The End of Diversity in Art Historical Writing

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North Atlantic Art History and Its Alternatives

DE GRUYTER

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CHAPTER 2

Leading Terms: Master Narrative, Western, Central, Peripheral, North Atlantic

It is a sign of the unsettled nature of the study of worldwide practices of art history that most of the basic terms are contested. Some scholars prefer "global"; others prefer "worldwide," "transnational," or "international." In some places the modifiers "Western" and "non-Western" are common; in other places they are proscribed as overdetermined. "Central" and "marginal" or "peripheral" less likely to be seen as problematic, but they are difficult to avoid. In this chapter I consider several overlapping sets of these qualifying words:

1. Canon, trajectory, master narrative
2. Western, non-Western, European, Euramerican, North American, Anglo-American, and American
3. The choice of North Atlantic for this book
4. Central and peripheral or marginal
5. Regional, provincial, parochial
6. Decolonial theory

I will not attempt to provide fixed definitions for these terms, but I hope to settle them in the informal sense of that word, the way a person might settle a restive animal: I want to describe them in such a way that they can be useful in the context of this book, and hopefully prevent them from leaping out of context and ruining the arguments they are meant to articulate.

1. Canon, trajectory, master narrative

I begin with a set of concepts that is relatively easy to frame. "Canon," "trajectory," and "narrative"—as in "master narrative"—are used interchangeably, but it helps to make some simple distinctions between them. In this book, a canon is a set of artists,

artworks, periods, places, styles, movements, or other categories that is considered, in some interpretive context, to be both essential and irreplaceable for a larger sense of the pertinent history. A canon in itself is not a temporal object; it is a list. When chronology is added a canon becomes a trajectory, history, genealogy, or lineage—I will mostly be using those terms interchangeably. The central trajectory of modernism includes the sequence

Manet → Cézanne → Picasso

and it also includes the branching sequence

Postimpressionism → Cubism → Abstraction → Dada → Surrealism → Abstract Expressionism.

Either one of those also comprises a canon. I will be using the expression "master narratives" to evoke the sum of the texts that articulate and justify canons and trajectories. The "master narrative" of modernism, in its simplest form, is this branching sequence; but the term *narrative* is a reminder that this is not a list, but a story or a series of stories, together with all their supporting values and instances. "Master narratives" is a way of gesturing toward a sum total of justifications and interpretations: some arguments later in this book, especially in chapter 6, depend on the entanglement of the full complement of texts that support and articulate canons and trajectories. (*Partisan Canons,* edited by Anna Brzyski, 2007; *Master Narratives and Their Discontents,* 2005.)

2. Western, non-Western, European, Euramerican, North Atlantic, North American, Anglo-American

"Western" and "non-Western" are perhaps the least useful terms in the discussion of the worldwide practices of art history, theory, and criticism. The reason isn't that they are inaccurate or outdated, and it isn't that they are irremediably biased or that they rely on overdetermined assumptions. Nor is the problem their generality. The reason these terms are not useful is that there is an impasse between communities who use these terms and those who do not.

On the one hand, scholars in Europe and North America often wish to shelve talk about "Western" and "non-Western." The concept of "Western art history"—or Western scholarship in general—is widely rejected, for several of the reasons I gave in the preceding paragraph. "Westernness" is under- and over-defined: writing on art from the 18th century to the mid-20th century has in effect proposed many detailed definitions of what counts as Western art, while also leaving the nature of that art implicit. "Westernness" is also ideologically loaded, meaning it does work that those who use it may not intend, defining their own identities and implicitly also the identities of their readers.

Claire Farago has researched what might be said and done without words like "Western" and "non-Western." Her *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe*

and Latin America 1450–1650 (1995) was an influential marker of the turn in art history toward global studies. The program called Art in the Contemporary World and World Art Studies, at the University of Leiden (begun in 2005), the program Art History and World Art Studies at the University of East Anglia (1992), and the program for Arty History in a Global Perspective at the Freie Universität Berlin (2008), were founded on the conviction that it was time to pay attention to the world's art practices without categorizing them into "Western" and "non-Western." (More on this is in Ulrich Pfisterer's "Origins and Principles of World Art History," *World Art Studies,* 2008, pp. 69–89.) Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (2000), Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), and other critiques in political theory and area studies have effectively removed the concept of "Western" from serious discussion.

But on the other hand, terms like "Western," "non-Western" and "Oriental" are routinely used in East Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa, the Middle East, eastern Europe. (And note that all four of those terms are European or North American in origin, and a couple, like "East Asia," are not used in the places they designate.) For example, as Xenia Gazi points out, "oriental" is widely used in the Middle East to designate characteristics of art such as the use of calligraphy and geometric patterns. (Its use in other parts of the world is an entirely different matter.) Even in as geographically close a country as Turkey, the concept "Western" is commonly used to refer to European art and scholarship. The same is true in Morocco, which is geographically west of most of Europe. Piotr Piotrowski uses "Western" to talk about art history as it is practiced not only in *Art Since 1900,* but art history to the west of the area he studies ("On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History," *Umeni,* 2008, p. 379).

The opposite of "Western," in some of those contexts, is not "non-Western" but African, Middle Eastern, Asian, Chinese, or any number of specific regional and national labels. When I am traveling, I sometimes find myself in discussions that take "Western art history" as a given: it isn't always well defined or geographically precise, but it is useful in those contexts because it corresponds well to the ways that scholars think of themselves and their places in the world. But "Western" and "non-Western" are non-starters in western Europe and North America: and that difference is itself one of the most interesting, and intractable, problems with the words.

The challenge, then, is double: it is necessary to find terms that can bridge that gap between the rejection of "Western" and its routine use outside western Europe and North America; and to find working synonyms for "Western" that will allow conversations about different parts of the world to go forward in western Europe and North America.

It is my preference to take this double bind regarding "Western" and "non-Western" as a starting point in conversations, even though the western European and North American resistance to the qualifier "Western" is so strong that it's sometimes necessary to abandon it, even though that means playing false with the self-descriptions of

historians and other art writers elsewhere in the world. (My own book *Chinese Landscape Painting as Western Art History* is aimed principally at Western scholars of Chinese art who have experience of this use of the word "Western." But that book should probably have been titled *Chinese Landscape Painting as North Atlantic Art History,* because it is a study of mainly European scholars' reactions to Chinese literati painting. The book says nothing about Chinese landscape painting itself: my subject is European and North American scholars' interpretations of Chinese landscape painting, so I don't make any judgment about the painting itself or the many Chinese interpretations.)

In addition I use "Western" and "non-Western" in several carefully defined contexts when I lecture. One of the restricted uses of "non-Western" that I find particularly helpful in conversations outside Europe and North America is what I call the *narrative definition* of Western and non-Western.

