The Metropol Drama: Works texts

1a–1h:
Jacques Callot
French, 1592–1635

1a: *Le Malingreux* (*An Old Sick Man*)
1b: *La Mendiante aux béquilles* (*A Female Beggar on Crutches*)
1c: *Le mendiant aux béquilles coiffé d'un bonnet* (*A Beggar on Crutches Wearing a Cap*)
1d: *Le Mendiant aux béquilles et à la besace* (*A Beggar on Crutches with a Beggar's Bag*)
1e: *Le mendiant aux béquilles coiffé d'un chapeau et vu de dos* (*A Beggar on Crutches Wearing a Hat, Seen from Behind*)
1f: *L'Aveugle et son chien* (*A Blind Man and His Dog*)
1g: *Le Vieux mendiant à une seule béquille* (*An Old Beggar on a Single Crutch*)
1h: *Le Mendiant à la jambe de bois* (*A Beggar with a Wooden Leg*)
circa 1622

Gift of Joseph V. and Brenda F. Smith
Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, 2002.85m, 2002.85p, 2002.85d, 2002.85j, 2002.85e, 2002.85v, 2002.85q, 2002.85o

2:
A Bohemian Glassmaker
Glass Beads
14th century
Glass beads with contemporary hardware
The collection of Lynn Hauser and Neil Ross

In that tender area between currency and adornment, the bead is the traceable hustler. The bead's place in almost any community is greater than the role it plays in adornment. It also satisfies the primal affinity for pattern and ornament, as well as for communal recognition of the ego for the possessor of the beads. Beads and jewelry in general also provide example of where aesthetic desire (the wanting of something handsome) and the market intersect. A pebble in the pocket, circulating endlessly from adornment to currency back to adornment. In the 1500s and 1600s, the formulations of glass were tightly held industrial secrets limited to distinct geographic areas. In tracing glass beads one can follow the path they took from continental Europe to new spaces in the Americas and throughout the world. We learned in school that Manhattan and other parcels of now invaluable

land were traded/pilfered between the Lenape peoples and the colonizer for “mere beads,” goblets of glass cast in either Bohemia (like the ones hanging above) or Murano. In the education I received there was never any talk of why and how those leaders made that decision to trade. One can only imagine that it was a mix between the tip of the musket and the otherworldly beauty which those beads must have held for them.

3a:
An Aztec Ceramicist
Late Aztec

Ceramic Glyph
circa 1500–1530
Low fired ceramic

3b:
Ceramic Disc
circa 1520–1550
Ceramic

Lent by The Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, 95850, 95851

We make things to understand our world. In grappling with form, the stuff of the world allows for us to mix, match, and create anew out of the sensibilities or feelings that existed in the past. Sometimes this includes making space for a bully—contorting your old world to make sense of the impositions you currently find yourself involved in whether you like it or not, and figuring out how to survive oppression.

This terracotta disc is an incredibly rare example of the intersection of systems of conception and belief. The cross came from abroad, attached to a power that was awesome in its ability to shape and destroy and brutal in its logic. The disc form is a compositional unit that has existed in Mesoamerican aesthetics far back in the historical record. The artisan (most likely a man) that put tool to this clay modified this form, probably very known to him, in order to incorporate the new regimes of beliefs he was being exposed to. In this object two very different ideas about life’s energetic forces come into proximity with one another. The wind form, as rendered in the glyph, was the vehicle with which the late Aztec thought through the ways in which the energies of life were sacrificed and recirculated to help the living and to renew important life cycles, whether that is a harvest, a victory in battle, or quite literally being reborn. This way of thinking about the world was

forced into conversation with Spanish Catholicism's very different ideas about death as a redemption, judgment, and salvation embodied in the cross.

In comparison, the wind form of the glyph is part of a belief system the Aztecs built over generations to represent the cyclical nature of life and the recirculating energies of the Earth. Much like the divine, the wind is a life force that moves through all things, inhabiting the body, the Earth, and the sea. The wind also transported ships from Spain to the New World and with them brought the cross and the ideas that cascaded from it.

The form of the glyph was likely incorporated into a religious building. It is incredibly elegant in its construction, betraying the work of a master craftsperson. In contrast to the assurance with which the wind has been embodied in the glyph's clay, I find the disc slightly clumsier in its construction and wonder if that is due to its attempt to synthesize multiple belief systems. The glyph has been made hundreds if not thousands of times before by these hands; by comparison, there is a speculativeness to the disc, a new idea looking for a form.

