Art Power

Boris Groys

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The Hero's Body: Adolf Hitler's Art Theory

Anyone who speaks of heroes and the heroic these days can hardly help but think of Fascism, National Socialism, and Hitler. Fascism elevated the production of the heroic to a political program. But what is a hero? What distinguishes a hero from a nonhero? The heroic act transforms the hero's body from a medium into a message. In that respect the hero's body is distinct from that of the politician, scientist, entrepreneur, or philosopher, the bodies of whom are concealed behind the social function they exercise. When a body manifests itself directly, however, when it explodes the shell of the social roles it usually plays, the result is the hero's body. Such explosive bodies were exalted and exhibited for example by the Italian Futurists. They cast off the artist's traditional role of supplier to the art market, of producer of images, and instead made their own bodies the image. And these were not bodies at rest; they were battling, enthusiastic, emotionalized, vibrating, explosive bodies—that is to say, heroic. The heroes of antiquity had such bodies, when they were seized by an unbridled passion and were ready to destroy or be destroyed. Italian Fascism and German National Socialism adopted the artistic program of making the medium of the body the message, and they made the message a political one. They sided not with convictions, theories, and programs, but with bodies—those of athletes, fighters, and soldiers.

Making the body the message requires above all an arena, a stage—or, alternatively, it requires modern reporting, a public created by the media. That is why today we are experiencing a widespread return of the heroic, even if it is not always explicitly avowed, because we live in a world theater in which everything ultimately depends entirely on the body. In this world theater, all discourses are reduced to sound bites, slogans, and exclamations. Today's media stars become stars entirely by means of their bodies, not by what they say or do. These are the bodies of athletes that make it evident that they are under great exertion, bodies that are involved in a struggle, bodies subject to danger, but also the bodies of rock stars that vibrate with the

passion that seizes them, the bodies of models, actors, politicians—and the bodies of suicide bombers who explode along with the bodies of others. Documented, commented on, and celebrated by the media, all these bodies dominate our collective imagination.

Fascism introduced the age of the body, and we continue to live in that age, even though Fascism as a political program has been displaced from the cultural mainstream. Indeed, this very displacement of it as a political program is a sign that we are unable to come to terms with the reality of our own media. Above all we shy away from asking the crucial questions: What distinguishes the heroic body of a media star from the unheroic bodies of the audience? Where lies the magic border that separates the hero from the nonhero on a purely corporeal plane? These questions arise because on the ideological plane a democratic equality of all is postulated that does not in fact exist in the reality of the media. For in today's media-driven democracy, all ideologies, theories, and discourses are equal, indeed—and hence also irrelevant. Yet bodies are all the less equal for that.

National Socialism and Hitler, of course, had an answer for such questions: race. As Hitler said:

> When defending its existence, every race operates from the powers and values that are naturally given to it. Only someone who is suited to be heroic thinks and acts heroically. . . . Creatures that are by nature purely prosaic—physically unheroic creatures, for example—also demonstrate unheroic features in their struggle for survival. However, just as it is possible, for example, for the unheroic elements of a community to train the heroically inclined to be unheroic, the emphatically heroic can also single-mindedly subordinate other elements to its own tendency.

With this ideology in mind, Hitler observed that the German people, because it is composed of "various racial substances," cannot be characterized unconditionally as heroic, since it must be admitted "that the normal span of our abilities is determined by the inherent racial composition of our Volk." Yet Hitler was not satisfied with that observation, and he defined National Socialism as follows: "It wants the political and cultural leadership of our Volk to take on the face and expression of the race whose heroism that is rooted in its racial nature first created the German Volk out of a conglomerate of its

various elements. National Socialism thus commits itself to a heroic teaching regarding the value of blood, race, and personality as well of the eternal laws of selection. . . ."[1]

Consequently, Hitler saw himself as a trainer, a coach for the German people. Like the Jedi Knights from the *Star Wars* epic, he sought hidden, racially determined forces that had to be discovered and mobilized in the body of the German Volk. Films of more recent years are absolutely teeming with such trainer figures. Countless kung fu teachers in all sorts of films—from the cheapest B movies to *Matrix* or *Kill Bill*—try to get their charges to forget everything they have learned, heard, and thought and to trust only the inherent, hidden instincts of their bodies in order to discover the powers to which their bodies are genetically destined. In real life, as well, thousands upon thousands of advisers teach athletes, politicians, and entrepreneurs to trust themselves, to act spontaneously and instinctively, to discover their own bodies. The discovery of one's own body has thus become the greatest art of our age.

In the Third Reich this art was declared to be the official art of the State. For Hitler said: "Art is a sublime mission that obliges one to fanaticism."[2] And also: "Art can never be separated from the human being. . . . Even if other aspects of life can still be learned through some form of education, art must be innate."[3] For Hitler, true art consists in revealing the heroic race, the heroic body, and bringing it to power. This art, of course, is possible only for those who are themselves by nature heroically endowed, for this kind of true art is itself a heroic mission. The artist thus becomes one with the hero. Therefore Hitler saw art not simply as a depiction of the heroic but as an act that is itself heroic because it gives shape to reality, to the life of the Volk. And this act, which is also an act of the body, because it cannot be separated from the body of the person performing it, is the work of an artist-hero that should and must be valid not only for the present but for all time. In Hitler's view, unheroic "modern" art can never acquire this eternal value because it does not manifest a heroic determination on the level of the artist's body, but instead tries to support itself on a theory, on a discourse, on notions of international style and fashion. Consequently, modern art betrays and fails its higher mission, since theory, discourse, and criticism are superficial phenomena characteristic only of the age that tends to neglect and conceal the body of the artist.

This is why Hitler declared that the liberation of art from its imprisonment by an art criticism that argues in terms of pure theory would be the main task of his policies on art—and he was committed to pursuing this battle for liberation as ruthlessly as possible. He wanted to produce instead a heroic art that possessed eternal value. One could admittedly say that this constant emphasis on art's eternal value was mere talk, merely rhetorical flourishes meant to justify the regime's atrocities. That view loses plausibility, however, when one notes that Hitler used the same arguments to move the members of his own party to sacrifice their immediate political goals in order to create art that would have eternal value, asking them: "Can we allow ourselves to sacrifice for art at a time when there is so much poverty, want, misery, and despair everywhere around us?"[4] The answer, of course, is "Yes, we can and should"—and therefore Hitler denounced the lack of appreciation for art by those members of the National Socialist Party who were not willing to mobilize the means and forces of the Third Reich not just for the economy and the army but for art as well. Because, so Hitler argued, the Third Reich could exist eternally only if it were to produce art that possessed eternal value. And there is no doubt that Hitler saw the perspective of eternity alone as a State's ultimate justification. Hence the production of art with eternal value was the ultimate task of politics if politics hoped to pass the crucial test—the test of eternity. The concept of eternity was thus the core of Hitler's reflections on heroic art—on art as a heroic act. The heroic was nothing other than a willingness to live for eternal fame and to exist in eternity. The heroic act was defined by its transcendence of immediate, temporal goals and was an eternal role model for all time to come. Given its centrality and influence, it makes sense for us to look at this concept of eternity in detail.

First of all, Hitler never spoke of eternity in the sense of the immortality of the individual soul. The eternity of which Hitler spoke was a post-Christian one, a thoroughly modern one in that it was a purely material, corporeal eternity—an eternity of ruins, of the relics left behind by any civilization once it has gone under. These material remains that outlast every civilization could produce in later observers either fascination, astonishment, at the recognition of the traces of a heroic, artistic, creative act, or simply tired disinterest. Thus Hitler understood the eternal value of art as the impression that art makes on a future observer. And it was this gaze of the future observer that Hitler sought to please first and foremost—and from it Hitler expected to receive

an approving aesthetic judgment of the monuments of that past which was Hitler's own present. Hence Hitler viewed his own present from an archeological perspective—from the perspective of a future archaeologist and *flâneur* with an interest in art—and from that perspective Hitler anticipated ultimate aesthetic recognition. This archaeological perception of his own present linked Hitler with a sensibility widely held in his day. The question of how their own present would eventually be seen in the historical perspective moved many writers and artists of modernity.