There is a common pattern in books that recount the histories of art in their countries or regions: the author says she will not rely on styles and movements from western Europe or North America, but the book ends up describing artists by reference to western European or North American examples. A Filipino painter might be said to have a style "reminiscent of Bernard Buffet," for example, or a Hungarian modernist might be said to work in a manner indirectly influenced by Cézanne. That narrative form, in which an artist from outside western Europe or North America is described, if only provisionally, in terms of a western European or North American model, is common and in some contexts unavoidable. For example, in *Modern Art in Eastern Europe* (2001) Steven Mansbach mentions the Hungarian modernist Vilmos Perlrott-Csaba, and remarks that Csaba was influenced by Cézanne. He reproduces Perlrott-Csaba's *Bathing Youths,* saying simply that its composition "[stems] from the work of Cézanne and Matisse" (p. 271). At first glance—and even in front of the original, which is in Budapest—Mansbach seems entirely correct, but the form and the economy of this kind of reference drains Perlrott-Csaba's painting of its interest by making it conceptually, historically, and artistically dependent on an artist at the center of the narratives of modernism. This is a complex problem, and I will return to it in chapter 8. (See also the longer account of Mansbach's book in *The Art Bulletin* (2000), 781–85.)

It can be useful to say that the form of such references makes the narratives of which they are a part "non-Western." A "Western" narrative in this sense is one that avoids being dependent on references outside its own subject—in this case an introduction to Hungarian modernism. In this sense a "non-Western" art historical account would be one in which interpretations of the country's art depend on the conceptually or historically antecedent artists, concepts, and practices from western Europe or North America. "Western," from this perspective, would be whatever narratives are sufficient in themselves and do not require references taken from outside of their purview. Examples of "Western" art histories in this sense would be Gombrich's *Story of Art,* or the book *Art Since 1900.*

This isn't a sufficient conceptualization of "Western" and "non-Western"—far from it—but it has the virtue of clarity, and it can be a provocative and fruitful way of thinking about art historical accounts of different national traditions. The *narrative definition* makes it possible to study a wide range of books that tell the history of national art traditions, by flagging places where the historian has chosen to let her narrative lean on an existing narrative of art outside her country or region. This narrative definition is also useful in discussions that take place outside western Europe and North America, because this sense of "non-Western" corresponds well with the ways that some nations' historians understand their geographic and historical position.

I have experimented with this in other books. Readers who are interested in the practice of writing the history of one nation's art, or of trying to balance such a history with an account of the art of the rest of the world, might be interested in the book *Stories of Art* (2002, reprinted 2013), which surveys textbooks of national and global art history written in the Soviet Union, Japan, Iran, Turkey, India, and elsewhere. Just looking at the tables of contents of such books can be an interesting exercise in dislocating what seems culturally natural. Burhan Toprak's textbook *Sanat Tarihi*, published in Ankara in 1957, for example, begins with Anatolia and the Hittites, moves through the Christian middle ages to mid-century Picasso, and then veers back to the Indus Valley, and ends with 19th century Japan. It isn't a trajectory that would be persuasive to students in western Europe or North America, because it seems incomplete—it appears as if Toprak did not want to let Judaeo-Christian art continue and envelop all of art, or as if he did not approve of modernism after mid-century. But to say such a book ends strangely, or that it "veers" from some course, is to acknowledge the pull of standard North Atlantic narratives of art history. There are many more examples in the book *Stories of Art;* each one reveals assumptions we tend to make about the naturalism of our own accustomed narratives.

Another way of considering this *narrative definition* is to inquire more closely about what counts as "our" narratives. I have sketched this in a book called *Master Narratives and their Discontents* (2005). That book is focused on European and, later, North American versions of the principal narratives of modernism and postmodernism. One story of modernism, for example, has it beginning with the Industrial Revolution; another, more applicable to art history, ties modernism's formative moments to the French Revolution. Several of Tim Clark's accounts of painting, especially a chapter on Jacques-Louis David in *Farewell to an Idea* (1999), make a case that modernist "contingency" is to be found first, and perhaps best, in paintings like the *Death of Marat.* Another narrative of modernism begins with Manet, and especially his awareness of the history of painting as a history of art; this reading is mainly associated with Michael Fried and the book *Manet's Modernism* (1996). Still another guiding narrative locates modernism in Cézanne's experimentation and in Picasso and Braque's cubism: this is the story implicit in *Art Since 1900,* which I will consider in chapter 4.

Postmodernism, too, has its principal narratives, which are associated with writers such as Peter Bürger, Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, and Arthur Danto. It is useful to call such stories *master narratives,* because they tend to guide specialized inquiries by providing large frames for local research. It makes sense to study Rayonism in detail, for example, if Russian cubo-futurism is part of a larger narrative of modernist practices considered to be canonical or essential for understanding art of the past century. It is of interest to study Argentine, Colombian, or Peruvian conceptualism because discussions about the worldwide occurrences of conceptualism are common in art history (see the discussions of *Global Conceptualism* in chapters 2 and 5). And global conceptualism is of central interest, in turn, because of valuations of conceptualism that are found in the master narrative associated with *October* and *Art Since 1900.* (This is not to say that master narratives have predictable effects, good or ill, on more local or alternative narratives: it's just to point to the fact that master narratives tend to inspire and justify local or alternative narratives, making it harder for specialized studies that aren't connected to master narratives to attract attention.)

My subject in this book is not the number of cogency of these master narratives, but what I am exploring here would not make sense without the persistence of such narratives. Unlike visual studies, art history is cogent to the degree that its many individual research projects implicitly contribute to larger conversations on the important moments of modernism and postmodernism—and those moments, in turn, are given in the form of episodes in various master narratives.

This *narrative definition* is useful mainly when the question is specifically the form of writing—the stories of art, the master narratives. In practice, when narratives of national and regional traditions are not at issue, and when it is not feasible to raise the problem of the double bind, it is probably best simply to be careful and articulate what is at stake in words like "Western." The Polish scholar Piotr Piotrowski's paper in the book *Circulations,* which I will consider in chapter 5, is a good example. Both Uruguay and Poland in the 1970s, he writes, "worked at the margins of Western culture," and in general "both Latin American and East European art are somehow Western." I like the "somehow," which allows his argument to proceed without hobbling it by overly rigid definitions. Often, but not always, "Western" is best treated as a *placeholder*—that is, a word used in ordinary speech to signal the speaker doesn't feel the need to think of a more precise word in order to get on with what she intends to say.

