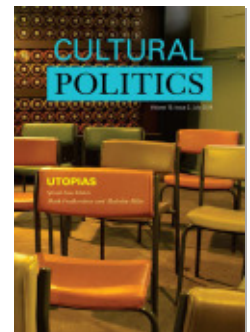System, Totality, Representation: "Utopian Globalist"
Gestures of Dissent in Late Cold War Visual Arts and Culture

Jonathan Harris

SYSTEM, TOTALITY, REPRESENTATION

"Utopian Globalist" Gestures of Dissent in Late Cold War Visual Arts and Culture

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Abstract This essay highlights post-1945 intertwined aesthetic and political radicalisms in the visual arts, drawing on key examples from the United States and Western Europe in the decades from the end of World War II to the present. It seeks to explore the complex relations between selected artists, practices, and products, and nascent spectacular global capitalism (including some of spectacle's "technical means of production," such as perspectival representations). Drawing on elements of the well-known critique of spectacle developed by Guy Debord, the essay posits a tradition, or lineage, of "utopian globalism" in the visual arts, traceable back to the time of the Russian Revolution and active, in mutating form, across the world in the period from 1917 up until the late capitalist 1990s. In a discussion linking artworks by Vladimir Tatlin, Pablo Picasso, and Joseph Beuys to the work of 1960s artists Robert Smithson, Jan Dibbets, and Douglas Huebler, the essay posits the existence of a tradition of "anti-anti-utopian" thinking and art making. Inspired by Fredric Jameson's recent analyses of science fiction, the identification of this tradition constitutes a means to keep alive the possibility of systemic social transformation and an end to destructive and self-destructive Cold War legacies.

Keywords utopian globalism; spectacular capitalism; anti-anti-utopianism; globalization

Spectacular Global Capitalism and "Anti-Anti-Utopias"

If Euroasian modernisms in visual art in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries had always maintained critical relation to political and ideological forces both progressive and reactionary—each side incubating utopian elements drawn from Marxian-socialist discourses, on the one hand, and nationalist-resurgent themes, on the other—then, by the late 1950s, a new and distinct formation became discernible. This lineage, which I have dubbed "utopian globalist," can be traced back to Vladimir Tatlin's ecumenical symbolism materialized in his tower design, the *Model for a Monument to the Third International* (1919), and forward to its final instantiation in the large "poststudio" installation projects conceived and built by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, culminating in their *Wrapped Reichstag* (1971–95). This lineage, however, is not mappable onto the conventional story of political modernism found in standard art history centered on iconographic, style-based accounts (e.g., Gustave Courbet's realism, agit-prop design in revolutionary Russia and Germany, Soviet socialist realism). The two accounts certainly overlap, but my concern is with the much deeper transformations in materials, ideals, and social collectives within, and out of which, the utopian globalists produced their greatest works.

By the mid-1950s, West German artist Joseph Beuys—linchpin in the lineage—had broken with Soviet Marxist socialism as well as refused the US capitalist-democratic rhetoric that had helped power the rise, since 1947, of American abstract painting by deeply pessimistic left anarchists such as Mark Rothko. Utopian globalism melded in the later 1950s with a range of New Left social and political formations in Europe and the United States—in a Cold War atomic apocalyptic culture within which holding out for transformative social change became at once utopian and a practical feature of maintaining dissent. These two facets were to become ever more closely bound up together in the work and activism of the artists already mentioned, along with that of Pablo Picasso after his decision in 1944 to join (and remain in, until his death) the French Communist Party. By the mid-1960s, the crises in the mainstream left political parties in Europe and the United States, as well as in the communist parties affiliated with the Soviet Union, had deepened. Beuys, in his "actions" and statements, condemned Western democratic-capitalist and Soviet communist states as constituent parts of a single totalitarian order, prefiguring aspects of Guy Debord's analysis published in 1967. The stakes for twentieth-century utopian globalist art were getting high (Harris 2011, 2013a).