At the same time, however, Hitler parted with the mainstream of artistic modernism on this very point. The typical modern artist is a reporter, an observer of the modern world who informs others about his or her observations. In this sense, the modern artist is moving on the same plane on which a theoretician, critic, or writer moves. Hitler, by contrast, did not want to observe; he wanted to be observed. And he wanted not only to be observed but to be admired, even idolized, as a hero. He understood art, artists, and artworks as objects of admiration—not as the subjects of observation or analysis. For him, observers, viewers, critics, writers, and archaeologists were always other people. And thus for Hitler the crucial question became: How could he as artist-hero hold his own against the judgment of the future observer, the future archaeologist? What could he do to ensure that his present work would be admired and idolized in the indeterminate, indefinable future of eternity? The future observer is a great unknown, who initially has no immediate access to the artist's soul, who does not know the artist's intentions and motives—and thus who can scarcely be influenced by theoretical discourse or political propaganda of the past. Future observers will pass judgment exclusively on the basis of the external, corporeal, material appearance of the artwork; its meaning, content, and original interpretational framework will be necessarily alien to them. For Hitler, the recognition of art as art is not, therefore, a matter of a spiritual tradition, of a culture that is transferred from one subject to another, from one generation to another. And for that reason alone, Hitler should be seen as a product of radical modernity, because he no longer believed that culture could be "spiritually" handed down across time. Since the death of God, in Hitler's view, the spirit of culture, the spirit of tradition, and hence any possible cultural meaning or significance had become finite and mortal. The eternity of which Hitler spoke is thus not a spiritual eternity but a material one—an eternity beyond culture, beyond spirit. And

hence the question of the eternal value of art becomes one of material constitution, one of the body of its observer.

Thus Hitler by no means understood the search for the heroic in art to be a superficial stylization of the glorious past. He vehemently rejected a purely external, formalistic imitation of the past that tried to apply obsolete artistic styles borrowed from the vocabulary of art history to the products of technical modernity. Hitler recognized that such attempts were themselves a regression into the past that would lead artists astray from the true goal of achieving an artistic perfection adequate to their own historical time. Hitler was full of irony when remarking on such regressive trends. In his polemics against them, he liked to use arguments that the representatives of modernism—in his view, "the Jews"—customarily used in such cases. Thus he said that

> the National Socialist state must defend itself against the sudden appearance of those nostalgic people who believe they have an obligation to offer the National Socialist revolution a "theutsche Kunst" with an h [i.e., "German art," with an archaic spelling—Trans.] as a binding legacy for the future handed down by the muddled world of their own romantic conceptions. They have never been National Socialists. Either they lived in the hermitages of a Germanic dream world that the Jews always found ridiculous, or they trotted piously and naively amid the heavenly crowds of a bourgeois Renaissance. . . . Thus today they offer train stations in genuine German Renaissance style, street signs and typefaces in Gothic letters, song lyrics freely adapted from Walther von der Vogelweide, fashions based on Gretchen and Faust . . . No, gentlemen! . . . Just as in other aspects of our lives, we gave free rein to the German spirit to develop, in this sphere of art too we cannot do violence to the modern age in favor of the Middle Ages.[5]

The very question of which style was appropriate to the art of the Third Reich is one Hitler considered fundamentally wrong, because he considered style to be a catchword that corrupted art just as much as the concept of the new did. For Hitler, an artwork is good only if it achieves perfection in its response to a specific, very concrete, present-day challenge—and not when it presents itself as an example of a universal style, old or new. But how does a viewer determine that this concrete artwork has achieved a specific, concrete result with the greatest possible perfection? How can art be produced and

appreciated at all if all known criteria of aesthetic judgment, both new and old, "medieval" or "modern," are considered invalid and even detrimental to art? To make the correct aesthetic judgment, the viewer simply needs to have certain taste—namely, good, correct, precise taste. That is: in order to judge an artwork adequately without using any additional explanations, theories, and interpretations, the person judging must have "eternal" taste, if you will—taste that outlasts the ages. And the artists themselves have to possess such taste as well if they want their works to continue to be judged valid beyond their own time. At this point it becomes clear how art can become eternal: Art that is valid for the ages can be produced only when, first, the artist has the same taste as the viewer, and, second, when it is guaranteed that this taste will endure the ages. All attempts to escape this fundamental requirement of stabilizing the aesthetic taste that binds both the artist and the viewer are firmly rejected by Hitler. Neither discourse nor education comes into question for him as a possible mediator between artist and viewer, because such things are always superficial, conventional, and temporal. Only an inherent identity, prior to all reflection, between the taste of the artist and the taste of a possible viewer can guarantee that the artwork will be perceived as perfect.

But how can someone—artist or viewer—come into possession of such an inherent taste that both joins and binds if all taste is dependent on its time? That was the central question of Hitler's art theory, and his answer to this question was race. Only the concept of race enabled Hitler to postulate the possibility of a purely inherent, nontheoretical, nondiscursive unity between artist and viewer. And indeed: The course of modern art has constantly been fraught with complaints about its dependence on commentary, of its being overburdened by theory. Even today, there are regular calls to dismiss all theories, all interpretations, and all discourses and finally concentrate on the pure perception of the artwork. In general, however, these unceasing demands to devote ourselves to the pure perception of art leave unanswered the question of what guarantee there could be that this kind of perception of art can take place at all. How can one look at art and react to it if one has never been informed by any means of discourse that there is such a phenomenon as art? And how can such utterly uninformed perception lead to an aesthetic judgment about an artwork's value when there is no discourse that links the artist's creation to the viewer's appreciation of it? It seems that it is

indeed only a theory of race that could explain to us how art can be perceived beyond all theory.

For race theory transposes the whole analysis from the level of discourse to the level of the body. In Hitler's view, the artwork is not a statement but a body that is derived from another body, namely, the body of the artist. The appreciation of art is, therefore, an effect of direct contact between two bodies: the body of the artwork and the body of the viewer. Everything that relates to art thus plays out on a purely corporeal level. And so one might say that the viewer can identify the artist's artwork and adequately perceive it independently of all discourses only because the viewer's body is similar in structure to that of the artist—and therefore it is equipped with the same purely corporeal reactions to external stimuli. And the artistic taste consists of the totality of these instinctive corporeal reactions. Hence one could say that human beings are able to identify and enjoy human art only because the producer and consumer belong to the same race—namely, the human race. By contrast, if we credit this theory, extraterrestrials would not be in a position to identify, perceive, and enjoy human art because they lack the necessary affiliation with the human race, the human body, and human instincts. Of course, Hitler did not believe that humanity was composed entirely of a single race, since there were substantial factual differences in the judgments of taste made by different people. Consequently, he presumed that humanity was composed of different races, and thus people have different tastes because they belong to different races. And that means that for art to be eternal, the body itself must possess an eternal component. And this eternal component of the body, the eternity immanent to the body itself, is race. Only the viewer who is racially endowed with a heroic attitude can recognize the heroic element in the art of the past.