4:

Aleksandr Rodchenko
Russian, 1891–1956
Pryzhok s shestom (*Pole Vault*)
1936
Gelatin silver print
The Art Institute of Chicago, Wirt D. Walker Endowment

"You don't take a photograph, you make it."
—Ansel Adams

By the 1930s the Soviet artist Aleksandr Rodchenko was forced by political expediency to mask his interests in the utopian and the rational within the dynamics of sport. This wink proposed sport not only as a place free from the political—a platonic space where bodies are articulated in celebration of their self-evident excellence—but also as a regime of constant striving for betterment. This insistence on the apolitical became increasingly difficult in Rodchenko's daily life. Note the date of this image: 1936. Historians have proposed that this photograph was taken by the artist at a practice in preparation for the Olympic Games on the outskirts of Berlin. If you know what I'm saying.

Pole Vault proposes a dynamic between the shaping and perfecting of the body and the building and shaping of new communities via Marx's venture. The contouring body of the athlete as a synecdoche

for the perfectible publics under the modernist project that was Marxism. There is also, in my mind, a conceit about the central place of subjectivity in this new world. The perspective of the photographer here exalts both artist and subject, as the athlete straddles the precipice of gravity and transcendence. Lifted above the past, entering into a new orientation with the earth. Much like in Giovanni Battista Tiepolo's ceilings and paintings, here the subjective eye of the artist orients the comprehension of the celestial scene, although in *Pole Vault* it is that of the artist rather than G_d as in the work of Tiepolo. It is through this highly idiosyncratic perspective that Rodchenko brings his own subjectivity as a witness to the spectacle of life to the center of our attentions.

Jumping back in time, the Olympic Games of Ancient Greece were testament to the cultural capital placed on athleticism, especially insofar as it was seen as a byproduct of discipline, progress, and aggression. Men would exercise in specialized, dedicated spaces (gymnasiums), where they would socialize and practice sport in the nude. Greek culture saw this as an opportunity to prepare for war and to train and shape young men. Youth were encouraged to exercise regularly to maintain the manly beauty of their bodies, as any sign of weakness or flabbiness was seen as undesirable. Hercules mythologically founded the Games to celebrate the completion of his "Herculean" tasks. Rendered as a statue by the ancients, he is notably more sturdily built than most depictions of the male form. His form is the one the Games were founded on, but given that the participants weren't demigods, they came to idealize and perhaps fetishize these masculine depictions of strength, speed, and the skilled deployment of controlled, athletic violence. Perhaps the oddest case study in this story is the Spartans. Physical performance was a core Spartan virtue. Glory in combat and individual achievement were made the stuff of legend and celebrated, the overarching goal being to produce warriors in sufficient numbers and quality to support the expansionary foreign policy of the city-state. In their politics you find the template for the far right's celebration of masculine aggressiveness.

Like the ancients, *Pole Vault* is a return to bodily excellence signaling the excellence of the state, but now within the dynamics of modernism. The "people's" technology of photography and the artist's eye meet the aestheticized body halfway. Meant to embody the values of the people rather than the individual, personality is subsumed into a larger narrative of progress that the Soviets projected onto Marx's writing. As an aside, it is interesting to think of this while at the same time holding in mind the much more bourgeois interest in the categorization of social type that August Sander's images of Raoul Hausmann propose here in the gallery.

If we wanted to extend outward this circle of thought, draw an arc linking our statue of Hercules, Rodchenko's *Pole Vault*, and Leni Riefenstahl's terrifying, beautiful film from the 1936 Berlin Olympics, *Olympia.* Sometimes opposing forces are so focused on destroying one another they end up speaking in the same tongue. One can see syncopated approaches between Rodchenko and Riefenstahl. One has to imagine that each was aware of the other's work. Looking at the tactics of Rodchenko and the approach of Riefenstahl suggests that Rodchenko's work is perhaps more

ideological than this small, discreet photograph may at first appear. Riefenstahl's film opens with a sequence of young, handsome men performing choreographed, classic feats of athleticism against a moody sky. *Olympia* can point us to see to the more subtle way *Pole Vault* performs a similar deification. This makes sense alongside Rodchenko's largely pro-state portfolio. Looking at these two projects from roughly the same time and roughly the same place but on extremely different ideological poles we can ask important questions, ones that remain even today, about the relations between aesthetics, ethics, and ideology as located within the male body.