Even "comrade Picasso" had grown somewhat quieter over the years in his public defense of the Soviet Union, voicing criticism of its military interventions into the territories of its Eastern European allies (Harris 2013a: 18–64; 2013b). He had voiced pleasure, too, for instance, in seeing prints of his 1951 painting *Massacre in Korea*—an intended attack on American military intervention in south Asia—unveiled by anti-Russian demonstrators on the streets in Warsaw in 1956 (Morris and Grunenberg 2010: 44–51). Picasso and Beuys maintained resolutely anti-imperialist stances during the 1950–75 period from the beginnings of US involvement in the Korean War to its eventual defeat in Vietnam. Both were perceived to be mordantly anti-American.

In contrast, John Lennon and Yoko

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Ono's public and private antiwar activities—given their periods of residence and desire to be allowed to remain in the United States—were more nuanced, although, like many politicized US artists and performers, they repeatedly agitated against the US military invasion of Vietnam and attacked its government's simultaneous repression of domestic dissent (Harris 2013a: 211–45). Sculptor Robert Smithson's 1970 "found object" construction *Partly Demolished Woodshed* was constructed at Kent State University in Ohio by loading tons of earth onto the roof until the central beam cracked. A few months later, four student antiwar protestors were shot to death by National Guard troops on the campus and someone sprayed "May 4 Kent 70" onto the woodshed's side. It stood for a number of years, before its demolition by the college authorities, as a lugubrious if inadvertent monument to this era of endemic violence in US political life (Flam 1996). In contrast, the Artists' Tower of Protest, built four years earlier in Los Angeles, invoked, if weakly, something of Vladimir Tatlin's proposed Ur-utopian globalist tower (Frascina 1999; Harris 2013a: 76–117).

Debord argued in his *The Society of the Spectacle* that the Cold War era after 1945 ushered in the epoch of a single spectacular world system divided up between two variants of power that, together, constituted a totality of global domination under the intermeshed rule of state and capital. Though the US and Soviet power blocs might present themselves "officially" as "irreconcilable antagonisms," beneath this surface of conflict they reflected, he claimed, "that system's fundamental unity, both internationally and within each nation" (2004: 27). The rivalry between these blocs was more apparent than real since, together, they actually constituted a global system based on capital accumulation—whether by private capitalist corporations, as in the United States, or by the state acting as a surrogate ruling class, as in the Soviet Union. Their separate interests were merely sectoral, subsumed within a development that has created a "universal system" that had "the planet for its field of operations" (27).

Debord acknowledged significant differences in these sectoral power organizations—citing, for example, "local manifestations" that include "totalitarian specializations of social communication and control." Nevertheless, in the system overall, these sectoral specializations have a role within what he called "a *worldwide division of spectacular tasks*" ([1994] 2006: 6–7; italics in original). The concepts of *system*, *totality*, *order*, and *representation* have, I will argue in this essay, ranges of connotation and significance that flood across the analytically distinguishable areas of economic, political, cultural, and artistic activity. They also, inevitably, introduce and require historical and geographical qualification—as the terms *earth*, *global*, and *world* themselves ricochet meanings back into the realms of human life, its social organization and cultural forms.

Life activities and related human consciousness are always, apart from anything else, matters of conceptualization and modes of understanding—Debord's own distinctive language and forms of argument never let us forget that. The identifications of *West* and *East* in Cold War rhetoric, for example, were driven by particular images with implied meanings and values. Now, apparently beyond the Cold War that formally ended in 1991 with the self-termination of the Soviet Union, the dominance of Western "new world order" perspectives in how the globe is named