Thus, in Hitler's view, race theory and art theory form an inherent, indivisible unity. In the end, races exist because they are necessary to explain how art can be transhistorical—that is, why future generations can enjoy the art of the past. Race theory is a theory of the autonomy of art in relation to history, to culture, and to art criticism. In fact, the faith that in questions of art it ultimately comes down to the body is indeed a thoroughly modern faith. It is our era's widespread response to the death of God—understood as the death of the spirit, of reason, of theory, of philosophy, of science, of history. Reference to this sort of immediate corporeal response to art usually serves

today also as a reason to reject any interpretive discourse on art as a falsification of art, that is, as a falsification of the spontaneous reaction of the spectator's body to the artwork. And quite a number of modern and contemporary authors would agree with the opening statement of one of Hitler's speeches that he made in the year 1937: "One of the signs of the decay of culture we have experienced in the recent past is the abnormal growth of art theoretical writing."[6]

For Hitler, establishing the eternal value of art could be reached only by stabilizing the racial inheritance that would guarantee the correct reaction of the future spectator's body to art. Here lies the true originality of Hitler's theory of art: He moved the discussion from the level of the artist's production to the level of the spectator's production. For him, therefore, it was less about producing good art—that already exists, after all—than about producing the mass of viewers who will react correctly to this art even in the distant future. The true artwork that the Third Reich wanted to produce was a viewer of art who was in a position to recognize and appreciate the heroic element in art. For, once again, Hitler by no means understood an artwork to be a passive depiction of the hero. For him, and in this respect he is a child of modernity, the artist is a hero. The act of artistic creation is in itself an active, heroic act, no matter whether it is the creation of an artwork or the creation of a State. The more magnificent this creative act is, the more clearly evident is the heroism of its creator, since such an act is, as we have said, not a spiritual act but a purely corporeal one. The creations of a heroic race can be observed and admired in the monuments produced by the bodies that belong to that race. The ultimate artwork, however, is the viewer whom the heroic politics makes into a member of the heroic race. The true art of politics is, for Hitler, the art of the continuous production of heroic bodies.

The practical consequences of the artistic efforts that Hitler made in this direction are well known, and little need be said about them. Perhaps this will suffice: In terms of art, this work presented itself exclusively as a work of reduction, of destruction, of regression. To put it another way, as soon as he had an opportunity to operate with the body of the Volk and with the State in an artistic way, he immediately began to follow the very program that, on the theoretical plane, he had polemically blamed on modern, "degenerate" art. The true activity of the Third Reich consisted in the constant annihilation of human beings or the continuous reduction of them to

the level of "bare life," as Giorgio Agamben called it. All of the constructive intentions, all the programs for centuries of racial breeding that were supposed to produce a heroic race remained pure theory in the end.

Historically, Hitler embodies exemplarily the figure of a loser who was unable to bring to conclusion anything he started—not even the work of reduction and annihilation. Amazingly, Hitler succeeded in losing utterly, not only politically and militarily but also morally—something that is almost unique as a historical achievement, for defeat in real life is usually balanced by moral victory and vice versa. As an absolute loser in this sense, Hitler holds a certain fascination for our time, because modern art has always celebrated the figure of the loser—this is the very penchant for which Hitler condemned modern art so vehemently. We have learned to admire the figure of the *poète maudit* and the *artiste raté* who earned their places as heroes of the modern imagination not by victory but by spectacular defeat. And in the competition among losers that modern culture has offered us, Hitler was exceptionally, if inadvertently, successful.

Educating the Masses: Socialist Realist Art

From the beginning of the 1930s until the fall of the Soviet Union, Socialist Realism was the only officially recognized creative method for all Soviet artists. The plurality of competing aesthetic programs that characterized Soviet art in the 1920s came to an abrupt end when the Central Committee issued a decree on April 23, 1932, disbanding all existing artistic groups and declaring that all Soviet creative workers should be organized according to profession in unitary "creative unions" of artists, architects, and so on. Socialist Realism was proclaimed the obligatory method at the First Congress of Writers Union in 1934 and was subsequently expanded to encompass all the other arts, including the visual arts, without any substantial modification of its initial formulations. According to the standard official definition, Socialist Realist artwork must be "realistic in form and Socialist in content." This apparently simple formulation is actually highly enigmatic. How can a form, as such, be realistic? And what does "Socialist content" actually mean? To translate this vague formulation into a concrete artistic practice was not an easy task, and yet the answers to those questions defined the fate of every individual Soviet artist. It determined the artist's right to work—and in some cases his or her right to live.

During the initial, Stalinist period of the formation of Socialist Realism, the numbers of artists, as well as artistic devices and styles, that were excluded from the Socialist Realist canon continually expanded. Since the middle of the 1930s, officially acceptable methods were defined in an increasingly narrow way. This politics of narrow interpretation and rigorous exclusion lasted until the death of Stalin in 1952. After the so-called thaw and partial de-Stalinization of the Soviet system, which began at the end of the '50s and continued until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the interpretation of Socialist Realism became more inclusive. But the initial politics of exclusion never allowed a truly homogeneous or even coherent Socialist Realist aesthetic to emerge. And the subsequent politics of inclusion never led to true openness and artistic pluralism. After the death of Stalin, an unofficial art scene emerged

in the Soviet Union but it was not accepted by the official art institutions. It was tolerated by the authorities, but works made by these artists were never exhibited or published, showing that Socialist Realism never became inclusive enough.

Soviet Socialist Realism was intended to be a rigorously defined artistic style, but it was also intended to be a unified method for all Soviet artists, even those working in different media, including literature, the visual arts, theater, and cinema. Of course, these two intentions were mutually contradictory. If an artistic style cannot be compared with other artistic styles in the same medium, its aesthetic specificity as well as its artistic value remains unclear. For Soviet artists, the main point of reference was the bourgeois West. The main concern of the Soviet ideological authorities was that Soviet Socialist art not look like the art of the capitalist West, which was understood as a decadent, formalist art that rejected the artistic values of the past. In contrast, the Soviets formulated a program that appropriated the artistic heritage of all past epochs: Instead of rejecting the art of the past, artists should use it in the service of the new Socialist art. The discussion regarding the role of artistic heritage in the context of the new Socialist reality that took place at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the '30s was decisive in terms of the future development of Socialist Realist art. It marked an essential shift from the art of the '20s, which was still dominated by modernist, formalist programs, toward the art of Socialist Realism, which was concerned primarily with the content of an individual artwork.

The attitude of avant-garde artists and theoreticians toward artistic heritage was powerfully expressed in a short but important text by Kazimir Malevich, "On the Museum," in 1919. At that time, the new Soviet government feared that the old Russian museums and art collections would be destroyed by civil war and the general collapse of state institutions and the economy. The Communist Party responded by trying to secure and save these collections. In his text, Malevich protested against this pro-museum policy by calling on the state not to intervene on behalf of the art collections because their destruction could open the path to true, living art. In particular, he wrote:

> Life knows what it is doing, and if it is striving to destroy one must not interfere, since by hindering we are blocking the path to a new conception of life that is born within us. In burning a corpse we obtain one gram of powder: accordingly

> thousands of graveyards could be accommodated on a single chemist's shelf. We can make a concession to conservatives by offering that they burn all past epochs, since they are dead, and set up one pharmacy.

Later, Malevich gives a concrete example of what he means:

> The aim (of this pharmacy) will be the same, even if people will examine the powder from Rubens and all his art—a mass of ideas will arise in people, and will be often more alive than actual representation (and take up less room).[1]

Malevich believed that new, revolutionary times should be represented by new, revolutionary art forms. This opinion was, of course, shared by many other artists on the "left front" in the 1920s. But their critics argued that true revolution takes place not on the level of artistic forms but rather on the level of their social use. Being confiscated from the old ruling classes, appropriated by the victorious proletariat, and put at the service of the new Socialist state, old artistic forms become intrinsically new because they were filled with a new content and used in a completely different context. In this sense, these apparently old forms became even more new than the forms that were created by the avant-garde but used in the same context by bourgeois society. This proto-postmodern criticism of "formalist trends in art" was formulated by an influential art critic of that time, Yakov Tugendkhol'd, in the following way: "The distinction between proletarian and non-proletarian art happens to be found not in form but in the idea of use of this form. Locomotives and machines are the same here as in the West; this is our form. The difference between our industrialism and that of the West, however, is in the fact that here it is the proletariat that is the master of these locomotives and machines; this is our content."[2] During the 1930s this argument was repeated again and again. The artists and theoreticians of the Russian avant-garde were accused of taking a nihilistic approach toward the art of the past, preventing the proletariat and the Communist Party from using their artistic heritage for their own political goals. Accordingly, Socialist Realism was presented initially as an emergent rescue operation directed against the destruction of cultural tradition. Years later Andrei Zhdanov, a member of the Politbureau who was at that time responsible for official cultural politics, said in a speech dedicated to questions of art:

> Did the Central Committee act "conservatively," was it under the influence of "traditionalism" or "epigonism" and so on, when it defended the classical heritage in painting? This is sheer nonsense! . . . We Bolsheviks do not reject the cultural heritage. On the contrary, we are critically assimilating the cultural heritage of all nations and all times in order to choose from it all that inspire the working people of Soviet society to great exploits in labor, science, and culture.[3]

The discussion of the role of artistic heritage set the framework for the development of the aesthetics of Socialist Realism, because it indicated some formal criteria that a Socialist Realist artwork should satisfy in order to be both Socialist and Realist. The introduction of Socialist Realism initiated a long and painful struggle against formalism in art in the name of a return to classical models of art-making. In this way, Socialist Realist art was increasingly purged of all traces of modernist "distortions" of the classical form—so that at the end of this process it became easily distinguishable from bourgeois Western art. Soviet artists also tried to thematize everything that looked specifically Socialist and non-Western—official parades and demonstrations, meetings of the Communist Party and its leadership, happy workers building the material basis of the new society. In this sense, the apparent return to a classical mimetic image effectuated by Socialist Realism was rather misleading. Socialist Realism was not supposed to depict life as it was, because life was interpreted by Socialist Realist theory as being constantly in flux and in development—specifically in "revolutionary development," as it was officially formulated.

Socialist Realism was oriented toward what had not yet come into being but what it saw should be created and was destined to become a part of the Communist future. Socialist Realism was understood as a dialectical method. "What is most important to the dialectical method," wrote Stalin, "is not that which is stable at the present but is already beginning to die, but rather that which is emerging and developing, even if at present it does not appear stable, since for the dialectical method only that which is emerging and developing cannot be overcome."[4] Of course, it was the Communist Party that had the right to decide what would die and what could emerge.

The mere depiction of the facts was officially condemned as "naturalism," which should be distinguished from "realism," taken to imply an ability to grasp the whole of historical development, to recognize in the

present world the signs of the coming Communist world. The ability to make the correct, Socialist selection of current and historical facts was regarded as the most important quality of a Socialist artist. Boris Ioganson, one of the leading official artists of the Stalin period, said in his speech to the First Convention of Soviet Artists in the 1930s: "A fact is not the whole truth; it is merely the raw material from which the real truth of art must be smelted and extracted—the chicken must not be roasted with its feathers."[5] And he argued further that the locus of creativity in the art of Socialist Realism is not the technique of painting but the "staging of the picture"—which is to say that the painter's work does not essentially differ from the photographer's. A Socialist Realist painting is a kind of virtual photography—meant to be realistic, but to encompass more than a mere reflection of a scene that actually happened. The goal was to give to the image of the future world, where all the facts would be the facts of Socialist life, a kind of photographic quality, which would make this image visually credible. After all, Socialist Realism had to be realist only in form and not in content.

The apparent return to the classical was misleading as well. Socialist Realist art was not created for museums, galleries, private collectors, or connoisseurs. The introduction of Socialist Realism coincided with the abolishment of the free market, including the art market. The Socialist State became the only remaining consumer of art. And the Socialist State was interested only in one kind of art—socially useful art that appealed to the masses, that educated them, inspired them, directed them. Consequently, Socialist Realist art was made ultimately for mass reproduction, distribution, and consumption—and not for concentrated, individual contemplation. This explains why paintings or sculptures that looked too good, or too perfect on the traditional criteria of quality, were also regarded by the Soviet art critic as "formalist." Socialist Realist artwork had to refer aesthetically to some acceptable kind of heritage, but at the same time it had to do so in a way that opened this heritage to a mass audience, without creating too great a distance between an artwork and its public.

Of course, many traditional artists who felt pushed aside by the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s undoubtedly exploited the change in political ideology to achieve recognition for their work. Many Soviet artists still painted landscapes, portraits, and genre scenes in the tradition of the nineteenth century. But the paintings of such leading Socialist Realist artists as

Alexander Deineka, Alexander Gerassimov, or even Isaak Brodsky referred primarily to the aesthetics of posters, color photography, or the cinema. In fact, the successful pictures made by these artists could be seen throughout the country, reproduced on countless posters and in endless numbers of books. They were popular "hits"—and it would be wide of the mark to criticize a pop song for having lyrics that were not great poetry. A capability for mass distribution became the leading aesthetic quality in Stalinist Russia. Even if painting and sculpture dominated the system of visual arts, both were produced and reproduced on a mass scale comparable only to photographic and cinematic production in the West. Thousands and thousands of Soviet artists repeated the same officially approved Socialist Realist subjects, figures, and compositions, allowing themselves only the slightest variations on these officially established models, variations that remain almost unnoticeable by an uninformed viewer. The Soviet Union therefore became saturated with painted and sculpted images that seemed to be produced by the same artist.

Socialist Realism emerged at a time when global commercial mass culture achieved its decisive breakthrough and became the determining force that it has remained ever since. Official culture in the Stalin era was a part of this global mass culture, and it fed on the expectations it awakened worldwide. And an acute interest in new media that could be easily reproduced and distributed was widespread in the 1930s. In their various ways, French Surrealism, Belgian Magic Realism, German Neue Sachlichkeit, Italian Novecento, and all other forms of realism of the time exploited images and techniques derived from the vastly expanding mass media of the day. But in spite of these resemblances, Stalinist culture was structured differently from its counterpart in the West. Whereas the market dominated, even defined, Western mass culture, Stalinist culture was noncommercial, even anticommercial. Its aim was not to please the greater public but to educate, to inspire, to guide it. (Art should be realist in form and socialist in content, in other words.) In practice, this meant that art had to be accessible to the masses on the level of form, although its content and goals were ideologically determined and aimed at reeducating the masses.

In his 1939 essay "Avant-garde and Kitsch" Clement Greenberg famously attempted to define the difference between avant-garde art and mass culture (which he termed "kitsch"). Mass kitsch, he stated, uses the effects of

art, whereas the avant-garde investigates artistic devices.[6] Accordingly, Greenberg placed the Socialist Realism of the Stalin era, as well as other forms of totalitarian art, on a par with the commercial mass culture of the West. Both, he averred, aimed to exert the maximum effect on their audiences, rather than engaging critically with artistic practices themselves. For Greenberg, the avant-garde ethos thus entailed a distant and critical attitude toward mass culture. But in fact, the artists of the classical European and Russian avant-garde were very much attracted to the new possibilities offered by the mass production and dissemination of images. The avant-garde actually disapproved of only one aspect of commercial mass culture: its pandering to mass taste. Yet modernist artists also rejected the elitist "good" taste of the middle classes. Avant-garde artists wished to create a new public, a new type of human being, who would share their own taste and see the world through their eyes. They sought to change humankind, not art. The ultimate artistic act would be not the production of new images for an old public to view with old eyes, but the creation of a new public with new eyes.

Soviet culture under Stalin inherited the avant-garde belief that humanity could be changed and thus was driven by the conviction that human beings are malleable. Soviet culture was a culture for masses that had yet to be created. This culture was not required to prove itself economically—to be profitable, in other words—because the market had been abolished in the Soviet Union. Hence the actual tastes of the masses were completely irrelevant to the art practices of Socialist Realism, more irrelevant, even, than they were to the avant-garde, since members of the avant-garde in the West, for all their critical disapproval, had to operate within the same economic conditions as mass culture. Soviet culture as a whole may therefore be understood as an attempt to abolish that split between the avant-garde and mass culture that Greenberg diagnosed as the main effect of art operating under the conditions of Western-style capitalism.[7] Accordingly, all other oppositions related to this fundamental opposition—between production and reproduction, original and copy, quality and quantity, for instance—lost their relevance in the framework of Soviet culture. The primary interest of Socialist Realism was not an artwork but a viewer. Soviet art was produced in the relatively firm conviction that people would come to like it when they had become better people, less decadent and less corrupted by bourgeois values. The viewer was conceived of as an integral part of a Socialist Realist work of art

and, at the same time, as its final product. Socialist Realism was the attempt to create dreamers who would dream Socialist dreams.