5:

A Babylonian Metalsmith
Old Babylonian period, 2004–1595 BCE
Iraq
Coil Money
Silver
Purchased in Baghdad, 1930
Lent by the Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago (A9543)

Value never dies, it just takes on new form. It can take the form of the base materials of the Earth, jewelry, or painted images of women, passing from one hand to another. Currency is a technology to store and transfer value, changing it from something ample and dense into a social abstraction. This gradient between mass and material value versus the abstractions of worth is a spectrum.

Let's talk about the physical object of this coil. There is a strong sense of in-between-ness here. It can be seen as adornment, a quick way to read the relative prosperity of its wearer. It also comes to our eyes from mists of history, in a time before the abstraction of value from currency was complete. It was clipped in increments and exchanged at a rate set by the local sovereign, warlord, or bigwig, while at the same time holding base and elemental value, having been dug from the earth with simple tools and melted down, raw and primal.

The bloodlust that needs and desires can engender in people necessitates both manners and controls. Manners come first and are arguably the biggest regulator of people. In the absence of the state, something has to keep us from the leviathan. Getting along takes less energy than conflict. When community bonds are weak, there lies a need for more abstract ways for people to come to accord. These are our "mitigating controls"—forms of culture built through accrual that we use to negotiate difference and to build dignified communion between dissimilar peoples. Things like currencies, contracts, adornments, and the things we believe to be art all provide an arena where ideas about

value and the resolution of conflict can rub up against one another in ways that avoid and sublimate physical violence and redirect those wants into other forms.

6:

The City of Berlin
20,000 Mark City of Berlin Bond
1922
Offset lithograph
Gift of Joyce Z. and Jacob Greenberg
Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, 1993.35

7:

Robert Crumb
American, born 1943
A Short History of America
1979, printed in 1992
Seventeen-color hand-pulled serigraph
The collection of Lynn Hauser and Neil Ross

The continuous expansion of individual rights (the Enlightenment's own Big Bang) is not the human animal's natural destiny but an ideology of its own.

The increased mobility of both people and ideas under the cosmopolitan has provided an environment where time, place, and relation are in constantly shifting proximities. Through want and neglect, the fortunes of people and places rise and fall at increasing speed. The traditional bonds of relation—family, community, religion—are in constant flux, balanced between the forces of values and power, shifting into increasingly complex mosaics, providing new paths of liberty as well as impositions from which we seek to be freed. Up until the global pandemic, the rate of people moving from the periphery to larger and larger megacities was growing exponentially. Pressured by resource depletion both economic and environmental, people move, eroding local networks and customs while building paths to regulate economic and social relationships in new places.

A Short History of America's melancholy register may reflect the fact that historically Americans have been an unmoored, nomadic people. While the original indigenous cultures of the United States are deeply connected to land rights, many more have moved about upon this land under different

cultural systems. Slavery, imperialism, and the greed of opportunity have made sure of that. In the Eden cascading from the top left panel, awareness begat shame and if one buys into that, that same shame is also the origin story for all of humanity's resourcefulness, craft, innovation, and self-ornamentation. While what is considered indigenous to a place is most often tied to land and history, perhaps that definition forecloses another important part of the communal experience of being human: our capacity for renewal. Seen here, the narrative is one of progress, but a progress which is more cyclical than linear. Crumb acknowledges the rise and fall of people and places, and that within that arc something new can be made. Any place has an indigenous culture, even if that culture consists of gas stations, luncheonettes, and the potential for environmental calamity. Indigenous culture can have a permission to be defined as something born of people finding a new voice in authentic response to the time and place in which they stand.

8:

Regina José Galindo
Guatemalan, born 1974
Tierra [Digital captures from the video]
2013
Courtesy the artist and Prometeo Gallery Ida Pisani, Milan-Lucca

The monument was made to always remember; the memorial, to never forget—as they say. And both have had a relationship with violence from the beginning. But in thinking through Regina José Galindo's *Tierra*, for me the more pregnant question is exactly where to place ourselves within the gradient between two extreme poles: those of victim and perpetrator. The specifics are clear in this work. It is an authentic, theatrical, and real demand for remembrance of the state's policy of murder, carried out institutionally under Guatemalan President José Efraín Ríos Montt. However, thinking through the specific political context of *Tierra* also asks us to think through questions of the place of bodily empathy and a hierarchy of pains.