and seen is perhaps even stronger—though the origins of this system of ordering long predate the Cold War (Said 2003, 1993; Bernal 1991; Williams 1983). Notions of *West* and *East* have aligned in complex ways, too, with ideas of *North* and *South*, and also with senses of *develope*d ("first") and *underdeveloped* ("second"/"third") worlds. Together, this system of terms forms a stated as well as implicit ideological discourse on power and dominance in and of the earth—economically and politically, as well as conceptually. The history of this territorializing language and its elaboration is extensive. It can be traced back to the sixteenth century in its emergent modern form—from, that is, an abstracting and dividing sense of a Christian West and a Muslim East; then, by World War I, to the notion of Western and Eastern fronts against Germany; on, then, to World War II, with its Western powers and a temporary Eastern ally—the Soviet Union—against Germany again. After 1945, the full Cold War sense of these terms arrived, abstracted once again to opposed senses of *West* and *East*, suggesting an absolute contrast between utterly different and opposed social orders (Williams 1983: 201–2).

Debord's claim that this bifurcation underpinned an actually single system is, in one sense at least, undeniable. After all, the terms *West* and *East*, forming a Cold War rhetorical dyad, came to depend on each other in order to achieve any meaning at all. Their ideological opposition meant "we are this because you are that," but also "we are this because you are not this" and "we are this because you are its opposite." Nevertheless, the stability of these meanings within this antagonism was always dependent on a variety of volatile factors and conditions. For example, as soon as some "third-world" countries

in the 1950s tried to assert independence from both Cold War power blocs, the dominant contrast dividing up the world neatly between West and East might have become undermined, and indeed, to an extent it was (Ryan 1990; Kahin 1956). For the domestic populations of Western Europe and North America, those who defended the US-led power bloc of course wanted *West* to mean "free-market liberal democracy" against what they called the "communist tyranny" of the Soviet Union's *East* (Žižek 2001).

The end of the Cold War and the rise to significance globally of environmental concerns saw 1990s ecological campaigns and related sustainable "life-style" movements partly displace traditional socialist movements around the world (Harris 2013a: 246–86). It became clear that the received terms *developed world* and *developing world* had referred, in normative fashion, to extents and paths of typically Cold War–era industrialization and related urbanization. *Development*, in these senses, was thought coterminous with modernity and social progress, though, of course, very significant political, institutional, and ideological differences had characterized Western democratic capitalist and Soviet communist industrial modes of production during the twentieth century. Common to both Western and Eastern development, however—here confirming Debord's thesis of a single world system—had been the use of alienating "Taylorist" factory mass-production techniques, the intensive mechanization of agriculture, and the maximum exploitation of natural resources, without heed to their sustainability or impact on the earth's ecosystems (Meadows et al. 1979, 2004; Sandbrook et al. 1992; Panjabi 1997; Kirk 2008). Utopian globalist art from the mid-1960s onward began to demonstrate and

explore aspects of an emergent ecological consciousness, including varying critiques of acquisitive mode-of-production materialism in the Western societies. Some of Beuys's works are relatively early examples, such as his *7,000 Oaks* tree planting project established at Documenta 7 in Kassel, Germany, in 1982 (Thistlewood 1995: 107–28; MacDonald 1998: 304–400).

There are playful, if ambiguous, variants of dawning eco-awareness, too, in Ono's solo performance work from the earlier 1960s, along with examples by the Americans dubbed "land," "earth," or "conceptual" artists during the later 1960s, including Douglas Huebler, Robert Morris, Robert Smithson, and Michael Heizer. Émigré Bulgarian Christo's wrapping projects and other interventions into the human architectural and natural environments contributed to utopian globalism's ecological seam of concerns from the 1960s up until the 1990s and beyond (Kastner and Wallis 2010). (It also became a theme related to several of the Unilever-sponsored works exhibited in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern since 2000; these include Olafur Eliasson's *Weather Project* [2003] interpreted as a spectacular meditation on global warming, Rachel Whiteread's *Embankment* (2005–6), a terrain of white boxes that connoted a world of disappearing polar ice, and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's *TH.2058* [2008–9], a vision of a future permanent London rain environment [Harris 2013a: 316–32].)

