

## A structure of relationships for the discussion of course themes

Relations of art and artist....

- 1) to medium
- 2) to interpretation  
(and the systems of interpretation called “the art world”)
- 3) to society  
(and its spawn, mass culture)
- 4) to the means of production

## Modern

ca. 1850-1950

- 1) an extreme consciousness of medium, a desire for medium-specificity or genre purity  
(painting should be about painting, sculpture about sculpture... “Art for art’s sake”)

“Flatness and the delimitation of flatness” (Greenberg)

At the edge of the modern, always: the photograph, the film, the television

- 2) a belief in depth models of interpretation, e.g., there is a secret unconscious (Freud), there is a secret class ideology (Marx), there is a secret selfishness of capital (Horkheimer and Adorno)... the role of the critic/ art historian is to plumb these depths
- 3) a certainty that artists are always alienated from society (the melancholic temperament), prophets in the wilderness, an alienated *avant-garde* □
- 4) Industrial, collapse of artisanal hand production in favor of mass production, results in paradoxical “freedom” of artisanal fine arts from patronage systems. These are still affiliated with capitalism by “an umbilical cord of gold” (Greenberg) – artist must establish market niche through originality that nonetheless relates to commodity capital by aestheticizing, framing, or rejecting its effects (from Duchampian readymade to Pop art’s ambivalent embrace)

Continued on verso

# Postmodern

ca. 1968–1988

- 1) an eclectic use and mixing of techniques, such as text and image, or performance and object; a fascination for borderline genres and media, the photographic suffusion of the pictorial field – in sum, an extreme miscegeny used to surface systems of circulation  
  
“I’m interested in the apparatus I’m being threaded through” (artist Robert Smithson)
- 2) a collapse in depth models, an embrace of surface effects, “performativity” rather than “subconscious motivations”... an infiltration of the apparatus of interpretation by artists: artists writing criticism, artists acting as curators, artists opening “museums,” etc.
- 3) art and artist as coextant with culture, interpretive field, mass consumer society, etc. artist *inside* the social, working the system, eschewing artworld isolation for mass circulation (if possible) – yet preserving a critical voice in the ambiguous “shifter” (“You believe in the divinity of the masterpiece” [Kruger])
- 4) Post-industrial service or information economy, no longer based on exchange value but on symbolic value (reproduction rather than production) – artist must establish salience through discourse that is only barely distinguishable from the sign system of late capitalism

# Post-critical present?

ca. 2000 on

- 1) an absolute dominance of filmic, photographic, and video technologies, a disappearance of text, a displacement of discourse from academy and critical apparatus to “buzz,” a neo-gothic oracular spectacle.  
  
Apocalyptic millennialism (Barney’s crisis of masculinity), post 9-11:  
“ The pillar on which pride did rest/ That tower lies now level, prone/  
with this stone true, the tower did fall/ From th’ grace his basis found” [Barney]
- 2) depth models are still unavailable; interpretive apparatus thrown into full-blown crisis by artistic *gesamtkunstwerk* (total artwork): museum book, film program, installation decisions, are all arrogated to the artist
- 3) refusal of critical stance produces effect of absorption into society, in effect there is an absorption *of* society: viewers seek total immersion into artifice, not as escape from social but *as* social
- 4) similar to postmodern, but without the text (if possible), fully a part of economic structure in which artworld, fashion world, entertainment industry (US largest export) all begin to merge