There is a triumphant monumentality to the work and it is beautiful at almost any scale, from YouTube to a darkened theater. In the video, two forms are reduced to icons, interacting with one another in the tradition of Neoclassical sculpture. The perpetrator of the backhoe is presented as the spear end of a set of decisions made very far away, from Guatemala City and beyond. The brutal violence of the backhoe rips into the land and by extension its people. It is data-driven and technological as much as it is an outcome of choices made by people.

The body we see is a body vulnerable in that moment to real violence and pain. Something is happening–how is this body going to be hurt? This person is not only the witness to the suffering, she also represents it. Portraying the body's vulnerability to wound in relation to the relentless

machinery, this body becomes a monument that is in imminent danger of violence. *Tierra's* acknowledgment of vulnerability is shown to us as idealized but not romanticized, nor is it romanticized in victimhood.

9a:
August Sander
German, 1876–1964
The Dadaist Raoul Hausmann, Posing

9b:
The Dadaist Raoul Hausmann, Sitting
From the portfolio, *Portraits of Artists*
1930, printed 1974

Gelatin silver prints
Gift of Lewis and Susan Manilow, Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago
2001.119f and 2001.119g

Weimer-era Berlin in between the World Wars saw an explosion of new social configurations. The development of sociology, which provided new tools with which to think about social organization, as well as an inner-war economy organized around increasingly sophisticated production and communication changed the way people were able to see and think about one another without the benefit of intimate knowledge. Within this context, August Sander carried on his audacious life project around a topology of social type, organizing a social taxonomy in Berlin's increasingly complicated and pressured metropole. Sander and his fellow travelers within the New Objectivity movement thought of almost nothing but essentialist categories when it came to people, and his topology reflects this. The New Objectivists' painting engaged in a fashionable reduction of individuality. Features are reduced to circles and simple forms; rendered faces have blank eyes, anonymous in the newly-lit city so often portrayed in the movies as wet, and at night. Sander in a different way also engaged in this universalization through type. The baker and the banker are just that—no need for names, backstories, and loved ones—and serve as representatives of systems of interaction and power that were being formed in real time.

Sander's friend and comrade Raoul Hausmann played with these conceits, turning Sander's earnest investigations into social type and caste on their head. With an embrace of roleplay and a flamboyant performance of individuality as conceptual art, Hausmann was one of the real polemicists of Dada, helping to define a movement that gave permission to play with meaning as a plastic form.

Hausmann was not a part of, but rather was adjacent to, the New Objectivists. He shared their interests but pushed back on their pieties. Here we see the artist giving himself the same liberty an actor gives to a character on the stage, and by extension implicating the masks we wear in social space. Identity is being proposed as plastic, transferable, and temporary during a moment in Berlin in which the multitudes are gaining a freedom to fashion who and how they present to others, cut off from the traditional bonds of family, god, and place. Sander took many images of Hausmann dragging/playing the roles of many different types of upstanding bourgeois citizens. From afar it almost looks like a collaboration between the two men. In this series Sander produced one photograph that accidentally told the truth in its authenticity: with Hausmann stripped down to his performer's costuming, Hausmann is perhaps showing us a more authentic presentation of the self, acknowledging the performative nature of how we reveal ourselves to strangers along the way.

10:

Chen Xiaoyun
Chinese, born 1971
Night/2.4KM
2009
Single-channel video (silent), 9 min. 30 sec.
Courtesy of the artist and ShanghART Gallery

Within the inputs and outputs of modern life are hidden, negative externalities.

Negative Externalities: When the production or consumption of a product results in a cost to a third party.

Marxism's alienated labor can also be hidden labor. In this day and age, we are asked to toil many miles and cultures away for the benefit of one another. Our inputs in this small way enters into a system that no one understands in total, like a blind man touching an elephant. Part of this intended blindness within global capitalism is the relegation to the shadows of the costs and burdens placed upon the individuals who work for others' behalf. We move away from loved ones in search of basic needs, food, and clothing, in the hope of betterment but quite often at the cost of dignity. This is a cost taken in the drudgery of the labor but also in what one loses of oneself in the suppression of psychic autonomy. It is often to the benefit of power that we do this alone, in the evening. This is not a bug but an attribute of a system constructed over decades.

