

# European Theories in Former Yugoslavia



# European Theories in Former Yugoslavia:

*Trans-theory Relations between  
Global and Local Discourses*

Edited by

Miško Šuvaković, Žarko Cvejić  
and Andrija Filipović

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## INTRODUCTION

# EUROPEAN THEORIES IN FORMER YUGOSLAVIA: TRANS-THEORY RELATIONS BETWEEN GLOBAL AND LOCAL DISCOURSES

ŽARKO CVEJIĆ, ANDRIJA FILIPOVIĆ  
AND MIŠKO ŠUVAKOVIĆ

*European Theories in Former Yugoslavia* is intended for students and scholars (ex-Yugoslav and international alike) of art and media theory, philosophy, sociology, and cultural studies in the context of their reception, interpretation, application, and elaboration in the region of former Yugoslavia. The book stems from a research project undertaken at the Faculty of Media and Communication in Belgrade in the spring and summer of 2014. The project was meant to produce an overview of the reception of contemporary European theories of art and culture in Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav theory. In the conceptual framework of the project and this book, “reception” also signifies the translation and elaboration of these theories in the hybrid context of former Yugoslavia and the contemporary transitional cultures of its successor states. The book seeks to corroborate the main thesis of the project: that there is no such thing as direct transfer or influence of theories from the centre to the margins, but only the complex practices of borrowing, translating, and reinterpreting, conditioned by specific contexts and contextual identities, in this case, those of former Yugoslavia and its contemporary cultural sphere.

In Yugoslav modernity, the theoretical objective was to catch up, as it were, with the rest of the world, the European and international theoretical discourses that were current at the time, by emancipating the local environment and by joining the mainstream in international theory and philosophy. In socialist Yugoslavia, the aim was to open Marxist

philosophy to the debates and controversies of post-war European theory and philosophy. In the 1950s and 1960s in particular, Yugoslav theory strove to open the philosophy and theory of real- and self-managed socialism to various strands in European Marxism, including critical theory and the influential German philosophical traditions of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and existentialism (Heidegger and Gadamer). By contrast, in today's post-Yugoslav cultural sphere, as shown in this book, the reception of contemporary European theory works only as an initial impulse for complex re-contextualisations of theories and philosophies, relating to various situations in contemporaneity and contemporary culture. Reception is no longer simply about receiving fresh knowledge from the centre, but also about communicating feedback from those international European theoretical insights into broader contexts, characterised by multicultural and global connections and exchange.

Also, the book poses broader questions about contemporary theory today: what *are* theories today? How do specialised theories of culture, gender, media and art history relate to current philosophical turns in new materialism, neo-Marxism, and biopolitics? These basic questions concerning the relationship between theories and philosophy from the perspective of a European periphery, in this case the cultures of former Yugoslavia, gesture toward a dialectically tense relationship between the centre and the margins, that is, between original theories and their transformed perspectives.

The selection of authors featured in this book is a cross-section of post-Yugoslav theory, including both young authors in the early stages of their academic careers, educated in the region and abroad, and more senior, established thinkers. Both groups of authors come from a variety of disciplines, including art theory, gender theory, cultural studies and theory, popular culture theory, sociology, anthropology, theatre studies, art history, musicology, media studies and theory, political theory, architecture, literary theory, and various trans-disciplinary combinations thereof. In terms of the topics and theoretical problems they address, their texts likewise offer a representative sample of current post-Yugoslav theory.

Roughly, the texts may be divided into two groups: those that offer post-Yugoslav views and discussions of current European theories and philosophies and those that document the post-Yugoslav reception, application, translation, and transformation of those theories in practice. In terms of the thinkers and theoretical and philosophical strands they address, both groups of texts are dominated by post-structuralist French theory and philosophy, including, in the first group, Lacanian

psychoanalysis (Miško Šuvaković); Jacques Rancière's work in aesthetics (the notion of the dehumanisation of art and *dissensus communis* as that which lies between ethics and politics – Bojana Matejić); Philippe Sollers's work in critical theory (his idea of textual and ideological revolution – Sanela Nikolić); and the feminist theory of Luce Irigaray (her critique of the phallogocentric model of oneness/sameness – Dragana Stojanović) and, in the second group, Hélène Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine* juxtaposed with American poet Rachel Blau DuPlessis's concept of writing as a feminist practice (Dubravka Đurić); the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and the question of the human in contemporary art, and, in particular, the critique of a certain image of the human in bio-art practices and contemporary literature (Andrija Filipović); Jacques Attali's political economy of music in the context of the music industry in former Yugoslavia (Marija Maglov); Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection applied to the critique of the hetero-patriarchal construction of the body in general and the transgender body in particular (Aleksa Milanović); the potential of Bruno Latour's sociology of non-humans for contemporary social theory through his concept of "actor-network" (Ana Petrov); the reception and elaboration of Lacanian psychoanalysis in former Yugoslavia and especially in the context of Slovenian philosophy and theory; a critique of Foucault from the perspective of Stanley Cavell's philosophy of everyday language and his concept of "moral perfectionism" (heterotopia versus utopia – Nikola Dedić); Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation in the post-socialist context of the Balkans today (Rade Pantić); and Jacques Derrida and his concept of *différance*, introducing us to his treatment of philosophical and theoretical discourse (Novica Milić).

