and as *Vertretung* or delegation as functionary—of the financialization of the globe, or globalization. (Spivak 1999, 363).

Rather than the historical fascisms themselves, it is the conceptual tool elaborated to analyze them that helps us understand today's sociopolitical processes and their political articulations. Politics that take the nation-state as their ultimate reference and articulate both the attempts to form a national bourgeoisie and the resistance of working people who do not recognize themselves in the post-social-democratic policies, may be termed neofascist. Although their ideological profile is culturalist and differentialist (rather than, crudely, biologically racist) they share with historical fascisms the contradictory combination of the top-down reshaping of domination and bottom-up popular revolt, as well as their anti-democratic, authoritarian orientation. (Močnik 2016, 615)

The failure of any convincing rebuttal from the elites gives their fears greater plausibility. Thus, white nationalists in the USA claim to be taking their own lives in hand again, vindicating their own liberties. Despite the repellent xenophobic aspects of their rhetoric, they offer an anti-elite case that does not fail to connect with the wider public's own hunches. Trump and his supporters in the world's richest country are no less the

dramatic symptom of a general crisis of legitimacy than those terrorists who plan and inspire mass violence by exploiting the channels of global integration. (Mishra 2017, 342)

A global artworld?

In the last couple of decades it has become commonplace to talk of a *global* artworld, to the extent that the notion of an artworld as such—and what this entails of publics and publicity—is interchangeable with the term globalism itself. Increasingly, Contemporary Art, and its institutions present themselves as *truly* international, and any major survey of contemporary art, or of modern art for that matter, whether in exhibition or book form, can no longer reasonably present itself as exclusively western, or even exclusively white, but would be required to make claims for diversity and cosmopolitanism in order to have any credibility with its publics, both in terms of audience and its critical and historical reception (be this art criticism, art history or the art market).¹ In this sense, the internationalism of contemporary art is not only descriptive, but also *prescriptive*—it is not merely a condition, but rather an *aspiration* and even a *demand*. As such, contemporary art can be said to produce a specific space of representation, that of the international, of the global—or globalism as a cultural, political and economic project. Finally, the circulation of discourse that contemporary art has provided through its

public platforms is not only establishing a potential global (art)market place but it also has the promise of being or becoming a transnational global public sphere.

Now, for a global artworld to constitute a transnational public sphere, it must be because it has some of the political, aesthetic and economic features that can be called public, that is a framework, a circulation of discourse and modes of address that not only identify but also produce an audience or community *as a public*. However, whereas the historical public sphere always located itself within the confines of a given nation state, to the extent of the two being almost synonymous, a global artworld is transnational and transient. In the case of the latter, the forms and institutions are neither permanent nor stable, and in the former they are always addressing those within a given geopolitical space (such as the nation), as well as beyond, from one place or to another, places that are only connected as an international art community of a public of strangers that has never, in any shape of form, constituted global citizenship. That is, even if you do consider yourself part of the discourse of contemporary, global art, you are nonetheless always also either a citizen of another, actual nation, sometimes perhaps multiple ones, or plainly stateless, and thus a carrier bearer of the currencies and privileges, or the lack of these, that this status implies. In this text, then, I will consider the relationship between contemporary art and globalization, which I will argue are entangled and mutually constitutive, as the formation, or blue print if you will, of a specific transnational public sphere that has emerged under the specific historical conditions after 1989, but which are now, also, if not defunct, then under attack and in suspension.

Moreover, it must be noted that any notion of “the contemporary” is not a unitary concept, in either temporal or spatial terms. Rather, the contemporary implies multiple temporalities, not just in terms of the calendrical, but also with the contemporary as epochal and potentially replacing the notion of the postmodern as characterizing our time(s) and chronologically succeeding modernity. Or, as Peter Osborne has phrased it: “... the present is increasingly characterized by a coming together of *different but equally ‘present’* temporalities or ‘times’, a temporal unity in disjunction, or a *disjunctive unity of present times*.” (Osborne 2013, 17) This disjunction also plays out spatially, with regions, nations and even peoples potentially described as contemporary or modern, but also as developing, as catching up to modernity, and, even more negatively, as backwards or primitive, and so on. Globalization may be inclusive and expansive, but it is first and foremost uneven and unbalanced

—the cultural, political and economic aspects of globalization are not only occasionally contradictory but also sometimes conflictual, which, in turn, affects contemporary art as a practice, a field and an economy. It is these contradictions and conflicts that constitute contemporary art’s politics of representation, as well as the burden of representation that is placed on specific agents in the field (agency is here understood in terms of both the subjects and the objects that circulate within the artworld). As Stuart Hall has pointed out in his work on the concept of representation, this entails processes of exchange in relation to the meaning of objects among members of a community, and therefore a shared conceptual map as well as a shared language in which meaning can be attributed but also *contested*. (Hall, Evans, and Nixon 1997) Contemporary art, then, in all its artistic and institutional forms, not only represents globalism and celebrates cosmopolitanism and diversity. It also contests globalization, sometimes with the insistence on local sedimentation and community building as opposed to, say, internationalist biennials, at other times through the position of another internationalism, an alter-globalization, and even, on occasions, in terms of a radical anti-globalization and anti-systemic movements, and so on.² There is, however, a third aspect to add with regards to contemporary art and globalization. As I have written elsewhere—in thinking about the possibilities of curating after globalization—contemporary art is not only a field in which globalization is represented, negotiated and contested (i.e. engaged in criticality), it is also where it is celebrated and *promoted*. (O’Neill, Steeds, Sheikh and Wilson 2019) I argue that it was the political success and hegemony of the neoliberal globalization since the 1990 s that enabled the art world to expand and become world-conquering—both geographically, in terms of audiences and publics, and in terms of the proliferation on a global scale of the art school model, and with a dedication to contemporary art as a form, above and beyond any other (historical) form of art-making, creating in effect *a world system of art*. It is, of course, also the neoliberal deregulation of global markets, and thus tax revenue, which has created the concentration of wealth among a global elite that has allowed the art market to grow to unprecedented levels over the same time period. Thus, the representative function of contemporary art—as a global enterprise—is as a cultural logic of neoliberal globalization, a system of cultural exchange and dissemination, and, crucially, of financialization itself, understood here not only as a growing sector of the economy (as opposed to the decline in industrial production) but also as a way of