In time people revolt at this imposition of loneliness, and when they do they are propelled forward with energy from one another. Rejoining in a solidarity of frustrations, building pressure, they are propelled forward by the momentum of communion in this alienated burden. In *Night/2.4KM* there is an impending violence, likely to culminate but never climax. It's quite hard to tell whether this is a

righteous violence— something that should happen—or whether these men (and it appears to be all men) are about to bring down an injustice upon an innocent.

11:

A Safavid Painter
Safavid Dynasty, 1501–1736, Iran
Two Women and Two Men Reading in the Countryside
17th century
Album page, ink, light color and gold on wove paper
Gift of Dr. Charles A. Hoffman (U.C., Ph.D. `32) and Mrs. Ruth H. Hoffman
Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, 1994.17

The pursuit of leisure is a fundamental goal of those in charge of their destiny. Refinement and ease of life, often discussed as byproducts of power, are actually part of its intent. As we know, desire for the privilege of time and space for repose is often held up by people less in charge of their time and destiny. *Two Women and Two Men Reading in the Countryside* depicts a lovely scene: people clearly of means (look at those coats!) hanging out in the countryside, taking in its beauty while reading and enjoying one another's company.

Creeping into this languid mise-en-scène are thoughts of the economic and social infrastructures that allow such leisure time. The Safavid Empire's innovations in the development of bureaucracy in early modern Iran involved allowing for a space of refinement and leisure not available to earlier generations. This in turn produced major developments in the fine arts, literature, and pleasure. But underneath the flowers allowed to bloom at the top of this structure was an efficiency and sophistication in combat and death that was shocking for its time. The newly developed technology of gunpowder allowed for the army to be fantastically centralized in its violence with a ruthlessness and specificity that was new. Previously, combat was up close and personal. Blood-stained hands were its aftermath. The gunpowder empire, as it was called, was predicated on artillery and required a degree of bureaucratic organization quite different than did armies primarily made of foot soldiers and cavalry. The transportation and logistics of cannons' continuing flows of gunpowder and shells required a conflation of industry, bureaucracy, and the military that weaved together society into new organizational systems, and certainly produced new ways to get rich on the blood of others.

The enormous profits generated by these new combat technologies and the influences of freshly conquered territory allowed for a degree of free time and space for the rich to engage with new pursuits. For example: hanging out in a garden and reading. It was also time of violence, complex geographies, and cultural intersection, and one can see that in the compositional logics at play here. The perspectival technologies from recent contact with distant cultures, especially European,

revealed new ways of rendering space to Safavid artists, who in turn adapted these artistic technologies to homegrown values and subjects, seen here in the way the two couples hold themselves. The couples are luxuriating in leisure, addressing only the book, curling in upon themselves with contentment. This can be seen as a counterpoint to the European ideal of the athletic body's perfection as a synecdoche of the enlightened mind— something reflected in the Aleksandr Rodchenko piece in this exhibition. The Safavid upper classes disliked physical activity and were not in favor of exercise for its own sake, preferring repose, but sitting among the luxuries that life could offer they were also free to go inward, into the life of the mind.

12:

A Mesopotamian Scribe
Early Dynastic period, circa 2600 BCE
Iraq, possibly from Isin
Stone Tablet Recording Transactions
Limestone
Purchased in New York, 1943
Lent by the Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago (A25412)

Every person, regardless of their background and disposition, has a body. This body is *a* body, as opposed to *the* body which is the subject of conversations that orbit around sculpture and architecture. While it is not universal—coming as it does in many different shapes, sizes, abilities, and histories—in the end it is one of the few common denominators we human animals share. We all know what it is to have a corporeal presence upon the Earth.

If art historians' retelling of minimalism is correct, and our body really is the index by which all other things we build and surround ourselves with are indexed to, then our bodies form the public sphere. This is the starting point for and underpinning of public art and the public monument. A physical object in public space puts forth a focal point of shared experience through which we can come together, debate, and hopefully commune and build shared social values. We may not agree about much but a rock is a rock, and a scar in the rock in the form of inscription is something we all see.

Here, in something as modest as a real estate transaction, we awaken to the idea of a public commons as the place where community values take on public form. The proclamation of a Mesopotamian community's idea of what is owned or deserved rendered as shared plastic agent placed into the commons is a tool in the process of value-making. The beginning of the monument is almost always a proposal, either to remember or to never forget. This object, either placed in the

field it describes as the property of a farmer or in the local temple, operates at the intersection of agreement between individuals and the community. It is not a tale of conquest, or something else to rub in the nose of people outside of the maker's circle of compassion, but rather something to try to build relations, not tear them down. In this spatialization of agreed-upon value, it protects from the violence of theft—a marker of what is agreed upon and backstopped by power.