3. The choice of North Atlantic

For this book, I had the choice of a number of other terms: "Eurocentric," "Euramerican," "North Atlantic," "North American," "Anglo-American," and "American." My principal subject is practices of art history that are emulated by much of the world, and

there is no single way to adequately localize those practices. It is tempting to think of this as a series of concentric circles:

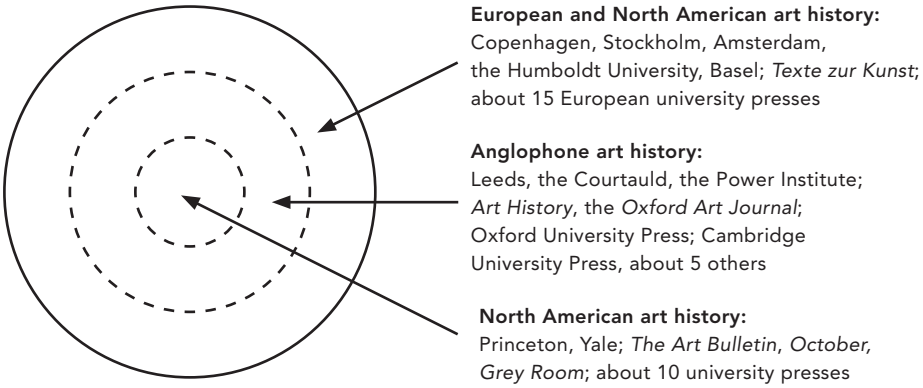


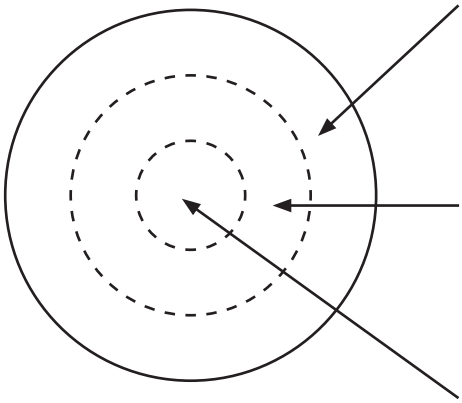
Diagram 1 The central institutions, journals, and publishers in art history

The same sort of diagram could be made beginning with German-language art history, and moving out by concentric circles to its direct and indirect influence on Anglophone art history. It would also be interesting to experiment with Francophone diagrams, or diagrams starting with Italian and other languages and national traditions. But the diagram doesn't represent a topographic truth: German *Kunstwissenschaft* is not somehow "outside" or secondary to English-language art history, and none of these three circles are unitary or otherwise well defined. It is a diagram of a perception. What matters, in the study of world art history, is what is being emulated (or rejected), and how that object of emulation is identified by the people who admire or study it.

For the purposes of this book, something like the center of this chart is approximately right: what is emulated around the world is some version of what happens in places like Princeton and Yale or in journals like *October* or *The Art Bulletin*. That is not to say the center and the first ring aren't permeable—I have tried to indicate that with the interrupted lines. The salient point here, however, is that what is being emulated in China, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Argentina, Colombia, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, and many other places is English-language art history, even more than French and definitely more than German or Italian scholarship. The mixtures of models are complex, but I am risking this diagram in order to make the point that there is a center toward which emulations are aimed. (The listings on the diagram are mainly based on a comprehensive bibliography of North American and European art history translated into Chinese, which I will discuss in chapter 10. The examples of institutions, journals,

and publishers in the diagram therefore reflect texts and scholars that have been considered worth translating.)

That center is a mobile target, but often it can be provisionally described as the sum of the most active art historians working in the principal universities in the US and western Europe including Scandinavia, along with their principal journals and university presses. Any young art historian in the US could rattle off a list of the ten or so top-tier universities, the three or four acceptable journals, and the ten or so acceptable university presses. Young scholars in North America can be so fixated on such lists that they won't apply to PhD programs in other institutions, or, at a later stage in their careers, they won't send their manuscripts to publishers who aren't on the list. Below is a half-serious diagram of the centers of emulation from the point of view of some scholars who work in or near those centers. If anything, this would be even more contentious than the first diagram! But that very contentiousness shows the gravitational pull of what are considered centers and margins of the field.



Less prestigious universities for art history: South Florida, North Dakota, NUS (Singapore), Dundee, Lund, Bologna, Plymouth; commercial art presses such as Abrams and Prestel; commercial art magazines

Second-tier universities for art history: Iowa, San Diego, Amherst, Trinity College Dublin, Copenhagen; presses more acceptable in the UK such as Ashgate and Sage; smaller presses such as Fordham, Minnesota, Penn State; national and specialist publications like *Word and Image, Artibus et historiae, Perspective (INHA), Umeni*, or *Nonsite*

Top universities: Columbia, Princeton, Yale, Leeds, the Humboldt University, the Courtauld, Berkeley; *The Art Bulletin*, *Art History*, *October*, especially the first ten years; Yale University Press, Princeton University Press, and a half-dozen others

Diagram 2 The central institutions, journals, and publishers in art history, seen from a North American viewpoint

(Caveat emptor: I am only hoping to point to general trends here. These names and places vary somewhat depending on the scholars' specialties, and I don't mean to imply an equivalence or connection between the places and publishers.)

Seen from the reverse perspective, what counts as the best practices of art history, those worth emulating, is somewhere toward the multiple centers of the first diagram. Hence among the possible choices of words, "Eurocentric," "Euramerican," "North Atlantic," "North American," and "American," one of the better choices is "North Atlantic," because it names the general geographic region that art historians in different parts of the world take as optimal practice. "North Atlantic" has drawbacks: it omits major centers such as the west coast of the US, and it is vague about what matters in central and eastern Europe. In addition it is reminiscent of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) and Jigna Desai's *Brown Atlantic* (for example in her book *Beyond Bollywood,* 2003), although Gilroy and Desai's projects critique previous models of diaspora, while my purpose here is to delimit a region that threatens to expand unhelpfully or contract until it has no critical purchase. "North Atlantic" is also less than optimal because it echoes North Atlantic Studies, an established specialty that has nothing to do with this subject (as in books like Jeffrey Bolster's *The Mortal Sea: Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail,* 2012).

"North Atlantic" also has the drawback of being an unusual term in art history, somewhat like John Clark's "Euramerican"—a term I might have used, except that much of the argument in this book turns on differences and divisions within North America and Europe. ("Euramerica," incidentally, is a geologic term, referring to a continent in the Devonian period that was comprised of present-day North America and Europe. It is also known, amusingly, as "The Old Red Continent." And more appropriately for Clark's usage, *EurAmerica* is the name of a journal published in Taiwan and dedicated to the study of Europe and North America.)

"Anglo-American" was another possible way of naming this book's subject, but it is too narrow, because the art history that is discussed in South America, southeast Asia, and Africa is often French. Another drawback is that "Anglo-American" is a term used in political theory to name the shared economic and cultural values of the United States and the UK. "Anglo-American" could be a good shorthand for the linguistic dominance of English that I discussed in the previous chapter, because it hints at distinctions between American and UK academic practices—differences that are sometimes visible in the reception of English-language art history. The historian Cao Yiqiang, for example, studied with Francis Haskell and E. H. Gombrich; his work is quite different from Chinese art historians educated in the US.