socializing the population alongside the financialization of all aspects of human existence. (Lee and LiPuma 2004; Martin 2002) As Gayatri Spivak (1999, 364) has pointed out, “Globality is invoked in the interest of the financialization of the globe”, directly combining the cultural programme of internationalism and cosmopolitanism with the transnational, unhindered flow of capital that is financialization.

TINA

That contemporary art would come into being as contemporary rather than modern or postmodern, through these characteristics of global circulation and the simultaneous diversification and homogenization, after the end of real existing socialism in 1989–90 and the unopposed march of neoliberal reform in the 1990s and beyond, ushering in what Mark Fisher, drawing upon postmodern art, aptly named as capitalist realism, and depressive and defeatist acceptance of the current hegemony of neoliberalism, and the famous dictum of there being no alternative, and the slow cancellation of the future this entails, and the political reign of what Tariq Ali—writing from the same historical context of New Labour in the UK—has termed *The Extreme Center*, with its insistence a politics beyond left and right, with no conceivable political alternatives to neoliberal reforms, economic austerity, increased security measures and surveillance, and so on. (Ali 2015; Fisher 2009) Fisher and Ali provide us with tools through which to understand art as forms of practice (works of art, exhibitions) and as forms of governance (institutions). Both authors focus on the shift towards the centrist, neoliberal policies throughout the 1990s, and with the social democratic parties in the former west abandoning socialist proposals and ideals in favour of new public management, further deregulation and privatization—in effect accepting Margaret Thatcher’s famous dictum *There Is No Alternative*, also known as TINA, and in most cases taking neoliberal reforms much further than the conservative, former adversaries had ever managed and perhaps even dreamt of. This, in turn, produces cultural responses of depression, hauntology and nostalgia (Fisher), and institutions, museums, biennials and art fairs adapting a realist approach to capital, but also an extreme centrism that allows for no alternatives to either structures or policies (Ali). It is also, as we shall see, this erasure of alternatives and the loss of futurity that arguably has produced the alt-right rejection of the extreme centre and its politics, and culture, of consensus in recent years, with broad consequences for how art is produced, presented and circulated, and how it is received and regulated.

In a recent analysis that echoes both Ali and Fisher’s thinking about the suffocating hold of neoliberalism, Nancy Fraser argues that the extreme centre can no longer hold, and that a vast majority of people have lost faith in the idea that neoliberal capitalism will be beneficial to most and are having serious doubts about whether the TINA ideology can in any way address the global breakdown of the social, economic and ecological order we are now witnessing, apparently after the end of history and perhaps after the end of globalization? Interestingly, for our context, Fraser (2019, 13) ascribes the success of the neoliberal globalist hegemony to its *cultural turn*, and how this could cover up its uneven economic policies, in the shape of what she calls *progressive neoliberalism*:

For the neoliberal project to triumph, it had to be repackaged, given a broader appeal, linked to other, noneconomic aspirations for emancipation. Only when decked out as *progressive* could a deeply *regressive* political economy become the dynamic center of a new hegemonic bloc.

Drawing upon her previous analytical categories of recognition and redistribution, Fraser explains how it was the inclusive, cosmopolitan politics of identity, allowing for talented minorities to gain access to positions of power, at least symbolically—in effect political and cultural recognition—that enabled neoliberalism to not only deny any calls for economic redistribution from the few to the many, whether in social-democratic or socialist forms, but also, furthermore, to establish an upward redistribution of its own from the many to the few—the so-called 1%—through, firstly, deregulation and privatization, and, secondly, tax evasion and austerity. This was made possible by what are essentially cultural policies (recognition) rather than economic policies (redistribution)—precisely the policies and values advanced by contemporary art as a *global* phenomenon, where the extra-ordinarily talented, and previously excluded, can be included and represented, but where no systemic, economic reforms can be instigated. As Fraser writes about the political success of Bill Clinton in the early 1990s: he “won the day by talking the talk of diversity, multiculturalism, and women’s rights, even while preparing to walk the walk of Goldman Sachs” (Fraser 2019, 14) For better or worse, this is exactly the same situation that most successful artists, curators and museum directors have increasingly found themselves in in the ensuing decades: talking the talk of liberation and emancipation while walking the walk of financialization—and not just in the USA but everywhere where public museums, private galleries, and the private-public partnerships that are biennials, are economically

dependent on the spoils of finance capitalism and neoliberal deregulation. As if this was not precarious enough, though, this new spirit of capitalism has also paved the way for right-wing populism, as it was “now associated with the forward thinking and the liberatory, the cosmopolitan and morally advanced, the dismal suddenly became thrilling” as Fraser astutely points out (Fraser 2019).