To promote the creation of a new humankind, and especially of a new public for their art, artists joined forces with those in political power. This was undoubtedly a dangerous game for artists to play, but the rewards appeared at the beginning to be enormous. The artist tried to attain absolute creative freedom by throwing off all moral, economic, institutional, legal, and aesthetic constraints that had traditionally limited his or her political and artistic will. But after the death of Stalin all utopian aspirations and dreams of absolute artistic power became immediately obsolete. The art of official Socialist Realism became simply a part of the Soviet bureaucracy—with all the privileges and restrictions connected to this status. Soviet artistic life after Stalin became a stage on which the struggle against censorship was played out. This drama had many heroes who managed to widen the framework of what was allowed, to make "good artworks," or "truly realistic artworks," or even "modernist artworks" on the borderline of what was officially possible. These artists and the art critics who supported them became well known and were applauded by the greater public. Of course, this struggle involved a lot of personal risk that in many cases led to very unpleasant consequences for the artists. But still it is safe to say that within the post-Stalinist art of Socialist Realism a new value system had established itself. The art community valued not the artworks that defined the core message and the specific aesthetics of Socialism Realism, but rather the artworks that were able to widen the borders of censorship, to break new ground, to give to other artists more operative space. At the end of this process of expansion Socialist Realism lost its borders almost completely and disintegrated, together with the Soviet state.

In our time the bulk of Socialist Realist image production has been reevaluated and reorganized. The previous criteria under which these artworks were produced have become irrelevant: neither the struggle for a new society nor the struggle against censorship is a criterion any longer. One can only wait and see what use the contemporary museum system and contemporary art market will make of the heritage of Socialist Realism—of this huge number of artworks that were initially created outside of, and even directed against, the modern, Western art institutions.

Beyond Diversity: Cultural Studies and Its Post-Communist Other

One can safely say that the cultural situation in the countries of post-Communist Eastern Europe is still a blind spot for contemporary cultural studies. Cultural studies has, that is, some fundamental difficulties in describing and theorizing the post-Communist condition. And, frankly, I do not believe that a simple adjustment of the theoretical framework and vocabulary of cultural studies to the realities of Eastern Europe—without reconsideration of some of the discipline's fundamental presuppositions—would be sufficient to enable its discourse to describe and discuss the post-Communist reality. I will now try to explain why such an adjustment seems to be so difficult.

The currently dominant theoretical discourse in the field of cultural studies has a tendency to see historical development as a road that brings the subject from the particular to the universal, from premodern closed communities, orders, hierarchies, traditions, and cultural identities toward the open space of universality, free communication, and citizenship in a democratic modern state. Contemporary cultural studies shares this image with the venerable tradition of the European Enlightenment—even if the former looks at this image in a different way and, accordingly, draws different conclusions from the analysis of this image. The central question that arises under these presuppositions is namely the following: How are we to deal with an individual person traveling along this road—here and now? The traditional answer of liberal political theory, which has its origins in French Enlightenment thought, is well known: the person on this road has to move forward as quickly as possible. And if we see that a certain person is not going fast enough—and maybe even takes a rest before moving ahead—then appropriate measures must be taken against this person, because such a person is holding up not only his or her own transition but also the transition of the whole of humankind to the state of universal freedom. And humankind cannot tolerate such slow movement because it wants to be free and democratic as soon as possible.

This is the origin of the liberal mode of coercion and violence in the name of democracy and freedom. And it is very much understandable that today's cultural studies wants to reject this kind of coercion and to defend the right of the individual subject to be slow, to be different, to bring his or her premodern cultural identity into the future as legitimate luggage that may not be confiscated. And, indeed, if the perfect, absolute democracy is not only unrealized, but also unrealizable, then the way that leads to it is an infinite one—and it makes no sense to force the homogeneity and universality of such an infinite future on the heterogeneous cultural identities here and now. Rather, it is better to appreciate diversity and difference, to be more interested in where the subject is coming from than in where he or she is going to. So we can say that the present strong interest in diversity and difference is dictated in the first place by certain moral and political considerations—namely, by the defense of the so-called underdeveloped cultures against their marginalization and suppression by the dominating modern states in the name of progress. The ideal of progress is not completely rejected by contemporary cultural thought. This thought, rather, strives to find a compromise between the requirements of modern uniform democratic order and the rights of premodern cultural identities situated within this general order.

But there is also one aspect in all this which I would like to stress. The discourse of diversity and difference presupposes a certain aesthetic choice—I mean here a purely aesthetic preference for the heterogeneous, for the mix, for the crossover. This aesthetic taste is, in fact, very much characteristic of the postmodern art of the late 1970s and '80s—that is, during the time that the discipline of cultural studies emerged and developed to its present form. This aesthetic taste is ostensibly very open, very inclusive—and in this sense also genuinely democratic. But, as we know, postmodern taste is by no means as tolerant as it seems to be at first glance. The postmodern aesthetic sensibility in fact rejects everything universal, uniform, repetitive, geometrical, minimalist, ascetic, monotonous, boring—everything gray, homogeneous, and reductionist. It dislikes Bauhaus, it dislikes the bureaucratic and the technical; the classical avant-garde is accepted now only on the condition that its universalist claims are rejected and it becomes a part of a general heterogeneous picture.

And, of course, the postmodern sensibility strongly dislikes—and *must* dislike—the gray, monotonous, uninspiring look of Communism. I believe

that this is, in fact, why the post-Communist world today remains a blind spot. Western spectators trained in certain aesthetics and conditioned by a certain artistic sensibility just do not want to look at the post-Communist world because they do not like what they see. The only things that contemporary Western spectators like about the post-Communist—or still Communist—East are things like Chinese pagodas, or old Russian churches, or Eastern European cities that look like direct throwbacks to the nineteenth century—all things that are non-Communist or pre-Communist, that look diverse and different in the generally accepted sense of these words and that fit well within the framework of the contemporary Western taste for heterogeneity. On the contrary, Communist aesthetics seems to be not different, not diverse, not regional, not colorful enough—and, therefore, confronts the dominating pluralist, postmodern Western taste with its universalist, uniform Other.

But if we now ask ourselves: What is the origin of this dominating postmodern taste for colorful diversity?—there is only one possible answer: the market. It is the taste *formed by* the contemporary market, and it is the taste *for* the market. In this respect, it must be recalled that the emergence of the taste for the diverse and the different was directly related to the emergence of globalized information, media, and entertainment markets in the 1970s and the expansion of these markets in the '80s and '90s. Every expanding market, as we know, produces diversification and differentiation of the commodities that are offered on this market. Therefore, I believe that the discourse and the politics of cultural diversity and difference cannot be seen and interpreted correctly without being related to the market-driven practice of cultural diversification and differentiation in the last decades of the twentieth century. This practice opened a third option for dealing with one's own cultural identity—beyond suppressing it or finding a representation for it in the context of existing political and cultural institutions. This third option is to sell, to commodify, to commercialize this cultural identity on the international media and touristic markets. It is this complicity between the discourse of cultural diversity and the diversification of cultural markets that makes a certain contemporary postmodern critical discourse so immediately plausible and, at the same time, so deeply ambiguous. Although extremely critical of the homogeneous space of the modern state and its institutions, it tends to be uncritical of contemporary heterogeneous market practices—at least, by not taking them seriously enough into consideration.

