

rials (Wallerstein 18-19). What we have here, then, is a network of interconnected and interdependent players, both on a local and global level, carrying out capitalist modes of production, that is, selling goods for profit, by means of extracting raw materials from one group by another in order to convert these materials into finished goods to be sold. It is the dominant player who receives the greatest financial return within the global system. The nature of this interdependent relationship between core and peripheral nation maintains the inequality within the global system (Wallerstein 7). The reason behind this maintenance of inequality lies in the fact that most of the major economic players are located within the core areas and, according to Wallerstein, rely on “the intrusion of political entities to distort the market in their favor” (66).

This hegemonic dominance has its roots in the colonial period. At first this process benefited only the metropolitan areas of the core; however, after WW II, many of the core nations felt obliged to develop the third world nations in hopes that such development would stimulate industrialization, thereby raising the standard of living which would, in turn, provide a market in these peripheral countries for manufactured goods coming from the core nations (Fieldhouse 80-89). However, much of this development relied heavily on large international loans, which placed many third world countries in serious debt and the end result has been an elevation in the total number of people worldwide living in poverty (Bodely 371-375). An example of the problems arising from the development of third-world countries within a global system, whose own existence rests on socioeconomic inequality is provided by Fieldhouse who discusses the development of the Congo during the mid twentieth century. The Congo, according to Fieldhouse, had a booming economy based upon mining and plantations, but most of these operations were owned and operated by Europeans, redirecting the capital to Europe (89).

The notion that economic progress should become universal stems from the Enlightenment. In general, the ideological basis of the Enlightenment rests on the notion that social and moral betterment can be obtained through rational thinking and instrumental reasoning, which ultimately required a break from a previous historical relationship with the doctrine of the Church (Habermas 55). The root prob-

lem with the principles of the Enlightenment was not necessarily ingrained in the ideas themselves, but rather its meta-ideological nature resting on the ethnocentric assumption that these ideas should advance trans-globally (Mosquera 218). Advancing the Enlightenment ideologies trans-globally is predicated on the Eurocentric assumption that these values should be reproduced and utilized as unifying mechanisms due to their supposed superiority. (Richard 351-352). The whole concept of moral and social betterment is exemplified in the notion of economic progress, which ultimately lead to an ideological justification of the actions on behalf of the core countries described above (Wallerstein 50). Assuming that the rest of the world outside of the sphere of European influence was imperfect, the colonizers set out to spread their supposed universalizing ideas of material progress.

The idiosyncratic nature of progress, as an ideological vehicle for the advancement of the discursive baggage of Modernity, also characterizes the aesthetic progression of the visual arts. Progress within the visual arts emerging soon after the advent of the discourses known as the Enlightenment, is distinguished by the separation of the formal qualities of increasing abstractness from the historical narrative concerns of imitative mimesis (Risatti xii). This aesthetic progression is known as the *avant-garde*, which, in order to move forward, must continually suppress the normalization of what was previously considered vanguard (Habermas 55).

One particular mode, the sublime, exemplifies how the *avant-garde* is able to undergo a constant state of regeneration. According to Lyotard, the state of sublimity is initiated in the subject (the viewer) upon encountering an object (an *avant-garde* painting), which is both awe-inspiring, yet intimidating, as he/she attempts to reconcile the conceptual detachment of the object at hand through the lens of what is known to the subject via his/her own past cognitive conditionings. Consequently, this awe-inspiring yet intimidating aspect is translated experientially as “a pleasure mixed with pain, a pleasure that comes from pain” (Lyotard 250). Lyotard, referring to Edmund Burke’s theories on the role of the sublime in aesthetics, goes on to note that the intimidating factor of shock that is bestowed upon the viewer when encountering a disturbing (in the sense that the piece is at odds with the viewer’s own ideas of what should constitute a work of art) *avant-*

garde work is diminished by the very essence (formal qualities, perhaps) of the art itself, which “procures a pleasure of relief, of delight” (Lyotard 251). In order for the consternating cognitive initiatives of the avant-garde to produce subliminal effects upon the viewer, these shocking motifs of the avant-garde must be in a constant state of regeneration, that is, constantly breaking from any past associations previously referred to as avant-garde (Lyotard 254). Habermas sums up this continual regenerative persistence typical of the aesthetic progress of Modernism, stating that the avant-garde exposes itself “to the dangers of the sudden, shocking encounters, conquering an as yet unoccupied future” (55).

Aesthetic progress, as it turns out, found its voice in the guise of formalism, which places importance on the assumed aesthetic universals of formal qualities (Risatti 1). For the Modernist art critic Clement Greenberg, in order for art, namely painting, to advance in a vanguardist manner, it must undergo a self-investigative purification (Greenberg 12-15). And, since this investigative purification, involves formalism with its emphasis on line, shape, color, there is a necessary divorce of these qualities from the content of the work (Risatti 1). What Greenberg saw as a problem in the visual arts was the inability of the medium, in particular paint, to express itself through the veil of traditional representational illusion, stating that the traditional mode of working “[used] art to conceal art” (Greenberg 13). Exemplifying this aesthetic contradiction between traditional and Modernist art, Greenberg points out that “Whereas one tends to see what is in an Old Master before seeing it as a picture, one sees a Modernist painting as a picture first” (14). To further assert his disregard for representational elements, Greenberg expresses his concern that such elements “alienate pictorial space from the two dimensionality which is the guarantee painting’s independence as an art” (14).