On the other hand, it probably wouldn't be productive to try to specify my subject any more closely than "North Atlantic." For some people, the hegemonic model of art history should be identified with just a few institutions (as on the second diagram) and just a couple of dozen art historians (most of them also writers in English). Others might point to the crucial publishers as art history's real center; in that case the central models of art history would be found in books by Yale University Press, or in *The Art Bulletin, Art History,* or *October.* And still others might prefer the synecdoche of New York City to

the less precise "east coast" or "North America." Vicenç Furió puts this very well when he paraphrases Serge Guilbaut's famous phrase: New York didn't just steal the idea of modern art, Furió says, but the idea of modern art history (*Arte y Reputación,* p. 219).

"North Atlantic" is a compromise: it's not a common usage, but I hope its slightly unfamiliar sound might also draw attention to the fact that the practices of art history that are emulated throughout the world are themselves not well defined. That is the reason I have adopted "North Atlantic" in the title of this book.

4. Central, Peripheral, Marginal

Usually talk about center and periphery has to do with visual art, not the writing about it. Art historians, theorists, and critics talk about art practices, movements, styles, the market, and institutions as central or peripheral. But in this book center and periphery apply to art history: art history departments, individual historians' texts, publishers who maintain art history lists, as well as conferences and other elements of art historical writing.

"Central" is my term for whatever practices and institutions of art history are understood to be the models, norms, standards, or exemplars of art historical practice at any given time or place. "Central" might be as general as "Western" or as focused as "the first decade of *October*" or the Department of the History of Art at Yale. For someone in the art academy in Xi'an, central might be CAFA in Beijing or the China National Academy in Hangzhou.

Contrasted with these are whatever practices and institutions see themselves, or are seen, as "marginal." (From this point on I will omit the scare quotes around these terms, with the understanding that they do not name truths as much as perceptions, and that there is no one center or definable margins.) In this book, marginal or peripheral are intended as non-judgmental terms designating a geographic distance that is also perceived as a way of naming relatively isolated, belated, incomplete, perhaps simpler, less connected, less well financed, or smaller versions of what happens in the center. The mechanism of the relative isolation of center and periphery might be geographic, or it may also be political, historical, ethnic, economic, institutional, or linguistic.

Two conclusions are often drawn from the "center / periphery" relation when it is applied, as it usually is, to visual art. Neither one, I think, is justified by the discourses that make use of the terms, and the two conclusions need to be carefully distinguished from one another, if not always separated.

First, it is said that studies of local art contexts, "minor" practices (in Deleuze's sense), subaltern discourses, and glocal developments will eventually dissolve the fundamental relation between what is perceived as center and what is perceived, or perceives itself, as margin. This hope—that attention to local contexts can resolve or avoid the hierarchy

of center and margin—is repeatedly resurgent in art history, area studies, and postcolonial theory. I am not convinced that the many studies that articulate local contexts have eroded the hold of the concepts of center and periphery. (I can only suggest that argument here; see the Afterword to *Art and Globalization* for a full account and evidence.)

This is the argument I would make about art, and I think the same is true of art history. In this book I will be assuming that emphasis on individual art historians' work, on local practices of art history, or on "unusual" or "new" methodologies, interpretive concepts, publishers, institutions, or venues, may not erase the underlying distinction between center and periphery, which usually remains impervious to such attention.

Second, the rhetoric of the center and periphery can be so strong that it can obscure the fact that in any given case neither one might be well defined. In art, it's common to read about the central narrative of modernism or the exclusion of practices that do not conform to it. Yet it is far from easy to say precisely what that central narrative is, aside from many individual examples, such as the privileging of cubism in Paris, surrealism, Russian constructivism, and other movements. Rhetoric about central and marginal are also used in talk about art history, and in that case it can be even more difficult to specify what is meant because the canonical examples might not be available. When some Chinese scholars at a conference in Beijing in 2010 called for the abandonment of "Western art history," the rhetorical context gave the claim a kind of urgency, but the center itself was not clearly defined. This kind of dependence on the rhetorical force of claims about the center and margin can make it seem as if it may not be sensible to explore ideas of center and margin more systematically. It can then be concluded that the distinction is empty or overdetermined, or that it should be avoided as an example of an restrictive binarism. I do not think that those conclusions are always warranted, because the rhetoric of center and periphery continues to do a great deal of amount of work in contemporary art.

I think the same is true when center and periphery are applied to art history: an awareness that you're in a central place, or a peripheral one, can have a tremendous effect on your work as an art historian. Regardless of how vaguely center and periphery might be understood—it's never easy to find adequate examples or definitions—they form the interests of young art historians, the syllabi of art history classes, the themes of conferences, and ultimately, entire institutions and national traditions of art history.

These two common notions of central and peripheral art practices—that the distinction between center and margin can best be vitiated by paying attention to local cases, and that the distinction should perhaps not be entertained at all—are at times conflated. The second is taken to imply the first, and the first is understood as leading to the second.

Personally I find both conclusions, and their implied interdependence, Eurocentric in the worst and most old-fashioned way, and I think the same is true when center and periphery are applied to art history. The scholars who draw such conclusions

almost always speak from universities in Europe and North America. In those settings it can indeed seem that talk about the center and margin is unproductive. Elsewhere, center and periphery are crucial to discussions about art history, theory, and criticism. (The situation is similar with the pair Western and non-Western: as I mentioned, scholars who object to those terms almost always work in major universities in North America and western Europe. Elsewhere those terms are often fundamental, even if they are always also problematic.)

The philosophic critiques of center and periphery by Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, and many others up to Bhabha and Chakrabarty are cogent, but when they are applied to art, and also when they are applied to art history, they effectively continue the very imbalances their authors were so concerned to critique.

There have been several initiatives to work through these issues, and I will consider them in chapter 5. Here I want to emphasize four aspects of the center / periphery difference that might be productive in conversations about art historical practices worldwide. My examples come from applications I read in 2013 for an international travel grant for art historians. An earlier version of this chapter described that grant, and quoted the applications anonymously, but I was informed that even anonymous quotations weren't legal: I am bound not to say what grant I helped judge, and I am not permitted to quote any material from the applications, even if it is anonymous and untraceable. (And regardless of the fact that several applicants, whom I later met, would have been happy to see their perspectives considered here.)

(A) Center and periphery in art history operate at several scales: regional, national, at the level of the department, and at the level of individuals. An applicant from Brazil noted she had studied in Paris, with Georges Didi-Huberman, Alain Badiou, Danièle Cohn, and others. She had also supervised the translation of a dozen European and North American scholars into Portuguese. Several applicants were strongly international: one was born in Africa, studied in Germany, and worked in Egypt. Another was so accomplished and had so many international connections that it seemed the opportunities afforded by the travel grant weren't that important to him. He wrote that the present and future of art history open a path that we should transit only in an international researchers' community and in a global scale.