Some of these works suggested that catastrophic ecological disaster was the likely dystopian future of the industrialized world as it was developing in both its capitalist and "actually existing" communist variants. Radical political and imaginative thinking about futures in the West, as a result of the Cold War standoff, was rendered mostly impossible. *Utopia*, as

Fredric Jameson and others have argued, by the mid-twentieth century had become an ideological equivalent for Stalinist communism in the Soviet Union, although this equation, closing down real consideration of a genuinely noncapitalist future for the world, was achieved much more successfully in the United States than, for instance, in the countries of Western Europe (Jameson 2007: xlxvi; Harris and Williams 2011: 117–41). Though it's untrue that the Russian Bolshevik elites adhered to any clear or systematic notion of utopia as the basis for their organization of Soviet society in the 1920s and 1930s, the Soviet Union came in the West, and perhaps the East, too, to symbolize the ideal of a planned perfect system gone perfectly wrong, a total radical solution turned totalitarian social order (Jameson 2007: 142–69).

The conclusion that Cold War, Western democratic-capitalist ideologues sought to draw from this representation of history was that *any* attempt at radical social transformation was actually doomed to fail *because* it was premised at this systemic, totalized level. Such an effort could only, and inevitably, produce its opposite: the totalitarian slavery they pointed to in the Soviet Union, where they claimed that a utopian experiment had been attempted. The prospects of a globally integrated radical and systemic effort to deal with impending ecological catastrophe continues to be blocked partly because of the late persistence of such Cold War apocalyptic pessimism, although potential and actual conflicting interests between capital and state—despite their practical interrelation—also actively prevent such a necessarily wholistic initiative (Hardt and Negri 2001: 304–14).

Utopian globalist art's statements and actions may be read, then, as kinds of ameliorating hyperidealist (though also

actually material), productive, "radical voluntarist" gestures that responded to this suffocating denial of the possibility of radical systemic change. Such gestures included Lennon and Ono's "War is over! if you want it"' stipulation (mounted in a poster ad campaign in capital cities across the world in 1969, the same year as their Montreal "bed-in" event), US artist Douglas Huebler's infinite project "to photograph all the peoples of the world," and Christo's 1995 *Wrapped Reichstag* installation/performance that materially produced a wholly transformed image-object, in a masking process that symbolically denied the forces and realities that the building had represented in the political history of Europe and the world in the twentieth century (Harris 2013a: 281–315). These works constitute examples of what Jameson called for at the beginning of his account of science fiction utopias: considered forms of "anti-anti-utopian" thinking and envisioning, keeping alive the possibility of systemic transformation and an end to the destructive and self-destructive Cold War legacy (Jameson 2007: xvi). (Not much progress to report on that score, however.)

Social totality is both a referent and a concept—it *is* the world, and it is how the world is seen and represented. The two, in human understanding, are always inseparable: we act in and on the world with knowledge of what the world is and with a sense of what *it is for*. Moments of intense social crisis in later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history helped to engender some of the utopias (projected totalities of transformed human life) that inspired revolutionaries in Russia and elsewhere, although these were never limited to socialist or communist imaginaries. Earlier utopias had been based on a very large number of heterogeneous theories and images of ideal social order and human purpose (Jameson 2007: 10–41). Tatlin had drawn on elements from a number of these in his model for the tower, indicating that his utopianism was ecumenically physical and metaphysical, with emphatic spiritual and cosmic elements to it. Something of this legacy survived in the arcadian, mythic aspects of Picasso's Cold War paintings (such as the 1952 *War* and *Peace* murals at Vallauris in France), in many of Beuys's actions and sculptures, and in some of the conceptualist projects from the later 1960s and 1970s. Globalism's utopic face, while social and collective, was also subjective, individualistic, and rooted in the Coleridgean ideal of human imagination as a primal visionary force in the world (Coleridge [1817] 2008: chaps. xii and xiii).