Listening to postmodern critical discourse, one has the impression of being confronted with a choice between a certain universal order incorporated by the modern state, on the one hand, and fragmented, disconnected, diverse "social realities" on the other. But, in fact, such diverse realities simply do not exist—and the choice is a completely illusory one. The apparently fragmented cultural realities are, in fact, implicitly connected by the globalized markets. There is no real choice between universality and diversity. Rather, there is a choice between two different types of universality: between the universal validity of a certain political idea and the universal accessibility obtained through the contemporary market. Both—the modern state and the contemporary market—are equally universal. But the universality of a political idea is an openly manifested, articulated, visualized universality that demonstrates itself immediately by the uniformity and repetitiveness of its external image. On the other hand, the universality of the market is a hidden, nonexplicit, nonvisualized universality that is obscured by commodified diversity and difference.

So we can say that postmodern cultural diversity is merely a pseudonym for the universality of capitalist markets. The universal accessibility of heterogeneous cultural products which is guaranteed by the globalization of contemporary information markets has replaced the universal and homogeneous political projects of the European past—from the Enlightenment to Communism. In the past, to be universal was to invent an idea or an artistic project that could unite people of different backgrounds, that could transcend the diversity of their already existing cultural identities, that could be joined by everybody—if he or she would decide to join them. This notion of universality was linked to the concept of inner change, of inner rupture, of rejecting the past and embracing the future, to the notion of *metanoia*—of transition from an old identity to a new one. Today, however, to be universal means to be able to aetheticize one's identity as it is—without any attempt to change it. Accordingly, this already existing identity is treated as a kind of readymade in the universal context of diversity. Under this condition, becoming universal, abstract, uniform makes you aesthetically unattractive and commercially inoperative. As I have already said, for contemporary tastes, the universal looks too gray, boring, unspectacular, unentertaining, uncool to be aesthetically seductive.

And that is why the postmodern taste is fundamentally an antiradical taste. Radical political aesthetics situates itself always at the "degree zero" (*degré zéro*) of literary and visual rhetoric, as Roland Barthes defined it[1]—and that means also at the degree zero of diversity and difference. And this is also why the artistic avant-garde—Bauhaus, and so on—seem to be so outmoded today: These artistic movements embody an aesthetic sensibility for the political, not for the commercial market. There can be no doubt about it: every utopian, radical taste is a taste for the ascetic, uniform, monotonous, gray, and boring. From Plato to the utopias of the Renaissance to the modern, avant-garde utopias—all radical political and aesthetic projects presented themselves always at the degree zero of diversity. And that means: One needs to have a certain aesthetic preference for the uniform—as opposed to the diverse—to be ready to accept and to endorse radical political and artistic projects. This kind of taste must be, obviously, very unpopular, very unappealing to the masses. And that is one of the sources of the paradox that is well known to the historians of modern utopias and radical politics. On the one hand, these politics are truly democratic because they are truly universal, truly open to all—they are by no means elitist or exclusive. But, on the other hand, they appeal, as I said, to an aesthetic taste that is relatively rare. That is why radical democratic politics presents itself often enough as exclusive, as elitist. One must be committed to radical aesthetics to accept radical politics—and this sense of commitment produces relatively closed communities united by an identical project, by an identical vision, by an identical historical goal. The way of radical art and politics does not take us from closed premodern communities to open societies and markets. Rather, it takes us from relatively open societies to closed communities based on common commitments.

We know from the history of literature that all past utopias were situated on remote islands or inaccessible mountains. And we know how isolated, how closed the avant-garde movements were—even if their artistic programs were genuinely open. Thus we have here a paradox of a universalist but closed community or movement—a paradox which is truly modern. And that means, in the case of radical political and artistic programs, we have to travel a different historical road than the one described by standard cultural studies: It is not a road from a premodern community to an open society of universal

communication. Rather, it is a road from open and diverse markets toward utopian communities based on a common commitment to a certain radical project. These artificial, utopian communities are not based on the historical past; they are not interested in preserving its traces, in continuing a tradition. On the contrary, these universalist communities are based on historical rupture, on the rejection of diversity and difference in the name of a common cause.

On the political and economic level, the October Revolution effectuated precisely such a complete break with the past, such an absolute destruction of every individual's heritage. This break with every kind of heritage was introduced by the Soviet power on the practical level by abolishing private property and transferring every individual's inheritance into the collective property. Finding a trace of one's own heritage in this undifferentiated mass of collective property has become as impossible as tracing the individual incinerated objects in the collective mass of ashes. This complete break with the past constitutes the political as well as the artistic avant-garde. The notion of the avant-garde is often associated with the notion of progress. In fact, the term "avant-garde" suggests such an interpretation because of its military connotations—initially, it referred to the troops advancing at the head of an army. But to Russian revolutionary art, this notion began to be applied habitually since the 1960s.

The Russian artists themselves never used the term avant-garde. Instead, they used names like Futurism, Suprematism, or Constructivism—meaning not moving progressively toward the future but being already situated in the future because the radical break with the past had already taken place, being at the end—or even beyond the end—of history, understood in Marxist terms as a history of class struggle, or as a history of different art forms, different art styles, different art movements. Malevich's famous *Black Square*, in particular, was understood as the degree zero both of art and of life—and because of that, as the point of identity between life and art, between artist and artwork, between spectator and art object, and so on.

The end of history is understood here not in the same way as Francis Fukuyama understands it.[2] The end of history is brought about not by the final victory of the market over every possible universal political project but, on the contrary, by the ultimate victory of a political project, which means an ultimate rejection of the past, a final rupture with the history of diversity.

It is the radical, the apocalyptic end of history—not the kind of end-of-history as is described by contemporary liberal theory. That is why the only real heritage of today's post-Communist subject—its real place of origin—is the complete destruction of every kind of heritage, a radical, absolute break with the historical past and with any kind of distinct cultural identity. Even the name of the country "Russia" was erased and substituted by a neutral name lacking any cultural tradition: Soviet Union. The contemporary Russian, post-Soviet citizen thus comes from nowhere, from the degree zero at the end of every possible history.

Now it becomes clear why it is so difficult for cultural studies to describe the way that post-Communist countries and populations evolved after the demise of Communism. On the one hand, this path of evolution seems to be the familiar, well-worn path from a closed society to an open society, from the community to a civil society. But the Communist community was in many ways much more radically modern in its rejection of the past than the countries of the West. And this community was closed not because of the stability of its traditions but because of the radicality of its projects. And that means: the post-Communist subject travels the same route as described by the dominating discourse of cultural studies—but he or she travels this route in the opposite direction, not from the past to the future, but from the future to the past; from the end of history, from posthistorical, postapocalyptic time, back to historical time. Post-Communist life is life lived backward, a movement against the flow of time. It is, of course, not a completely unique historical experience. We know of many modern apocalyptic, prophetic, religious communities which were subjected to the necessity of going back in historical time. The same can be said of some artistic avant-garde movements, and also of some politically motivated communities that arose in the 1960s. The chief difference is the magnitude of a country like Russia, which must now make its way back—from the future to the past. But it is an important difference. Many apocalyptic sects have committed collective suicide because they were incapable of going back in time. But such a huge country as Russia does not have the option of suicide—it has to proceed backward whatever collective feelings it has about it.

It goes without saying that the opening of the Communist countries has meant for their populations, in the first place, not democratization in political terms but the sudden necessity of surviving under new economic

pressures dictated by international markets. And this also means a return to the past, because all Communist countries of Eastern Europe, including Russia, had their capitalist past. But until very recently, the only acquaintance most of the Russian population had with capitalism was mainly via pre-revolutionary, nineteenth-century Russian literature. The sum of what people knew about banks, loans, insurance policies, or privately owned companies was gleaned from reading Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Chekhov at school—leaving impressions not unlike what people often feel when they read about ancient Egypt. Of course, everyone was aware that the West was still a capitalist system; yet they were equally aware that they themselves were not living in the West, but in the Soviet Union. Then suddenly all these banks, loans, and insurance policies began to sprout up from their literary graves and become reality; so for ordinary Russians it feels now as if the ancient Egyptian mummies had risen from their tombs and were now reinstituting all their old laws.