By comparison with these scholars, the panel of judges was more provincial. As a panel we had various obligations, but if we had accepted only scholars like these, we would have been the provincial institution inviting the global scholars to enrich its practices. That would have been an interesting inversion of the usual state of affairs, in which the better funded countries and institutions are also the more international; but it would have been in line with the grant's interest in internationalism.

Center and periphery in art history cannot always be equated with nations, cities, or university departments of art history. There are departments in developing coun-

tries with art historians who travel internationally and look for positions outside their country. It is common, in my experience, to find small, under-funded faculties in developing nations that include one or two scholars whose breadth of reference is greater than the average for larger North American and European art history departments.

(B) Some first-world departments of art history are as isolated as some in developing nations. An applicant from Romania wrote that art history in his country was nourished with innumerable ingredients of belatedness. One could argue, he said, that "international" does not imply East and West anymore, that it abolishes the divide, but everyone he knows rightly believes the opposite.

This kind of observation can sometimes obscure a more subtle phenomenon, which is just as prevalent. Marginality doesn't just apply unexpectedly to certain centers of art history: some smaller, provincial and regional institutions in first-world countries can be as isolated, as belated in relation to the discipline of art history, as entire countries or regions in the developing world. There are whole art history departments in first-world countries that are peripheral in the sense that their faculty do not engage the latest scholarship, don't travel beyond what is necessary for their specialties, and wouldn't be viable on the job market. (Chapter 1, section 4 has some examples of marginal libraries and resources in first-world art history departments.)

Several applications for the travel grant were from art historians who worked in minor institutions in first-world countries. The countries themselves could not reasonably be called culturally isolated, but some of their institutions could be. One applicant said she worked in a medieval Croatian town that was culturally insensate. An applicant from Poland wrote eloquently about the relative isolation of her institution, saying she cannot ignore the inequalities that still exist between different parts of the world. She wrote that she can't easily get the newest books or catalogues, that she can't easily travel, and that her salary is lower than in the West. Even so, she and her colleagues make use of the same topics and theories as in the West, and so she is part of the same "knowledge community."

It is easy for western Europeans and North Americans to underestimate the influence of apparently slight economic inequalities. And it bears saying that those economic disparities, even though they are slight in comparison to differences between Europe and sub-Saharan Africa, for example, are more substantial than they might seem. In 2010 I estimated (based on on earning power reported by faculty) that effective income for art historians in Poland is one-seventh what it is in France. For most of Eastern-Central Europe, art historians need to have second and even third jobs. And the amount of disposable income that is left over for travel and books can be vanishingly small.

It wasn't a surprise to the grant panel that applicants from countries like Romania might need help traveling even within Europe. But it was harder to understand how that kind of inequality could apply to applicants from smaller countries in western

Europe. An applicant from Italy wrote that she felt Italy is struggling with a sort of isolation, and is underrepresented at an international level. My own experience working for three years in Ireland, in 2005-7 (that is, before the banking crises, and only just after the so-called Celtic tiger), was that even the major art history departments in Ireland had very small book acquisition budgets, and the university libraries had to consider seriously before acquiring even the basic electronic databases. (This is discussed in chapter 1.) The universities' budgets for bringing scholars in to talk were vanishingly small. At one stage the university where I worked, University College Cork, had a limit of €250 to invite speakers, which effectively limited the speakers to people from the U.K. who could pay part of their travel expenses.

If there is a center of art history, in this case, it is the approximately 2,500 private and state four-year colleges and universities in the U.S., all of which can afford to buy research materials and subscribe to all pertinent databases—and many of which can afford to invite speakers from anywhere in the world, pay them fees in the thousands of dollars, and help send their own faculty abroad. This may sound inaccurate if you work in a small state university or college in the US and you're hurting from budget crunches and meager travel and research funds, but the art history budgets for even small U.S. universities can look extravagant and even unthinkable in smaller universities in Europe.

In Europe only a few smaller institutions can hope to invite speakers from outside Europe, or obtain sufficient travel and research funds for professors. In the U.S. it is uncommon to have to apply for sabbatical leave; in the E.U. it is normal, and it's also common to be rejected. In Europe only the largest art history departments in western Europe, Scandinavia, Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, and some in other places have the budgets and capacities that even mid-size US state colleges have. There is no way to quantify this, but my sense is the ratio of such departments in the U.S. to those in Europe might be on the order of ten to one.

(C) Peripheral institutions almost always gravitate to the center. Part of the prejudice, common in major North Atlantic institutions, against words like center and periphery or Western and non-Western, comes from the idea that there are local cultures of scholarship, which are self-sufficient or inwardly directed, and are therefore not well described as "peripheral." Those departments and scholars are imagined to be largely unconcerned with what happens in the so-called "center." I find this nearly universally untrue.

One of the candidates for the grant wrote describing conditions of art history in his institution in South Africa. He said that aside from the national organization SAVAH (South African Visual Art Historians), hardly anyone shares knowledge, so scholarship goes on in relative isolation.

This paints a picture of endemic partial isolation of the kind that could, in theory, produce different research cultures. On the other hand the magnetic pull of the distant

center is very strong. This candidate went on to describe the excitement of meeting someone from the States or in Europe who was doing similar research, and how rare it was to meet anyone working on similar subjects face to face.

Another applicant from South Africa drew the consequences of this situation, saying that he thought the majority of ideas and discourses around the methodologies and cutting-edge approaches to art history remained centered in the proverbial "Western hegemony." He said he'd initiated a few conversations with colleagues about this subject, and he'd found a general acceptance that the very idea of art history as a field of study is a Western one. What matters, he said, is the possibility of developing new ways to theorize or engage non-Western art practices.

Even though the judges were interested in local practices, it was never clear, during the grant review process, which peripheral locations might be producing writing that might be different from writing done in central locations: this will be the subject of Chapter 6.

(D) Sometimes scholars at the margins do not appear as part of art history. Our grant panel also got some applications from people in less well represented parts of the world, like Togo, Cameroon, and Kazakhstan, and in some of those cases it wasn't clear whether the applicants knew what art history is. One wrote that art history helps humanity to take account of the past, and that without art history the present and the future cannot easily be foreseen. He added that art history helps humanity understand the way of life of our grandfathers, traditional know-how, and old ways of thinking. From a North Atlantic perspective, that applicant had a strange way of putting things, and it seemed he was guessing at art history rather than responding to it.

Notions of art history, theory, and criticism become less well-defined in places that are culturally isolated or impoverished, and at a certain point it becomes necessary to ask: what, in any given context, should reasonably be counted as the practice of art history? Does this applicant have a working idea of what art history is, or is she motivated by a kind of hope provoked by the questions on the application?