It should come as no surprise, then, that it was contemporary art, and the cultural sector at large, that was to come under attack from the populist right in the last decade or so, whether through political rhetoric demonizing the sector, through defunding and thus governmental control, through direct political interference in cultural institutions with the replacing of directors and curators in state institutions, or through intimidation, and even violence, and the attacking of cultural institutions, and their users in particular.³ Contemporary art and international culture was not merely an easy target but a precise one, as it is not only the place where progressive neoliberalism is, arguably, represented, but it is also structurally always already inclusive *and* elitist simultaneously, and continues to be so. In response to the global movement and mobilization that is right-wing populism, Fraser again posits an alternative, or a double if you will, namely progressive populism, which, while not being anti-internationalist or against culture (or the specific form it has taken as contemporary art) is nonetheless anti-elitist as well, and it would thus be reasonable to question where contemporary art, as we knew it, would fit in, or, rather, stay out of both projects? One should also take heed of Fraser’s warning, which closely resembles Ali’s conclusions, that to “reinstating progressive neoliberalism, on any basis, is to recreate—indeed exacerbate the very conditions” which have led to the success of right wing populism, and will only prepare the ground for more and more vicious populism and politics of anger and disruption (Fraser 2019, 28).

The age of anger

All across the globe, remarkably—east and west, north and south—we have been witnessing a reaction to globalism in the form of rejection, xenophobia and anti-internationalism, epitomized in the rise to power of autocratic strong men like Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, Rodrigo Duterte in Indonesia, Narendra Modi in India and Viktor Orbán in Hungary, as well as the ongoing saga that is the rise and fall of Donald Trump in the USA—to name but the most obvious.⁴ What these leaders and their followers share, among other things, is a disdain for the very liberal and humanist values of contemporary art and

its permissiveness, preferring instead a political agenda of so-called *illiberal democracy*, as it was named by one of these self-professed strong men, Viktor Orbán. (The Orbán government replaced all museum directors in the country with members of their own party, paving the way for a neo-national monoculture in direct response and opposition to cosmopolitanism, and in line with the violent anti-immigration policies and erasure of any culture of dissent in Hungary).⁵ However, this particular brand of deglobalization is no alter-globalization but, rather, an *after*-globalization, and as such not an actual political alternative to global capital but more a cultural response to the breakdown after decades of absolute hegemony of neoliberal deregulation and globalization. Indeed, as much as these strong men and their followers rage against globalization, the irony is how they are actually united in a truly *global* political and cultural movement of, to use Pankaj Mishra’s term, *ressentiment* that is, furthermore—and even more ironically—wholly dependent on the technological modes of communication of globalization itself. As a political movement, then, it is after the global, and, as a public formation acting within the post-public, no longer bound by the codes and spatial formations of the historical bourgeois public sphere but in a shady existence on a plethora of online forums, from 4chan and 8chan to Facebook and beyond—the manifestation of what Paolo Virno (2004, 40) once warned against as “publicness without a public sphere”, the unchecked circulation of discourse without a common political space of negotiation and action, precisely the ideal function of art institutions as part of a larger set of institutions of and for democracy itself.

There is another bittersweet irony to add here, namely that while social media does not function like a public sphere but to a large degree appears as one, and in many ways has historically and politically superseded both the historical public sphere and its counterpublics (such as various institutional forms of cultural spaces and publications), it is nonetheless a specific form of cultural production similar to the instrument within contemporary art known as curating. Social media platforms may not function as public spaces, with all the problems this entails, but they are heavily curated and targeted toward specific selections of viewpoints, information (and indeed, misinformation), and not least people. This may also be why it is such a perfect vehicle for anger and vitriol; the protocols of public speaking and civility do not apply, and every expression is amplified and repeated endlessly in an echo chamber of like-minded subjects, even believers. It functions as the perfect mediator and communicator of what Pankaj Mishra has described as *the age of anger*. The fury that consumes so much of our actuality is not, in his view, due

exclusively to the uneven geographic and economic development of globalization, although this is a major factor, but, crucially in this context, is also for reasons of culture and the sense of dislocation and time being out-of-joint stemming from the social acceleration of (post)modernity, with roots stretching back to the romantic and revolutionary sentiments of the 19th century. Our times of resentment, online fury, conspiracy theories and terrorist cells share with the agitated age of 19th century militants, in Mishra's (2017, 25) prose:

[T]he ambiguous emancipation of the human will, the challenges and perils of individuality, the yearning for re-enchantment, flight from boredom, demented utopianism, the politics of direct action, self-surrender to larger movements with stringent rules and charismatic leaders, and the cult of redemptive violence.

In the pressure cooker of the fragile human mind, more often than not this finds its release in the ostracization of the other and direct or indirect ethnic cleansing. However, if it sometimes seems as if the cultural politics and the programme of the far right are insubstantial and abstract, with their advocating for purity and return, although not exactly in any tangible institutional forms, this may indeed be because these are not cultural politics in the traditional sense of establishing a public sphere and constituent cultural institutions; the politics as such are almost exclusively the *cultural politics of identity*, rather than, say, economic policies or the like. Rather than any response in terms of politics to the uneven economic effects of globalization, in the main populists take a sharp right turn instead into identity politics, blaming immigrants and minorities for the ruins of our present. It is also a very contemporary understanding of politics and identity. Thus, in the span of a few decades, we have gone from the raging *culture wars* of the 1980 s and 1990 s, that were also about identities but which crucially tried to limit or prevent certain subjectivities access to and representation within cultural institutions, to the national bourgeois public sphere, if you will, and towards an outright, indeed alt-right, *war on culture*, its institutions, practitioners and users alike. Instead of cultural politics and policies, then, what we have is the complete *culturalization of politics* playing itself out in political questions that move from discussions of redistribution and the modelling of society and its future towards issues of tradition, identity, attitude and authenticity, with what we wear and who we talk to and sleep with being more important than what we earn and how, and politicians' personalities more important than

policies. The question thus becomes about how these profound political and structural changes, which are openly hostile to contemporary art and all its values, affect the production, distribution and sustainability of the art world system.