13:

John Miller
American, born 1954
The Tip of the Iceberg
2019
Inkjet print on Ilford Smooth Pearl paper
Courtesy of the artist

The cosmopolitan metropolis is not, of course, solely a site of coexistence and exchange but also a place of intense competition, profiteering, and exploitation. It also has its fair share of uncomfortable glances and bad hugs. Like film noir, it has a shadow. From this shadow we need protection and tools to guard and nurture our true selves and communal values at a safe remove from the cultural ravishment sometimes perpetrated by power, be that force majoritarian, colonial, or capital. Under late capitalism, a primary tool of protection is deflection. This can take the form of the mirrored facades of low-slung corporate office parks, the reflective glasses worn in the streets, or a mask of passivity.

John Miller shows us the perfection of this camouflage, a melding into what is so universally available it becomes the water we swim in. In that there is a type of safety—a withholding safety. Globalism has expelled a thin skin of almost universally-held cultural patrimony. This for the most part consists of brands, popular music, and short videos distributed digitally by global corporations. The illiberalism in this aspect of global culture renders us a monoculture of course, but it also can provide a cloak—an ability to don a protective shell that regardless of proximity offers a degree of protection from the penetration and metabolic hunger for new and specific cultural production by the prevailing forces of power. These masks universal production makes available protect our true selves by hiding them in the shadows of their own making.

What are we looking at here? Universalized figures or two distinct individuals engaged in conversation? The idea of a portrait is at stake here. Science has taught that the brain may have a specific "module" devoted to reading other people's faces and inferring from them things as intangible as feelings, intentions, and states of mind. Some say this is what separates us from other animals: intuition and emotional intelligence. But the inference of internal states is difficult; the way

it's done is unknown even to the mystics, and mistakes can be fatal, especially in dealing with those outside of one's own common circles of interaction.

Here I get the sense that this reflection back of any attempt to infer an emotional or psychic state is intentional. Defensive, if not passive-aggressive. The id and the ego of the subject is kept at a safe remove through distance in her eyes. If anything, she is assessing me, not addressing me, with surfaces that are so universalized as to be impenetrable and indiscernible from the environment they are situated within. Interiority can only be a metaphor in this instance. The illusion is an individual without self, or said another way, an "acting" of selfhood.

14:

Charles Joseph Traviès de Villers
Swiss, active in France, 1804–1859
Je suis francais! … moi (*I am French! … I Am…*)
19th century
Lithograph on heavy wove paper
University Transfer from Max Epstein Archive
Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, 1967.116.521

15:

An Unknown Photographer Working For The Associated Press
Untitled [Chicago Board of Trade]
Undated
Color photograph
Chicago Board of Trade Archives, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois Chicago

16:

An Unknown Photographer In Chicago
Untitled [Chicago Board of Trade]
Undated
Gelatin silver print
Chicago Board of Trade Archives, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois Chicago

Eight is an auspicious number. Within the elasticity of culture and time, the octagon has been deployed in buildings and places where people want to communicate with their gods. The biblical example of the octagon at the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is a transitional form, with heaven's circle intersecting a square representing Earth. It is doubtful that the willful people who revolutionized the efficient transfer of worth at the Chicago Board of Trade were interested in any of that, but in their never-ending quest toward the dematerialization of value they ended up building a church for money.

Modernity's fallacy of linear progress is mirrored in the increasing plasticity of value, and by the 1870s the economy of the United States wanted a quicker way to get rich. The first octagonal trading pit opened in 1877 for the negotiations needed for a novel financial vehicle, the futures contract. In an effort to syncopate trading with the growing season, the futures contract—a device to purchase a promise—was invented in Chicago and gave birth to the complex choreography we now call the open outcry method of communication.

Starting in 1885 traders stepped up onto the outside edge of the octagon and then down into "the pit," creating something of an appearance of an amphitheater in which hundreds of participants could see and hear each other during their time of work. In the course of trading grains (corn, oats, and wheat) people faced their colleagues and adversaries in the octagonal circle, buying and selling, indicating price and quantity with hand signals and yells until they could find a person with whom to make a trade. The whole point was speed and to build the frenzy of a hotter market. Orders no longer needed to be written down; instead they were carried to the trading pit via non-verbal hand signals which became known as "arbitrage," or "arb" in the parlance of the day.