Many of the texts address German critical and postmodern theory and philosophy, including Walter Benjamin's notion of the obscene as applied to Aleksey Balabanov's film *Of Freaks and Men* (Jovan Čekić); Gadamer's hermeneutics and the problem of the open horizon of actuality (Nataša Lah); Boris Groys's and Dieter Mersch's works in contemporary art theory (Žarko Paić); and Hans-Thies Lehmann's work in theatre studies (his concept of postdramatic theatre – Aneta Stojnić). The remaining texts treat various topics and authors in contemporary European theory and philosophy, including Andrew Bowie's reading of subjectivity in early 19th-century German philosophy and the role of music therein (Žarko Cvejić); Sarah Ahmed's work on race and racism in the context of former Yugoslavia (Marina Gržinić); André Nusselder's Lacanian analysis of digital technology and the difference between media and interface (Oleg Jeknić); Mikhail Bakhtin's work in linguistics compared to the Russian trans-rational avant-garde art practices (Amra Latifić); Boris Asafyev's

work in music analysis and his intonation theory in particular (Sonja Marinković); Stuart Hall's work in cultural studies applied to Yugoslav popular music (Vesna Mikić); the concept of authenticity in the work of Cesare Brandi in relation to the practice of art restoration (Marko Nikolić); Zigmunt Bauman's critique of modernity (his concept of "liquid modernity" as opposed to the "solid modernity" of early capitalism – Maja Stanković); the notion of minimalism in architecture as advanced by Ignasi de Solà-Morales and his role in the commercialisation of the discourse of minimal architecture (Vladimir Stevanović); Peter Davidson's work in baroque art history (Jelena Todorović); and Olga Freidenberg's work in cultural studies (her concept of the *parodic* corresponding to a certain extent to the Bakhtinian *carnavalesque* – Lada Stevanović).

Taken as a whole, this book illustrates the complex relationship between local, European, and American theories, the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav spheres, and contemporary theorisations. Its complex mappings and webs of contemporary European theory show the growing complexity of the contemporary culture of theory and philosophy and their gradual transformation into a field of collaborative work between various original disciplines and their dynamic relations of the individual and the universal. Bringing these texts and authors together in a single volume, *European Theories in Former Yugoslavia* specifically identifies a transnational and trans-cultural relation of fluid knowledge, shifting from one context to the next, its structure thereby transforming from a "tree of knowledge" into a "web/network of knowledge".

## CHAPTER ONE

# ANDREW BOWIE AND MUSIC IN GERMAN PHILOSOPHY AROUND 1800: THE CASE OF KANT

ŽARKO CVEJIĆ

There has hardly been a more dynamic period in the history of Western music aesthetics than the final decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the opening decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which saw the emergence of such works as Kant's *Critique of Judgement* in 1790, Schelling's *Philosophy of Art* in 1802, and Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* in 1818. In just a few decades, music came a long way, from being merely an "agreeable" art, alongside cooking and telling jokes, in Kant's hierarchy of the arts, to "the primal rhythm of nature" in Schelling (Schelling 1989, 17), and the only direct "*copy of the will itself*", that is, the only real existence in Schopenhauer's philosophy (Schopenhauer 1891, I, 331). It was a heady time in Western philosophy, too, that is, in its conception of human subjectivity. For Kant, arguably the greatest thinker of the German Enlightenment as well as the founding father of German Idealism, the human subject was still inherently, transcendently, and essentially free. But already in Schelling (while Kant was still alive), the subject is inherently split, never coherent or self-identical, not free but constantly driven and torn by urges and desires beyond his<sup>1</sup> control. Even more so in Schopenhauer, the subject is entirely enslaved to the Will, the impersonal and irrational force that drives the world in his atheist philosophy. In Robert Pippin's summary, much of European 19<sup>th</sup>-century thought was dominated by this "profound suspicion about [...] the free, rational, independent, reflective, self-determining subject", which was probably, at least in part, provoked by the catastrophic demise of the French bourgeois revolutionary project, first in Napoleon's dictatorship, then in his disastrous campaigns, and finally in the restoration of repressive

monarchical *anciens régimes* throughout Europe after 1815 (Pippin 2005, 5).