Transformations of discursive practices

Before looking into possible scenarios (rather than responses) that may emerge from this moment of transformation, and before looking for the roads taken in the present and leading, as it were, to a number of futures, it may be instructive to recall how Michel Foucault described changes to a discursive practice as not only economic and political but also as a complex set of modifications that can happen *outside* the discourse itself, as well as *within* it or *adjacent* to it (Foucault 2013, 225). So, in the reverse order, changes taking place alongside a specific discursive practice would be in another discursive practice. That is, when innovative techniques and methods alter one practice they can permeate adjacent discourses, the clearest example being how certain theories and methods can move quickly from one academic discipline to the next, in turn altering it, whether drastically or minimally, and so on. This is how a discipline such as art history went through major transformations throughout the 1980 s, naturally, but it is also how, more recently, philosophy became simply *theory* by the import of *curatorial* modes of research and presentation (from contemporary art specifically and cultural production more generally) into academia and its ways of producing and representing knowledge, as Fredric Jameson (2015) pointed out in his essay "The Aesthetics of Singularity". Currently, another tectonic shift is noticeable in how art institutions can and will operate through the mobilization that is happening subsequent to cultures of dissent such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo. This is having a strong affect on institutions of culture as they are the advocates of progressive liberalism, and in the case of Black Lives Matter has led to new public conflicts around contemporary art, race and the representation of racial violence, as in the protest over Dana Schutz's work at the 2017 Whitney Biennial in New York, as well as the current postponement of the travelling retrospective of Philip Guston's work, originally due to opening in Washington in the summer of June 2020 and now slated for 2024, and, in the case of #MeToo, led to the dismissal of several powerful male gallery and museum directors in the last few years.⁶

In terms of how the discourse of contemporary art has changed from within, it is precisely with the rise of the curator (as also mentioned by Jameson in "The Aesthetics of Singularity") as the central figure of contemporary art that has, indeed, been a signifier for the change from the modern and postmodern

into the contemporary in the 1990 s. As art became increasingly global throughout that decade, the curator emerged as the transient and migratory agent who could combine various positions, within art theory as well as art practice, from various parts of the world into a coherent whole through practices of selection, constellation and exposition. As the linear progression of art through the modernist idioms, and thus the division of art into time zones of the advanced and the developing, the central and the provincial, the avant-garde and the rear-garde, became both problematic and obsolete, the curator emerged as the nodal point that could connect the disparate and diachronic, select and represent the relevant and the cutting edge among a plethora of practices, and, in turn, deselect the irrelevant and retrograde—or, using Foucauldian terms, transforming the discursive practices through the development of new techniques for defining objects, adjusting concepts and accumulating information. Indeed, *the curatorial* has now become not just an adjective but also a notion, and even a field of study in itself (Martinon 2015).

Finally, there is the first, and possibly most radically transformative aspect—namely, the seismic changes outside the world of art itself. These changes are occurring in the forms of production, particularly in digital production and platform capitalism; in social relations, which we can understand in terms of flows of migration and new contact zones as well as the conflict zones this has created; and in the political institutions and politics as such, as in the appearance of strong men and their followers, and the global rise of the far right. But there is more: as the planet became engulfed in a global pandemic in late 2019, with the resulting economic recession, travel restrictions, social distancing and various degrees of lockdown, all of which made the artworld's primary modes of communication *and* assembly—the exhibition—extremely difficult to maintain, and truly, if only temporarily, bringing an end to the artworld as we knew it. Indeed, all spaces, museums, galleries and alternative spaces, etc., were affected, and were prevented from engaging in their primary historical social form of bringing people together, whether as customers, audiences or collaborators, in effect denying these institutions their public form and perhaps even their public role. In terms of the economics, the lack of visitors has had a drastic affect on both museums and art fairs, and even with a gradual opening up the after-effects will continue to be felt for a long time. In part this is because there are huge deficits to cover, especially for large-scale institutions and the particular financial gearing they have had for decades. It is also unclear whether the experience economy and the consumer market for fine art, i.e. collectors and collecting, will be able to return to any levels approaching those reached pre-pandemic,

although this remains speculative at the time of writing. But other spaces are affected, too, as people simply cannot gather there, can no longer assemble, and for institutions where spatial co-presence is paramount for community building, a period of rethinking, reorganization and even rebuilding will now be needed, but, I would argue, without any return proper and only with forms of reconfiguration. It is as if everyone has been forced if not underground then online, which indicates a whole other set of procedures and protocols than those that both mainstream and alternative spaces have been using for decades, whether in dialogue or in contention. And if putting exhibitions, screenings and talk programmes online has been the default short-term response, this will not work in the longer term without a drastic change in institutions' remit and their publics, and their funding. The success of the digital in art will potentially come at the expense of the physical, as with streaming services in entertainment arguably making both flow TV and cinema if not obsolete then marginal. Thus, it should come as no surprise that most institutions see online interfaces with their public as a stop-gap measure rather than the way ahead. Instead, the artworld, like the rest of the world, is simply holding its breath, or making appeals to national governments—in effect a renationalization of art's structures rather than continuous globalization. This appeal to national governments, and a return to the historical model of public space and public funding, must be read within an array of possible scenarios and it is to those that I shall now turn.