Beyond that—and this is, probably, the worst part of the story—the contemporary Western cultural markets, as well as contemporary cultural studies, require that the Russians, Ukrainians, and so on rediscover, redefine, and manifest their alleged cultural identity. They are required to demonstrate, for example, their specific Russianness or Ukrainness, which, as I have tried to show, these post-Communist subjects do not have and cannot have because even if such cultural identities ever really existed they were completely erased by the universalist Soviet social experiment. The uniqueness of Communism lies in the fact that it is the first modern civilization that has historically perished—with the exception, perhaps, of the short-lived Fascist regimes of the 1930s and '40s. Until that time, all other civilizations that had perished were premodern; therefore they still had fixed identities that could be documented by a few outstanding monuments like the Egyptian pyramids. But the Communist civilization used only those things that are modern and used by everyone—and, in fact, non-Russian in origin. The typical Soviet emblem was Soviet Marxism. But it makes no sense to present Marxism to the West as a sign of Russian cultural identity because Marxism has, obviously, Western and not Russian origins. The specific Soviet meaning and use of Marxism could function and be demonstrated only in the specific context of the Soviet state. Now that this specific context has dissolved, Marxism has returned to the West—and the traces of its Soviet use have simply disappeared. The post-

Communist subject must feel like a Warhol Coca-Cola bottle brought back from the museum into the supermarket. In the museum, this Coca-Cola bottle was an artwork and had an identity—but back in the supermarket the same Coca-Cola bottle looks just like every other Coca-Cola bottle. Unfortunately, this complete break with the historical past and the resultant erasure of cultural identity are as difficult to explain to the outside world as it is to describe the experience of war or prison to someone who has never been at war or in prison. And that is why, instead of trying to explain his or her lack of cultural identity, the post-Communist subject tries to invent one—acting like Zelig in the famous Woody Allen movie.

This post-Communist quest for a cultural identity that seems to be so violent, authentic, and internally driven is, actually, a hysterical reaction to the requirements of international cultural markets. Eastern Europeans want now to be as nationalistic, as traditional, as culturally identifiable as all the others—but they still do not know how to do this. Therefore, their apparent nationalism is primarily a reflection of and an accommodation to the quest for otherness that is characteristic of the cultural taste of the contemporary West. Ironically, this accommodation to the present international market requirements and dominating cultural taste is mostly interpreted by Western public opinion as a "rebirth" of nationalism, a "return of the repressed," as additional proof corroborating the current belief in otherness and diversity. A good example of this mirror effect—the East reflecting Western expectations of "otherness" and confirming them by artificially simulating its cultural identity—is the reshaping of Moscow's architecture that took place almost immediately after the demise of the Soviet Union.

In the relatively brief period since the Soviet Union was disbanded, Moscow—once the Soviet, now the Russian capital—has already undergone an astonishingly rapid and thorough architectural transformation. A lot has been built in this short time, and the newly constructed buildings and monuments have redefined the face of the city. The question surely is, in what manner? The answer most frequently advanced in texts by Western observers and in some quarters of today's more earnest Russian architectural criticism is that Moscow's architecture is kitschy, restorative, and above all eager to appeal to regressive Russian nationalist sentiments. In the same breath, these commentators claim to make out a certain discrepancy between Russia's embrace of capitalism and the regressive, restorative aesthetics now evident

in the Russian capital. The reason most often provided for this alleged contradiction is that, in view of the current wave of modernization and the host of economic and social pressures brought in its wake, these restorative aesthetics are intended as a compensatory measure through their evocation of Russia's past glory.

Without question, the aesthetic profile of contemporary Moscow is unambiguously restorative; although one encounters a few borrowings from contemporary Western architecture, these references are always situated in a historicist, eclectic context. In particular, the most representative buildings of Moscow's new architecture are those that signal a programmatic rejection of the contemporary international idiom. Yet in Russia, as was already mentioned, capitalism is already experienced as restorative, that is, as the return from the country's socialist future back to its pre-revolutionary, capitalist past. This in turn means that, rather than contradicting it, restorative architecture is actually complicit with the spirit of Russian capitalism. According to Russian chronology, modernism is a feature of the Socialist future, which now belongs to the past, rather than being part of the capitalist past, which is now the future. In Russia, modernism is associated with Socialism—and not, as it is in the West, with progressive capitalism. This is not merely because modernist artists often voiced Socialist views, but also a result of modernism's concurrence with a period when Socialism prevailed in Russia—which means, in fact, with the entire twentieth century. That is why the new Moscow architecture wants to signal the return of the country to pre-revolutionary times, for example, to the nineteenth century, by abandoning the modernism of the twentieth century.

Furthermore, Russians associate modernism above all with Soviet architecture of the 1960s and '70s, which by and large they utterly detested. During these decades, vast urban zones sprung up all over the Soviet Union, stocked with enormous, highly geometrical, standardized residential buildings of a gray and monotonous appearance and entirely bereft of artistic flair. This was architecture at the bottom line. Modernism in this guise is now spurned since it is felt to combine monotony and standardization and embody Socialism's characteristic disregard for personal taste. As it happens, similar arguments can be heard today in a like-minded rejection of the oppositional and modernistically inclined dissident culture of the 1960s and '70s, whose proponents nowadays find approval for the most part

only in the West. In Russia, the former dissident culture is dismissed for still being "too Soviet"—in other words, for being too arrogant, intolerant, doctrinaire, and modernist. Instead, the current *cause célèbre* in Russia is postmodernism. Thus, the postmodernist return of nineteenth-century eclecticism and historicism is currently celebrated in Russia as signaling the advent of true pluralism, openness, democracy, and the right to personal taste—as the immediate visual confirmation that the Russian people feel liberated at last from the moralistic sermons of Communist ideology and the aesthetic terror of modernism.

But, contrary to this rhetoric of diversity, inclusiveness, and liberation of personal taste, the new Moscow style is, in fact, wholly the product of centralized planning. Today's most representative and stylistically influential buildings have come about on the initiative of the post-Soviet mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, and his preferred sculptor, Zurab Tsereteli. As was also the case with Stalinist architecture, which likewise was the result of close cooperation between Stalin and a small coterie of carefully appointed architects, this is an example of a most typically Russian phenomenon—a case, namely, of planned and centralized pluralism. The current Moscow style has distanced itself from the modernist monotony of the 1960s and '70s to the same degree as Stalinist architecture was divesting itself of the rigorism of the Russian avant-garde. The Moscow style is a revival of a revival. But most importantly, this return to popular taste and aesthetic pluralism in both cases ultimately proved to be a state-sponsored *mise-en-scène*.

The way this kind of controlled pluralism functions is well illustrated by a concrete example, the reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in the center of Moscow, a project which was just recently completed. This rebuilt cathedral is already counted as the most important post-Soviet architectural monument in Moscow today. More than anyone else, Luzhkov has prioritized the reconstruction of the cathedral as the city's most prestigious project. A few historical details should shed light on the implications of this restoration project.

The original Cathedral of Christ the Savior was built by the architect Konstantin Ton between 1838 and 1860 as a symbol of Russia's victory over the Napoleonic army; it was demolished on Stalin's orders in 1931. Immediately after its completion, the disproportionately huge cathedral was roundly criticized and ridiculed as monumental kitsch. This original view was shared

by all subsequent architectural opinion, which was probably a further reason for the later decision to blow it up—it simply was deemed to be of little artistic value. At the same time, this demolition amounted to an intensely symbolic political act, since in spite of—or rather precisely due to—its kitschy character, the cathedral was immensely popular with the people, as well as being the most vivid expression of the power held by the Russian Orthodox Church in pre-revolutionary Russia. Hence its demolition came as the climax of the anticlerical campaign being waged in the late 1920s and '30s, which is why it has left such an indelible trace on popular memory.