In my mind, the most compelling interpretation of music's ascendancy in European aesthetics around 1800, from a merely "agreeable" art to "the primal rhythm of nature", has been given by Andrew Bowie, a major British scholar of German 19<sup>th</sup>-century philosophy. Bowie's interpretation links those "admittedly hyperbolic, but instructive, assessments of the unique significance of music" (Bowie 2007, 140) with the "fundamental fragility of the subject" revealed by modernity (Bowie 2007, 34), to argue that thinkers like Schelling and Schopenhauer redefined art as radically autonomous in order to make it into a utopian model of freedom, if freedom were possible. Art "thus becomes a utopian symbol of the realisation of freedom"; "in it we can see or hear an image of what the world could be like if freedom were realized in it" (Bowie 2003, 57). *Tonkunst*, instrumental art music, was deemed especially worthy due to its "potential to sustain aesthetic autonomy via its non-representational character", in other words, its self-referentiality, the fact that, strictly speaking, a sonata or symphony, unlike a painting or statue, typically represents only itself and not extraneous objects or people (Bowie 2003, 67).

Probably because Kant rated music so poorly, Bowie understandably focused away from him, to the early German Romantics, Schelling, and Schopenhauer. But focusing on Kant, as I argue below, would only further corroborate his claims concerning those thinkers, if from the opposite direction: music does not play such a major role in Kant, as it does in the succeeding generation of thinkers, at least in part because Kant still believed in (transcendental) freedom and thus had no need for a radically autonomous notion of music as a utopian symbol of freedom. Other reasons may include Kant's still Enlightened view of music as sound or at least as inseparable from sound and of edification through mimesis as the chief task of art. But more on that in the pages that follow. Presently, I must first briefly discuss Bowie's interpretations of Schelling and Schopenhauer's views of music and subjectivity, before returning to Kant.

Schelling is probably the first major thinker of the post-Kantian generation who rejected the free human subject of the Enlightenment and, in turn, extolled the supposedly unique merits of music. In Schelling's reasoning, the human subject, or "self", is inherently split, because it emerges in the act of his own self-intuition; therefore, it is always-already split between its intuiting and intuited self:

The concept of the self arises through the act of self-consciousness, and thus *apart* from this act the self is nothing; its whole reality depends solely on this act, and *it is itself nothing other than this act*. Thus the self can only be presented *qua act* as such, and is otherwise nothing. (Schelling 1978, 25)

As a result, the subject is never self-identical or free, always driven by longing for self-completion, which is attainable only in death, that is, in reuniting with God or “the absolute All” (Schelling 1989, 23–24), who constitutes the only free and self-identical being in Schelling’s philosophical system. God is also “*the immediate cause of all art [...] and the final possibility of all art; he himself is the source of all beauty*”, just as art is “an emanation of the absolute” (Schelling 1989, 19–32). Since God is absolutely beyond human cognition, He chooses to manifest Himself through art, whose aesthetic autonomy is a sensuous representation of His self-unity and freedom, which the human subject loses in the act of self-intuition, but regains in reuniting with God:

The work of art merely reflects to me what is otherwise not reflected by anything, namely the absolutely identical which has already divided itself even in the self (Schelling 1978, 230).

Instrumental art music is especially well-placed to perform this role due to its autonomy and self-referentiality: unlike a poem, painting, or statue, a sonata or symphony, autonomous in its rational musical structure, it appears to represent and refer to nothing but itself. In it, the human subject may catch a consoling glimpse of his own lost autonomy and self-unity, as well as that of God. Hence its capacity “to pacify our endless striving, and likewise to resolve the final and uttermost contradiction within us” (Schelling 1978, 222). That is why for Schelling, music is no less than “the primal rhythm of nature and of the universe itself”.

By contrast, there is no place for God in the radically atheist philosophy of Schopenhauer. The only entity that truly exists and is therefore free is the Will, the impersonal and irrational *spiritus movens* of the world according to Schopenhauer. Everything else – humans, animals, and their various urges (e.g. the sexual drive, self-preservation instinct, etc.), plants, inanimate objects, various natural forces such as gravity, magnetism, electricity, and the like, the entire phenomenal world – are merely its sensuous manifestations, in other words, illusions, including freedom itself:

During life the will of man is without freedom: his action takes place with necessity upon the basis of his unalterable character in the chain of motives. (Schopenhauer 1891, III, 351)

[T]he individual, the person, is not will as a thing-in-itself, but is a *phenomenon* of the will, is already determined as such, and has come under the form of the phenomenal [...]. (Schopenhauer 1891, I, 146–47)

All beings, including humans, live only to satisfy their urges, which are not even theirs, but only imposed on them by the Will; if they fail to satisfy them, they suffer, but when they satisfy them, new urges appear, following a brief period of “ennui”. As a result, Schopenhauer paints a rather bleak picture of life in general: “essential to all life is suffering”, he writes: “the brevity of life, which is so constantly lamented, may be the best quality it possesses” (Schopenhauer 1891, I, 401, 419).