Roads taken, roads ahead

In, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, Walter D. Mignolo (2011) argues for colonialism as the hidden agenda of European modernity, and, as the former West has increasingly lost its hegemony, both militarily and morally, for decoloniality as an intellectual and political programme that is not only directed to revisiting and excavating the past but also to a reclaiming of the future as *optional*. Hence, the book carries the subtitle *Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, and famously advocates for the decolonial option. Nonetheless, this is also set in contrast to four other trajectories for the future, all of which can be used to map out not a new global art but different versions of art production and institutions *after* the global. As will become clear, and as most of these options have been further pursued in the decade since Mignolo published his ideas, I would argue that a sixth avenue now needs to be added to Mignolo's original list of five, which were: *Rewesternization*, *Reorientation of the Left*, *Dewesternization*, *the Decolonial Option*, and *the*

Spiritual Option. This sixth avenue could be called simply the *Fascist Option*—more of which later.

In terms of rewesternization, Mignolo shows how two successive US Presidents, George Bush and Barack Obama, were both concerned with the same goal, namely solidifying the west's hegemony over the rest of the world in terms of the economy, authority, science and knowledge (even if they used different strategies, such as military force and unilateralism in the case of Bush, and diplomacy, trade agreements for Obama). However, as the prefix *re-* implies, it is not only about maintaining and even broadening US power and influence but also about actually restoring it, indicating that the west as a coherent concept has already become former. What is left of the west can no longer take its hegemony for granted but must attempt to reinstate it, and, staying within the narrow frame of US Presidential politics, the 2020 campaign may have bitterly and utterly divided that nation but nonetheless it did so in terms of two versions of rewesternization and thus of saving capitalism. There only needs to be a comparison of the retrospective ring of the two campaigns' slogans: *Make America Great Again* and *Build Back Better*. Any invocation of the future, then, is in the form of a *return*—or, in a word, rewesternization. In this sense, rewesternization is precisely not just continued westernization but the response to, or the hegemonic struggle, if you will, with its other, its counter: dewesternization.

So, as the place for the advancement of progressive neoliberalism, contemporary art (as a system rather as a set of specific practices) can thus be analysed as a project of westernization, despite its multicultural aspirations and global outreach. Indeed, certain artistic forms, and especially certain institutional forms, were exported world-wide from the former west—such as the international biennial and the art fair, for example, and their preferred architectural model, *the global white cube*, to use Elena Filipovic's excellent phrase. (Filipovic 2006) This cultural export, with its adjacent discourses and markets, was happening long before contemporary art and globalization, and, to paraphrase Mignolo, are only part of a partially hidden dark side of modern art as western art, and has its roots in the classical age itself as a colonial enterprise with the birth of the museum, both in its anthropological forms and in art history. It is worth remembering that in Latin America, from where Mignolo's theories originate, classical painting is known as colonial painting. However, this does not amount to rewesternization as such, as it was taking place at the height of western power and dominance over the world and its cultures. Rewesternization, then, becomes a project at the historical moment when this hegemony is challenged, not only by dewesternization but also possibly by other options, by multi-polarity, for example—which is precisely the moment we have now of alter-, anti- and after-globalization (and after the three strikes of the

financial crisis, the global success of the populist right and the pandemic). It should come as no surprise, then, if and when agents and institutions at the heart of the artworld make pleas for a return to the former normal of neoliberal globalization and its flows of objects, subjects, discourses and finances, as in London's Serpentine Gallery director Hans Ulrich Obrist's call for a new *New Deal* in the arts (Obrist 2020).

Hence, rewesternization is a project of return and restoration rather than alteration or annihilation, and indeed Obrist's 2020 opinion piece in *Artnews* argues for a return to the New Deal public art programme in the USA after the great depression of the 1930 s, based on two fundamental assumptions: that a) art is dependent on audience; and b) art needs massive funding in order to reach this audience. In terms of the former, the challenges for art institutions are that the public cannot enter these institutions in the same way and in the same numbers as previously. This will, in turn, influence the funding stream, partly in terms of ticket sales, but also, it would seem, in terms of patronage and sponsorship. The response is thus to move the spectacle of art out of the museum and into public space, rather than any ideas for downsizing, withdrawing or rethinking materiality and what constitutes a public. What we need, according to Obrist, is a massive scheme of public commissions, along the lines of the cultural programme of the New Deal, a *new new deal*. Not only does this indicate that the spectacular is the modus operandi of contemporary art, both in terms of modes of address and reception, but it also suggests a return to public rather than private funding, with calls for the state to sponsor a huge renewal of the arts sector as part of the *new new deal*. This may be somewhat surprising, considering how the Serpentine in particular has thrived on private patrons and sponsors in recent times, but is now pleading for state funding, which would indicate that such patrons and sponsors as the Bloomberg group, for example, will not willingly contribute to a public arts programme, and that we therefore have to turn to the nation state (like so many other industries during the pandemic) rather than international finance and thus some sort of versioning of globalization. However, as a return to a historical model of state-funded arts (and social) programmes—the original New Deal—can this response to the current crisis in the arts best be understood as being precisely a call for rewesternization?

Leftwards reorientations of the artworld?

The historical New Deal had a strong social programme, not only in terms of supporting artists but also in servicing communities with both social and cultural outreach programmes, which leads us to a possible future scenario involving a reorientation

of the Left. Any such reorientation would require a different globalization, rather than a return to the nest of the nation state, and a different institutionalization than that found in the artworld currently; a different way of instituting social relations and imaginaries. It should come as no surprise, then, that attempts at creating a Leftwards reorientation of the artworld have increasingly taken the form of action against and within the primary globalist events and institutions of contemporary art—that is, the international biennials. This has indeed been taking place from top to bottom—if mostly from the bottom up, of course! Many curators have seen biennials as spaces of not only capital but also of hope, that could highlight political issues and aesthetics in a global dialogue, often highlighting a documentary approach, as in the 2015 Venice Biennale, for example, curated by the late Okwui Enwezor under the telling title *All the World's Futures*. This Biennale showcased numerous works from around the globe, many of which depicted labour conditions, with one of the works, Isaac Julien's *KAPITAL* directly attempting a rereading of Marx's *Das Capital*, repurposing it for a contemporary reorientation of the left as opposed to historicizing it. Now, curatorial orientations, or even reorientations, of single biennials, do not change their structures or even their functions, and the 2017 Venice Biennial, curated by Christine Macel, made every effort to follow the opposite path of its precedent, eschewing grand themes of narratives for the more elusive claims of a *l'art pour l'art*. It could even be argued that this dialectic approach allows for a certain biannual equilibrium that can resist most demands for and attempts at structural reform or readjustment (which will now take place as part of deglobalization).