The "Conquest of Space," Spectacular Art, and Globalist Visions in the Visual Arts

The totality of the actual world can never wholly be seen or known, but it has been and may be imagined, ordered, and projected in thought and representations. Debord noted that the society of the spectacle, on the one hand, expresses "the total practice of one particular economic and social formation," while, on the other, it constitutes "a vast inaccessible reality" (Debord [1994] 2006: 15, 2004: 9). He may mean to convey here the interrelation but nonidentity of ideological and experiential aspects to human consciousness and action in the world. For him, one result of the separations brought about by spectacle's "global social praxis" is precisely a sundering of relation between "reality on the one hand and image on the other" (Debord [1994] 2006: 13). This is the foundation of all human alienation in capitalist society and Debord's account is almost unremittingly pessimistic in its tone and judgment. The spectacle's conquest

of global social praxis through its effect on the world, including its domination through image, necessarily entails discussion of the role of the device of perspectival rendering in the realm of visual representations.

The art historian of Renaissance culture Erwin Panofsky, like Debord, had also been, for a time, preoccupied with questions of totality, order, system, visual representation, and the "conquest of space." His well-known essay *Perspective as Symbolic Form* was written and published, in German, at about the time that narrative film with synchronized sound was becoming ubiquitous around the world (Panofsky [1927] 1997). Panofsky's concern was with how a technical system of originally hand-drawn visual linear representation—with complex roots in ancient Greek culture and society—had, by the early twentieth century, evolved into the globally dominant worldview: a technically highly diverse means of ordering, presenting, and giving meaning to phenomena that had seemingly conquered all others. This single-point perspectival system, based on a series of mathematical-geometric abstractions, had homogenized the appearance of all things represented and engendered the modern sense of a theoretical infinity beyond what could be seen, or conceptualized, from our human viewpoint on earth. Linear perspective's work on the world—like spectacle's—was a kind of objectification of the subjective. Panofsky called its fundamental reorganization of vision and representation a "carrying over of artistic objectivity into the domain of the phenomenal." One-point perspective united *Welt* (world), *Raumgefühl* (sense of space), and *Weltgefühl* (sense of world), transforming human "psychophysiological space" into "mathematical space." It also inspired Tatlin in the designs for his tower and hence constituted, as both symbol and

constitutive feature of modernity, another resource for the utopian globalists (Panofsky [1927] 1997: 31, 34, 66, 72).

Linear perspective de-theologized visions of the universe and space, as Panofsky suggested, putting human social perspective at the center of the visible and knowable world. Though it certainly intermeshed with religious institutional ideologies in the art of the Renaissance in Europe—helping further to entrench religious power in the autocratic Christian states between the sixteenth and the late eighteenth centuries—perspective also began a process that transformed cultural and artistic practices globally (Baxandall 1972; Crary 1990). Whatever the details and stages in perspective's long technical history, Panofsky emphasized the broad societal significance its development in all forms of representation—such as painting, theater-stage set design, photography, and film—implied. Moreover, as what he called an "objectification" of a subjective mode of seeing, he observed that "modern perspective" presented problems involving the "great antitheses" of human life and social order—"free will versus norm, individualism versus collectivism, the irrational versus the rational." On such matters, he noted, "epochs, nations and individuals" had to take up "especially emphatic and visible positions" (Panofsky [1927] 1997: 67–68; Holly 1984: 155–56).

Panofsky's understanding of linear perspective was thus also a kind of globalist one. Both as a set of conventions and a conceptualization of space and things, perspectival representation—especially in its combination with oil painting—established the world as a terrain of objects within it to be conquered and possessed. Perspective became implicated within imperializing visions of the possession of a whole world of things and meanings (Burgin 1986).

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With its inception in Western pictorial design from the Renaissance onward, linear perspective produced a rationalization of space and world, a cultural mode of seeing and of being seen. It places us in a/the world. *World* refers both to "age of man" (to a specific, conditional time and place) and to the earth understood as a mappable totality. Perspective shapes but narrows human vision and understanding through its conventions and related cultural attitudes. These have, over time, become naturalized and globalized: the perspective devices deployed within Renaissance paintings became the "perspective of the world," as forces in the West honed this culturally colonizing way of seeing all others (Panofsky [1927] 1997: 60–61).