The only consolation, however fleeting, comes in the form of art, that is, the disinterested contemplation of art, which is the sole preserve of the human subject. In Bowie’s words:

Unable to tolerate the consequences of such a view, which just promises a life of endlessly renewed dissatisfaction, of the kind inherent in the very nature of the Will, Schopenhauer seeks a way of transcending the Will that is based on aesthetic contemplation. (Bowie 2003, 263)

In aesthetic contemplation (of a beautiful work of art), the subject temporarily forsakes his urges and desires and thus briefly transcends the Will and approaches true freedom, using art “as the only means of temporarily escaping the fundamentally futile nature of reality” (Bowie 2003, 262). The subject then briefly attains “pure knowledge, which is foreign to all willing” and becomes a *genius*, the pure subject of knowledge. However, it is important to note here that the subject thereby does not become free, but only transcends his own subjection (by the Will), temporarily loses his subjectivity and thus approaches death, the only true emancipation from the Will:

[G]enius is the power of leaving one’s interests, wishes, and aims entirely out of sight, thus of entirely renouncing one’s own personality for a time, so as to remain *pure knowing subject*, clear vision of the world. (Schopenhauer 1891, I, 241)

In this regard, Bowie rightly notes that “only death gives real freedom, by delivering one from individuation altogether” (Bowie 2007, 199). Therefore, there is no personal freedom for the subject in aesthetic contemplation, for Schopenhauer is adamant that the subject cannot attain

freedom *and* remain a subject. Rather, in aesthetic contemplation the subject may only partake of freedom, not his own, but that of the Will, the only notion of freedom that Schopenhauer allows, by communing with the Will, by losing itself or transcending his own subjectivity.

Music is especially well-disposed to afford aesthetic contemplation, essentially due to its self-referential or non-representational character. In other words, whereas the other arts represent contents extraneous to them, music, at least instrumental art music, represents only itself. In fact, Schopenhauer credits it with representing the Will itself, because he views tonality, the underlying structure of all European 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century art music, as another manifestation of the Will. By contrast, the other arts represent only “Platonic ideas”, which are themselves manifestations of the Will and are thus twice removed from the Will, whereas only music represents the Will directly. “Music is by no means like the other arts, the copy of the Ideas, but the *copy of the will itself*, whose objectivity the Ideas are”. Consequently, it is

entirely independent of the phenomenal world, ignores it altogether, could to a certain extent exist if there was no world at all, which cannot be said of the other arts. (Schopenhauer 1891, I, 333)

In concrete terms, while Michelangelo’s *David*, for instance, represents not just the Biblical figure, but also the Platonic idea of male beauty, Beethoven’s symphonies represent the Will itself. That is why music occupies the very top of Schopenhauer’s hierarchy of the arts.

By contrast, in Kant’s hierarchy of the arts, music occupies a much less flattering place: the top of the “agreeable” arts, such as cooking and telling jokes, or, perhaps (Kant is not entirely sure), the bottom position among the “fine” art, such as poetry, painting, and sculpture:

music [...], since it plays merely with sensations, has the lowest place among the fine arts – just as it has perhaps the highest among those values at the same time for their agreeableness. (Kant 1973, §53)

Now one might have expected music to fare much better in Kant’s aesthetics, given how well it conforms to his two main conditions of aesthetic judgement: disinterestedness – the idea that aesthetic judgement must be free of any interest on the judging subject’s part (“it must please apart from all interest”; Kant 1973, §29) and conceptlessness – the stipulation that “delight in the beautiful is such as does not presuppose any concept” (Kant 1973, §16). But this is not how Kant saw things. Part of

the reason for Kant's poor treatment of music is contained already in that brief quotation above: music "plays merely with sensations"; elsewhere, Kant writes that music "speaks by means of mere sensations without concepts, and so does not, like poetry, leave behind it any food for reflection", has no "intrinsic meaning", represents "nothing – no Object under a definite concept", and therefore "possesses less worth in the eyes of reason than any other of the fine arts" (Kant 1973, §53). In other words, for Kant, as for most other thinkers of the Enlightenment, music is still first and foremost pure sound with no other, hidden meanings and not an abstract art independent of the phenomenal world, including sound, as in the next generation of German thinkers. It cannot communicate any concrete meaning (the only kind of meaning valued by Kant) and thus edify its listeners, the way a poem, painting, or a statue can.

But I suspect that there is at least one other reason for music's lowly position in Kant's hierarchy of the arts: his likewise Enlightened and Christian belief in free human subjectivity. "Freedom actually exists", Kant writes at the beginning of his major work on ethics, the *Critique of Practical Reason*; it "is the only one of all the ideas of the speculative reason of which we *know* the possibility *a priori*" (Kant 1996, 14–15). In other words, the Kantian subject is still essentially free. Therefore, to turn, so to speak, Bowie's thesis on its head, Kant, unlike Schopenhauer or Schelling, had no need for music conceived as a radically autonomous abstract art and a model or symbol, whether utopian or not, of freedom, if freedom could exist. In Kant's still Enlightened and Christian philosophy, the subject is inherently free, having received freedom as a mixed blessing from God, as the capacity to choose right from wrong as well as responsibility for his choices. In other words, Kant still accepted freedom as a core Christian dogma, an axiom, "of which we *know* the possibility *a priori*".