Given its symbolic status, Stalin designed the square that had been cleared by the cathedral's demolition to be a site for the construction of the Palace of the Soviets, which was envisaged as the paramount monument to Soviet Communism. The Palace of the Soviets was never built—just as the Communist future that it was meant to commemorate was never realized. Yet the design of the palace, drafted by Boris Iofan in the mid-1930s and, only after numerous revisions, approved by Stalin, is still regarded—justly—as the most notable architectural project of the Stalin era. For although the Palace of the Soviets was never actually erected, the project itself served as a prototype for all Stalinist architecture thereafter. This is particularly conspicuous in the notorious Stalinist skyscrapers built in the postwar years that even now largely dominate Moscow's skyline. Just as official ideology at that time claimed that Communism was being prepared and prefigured by Stalinist culture, Stalin's skyscrapers were assembled around the nonexistent Palace of the Soviets in order to herald its advent. However, in the course of de-Stalinization during the 1960s, this locale was given over to build a gigantic open-air swimming pool, the Moskva, in lieu of the palace; and, like the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, it subsequently enjoyed enormous popularity. The pool was kept open even in the winter; and for several months each year vast clouds of steam could be seen from all around, lending the entire prospect the air of a subterranean hell. But this pool can also be viewed as a place where Moscow's population could cleanse themselves of the sins of their Stalinist past. One way or another, it is precisely its memorable location that makes this swimming pool the most dramatic embodiment of the "modernist" cultural consciousness of the 1960s and '70s: It represents a radical renunciation of any type of architectural style, it is like swimming free beneath a clear sky, the "degree zero" of architecture.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the swimming pool was emptied and replaced by an exact replica of the demolished Cathedral of Christ the Savior. Just how true to the original this copy in fact is has become a highly debated and contentious issue in Russia. But ultimately, all that counts is the underlying intention, which unquestionably is to construct the nearest possible replica of the demolished church—which functions symbolically as an exact copy of the historical past, of Russian cultural identity. Far from being a monument to the new Russian nationalism or a symptom of the resurrection of anti-Western sentiment, the rebuilding of the cathedral was designed to celebrate the defeat of the Soviet universalist, modernist, avant-garde past and the return to the folkloristic Russian identity, an identity that can be easily inscribed in the new capitalist international order. And at first glance, such a symbolic return to national identity seems to be especially smooth in this case: during the entire Soviet period, the site of the cathedral remained, as I said, a void, a blank space—like a white sheet of paper that could be filled with every kind of writing. Accordingly, to reconstruct the old cathedral on its former site, there was no need to remove, to destroy any existing buildings. The Soviet time manifests itself here as an ecstatic interruption of historical time, as a pure absence, as materialized nothingness, as a void, a blank space. So it seems that if this void disappears, nothing will be changed: the deletion will be deleted, and a copy will become identical with the original—without any additional historical losses.

But in fact, this reconstruction demonstrates that the movement to the past—as, earlier, the movement to the future—only brings the country again and again to the same spot. And this spot, this point from which the panorama of Russian history can be seen in its entirety has a name: Stalinism. The culture at the time of Stalin was already an attempt to reappropriate the past after a complete revolutionary break with it—to find in the historical garbage pit left behind by the Revolution certain things that could be useful for the construction of the new world after the end of history. The key principle of Stalinist dialectical materialism, which was developed and sealed in the mid-1930s, is embodied in the so-called *law of the unity and the struggle of opposites*. According to this principle, two contradictory statements can be simultaneously valid. Far from being mutually exclusive, "A" and "not A" must be engaged in a dynamic relationship: in its inner structure, a logical contradiction reflects the real conflict between antagonistic historical forces,

which is what constitutes the vitally dynamic core of life. Thus, only statements that harbor inner contradictions are deemed "vital" and hence true. That is why Stalin-era thinking automatically championed contradiction to the detriment of the consistent statement.

Such great emphasis on contradictoriness was of course a legacy dialectical materialism had inherited from Hegel's dialectic. Yet in the Leninist-Stalinist model, as opposed to Hegel's postulates, this contradiction could never be historically transcended and retrospectively examined. All contradictions were constantly at play, remained constantly at variance with one another, and constantly made up a unified whole. Rigid insistence on a single chosen assertion was counted as a crime, as a perfidious assault on this unity of opposites. The doctrine of the unity and the struggle of opposites constitutes the underlying motif and the inner mystery of Stalinist totalitarianism—for this variant of totalitarianism lays claim to unifying absolutely all conceivable contradictions. Stalinism rejects nothing: it takes everything into its embrace and assigns to everything the position it deserves. The only issue that the Stalinist mindset finds utterly intolerable is an intransigent adherence to the logical consistency of one's own argument to the exclusion of any contrary position. In such an attitude, Stalinist ideology sees a refusal of responsibility toward life and the collective, an attitude that could only be dictated by malicious intentions. The basic strategy of this ideology can be said to operate in the following manner: If Stalinism has already managed to unite all contradictions under the sheltering roof of its own thinking, what could be the point of partisanly advocating just one of these various contrary positions? There can ultimately be no rational explanation for such behavior, since the position in question is already well looked after within the totality of Stalinist ideology. The sole reason for such a stubborn act of defiance must consequently lie in an irrational hatred of the Soviet Union and a personal resentment of Stalin. Since it is impossible to reason with someone so full of hatred, regrettably the only remedy available is reeducation or elimination.

This brief detour into the doctrine of Stalinist dialectical materialism allows us to formulate the criterion that intrinsically determined all artistic creativity during the Stalin era: Namely, each work of art endeavored to incorporate a maximum of inner aesthetic contradictions. This same criterion also informed the strategies of art criticism in that period, which always

reacted allergically whenever a work of art was found to be expressing a clearly defined, consistently articulated, and unambiguously identifiable aesthetic position—the actual nature of this position was considered secondary. Contrary to the explicit and aggressive aesthetics of the artistic avant-garde, the aesthetic of the Stalin era never defined itself in positive terms. Neither Stalinist ideology nor Stalinist art politics is in any sense "dogmatic." Rather, Stalinist state power acts as an invisible hand behind the heterogeneity, diversity, and plurality of individual artistic projects—censoring, editing, and combining these projects according to its own vision of the ideologically appropriate mix. This means that the symbolic void on which the new-old cathedral was built is not such a blank space after all. It is an invisible, internal space of power hidden behind the diversity of artistic forms. That is why, in the present context, it became so easy to coordinate—if not to identify—this invisible hand of Stalinist state power with the invisible hand of the market. Both operate in the same space behind the diverse, heterogeneous, pluralistic surface. Far from signifying a rebirth of Russian cultural identity, the cathedral's copy in the center of Moscow symbolizes a revival of Stalinist cultural practices under the new market conditions.

This example of the revival of Soviet Stalinist aesthetics as an effect of postmodern taste, which I have tried to elaborate at some length, illustrates a certain point on the relationship between art and politics. Art is, of course, political. All attempts to define art as autonomous and to situate it above or beyond the political field are utterly naive. But having said that, we should not forget that art cannot be reduced to a specific field among many other fields that function as arenas for political decisions. It is not enough to say that art is dependent on politics; it is more important to thematicize the dependence of political discourses, strategies, and decisions on aesthetic attitudes, tastes, preferences, and predispositions. As I have tried to show, radical politics cannot be dissociated from a certain aesthetic taste—the taste for the universal, for the degree zero of diversity. On the other hand, liberal, market-oriented politics is correlated with the preference for diversity, difference, openness, and heterogeneity. Today, the postmodern taste still prevails. Radical political projects have almost no chance today of being accepted by the public because they do not correlate with the dominant aesthetic sensibility. But the times are changing. And it is very possible that in the near future a new sensibility for radical art and politics will emerge again.