Perhaps Debord also had linear perspective in mind when he talked of spectacle's material reconstruction of the religious illusion. Spectacular technology had not dispersed the religious mists into which human beings had projected their own alienated powers. It has merely brought those mists down to earth (Debord 2004: 12; Panofsky [1927] 1997: 72). And linear perspective for Panofsky—like spectacle for Debord—is an ordering of totality that hives off, separates, reality from representation. A painting in linear perspective, he notes, may be inconsistent with the world around it, but nevertheless, and despite this, it operates its own "consolidation and systematization of the external world." Drawing on the work of the social philosopher Ernst Cassirer, Panofsky suggested that perspective is not an attempt to imitate the world as it is actually experienced but rather an effort to appropriate and control it in a certain way. Noting that Plato had condemned perspective "because it distorted the 'true proportions' of things, and replaced reality and the *nomos* (law) with subjective

appearance and arbitrariness," Panofsky remarked:

The most modern aesthetic thinking accuses it, on the contrary, of being the tool of a limited and limiting rationalism. . . . But this polarity is really the double face of one and the same issue. . . . Whether one reproaches perspective for evaporating "true being" into a mere manifestation of seen things, or rather for anchoring the free and, as it were, spiritual idea of form to a manifestation of mere things seen, is in the end little more than a question of emphasis. (Panofsky [1927] 1997: 67–70)

The phrase "free and, as it were, spiritual idea of form" here invokes both subjective autonomy and the conditions of alienation in social life that separate humans from this state. Though Panofsky certainly was no Marxist (though he was a Hegelian dialectician), his account cannot but encounter questions of power, including the power to represent and to have oneself represented.

He mentions the concept of power explicitly, first, in relation to his discussion of perspective and, second, in relation to art understood as a cultural practice. His reference above to "the most modern aesthetic thinking" and the "spiritual idea of form" indicate the conjuncture of 1920s early, and utopian, avant-garde art in which he was writing (Panofsky [1927] 1997: 153–54, n. 73). Panofsky then indicates perspective's role in the service of power: "The history of perspective may be understood with equal justice as a triumph of the distancing and objectifying sense of the real, and as a triumph of the distance-denying human struggle for control; it is as much a consolidation and systematization of the external world, as an extension of the domain of the self" (Panofsky [1927] 1997: 67–68). Further:

"Art . . . is the realizing and objectifying settlement (or conflict), aiming at effective results, between a forming power and a material to be overcome" (Panofsky [1927] 1997: 321–39; Podro 1982: 179–84). How suggestive yet still ambiguous these words are!

They indicate, however, that linear perspective became a crucial device of spectacle found in drawing and painting, architectural design, photography, and film in the twentieth century and now also in the forms and practices of computerized mapping and virtual representational modes used in games, designs, and planning of the built environment, and much more besides. As such a "forming power," therefore, perspective appropriates the "external world," denying "distance" within the "objectifying" systems it creates and interrelates. It constitutes, therefore, a key technology of global spectacle and globalization.

By the later 1960s some artists, such as Jan Dibbets, in works like his 1968 black-and-white photograph *Perspective Corrections (Square with Two Diagonals)*, were attempting to sabotage—symbolically, again as gesture—the powers of perspective in its formation of the image of the world and the world as image. Dibbets constructed a rectangle from string and placed it on a field of grass. The camera's viewpoint read and presented the rectangle, when photographed, as a perfect square, which appears to contradict the perspectival cues ordering the image. The consequence of this is that the illusory "perfect square" appears to have been superimposed on the photograph, and the viewer recognizes that the usually naturalized perspective view is actually a conventional, learned mode of seeing. This is a form of enlightening *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect): the recognition cannot

unite reality and representation but it demonstrates how the latter, for instance, through perspectival seeing, can mask, or masquerade as, the former (Bloch [1962] 1970: 120–25).