However, this freedom is transcendental, or noumenal, which means that it is entirely unknowable to the human mind, as is the rest of the noumenal sphere, which is why we may only know "the possibility" of freedom, but not freedom itself. We know the possibility of freedom thanks to our moral consciousness, which we all have, according to Kant – freedom and morality presuppose each other; without freedom (to choose right from wrong), there could be no ethics. Now, since the human subject is not an entirely rational being, like God, but also sensuous, the main purpose of art and the aesthetic judgement is to teach humans about morality by lending it a sensuous representation. That is why Kant insists that aesthetic judgement must be both disinterested and conceptless: via beauty, it must teach us to appreciate other human beings as "ends in

themselves”, without wishing to possess or violate them in any other way: “the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good” – it “prepares us to love something, even nature, apart from any interest” (Kant 1973, §§29, 59). Aesthetic judgement thus “makes, as it were, the transition from the charm of sense to habitual moral interest possible without too violent a leap” (Kant 1973, §59).

Finally, in lieu of concluding, one may legitimately ask: to what extent is art at all autonomous in Kant’s aesthetics? For, if aesthetically autonomous art denotes art that has no function other than itself, then Kant’s notion of art hardly fits the bill, since its *raison d’être* is moral edification and not itself. But one may equally argue, as I have done in this paper by extending Bowie’s thesis, that there is no such a burning need for aesthetic autonomy in Kant’s philosophy as there is in Schopenhauer’s or Schelling’s, because the Kantian subject is itself free. Thus in Kant, one may perhaps speak of a relative aesthetic autonomy and, by contrast, a transcendental, that is, absolute autonomy of the human subject.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Here I must point out that in German 19<sup>th</sup>-century philosophy the subject is always gendered male, whether implicitly or explicitly.

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## CHAPTER TWO

# WALTER BENJAMIN AND THE DETERRITORIALISATION OF THE ORIGINAL

JOVAN ČEKIĆ

### **...of People**

For Walter Benjamin, the advent of technical reproduction undoubtedly belonged among the type of events whose effects not only restructured the entire social field, but also conditioned the emergence of a new historical formation. It was therefore an epochal event-cut-turn; mapping it may yield only indications or tendencies of the possible effects of such a change. Benjamin's "prognostic demands" made no claims regarding proletarian art or art in a classless society, but referred to tendencies in art under contemporary conditions of production, that is, in 1936. The strategy of such a mapping was twofold: on the one hand, it was defined in relation to the growth of fascism as the most fantastic reterritorialisation of capitalism (Gilles Deleuze), whilst detecting, on the other hand, a series of symptoms that, starting with the advent of technical reproduction, led to the deterritorialisation of the original (Boris Groys), simultaneously suggesting a change in the entire social field.

In the first case, Benjamin sought to get out of the framework of the established concepts in art, such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery, because their uncontrolled use leads to a reprocessing of factual material in the fascist sense. Benjamin begins from the assumption that one may escape fascist reterritorialisation precisely by destabilising that conceptual web whose uncontrolled use transforms and establishes the dominant sign regime serving the aestheticisation of politics. This kind of strategy also assumes a different artistic production, which Benjamin defines as the politicisation of art. In both cases, we have a relative deterritorialisation, both in language, the utterable, and in (artistic) production,

the visible. It seems that for Benjamin, every deterritorialisation assumes a degree of deterritorialisation, in fact, an unspoken question: just how much fascism?

For Deleuze and Guattari, the “fascist State has been without doubt capitalism’s most fantastic attempt at economic and political reterritorialization” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 258), whose possibility of resurgence within any given future kind of capitalist formation should not be easily dismissed. Citing Wilhelm Reich, they argue that the masses were not simply duped; rather, under certain conditions, they desired fascism, which is the perverse desire of the masses that one must take into account. Similarly, “fascism is inseparable from a proliferation of molecular focuses in interaction, which skip from point to point, *before* beginning to resonate together in the National Socialist State” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 214). All sorts of different fascisms are possible: rural fascism, the fascism of a city/borough, youth fascism, the fascism of money, family, school, or office. Each one of these fascisms corresponds to an independent black micro-hole that communicates with other holes, before beginning to resonate in the big central black hole.