A reorientation of these institutions has not only taken place from above but also from below, through direct opposition and resistance, and in calls for reform from artists and artworkers. A recent example: in the US, W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy) asked artists to withdraw from the 2019 Whitney biennial in protest over the composition of the Museum's board. There were also precursors in the calls for a boycott of Manifesta 10 in 2014, and protests by artists against the governance and financing of the Sydney and São Paulo biennials, also in 2014. And 2021 has seen artworkers trying to unionize in major New York City museums, in the heart of empire itself.⁷ What these protests all share is a demand for structural change in the biennials themselves, particularly in terms of their funding and their political affiliations, and not just in terms of which curators and which artists are selected for them. For these very reasons, as well as countless others, the biennial form is now up for discussion, and an effort like the Bergen Triennial naming itself the Bergen

Assembly, indicating a communitarian form of political gathering, is an indicator of new roads to take in a reorientation of art's institution towards the global left. Yet, conversely, we are also seeing how political organizations of the global left are increasingly acknowledging the role of art in building the future, a reorientation along the lines of the early 20th century avant-garde movements (the political as the artistic), as is the case with Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research. Tricontinental was founded in 2018 as a Global South network for researchers and activists, and with a name that draws on both the 1966 Tricontinental conference in Cuba, which attempted to create a radical political network as part of the Non-Alignment Movement across Africa, Asia and Latin America, and on the Frankfurt School of critical theory with the second half of their name. The Institute not only does social research in the narrow sense but also has an arts programme, and even a migratory, international art school for emerging practitioners from the Global South.

Dewesternization and decoloniality

Across the Global South there is also the drive towards dewesternization, which is a rejection of the options (re)westernization and letwards reorientation, and partly aligned with the latter, in its opposition to (re)westernization, while structurally similar to the former, in the sense that it does not resist global capitalism, only western control over it, and it does not accept the western monopoly on the production of knowledge and truth, whether in the social, political or cultural organization of society. Thus, dewesternization is interesting to consider in terms of contemporary art as the cultural logic of neoliberal globalization: will dewesternization also indicate a withdrawal from the circuit of contemporary art, to the extent that it has been directed towards the west? Certainly, the major challenges to western hegemony currently come from Asia, partly from Islam and partly from the emerging power that is China. Following our logic from above, analysing the development of biennials and institutions in the Gulf and in China will be key, particularly as these biennials have integrated themselves into the system of contemporary art, and hugely expanded it. Needless to say, there is not one single direction that is being taken across these two very different regions, nor across the continent, and the picture remains contradictory and multifaceted, or, if you will, multi-polar. To take just two examples: on the one hand, the upcoming Sharjah 15th biennial in 2022 will be curated in the name, and—it would be expected—*spirit* of the late Okwui Enwezor, celebrating his legacy, while, on the other, several works were censored and thus removed just before the opening of

the 6th Guangzhou Triennial in 2018. What is remarkable with regard to the latter is that this included not only the works of Chinese artists but also of renowned western artists such as Harun Farocki and Lawrence Lek, attesting to a new international confidence in China with regards to openly embracing a project of dewesternization.⁸ As China has recently also signed RCEP, the world's biggest ever free trade agreement, covering most of the Asia-Pacific region, it will be interesting to follow what role the many biennials in China, and indeed in the region, will have in this economic and thus presumably also cultural dewesternization in the years to come.

Like dewesternization, the decolonial option also delinks from the west's hegemony in deconstructing what Mignolo (2011, 54) calls the colonial matrix of power: "Decoloniality [...] means both the analytic task of unveiling the logic of coloniality and the prospective task of contributing to build a world in which many worlds will coexist." Unlike dewesternization and rewesternization alike, and their clash of fundamentalisms, decoloniality embraces multipolarity and the possibility for different future and historical courses for societies to follow, including the cultural and the artistic. Indeed, we have seen a proliferation of artistic projects decolonising knowledge, in the arts, in the academy and in the archive, to name but a few sites of struggle. And while the decolonial option is equally as anti-capitalist as the international reorientation of the Left, it does not have an overarching ideological project but, rather, acknowledges different kinds of knowledge and thinking as principally non-hierarchical. What is remarkable, however, is how decolonial projects have not only taken place in the postcolony, but have also reached the former colonial centres of power in the west, thus taking the opposite direction of the Marxist Left, which moved from the industrial centres of the west out towards the rest of the world, emerging in the (former) colonies and returning to the cities and countries of the (former) colonizers. A case in point is the #RhodesMustFall movement that began in Cape Town in South Africa in 2015, with demands for the removal of the statue of the British colonialist Cecil Rhodes from the grounds of the University of Cape Town. This quickly spread to other universities in South Africa, but also led to calls for the removal of a statue commemorating Rhodes at Oxford University in the UK, and similar demands for the removal of statues of colonialists and slave traders swept across universities throughout the US. Famously, a statue of the slave trader Edward Colston was torn down and thrown in to the harbour of Bristol in the UK in the summer of 2020 (Nyamnjoh 2016). But #RhodesMustFall also led to the formation of #FeesMustFall, and the calls for

a decolonised curriculum in South African universities, which would also have economic consequences in the form of eliminating student fees. The South African university system is based on the British one, and thus employs tuition fees on the University level. The decolonial argument is therefore not only along the lines of the inequality this imposes, it is also a legacy of British settler colonialism, precisely the legacy contemporary South Africa wants to liberate itself from (Ndlovu 2017). Similarly, in the arts, the art collective Title In Transgression was formed in Johannesburg in 2016, arguing for a decolonising of art school and art history teaching in South Africa, as it takes the European Renaissance as its nexus rather than the history of Black Africa before as well as during and after Apartheid.