For our panel judging the travel grant, there was a practical question in applications like this one, because we wanted to be sure the applicants could make use of their exposure to art historians in North America. An applicant who knew nothing about art history as a field would presumably not know what to make of the talks given by professional art historians.

From these four points I conclude that there are interesting differences between the ways words like central and peripheral are used in relation to art, and the ways they might be applied to art history. The center or centers of art history are hard to define adequately. Some depend on not being adequately defined, and most are known only from informal, unquantified descriptions like this one.

In art, center and periphery or margin remain both well known and deeply problematic, especially in regard to modernism. I will end this chapter with an example in

order to draw out another difference between center and periphery in art and in art history.

(E) Envoi, on Global Conceptualism. This example concerns the book and exhibition *Global Conceptualism* (1999) and a response to it in a book called *Circulations,* edited by the Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel. *Circulations* is the product of two conferences hosted by the Atl@s group, which is comprised of Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Dossin, and Joyeux-Prunel; I will have more to say about it in chapter 5. The essay that provides my example here is by Sophie Cras; she opens by recalling that *Global Conceptualism* was founded on the rejection of the center. The exhibition, she says,

> suggested "a multicentered map with various points of origin" in which "poorly known histories [would be] presented as equal corollaries rather than as appendages to a central axis of activity." The very notion of centrality was altogether repudiated, as Stephen Bann made it clear in his introduction: "The present exhibition… explicitly rejects the customary practice of plotting out the topology of artistic connections in terms of 'center' and 'periphery'."

Cras also notes Peter Wollen's claim, in the catalogue, that conceptualism had no center, and therefore did not disseminate outward, so that its manifestations are all potentially equal. Her argument is that negating "the notion of an opposition between center and periphery in favor of a supposedly de-hierarchized panorama is problematic at three levels at least":

> First, artists of the time… effectively perceived the artistic scene in terms of centers and periphery, if only to contest its structural inequality. Second, leveling practices… does not allow an understanding of the process by which some established themselves historically while others had to wait for a belated rehabilitation… Third, this proscription of the notions of center and periphery… does little justice to the discipline of geography.

It's necessary, Cras argues, to retain "center" and "periphery," but to consider "circulations between these spaces… dynamically and dialectically" in order "to understand processes of emulation, domination and exclusion." The book *Circulations,* in which Cras's essay appears, is an attempt at writing around problems of center and periphery in art by focusing on geographical movements of artists, ideas, and artworks. The Atl@s group uses cartographic tools, large databases, and some historical and conceptual ideas provided by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann and others to try to rethink ideas like center and periphery.

Centers "create, or feed on, their peripheries," Cras remarks, creating a "dialectical tension," and the idea of multiple simultaneous equally important centers is a rhetor-

ical move, a hope rather than a reality. Her essay includes an excellent succinct criticism of Lucy Lippard's *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object From 1966 to 1972* (1973), contrasting Lippard's claims of the "decentered internationalism" of conceptual art with maps of the places she mentions, which turn out to have "defined centers and peripheries."

I agree almost entirely with Cras's criticisms of *Global Conceptualism* and of Lippard's book. Almost, but not entirely, because what most interests Cras seems to be the conceptualists' inexhaustible experimentation with maps. The many photocopied maps in On Kawara's 12-volume collection *I Went,* she writes, "suggest the endless possibility of other places, rather than the fixity of this or that art center or art capital." Here Cras is attracted by the "visually striking… diversity of maps, scales, typographies and alphabets," records of the artist's endless circulation. Here it might be good to mark the difference between a critique of center and margin, and a celebration of endless circulation or the poetry of forgotten "non-sites" or deserted places like the ones shown in Art & Language's *Map of a 36-square-mile area of the Pacific Ocean*, or Ger van Elk's *La Pièce* (a blank map of part of the North Atlantic Ocean). On Kawara's wandering and Art & Language's or Van Elk's poetics suspend talk of center and periphery, but—as in *Global Conceptualism*—they do not effectively remove or deconstruct either term.

Like other essays in *Circulations,* Cras's critique may depend too much on the expectation that an emphasis on cultural exchanges might itself remove or solve the traditional focuses of art history or "escape the hierarchization and exclusion that underlies the narrative of modern art." Elsewhere in *Circulations,* Piotrowski mentions *Global Conceptualism*, praising the way it combines "geographical and historical" perspectives, but saying that "in terms of global comparative art studies, however, one has to go further":

> Luis Camnitzer drew a geo-historical panorama of conceptual art, a kind of world atlas of such a practice. What we need to do is to compare East European and South American conceptual arts on a more detailed level.

The question here is how the "more detailed level" contributes to "breaking down the dominance of the Western paradigm in analysing conceptual art," or to re-conceptualizing the global.

Piotrowski first notes that "East European conceptual art" was not "uniform," and neither was "South American conceptual experience." He registers the "interesting paradox" that "anti-Soviet attitudes, although shared by almost everyone, did not produce any common transnational platform for subversive art in Eastern Europe." He also makes distinctions among the reasons for conceptualism in different parts of the world:

Mari Carmen Ramirez is more specific on this issue, and has polemicized against Benjamin Buchloh's famous essay which sees the origins of conceptual art within the "administrative drive" of late capitalist society. Following Marchan Fiz, she repeats that unlike the Anglo-Saxon self-referential, analytical model, Latin American conceptualism was "ideological" and revealed social realities.

As Piotrowski's argument develops, it seems plausible that an extended inquiry into conceptualisms in Poland and Uruguay, and in Eastern Europe and Latin America in general, will reveal differences so deeply informed by local contexts that the very project of studying global conceptualism (or even global conceptualisms, in the plural) will begin to fragment. This possibility appears, for example, when he writes, near the end of his chapter, that "neutral, purified, tautological projects such as Valoch's... or Kozłowski's... gave them universal, worldwide circulation, but their meaning came from local circumstances, making them entirely different from Latin American political projects." Piotrowski concludes by mentioning "the limits of reception of circulating ideas."

For me, this is one of the most interesting passages in the book *Circulations*. On the one hand, the comparison of conceptualisms in different places is made "more detailed"; on the other hand, that very detail threatens to make local and regional differences more important, more fundamental, than whatever label is used to link them in books like *Global Conceptualism.* Like circulation, globalism only makes sense at a certain level of generality and scope: but if the drive of the art historical inquiry is toward greater detail, then the discordance between contexts of production overrides similarities, and circulation gives way to local meanings.