In that sense, fascism makes use of technical reproduction, as Siegfried Kracauer showed in his book *From Caligari to Hitler*, as a new and powerful machine immanent to that process of fantastic reterritorialisation. Precisely for that reason, expressionist film unequivocally reflects the emergence of the Hitler automaton in the German soul. In his second book on cinema, Deleuze argues that Benjamin’s text shows how the art of automatic movement, ambiguously termed, Deleuze notes, “the art of reproduction”, coincides with the automation of the masses, whereby state direction – politics – becomes “art”. Not only does the art of the masses become a displaced subject yielding to the masses subjectivised as a psychological automaton, but also its leaders are repositioned as big spiritual automata. In such a constellation, Adolf Hitler appears as a (film) auteur, a singular abstract machine, and the fascist movement as a set overtaking the entire social field.

It seems that Benjamin was able to anticipate the possible effects of the fascist reterritorialisation and “automation of the masses”, whereby the leader was established as the great spiritual automaton. His starting point is that the capitalist machine “obstructs the human being’s legitimate claim to being reproduced” (Benjamin 2008, 34). From the perspective of the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s emerging technologies, this statement by Benjamin might truly be ambiguous, because, as W. T. J. Mitchell notes, “biocybernetic reproduction has replaced Benjamin’s mechanical reproduction” (Mitchell 2005, 318). This assumes that reproduction and reproducibility today

acquire a meaning rather different from a technology dominated by the “mass production” of commodities or “mass reproduction” of identical images. However, capitalism will answer this “legitimate claim” at being recorded with the “Kodak Idea”, cynically indulging the demands of today’s human beings: “You press the button, we do the rest”. But as Willem Flusser showed, the very core of that “Kodak Idea” consists of programmed cameras, which in most cases reduce the “We do the rest” to the production of clichés and stereotypes.

For Benjamin, the effects of this event/cut, on the one hand, were visible in the growing significance of the masses, which imposed changes in the functioning of the social machine, and, on the other hand, in the dissolution of the aura, the deterritorialisation of the original, as the domination of those forces that may be classified under the concept of exhibition value over the forces of cult value. Technical reproduction opposes the transience and repeatability of the “reproductive” to the singularity and durability of the “auratic”. The deterritorialisation of the original not only isolates the reproduced from the domain of tradition, replacing the singularity of the work of art with multiplication, but also, for the first time in world history, emancipates the work of art from its parasitical existence in ritual, relocating it into the register of the political. The advent of the technical reproduction of the work of art not only brings forth the demise of its aura, but also equals its demise by freeing the object from its shell. But for Benjamin, this shell is not exclusive to sacral objects or works of art. Rather, it is a product of the historical formation that produces such effects, which reterritorialise the entire reality, spawning countless closed enclaves and fastening it hopelessly into a “prison-world”. With technical reproduction, especially the emergence of film, this whole prison-world falls apart. “Then came film and exploded this prison-world with the dynamite of the split-second, so that now we can set-off calmly on journeys of adventure among its far-flung debris” (Benjamin 2008, 37). What is this prison-world to which Benjamin refers? One might say that this is the world that emerged as a regime against the background of the Foucaultian panoptic diagram and that fell to countless pieces precisely with the advent of technical reproduction. Benjamin thus correctly detects that exact moment of transition into the post-Panopticon as a change in the world itself and the emergence of much more fluid sets.

This bursting of the panoptic moulds/shells conditioned the establishment of a different relationship between the masses and art, while the framework of production itself likewise changed. This opening up to the masses entailed a tightest bond between the apparatus of technical reproduction and the movements of the masses. Besides, reproduction

accommodates the viewer whatever her position and thus actualises the reproduced. Thus, if the “pleasure” of singularity and durability was a privilege of a small class, one might say “the bourgeoisie”, then transience and repeatability were the masses’ answer to that privilege. The masses’ relationship with art changes thanks to the technical reproduction of the work of art, from most backward, in the case of Picasso, to most advanced, in the case of Chaplin. For Benjamin, the differences in the perception of the masses grow especially conspicuous when one compares painting to film. Painting is simply unable to present objects for simultaneous collective perception, the way film or architecture can, or, in the past, the way epic poetry could. The masses become the matrix, because all established outlooks on works of art change in line with them, while the mode of participation is itself reversed due to the ever growing mass of participants. Benjamin is aware that this mode of participation initially occurs in a scandalous way, but that any criticism that the masses demand only entertainment becomes a commonplace that overlooks precisely the meaning of that radical change. In that regard, Benjamin considers all debates regarding whether photography is an art irrelevant, a waste of “much futile thought”, precisely because they mask a much more important question: is it not true that the discovery of photography has changed the character of art altogether?

In Benjamin’s judgement, the method of film is much closer to the methods of Freud’s psychoanalysis, that is, to the deep perspective on speech of *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. The function of the Freudian slip would thus correspond to the movements of the camera, zooming on and thus emphasising the hidden details of the everyday in some banal environments. Right there it becomes clear just how differently nature addresses the camera than the human eye, above all because it complements a space permeated with human consciousness with a space permeated with the unconscious. Therefore, the camera, with all of its capabilities – moving, cutting, accelerating and decelerating, zooming in and out – uncovers the optical unconscious, just as psychoanalysis uncovers the instinctive unconscious.