Running out of road: revenants and returns

The fifth and final option brought forward by Mignolo is the spiritual option, which may sound somewhat elusive. Perhaps this is why the spiritual option is only barely sketched out by Mignolo, and indeed it is, perhaps deliberately, underdeveloped. This has to do with the types of knowledges that have been suppressed by the colonial matrix of power, including through its modernist rationalism and its organized religion. Interestingly, it also has to do with "the colonization of aesthetics, its mutation into aesthetics, and its *imprisonement* in the concept of the beautiful and the sublime (and then further limited to art)" (Mignolo 2011, 62). So, to the extent that the spiritual can easily be identified in artistic production, both historically and currently, this option does not automatically lead to a renaissance of world art, but, rather, undoes the Western concept of art as based on Kantian aesthetics altogether, and instead asks us to acknowledge the spiritual not only outside of art itself but also outside the monopoly of organized religion. It proposes to accept indigenous knowledges as equal to western rationality, as in tying the land itself, and thus land rights, to the spirits, to the spiritual, rather than to extraction and viewing the land as a commodity. This is implied in the Canadian artist Ange Loft's work on treaties and land rights, as in her performative and collaborative work *Land Acknowledgement Generator*, which, among other things, asks us to acknowledge those humans and non-humans, living and dead, that have trodden the land around us, and with whom we share it, in effect asking us to accepting haunting as a social category, as Avery F. Gordon (2008, 8) compellingly suggested:

The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make

social life. The ghost or apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition.

Certainly, our actuality seems positively haunted by both its past and the vanishing of the future, but a spectre that is haunting not only Europe but the world as well is perhaps no longer that of *communism*, as famously suggested by Marx and Engels, but, in a perverse way, *fascism*; the very fascism that was supposedly defeated by World War II and its aftermath, in Europe at least, as a global political force with any holds on the future and thus considered to be relegated to the dustbin of history. In the words of Ratsko Močnik (2016, 606): “historical fascism occurred in semi-peripheral regions with internationally non-competitive economies”.⁹ However, as Močnik has also pointed out, we have recently seen a resurgence of fascism on a global scale, whether in the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe, or in postcolonial countries such as India and the Philippines,¹⁰ both of which are ruled by the type of strong men mentioned above, to the extent where we can now talk of both neo- and post-fascism:

We can say that fascist-like policies arise when there is a top-down transformation of the state form; the transformation is carried out by the weaker faction of the ruling class (or coalition); and the masses have been disillusioned by the established economic and state forms, but lack the power and the organization to change them. (Močnik, 611)

Thus, in relation to Mignolo’s original five options, some more realized than others and some in more antagonistic relationships to each other than others, I would like to suggest adding a sixth option, one that is already spreading a trail of destruction and promising a road of rage and leading to more ruination: the return and reappearance of fascism, both neo and post. Such a road forward certainly provides an antagonistic counter-position to any reorientation of the Left and any decoloniality, but may play along with both re- and dewesternization. It is noteworthy how this is a global movement centred around politics of exclusion, but which is nonetheless united in its attack on both local and global democratic measures and institutions, as well as against any politics of social justice, recognition and redistribution.

This road, which many places and people have not only laid out but have actually started walking, will by necessity not only drastically reorganize the institutions

and practices of contemporary art. This has already been seen in the top-down transformation of all cultural institutions in Hungary, or in the exclusionist politics of identity in India and its recolonization of the subcontinent in the name of Hinduism (effectively also merging fascism with spirituality), stripping millions of Indian Muslims of their citizenship, and, in relation to culture and the public sphere, undertaking a demolition and redevelopment plan of New Delhi. This has been compared to nothing less than the ideological and aesthetic project undertaken by Alfred Speer in Nazi Germany, transforming both the population and the public in the image of their leader.³⁷ Such examples of neo-fascist cultural politics in Hungary and India are obviously occurring on different scales but through a shared, totalitarian political logic, with a radical cultural impact, and is already bringing about the exit from the progressive neoliberalism of contemporary art that many have called for—although not in terms of allowing art to blossom anew in other arenas and forms of circulation, but literally bring about the end of art and of the cultural public sphere. If, then, as Bruce Robbins (1993) has famously argued, the public sphere was never more than a mere phantom—a spectre haunting art and politics, as it were—then perhaps the nostalgia, the rage and the loss now being felt and feared might best be described as *phantom pains*. Phantom pains are notoriously difficult to alleviate, as the pain is felt neurologically in a part of the body that is no longer there . . .