Utopian globalist art has itself repeatedly used evolving spectacular technologies in its own attempts to critique and subvert global capitalism. Photography and film, both as primary and documentary representational modes, have been intrinsic to its works and historical development since the early twentieth century. Tatlin's original model has existed for many decades only through surviving photographic evidence. Picasso was one of the first artists to enlist photography and its mass reproducibility in order to disseminate knowledge of his propagandistic paintings of the 1937–1950s era and to take advantage of reproductive print technologies in the many drawings and designs he made for the Communist Party in France. Beuys, in the early 1960s, saw that television could massively extend the public for his actions and political statements. Lennon and Ono conceived their bed-in in Montreal intrinsically as a televisual phenomenon for global consumption. Huebler and others used photography partly because it was a cheap and easily distributed means for displaying works of various kinds. Christo relied on print technologies through which to sell sketches of his planned wrapped buildings that financed the cost of undertaking these projects—which were then filmed and televised in order to achieve maximum publicity. At the time of their making and subsequently, then, all these artists have had their works commodified, mass-reproduced, and globally disseminated through print, film, television, and other mass broadcast forms. The utopian globalist artists thus internalized the technologies and techniques of spectacle

within their gestures of its very refusal and destruction.

If the character of the spectacle is the "visible negation of life," Debord observed, then it is a "negation of life that has *invented a visual form for itself*" (Debord [1994] 2006: 14; italics in original). In one sense, utopian globalist art cannot but constitute part of this spectacle, because, as Debord notes, as "culture becomes completely commodified it tends to become the star commodity of spectacular society" (Debord 2004: 107). And if the "stars"—the celebrities of spectacular culture—function within the system "as superficial objects that people can identify with in order to compensate for the fragmented productive specializations that they actually live," then artists in the twentieth century, indeed some of the most successful, have formed part of this imaged compensation. Debord's words might be read here as if he was specifically discussing a "Picasso" or a "Beuys" or a "Lennon and Ono." The function of these artist-celebrities, he notes, is "to act out various lifestyles or socio-political viewpoints in a *full, totally free manner*" (Debord 2004: 29; italics in original).

Avant-gardes in Western European art had, since the late nineteenth century, been rooted in modern artists' distance and self-alienation from conventional, bourgeois society. By the 1910s, this distance and alienation had mutated into an active oppositional stance linked to the participation of some in revolutionary socialist politics in Europe. Tatlin symbolizes an early moment in this radicalism, while the constructivists, Dadaists, and then a faction of the surrealists continued it into the later 1920s and 1930s. After World War II, artists' groupings close to Debord himself attempted to reinvigorate this activism, under radically changed conditions (Spector 1997; McDonough 2004).

As a premier star in the global spectacular celebrity system of the 1950s, Picasso, though a Communist Party member, was considered by high-ranking politicians, such as then US vice president Richard D. Nixon, to be a "high-value" individual who might still be "turned" and made a useful propagandistic symbol for American Cold War values (Cowling 2006: 182). The French Communist Party leadership similarly tolerated Picasso's occasionally voiced dissidence, as well as his casual disregard for its insipid socialist realist nostrums, because of his global celebrity status. Functionaries of all stripes realized that Picasso, as name and persona, was worth far more to them than they were to him. If it has been pop-music stars and actors who have occupied this celebrity-activist role most fully and visibly since the 1970s, then visual artists, in earlier decades in the century, helped to prepare the way (Denselow 1990; Eyerman and Jamison 1998; Doggett 2007; Richey and Ponte 2011). Their commitment to "causes," those both distantly utopian and immediately practical, can be traced at least back to Tatlin. Picasso's paintings *Guernica* (1937) and *Massacre in Korea* were intended as punctual protests at contemporary events in the world, whatever other significance they may have accrued since. Both these artists affiliated themselves with and spoke on behalf of what they believed to be genuine socialist movements (Egbert 1970: parts 1 and 2).