(Piotrowski's criticism of *Global Conceptualism* resonates with the book itself, in that Stephen Bann's Introduction casts doubt on the coherence of the title concept. There have been a number of reflections on the exhibition, for example Jane Farver, "Global Conceptualism: Reflections" [2015] and "Reiko Tomii Looks Back: Thoughts on Global Conceptualism" [2015]. In 2019 the School of the Art Institute hosted a panel with Luis Camnitzer and Rachel Weiss, another of the exhibition's curators. There it emerged that the curators excluded practices that showed lack of self-awareness regarding conceptualism, and practices that claimed awareness of conceptualism but did not fit the exhibition's tacit criteria for form or medium. Camnitzer mentioned a Chinese painting of two hands holding a cup of tea, which he had wanted to include, but it hadn't seemed sufficiently aware of its traditional medium. The art historian Delinda Collier remarked that she found the Africa section of *Global Conceptualism* unconvincing because there were so few artists who had awareness of New York- or Buenos Aires-based conceptual art. Weiss and Camnitzer implied that they also had doubts about the concept of global conceptualism, but they considered it was best to keep the category as a provocation. In correspondence after the 2019 event, the art historian Daniel Quiles, one of the panelists, pointed out that Camnitzer's own

practice was always ambiguously excluded, as if it was in some way outside of conceptualism. Quiles said some of the curators' idea of vacillating between the umbrella term, "global conceptualism," and an emphasis on different regional practices, struck him as "a deliberate rhetorical move" on their part. "You ask Luis what conceptualism is," Quiles wrote, "and he treats it almost like a verb: it is the opening up of 'conceptual' to all possibilities, to determination by political context, to 'whatever.' And yet in the Foreword for the exhibition, conceptualisms are pinned down to the familiar characteristics of conceptual art, just with political action as a prominent component: dematerialization, language-information, institution critique. So I feel the flexibility of the term is actually quite skillful, and designed to avoid close scrutiny. Perhaps the reason the curators return to the myth of having suffered bad reviews in the immediate aftermath of the exhibition, regardless of how influential and revered the show has been ever since… [is to help] defer questions about whatever hegemonic position Camnitzer in particular has maintained to this day." [Correspondence, April 3, 2019.])

This problem of the historiography of global conceptualism is emblematic, and perhaps even crucial, for any account of center and periphery in modern and postmodern art. But I want to leave it here, in order to suggest a difference between center and periphery in art and in art history. The two conferences and several years of editing that produced the book *Circulations* were themselves examples of central art historical practices. At the first conference, in Purdue University, the presiding historiographer was Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, who had occasion to mention, in passing, that he worked at the world's richest university. His own work has been central to geographic understandings of art for several decades. (He also wrote the introduction to *Circulations*.) The scholars at both conferences came from a range of places, but the concepts that brought them together—the idea of using circulations to think differently about center and periphery, the idea of gathering cartographic databases—were held in common. For a number of more marginal, less connected departments of art history, that kind of conversation might not have been possible, because it required some shared knowledge of the problematic of center and periphery, and a tacit agreement that a new kind of study could help resolve the issue.

Personally, I am not convinced that "circulation" can replace center and periphery. As in other such projects, such as Claire Farago and Donald Preziosi's *Art is Not What You Think It Is* (2012), I find that projects that seek to reframe the discourse of center and periphery (or the related discourses of the new and the belated, or the canonical and the marginal) only postpone discussion of the target concepts "center" and "periphery." But that is not my point here: what matters in this context is that the art history performed in *Circulations* is itself firmly in the center, and it does not engage ways of talking about center and periphery that insist—as many of the applicants for the travel grant did—on directly emulating a center, regretting a peripheral situation, claiming a central status, or otherwise arguing status rather than reformulating it.

5. Regional, provincial, parochial

There are many more terms—but perhaps not too many—that could be counted as "leading" concepts in the articulation of global art history. For a long while, working on this project, I thought the terms *regional, provincial,* and *parochial* could be helpful in characterizing practices of art history as well as art. I am not so sure of that now, but it can be helpful to adopt provisional definitions.

Speaking first of the usual applications of these words to art, rather than art history: the term *regionalism* can be applied to cases in which an artist knows what is happening in some other region, but decides to continue making art that is particular to her own culture. An example is suggested by Steven Mansbach in *Modern Art in Eastern Europe* (1998) when he points out that artists in Riga were "cognizant of progressive developments in Belgrade or Budapest" through the exchange of journals, although they continued to pursue different trajectories.

Parochialism would be a better term to describe the case of an artist who knows something is happening in some other region, but is afraid to find out too much. Mansbach notes, for example, that some eastern European groups avoided outside contact "for fear of compromising their perception of their own unique contribution" to their nations' art. This is less documented than regionalism, but perhaps even more pervasive; I will consider examples later in this book.

A *provincial* artist, then, would be one who wants to know about art that is taking place in some other region, but is prevented for political and economic reasons. Mansbach notes the difficulty Polish artists had in forming contacts "across the lines of partition separating Russian, Austrian, and Prussian (German) provinces": a good example of provincialism (p. 7). (These examples are in my review, *The Art Bulletin* 82, 2000, pp. 781–85; also *The Art Bulletin* 84, 2002, p. 539.)

I have not pursued these distinctions in this book, for several reasons. "Regionalism," which was a term of pride and anxiety in 20th century North American art up to the dissemination of Abstract Expressionism and Pop, has become a general term for modernisms outside western Europe and North America. The affective conflict of the older use of "regional" is somewhat lost in its use as a synonym for "multiple," as in "multiple modernisms" (chapter 5). There is also Terry Smith's exemplary essay "The Provincialism Problem," which has been studied by Heather Barker and Charles Green ("The Provincialism Problem: Terry Smith and Centre-Periphery Art History," a chapter in a forthcoming book on Australian modernism). As Barker and Green note, "Smith defined provincialism as 'an attitude of subservience to an externally imposed hierarchy of cultural values," which is different from the sense I mentioned, but just as important in its psychological inflection. It seems to me that the affective content of categories like "regional," "provincial" (in my sense, and in Smith's), and "parochial" may be the best reason to retain them: as categories they are more of their time—from the opening of

the 20th century, with American anxieties about European modernism, to the end of the century, with academic experiments in writing about "other" modernisms.

These terms appear differently when they are used to describe art historical writing. There are certainly *parochial* art historians in my sense of the word—scholars who avoid looking too closely at some potential sources, languages, and theories—and in Smith's sense—scholars who feel subservient to ideas and methods that seem not their own. A common example of both would be the discipline's relation to Hegel: he is an object of fascination, as the potential "father of art history"; but his texts are seldom read at length. (E. H. Gombrich, *In Search of Cultural History,* 1969.) For younger scholars, it is not an unfamiliar feeling to be at once beholden to and anxious about theorists like Jacques Derrida, Jacques Rancière, or Alain Badiou. Whether or not these provincialisms and parochialisms correspond to geographic areas, as provincialism did for Terry Smith in New York City in the 1970s, is another question: but in the final chapter I will argue that art history does have identifiable regionalisms.