In fact, the camera’s presence changes our entire relation with the real and so for Benjamin, the most artificial aspect of reality becomes precisely one that is not disturbed by a machine. In a technological world, the appearance of unmediated reality becomes a mirage. But precisely this turn, with the inflation of technically reproduced images in capitalism, gives rise to a mighty cultural industry, whose only task, in Adorno’s words, is to “feed man with stereotypes”. Rather than a civilisation of images, this inflation of images makes capitalism above all a Deleuzean

civilisation of clichés. In the same vein, cameras themselves are programmed to keep producing redundant image-clichés (Flusser). Like in fractal hierarchy, the matrix of their programmes takes form from the programme of the photo industry, which is in turn a sub-programme of the socio-economic apparatus, itself a sub-programme of the industrial park, and so on.

For Benjamin, the reterritorialisation of the programme of an apparatus serves the functions of the fascist organisation of the emerging proletarianised masses, but without questioning existing property relations. The masses are thus allowed to acquire their own expression (*the reproduction of the masses is especially conducive to mass reproduction*), but never their right, the realisation of which would change precisely the property relations. Consistently striving to aestheticise political life, fascism seeks to conserve those relations. For Benjamin, reterritorialisation is a double articulation: on the one hand, the subjugation of the masses takes place via the cult of the leader, while, on the other hand, the subjugation of the apparatus serves the function of producing cult values. The politicisation of art is thus the deterritorialisation of the original *qua* dissolution of the very matrix of cult value and all its derivatives in all sorts of different registers of the social field.

### ...of Freaks

From another perspective, in his film *Of Freaks and People*, Aleksey Balabanov maps the same epochal event, the advent of technical reproduction, but in this case on the margins of Modernity. The film presents not only the advent of the apparatus of technical reproduction in Russia, that is, St. Petersburg, first a photographic and then also a film camera, but also a radical restructuring of the entire social field.

In contrast to Benjamin's conclusion that in film, that new and mighty medium, "the masses take a look at their own faces", Balabanov eliminates the masses altogether. He sets up Benjamin's "legitimate claim to being reproduced" almost as a Deleuze-Guattarian desiring machine, which gets an entire "industry" going in the background, so as to render visible the blind spots in the social field. The subtlest reference to Benjamin is Balabanov's presentation of St. Petersburg along the lines of Atget's Paris, as an empty, almost deserted city, where the protagonists only sporadically fall into that void. There are no masses, there is no matrix, but only a fragmentary, above all "obscene", "pornographic" humming of the "perverse desire of the masses" – to be reproduced. The entire film is shot in a melancholic sepia from the early days of technical

reproduction, which irresistibly sucks the viewer in, producing the impression that things looked exactly like that. And an entire series of “passing” quotations from the very beginnings of cinema, such as the train that seemingly keeps arriving at the station over and over again, or the motive of clichéd pornographic images that redundantly appear one after another, almost generate a background noise of the universe of entire Modernity.

With the emergence of technical reproduction, within that Foucaultian split between the visible and the utterable, Balabanov emphatically sharpens the division between those who see and those who do not see, those who utter and those who cannot. If Foucaultian surveillance society reaches its apogee in the advent of technical reproduction, then in such a society *surveying* is largely synonymous with *seeing*. It is as if Balabanov’s starting point were that colloquial usage: looking, but not seeing. Of course, there arises the following question: “Not seeing what?”, and then also: “What does it mean to see?”. *Seeing* always involves a surplus of meaning as opposed to looking, staring, feeding one’s eyes. Between that *looking* and *seeing*, there is something that one might call “looking-and-seeing” or, so to speak, “per-see-ving”, which is perhaps closest to that Deleuzian definition of Hitchcock’s “mental images”. When one begins to see, s/he first begins to perceive. Perceive what? The network of other gazes. More accurately, one also sees that which is not given as represented in the field of vision – the network of relations. Balabanov seeks precisely to show the structuring of that network of relations and gazes, whilst at the same time uncompromisingly pointing to a blind spot in the social machine, which is typically defined as “the bourgeoisie”. He seeks to outline the contours of that blind spot wherefrom members of that class simply cannot see.