By the late 1960s, artist-stars such as Beuys, partly in reaction to the stalemate of Cold War antagonisms, had begun to disaffiliate from organized movements and to position themselves, theatrically and doctrinally, against mainstream party political systems. Instead, they presented themselves and their works within autonomous

campaigns and struggles of many kinds. Single-cause activism and related publicity events began to proliferate. These included, for instance, Beuys's 1966 action related to the Thalidomide drug scandal of the time, *Infiltration—homogen for grand piano, the greatest contemporary composer is the thalidomide child*, a performance at the Staatliche Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf. During this performance, Beuys wrapped a grand piano in felt, presenting it, metaphorically, as the potential creativity of disabled young people trapped inside their bodies that had been "muted" by the drug's harmful side effects caused before their birth. Lennon and Ono's bed-in against the war in Vietnam—also an avowedly "transparty political event"—followed, and the decades since have seen many other artists' events and works with manifest socio-political themes. Despite, then, the end of the communist movement as a global force in the 1990s and the continued incorporation of artists into the modern art museum and its related institutional apparatuses, a utopic belief and self-belief in artists as naturally radical, free, and revolutionary agents has persisted (Debord [1994] 2006: 129–47).

Theodor Adorno famously claimed that the time for a genuinely political art was over by the 1950s, peremptorily dismissing surrealism, the plays of Bertolt Brecht, and novels by Jean-Paul Sartre. The deep utopian impulse for freedom that he believed genuine art could still embody—only, however, through another process of distancing from actual reality— had migrated, he believed, into formal abstraction in music, in painting, and in literature. Somehow this managed to figure a state of autonomy and truth, a utopic "peace as a state of distinctness without domination," with the uselessness of such art confirming its successful resistance

to capitalism's instrumentalizations (Jay 1984: 159). Is Beuys, in bathetic contrast, to be placed then, tantalizingly, on the cusp between the 1930s "historic" avant-garde and the 1960s nascent postmodern avantgard*ist* machine of art-world celebrity publicity? Or is such a critical distinction itself hopelessly idealized? The utopian globalist lineage in the visual arts that I have traced suggests, on the whole, that it is: spectacle and critique of spectacle have been bound up together throughout, although spectacle's penetration has deepened.

Debord himself, on occasion, appeared not to hold out even Adorno's flicker of hope for an authentic resistance to capitalism. Once art, he observed, "develops into independent art in the modern sense, emerging from its original religious universe and becoming individual production of separate works, it too becomes subject to the movement governing the history of all separate culture. Its declaration of independence is the beginning of its end" (Debord 2004: 103). By the early 1970s, American critic Lucy Lippard's hope that conceptual art might evade art-dealing commodification processes had quickly been proved wrong. The antispectacular "Xerox sheet," the cheap "photographs documenting an ephemeral situation," a project such as Huebler's *Variable Piece no. 70 (In Process) Global* never meant to be completed, "words spoken but not recorded"—all would find their way in one form or another to market within the global village of modern communications. So much for the "dematerialization" of art (Lippard 2001: xxi)! Debord's now also well-known dismissal was historic in comparison. Dada, he said, had "sought to *abolish art without realizing it*; surrealism sought to *realize art without abolishing it*" (Debord 2004: 105–6; italics in original).

However, the structural fault—that is, the separation—lay in the social totality: the human system did need systemically to be transformed and the utopian globalist artists, however compromised themselves by spectacle, managed to incorporate this insight into their gestures.

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Jonathan Harris is professor at Winchester School of Art and is the author or editor of twenty books and the author of more than one hundred fifty essays and reviews. His 2001 study *The New Art History: A Critical Introduction* has been translated into Mandarin, Korean, Turkish, and, most recently, Farsi, in a new Iranian edition.