This became a financially derivative choreography. Bodies and hands blending together, communicating via shapes to buy and sell agreed-upon prices for products to be produced on a promise. The traders supplemented their traditional dress code with brightly colored team jackets inscribed with the logo of their employer, and often bright and frisky accoutrements to help catch the eye of fellow traders on the floor. They must have been very hot.

17:

Pablo Picasso
Spanish, active France, 1881–1973
The Glass
1911–1912
Oil on canvas
The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Claire B. Zeisler in memory of A. James Speyer

For René Descartes, a sense of mental presence—an awareness of oneself as a thinking thing—is the basis for confidence. Right or wrong, the feeling of thought is immune from doubt.

Analytic Cubism is thought to be austere, preoccupied with understanding and deconstructing our heterogeneous world through shape. But looking past its formal innovations, we can also see it as much more complex and much more ideological. Empires exist not only in the land and sea, but also in the shadows of the mind. How we think through the world and understand what we see is part and parcel with the way we understand power. The chain of interpretation which shapes how we are taught to think through images is a kind of optical hegemony, mainly European.

I want to say from the outset: don't get me wrong, I love Picasso's work, especially his wooden sculpture, and if I'm really honest I can get behind his public image as the Ur Male Artist. Feet shod in woven leather sandals, spilling paint on the parquet floor of an elegant but run-down mansion in the South of France—I find the lack of apology refreshing. The Cubism Picasso trafficked in at this time is rightfully regarded as primarily an invention of the European avant-garde, and part of its story is its important role in the decentering the dominance of Euclidean conceptions of space. But in addition to that revolution in spatial comprehension, the full extent of its formal innovation is much more convoluted and beautiful, and reveals a tale of how the metropole acts as a clearinghouse for culture and senses of self as well as goods, taking in influence and form to be recombined into new cultural dispositions.

In the early 1900s Paris sat upon an enormous colonial empire. Coffee, gold, and rubber as well as plain old liquid financial capital poured into the city. Along with all that wealth came an enormous amount of cultural patrimony from the nations under the yoke of the French. The kaleidoscopic amount of material culture from Africa, the Levant, and Southeast Asia introduced European artists to complex new ways of forming the world that went beyond representation, while simultaneously sending European ideas about individual agency and the bureaucratic the other way to the vassal states of France. Concurrently, advances in photography and optics continued to show new ways of producing images of the city with increasing democratic accessibility. With this there was a normalization of the impulse to metabolize other people's aesthetics into new ideas of the modern. This allowed artists like Picasso to be exposed to new ways of seeing and new conceptions of compositional space. So while in Porto-Novo, Benin people were experimenting with the newly imported technology of 35mm cameras, in the neighborhoods of Paris artists like Picasso were freed by the precision of mechanical image-making to ingest the new aesthetics then being pulled into the city to produce individual, rather than communal, subjectivities.

In this way, *The Glass*'s banal subject, a drinking glass on a bar table, becomes a stage from which we begin to hear claims of a universalized subjectivity being made. This rendering of perception as fractured shape belies the tension emergent in Cubism between the universalization of the shape as

“representation” and a hyper subjectivity of “perception” on the part of the artist. The painting is a claim that The Artist (proper noun intended) now decides what he is seeing as the universal: “I, Pablo, decide that my experience is the structure of interpretation, of impression, and that the consciousness held within the painter is common to all people.” This is an assertion of the artist as one who determines value—who not only realizes the rule but also provides it and even embodies it.

In former times and places, such as in the French salons of 18th century Paris, there was an external body that determined and allocated value in art. Value was not based on abstract criteria but on the bureaucratic body put in place to provide aesthetic and political judgment. Narrative clarity, assertion of the “right values” for the people, and even things like compositional audacity were all factors that were codified within the institutions where the state and the atelier intersected. Picasso and his circle rejected all of that. By the early 1900s it had become the artist who produced the rule, embodied it, and judged themselves by it. Since then, artists have claimed that the only measuring stick you can judge art by is the artist. This new modern sensibility is rooted in the supremacy of the individual—the supremacy of subjectivity and an emphasis on the production of one's own value(s) as an object to be observed, discussed, and sold. This has become a fundamental tension of liberal pluralism—the production and exultation of subjectivity against a hegemonic universalism.

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