The advent of technical reproduction also brings a shift, producing a crack in the ideal model of the Panopticon, which challenges the very automatism of Bentham’s machine. On the one hand, this is the Benjaminian dictum that states that the masses become the matrix, that is, that the masses are no longer an object structured by the operation of the panoptic machine, that the masses are no longer that which is observed, but that begins, owing to film, to “see”, to capture that surplus of meaning. That is the revolutionary potential of technical reproduction. On the other hand, Balabanov completely perverts the story and turns technical reproduction toward the obscene: the advent of pornography. Why is this significant? Because pornography is that spot, that place where emerges that which is more visible than the visible itself. Therefore, the “producer” who appears in the film is a man who sees. Sees what? The blindness of

the bourgeoisie itself. For that reason precisely, he “sees everything”: the horizon of their significance, the horizon of their desire, and at the same time the horizon of what they are looking (staring) at, without, in fact, seeing it – their own impotence and powerlessness. The bourgeoisie is blind and thus, in the spirit of Grosrichardian oriental despotism, no longer able to lead or govern. Its inability to see is a symptom of its impotence, which precisely opens the crack through which those from the outside, the “Barbarians”, burst in and destabilise the entire field, moving the horizon of meaning.

Unlike Benjamin, who places the cinematic operator on a par with the surgeon, in other words, with a sort of precision and penetration into the essence of things, Balabanov’s positioning of the artist is radically different. One might say that Balabanov makes another claim that radicalises Benjamin’s idea of the politicisation of art. He shows that in such a network of gazes, bourgeois artists are nothing but a function of those who see, that is, a function of the producers, even when successful. Their fame has nothing to do with art; in a word, they remain within the horizon of bourgeois blindness.

Then, the following question arises: what is the function of artists who seek not to be bourgeois artists, who do not acquiesce to the blindness of their own class? With his film, Balabanov already answers that question, showing that their task is to see even those who see. It is an almost Hitchcockian position of the artist, who, in order to evade the trap of blindness set up by the social machine, must simultaneously see those who see and those who do not see – must turn toward mental images. Artists need to see the web of all of those gazes, as well as the gaze of those who see and unscrupulously restructure the social field. Those who occupy the position of those who see may, as in oriental despotism or Balabanov’s film, be stupid, sick, or retarded. After all, at the very end of the film, the viewer realises that the producer has no power whatsoever, that it is a broken Oedipus-complex sufferer and afflicted man, an epileptic, which is actually irrelevant, because he occupies the place of “the one who sees”, precisely the obscene desire in the gaze of others, which for him is only a symptom of their blindness. He takes into account that blindness of others, which is Balabanov’s initial postulate, and that blindness of others, with whose obscene desire Balabanov plays, conditions the possibility of a different view. For Balabanov, it is a model: in a social force field, establishing a new medium always carries another, obscene, pornographic side. We have no reason to believe that something like that is not happening today as well, following the advent of digital media and screen culture.

One might think that within the same linear historic flow, these two mappings of an epochal event-cut are mutually exclusive. If Balabanov is close to Hitchcockian “mental images”, which focus on weaving relations, or gazes, then Benjamin, with his demand to politicise art instead of aestheticising politics, is close to demanding absolute deterritorialisation. Finally, one might say that both Benjamin and Balabanov perceive the threat of blindness, which in Benjamin leads toward fascist reterritorialisation and in Balabanov to a servile assistance of the production machine (the masses’ perverse desire), regardless of its political orientation. In that sense, the politicisation of art and mental images are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they presuppose each other as a condition for resisting any kind of fantastic reterritorialisation, be it in terms of the utterable and the visible or those of the thinkable.

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CHAPTER THREE

TOWARD A CRITIQUE  
OF POST-STRUCTURALIST ANTI-HUMANISM:  
CAVELL AND FOUCAULT

NIKOLA DEDIĆ

Following the great epistemological turn of 1960s French poststructuralism, how might one rethink the idea of modernity and the modern project? In his more recent books dealing with Emerson and Thoreau (centred on his 1990 Carus Lectures, combined under the title of *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*), Stanley Cavell developed his postulates on “moral perfectionism”. With his theses there, Cavell initiated an anti-metaphysical and anti-idealistic reconstruction of the humanistic conception of the subject, that is, a correction of Foucault’s, Derrida’s, and Lacan’s anti-humanism. Therefore, Cavell’s theses may be viewed as a sort of American “answer” to French theory of the 1960s.

Cavell interprets perfectionism not as a strictly ethical theory, but rather as a set of texts produced in Western philosophical tradition ever since antiquity, discussing the practice of “the care of the self” and the parallel problem of transforming society, that is, transcending the current conditions of life. In that sense, the principle of moral perfectionism applies to a rather varied collection of texts – from Plato and Aristotle, via Kant, John Stuart Mill, Matthew Arnold, and Bernard Shaw, to Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein. Still, Cavell places two American Romanticists, Ralf Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, at the centre of this overlapping group of texts, taking Emerson’s essay “On Self-reliance” as central: in that context, moral perfectionism constitutes the practice of the subject’s self-constitution through the process of an open and never complete individuation. It is a process of continuous advancement, the moral perfection of the self by way of negating, in parallel, the current conditions of life. Still, one should note that while moral perfectionism is a practice of “the care of the self”, it is not