6. A note on decolonial theory

Even though the term *decolonial* doesn't play a large role in this book, it matters that it has different meanings and uses, and that they vary by continent and region, just as concepts like *local, regional, national, central,* and *peripheral* vary. It is sometimes taken for granted that "decolonizing art history" or "decoloniality" (Walter Mignolo's term) are sufficiently stable so they can be applied to contexts in different parts of the world, but I am not sure that's a safe assumption.

In June 2019 the English journal *Art History* issued a questionnaire on "decolonizing art history," asking about the "historical specificity" of calls for decolonization, and wondering if they are "different from previous challenges to the discipline (such as postcolonialism, feminism, queer studies, Marxism)." (Published in *Art History* 2020 n. 1, 8–66.) The authors of the questionnaire, Catherine Grant and Dorothy Price, noted the unrest in South Africa beginning in 2015 as the inception of a growing awareness that "unspoken colonial legacies had for too long upheld and promulgated white privilege," and they also mentioned the "increasing sense of art history being an embattled discipline, an unnecessary luxury for many students faced with tens of thousands of pounds of student debt."

I wondered, in my response, about the word "decolonization" and its variants, especially Mignolo's original "decoloniality." It seems to me there may be at least three distinct senses of "decolonization" and related terms.

(A) Decolonization as epistemic disobedience. This is Walter Mignolo's expression, denoting divestiture, deconstruction of the colonial heritage, and reconceptualisation

of art history. This would potentially involve the traditional subjects and institutions that have supported art history. There are serious conceptual and practical issues here. Proportional representation of African voices in South African art history would involve hiring Black African faculty up to 75% of total faculty and reducing White African representation to less than 10%, to reflect the demographics of the country. A change in faculty on that scale is conceivable, but a concerted and consistent decolonization of South African universities would entail decommissioning the universities themselves, because they are indebted to UK models. I wonder if deconstructing or abandoning university structures can make sense: without the institutional models inherited mainly from the UK—including programs in art history, conferences, and journals—what would remain to be called "art history"? (This isn't an argument to save some form of art history, but an observation about the open-ended nature of the critique.)

This first sense is also the one that informs Prasenjit Duara's accounts such as *Decolonization: Perspectives from Now and Then* (2004) which chronicles the transfer of institutional and political powers to postcolonial states. Duara's work has been influential in contexts that are not postcolonial, such as the Australian Aboriginal rights movements. (Davina Woods and Tarquam McKenna, "An Indigenous Conversation," *Creative Approaches to Research,* 2012, especially 80–81.)

(B) Decolonization as incremental change. Decolonial theory in North and South America is more a matter of accelerating the work of postcolonial theory. My North and South American students at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago (representing, this past year, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Chile, and Uruguay) tend to speak of decolonization as a practice of individual interventions, especially installations, texts, performances, and acts of curation.

In my experience, this is the principal sense of "decolonial theory" in the United States, Canada, and Europe: it is a set of strategies that permit "epistemic disobedience" to continue both against and within existing institutions, as in Mignolo and Catherine Walsh's 2018 book *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*.

(C) Decolonization as an interpretive strategy. In the first two decades of this century decolonial studies has been aimed at institutional change, but it is already operating as an interpretive strategy, in the way that postcolonial theory, feminisms, queer theory, and other theories have done for some time. The move from activist critique to interpretive strategy is a characteristic of academic poststructuralism; an early example is psychoanalysis, whose clinical dimension has long been absent from the academy. In my seminars in Chicago, I am more likely to encounter decolonial theory as a focus for exhibitions or a scholarly aid to the interpretation of art, rather than as a justification for resisting or avoiding habits ingrained in the art world or in art history.

Perhaps this list of three senses of decolonial theory forms a temporal sequence, from radical change to academic writing. If so, then "decolonized art history" is actu-

ally a name for an art history that has added decolonial theory to its battery of interpretive methodologies. If not—if something like the first meaning of "decolonization" is nearer the mark—then a "decolonized art history" won't "look like" anything at all. If it does, then the revolution won't have taken place.

Decolonial theory and its variants have been mainly used in contemporary international art, but it is important to note that as in theories like psychoanalysis, there is no inherent geographic or temporal limit to the application of decolonial theory.

A decolonized art history in this third sense would present a very different narrative of modernisms. Theories of multiple modernisms have opened doors in this regard, and so have recent exhibitions, but where is the story of modernisms that gives equal place to France and Hungary (which had a very large modernist movement), or the thirty or forty other regions and countries that produced modernist work, from Georgia to Paraguay? Where is the art history that gives equal attention to "unusual" modernist practices, such as those in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and in areas still part of Russia, such as the Republic of Bashkortostan?

Decolonial theory is even more pertinent in the deeper past. The history of colonialism goes back much farther than the five centuries that concern current scholarship. From the earliest pottery sequences to the modern age, art history can seem to be nothing other than a continuous series of colonizations. The politics is different (or, often, it is unknown), but the results are analogous: certain practices are marginalized in relation to others, and it can require effort to refocus interpretive effort away from the apparently central, significant, or canonical. Entire cultures have nearly been erased from memory (little remains of the Phrygians, the cultures associated with Jinsha and Sanxingdui, the Valdivia culture, and hundreds of others). And yet when the historical record permits, the history of subjugation, erasure, iconoclasm, and syncretism can be compelling (recent scholarship on Angkor Wat is exemplary in this regard). Art history has dealt with the problem of "unknown" cultures and colonial complexities by teaching a "master narrative," the one codified in E. H. Gombrich's *Story of Art,* with additions for cultures that have been more widely studied since Gombrich's generation, such as Inka, Rapa Nui, Chavin, Nok, and many others. A decolonized history of art before the modern age would be almost incomprehensibly alien. At the moment no such textbook exists.

For this book the most important property of decoloniality is its geographic variation. I wrote the response to *Art History's* questionnaire in Yirrkala, in the Northern Territory in Australia, in a workshop on "postnational art histories." The participants were interested in Yolngu Aboriginal art and the voices of Aboriginal art in future Australian art histories. One of the organizers, Ian McLean, proposed we consider whether "postnational art practices and histories decolonize national art practices and histories." What was at stake was the postnational, not the decolonial, which was barely discussed. The idea was that postnational and international initiatives, like the

one that had brought a dozen non-Australian scholars to an isolated art centre in a region where most residents spoke Yolŋu Matha languages, could be agents of decolonization. Likewise there are parts of the world where decolonial theory points more to political histories like Duara's than to accounts like Mignolo's.

It may be the case that decolonial theory is moving from activism (the first and second meanings) toward a homogeneous theory (the third meaning). It would be helpful to assemble a conference, and produce a book, on the geographic distribution of the meanings of "decolonization" and "postnationalism." After all, most artists and scholars involved in this subject have a common purpose: to give art of all kinds the capacity to collaborate in inclusive conversations, while retaining something that could still be called a history of art.