Notes

1. The globalization of art, now as *contemporary art*, can be mapped in terms of the growth of international biennials and art fairs in the last couple of decades, but can also be seen in curating, that is exhibition-making itself, and in the (re)writing of art history as global rather than European, and finally in the cross-field between the two. An example of this was the groundbreaking *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, curated by Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss for the Queens Museum, New York, in 1999, an exhibition that expanded the history of conceptual art both in terms of the time-frame, extending beyond the periodization of the 1960s and 1970s backward into the 1950s and forwards into the 1980s, and, more crucially, expanding it geographically, encompassing not just Western Europe and the USA, but most, if not all, parts of the globe. Moreover, contemporaneous current curatorial practice, such as the by now canonical documenta 11 of 2002, had four platforms taking place outside of the 5th platform (the exhibition itself in Kassel), preceding and informing the exhibition in locations across the world, such as Vienna/Berlin, New Delhi, St. Lucia and Lagos, in acknowledgement of a more global perspective on contemporary art and of the idea that any global view would not have to consist of an overview but, rather, of different views and vantage points. In the realm of art history, this is precisely what has been

- some of the criticism directed towards attempts at an overview, such as Hans Belting and Peter Weibel's 2006 research project *Global art and the Museum*, from Claire Farago and Ruth Sambao, among others, that takes issue with the notion that a global art history can be constructed from a single place, and moreover, that this place is the former west itself. Instead, entanglements, local complications and sedimentations must be teased out in order to contract if not global then globalized accounts, histories and counter-histories. See Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg and Peter Weibel, *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013; Claire Farago, "Cutting and Sharing the 'Global Pie': Why History Matters to Discussions of Contemporary 'Global Art'", *On Curating*, Issue 35, 2017, <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-35-reader/cutting-and-sharing-the-global-pie-why-history-matters-to-discussions-of-contemporary-global-art.html#.YMYeZG5JHOR>; Ruth Sambao, "What 'global art' and current (re)turns fail to see: A modest counter-narrative of 'not another biennial'", *Image & Text*, Number 25, 2015, pp. 261-286.
2. The notion of anti-systemic movements, as a way of describing various forms of dissent and resistance to the social transformations of global capitalism, has been coined by Giovanni Arrighi, Terence K. Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein in their book of that title. See Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein, *Anti-Systemic Movements*, London: Verso, 1989.
 3. The most cited examples of recent government interference in the governance and policies of museums and cultural institutions tend to be the European cases of Hungary (more of which subsequently) and Poland, both in the so-called former East, but here it is also worthwhile to list the recent attacks on institutions such as the Raw Material Company in Senegal and BAK in the Netherlands, two very different contexts. The Raw Material Company saw an exhibition closed by the Senegalese government after pressure from Islamist groups, and BAK needed police protection for specific public events held as part of their ongoing project, *Propositions for Non-Fascist Living*. For more on the Nigerian case, see <https://fd.artistsafety.net/2014/06/show-on-african-homosexuality-shut-down-after-fundamentalist-attack/> Information on the situation at BAK stems from my conversations with the staff there and from events attended.
 4. In his introduction to his edited volume *Strongmen*, Vijay Prasad argues that these strong men are not really strong, only parading as such, while retaining a cowardly stance to the social problems and economic injustices surrounding us and instead taking refuge in the easy rhetoric of hate speech and indeed action, with the marginalizing and criminalizing of specific social groups, migrants, religious minorities, and so on. See Vijay Prasad, "The Return of the Monster", *Strongmen*, New York: OR Books, 2018, pp. 1-11. Interestingly, the five essays in the book, each portraying a Strong Man such as Putin, Erdogan, Duterte, Trump and Modi, are all cultural responses, fables, as it were, written by playwrights and novelists rather than political theorists or historians.
 5. For more on the Hungarian malaise, see Barnabás Bencsik, "The Captured Institutions of an Art Scene: Hegemonic Tendencies in Hungarian Cultural Politics since 2010," in *Art and the F Word, Reflections on the Browning of Europe*, edited by Maria Lind and WHW, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014, pp. 137-166, and Hajnalka Somogyi, "Can We Work like This? OFF-Biennale Budapest," in *Curating After the Global: Roadmaps for the Present*, edited by Paul O'Neill, Simon Sheikh, Lucy Steeds, and Mick Wilson, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2019, pp. 427-440.
 6. And while it may be tempting to correlate the anger of these political movements with Mishra's age of anger mentioned above, particularly as both seem on the surface to be grounded in the politics of identity, there is a fundamental difference between how identity is constructed in these social and political movements. The anger that resides in Black Lives Matter and #MeToo is less a matter of *ressentiment* and more a matter of indignation caused by a *lack* of justice and as a reaction to systemic violence, whereas the anti-globalization-fuelled anger that Mishra identifies is driven by a perceived *loss* of privilege of position and the threat of the Other. Political identities are, then, in the first instance, constituted through lack, and in the second through loss.
 7. Until very recently, MOMA was the only unionized major art museum in New York, but in the last few years unions have formed at the Guggenheim, the New Museum, and most recently at the Whitney Museum in 2021. See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/17/arts/design/whitney-museum-forming-union.html>.
 8. <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/sharjah-biennial-15-delayed-2023-1234593/http://artasiapacific.com/News/AIAndBiotechnologyWorksCensoredAt6thGuangzhouTriennial>.
 9. Rastko Močnik, p. 606. Močnik is here referring to the historical form of fascism as it emerged in the 1920s in Italy, Germany and Austria, but it is remarkable how the same conditions of peripheral economies (and weakened labour movements) can be seen in the after-life and continuation of the fascist project in Europe on the Iberian peninsula and to an extent in the US-controlled post-colonies in Latin America in the post-World War II period.
 10. Both the theorist Arjun Appadurai and the artist Anish Kapoor have recently published strikingly similar analyses that are also calls of alarm and for resistance.

<https://thewire.in/government/central-vista-delhi-reconquest-hindutva>

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/jun/04/modi-parliament-taliban-anish-kapoor>.

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