In a discussion about Greenberg’s theory of formalism as a purification process, Clark puts forth the notion that such simplification is, in fact, a negation of the medium (33). Clark claims this Modernist notion of negation in painting reflects the breaking down of painting’s former purpose as a concealment of its own qualities on behalf of three-dimensional illusion to its subsequent “absence of finish or coherence, indeterminacy, a ground which is called on to swallow up

distinctions” (32). On the extreme end of this critique of aesthetic modernism, Clark goes on to assert that, “the fact of Art, in modernism, is the fact of negation” (33). Although this focus of negation of medium as the purpose of modernism is debatable. There is a tendency, however, to negate the content in favor of formal concerns.

Negating the content of a work at first seems like innocent dabbling in the essence of aesthetics; however, when the borrowing, or appropriating, of visual motifs outside the realm of traditional Western European artistic concerns becomes an act of negation relative to the aesthetic intents of the individuals who created such art outside the sphere of European influence. In fact such appropriating of foreign aesthetic elements traditionally outside the European academic establishment has indeed taken place in the characteristic early twentieth century incorporation of visual formalities from the so-called “primitive” of the third world. Such appropriation is exploitative in nature, “the response on the part of progressive Western artists, who had virtually no understanding of the original conditions” (Arnason 113). If Greenbergian formalism involves stripping the visual arts of its content and representation only to focus on the aesthetic formalities, then would the appropriation of so-called primitive elements typical of the early twentieth century not be considered an injustice to not only the contextual intents of the artist but also to the values of his/her culture at large? Even more absurd is the repossession inherent in the artistic practices of these Western artists when incorporating these foreign elements into their work, as noted by Rosalind Krauss (84-85).

The ethnocentricity implicit in these acts of stealing formal qualities from the art of the third world parallels the earlier discussions of the repossession of natural resources from various indigenous peoples as a means of incorporating them into the scheme of global economic dynamics. Assimilating people into system at odds with their cultural values attempts to negate their cultural integrity. Furthermore, the enslavement of the thousands of people against their will is an obvious negation of their integrity as human beings. These two forms of negation have been done in the name of progress, on behalf of an ideologically supposed universal stemming from the Enlightenment.

In spite of the seemingly inevitable consolidation of the hegemonic ideas of modernism, much of what was previously perceived as

necessary cultural progress from the European center or vanguard in the visual arts has now come under scrutiny due to a loosening of the universalist language characteristic of modernism via structuralism/poststructuralism, which has ultimately resulted in the advent of postmodernist discourses (Laclau 332). Structuralism emphasizes the formal qualities of linguistics, i.e. the various meanings a word or sign may take on, with regards to the isomorphic relationship between the signifier and signified (Laclau 333). Due to the ambiguous relationship between the signifier and signified, utilizing various elements from the cultural and economic periphery in the name of a totalizing signified constitutes an act of negation. Picasso's use of African masks in his pre-Cubists oeuvre, for instance, clearly illustrates the lack of an isomorphic relationship of the signifier/signified aspect of the sign. When viewing, say, Picasso's "Les Demoiselles D'Avignon," the presence of African masks in a work considered avant-garde would perhaps lead the viewer to associate such "primitive" elements as vanguard. However, these "primitive" elements have a geographical origin other than Europe and, hence, a context other than signifying avant-gardism within Western aesthetics. In this case, the signifier "African mask" has two different signifieds: Western aesthetic vanguardism and whatever cultural values were given to it in its original context, thereby, becoming what Laclau has referred to as a "floating signifier" (Laclau 335). Thus, poststructuralist theory, which has succeeded in yielding the dissolution of the isomorphism between the signifier and signified, has set the stage for the potential ideological liberation of people marginalized by the ethnocentric hegemony of modernist discourse.

With the advent of postmodernism, we see an increased awareness of the poly-contextual relationship of signifier and signified. Individuals within the art world have attempted to examine the negation of cultural contexts from which various "primitive" elements have been plucked, appropriated and recontextualized in the name of a Western foundational signified that was the avant-garde in the modern art (Archer 196). Exhibitions such as "Magiciens de la Terre" emphasize the exchange between the core and periphery in opposition to the role of "primitive" elements as a catalyst in the propulsion of modern art toward Greenburgian purification (Archer 196-1976).

Despite this increased awareness, certain paradigms of the global system persist. As warned by Laclau “this weakening of the isomorphic connection between the signifier and signified does not in any way negate the contents of the project of modernity” (336). Buchloh, discussing the last several decades, laments that “the autonomous spaces of cultural representation . . . are gradually eroded, assimilated, or simply annihilated” (673).

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